



Ph. D. (Arts)
(Women's Studies)

Queering Freud:

Textual (Re)configurations of Lesbian Desire and Sexuality

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Thesis Abstract.

My thesis examines some contemporary textual (re)constructions of lesbian desire and sexuality. The textual forms chosen for analysis include writing, film, and new technologies (multimedia and hypertext). Where necessary for comparison, more traditional examples of fictional lesbian sexed subjects are also considered in detail. This semiotic and psychoanalytic analyses is situated theoretically within a framework of post-Freudian and Lacanian, poststructural, feminist and lesbian feminist arguments. The work concentrates predominantly on particular figures/subjects represented in lesbian texts since the 1970's. These figures include (i) the vampire; (ii) the fetishist; (iii) the sadomasochist; and (iv) the cyborg. This thesis critiques, reformulates and expands Freudian psychoanalytic theories of lesbian desire and sexed subjectivity, particularly through re-thinking Freudian notions of the sexual perversions (i.e. non-normative or non-reproductive sexualities).

Towards this end, *Queering Freud* mobilises contemporary theoretical developments in lesbian feminist psychoanalytic criticism (e.g. those of Teresa de Lauretis, Parveen Adams and Elizabeth Grosz). This feminist theorising constitutes a radical departure from orthodox Freudian interpretations of normative female sexuality, as well as contributing significantly to the re-working of, and moving beyond, the Freudian concept of female homosexuality as a "masculinity complex." My work has been significantly influenced by de Lauretis' thinking through of lesbian sexuality and perverse desire, and more recently (1994) by her notion of Freudian theories as "passionate fictions."

The fictions chosen for analysis begin with Freud's case histories of female homosexuality, "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman" [1920], and "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria" (1905 [1901]) - the latter a case of unconscious lesbian desire. This section also re-reads Freud's development of ideas concerning perversions in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* [1905].

The body of the thesis includes analyses of Pat Califia's "The Vampire" (U.S.A. 1988). This short story is read with and against an early lesbian vampiric tale by Irish writer Sheridan Le Fanu, *Carmilla* (1872). The trope of lesbian vampirism in *Carmilla* is read back through Freud's essay "The Uncanny" [1919], and through feminist psychoanalytic theories of the pre-oedipal relation to the imaginary maternal body. "The Vampire," doubling as a s/m fantasy tale, is also read against Freud's essay "'A Child is Being Beaten': A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversion" [1919]. The fantasy at the origin of lesbian sadomasochistic sexual structures is further explored in the scenarios of Monica Treut's 1985 film, *Seduction: The Cruel Woman*, particularly in relation to Freud's resistance(s) to "masculine" passivity (masochism) and "feminine" mastery. This section also touches on classical narratives of masochism and sadism such as Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* and de Sade's *Philosophy in the Bedroom*.

Jeannette Winterson's *The Passion* forms the basis of a reading of lesbian fetishism. Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* also appear in this context. This chapter is a continuation of work on female fetishism which formed part of my

Master's thesis *Textual (Re)constructions of Desire, Sexual Difference and Sexuality by Contemporary Female Writers*, (University of Adelaide, 1991). This initial work refuted Freud's claim that fetishism was not a structuring fantasy open to women via a detailed analysis of Winterson's textual construction of a fetishistic, fantasy-phallus (the heroine's webbed feet) as a signifier of lesbian difference and desire. The chapter in this thesis expands on lesbian fetishistic signification through the trope of detachable organs (the heart), and a female transvestite fantasy-phallus (the codpiece). This section also works against the Freudian-Lacanian fiction of the penis-phallus as the universal signifier of desire. The theoretical trajectory of this work on *The Passion* remains influenced by Teresa de Lauretis.

The chapters on cyborgs includes a reading of the signification of desire and the representation of sexualities of the female replicants from Ridley Scott's 1982 science-fiction film noir, *Blade Runner* (based on the Philip K. Dick novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*). This section centres particularly on Rachel, whose question: "Are you testing whether I'm a replicant or a lesbian, Mr. Deckard?" remains ostensibly unanswered within the film narrative. This final chapter also examines some futuristic fantasy (and utopian) possibilities for constructions of polymorphously perverse signified lesbian desire through the work of new media artists, VNS Matrix's, multi-technological installation *All New Gen* (1993). The cyborg chapter utilises feminist theoretical developments in science-fiction film analysis (e.g. Barbara Creed and Constance Penley), and those from cyberfeminists, particularly Donna Haraway, Zoë Sofoulis, and Sadie Plant.

Overall, *Queering Freud* reconfigures psychoanalytic discourses on female homosexuality in a way more appropriate to the reading of, and construction of, representations of lesbian desire and sexuality in contemporary western culture.

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Declaration.

This thesis does not contain any material that has been accepted for the award of any degree or qualification in any university or other tertiary institution. To my knowledge the material herein is entirely my work, except where I give due reference to other authors.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Jyanni Steffensen (June, 1996).

Introduction.

Why Isn't Marcel Simply A Lesbian?

Queering Freud: Textual (Re)configurations of Lesbian Desire and Sexuality is an investigation from within a French feminist inspired poststructural (psychoanalytic and semiotic) framework, of the construction of "perverse" lesbian subjectivities, the languages in which they are symbolised, and the manner in which female desire is signified. Theoretically, and in terms of a sexual/textual lesbian feminist practice, my analysis implies a re-reading and re-writing of Freud's, as well as Lacan's, and Kristeva's psychoanalytic discursive constructions of "female homosexuality" (Freud), "feminine homosexuality" (Lacan), and "lesbian loves" (Kristeva), in dialogue with other fictional and critical texts.¹ French feminist reading and writing practices, particularly those of Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, can provide cultural and literary theorists with categories for creating a post-structural feminist practice of reading texts as discursive constructs. Textual analysis, with its emphasis upon language as a system, no longer regards texts, including psychoanalytic discourses, as privileged reflections of reality but as situated productions. The text is not simply attributed to the individual writer but to the systems of power which gives her/him a position and codes from which to speak, to write and to read. The lesbian constructions of sexuality and

¹ For an overview of the conjunctions between psychoanalysis and literary criticism see Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

desire that I will analyse in dialogue with psychoanalytic narratives - which Teresa de Lauretis calls "passionate fictions" - were produced by contemporary Eurowestern writers, filmmakers, and techno-artists.² Generically the lesbian discourses on perverse sexuality and desire selected for analysis might be classified as fantasy or speculative fiction. What I wish to articulate is something which culturally and subjectively influential psychoanalytic writers such as Freud could not at the time imagine, but which some contemporary lesbian producers of experimental texts can - that is, a lesbian subject discursively constructed, with the means to signify perverse desires in what are all too overtly recognisable as fantasy fictional socio-symbolic orders.

Rosemary Jackson, who appropriates Kristeva's semanalytic method of sexual/textual analysis for reading fantasy literature, reminds us that while the theories of Freud and Lacan are valuable for understanding some of the problems involved in the complex interaction between ideology and the unconscious life of the individual subject, it is not always possible to apply their ideas to literary criticism in a neat manner.³ Freud's texts themselves suggest to lesbian feminist analysts such as Teresa de Lauretis points of in(ter)vention for formulating a concept of "discursive consent" in relation to

² Teresa de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994). De Lauretis writes, following Bersani and Dutoit that "the only guarantee any theory can give about itself is to expose itself as a passionate fiction," p. xiv.

³ See Rosemary Jackson, "Psychoanalytic Perspectives," *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London and New York: Methuen, 1981), pp. 61-91. While Jackson is not involved in debates over the applicability of Lacan's theories for materialist criticism, she suggests that literary fantasies can be approached as expressions of those elements in the subject's psychic life which do not conform to the demands of her social positioning. See particularly Notes p. 185. Jackson understands the Freudian superego and the Lacanian "I" which interacts with the self as it tries to meet the demands of its social order as a cultural construction.

representations (public fantasies) of lesbian sexuality, and for making "a suitable transition from the discourse of the couch to that of literary, critical, and filmic texts, or from psychoanalysis to cultural analysis."⁴

While keeping de Lauretis' conceptual and theoretical framework for re-thinking the cultural/clinical picture in mind, I will re-harness and re-model the Jackson/Kristevan theoretical insights into the discursive modes of production of the (s)textual subject through the signifying systems of realist/fantasy intertexts and hypertexts. My analysis will also mobilise Irigaray's conceptual and theoretical framework for re-structuring or rewriting a female sexed symbolic and imaginary - in this case lesbian - subjectivity. This will include Irigaray's demands, following her deconstructive reading of Freud's and Lacan's texts, that the mother/daughter imaginary relation be symbolized - that the difference between them be told - and that female sexed and desiring subjects - other than the fantasmatic phallic/castrated mother constructed in psychoanalytic narratives of the origins of male subjectivity - be symbolically articulated.

Theoretically, Margaret Whitford, following Lacan, argues that fantasies do not precede a symbolic structuring process. The pre-oedipal moments are retroactive constructs effected after the oedipal stage. Pre-oedipal fantasies are not primitive fantasies, but imaginary ones, dependent on the ego, the "I,"

⁴ de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*, p. 76. What de Lauretis argues, following Michel Foucault's assertion that sexuality and perversion are produced through the proliferation of discourses about them is that "consent" to lesbian sexuality may mean no more than the production of a discourse in which sexual activities between women are given representation and signified as desire. For de Lauretis, the problem is not with "female homosexuality" but with representation, p. 75.

which, for Whitford and Lacan, is a pre-condition for having fantasies at all.⁵ Given that lesbian subjects do speak, write, produce film and art, one would assume that they take up an "I" position within a symbolic order of language, fantasy, representation, and constructed meaning as socially and historically situated agents with access to innovative discursive signifying systems and cultural, including lesbian sub-cultural, practices.

My analytic conclusions will be read critically back into Freudian discourses on female homosexuality through structural and post-structural psycholinguistic theories - particularly Lacanian, French feminist, and lesbian feminist revisions- and Sigmund Freud's own narratives of non-pathological perversions. What I wish to reformulate is a psycholinguistic, multiply articulated model through which the perverse dynamic(s) operative in various significations of lesbian desire and sexuality might be read as culturally and psychically intelligible. Toward this end I have drawn on analytic methods, textual strategies of reading and writing, and the theoretical insights of both French and English writing feminists including Luce Irigaray, Elizabeth Grosz, and Teresa de Lauretis. The differences between the discursive constructions of lesbian subjectivity by lesbians, and the discourses about lesbian subjects will be utilised to demonstrate the distance travelled by contemporary lesbian produced discourses in re-working the signification of female/female desire as it has been articulated in some generic cultural fictions, including psychoanalytic ones.

⁵ See Margaret Whitford, "Pre-oedipal," *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, ed. Elizabeth Wright (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), pp. 346-47.

Freudian psychoanalysis is a metadiscourse on sexuality and the unconscious. From the time of Freud's writing *The Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905)⁶ human sexuality as drive has been linked to perversion and to representation (the contents of fantasy). De Lauretis, following Laplanche and Pontalis, writes in *The Practice of Love* that fantasy is at the origin of sexuality as a social, as well as a subjective construction. The fantasies of origin (of the subject and of desire) are cultural myths that have a powerful hold in subjectivity, but are historically and culturally structured. As such they are open to transformations along with historical change.⁷

When psychoanalysis has been understood as the study of how sexed subjectivities are culturally and psychically produced, it has been strategically deployed by many feminists to critique the constructions of "feminine" sexuality produced by phallogentric psychoanalysts. Where psychoanalysis is of use to feminist theory, there is entailed a feminist re-working or re-deployment of psychoanalytic principles and techniques against explicit phallogentric pronouncements and presumptions. Many feminist writers have developed, and continue to develop, sophisticated psychoanalytic methodological and theoretical procedures for understanding the psychic dynamics of the sexed identifications and desires of female subjectivities in contemporary Eurowestern cultures. Their work has turned psychoanalysis to feminist political, social, and cultural advantage.

⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 7. Trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), pp. 123-243. All references to Freud's writing will hereafter be marked in the text in parentheses as SE, followed by volume number and page number(s), for instance (SE 7: 123-243).

⁷ de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*, p. xv.

This argument could also be advanced in relation to lesbian feminist theory. Lesbian and gay theorists have not uncritically embraced psychoanalysis as a structural or explanatory model for their particular sexualities. This is almost certainly due to the fact that many of the various clinical and theoretical practices and applications of psychoanalysis - particularly the North American adaptations - have worked from the premise that homosexuality is pathological, an illness, or both. From this normalising perspective, the homosexual is perceived to be in need of being "cured" of his or her deviant desires and identifications. In this scene, same sex desire is often conflated with both "perversion" and pathology. In Freud's writing, however, perversion and pathology are not necessarily synonymous terms, neither does the concept of perversion necessarily co-incide with homosexuality. The limitations and possibilities of utilising and extending Freudian theory for my purposes are that lesbian sexuality in Freud's narratives remains radically underdeveloped, and that perverse lesbian subjective fantasy structures such as sadomasochism or fetishism are, within his analysis, unthinkable. Female homosexuality is not entirely absent in Freud's work although he confines his speculations primarily to the case history of a young woman in "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman" (1920) and a footnote reference to the pseudonymous Dora's "gynaecophilia" in "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria" (1905). In the final analysis, Freudian discourse left narratives of lesbian sexuality and desire stranded within structuring fantasies of "penis envy," "disappointed father-love," and "masculinity complexes," recasting female same sex desire into the prototypical fantasmatic narratives of male subjectivity, both heterosexual and homosexual.

Queering Freud might in some sense imply a paradoxical proposition. Because of logical inconsistencies internal to Freud's writing, his texts can be read, and have been read, as already implicitly "queer." Teresa de Lauretis in *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire*, interprets the meanings of Freud's theory of perversions as they are laid out by him in *Three Essays*:

... if perversion is understood *with* Freud outside the moralistic, religious, or medical frames of reference, as a deviation of the sexual drives from the path leading to the reproductive object - that is to say, if homosexuality is merely another path taken by the drive in its cathexis or choice of object, rather than as pathology (although, like every other aspect of sexuality, it may involve pathogenic elements) - then Freud's theory contains or implies, if by negation and ambiguity, a notion of perverse desire, where perverse means not pathological but rather non-heterosexual or non-normatively heterosexual.⁸

Before outlining the feminist conceptual, textual, and theoretical strategies which I have mobilised toward reading some contemporary lesbian cultural fantasy productions I will detour through some questions about questions - how, and by whom, they are posed, and from what identificatory (and desiring) position they can be, and have been, asked. The question: "Why not think of Marcel simply as a lesbian?" was posed by feminist critic Kaja Silverman in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*.⁹ Asked outside the specific,

⁸ de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*, p. xiii.

⁹ Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 386.

and complex, analytic context in which she posed this question - and in which it was quite logical, if convoluted - it would appear culturally and psychoanalytically eccentric. Silverman is analysing in Marcel Proust's *A la Recherche du temps perdu* a scenario in which Marcel is watching his beloved Albertine in a sexual situation with another woman. He identifies with the other woman in desiring to be desired by Albertine (i.e. with an object of lesbian desire). The reason why Silverman posed the question of why we don't simply think of Marcel as a lesbian is because she considers extra-textual biographical material - Marcel Proust had a lover named Alfred Agostenelli. If Albertine is modelled after Albert as some commentators have observed, then the primal scene which Marcel is observing might be said to be a heterosexual one, and his desire for Albert a displaced male homosexual desire. However, as I do not practice psychoanalysing authors, within the text Marcel is ostensibly a heterosexual male identifying with/as a lesbian (object of desire). In other words, the reader might be confronted with the proposition that a male homosexual (Silverman's reading) or a male heterosexual (my reading) might be identifying with a lesbian and/or desiring to be desired by a lesbian. I have wilfully appropriated Silverman's question as a tactic for problematising the hierarchy of phallogentric and heterosexual privilege frequently enacted in classic psychoanalytic accounts of sexed subjectivity. While writers of psychoanalytic discourses have traditionally experienced little difficulty assuming that lesbian subjects desire fantasmatically to be metaphorical men - i.e. suffer from a "masculinity complex"- they have rarely, if ever, entertained the notion that heterosexual male sexed subjects make female object-choices in envy of, or in imaginary identification with, lesbians. My thesis then, as it traces lesbian subjective

constructions from Freud to postmodern female writers, could be read as a theoretical articulation of the proverbial turning of the screw. In Foucauldian terms this might be expressed as both a reversal and a movement toward the centre of otherwise historically and culturally power/knowledge marginalised discourses on both female and lesbian sexuality.

One of the basic cultural fantasies grounding the psychoanalytic discourses of sexed subjectivity constructed by Freud, Lacan, and Kristeva is that the libido is invariably masculine. Lacan and Kristeva also assert that desire is released in the male by giving him its signifier in the phallus (i.e. the signifier of desire and heterosexual difference). The psychoanalytic presumption is that desire and sexuality originate in the male subject. The recasting of lesbian subjectivity in the structuring fantasies of male oedipal narratives makes difficult the possibility of imagining a lesbian sexed subjectivity independently from that of the prototypical heterosexual male subject. On the other hand, in and against Lacanian terms, the "masculinisation" of the lesbian subject also opens up conceptual possibilities for articulating a lesbian subject positioned in a socio-symbolic realm of language and meaning, as a speaking "I" with the means to signify desire. The question of my thesis might be framed in de Lauretian terms as "Why would lesbian lovers care if a hand or a whip is a (substitute for a) penis if reproducing (heterosexuality) is not the aim?" This would require, as de Lauretis argues, recasting the castration scenario in terms other than the absence/presence of the master signifier the penis/phallus (i.e. in the imaginary "phallic moment" in the mirror which constitutes the origins of male subjectivity and desire). For the purposes of my argument, the lesbian sexed-subject's desire might be

signified fetishistically through any *objet a* which signifies the difference between the subject and (maternal or paternal) objects of desire. It might also be signified within perverse oral, sadistic, or voyeuristic moments - perverse component moments other than the ubiquitous phallic moment of the prototypical fantasmatic of male desire. The difference between the imaginary lesbian body and the imaginary maternal body can be symbolized, as de Lauretis demonstrates in her reading of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* in terms other than the perceived absence of the phallus-penis. The poly-signification and mobility of lesbian desire, as I will reconfigure it through my readings, requires the conflation of fantasmatic Freudian "moments" (e.g. orality and attendant fantasies; genitality and its fantasies) which Freud would like to maintain in relative isolation from each other, and scenarios which he would keep excluded from narratives of female sexuality altogether (e.g. the perverse desiring fantasies of sadism and fetishism). The questions raised for psychoanalytic discourses by contemporary representations of lesbian sexuality and desire articulated through component drives/fantasies are comprehensible only if the Freudian narratives of sexuality are disassembled into their constituent parts of divergent pathways and/or object cathexes and reassembled in different, non-teleological, non-hierarchical configurations and if the structuring fantasy of castration (difference between the lesbian body and the maternal body) is, in Lacanian and Irigarayan terms, symbolised. The imaginary body identified with or desired in the symbolic mirror of a technocultural reproductive machine does not have to be the male body.

French analyst and theorist Luce Irigaray is perhaps one of the most important contributors to the psychoanalytic discourses on female homosexuality.¹⁰ Her initial deconstructive interrogation of Freudian and Lacanian discourses opened up a conceptual space in which a symbolic and imaginary system of representation and signification of female specific desires, aims and objects might be creatively articulated outside of the parameters of the "feminine" when understood as a patriarchal fantasy construct. Her subversive reading of Freud's writing on femininity and her poetic extension of psychoanalytic figures of sexual difference offer powerful positive and negative critiques of the speculative discourse on lesbianism. From Irigaray's perspective, she is not prescribing or even describing what the female, or a female/female specific economy of desire is, should or could be. She is revealing how the term "woman" functions within western imaginary and symbolic operations to show how what is taken to be the unalterable order of reality (discursive or otherwise) is in fact imaginary and susceptible to change. Irigaray, whose work continues to be of interest to lesbian theorists and writers alike, shows how psychoanalysis, blinded by discursive structures of phallogentrism, cannot envisage the circulation of pleasure and desire between women unmediated and unmobilised by male desire. In theory, then, for Irigaray, psychoanalysis prohibits female auto- and homoeroticism in order to subject women's sexuality to the male subject's sadistic and scopophilic drives.

¹⁰ For a brief overview of Irigaray's critique of Freud's "female homosexual" figure and her demand for the signification of specifically female aims and objects see Dianne Chisholm, "Lesbianism," *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, pp. 217-218.

If psychoanalytic theory, when pressed as it is by Irigaray, reveals discursive mechanisms which alienate women from each other and themselves, it also points to sites of transformation/reconfiguration. Irigaray locates and identifies rhetorical gaps and logical inconsistencies where the "other woman," with other desires, other fantasies, and another libidinal economy might emerge. Locating totalising tropes, Irigaray works through the dominant images of male desire, replacing negative images of femininity with ones reconstructed from deconstructed phallic figures. In her essay "This sex which is not one" Irigaray suggestively presents a figure of multiple female organs and erogenous zones neither reduced to one (phallic) sex nor lost to polymorphous perversity. Rather, for her, the female subject encompasses auto-, homo-, and hetero- sexualities. Moving toward the postmodern my readings will suggest that contemporary lesbian articulated sexualities *might* encompass male auto-, homo-, and hetero-sexual possibilities as well through the appropriation of magical (fantasy and mythical) penis-phallic signifiers whilst simultaneously articulating desire and difference within a maternal genealogical framework in terms other than mutual mother-daughter castration in relation to the paternal phallus.

In the lesbian feminist arena, theorists Elizabeth Grosz, Teresa de Lauretis, and Diane Hamer,¹¹ have taken the persistent proposition of the lesbian "masculinity complex" as a starting point for developing more sophisticated discourses on, and analyses of, representations of lesbian sexuality and desire

¹¹ See Elizabeth A. Grosz, "Lesbian Fetishism?," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3/2. *Queer Theory* (Summer 1991): 39-54; Teresa de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love* and an earlier essay, "Perverse Desire: The Lure of the Mannish Lesbian," *Australian Feminist Studies* 13 (Autumn 1991): 15-26; and Diane Hamer, "Significant Others: Lesbianism and Psychoanalytic Theory," *Feminist Review* 34 (Spring 1990): 143-45.

than those offered in Freudian and Lacanian texts. De Lauretis however, in particular, warns that to not reappropriate Freudian concepts such as the masculinity complex would leave lesbian theory "playing around in the pre-Oedipal sandbox."¹² She also states that to refuse to rethink the castration complex in Lacanian terms "is to find ourselves without the means to signify desire."¹³ In the same essay, "Perverse Desire: The Lure of the Mannish Lesbian," de Lauretis also appropriates the one perversion Freud, Lacan and Kristeva insisted was not open to women - i.e. fetishism - to the side of the lesbian subject. De Lauretis insists that the object signifying the fetishist's desire might bespeak difference or lack but need not resemble a phallic object or symbol (i.e. the fetishist refuses the meaning of the paternal phallus). For my argument this opens the way for insisting that any Lacanian *objet a* might operate as a signifier of desire and difference in a newly formulated and articulated lesbian symbolic/imaginary.

While the French and English - writing feminist projects may seem antithetical to each other, I would argue that the differences are ones of degree rather than ones of kind. While Irigaray can be read as opening up a space for the re-signification of female desires without prescribing what they should be, de Lauretis can be read as appropriating from already existing categories within psychoanalytic discourses and re-working them to lesbian and feminist cultural, subjective and political advantage. Both schools offer a proliferation and multiplication of the articulation of sexualities, sexual

¹² de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*, p. 31. What de Lauretis is referring to is a form of feminist theorising in which lesbianism is based on a model of mother/daughter pre-oedipal relations. This undifferentiated state, psychoanalytically speaking, is a form of psychosis and would signify the psychic death of the subject.

¹³ de Lauretis, "Perverse Desire," p. 17.

practices, relations, identifications, and modes of representation, both inside and outside of the construction of specifically lesbian desires, that, taken together, de-centre the domination of a phallogentric symbolic order of representation. In constructing my argument and providing a framework for my analytic readings I will proceed, in general, by working interpretatively with Grosz (particularly in reading Lacan and the French feminists); conceptually within Irigaray's larger picture of a female specific imaginary/symbolic; textually with and against Kristeva and Deleuze; and re-appropriatively in terms of lesbian theory, with de Lauretis. I will critique, where necessary, Lacan's construction of the phallus as universal signifier of desire, and in particular the tendency in Kristeva's text to re-cast lesbian subjectivity in a scenario of unmediated mother/child cathexis.

The problematics for lesbian feminist psychoanalytic theorising are complex but shifting. Firstly there are linguistic and conceptual problems. In both Freudian and Lacanian discourses, human sexuality *per se* is premised on an imaginary /symbolic system of male referents (e.g. penis envy, masculine libido, phallus, castration, paternal function). Two central structuring fantasies of Freud's narrativising the origins of sexual difference are the castration complex for boys and penis envy for girls. Lacan's writing privileges the penis-phallus as the universal signifier of desire. In the Lacanian framework, symbolic castration and the (paternal) penis-phallus - both signifier of desire and designator of positions in desire - are inextricably linked. Secondly, the significance of the imaginary mother- daughter relation and its symbolisation are underdeveloped in Freudian and Lacanian fictions. Thirdly, most Freudian and Lacanian derived narratives of psychosexual

constitution, including many feminist forms, have presumed desire and sexuality to be functional only in the structural relation between men and women (i.e. according to hetero-sexual difference). Lastly, psychoanalysis often re-assimilates larger social issues back into the closed circle of the familial domain, thereby ignoring the heterogeneity of the much more complex power relations and conflicts that structure our world.

What I desire to reconfigure is a discursive mode of lesbian sexed subjectivity, socio-symbolically constituted through specific and multiple fantasy structures and scenarios, that are intelligible through Freud's accounts of perversions, component drives, and Irigarayan female differences in relation to the (m)other rather than through an imaginary/symbolic system of meaning in which teleological heterosexual genital reproductive sex figures sexuality *per se*, or a castration scenario in which the totalising phallus-penis figures as *the* marker of sexual difference and desire. Through a feminist psychoanalytic reading of certain texts, I will argue that, fantasmatically speaking, vampiric subjects (male and female, homosexual and heterosexual) orally privilege necks; that a female voyeur can desire a female sadist; that the same lesbian subjects- one of whom is a vampire with the ability to suck just enough blood and re-suture the wound- can signify their desire through the (subjected) body of a male masochist; that a lesbian businesswoman who owns a fetish shoe store can desire a lesbian businesswoman who operates a performance-art theatre where lesbian s/m scenarios are enacted for men dressed in tuxedos, while, behind the scenes, a male journalist who desires to be a toilet has taken up residence in her bathroom; that a lesbian - bisexual, cod-piece wearing transvestite with webbed feet (a fantasy phallus) who

walks on water, can signify desire for a woman by losing her heart to the masked woman who keeps it, wrapped in silk, in an indigo jar in her clothes closet, and then stealing it back; that humans can desire machines; and that females subjects can fantasmatically constitute their sexed subjectivity in a clitorally and slime signified cyberspatial matrix. As Jeanette Winterson writes so eloquently in *The Passion*: "I'm telling you stories. Trust me."

Historically, this thesis is situated within a contemporary framework - the lesbian authored texts I will discuss were published or produced between 1985 and 1993. Culturally, all the texts under scrutiny could be described as Eurowestern, "first world." One could say Eurocentric. They were all produced by white writers, artists and film-makers. With the exception of Monica Treut's film, *Seduction: The Cruel Woman* (1985), the texts are all in English.¹⁴ Overall, the analysis contained in this thesis is limited within certain parameters by a number of other factors. It makes no claim to either universality or reductionism. I do not wish to suggest that any individual subjectivity is reducible solely to sexed subjectivity. Poststructurally, or politically, this would be to proceed in disavowal of the complexity of individual, or collective, subjectivities as they are structured, discursively or otherwise, through or against, the operative dynamics of differences in race, class, ethnicity, age, gender, economics, education, and power, as well as sexuality. Nor do I wish to imply that the constructions of lesbian desire that I am about to analyse are universal within lesbian subjective structures. To the contrary, my findings are text specific. They will be utilised to critique, re-

¹⁴ The video version of *Seduction: The Cruel Woman* from which I predominantly worked is spoken in German, and translated and subtitled in English. I relied on the English translation.

configure or expand the horizons of the models and modes of female homosexuality formulated within the discourses of psychoanalysis predominantly, though not exclusively, the passionate fictions of Freud. Numerous other psychoanalytically inclined theorists will be brought into play as their work bears on the trajectory of my argument. Theoretically, this thesis might be described generically as a lesbian thriller. The desired objects of investigation are lesbian s(t)exts.

Overview

Elizabeth Grosz, whose *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* and *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*¹⁵ introduced both Lacanian thinking and French feminist psychoanalytic discourses to many Australian feminists, argues that: "Freud's work enables unknown spaces to be developed by feminists using Freudian concepts like pre-oedipal sexuality, the movement of desire, and the unconscious to unsettle other terms, like the phallus, in his system."¹⁶ She adds that these spaces may be read as symptoms of, or clues about, a concept of woman different from Freud's model of castration, or Lacan's model of woman as lack or absence. Central to *Queering Freud* I have addressed the leading question of "Why would lesbian lovers care if a hand is a penis if reproduction is not the aim?" In chapter one titled "Freud: Sexuality and Its Fantasies" I have extensively re-read Freud's narratives of the origins of sexuality in perverse structuring fantasies sited at multiple (polymorphous) imaginary bodily locations (eg. oral "moments," anal-sadistic

¹⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989) and *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990).

¹⁶ Elizabeth Grosz, "Freud, Sigmund," *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 133.

moments, castration moments) teasing out the threads of Freud's perverse (non-normative, non-teleological) narratives of sexuality, desire, and structuring fantasies - including those attributed to his female homosexual subjects /analysands. Central to this chapter is Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) which can be read as articulating multiplistic desires, aims and object choices which (as Foucault would say) are culturally constructed and which (as Freud would say) are psychically repressed and which (as de Lauretis would say) have a powerful hold, even today, as cultural and subjectively structuring myths. My aim is to investigate - following the lead suggested by the discursive constructions of sexuality and desire in contemporary Eurowestern lesbian texts - how culturally and subjectively structuring fictions already apparent in Freud's texts are re-configured through contemporary French feminist-inspired discourses in innovative, experimental, and speculative ways.

In chapter two I will examine Lacan's re-writing of Freud's narratives of sexuality and desire in socio-linguistic terms. From this perspective it can be seen that the subject's sexuality and desire are constituted within the language, representations, and fantasies of the culture into which the subject is born. Towards a feminist and lesbian feminist practice of reading I will also examine both the work of Luce Irigaray, who critiques the language and representations of female sexuality constructed by Freud and Lacan, and the work of Teresa de Lauretis, who suggests ways of appropriating Freudian and Lacanian cultural fantasies for reading the discursive productions of lesbian desire and sexuality. At the conclusion of this chapter, I will trace some of the shifts in cultural and psychoanalytic meaning of the concepts of

"perversion" and "fantasy" through the writings of several queer psychoanalytic and cultural theorists, including de Lauretis, Jonathan Dollimore, and Michel Foucault. These two chapters will constitute a general theoretical and textual framework within which my analyses will be situated.

Chapter three, "Lesbian Vampires: Love in the Oral Phase" examines the embodiment of the homosexual in metaphors of vampirism in psychoanalytic and other fictional discourses dating from the late nineteenth century. As fictional fantasy figures vampires have symbolic significance in Western cultural mythologies, although predominantly Slavonic in origin. In theorising vampirism from a psychoanalytic and lesbian perspective, I have taken some leads from gay theorist, Christopher Craft, whose analyses of the conflation of vampirism and male homo-eroticism in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* proved insightful.¹⁷ Craft also suggests that upsurges in vampiric figures historically coincide with moments of cultural anxiety about sexuality (e.g. the emergence of the homosexual as a sexual identity and an object of psychoanalytic investigation in the early twentieth century; the current AIDS crisis).¹⁸ In relation to classic psychoanalytic discourses on vampirism, Ernest Jones published essays variously titled "On the Nightmare" and "On

¹⁷ Christopher Craft, "Kiss Me with Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*." In *Speaking Of Gender*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York and London: Routledge, 1990). Francis Ford Coppola's filmed version of *Dracula* excluded the scene from the novel in which Dracula states his desire to "vamp" another male, Jonathan Harker. This scenario was central to the development of Craft's reading. However in Werner Herzog's earlier re-make of the classic German Expressionist *Nosferatu* the scene in Harker's bedroom was explicitly coded as male homo-erotic.

¹⁸ At the time of writing, *Interview With a Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*, a film adapted from a novel of the same name by Anne Rice, directed by Neil Jordan and produced by Francis Ford Coppola, opened in Australian cinemas. In Jordan's adaptation of Rice's novel, the homo-erotic desire between the two male protagonists, Louis and Lestat, is quite explicit. Shortly after I began researching for this chapter in 1992, Coppola's film version of Bram Stoker's novel, *Dracula*, was released.

the Vampire" (1920) in which he analysed the psychological meaning of vampire mythology from a Freudian perspective - i.e. as representing unconscious wishes. For most psychoanalytic readers vampiric sexuality, with all its sucking and biting, belongs to the unconscious world of infantile sexuality with its Freudian polymorphously perverse tendencies. Diana Fuss in "Fashion and the Homospectatorial Look" theorises "lesbian vampirism" as a metaphoric paradigm for the specific combination of contradictory identificatory and desiring subjectivities constructed within the apparatus of fashion photography for heterosexual female viewers and consumers. The conflation of the vampire figure with the lesbian subject, particularly in film history, has been well documented by Bonnie Zimmerman who also notes that upsurges in the cultural production of lesbian vampire figures coincide historically with feminist socio-political movements.

Chapter three, a short chapter, is a reading of a classic "lesbian" vampire story, *Carmilla* [1872], written by Irish author, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu. This fantastic tale of "unspeakable" desire will be read against Freud's essay on the uncanny which has become a classic paradigmatic model for reading fantasy/horror fiction through narratives of male castration anxiety. Beginning a series of feminist readings of lesbian subjectivity constructions with a novel written by a male writer might appear as an eccentric strategy. However, my reading of this work uncovers some startling scenarios which also lay the foundation for my re-working of the conceptual framework of a maternal genealogy and its place in some contemporary fantasmatic constructions of lesbian desire. In a recent essay on sexuality and politics, Julia Creet claims that, although women may think they have turned away

from the maternal feminism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the association of morality with maternity has proved to be by far the most enduring baseline for feminism. The feminist movement, she argues, has become a kind of symbolic mother, particularly in relation to sexual desire. Perverse female sexualities such as lesbian sadomasochism then, for Creet, are not transgressing the law of the Father (woman as lack) but the law of the Mother (women as morally superior).¹⁹ What emerges significantly in my reading of Le Fanu's 1872 fantasy text is a symbolic maternal (vampire) figure who not only permits lesbian sexuality between her daughters and the daughters of non-vampire (read paternal) families, but actively instigates them. For this the maternal figure is set upon by the paternal figures, representing the Father's law in this text, with ferocious brutality.

Chapter four, "Why would the lesbian lovers care if a whip was a penis if reproduction isn't the aim?," examines a contemporary short story by United States writer Pat Califia, titled "The Vampire." This section continues the re-reading of vampirism as a metaphor for homosexuality as well as examining the construction of a lesbian sadomasochistic scenario insofar as this story borrows from both genres. Califia narratively transforms sadomasochistic impulses in the relation between two female subjects (one a vampire) - and who are signified respectively as phallic/sadistic and phallic/voyeuristic - into genitally active sex. The structuring fantasy might be read as one of seducing the phallic (m)other without being devoured (killed), a rewriting of Freud's fantasy of "love in the oral stage." However this text is read back into Freud's fantasy structure of the origins of perversion (male homosexuality)

¹⁹ See Julia Creet, "Daughters of the Movement: The Psychodynamics of Lesbian S/M Fantasy," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3/2 (Summer 1991), pp. 135-159.

outlined in "'A Child is Being Beaten': A Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversion". The structuring fantasies of Califia's narrative can be read as "beating" the meaning of the paternal phallus; marking castration (difference) between the female subject and female object of desire; and seducing the phallic (m)other sexually without being re-absorbed into the fantasy of oneness with the maternal body or into symbolic identification with the position marked as "mother."

As suggested in my summary of Creet's argument above, much acrimony and ink have been spilt within western lesbian and feminist debates over the politics and cultural practice of lesbian sadomasochism (s/m or SM). The need for brevity does not permit this cultural and political conflict to be fully re-iterated here, although Pat Califia was a major protagonist in this somewhat ill-tempered debate.²⁰ I will insert at this point something of my own culturally (parental and otherwise) acquired fantasies about perverse sexualities. Inasmuch as my parentally acquired culture of origin can be said to be northern (Scandinavian and more significantly Danish) rather than western, I find the conceptualisation of perverse sexualities, discursive or otherwise, as a "war" waged against maternal *or* paternal law somewhat perplexing. Given that Danes are frequently (and reductively) perceived by neighbouring western European cultures as notorious "bicycling pornography enthusiasts" who legalised civil marriage between homosexuals, I locate, in both a subjective narrative and abstract theoretical sense, sexuality

²⁰ For a summary of the feminist debate about sadomasochism, see Karin M. Cope, "Sadomasochism: Feminist Perspectives," *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, pp. 387-390.

differences and conflicts as at least partially inter-cultural rather than exclusively in familial or feminist, metaphorised as familial, scenarios.²¹

This chapter also examines the centrality, and the symbolic meaning, of fantasies involving male masochism to textual configurations of lesbian sadomasochistic desire. Variations on this scenario appear in both Califia's "The Vampire" and in Monica Treut's film, *Seduction: The Cruel Woman*. Both the writer and the film-maker construct a scenario in which a "normal" male spontaneously transforms into an abject masochist when confronted by a lesbian sadist. This male figure operates as the third term in a tripartite structure whose structural function might be read as analogous to the oedipal scenario, but in which the structuring fantasy might not have been easily imaginable to Freud. Difference (castration) is marked in this scenario - but not as the imperialist sex(ual) difference. Desire is mobile between the *perverse positions* in the triad taken up by the two females in relation to the "beaten" (non-phallic) male body - one as sadist, the other as voyeur. This section also implies a disassembling of feminist film theories which posit the gaze as male-sadistic and the female body as "being the phallus" (fetish object) for a male-masculine voyeur.

Chapter five, "Floating Phalli: Fantasy Fetishes in Winterson's *The Passion* ", analyses constructions of lesbian fetishism through a reading of Jeanette Winterson's novel, *The Passion*. Elsewhere, I have briefly analysed the significance of the heroine, Villanelle's, webbed feet as a parodic fantasy

²¹For a more detailed reading of the differences (economic, social, cultural, political, and sexual) between northern and western Euro-cultures see Tony Griffiths, *Scandinavia* (South Australia: Wakefield Press) particularly the reference to the "bicycling pornography enthusiasts," p. 261.

phallus marking the difference between herself as her female lover.²² Freud insisted that fetishism was not a psychic structure applicable to women as it was grounded in male castration anxiety, although in one of his versions of the sexual theories of children he constructs a scenario in which female children also believe the mother had a penis but lost it by castration. De Lauretis theorises the role of castration anxieties in lesbian subjective structuring less narrowly, and less literally, than Freud. Her essay, "Perverse Desire: The Lure of the Mannish Lesbian," reads the fetishistic desiring fantasy in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* as centred on Stephen Gordon's (the central lesbian protagonist's) loss, or lack, of a specific type of "feminine" (maternal) body. This theoretical work on lesbian fetishism, plus de Lauretis' latest publication, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (1994), remains influential to this chapter on lesbian fetishism which continues tracking the circulation of fetishistic signifiers in Winterson's text. This time the analysis involves the narrative and structural circulation of detachable fantasy fetishes. These include items of Villanelle's transvestite clothing, particularly her predilection for wearing cod-pieces, and her (fantasy) detachable heart. In Freudian narratives (male) fetishism can be read as structured around the fantasy that the (maternal) penis has not been castrated, but merely lost (is detachable). Imaginary (organ) signifiers remain central to psychoanalytic narratives of the origins of fetishism. In the case of

²² Jyanni Steffensen, "Jeanette Winterson: (Re)writing a Fetishistic (Female) Villain," In *(Re)constructions of Sexual Difference, Desire and Sexuality in Contemporary Female Experimental Texts* (M.A. Thesis, University of Adelaide, 1991), pp. 47-82 The fantasy phallus operates in the text as a signifier of difference (and desire) between Villanelle and her masked female lover. Her webbed toes also enable her to walk on water. This reading took cognisance of theoretical developments and debates within lesbian psychoanalytic scholarship regarding the applicability of fetishism to female and/or lesbian sexuality, particularly work by Elizabeth Grosz, and Teresa de Lauretis.

The Passion it is certainly not the same floating (male) organ that it was before.

Chapter six is titled, "Is this testing whether I'm a replicant or a lesbian, Mr. Deckard?" The text analysed here is the science-fantasy *tech noir* film, *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982/92). This is neither a film by a lesbian film-maker, nor a film ostensibly about lesbian(ism)s. The question that doubles as chapter title is the only occasion on which the word "lesbian" is spoken in the film. It is what occurs narratively in (unspoken) answer to the replicant Rachel's question, that I have appropriated to demonstrate how, linguistically, the cultural myth of the Father's law is evoked in this film to position Rachel as object of male desire in this futurist fantasy. Rachel is, in the virtually real *mise-en-scène* of *Blade Runner*, a genetically manufactured woman- she has no childhood memories, she has no childhood at all. She does not "know" what sexuality she is. The (hysterical) question of whether she is a lesbian or not is narratively foreclosed by Scott/ Deckard in the 1982 release. The implications for the outcome(s) of Rachael's virtually real oedipal scenario differ between this ending and the ending of the re-released director's cut (1992). The second ending resonates with a gap in the narrative logic of the film which can be read to imply that Rachael may have the ability to circumvent the Father's (Deckard's) voice/law, without his knowing (how she did) it.

The text analysed in chapter seven is a hypertextual electronic art installation by an Australian cyberfeminist collective, VNS Matrix. This multi-layered text includes as major components a computer game; a video installation; an

acoustic installation; a manifesto which doubles as a public billboard; and a photographic "shrine" to the Oracle Snatch. The spectator doubles as an interactive participant - reading the text is dependent on how one negotiates the installation space. This section of the chapter which focuses on the VNS Matrix assertion that: "the clitoris is a direct line to the Matrix," concentrates centrally on the computer game and the video installation.

All New Gen, the name of both the multi-media installation and the game, is analysed for my purposes as a hypertextual Deleuzian rhizome structure. One of the narrative outcomes is (re) routed through a lesbian s/m video installation called the "Bonding Booth." The objective of the game is to join a band of (s)heroes - the renegade DNA Sluts - on a quest to defeat Big Daddy Mainframe, the imperialist, militaristic Machine and his technophilic son (a "techno-bimbo") called Circuit Boy. Appropriating the language of computer technology and the imaging of cyberpunk, VNS (re)structure female sexuality through a futuristic fantasy discourse which encodes the clitoris as a laser beam "phallus" - a signifier of power and a direct on-line connection - in this multi-dimensional cyberspatial Matrix. Circuit Boy's on-line access to the Matrix is possible only by unscrewing his penis-phallus and transforming it into a telecommunications device, a cellular phone. This chapter will also examine what might be useful for feminist theorising beyond psychoanalytically inscribed cultural myths and practices through selective readings of Michel Foucault's accounts of the "technologies of sex," the cultural production of multiple and perverse sexualities, and Gilles Deleuze's "desiring machines" - a concept which envisages desire as productive, manufacturing things and forging alliances. This last reading also turns

implicitly back to my first reading of le Fanu's lesbian vampire figures in that the maternal configured entity *All New Gen* collaborates with the multi-sexed "daughters" in the VNS game in disordering the Father's law.

In the conclusion I will summarise the multiplistic and heterogeneous contemporary discourses and modes of signification through which lesbian desire is articulated and sexuality represented. This is by no means a definitive model by which any singular lesbian sexed- subjectivity is to be understood. Rather it is a selective reading and rewriting of both Freudian and lesbian texts, highlighting certain aspects and consequently diminishing the significance of others. My aim is to reorganise the terms through which lesbian subjectivity has been represented in psychoanalytic and other cultural and critical discourses.



One

Freud : Sexuality and Its Fantasies

Two of the most significant contributions made by psychoanalyst and writer Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) to twentieth century thought were the theories he constructed of human sexuality and the unconscious. In this chapter I will outline some of Freud's theoretical concepts - what Teresa de Lauretis writing in *The Practice of Love* terms "psychoanalytic narratives" or "passionate fictions" - highlighting aspects which have been restructured in subsequent psychoanalytic discourses and those that can be read as reconfigured in contemporary lesbian texts.¹ These include Freud's narratives of the origins of adult sexuality in infantile (pre-oedipal and oedipal) sexuality; his re-conceptualisation of the turn-of-the-century notion of genital instinct as sexual drives (the fit between the body and the psychical); the attachment of the drives to representations, the contents of fantasy (the only way the drive can be known in psychical life); and cultural and mythical oedipalisation (through the structuring fantasy of castration) which regulates infantile perverse sexual drives aimed at the first object, the mother (that is, incest).²

¹ See Teresa de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. xiv. De Lauretis re-iterates the Bersani and Dutoit idea that the only guarantee any theory can give about itself is to expose itself as a passionate fiction ie. as individually, historically, and culturally specific. De Lauretis also reads psychoanalytic theory as narratives in dialogue with other cultural, fictional and critical texts.

² I have used lower case lettering for "oedipal" throughout except where I have directly quoted Freud or other psychoanalytic theorists who use the upper case "O".

In Freudian terms it is by means of the repression of the sexual drives, wishes, and impulses that the unconscious - the content of which is non-contradictory signifiers and ideas cathected with more or less affect - is formed. The unconscious as the residue of repressed component drives and wishes has, according to Freud, no indicators distinguishing the production of fantasy from what is the effect of reality. In the text of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1905), Freud constructs a theoretical model which suggests that the centre of sexed subjectivity is the unconscious, that it is not in consciousness that reality is established but in another scene - the *mise-en-scène* of desire, the unconscious. For Laplanche and Pontalis psychical reality denotes an unconscious wish *and* the fantasy associated with it. De Lauretis calls the elaboration of conscious and unconscious fantasies into images and narratives, the scenarios (scripts and stage settings) of the subject's desire - initially shaped by parental fantasies and subsequently refashioned with new material drawn in from the outside world.³ Moreover, in "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," Laplanche and Pontalis argue, followed by de Lauretis, that the contents and forms of fantasy make up and structure the individual's psychic life. De Lauretis adds: "Thus fantasy, not nature or biology, is at the origin of sexuality as a social, as well as a subjective construction."⁴ The original or primal fantasies, like myths, provide representations of, and solutions to, the dilemmas which confront the child - questions of "Where did I come from?" and "What sex am I?" The primal scene, according to de Lauretis' reading, pictures the origin of the individual in parental sex; the

³ J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 363. See also Teresa de Lauretis, who reads lesbian desire through Laplanche and Pontalis' re-theorising of the psychoanalytic notion of fantasy, "Original Fantasies, Scenarios of Desire" in *The Practice of Love* particularly, pp. 81-83.

⁴ de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*, p. xv.

seduction scene, the origin of the upsurge of sexuality; and the castration scenario, the origin of sexual difference. For de Lauretis the fantasies of origin are cultural myths that have, nonetheless, a powerful hold in subjectivity.

In this chapter I will also resuscitate Freud's narratives of the structuring fantasies of the infantile negative oedipus (same-sex desired object); the "masculinity complex" through which Freud fantasmatically constructed a narrative of female homosexuality; and the perversions. Freud constructed homosexuality variously as a non-pathological "inversion", a form of inhibited development, and a regression to infantile narcissistic identifications with the fantasised phallic mother.⁵ Perverse subjective structuring fantasies such as those motivating fetishism and sadism are not enlisted by Freud in his discursive construction of female homosexual subjects.⁶ What follows logically from de Lauretis' argument concerning the fantasies of the origins of sexuality as cultural myths - and indeed de Lauretis underscores this point - is that cultural myths "are not carriers of eternal truths." They are historically (and culturally) structured as well as structuring each subject's history. Fantasies, like cultural myths, can be transformed, along with historical and cultural change.⁷ Representations of the origins of sexuality then become both private and public forms of fantasy that are open historically and culturally to restructuring, to reconfiguration.

⁵ For a broader overview of the chronological trajectory of Freud's thinking on female sexuality, including his work with hysterical patients and his theories of female bisexuality and homosexuality, see Elisabeth Young-Bruehl's introduction to *Freud on Women: A Reader* (London: Hogarth Press, 1990), pp.3-47.

⁶ Freud uses the term "female homosexual" in his rare writings on the subject. I will retain the term in this chapter moving toward "lesbian" as this term is used in more contemporary fictional, psychoanalytic and critical discourses particularly feminist ones.

⁷ de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*, pp. xv-xvi.

Freud can be, and has been, read historically as effecting a break with the discourses of the sexological community of his time. He is strategically positioned at the interstices of a physiological, psychological, philosophical, literary and self-analytic construction of sexed-subjectivity. Sexology at the time had two tasks: one to define the characteristics of biological men and women *vis-a-vis* masculinity and femininity; and secondly to catalogue, and hierarchise, sexual practices. These were linked and subsequently defined as normal or abnormal. Heterosexual object choice was closely linked to normal genital intercourse. Other sexual activities were either categorised as forepleasures or as abnormal (aberrations and perversions). Michel Foucault's theory of social sexual organisation is less dependent for its constitution on psychic mechanisms than on systematic strategies of power-knowledge and social organisation that had long been in operation in dominant European culture. These external forces, as it were, constitute, for Foucault, the modern "technology of sex." By this he means the "hysterization of women's bodies; the pedagogization of children's sex; a socialization of procreative behaviour; and the psychiatrization of perverse pleasure."⁸ Foucault's fundamental proposition is that psychosexual perversions are constructed as a product which enables power to gain purchase by fastening on discursively constructed identities of its own making. For him, sexuality is not, as in Freud, a drive which civilisation seeks to sublimate or regulate, but is rather an historical construct which enables the operation of power relations.

Neither de Lauretis nor Jonathan Dollimore⁹ read Freud and Foucault in

⁸ Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality* Vol.1: *An Introduction*. trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1985), pp. 104-105.

⁹ See Jonathan Dollimore, "Perversion, Power, and Social Control", in *Sexual Dissidence; Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp.217-227.

opposition to each other. De Lauretis, while distancing herself from Dollimore's faith in the subversive potentiality (social shattering effect) of sexual perversion, connects Foucault's assertions of endogenously constituted sexuality and perversion to the forms of sexuality articulated by Freud in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*: the sexual drives, revealed by the symptoms of hysteria and the neuroses at the join of the somatic and the mental; infantile sexuality; the oedipus complex, with its attendant fantasies of parental seduction and the transformation of the sexual instinct at puberty; and the sexual aberrations.¹⁰ In other words sexuality can be understood as both "outside" (culturally produced) and "inside" (subjectively constitutive of) the subject. De Lauretis also rereads Freud's account of the perversions, through the ambiguities inherent in his texts, as his "negative theory of desire", as the reverse side of what he defined as the neuroses, rather than as sexual aims in opposition to what was then regarded as "normal." Freud states that:

The normal sexual aim is regarded as being the union of the genitals in the act of copulation . . . But even in the most normal sexual process we may detect rudiments which, if they had developed, would have led to the deviations described as 'perversions'. (SE 7: 149, quotation marks Freud).

I will return to Dollimore's argument for an historically informed approach to reading perversions and perverse strategies¹¹ toward the end of the next

¹⁰ See Sigmund Freud, "The Sexual Aberrations;" "Infantile Sexuality;" and "The Transformations of Puberty" in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* [1905], Standard Edition, Vol. 7, pp.135-243. See also de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*, p. 8.

¹¹ Jonathan Dollimore, "The Cultural Politics of Perversion: Augustine, Shakespeare, Freud, Foucault," *Genders* 8 (Summer 1990): 1-16.

chapter. For now I will endeavour to tease out some of the threads in Freud's fictions of perverse psychic structures; multiple erotogenic sites, component drives and attendant fantasies ("moments"); and his constructions of female homosexuality - in short whatever my readings of texts on perverse lesbian desire have suggested to me is, fantasmatically and culturally, in the process of being restructured. On a more cautious note Laplanche and Pontalis have this to say about psychoanalytic discourses:

The fact remains that Freud and all psychoanalysts do talk of 'normal' sexuality. Even if we admit that the polymorphously perverse disposition typifies all infantile sexuality, that the majority of perversions are to be found in the psychosocial development of every individual, and that the outcome of this development - the genital organisation - 'is not a self-evident fact' and has to be set up and governed not by nature but by the process of personal evolution - even if we admit this, it is still true that the notion of development itself implies a norm.¹²

Freud, writing in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), can be read as problematising the general sexological discursive agreement of his time on the "natural" procreative function of the sexual instinct which was frequently and interchangeably called "genital instinct."¹³ In Freud's psychoanalytically discursive model sexuality can be read as not "natural" or innate, instinctive or biologically regulated, although he comes perilously close at times to

¹² Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*. trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p.308.

¹³ See Arnold Davidson, "How to Do the History of Psychoanalysis: A Reading of Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*", in *The Trial(s) of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Françoise Meltzer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987-88), p. 47. Also see de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*, p. 8.

collapsing his theory of sexual drives back onto biologically regulated teleological phases and hydraulic models derived from the discourses on physics/mechanics. As he evolves into a more psychologically driven framework, sexuality can be understood as what in 1910 he came to call "psychosexuality"(SE 11: 222). In Freud's texts human sexuality is defined as a system of unconscious and conscious fantasies involving a range of excitations and activities producing pleasure beyond any satisfaction of physiological need.¹⁴ It arises from various sources, seeks satisfaction in many different ways and is aimed at many diverse objects. Only with great difficulty does it move from being a drive of component parts - a "masculine" (active) libido expressed through very different phenomena including cultural production, epistemological effort (sublimation), or even railway travel - to something which appears to be a unified instinct in which heterosexual reproductive genitivity predominates (normative sexuality). Sexuality in Freud's psychoanalytic narratives is rather linked to pleasure, derived from a wide variety of sources, and directed, not at a real object, but to a lack, or an absent object (i.e. a fantasmatic object). Desire in Freud's texts can be read not as a relationship to a real object, but as a relationship to fantasy.

Most feminist analysts have agreed on the limitations and difficulties of Freud's account of the origins of sexual difference in the structuring fantasy of castration, which in Freud's oedipal tales accounts for the acquisition of masculine or feminine hetero-subjectivities. Jacqueline Rose warns that to answer the problematic by reference to a pre-given sexual difference aimed at

¹⁴ See Juliet Mitchell, "Introduction I," Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (eds.), *Feminine Sexuality: Lacan and the école freudienne*, trans., Jacqueline Rose (New York: Norton, 1982), p. 2.

securing that identity for both sexes loses sight of Freud's sense that sexual difference is socially constructed at a price (higher for women, many feminists argue), and that it involves subjection to a cultural law (the myth of the symbolic Father) that exceeds any biological or natural division.¹⁵ Rose argues that if one is not arguing for the pre-given nature of sexual difference, for the specificity of male and female drives, then one should not lose sight of the more radical aspects of Freud's work on sexuality - his positing of a disjunction between the sexual object and the sexual aim, his challenge to the concept of perversion, and his insistence that heterosexual object-choice be explained rather than assumed.¹⁶ Freud writes that: "... from the point of view of psycho-analysis the exclusive sexual interest felt by men for women is also a problem that needs elucidating and is not a self-evident fact based upon an attraction that is ultimately of a chemical nature" (SE 7: 146).

In chapter two I will examine Lacan's rewriting of the oedipal scenarios in socio-linguistic terms and his narrative of the origins of the speaking subject. Here, too, I will outline developments in poststructural feminist textual/discourse and cultural analysis which move beyond the Freudian /Lacanian psychoanalytic project, particularly Freud's clinical concerns. Toward this end I will concentrate initially on the writings of the French feminist philosopher, psychoanalyst and linguist, Luce Irigaray.¹⁷ Irigaray

¹⁵ Jacqueline Rose, *Feminine Sexuality*, p. 28.

¹⁶ Rose, *Feminine Sexuality*, p. 33. While I do not dispute Rose's latter points, her accusation that some feminists, notably Luce Irigaray, do argue for pre-given feminine drives, is misplaced. It is clear in Irigaray's answer to Freud's description/construction of "femininity" that Irigaray is working at the level of representation (symbolisation) of drives. See *Speculum of the Other Woman*, p. 12.

¹⁷ See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), and *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985). For further readings on Irigaray see Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991)

neither gives an alternative account of female or lesbian psychosexual constitution nor analyses literary texts. What Irigaray performs is a relentless psychoanalytic, linguistic and deconstructive critique of Freudian and Lacanian discourses. Her object of interrogation in *Speculum of the Other Woman* is the dominant conceptualisation and representation of sexual difference in philosophical and psychoanalytic discourse which, on Irigaray's analyses, interprets sexual difference as though there were only one sex, and that sex were male. On Irigaray's reading of Freud identity is articulated in psychoanalytic discourses as symbolically male; women are represented as defective men.

In Freud's later fictions of the origins of female sexuality, children/subjects of both sexes seem to pass through the early (pre-oedipal) stages of libidinal development in the same manner. Little girls in the anal-sadistic phase are constructed as exhibiting no less aggressive impulses than boys, no less genital activity in relation to the (m)other in the "phallic" scenarios, and no less epistemophilic drive in relations to questions of origins and other sexual matters. From this perspective it can be theorised that the fantasies of oedipalisation and the attendant castration complex - the regulation of drives and objects according to the symbolic law of the (patriarchal) father in order to produce sexually differentiated and socially valued individuals - that the little girl's libido, in order to produce a "passive feminine" woman, is subjected to greater, trauma-prone repression. In 1931, in "Female Sexuality" Freud almost invents an unconscious structuring female fantasy, but is unable to "fit" the elements of maternal seduction, female infantile fantasies of

and Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989).

being devoured by the phallic mother, female infant mastery and representational play, and what manner of symbolic agency (prohibition plus future reward) enables the female child to surmount or resolve the oedipal scenario and choose an exogamous female object of desire (substitute for the lost object), effect sublimation, and retain her narcissistic investment in her clitoris together.¹⁸

A rudimentary maternal symbolic interdict against female infantile masturbation which is accompanied by "intense active wishful impulses [and ideas] directed towards the mother" - the girl must already be auto-erotic, separate from the mother's body - appears around this time in Freud's writing (SE 21: 239). This thesis is left underdeveloped as Freud is lured back to his persistent "penis envy" structuring fantasy of female castration. In this story of the female child/subject, Freud speculates that the girl discovers that she as well as her mother are "castrated," and turns to the father and/or father substitutes as love objects, possessors of the superior, hence desired, organ (signifier of desire). This turning he attributes, as symbolically unmediated, to the little girl's optics rather than to her entry to a socio-symbolic in which the meaning of, fantasies about, and "laws" (language) constituting female bodies, sexual drives and socially desirable object-choices already exist.¹⁹

This is what Freud, at the time, could not say.

¹⁸ This may seem to be a wilful misreading of Freud, or at best recasting a fantasmatic scenario of lesbian subjectivity in male heterosexual mode. However, it is entirely within the terms and logic of Freud's thinking. The model of lesbian subjectivity that I am aiming for begins with this basic model in many respects, but does not subsume representations of the heterogeneous component drives and attendant fantasies under the primacy of phallic and/or clitoral representations. It doesn't exclude them either.

¹⁹ Freud's privileging of sight over other senses such as touch in the formulation of "penis envy" theory has been much critiqued by feminists. In line with sexological thinking of the time he obviously considers the clitoris a stunted penis. As human optical ability does not come with an innate value system, ie "larger is superior", then all one might say in

Seduction and Fantasy.

In two quite distinct periods of writing, Freud constructs two different narratives of the origins of sexuality in childhood. Elizabeth Grosz calls these two accounts of the genesis of sexuality "the seduction theory and the oedipal theory."²⁰ In relation to Freud's seduction theory, de Lauretis contends that: "the fantasy of seduction is central to the theory and clinical practice of psychoanalysis." In the theory, it provides a fantasmatic explanation for the upsurge of sexuality. The fantasy of seduction is how the subject initially represents to herself the internal pressure of the drives, by imagining it (some say) as coming from the outside, or by responding (others say) to the mother's and other adult's fantasies as they handle or physically care for the child, be their stimulating gestures unintentional or deliberate (incestuous).²¹ Although Freud "officially" abandons his paternal seduction scenarios in 1897 when he begins to outline the first of his oedipal structuring fantasies, it returns in various guises rather than disappearing. At the time of his "abandonment" of the first paternal seduction hypothetical scenarios in his correspondence with Wilhelm Fliess, three themes predominate in Freud's writing: infantile sexuality, fantasy, and the oedipus complex.²² As late as

reconfiguring Freud is that little girls exhibit an active scopophilic drive and that little girls are born into a culture in which particular fantasies about female genitals already exist.

²⁰ Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, p. 51. See also J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis. "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality." *Formations of Sexuality*, eds. Victor Burgin *et al.* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989). In between these two models Laplanche and Pontalis elaborate a theory of the origins of sexuality through the concept of fantasy. Fantasy figures eventually in Freud's seduction theories but remains largely dormant in his developmental theory of infantile sexuality even though it was through the concept of fantasy that he originally moved from one theory to the other.

²¹ de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*, p. xvi.

²² It should not be forgotten that Freud's formulation of the oedipus complex was inspired by a work of literature -Sophocles' tragedy of King Oedipus recounted in the Theban cycle of

1931, a permutation of seduction fantasies re-emerges when he "discovers"- in dialogue with female analysts²³ - the intensity of the female child's pre-oedipal attachment to the mother; the mother's unwitting arousal of female children in routine nursery care; and the female fantasy of having been seduced by the mother (SE 21: 232, 238). This particular scenario remains underdeveloped in Freud's texts. As I propose to reconfigure this scene, among others - through Lacanian/Irigarayan theories of the subject's entry into a female imaginary/symbolic (let us say lesbian culture and discourse production) and the Lacanian/Whitford theory of the imaginary (unconscious fantasies) as effects of the symbolic, I will return periodically to this point.

In the first of his seduction stories of the upsurge of the subject's sexuality, Freud contends that sexuality is imposed on the child from an external source, usually literally - in reality- by a father, brother or uncle. Freud begins his seduction scenarios with the theory that hysterics (predominantly female in his account although he acknowledges that hysterics could also be male) were seduced, among other things, by their fathers.²⁴ In developing

legends. Oedipus progressively uncovers a chain of past events which have brought a plague on his kingdom. As a child Oedipus is sent away in order to prevent an oracular curse - that he will kill his father Laius and marry his mother therefore precipitating a plague - coming true. However as an adult, at a crossroads, he murders an old man (who he does not recognise as his father) and unwittingly marries Jocasta who he does not recognise as his mother. When he realises the truth, he blinds himself.

²³ In his 1931 essay, "Female Sexuality", Freud acknowledges the contributions of Dutch physician Jeanne Lampl-de Groot, and Polish analyst Helene Deutsch. He had earlier acknowledged work on the pre-oedipal period by the American, Ruth Mack Brunswick.

²⁴ For an overview of the controversies and debates generated by Freud's paternal seduction/abuse theory see Dianne Hunter, "Seduction Theory," *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, pp. 397-402. Freud's early hypothesis of seduction theory, named by his disciple Ernest Jones, is contained in his correspondence with a friend and colleague, Wilhelm Fliess. See Freud (1892-9) 'Extracts from the Fliess Papers,' SE 1, pp, 173-280, particularly p, 253. See Also Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, ed., *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887-1905* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1985). For an account

his "sexual thesis" in relation to the treatment of hysteria, Freud speculated that hysteria was a conflict between desire and a defense against desire. In hysterics, he narrativised, past traumatic sexual experiences were repressed and dissociated from other memories. Dammed up libido or sexual desire sought an outlet through, and manifested in, hysterical symptoms which, Freud postulated, constituted the hysterical subject's entire sexual life. Freud began to "read" symptoms as hieroglyphs (mnemonic symbols) in need of decoding, as clues to the unconscious, the domain of repressed desires. In *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), co-authored with Josef Breuer, Freud claimed a connection between psychical trauma and neurotic defence. He also advocated "the talking cure"- which he called "psychoanalysis" - and in which the hysteric's trauma is "abreacted" through recollection and verbalisation of the traumatic event(s) and by means of which the symptoms disappears. By 1897 Freud was writing that the presexual (owing to the child's naivety) origin of the cumulative stages of, and retroactively meaningful (as sexual) traumatic events underlying neurotic symptoms, was childhood seduction or abuse by fathers (SE 1: 253). Unwilling to accept the nearly universal perversion of fathers, however, Freud, in his letters to his chief audience at this time, Fliess, abdicated from his "neurotica" hypothesis. He shifted to constructing theories in which fantasies of seduction emanate from the child.

He came to write that "what we are faced with is a falsification of memory and phantasy" (SE 1: 258). The unconscious, he argued, cannot distinguish

of how Freud's renunciation of seduction theory is seen as a sign of his patriarchal complicity with the silencing of women and children see Jeffrey Masson, *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984). For a reading of how Freud's shifts seduction from father to child to mother (or nurse) as "the source" of sexuality, perversion and neurosis, see Jane Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction* (London: MacMillan, 1982) ,pp. 143-44.

between "reality" and "fantasies" and a memory may have originated as either a perception or a wish. In revising his view that these rapes or seductions originated in the trauma of real events, Freud constructed his theory of "psychical reality." (SE 20: 24, "An Autobiographical Study" [1925], pp. 7-70). Psychical reality means that the fantasies a subject has entertained but repressed (for instance, desire for a parent) and the reactions to those fantasies (guilt, for instance, over the wish to eliminate the rival parent) have the same effect on behaviour as if they had been real "events." In psychical reality, according to Freud's discourses on the subject, one might feel as guilty as if the crime had occurred. In his first attempt at formulating an aetiology of hysteria, Freud writes that hysterical symptoms were based on the real trauma of paternal rape or seduction - real events. What Freud came to write was that the trauma was multi-factoral, that the imposition of external events - an actual seduction/rape - retroactively and accumulatively causes hysteria. What Freud was getting at with the notion of psychical reality was that sometimes the repression of a real trauma was involved in the formation of symptoms; sometimes the symptoms originated in the repression of a fantasy.

In modifying his passionate fiction that the paternal seductions his hysterical patients reported were necessarily or always real events, Freud was influenced by a process of self-analysis. This self-analysis, presumably influenced by his hysterical patients' revelations, revealed to Freud his own oedipal impulses. In a letter to Fliess on 15 October of the same year (1897), one month after the "collapse" of the seduction theory, Freud announces his "discovery" of the oedipal complex. This complex, meaning sexual love for the opposite sex parent and jealous hostility toward the same sex parent,

Freud assumed to be analogous to the impulses which lay behind the female hysterics he analysed: "I came to understand that hysterical symptoms are derived from fantasies and not from real occurrences. It was only later that I was able to recognize in this fantasy of being seduced by the father the expression of the typical Oedipus complex in women" (SE 23: 120). He states (1897) that "I have found in my own case too, falling in love with the mother and jealousy of the father, and I now regard it as a universal event of early childhood" (SE 1: 265). By analysing his own dreams and memories and considering children's fantasies, Freud begins to narrate and interpret scenarios of identifications with, and death wishes against, parents: "Hostile impulses against parents (a wish that they should die) are also an integral constituent of neuroses . . . it seems as though this death -wish is directed in sons against their fathers and in daughters against their mothers" (SE 1: 255). In *The Interpretation of Dreams* which Freud wrote between 1897 and 1899 he concludes, constructing infantile heterosexual fantasies and desires, that "a girl's first affection is for her father and a boy's first childish desires are for his mother" (SE 4: 257). The scenario of pre-oedipal attachment of the girl to the mother came very slowly to Freud. Following Lacanian and feminist revisions of Freud's texts, it can be seen more clearly that the first attachment for both boys and girls is to the maternal body.

In the beginning, as he added new elements to his causal theory of neurosis, Freud's narrative of infantile sexuality began to turn from the idea of an externally imposed "seduction" to an account of sexual desires and fantasies emanating from the child. The child, in Grosz' reading of Freud's story of the

origins of sexuality, fantasises or desires seduction, albeit in infantile terms.²⁵ In his letters to Fliess while working on *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud claims becoming aware of the part childhood fantasies played in generating hysterical symptoms. He states that children as young as six months could witness events such as the "primal scene" of parental intercourse. This scene would later become woven into their fantasies and dreams (SE 1: 244, 247).

Yet another causal element in the formation of hysterical symptoms is constructed in another letter to Fliess. In this correspondence Freud formulated a theory of "erotogenic zones" - the mouth, the anus and the genitals - exciting to children in various stages of development (SE 1: 229, 268). Central to the psychic histories of hysterics, he concluded, were the satisfactions and dissatisfactions connected to oral experience (nursing and sucking). Infantile masturbation also played a role, he thought, in all psychoneuroses. What the structuring myth of the erotogenic zones implied was that in the aetiology of the psychoneurosis, spontaneous childhood sexual activities and autoerotic pleasures were involved as well as passive or seductive experiences initiated by adults. One other point which emerges in Freud's dialogue with Fliess on the causes of female neurotica is worth mentioning. Freud designated from the outset, and never retracted this meaning, that all libido or desire is "masculine" (SE 7: 219).²⁶ He claimed that among female children and adult (female) hysterics clitoral masturbation, which he names "masculine" - in line with the then-current definition of the

²⁵ Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, p. 54.

²⁶ Also see Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, "Letters to Fliess" in *Freud on Women* (London: The Hogarth Press), p. 63. Young-Bruehl also points out, p. 19, that by "masculine" libido, whether it occurs in men or women, Freud often meant "active." However he retains throughout his work the conventional associations masculine/active/men and feminine/passive/women.

clitoris as an undeveloped penis - was ubiquitous. This led Freud to speculate that "primitive" female sexual desires - as they were both "masculine" and directed toward the father - were (il)logically "male homosexual" desires. This was to prove an enduring legacy of Freudian narrativising and is particularly striking as a fantasy construct underlying his narrative of female homosexuality in "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman" (1920) (SE 18: 145-72). What Freud was attempting to theorise at the time was a preliminary (primitive) stage for symptoms even before fantasy. Having partially abandoned his seduction theory as a single cause of pathology, he focused on the role of "the wish fulfillment of the repressing thought" in dreams, fantasies and symptoms (SE 7: 60).

Emerging gradually from all of these theories of the multi-factoral causes of hysterical neuroses is (i) Freud's retraction of the idea of familial (the father's) sexual imposition on the child and (ii) the development of a scenario in which infantile sexuality unfolds through a series of biologically pre-structured stages (polymorphously perverse sexuality) and an internal logic of wishful desires (fantasised seductions), projected by the child onto adults. He claimed that all children are sexual from birth, through oral, anal, and genital stages, and that all children desire the parent of the opposite sex. Seduction then, for Freud, was not universally perpetrated by perverse fathers, but had to be seen against a background of perverse infantile desires. In between the two seduction stories, one real and imposed on the child, the other wished for in fantasy by the child, Freud inserts a third which he does not incorporate overall into his theory of the genesis of infantile sexuality. In 1905 he

proposed an inadvertently enacted "seduction" by the mother, or nurturer, unavoidable in nursery care. This scenario is one in which the child's erogenous zones, particularly the genitals, are mapped by the mother/nurturer and the sexual instincts thus aroused (SE 7: 223). Freud returned to this seduction permutation specifically in relation to his speculative writings on "femininity" and female sexuality in his late work. Between the first passionate seduction fiction and the emergence of the oedipal narratives, Freud shifts concentration from perverse fathers to the cultural regulation, via the father's intervention, of mother/son incest.

Infantile Sexuality & Perversion.

In the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Freud claimed that he had presumed a non-sexual infant and neglected infantile (oedipal and pre-oedipal) factors in the aetiology of the psychoneuroses. Between 1905 and 1908 he was also preoccupied with fantasies. He recapitulated that symptoms are compromise formations between opposite impulses - one sexual and one repressing; and that modes of oral, anal, and genital satisfaction in infantile life are recreated and disguised in symptoms. In a 1908 essay "Hysterical Phantasies and their Relationship to Bisexuality," Freud claims that "in psychoanalytic treatment it is very important to be prepared for a symptom's having a bisexual meaning" (Young-Bruehl, p. 152). He also observes that the delusions of paranoia are unconscious fantasies which "rest on the sado-masochistic components of the sexual instincts and they, too, might find their complete counterpart in certain unconscious phantasies of hysterical subjects" (Young-Bruehl, p.149).

Freud's theory of bisexuality eventuated in a more complicated version of the oedipal fantasies as composed, for both males and females, of a positive complex (desire for the opposite- sex parent) and a negative complex (same- sex desire). I shall return to Freud's oedipal narratives later in this chapter. His case study (prepared in 1901 and published in 1905) of an hysteric concerned a young woman whom Freud called "Dora." In this essay, "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria" (SE 7 1-122), Freud, belatedly, claims to have found a second, less accessible "object" (mental representation of a desired person or thing), other than the father in Dora's unconscious fantasies. This was connected to Dora's homosexual desire for her father's mistress. In a postscript footnote, Freud writes: "I failed to discover in time and to inform the patient that her homosexual (gynaecophilic) love for Frau K. was the strongest unconscious current in her mental life" (SE 7: 120). In Freud's narration of Dora's case any connection to the mother is barely touched upon (SE 7: 20). Dora abruptly terminated her analysis with him. After the Dora case, Freud can be read as retreating somewhat from his tendency to inflict interpretations on his patient's discourses and to insist on their compliance.²⁷ Freud gave the name "countertransference" to the (patriarchal) cultural presumptions and unconscious fantasies that he brought to the analysis.

²⁷ It is obvious from the case history that Freud is more sympathetic to the exchange of Dora between her manipulative father and the husband of her father's mistress than he is to Dora's resistance. However, the tone of his later case study (1920) of a female homosexual is quite different although his interpretation still poses problems for a lesbian feminist reading. For a feminist interventionist analysis of the "Dora" case see Jane Gallop, "Keys to Dora", *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction*, pp. 132 -150. I will take up lesbian feminist readings of "Dora" in later chapters. Gallop also reworks father/daughter seduction as a metaphor for the relationship between psychoanalytic fathers such as Freud and Lacan and "dutiful" daughters who are lured into accepting the more orthodox aspects of psychoanalytic discourses.

Dora was eighteen when she was sent to him by her father. She was suffering, according to Freud, from hysterical symptoms (loss of voice, nervous cough, headaches, depression). She was convinced, and so was Freud, that she was being used as a pawn in a game between her father and Herr K. Her father's mistress was Herr K.'s wife. As a *quid pro quo* for her father's affair with Herr K.'s wife, Dora was expected to become Herr K.'s lover. She refused, and was sent to Freud to be "cured" of her opposition to this arrangement. Dora was aware of this game, and Freud does not indicate in his writing of the case that he has any reason to disbelieve her. What Freud can be read as believing is that Dora developed the hysterical symptoms because she was repressing, in Freudian terms, her sexual desire - in the first instance, for her father, and as a substitute for the father, her desire for Herr K. Although Freud indicates no difficulty in believing Dora's assertion that the two men are involved in a game of exchanging women, he refuses to believe that Dora does not desire Herr K. In Freud's narrative he describes how Herr K:

suddenly clasped the girl to him and pressed a kiss on her lips. This was surely just the situation to call up a distinct feeling of sexual excitement in a girl of fourteen who had never before been approached. But Dora had at that moment a violent feeling of disgust, tore herself free from the man, and hurried past him to the street door (p. 28).

He disbelieves Dora's "violent feeling of disgust." In this case history narrative, Freud's treatment consists of repeated attempts to coerce Dora to

admit of her desire (for Herr K.). She wilfully resists this "treatment," finally terminating the analysis. It is apparent that Freud himself, in instigating this treatment, is ruled by a set of cultural assumptions: firstly, the centrality of heterosexuality to sexuality; and secondly, the centrality of men to female desire. His treatment can be said to proceed from the patriarchal cultural assumption that men are universally desirable to women/Dora. The possibility that Dora is not attracted to her father/Herr K./Freud is, at this stage, inconceivable to him. Freud also assumes his own neutrality, as analyst/dispassionate "scientist," unaware of his own counter-transference, his place in the structuring narrative of Dora's desire. Too late, he realises that the source of Dora's problem might be her repressed desire for Frau K. Behind this possibility looms, in Freudian terms, Dora's oedipal fantasmatic desire for her mother. The mother is defined as "nothing" and erased in Freud's text.

There is no doubting Freud's sincerity in narrating this case history. There is, however, something vitally missing. Lacan has observed in this instance - as have many feminists re-reading "Dora" - the signs of Freud's counter-transference in the case; his identification with Herr K, and his inability to accept that Dora had no desire for him.²⁸ Jeffrey Weeks, furthermore, speculates that in resisting the (hysterically represented) knowledge of Dora's homosexual desire, Freud surely resists any confrontation with his own

²⁸ Jacques Lacan, "Intervention on Transference", trans. Jacqueline Rose, *In Dora's Case: Freud, Hysteria, Feminism*, eds. Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane (London: Virago, 1985), 92 - 104.

(unconscious) homoerotic desire - particularly as it is Dora's father who pays the analyst for his services.²⁹

As analyst/father, Freud could be said to fail Dora at the symbolic level. Ann Game reads "Fragment of an Analysis" as a "particularly striking case of the positioning of a woman in phallogentric culture."³⁰ Dora is the object of exchange between men - her father, Herr K. and Freud. Game asks: "What choice did Dora have in *her* objects and identifications?" (Game, p. 58). Freud fantasises that had Dora not been an hysteric she would have been naturally attracted to her male suitor Herr K. as she had been attracted to her father as a small child (and in transference to him). In other words, she would have had "normal" positive female oedipal fantasies. Freud's discourse attempts to position Dora as an object of male desire. This interpretation she refuses, but cannot speak of a desire of her own, can not speak as subject of her own (unconscious) desire. A scenario in which Dora might identify with her father in desiring Frau K. is not entertained by Freud. Without an authoritative speaking position (Dora suffers from aphonia, no one believes her) she hystericises the real of her body - phallicises her throat. Freud accounts for her desire for Frau K. as a disappointment in father substitutes: a regressive masculinity complex relayed through the fantasmatic oedipus scenario. What Dora lacks, and Freud fails to put in the place of the oral symptom, the *meaning* of the fantasy of sensual sucking (SE 7: 30) which can not speak, is an adequate signficatory system of language through which Dora's (unconscious) desire might be represented. Paradoxically, Freud's text

²⁹ Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and Its Discontents: Meanings, Myths, and Modern Sexualities* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985)p. 145.

³⁰ Ann Game, *Undoing the Social: Towards a Deconstructive Sociology* (Buckingham,UK: Open University Press, 1991), p. 56.

already suggests that the (oral) discourse between herself and Frau K. (intercourse) has been about oral sex although it is not until the 1923 postscript that he acknowledges Frau K. as the probable oral source of Dora's knowledge of "perverse" sexual practices (SE 7: 120). Freud assumes at the time of writing (1905) that oral sex means fellatio, but in the text he slips, Freudian like, and calls a pussy a pussy. He states that the only way to speak to girls and women about sexual matters is to do so directly and drily: "I call bodily organs and processes by their technical names . . . *J' appelle un chat un chat*" (SE 7: 48). In Freud's scenario infantile orality (sensual sucking of the mother's breast) is translatable as a structuring fantasy for fellatio (sucking the male organ), but not for cunnilingus - which might be open to an interpretation of female/female desire - despite the metonymic slippage to *chat* (vulgar French for female genitals).³¹ Jane Gallop in "Keys to Dora" points out that *chat* or *chatte* in the French vernacular is equivalent in meaning to the English term "pussy." The Freudian slip works in both languages. Lacan points out that cunnilingus is a more obvious interpretation of oral sexual intercourse in this case, but only insofar as he is suggesting that Dora's working out the meaning of what she is searching for in Frau K. is a means to accepting herself as a "virile" object of male desire. Lacan assumes that Dora means heterosexual cunnilingus.³² Freud's subject Dora remains hysterical, refusing her place in the imaginary oedipal triangle, but unable to represent or inscribe her (unconscious) desire in any other symbolic place.

³¹ See Gallop's essay in *In Dora's Case*, particularly p. 209.

³² See Lacan, "Intervention on Transference" also in *In Dora's Case*, pp. 98-99.

I will return briefly to Freud's narrative of "Dora" in chapter six where I will analyse a sequence of scenes from Ridley Scott's 1982 (re-cut 1992) science fantasy film *Blade Runner*. The intertextual resemblances between Freud's story of Dora and Scott's contemporary narrative of Rachael the replicant are, in Freud's own terms, uncanny. Rachael too is told by the paternal figure, Rick Deckard, in Scott's text that: (i) she sexually desires this same Rick Deckard; (ii) that she has no mother and that her memories of her mother are false; and (iii) in answer to her (hysterical) question as to whether she might be a lesbian or not she is told to just answer Deckard's question about her (presumed) heterosexual desire.

Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905), written instead of a proposed work titled *Human Bisexuality*, represents Freud's most clearly elaborated narratives of the developmental of infantile sexuality. It also re-presents, as do many of Freud's writings, the characteristic ambivalences, ambiguities and uncertainties in the trajectory of his thinking. Between the first two essays on perversity and infantile sexuality respectively and the third, on the development of adult sexual organisation at puberty, Freud's thinking slides from polymorphously perverse infantile component drives and indifferent object choices to different paths for men and women and appropriate reproductive genital organisation and choices: "the sexual instinct is now subordinated to the reproductive function" (SE 7: 207).

He began these essays by explaining why he considered the neuroses to be the negative of the perversions. By perversions he meant those objects or sexual acts generally considered abnormal, including homosexuality. His

thinking, briefly, is that a perverse person expresses, in fantasies or behaviour, his (or her) "abnormal" object-choices and sexual behaviour; a neurotic represses these and replaces them with symptoms. For Freud, a subject who chooses a sexual object considered abnormal - for instance a homosexual - is not a psychoneurotic for that reason alone; he/she may be "quite sound in other respects" (SE 7: 148).

In Freud's one full case study of a female homosexual, "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman" (1920) (SE 18: 145-72), the patient is pronounced by Freud as not "in any way ill." The eighteen-year-old woman is narrated by Freud as free of hysterical symptoms and unusual only in having taken a path banned by society. Having broken with the *fin-de-siècle* medical and psychiatric thinking that homosexuality was a form of degeneracy or insanity, Freud nevertheless leaves his heroine's same-sex desire and object choice stranded in unresolved oedipal fantasies of (incestuous) desire for her brother and "revenge" fantasies against, and masculine identification with, the father. Female homosexuality is constructed by Freud as both a different pathway to the culturally admissible heterosexual one in terms of aims and objects choices, and is yet recast in the narratives of both male heterosexuality (she has a masculinity complex and is seeking a feminine object); and male homosexuality (she has a masculinity complex and is seeking a displaced brother). I will return to this analysis when I have discussed Freud's structuring account of sexuality particularly the negative oedipal fantasies and the castration fantasies. Given the active pursuit by the young woman of a female figure of "ill-repute", to whom Freud pays scant attention, what Freud cannot say, and could never think

ultimately, is that sexual difference might be cast in terms other than the presence or absence (the fantasy of female castration) of a penis. I will examine de Lauretis' reading and recasting of the masculinity complex and castration complex in relation to the signification of lesbian desire in chapter two. In this chapter also I will return to Freud's narrative of female homosexuality in "Psychogenesis" in relation to Luce Irigaray's suggestive speculations on what would happen if women went "to market" on their own.

In his first major public statement on sexuality, *Three Essays*, Freud opens with a discussion on homosexuality, and continues with a discussion of the perversions, suggesting a break in the automatic link between pleasure and genitality, and between sexuality and heterosexual object-choice. For Freud, the accomplishment of heterosexual object-choice, which may or may not be achieved, linked to the organisation of sexuality under the banner of genitality, is less a foregone conclusion than the culmination of a process of development. In *Three Essays* Freud states that:

It has been brought to our notice that we have been in the habit of regarding the connection between the sexual instinct and the sexual object as more intimate than it in fact is. Experience of the cases that are considered abnormal has shown us that in them the sexual instinct and the sexual object are merely soldered together - a fact which we have been in danger of overlooking in consequence of the uniformity of the normal picture, where the object appears to form part and parcel of the instinct. We are thus warned to loosen the bonds that exist in our thoughts between instinct and object. It seems probable that the sexual instinct is

in the first instance independent of its object; nor is its origin likely to be due to its object's attractions (SE 7 147-8).

In Freud's theories of the sexual drive, the sexual aim and the sexual object are welded together in a process of psychic development. Freud's entire theory of the human psyche - in which the instincts, their objects, and their vicissitudes are overdetermined by social and subjective fantasies - is developed according to his clinical studies of psychoneurosis. In other words, as de Lauretis observes, Freud's theory is developed through his study of those cases in which the mental apparatus and drives reveal themselves in their processes and mechanisms which are normally hidden or otherwise unremarkable. According to de Lauretis' reading, in Freud's schema, "normal" heterosexuality is arrived at only by approximation (i.e. by elimination or repression).³³

The mechanism by which heterosexual (like homosexual) object-choice was achieved, for Freud, was the oedipus complex, the centrally organising structure of early childhood (SE 19:173-82). In Freud's terms, the oedipus complex marks the end of autoeroticism and the achievement of true object-relatedness. Infantile sexual drive, according to Freud, in *Three Essays*:

has been predominantly autoerotic; it now finds a sexual object. Its activity has hitherto been derived from a number of separate instincts and erotogenic zones, which, independently of one another, have pursued a certain sort of pleasure as their sole sexual aim. Now, however, a new sexual aim appears, and all the

³³ De Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*, p. xii.

component instincts combine to attain it, while the erotogenic zones become subordinated to the primacy of the genital zone. Since the new sexual aim assigns very different functions to the two sexes, their sexual development now diverges greatly (SE 7: 207).

De Lauretis and Jeffrey Weeks, following Laplanche and Pontalis and Arnold Davidson, point out the incongruities and ambiguities in the trajectory of Freud's own thinking. Having radically departed from the sexological and psychiatric theories which presumed a specific object (i.e. members of the opposite sex) and a specific aim (i.e. reproductive genital intercourse) as integral or constituent parts of the sexual instinct, Freud nonetheless posits a normative outcome for adult sexuality as a cultural necessity. Whilst Freud did not consider homosexuality to be pathological, he nevertheless considered same - sex object choice to be a form of arrested infantile development, a failure to attain mature adult sexuality: "we consider [homosexuality] to be a variation of the sexual function produced by a certain arrest of the sexual development."³⁴

In Freud's discourses on sexuality the oedipus complex is abolished in the unconscious by the threat or belief of castration (for the boy) and survives in traces of pathological psychic structures. To make the transition from narcissistic libido (autoeroticism) to heterosexual object-choice, the child must overcome the earlier object cathexes and identifications. To attain a genitally appropriate gender identification, as a man or a woman, and the culturally appropriate procreative sexual organisation, is a difficult and trauma-prone

³⁴ Ernst Freud (ed.), *Letters of Sigmund Freud 1873-1939* (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), p. 277.

process. This is particularly so for girls in Freud's scenarios as they must relinquish not only their first object but also their narcissistically invested genital, the clitoris. In "Female Sexuality" (1931) Freud re-iterates a point made in *Three Essays*:

We have long realized that in women the development of sexuality is complicated by the task of renouncing that genital zone which was originally the principle one, namely, the clitoris, in favour of a new zone - the vagina (SE 21: 225).

Returning for the moment to the question of perversion, Freud says, "the abandonment of the reproductive function is the common feature of all perversions. We actually describe a sexual activity as perverse if it has given up the aim of reproduction and pursues the attainment of pleasure as an aim independent of it."³⁵ If the prescriptive teleological goal of adult psychosexual maturation is assumed to be reproductive genital heterosexuality, then the polymorphously perverse infantile aims (e.g. auto-eroticism and homo-eroticism) and pre-genital drives of sexual development (oral, anal-sadistic, and phallic), classified by Freud, must be systematically overcome (i.e. repressed and/or sublimated). "Feminine" genital sexuality requires the discovery of the vagina and the suppression of the phallic phase clitoris. Retaining the clitoris as the primary erotogenic organ would certainly be considered as perverse. Logically then, within the interpretation of normative sexuality as a linear development, and as gay theorist Jonathan Dollimore reminds us *apropos* Freud, "one does not become a pervert but

³⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Pelican Freud Library*. Vol. 1, p. 358. Cited in Jonathan Dollimore. "The Cultural Politics of Perversion," p.1.

remains one."³⁶ Freud also defined perversions as sexual activities which were transgressive (of reproductive heterosexual genital intercourse) in their aims, parts of the body involved, and choices of object: "perversions are sexual activities which either (a) extend, in an anatomical sense, beyond regions of the body that are designed for sexual union, or (b) linger over the immediate relations to the sexual object which would normally be traversed rapidly on the path towards the final sexual aim" (SE 7: 150). In Freud's terms "inappropriate" objects may very well include someone of the same sex. Sexual desire might also be invested in other objects such as the foot or fur (as in fetishism) (SE 7:155). Deviant sexual aims may include obtaining pleasure from the desire to inflict and or/receive pain (sodomasochism) (SE 7:157).

I shall turn to reconfiguring Freud's structuring fantasies of perverse sexual aims in my readings of contemporary lesbian texts. While in his late work on female sexuality, he constructs actively aggressive (sadistic), oral and phallic impulses and wishes for female children, he puts these down to transformations of oral aggressivity towards the fantasised phallic mother, never toward the father (love) object. Freud never does suggest that separation anxiety from the (phallic) mother in the oral moment might account for substitution perversions - for instance fetishism. Fetishism was never constructed by Freud as open to women. Freud phallicises fetishism around male castration anxiety scenarios. In 1905 he pathologised the practice without gendering it. In 1909, women were included in the discussion but differentiated from fetishists proper by their passivity - as fashion fetishists.

³⁶ Dollimore, *ibid.* Also see his later published book, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991). The remark from Freud is "When, therefore, any one has *become* a gross and manifest pervert, it would be more correct to say that he has *remained* one..." (SE 7: 50).

In 1927 he opens his essay "Fetishism" with the statement that "In the last few years I have had the opportunity of studying analytically a number of men whose object-choice was dominated by a fetish" (SE 21: 152). The trauma underlying fetishism is conceptualised by Freud as occurring to the little boy, and the practice is located as a denial of male castration anxiety as, in Freud's words: "probably no male human being is spared the fright of castration at the sight of a female genital" (SE 21: 152). Women, who have no penis to protect, are eliminated from this account. By 1937 fetishism is almost definitively masculine: "This abnormality, which may be counted as one of the perversions, is, as well known, based on the patient (who is almost always male)" (SE 23: 202).

What Freud was driving toward at the time of writing *Three Essays* was the idea that perversity was normal for children. The legacy of Freud's ambiguous stance in *Three Essays* is that, on the one hand, perversity is posited as normal in the early history of every individual and that perverts are less prone to neurotic symptoms than those who repress perverse fantasies and behaviours, and on the other, that homosexuality and manifest perversions are either a case of inhibited development or a regression to pre-oedipal fixation on the phallic mother. *Queering Freud* for my purposes requires following through selectively on the first two propositions while avoiding falling into the second.

In the second of the *Three Essays*, Freud argued that as infants our sexual desire is neither focused on a particular type of sexual object (a person or a part of a person's body) nor aimed at a particular type of sexual activity. For

Freud, sexual drives are initially independent of their objects and children are of an undifferentiated sexual disposition. Drives, which Freud differentiates from instinct - the pre-condition for the emergence of drives - have no pre-given objects and are dominated by an erotogenic bodily zone.³⁷ The sexual drives in Freud's account of infantile psycho-sexual stages mimic biological instincts for self-preservation, insinuating themselves at the site of bodily zones and process previously dominated by instincts. For instance the nutritive instinct (hunger)- sucking with the mouth to obtain food- gradually gives over to sensual sucking, pleasurable in itself and sometimes indifferent to its original object of need, milk. In sensual sucking, gratification, pleasure or satisfaction might be obtained in relation to other suckable objects, for instance other parts of the infant's own body. This sensual oral pleasure becomes, in a two stage process, a sexual drive with an object outside the child's own body:

Our study of thumb-sucking or sensual sucking has already given us the three essential characteristics of an infantile sexual manifestation. At its origin it attaches itself to one of the vital somatic functions; it has as yet no sexual object, and is thus autoerotic; and its sexual aim is dominated by an erotogenic zone (SE 7: 182-83).

³⁷ For a discussion of the difference between instincts and drives, and James Strachey's (Freud's English translator) collapse of the two terms as "instinct" see Elizabeth Grosz, "Drives," *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, pp. 71-73. For a more detailed overview of the relation of biological instincts to infantile sexual drives see also Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*, pp.54-58 and *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1994), pp. 52-57. See also Elisabeth Young-Bruehl's "Introduction" to *Freud on Women*, pp. 15-16.

Moreover, in Freud's framework, "sensual sucking" (orality) emerges from self-preservative instincts as erotic relations - as a sexual drive with a sexual object outside the child's own body - on weaning. The child both loses the breast and recognises the person to whom it belongs. Sexual drives are then posited by Freud as *auto-erotic*. In this scene the child realises (or imagines) the distinction between its own body and the outside (the other):

the sexual instinct has a sexual object outside the infant's own body in the shape of the mother's breast. It is only later that he [sic] loses it, just at the time perhaps, when he is able to form a total idea of the person to whom the organ that is giving him satisfaction belongs. As a rule, the sexual drive then becomes auto-erotic, and not until the period of latency has been passed through is the original relation restored. There are thus good reasons why a child sucking at his [sic] mother's breast has become the prototype of every relation of love. The finding of an object is in fact the re-finding of it (SE 7: 222).

It is in this gap, hollowed out by lack or loss of the object, between need and demand, that Lacan will locate the emergence of desire and the positioning of the subject into networks of signification, fantasy, representation, and meaning. From this perspective sexual drives can be seen as resulting both from exogenous (cultural) sources and the child/subject's active agency in "trying to find a place in the web of meaning into which it is born."³⁸ Avital Ronell summarises and ironises the situation as: "Dr. Lacan has noted, every subject belongs to a circuit that transmits error and secrecy from one

³⁸ See Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, pp 55-56.

generation to another."³⁹ For poststructuralist feminists, questions of subjectivity and language, including the web of signification and fantasy woven by Freud and Lacan's discursive constructions remain central to critical readings of psychoanalytic discourses on sexuality. Notions of fantasy, desire, and representation are already implicit in Freud, but despite *The Three Essays* having been published in 1905 - the same year as Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* - it is not until Lacan's revisions that sexuality and desire can be seen to be intimately connected to the structure of individual and collective fantasies and systems of signification. I will re-visit some of Lacan's theories momentarily. What re-emerges quite significantly in *Three Essays* is another variation of the seduction narratives in which desire, in unarticulated form, and zonal excitation are bestowed on the child through a process of corporeal mapping by the mother/nurturer:

A mother would be horrified if she were made aware that all her marks of affection were arousing her child's instinct and preparing for its later intensity. She regards what she does as asexual, 'pure' love, since, after all, she carefully avoids applying more excitations to the child's genitals than are unavoidable in nursery care. As we know, however, the sexual instinct is not aroused only by direct excitation of the genital zone. What we call affection will unfailingly show its effects one day on the genital zone as well (SE7: 223).

Affectionate genitals aside, sexualised drives in Freud's phase developmental narratives originate in erotogenic zones and processes other than the oral/breast/weaning nexus, for instance the eyes, anus and genitals (clitoris

³⁹ Avital Ronell, *Crack Wars: Literature, Addiction, Mania* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p. 137.

and penis). The Freudian phases (i.e. drives related to particular erotogenic zones) through which (infantile, pre-genital) sexuality is inaugurated are oral (the breast; from passive sucking to sensual sucking); anal - sadistic (mastering toilet training); and phallic (auto-erotic mastery of one's own genital, masturbation). The erotogenic zones acquire significance for Freud when a satisfaction that was originally associated with a vital function becomes detached from that function; it is detached when the pleasure associated with the vital function is repeated in wishful "auto-erotic phantasy." In *Three Essays* Freud argues that the pleasurable feelings produced by the internal and external stimulation of the erotogenic zones, the penis and the clitoris, lead to a need for repetition (SE 7: 187-8).

Kaja Silverman points out that in discussing the potential polymorphous perversity of the child, Freud is suggesting that human infants have the capacity for experiencing sexual gratification at sites other than those designated culturally appropriate.⁴⁰ It is only through sexual territorialisation that pleasure comes to be localised at certain erotogenic sites. Traditionally three sites are privileged within western childcare - the mouth, the anus, and the genitals. In normative psychoanalytic accounts of sexual development, the oral and anal zones or phases properly yield over time to the primacy of adult genital sexuality. However, in *Three Essays*, Freud himself concedes that "What is true of one [erotogenic zone] is true of all" (SE 7: 210) and accords to oral sexuality an equivalent status to genitality:

⁴⁰ Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, p. 191.

No one who has seen a baby sinking back satisfied from the breast and falling asleep with flushed cheeks and a blissful smile can escape the reflection that this picture persists as a prototype of the expression of sexual satisfaction in later life (SE 7: 182).

Silverman, following Laplanche and Lacan on desire and fantasy, reads Freud's account of oral, anal, genital eroticism as sexual drives which are not assimilated to any biological or instinctual processes. Genitality is no more "natural" than its oral or anal counterpart. The aim of the nutritive instinct, for example, is the appeasement of hunger which can not be transformed or renounced if the organism is to survive. Oral sexuality, on the other hand, seeks the pleasure of the organ in place, i.e. the pleasure of the mouth rather than the satisfaction of hunger. According to Freud, the drive, unlike the instinct, gains satisfaction even in the deflection of its aim, as can be seen in the vicissitude of sublimation ("Repression" SE 14). Silverman states that not only is the object of the drive - the breast rather than the milk - marginal in relation to nutrition, but it is potentially and definitionally fantasmatic. Laplanche argues that this is what is implied by Freud's emphasis upon the original auto-eroticism or object-lessness of sexuality which forecloses on the material world. The sexual drive turns back upon the subject's own body, and upon an internal, fantasised object.⁴¹ Lacan concurs more or less ("as one says") that the drive is indifferent to its object:

Even when you stuff the mouth - the mouth that opens in the register of the drive - it is not the food that satisfied it, it is, as one says, the pleasure of the

⁴¹ Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 8-47.

mouth ... it is obvious that it is not a question of food, nor the memory of food, nor the echo of food, nor the mother's care, but of something that is called the breast. .. *la pulsion en fait le tour* [the drive moves around, or tricks its object].⁴²

I will return to Lacan's discourse on the *objet a* as the cause not the object of desire, and Laplanche's reading of a nuance in Lacan's texts which suggests that "phantasy" is a post-mirror stage representation of what came before in the next chapter. Freud is customarily vague on how a pre-subjective child could have fantasies or where unconscious ideas, images and representatives come from other than the fact that they are produced under external pressure. In Freud's account of the perversions, infants are predisposed towards a sexuality that is polymorphous and potentially bisexual. It is a pre-condition of the successful gendering/sexualising of the human subject - that is its positioning within hetero/sexual difference - that the perversions be renounced. This renunciation is achieved, albeit in a precarious and unstable manner through repression and sublimation. I will turn to Freud's accounts of the "psychical apparatus" shortly. Margaret Whitford states that from the structural perspective of the pre-oedipal, fantasies do not precede a symbolic structuring process, but are effects of it.⁴³ For Whitford/ Lacan, the pre-oedipal is a retroactive construct that is effected after the oedipal stage. Pre-oedipal fantasies are not primitive ones, but imaginary ones, dependent on the ego which is a pre-condition of having fantasies at all. In relation to Freud's later account of the female child's oral and anal-aggressive impulses toward, and fantasies of being devoured by, the mother, it is unclear whether

⁴² Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, (New York: Norton, 1981) p. 168.

⁴³ Margaret Whitford, "Pre-Oedipal," *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, pp. 346-47.

the Freudian pre-oedipal refers to a period of psycho-sexual development preceding the oedipal complex, or an unconscious psycho-sexual structure in which the attachment to and *fantasies* about the mother are predominant. Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* insist that the Freudian unconscious is a construction, a capitalist ploy, an internalised set of power relations, the result of repression produced for capitalism by the family. Schizoanalysis *constructs* an unconscious, sees libido as still fluid, able to be channelled into new directions, not already stabilised according to oedipal constraints.⁴⁴ I will revisit Deleuzian schizoanalysis as well as Irigaray's demand for a re-presentation, a re-structuring of a (female) symbolic (order of language) and imaginary (unconscious fantasy) in the next chapter.

For Freud, love in the oral phase - the phase in which sexual excitement is produced by fantasies of "incorporating and devouring" - "is consistent with abolishing the object's separate existence." He continues that at the stage of sadistic anal organisation, "the striving for the object appears in a form of an urge for mastery," and while "injury or annihilation of the object," Freud claims, "is a matter of indifference" here, "love in this form and at this preliminary state is hardly to be distinguished from hate in its attitude toward the object" (SE 14: 138-39). I will examine how complex, combinatory oral, sadistic, castration, and seduction fantasmatic moments are re-structured discursively through Califia's writing of lesbian sexuality and desire in chapter four titled "Why would the lesbian lovers care if a whip is a penis if reproduction isn't the aim?"

⁴⁴ See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. (New York: The Viking Press, 1977).

Returning to *Three Essays*, Freud continues that physiological control or "the instinct of mastery" (SE 7: 198, 202) over the operations of oral, alimentary, bowel, sphincter, and bladder organs and muscles, as well as the child's musculature for mobility, all provide preconditions for the emergence of infantile psycho-sexual drives and impulses - but do not cause them. In fact, Freud includes all orifices, their mucous-membrane coverings, the entire surface of the skin, all external and internal organs, as well as intellectual effort (mental functioning) as potential sexual zones: "I am led to ascribe the quality of erotogenicity to all parts of the body and all internal organs" (SE 7: 184). At this time, in addition to zonal drives, Freud also introduced component non-organ-based drives that appear independently of erotogenic zones but involve other people: "the drives of scopophilia, exhibitionism and cruelty, which appear in a sense independently of erotogenic zones" (SE 7: 191). Scopophilia refers to pleasure in looking and exhibition to pleasure in being looked at. Cruelty for Freud has an active form (sadism) and a passive form (masochism). In Freud's normative narratives of sexual development, these component drives and erotogenic zones are eventually integrated under the dominance of the genital zone and the reproductive instinct. This includes the subsuming of another drive which emerges between the ages of three and five, the drive for knowledge or research.⁴⁵ This epistemophilic

⁴⁵ Leo Bersani in "Foucault, Freud, Fantasy, and Power" points to Freud's *Three Essays* as the first major theoretical attempt - both forceful and evasive - to desexualise and degenitalise pleasure by ascribing erotogenicity to the entire surface and internal organs of the body. Bersani connects this "different economy of pleasures" to Foucault's suggestion that effective resistance to the disciplinary production of sexuality should not be a struggle against prohibition - a lifting of the repression on seething drives - but rather a kind of counter-productivity in which we consciously play on the surfaces of bodies with form or intensities of pleasures not covered by the disciplinary classifications that have taught us what sex is. See Leo Bersani, "Foucault, Freud, Fantasy, and Power", *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 2/1-2 (1995): 11-34. What Foucault is never clear about is whether his disciplinary

impulse might be said to take the brain as it favoured erotogenic organ. The infantile drive for knowledge emerges initially for Freud in the riddle of where babies come from and later in questions as to the distinction between the sexes.

According to Young-Bruehl's reading it can be assumed in the *Three Essays*, up until 1924, that before the integration of the component drives under the primacy of the genitals in the service of reproduction, "auto-erotic" (active pleasure seeking) oral, anal, genital, and epistemological activity was the same in Freud's stories for boys and girls.⁴⁶ However it is obvious from Freud's 1915 inclusion of a section on the sexual theories of children that the "instinct for knowledge" produces different results. Boys assume that everyone - despite visual evidence to the contrary - has a penis. This denial also lays down a structure for later perversion, including fetishism. Boys who struggle for realism do so because of their "castration complex" - all the conscious and unconscious fears about losing their penis (SE 7: 195). Girls, on the other hand, can see the difference between genitals very clearly and fall immediately into envy of the penis and wish to be boys themselves. The girl who refuses to give up this hope for a penis is marked by her "masculinity complex" and will, according to Freud, tend toward feminism and homosexuality. In 1924 he added the conclusion that he had reached in a 1923 essay titled "The Infantile Genital Organization". Freud then argued, in line with Karl Abraham's "Manifestations of the Female Castration Complex"

"technologies of sex" operate on female bodies in the same manner that they operate on male bodies. It is one thing to complain that male sexual pleasure is genitalised, but Freud's texts suggest that the normativisation of female sexuality requires the renunciation of pleasure in the clitoris.

⁴⁶ Young-Bruehl, *Freud on Women*, p. 16.

(1920), that there was a third stage of development after the oral and anal stages - the "phallic" stage. In the 1923 essay he writes that:

the main characteristic of this 'infantile genital organization' is its *difference* from the genital organization of the adult. This consists in the fact that, for both sexes, only one genital, namely the male one, comes into account. What is present, therefore, is not a primacy of the genitals, but a primacy of the *phallus* (SE19: 142).

Freud also made one other adjustment in his theory of the genital phase. In a 1920 addition to his "instinct for knowledge" drive he claimed that it was possible to speak of a female castration complex as both male and female children form a theory that women no less than men originally had a penis, but lost it by castration. The castration complex, like the oedipal complex and seduction, is a central structuring fantasy of Freudian narratives of the sexed subject. Fetishism, in psychoanalytic terms, is a refusal to acknowledge, a disavowal of, maternal castration. In Freud's understanding, it is a response to the mother's lack of (male) genitals open only to the boy - the girl having no motivation to sustain the fantasy of the maternal phallus. Wishing to deny the possibility of his own impending castration the boy in Freud's fetishistic scenario disavows what he has in reality seen. Disavowal entails both simultaneously affirming (the mother has been castrated) and denying (if she is I might be too) his scopophilic observations. He replaces the missing genital with a substitute, a fetish. In the sense that the maternal phallus is missing, the male subject accepts castration; in the sense that he substitutes an object (shoe, stocking, fur, hair, etc) he denies its absence. However, as de

Lauretis -following Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit - observes, desiring fantasies may be attached to almost any objects. These (shoes, clothing, other parts of the body) may or may not resemble phallic symbols or objects. They may be things attached to or surrounding a body (hands, clothing, stance, gestures, attitude, etc) which do not operate even in fantasy according to anatomical differences between the sexes. I will return to narrative (re)constructions of lesbian fetishism at length in chapter five where I will discuss the comic proliferation of fantasy (and parodic) fetishistic signifiers in Jeanette Winterson's novel *The Passion*.

The Psychological Apparatus.

Over time Freud developed the notion of a realm of "psychical reality" in which wishes or fantasies have as much force as real events in the subject's psychical life (SE 20: 24). Freud introduced the concept of psychical reality in the last lines of the *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), which sums up his thesis that a dream is not a fantasmagoria but a text to be deciphered (SE 4/5). Symptoms, in Freud's texts, are meaningful, as representing repressed wishes and sexually-related experiences. They tell a story. The approach to language Freud evolved through *The Studies on Hysteria* (1895) and *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) implied a re-evaluation of the status of speech as relating to the body which diverged radically from classical conceptions of speech as directly reflective of thought. This theoretical move paralleled Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1905).⁴⁷ For Lacan, the unconscious is not a random set of images and representatives but is structured like a language.

⁴⁷ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* [1905]. Trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966).

Psychic reality in psychoanalytic terms is fundamentally different from biological and social reality. What the unconscious contains, for Freud, is not repressed instincts, but ideas (instinctual representatives) attached to drives which seek to discharge their energy, wishful impulses which are denied access to consciousness. The repressed wishes that constitute the unconscious are, apart from the demands of reality, the (incestuous) desires of infancy. For Freud, what is unconscious in psychic structuring is also what is infantile. In order to arrive at adult heterosexual reproductive genitality, what must be repressed are the infantile "stages" of sexuality, namely the oral, anal-sadistic and phallic (masturbatory) phases, and the perverse sexual drives or impulses. What must also be repressed are the child's first love-objects, the incestuous wishes towards the parents, particularly the same-sex parent. It is, for Freud, through the repression of the contradictory dynamics of desires and drives that we become human subjects in human culture. The acquisition of culture is constitutive of humanity, and the repression necessitated by culture, for Freud, is not an imposition, but an essential stage in its emergence. This "humanity" is achieved at a cost - a cost paid in neurosis, which as we have seen was the originating object of psychoanalytic investigation. Our identity, according to Freud's speculations, is an ever-precarious achievement, constantly undermined by the repressed wishes that constitute the unconscious. In Freud's account of the origins of sexuality, at each stage the infant has to give up part of its bodily satisfaction: the breast, the faeces - its first product - and clitoral activity directed to the mother.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ This is also a creative piece of rewriting on my part. Although Freud later revised his ideas about female psychology he focused his attention on "object-relations" (the girl's active "negative" oedipal relation to the mother). He did not think it necessary to reconsider the whole of his theory of stages - oral, anal, phallic, and genital. Even though the infantile

The child/subject's selfhood, for Freud, will depend on its assumption of a sexual identity, not merely anatomically determined, but psychically constructed.

A major element in Freudian theory is the centrality of desire (or wish). For Freud desire is initially related to satisfaction. The experience of the satisfaction of need gives rise to a mental trace in the form of an image. Having established this linkage of need and image, the next time the need arises, it will give rise to a psychical impulse seeking to recathect the image and re-evoked the feeling of satisfaction. This is a desire or wish. Internal tension caused by the specific need (for instance hunger) can be satisfied by a specific action, the attainment of a particular object (for instance food). Wishes and desires are linked to memory traces of previous satisfactions (e.g. sucking the breast) and are fulfilled through hallucinatory reproductions of the perceptions which have become signs of satisfaction. The search for the (lost) object of desire is governed by the relationship of signs and representations. It is the organisation of these representations that constitutes fantasy, both the correlate of desire and the principle of organisation. Desire in this sense is not a relationship to a real object, but a relationship to fantasy.

For Freud, the psychical apparatus is defined as a succession of inscriptions of signs, the unconscious is a structure of representations. In *The Ego and the Id* (1923), he writes that: "these word-presentations are residues of memories; they were at one time perceptions, and like all mnemonic residues they can

clitoral satisfactions in relation to the mother are prohibited, the clitoris never appears as a symbolic representative or image cathected with affect in Freud's theories of the unconscious. He stressed penis envy as constitutive of female sexuality throughout, and wishes for penises and babies remain embalmed in Freud's notions of the female unconscious.

become conscious again" (SE 19: 20). Further more, Freud speculates that: "verbal residues are derived primarily from auditory perceptions" (SE 19: 20). Freud extends these representations to include visual components - "optical mnemonic residues" - which he names *things*, and comments that: "in many people this seems to be the favoured method" (SE 19: 21). The Freudian unconscious contains symbolic representatives such as breast, baby, penis, shit (money): "corresponding exactly to analogous changes of meaning that occur in linguistic development, this ancient interest in faeces is transformed into the high valuation of *gold* and *money* but also makes a contribution to the affective cathexis of *baby* and *penis*."⁴⁹ The identification whereby gifts of gold or money or babies are equated with faeces is given by Freud as an example of how, in fantasy, the ego represents its activities (mental and physical) to itself as equivalents of bodily activities. I will take up Freud's various account of the ego in a moment. Of these fantasy equations or identifications (gold = shit), Freud suggests in his writing of "Character and Anal Eroticism" that they may be provisional or shifting, or may become static, stabilise into a set of character traits. (SE 9: 167-75). I will also examine in Winterson's text of *The Passion* how both clitoris and penis are constructed as equivalent to gold in various character's fantasmatic scenarios, and how indeed these identifications are extremely mobile, particularly for the female hero, in her text.

In "Negation," Freud gives another example of fantasy. In this the intellectual faculty of judgement (assigning truth or falsity to an assertion) is traceable to

⁴⁹ See also Freud on the sexual theories of children in "Anxiety and Instinctual Life" In *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1965), p. 100.

a primitive type of thinking whereby everything is perceived/conceived on the model of the body. Expressed in the language of the oldest - the oral instinctual impulses - the judgement is, according to Freud: " 'I should like to eat this' or 'I should like to spit it out'" (SE 19: 236-237). Put more generally by Freud, the judgement is that one would like to keep *this* inside oneself and keep *that* out. To judge that something is true in fantasy is to swallow or incorporate it. To judge that something is false is to spit it out or to expel it. Freud comments that the way in which a repressed thought might return is through a form of negative assertion: 'That is *not* what I was thinking,' which is a fantasy expulsion of the forbidden thought. Conceptual thought for Freud is rooted in bodily fantasy and the unconscious emotion (cathected affect) attached to it. It has little to do with truth or falsity. In the unconscious there is no negation, no "yes" and no "no." Fantasy in Freud's terms is neither true nor false. It belongs to a different order with different rules. Furthermore, Whitford argues, as Freud has shown in his paper on the sexual theories of children (SE 9: 205 -26), fantasmatic representations are not necessarily accurate representations of biological or social processes, but *interpretations* of them.⁵⁰ These unconscious (mis)representations can coexist with knowledge acquired at a later date, and can provide that later knowledge with often unconscious feelings towards that later knowledge. The Freudian account of the (bodily) ego and its relation to more conceptual/intellectual activities in (unconscious) fantasies is explicitly assumed by Lacan under the explanatory concept of the imaginary. The symbolic equation, money= shit arises from the alternating mechanism of

⁵⁰ Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*, p. 64.

expulsion and introjection, from an imaginary game.⁵¹ Lacan builds on the Freudian notion of unconscious fantasy a more complex theory of the imaginary, the ego, and their relation to the symbolic and the real. Irigaray analyses Freud's and Lacan's imaginary fantasies as anal, that is she reads their psychoanalytic discourses as based on the assumption that there is only one sex and that sex is male. Irigaray bases her interpretation of Freud's theorising on Freud's own account of the little boy's theory that babies are born through the anus.⁵² In my last readings in chapter six of VNS Matrix's techno-cultural production *All New Gen* and Scott's *Blade Runner*, I will examine Zoë Sofoulis' Kleinian inspired theory of masculinist fantasies of incorporation of the maternal body in the production of "womb-brain" male corporate figures who give birth to monstrous off-spring.⁵³

Freud does not use the term ego entirely consistently. Elizabeth Grosz identifies two distinct formulations of the ego in Freud's texts which she names the "realist" and "narcissistic" egos.⁵⁴ Lacan's imaginary and "mirror stage" have their origins in Freud's theories of the ego and narcissism.

Margaret Whitford in *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* sketches those aspects of Freud's theory of the ego which shed light on Irigaray's concept of

⁵¹ Jacques Lacan, in Mitchell and Rose (eds.), *Feminine Sexuality*, p. 174.

⁵² See Whitford, p.65; Irigaray in the first section of *Speculum*; and Freud (SE 9: 205-26).

⁵³ Zoë Sofoulis, "Slime in the Matrix: Post-Phallic Formations in Women's Art in New Media," in *Jane Gallop Seminar Papers*, ed. Jill Julius Matthews (Canberra: Australian National University, The Humanities Research Centre, 1994), pp. 83-106.

⁵⁴ See Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, particularly chapter two, "The ego and the imaginary", pp. 24 - 49.

⁵⁵ Whitford, *Luce Irigaray*, pp. 63-65. What Irigaray is doing is psychoanalysing the psychoanalysts, analysing Freudian and Lacanian imaginary/unconscious fantasies which Irigaray claims are not peculiar to them but is the imaginary of the ruling symbolic. Irigaray's point is that Freud's fantasy about anatomical difference (or rather lack of anatomical difference between the sexes) is perceived in the light of a conceptual framework already available.

the imaginary. Irigaray reworks Freud's theory of unconscious fantasy - part of the ego is unconscious (SE 14: 192-3) - as a social rather than an individual unconscious fantasy/imaginary.⁵⁵ Almost everyone, including Freud and Lacan, agree at some point that "the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego" (SE 19: 26). Freud concludes that "the ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body, besides . . . representing the superficialities of the mental apparatus" (SE 19: 26). In psychoanalytic terms the narcissistic ego is not innate or pre-given but something which develops: "a unity comparable to the ego cannot exist in the individual from the start; the ego has to be developed" (SE 14: 77). Freud describes it as a "coherent organization of mental processes" (SE 19: 17). The unity of personal identity (illusory for Lacan) is constructed out of lack of organisation, undifferentiation, fragmentation. The ego develops in the context of the literally life-giving relationship with the parental figures and is suffused with affect. For Freud "there must be something new added to auto-totism - a new psychological action - in order to bring about narcissism" (SE 14: 76-77). For Freud, the narcissistic ego is a pliable and mobile series of identifications, internalisations of images and perceptions invested with libidinal cathexis and can not be easily separated from its internal processes (the flow of libido) or from external objects. The ego in this scenario is governed by fantasy, and modes of identification and introjection, and depends on the subject's relations with the other.

In his 1923 text, *The Ego and the Id*, Freud introduced what is often referred to as the "structural theory" of the mind. In this model the ego, which Grosz calls the realist ego, is one of three distinct agencies: the superego, the ego, and the id. The id is a term which Freud applied retrospectively to the instinctual drives which he theorised as springing from the constitutional needs of the body. The ego in this model is developed out of the id to be an agency which regulates and opposes the drives; and the superego is the representative of parental and societal norms as they are internalised and transform the drives rather than an external agency. The filter-like ego intervenes in the conflict between endogenous sexual impulses and wishes and the demands of reality. This model of the psyche is the one drawn on by ego-psychologists who concentrate on that which "controls" the wish rather than the content of the wish. What preceded Freud's formulation of the agency of the superego, which forbids incestuous desires, was his need to explain the importance of guilt in the "beating fantasies" which he presented in a complex clinical essay "'A Child is Being Beaten': A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversion" (1919) (SE 17: 175-204). I shall deal with this essay in detail in chapter four in relation to Pat Califia's construction of a lesbian sadomasochistic fantasmatic scenario. Freud suggested that this multiform fantasy of being beaten was a fantasy of being loved which had been reworked until it was acceptable to the fantasiser's conscience (superego). In Freud's version of the "beating fantasy," the female fantasiser assumes a male guise by way of avoiding guilt-inducing incestuous desires for the father. In Freud's narrative the "naturally" heterosexual female child avoids, in fantasy, incest guilt by disguising herself as an incestuously desiring, male homoerotic infant. No female authority figure appears in

female beating/loving fantasies, but does in the male version. Freud's boy substitutes a female authority (beating) figure to avoid guilt-inducing homoerotic desire (the negative oedipus fantasy).

Silverman points out that what flares up again in Freud's narrative of the origin of the perversions (sadism and masochism) with renewed intensity is the form of the oedipus fantasy which is positive for the female subject and negative for male subjects -the form that turns upon desire for the father and identification with the mother.⁵⁶ Freud is quite explicit about the male child/subject's negative oedipus. He writes in "The Economic Problem of Masochism:'

We were able to translate the expression 'unconscious sense of guilt' as meaning a need for punishment at the hands of a parental power. We know that the wish, which so frequently appears in phantasies to be beaten by the father stands very close to the other wish, to have a passive (feminine) sexual relation to him and is only a regressive distortion of it (SE 19: 169).

Silverman observes that through moral masochism the ego is beaten/ loved by the father, a situation which - once again - is "normal" for the female subject, but "abnormal" for the male. In this fantasmatic⁵⁷ (unconsciously structuring scenario) Freud observes that whereas the sadism of the super-ego "becomes for the most part glaringly conscious," the masochism of the

⁵⁶ Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, p. 191.

⁵⁷ In *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, Laplanche and Pontalis suggest that the subject's life as a whole can be seen to be shaped and ordered by what might be called a "phantasmatic". For them this fantasmatic scenario is not just thematic but is a structuring dynamic of the subject which seeks to express itself, in consciousness and action, and is constantly drawing on new material, p. 317.

ego "remains as a rule concealed from the subject and has to be inferred from his behaviour" (SE 19: 169). The ego finds itself threatened by the pressure of the unacceptable wishes. Memories of these experiences, that is ideas and images associated with them, become charged with unpleasurable feeling, and are barred from consciousness (repressed). Freud admits in his narrativisation of "A Child is Being Beaten," that the male subject's masochistic (feminine/homoerotic) relation to the father is a construct in analysis and as a rule remains concealed from the subject. With the female masochist the beating fantasy assumes a shape that is available to consciousness, but not necessarily to rational scrutiny. A female negative oedipal scenario does not appear in Freud's narrativisation of the "beating" stories although he has inferred from the figure of the beating mother in the male fantasmatic scenario that this figure has been substituted to conceal or disguise the male subject's homoerotic desires. The father figure is apparently not a substitute for a maternal figure in the female scenario. The female in Freud's sadistic and masochistic scenarios remains consciously a heterosexual and/or a male homosexual child/subject in unconscious fantasy.

Oedipal Fantasies.

Freud was not able to articulate his fantasies of the origins of infantile sexuality together with the oedipal complex fantasies for some time. He described this complex - the "nuclear" complex (*Kernkomplex*) - as the father's (real or symbolic) intervention into the dyadic mother/child relation. Elizabeth Grosz points out that this formulation presupposes that the mother

(or child) has no desire to regulate claustrophobic mother/child identifications.⁵⁸ The positive oedipal fantasmatic in Freud's texts involves the incestuous desire for the parent of the opposite sex, while the negative oedipal scenarios concern desire for the parent of the same sex. According to Martin Stanton's reading of Freud, this complex comprises the infant/subject's negotiation of incestuous desires for its parents. These desires are considered by Freud as both erotic and destructive with concomitant guilt and fear of parental reprisal. The oedipal fantasmatic consolidates the infant subject's ego and superego and orientates its sexual proclivities. Stanton sums it up thus:

During this phase, each individual is supposed to acquire some effective relation through knowledge to the law that governs the child/mother/father triad, and thus opt for the one prescribed route out of the complex: renunciation of incestuous desire and identification with the parent of the same sex. The law operates within the infant through the superego and freedom of erotic choice outside incest develops within the ego.⁵⁹

Within Freudian scenarios, to make the transition from narcissistic libido (autoeroticism) to heterosexual object-choice, the child must overcome the earlier object cathexes and identifications. To attain a genitally appropriate gender identification, as a man or a woman, and the culturally appropriate procreative sexual organisation, are in Freudian formulations a difficult and trauma-prone process (particularly for girls).⁶⁰ What makes it particularly

⁵⁸ See Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, p. 68.

⁵⁹ Martin Stanton, "Oedipus Complex," *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 291.

⁶⁰ See Weeks, "Heterosexuality," *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 154.

difficult for girls, one might very well argue, is that not only does the primary love-object, the mother, have to be foreclosed, but also the primary autoerotic phallic erotogenic zone, the clitoris. From a feminist and Lacanian perspective one might say that the symbolic order represses the clitoris as a primary signifier of female sexuality and desire. In lesbian terms the clitoris as *object a* can be mobilised as a signifier of desire and difference between "mother" and "lesbian." I will trace the symbolic de-repression of the clitoris as a (not the only) signifier of lesbian sexuality and desire in both my readings of Winterson's and VNS Matrix's imaginative works.

Freud worked initially from the assumptions that the cultural law against incest is specific to mother-son relations, and that the castration complex does not impose itself as a law on girls in the same manner as it does on boys. From this perspective the Freudian framework is more problematic for understanding the process of oedipalisation for the girl/subject. In "Femininity" (1933), after his "discovery" of the girl's pre-oedipal attachment to, and fantasies about, the mother, Freud introduces a specific prohibitory maternal injunction against the girl's phallic activity and incestuous wishes (fantasies) in relation to the mother. In his narratives of female sexuality, Freud maintains that the little girl arrives at the positive oedipus position, not because of any symbolic injunction to terminate her sexual desires for the mother, but because of her penis envy. Freud's little girl allegedly concludes that she is already castrated. She tries to get what she wants from the father, the possessor of the penis. In "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex" (1924), Freud with characteristic ambivalence presumes that as the little girl has nothing to lose in the way of (male) organs, but only "in the way of love,"

has no fear of an already accomplished castration, she does not need a powerful superego. He writes:

The fear of castration being thus [accepted as an accomplished fact], in the little girl, a powerful motive also drops out for the setting-up of a super-ego and for the breaking off of the infantile genital organization. In her, far more than in the boy, these changes seem to be the result of upbringing and of intimidation from outside which threatens her with a loss of love. The girl's Oedipus complex is much simpler than that of the small bearer of the penis; in my experience, it seldom goes beyond the taking of the mother's place and the adopting of a feminine attitude towards her father. Renunciation of the penis is not tolerated by the girl without some attempt at compensation. She slips --along the line of a symbolic equation, one might say -- from the penis to a baby. Her Oedipus complex culminates in a desire, which is long retained, to receive a baby from her father as a gift - to bear him a child. One has the impression that the Oedipus complex is then gradually given up because this wish is never fulfilled. The two wishes - to possess a penis and a child - remain strongly cathected in the unconscious and help to prepare the female creature for her later sexual role. The comparatively lesser strength of the sadistic contribution to her sexual instinct, which we may no doubt connect with the stunted growth of her penis, makes it easier in her case for the direct sexual trends to be transformed into aim-inhibited trends of an affectionate kind. It has to be admitted, however, that in general our insights into these developmental processes in girls is unsatisfactory, incomplete and vague (SE 19: 178-9).

If one lays the oedipal/castration structuring fantasy grid over Freud's infantile developmental narrative then in the positive oedipal fantasmatic, the boy need only defer his genitally inscribed desire in relation to his first love-object, the mother. This is effected through a castration threat from the real or construed father. He then identifies with the already phallic, genitally speaking, father, but temporally (temporarily) represses his desire for the (m)other. Later in this story of the male subject, the (heterosexual) male may re-vitalise his phallic genital desire in relation to (an)other (woman). In the girl's positive oedipus scenario, she must repress, rather than defer, not only her phallic clitoral aim in relation to the (m)other (woman), but her phallic clitoral pleasures altogether. On the road to oedipalised femininity in Freud's terms, the symbolic slide, following the repression of the infantile, perverse component drives, aims and objects, is along a (reversed and asymmetric) metonymic chain from clitoris to penis - as the only symbolic representative of phallic genital sexuality- to baby as symbolic substitute.

Stanton defines the negative form of the oedipus fantasies as that which occurs when the infant incestuously desires the parent of the same sex, and aggressively fantasises the destruction of the opposite sex parent.⁶¹ The negative form was defined by Jeanne Lampl-de Groot in 1927 as *primary* in the oedipal development scenarios of women.⁶² Lampl-de Groot conceptually re-worked the negative oedipus in relation to psychoanalytic discourses on female subjects. For her it was more significant than Freud had claimed. She posited that the girl's desire for the mother could not be

⁶¹ Martin Stanton, "Negative oedipus complex," *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, pp. 275-276.

⁶² Jeanne Lampl-de Groot, "The Evolution of the Oedipus Complex in Women," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 9 (1928): 332-45.

confined to a pre-oedipal phase and that it continued throughout their development. She utilised this insight to expose the inadequacies of castration to explain the infant female subject's development and argued for another view of the dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship. Melanie Klein furthermore questioned whether the "negative charge" of fear and anxiety that provokes Freudian homosexual identification actually derives from the oedipus complex at all. Kleinian analysts and theorists argue that all erotic and aggressive drives retain pre-oedipal characteristics of fragmentation and splitting. Freud, in "A Child is Being Beaten" regarded the negative oedipal form as a defence against castration anxiety, through regression, to pre-oedipal fusion (oneness) with the phallic, all-powerful mother (SE 17: 175-204). I will return to Freud's refusal to construct in analysis a female authority figure in the girls' permutations of the beating fantasy. For Freud, the persistence of the regression to mutually narcissistic identification with the phallic mother accounted for the aetiology of the perversions, particularly homosexuality.

Both the masculinity complex and the negative oedipal fantasmatic function centrally in Freudian formulations of female homosexuality. Freud himself muses that: "this 'masculinity complex' in women can also result in a manifest homosexual choice of object" (SE 21: 230). Of the connection between lesbianism and the "masculinity complex" as an outcome of the girl's (negative) oedipalisation, Freud suggests that: ". . . the girl may refuse to accept the fact of being castrated, may harden herself in the conviction that she does possess a penis and may subsequently be compelled to behave as though she were a man" (SE 19: 253). This distinctive disavowal of her

castration is what Freud calls the "masculinity complex." The girl who exits the oedipal scenario under these circumstances is, according to Freud, "suffering" from a refusal to accept her secondary (essential) status. She aspires to be treated like, and to act like, a man. Freud suggests that although having a masculinity complex may not imply lesbianism, many lesbians could be classified in this category. Freud referred to both his homosexual female analysands as "feminists."

As with male homosexuality, for Freud female homosexuality takes on one of two forms, forking paths of infantile development. Taking the feminine path to female homosexuality involves acceptance of castration and the temporary transferrance of libidinal attachment to the father. Instead of then transferring this attachment to another suitable male, this girl seeks a "phallic" woman, that is, a woman with a masculinity complex. Freud reassures us that:

analytic experience teaches us, to be sure, that female homosexuality is seldom or never a direct continuation of infantile masculinity. Even for a girl of this kind it seems necessary that she should take her father as an object for some time and enter the oedipus situation. But afterwards, as a result of her inevitable disappointments from her father, she is driven to regress into her earlier masculinity complex.⁶³

In Lacanian terms, on the masculinity complex path to female homosexuality there is disavowal of women's castration and a refusal to acknowledge the

⁶³ Sigmund Freud, "Femininity," *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 131.

symbolic meaning of sexual difference. The girl will continue to identify with the phallic mother and may see the father as another embodiment of the phallic status of the mother. This retention of the phallic mother is the fate of the male fetishist as well. In refusing to acknowledge her difference from the phallic position, she retains her pre-oedipal masculinity and maternal love-object. For Freud, the female homosexual refuses the normal path to femininity via acceptance of castration and the transfer of libidinal cathexis from mother to father (via penis envy). She retains her pre-oedipal phallic (active) sexuality and retains the maternal figure as a model for her later object attachments. In other words, according to Grosz's reading, she retains the clitoris as her primary sexual organ and continues to love mother-substitutes.

Freud in fact did contribute to a general theory of homosexuality. He breaks with the historical idea of homosexuality as congenital. In *The Three Essays* he also states that there is no case for distinguishing between homosexuality and heterosexuality at a strictly *psychic* level. He states that "all human beings are capable of making a homosexual object-choice" and continues that they have in fact made one in their unconscious. In the case of what is obviously a conscious homosexual object-choice of the unnamed female analysand, he reverses this proposition to include the possibility of being consciously homosexual and unconsciously heterosexual (SE 18: 145-72). In *Psychoanalytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia*, Freud suggests that sexuality may remain in a constant state of flux in relation to the object since "generally speaking, every human oscillates all through his life between heterosexual and homosexual feelings" (p. 46). For Freud

heterosexual object choice requires as full an explanation as that of homosexual erotic object-choice.

In "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman", Freud also breaks with the notion that homosexuality, like heterosexuality, always pairs masculinity with femininity. Freud concedes that identification and object-choice do not always reverse each other according to a strict oppositional binarism. In other words, a masculine identification can coexist with a masculine love-object, and a feminine identification with the desire for a feminine object:

... a man with predominately male characteristics and also masculine in his erotic life may still be inverted in respect to his object, loving only men instead of women. A man in whose character feminine attributes obviously predominate, who may, indeed, behave in love like a woman, might be expected, from his feminine attitude, to choose a man for his love-object; but he may nevertheless be heterosexual, and show no inversion in respect to his object than an average normal [sic] man. The same is true of women; here also mental sexual character and object-choice do not necessarily coincide. The mystery of homosexuality is therefore by no means so simple as it is commonly depicted ... a feminine mind, bound therefore to love a man, but unhappily attached to a masculine body; a masculine mind, irresistibly attracted by women, but alas! imprisoned in a feminine body" (p. 170).

Silverman claims that Freud has to a certain extent broken down the binarism masculinity/femininity which heterosexuality is assumed to maintain and

homosexuality to invert, therefore further eroding the distinction between the two (homosexual/ heterosexual).⁶⁴ Freud accounts for the possible co-presence of homosexual and heterosexual impulses in the same individual by stressing both the possibilities for pleasure implicit within the human organism and by showing the nuclear family to be a structure which makes available to each subject more than one kind of identification and one axis of desire.

Freud confines his speculations on female homosexuality primarily to narrativising the case history of an unnamed woman in "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman" (1920). Lesbians in the contemporary feminist defined socio-political meaning of the term do not figure in the majority of psychoanalytic texts, whereas "female homosexuals" do. Freud's constructions of homosexuality refer generally to male homosexuality. The only other overt reference to female homosexuality ("gynaecophilia") in Freud's writings is a footnote to "Fragment of an Analysis," the case of Dora. In both of these case histories, he attributes same-sex object choice (manifest or unconscious) to the woman's "masculinity complex," rather than to a desire originating from within the libidinal vicissitudes or an economy of female sexed subjective constitution itself.

The aim and object-choice of the female homosexual is understood by Freud to be the same as those of the male heterosexual. The homosexual woman with a classical Freudian masculinity complex - the heterosexual woman also suffering from this condition - is said to have identified with the father.

⁶⁴ Silverman, *Male Subjectivity*, p. 357.

Masculine identification, in the case of female homosexuality, results in a female-object choice which distinguishes it specifically from heterosexual female father-identification. This notion of a female homosexual "masculinity complex" is an amazingly enduring and frequently unquestioned notion in the history of psychoanalytic thinking since Freud. The masculinisation of homosexual women was developed much further in the 1920s and 1930s. Even proponents of the "cultural school" of psychoanalysis, such as Karen Horney, continued to defer to Freud's "masculinity" theory of female homosexuality (Nelson Garner, 1989). This strategy of thinking not only recasts female same-sex object-choice in the cultural fantasy of normative heterosexuality, it presumes that desire somehow originates in the male subject, and is comprehensible only if one understands lesbians as "becoming men." Moreover, de Lauretis adds:

... with regard to lesbianism, the masculinity complex has little or no explanatory power, for it fails to account for the non-masculine lesbian, that particular figure that since the nineteenth century has baffled sexologists and psychoanalysts, and that Havelock Ellis named 'the womanly woman,' the feminine invert.⁶⁵

Returning to "Psychogenesis," Freud explains the attraction of his young female analysand to an older woman, of whom her parents did not approve, as a retaliatory displacement of disappointed love for her father - a revenge fantasy. The analyst describes his unnamed female homosexual subject in terms of a crushing disappointment suffered when her mother became

⁶⁵ de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*, p. xiii.

pregnant to her father. Her adolescent longings for her father, thus thwarted, resulted, according to Freud, in her becoming "furiously resentful and embittered" (SE 18: 157). She rejects her father, all men, and her "femininity." He perceives her intense pursuit of a desired female object - a woman of dubious reputation - as a masculine (anaclitic) style of sexual love. He describes his client as "changing into a man" (p. 158). Rather than theorise this, according to some of his own formulations, as one of the vicissitudes of female libidinal impulses, or a component drive of feminine sexuality, he recoups active desire *tout court* to the side of the man - specifically to male masculinity. That his female subject might overtly desire and actively initiate a sexual relation directed towards another woman, *and refuse to relinquish this position*, seems unimaginable to Freud.

Freud, who has outlined in *The Three Essays* the perverse aims and objects of the component drives, nonetheless endeavours to define female homosexuality through the organisation of the drives according to the narratives of the positive oedipal complex - the positive oedipal trajectory of heterosexuality. The positive oedipal imperative demands that the girl wish for a child by the father. Of his female homosexual analysand, he writes:

She became keenly conscious of the wish to have a child, and a male one; that what she desired was the father's child and an image of him, her consciousness was not allowed to know. And what happened next? It was not she who bore the child, but her unconsciously hated rival, her mother. Furiously resentful and embittered, she turned away from her father and from men altogether. After

this first great reverse she forswore her womanhood and sought another goal for her libido.

In doing so she behaved just as many men do who after a first distressing experience turn their backs for ever upon the faithless female sex and become woman-haters (SE 18: 157).

According to the logic of the fantasy structure of the positive oedipus, the girl in Freud's "Psychogenesis", bitterly disappointed because the mother both has no penis and will not, or can not give her one, turns to the father as love-object. He also will not give her a penis. She converts this wish into a desire for a child (the father's), which he also forbids. Disappointed in both the mother and the father she limps morously out of the oedipus scenario, more or less settling for a male child by a father substitute to compensate for her obvious lacks. In this case Freud does not assume an early (positive erotic) attachment to the mother, and begins his interpretation with the father as (first) object choice. The mother is cast merely as the unconsciously hated rival for the father's affections (and child). Thwarted in this endeavour by the mother, with whom she is now so totally furious that she rejects motherhood and femininity altogether, she also furiously rejects the father and all men as possible object choices. Apart from the heightened drama, everything up until this point has gone according to plan. Having rejected the father as love object, but in order to have a masculinity complex, the oedipal girl in question must at least identify with the father (i.e. take a woman, but not the mother, as object choice). This she does - "sought another goal for her libido." But in the last quoted paragraph, the logic of Freud's narrative goes awry. If, in doing this, she behaves just as men do who turn their backs on women and become woman-haters then (i) she does not identify with her father - does not

have a masculinity complex or (ii) she identifies with her father who is presumably a homosexual himself ("turns his back on the faithless female sex"). If she identifies with a father who turns his back on the female sex, then she has a male homosexuality complex as well as a masculinity problem. The other possibility is that she is a female homosexual with a masculinity problem who hates women. This is what de Lauretis terms a "paradoxical proposition."⁶⁶

Freud doubly compounds his (unconscious) male homosexuality corollary. He links her recalcitrant masculinity with a displaced desire for her brother, whose bodily similarity Freud detects in the forbidden woman. Freud more clearly erases the question of female-female desire through his linkage of a masculinity complex with a male (like) object-choice. As Dianne Chisholm succinctly points out, Freud, in this case had subsumed female homosexuality, not only to male heterosexuality, but, more precisely, to male homosexuality.⁶⁷ Either that, or he is proposing a situation in which a masculine female takes another masculine female as an object-choice. Freud terminated this analysis suddenly. This was in response to the woman's repudiation of men which, Freud felt, included, or was transferred to, him. This, he thought, rendered his efforts to restore "full bisexuality" to his patient useless. Freud it must be noted did not consider restoring "full bisexuality" to heterosexual analysands. His fall-back position, rather lamely, fifteen years after *The Three Essays*, is that perhaps homosexuality is a congenital disposition.

⁶⁶ de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*, p. 43.

⁶⁷ Dianne Chisholm, "Lesbianism," *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, p. 216.

Freud had little to say specifically about the girl's pre-oedipal "stage." Influenced by female analysts such as Klein, Freud addressed this concept in 1931 (late in his career) in his essay on "Female Sexuality" (SE 21: 225-243). In this essay he acknowledges the intense attachment between the female child and mother, and re-adjusts his conception of the female oedipus to include an initial "negative" (homoerotic) variation prior to the positive one: "we can take due account of our new findings by saying that the female only reaches the normal positive oedipus situation after she has surmounted a period before it governed by the negative complex" (SE 21: 226). In this negative oedipus, Freud also notes in 1931: "The very surprising sexual activity of little girls in relation to their mother" (SE 21: 237). This sexuality manifests chronologically in oral, sadistic, and finally even in phallic trends directed towards the mother. As I have already observed in relation to Whitford's reading, the Freudian pre-oedipal might refer to a period of psycho-sexual development preceding the oedipus complex, in which the attachment to the mother predominates, or an unconscious psycho-sexual structure in which the attachment to and *fantasies* about the mother are predominant. In "Female Sexuality", Freud modifies his views on male and female oedipal symmetry, recognising belatedly his under-estimation of the intensity and significance of the girl's attachment to the mother. In this he followed the work of Klein, Ruth Mack Brunswick, Jeanne Lampl-de Groot, and Helene Deutsch. He speculated that the woman's pre-oedipal relation to the mother is related to the aetiology of hysteria, and to female paranoia, which he links to pre-oedipal fears of being killed, perhaps devoured, by the mother. Freud mentions the Kleinian fantasy of the "fear of being devoured" by the mother in "Female Sexuality" (1931). I will reread Freud's oral structuring fantasy of

being devoured by the phallic mother in chapter three in relation to metaphors of vampirism. In the last phase of a long story (1931), and after his elaboration of the oedipal structuring narratives, Freud writes in "Female Sexuality" that:

In regard to the passive impulses of the phallic phase, it is noteworthy that girls regularly accuse their mother of seducing them. This is because they necessarily receive their first, or at any rate their strongest, genital sensation when they are being cleaned and having their toilet attended to by their mother (or by someone such as a nurse who took her place). Mothers have often told me, as a matter of observation, that their little daughters of two or three years old enjoy these sensations and try to get their mothers to make them more intense by repeated touching and rubbing. The fact that the mother thus unavoidably initiates the child into the phallic phase is, I think, the reason why, in phantasies of later years, the father so regularly appears as the sexual seducer. When the girl turns away from the mother, she also makes over to her father her introduction into sexual life (SE 21: 238).

Speaking of the (girl) child, Freud writes that "it tries to do itself what has just been done to it. This is part of the work imposed on it of mastering the external world and can even lead to its endeavouring to repeat an impression which it would have reason to avoid on account of its distressing content" (SE 21: 236). In Freudian/Kleinian terms this means that the child acquires energetic and successful behaviour (i.e. mastery). Teresa Brennan, in *The Interpretation of the Flesh: Freud and Femininity*, argues that children of both sexes initially "identify" with the "executive (phallic) or subjective capacities"

of the mother (i.e. maternal handling, etc.).⁶⁸ For Freud the enigma of female sexuality- "what we men call the enigma of woman" - which so haunted him "may be derived from the expression of bisexuality in their lives" ("Femininity", p. 131). In this essay, Freud insists that the task of psychoanalysis is to inquire "how she comes into being, how a woman develops out of a child with a bisexual disposition." In this essay Freud can also be read as inquiring how a woman (a passive feminine woman) develops out of a child with an active (phallic) homoerotic disposition, replete with aggressive oral, sadistic, and clitoral drives and fantasies aimed at the (m)other, and an instinct for mastering "seduction" and other fantasies in representational play with dolls in full bloom. This play Freud calls phallic (active). He concludes that what he has to say about "femininity" is incomplete, fragmentary, and unfriendly and suggests that if one wants to know more about female sexuality one should inquire of one's own experience of life, consult the poets, or wait for science to provide the answer ("Femininity, p.135). In a general sense my objective in reading Freud in dialogue with the discourses on lesbian sexuality and desire constructed by lesbian cultural producers could be said to be a "consultation with the poets."

There are several key points which emerge from Freud's passionate fictions of sexuality and the unconscious : psychic reality; desire (or wishes); language (representation); and fantasy. In psychoanalytic theories of the unconscious and desire, human individuals are not deterministically biologically driven, nor are they merely effects of social relations. Psychoanalysis proposes that there is a psychic realm with its own history and imperatives (rules or laws)

⁶⁸ Teresa Brennan, *The Interpretation of the Flesh: Freud and Femininity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), particularly Chapter 4, "The Involution of the Drives," pp. 133- 177.

wherein the body acquires meaning. In *Sexuality and Its Discontents*, Jeffrey Weeks reconceptualises Freud's contribution to concepts of sexuality:

Freud's theory of the mind opens the way to a concept of sexuality and sexual difference which is alive to the body, aware of social relations, but sensitive to the importance of mental activities. As a result psychoanalysis offers the possibility of seeing sexuality as more than an irrepressible instinct which wracks the body; it is a force that is actually constructed in the process of the entry into the domain of culture, language and meaning.⁶⁹

The feminist discourse analyses which evolved from French and anglophone psychoanalysis are often informed by Lacanian revisions of Freud's texts, semiotics and poststructuralism. This approach focuses on questions of female subjectivity, language and cultural representation. I will turn to French feminist, lesbian feminist, and queer theoretical and critical engagements with psychoanalytic discourses in the next chapter. The signification of perverse desire in representations of lesbian sexed subjects will also be addressed in this context. These elements, for some time, remained buried in the corpus of psychoanalytic work while feminist debate, often reading Freud through Lacan, centred on critiquing Freud's theory of female sexual development through the positive oedipal scenarios and questions of (hetero)sexual difference. Many feminist theorists since have taken Freud's account of how the sexed subject is culturally inscribed in and through this story as a point of departure for their own analyses of the sexed subject. Two of the major critical trends which arose from analyses of the

⁶⁹ Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and Its Discontents*, p. 128.

oedipus complex could be described as the feminist/Kleinian critique which questions the structure, temporality, and centrality of the oedipal dynamic; and the Lacanian critique which points to the lack of an adequate account of the symbolic dimension in Freudian theory. Among the inconsistencies in the Freudian model are the suppression and ignorance of the mother, the erection of patriarchal law as a universal and normative principle determining psycho-sexual development, and particularly from a lesbian perspective, an inadequate account of lesbian subjectivity. The phallogocentric domination of psycho-sexual relationships in which "penis envy" and (male) castration, for example, determine the constitution of sexual difference as well as "knowledge" of it and its alleged heterosexual "resolution" has been widely critiqued by feminists. Reading Freud through Lacan, feminists who have been particularly concerned with the connections between meaning and language and the constitution of the sexed subject read the oedipal story, in Lacanian terms, as a story of language and the subject. The law of castration has the effect of division and differentiation, it instigates the presence-absence principle of language, and marks the different relation to language of boys and girls. The cultural or symbolic order is sexually differentiated and hierarchised; language works not just by differentiation, but by sexual differentiation.⁷⁰ In regard to my own project one can add that the cultural or symbolic order is sexuality differentiated and hierarchised; and that language and the law work by sexuality differentiation.

⁷⁰ See Mitchell and Rose, *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*, 1982.

Two

Re-reading Freud: Lacan, Irigaray, de Lauretis

Jacques Lacan

In this chapter I will outline Lacan's re-reading and rewriting of Freud's oedipal myths - through structural linguistics - in socio-linguistic, or literary-linguistic terms.¹ In this chapter also I will examine some French feminist re-readings of Lacan's (and Freud's) projects, most notably those by Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. Thirdly, I will briefly re-iterate Teresa de Lauretis' re-working of Freud's and Lacan's myths of lesbian subjectivity as well as some contemporary meanings of terms such as "perversion" and "fantasy." The section on Lacan's work includes a rehearsal of his narrative of the constitution of the subject in language, the function of the metaphorical Name-of-the-Father; the function of the phallus (a privileged metaphorisation of the imaginary penis) in the structuring of sexed subjectivity; and his shifting formulations of the interlinking of real, imaginary, and symbolic orders. At their most schematic these tripartite registers equate roughly to the body (also life, death, sexuality), the image (identifications and also fantasies), and the word (social and cultural symbolic

¹ For a much fuller account of Lacan's work than I can cover in this chapter see Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977). See also Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990) and Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy, *The Works of Jacques Lacan: An Introduction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986). I am particularly reliant on Elizabeth Grosz' feminist interpretation and close reading of Lacan's texts as his writing style and thinking are, as has been observed by almost every Lacanian commentator, notoriously difficult to understand.

systems including language). Here too I will re-iterate Lacan's concept of the "mirror stage" - *stade du miroir* - (1936), its place in the constitution of the (presumed male) subject as it is re-modelled after one of Freud's concepts of the narcissistic ego.² For Lacan the "true" subject is the subject of the unconscious and not the ego. The Lacanian subject is in another place, another scene, or "ex-centric" in relation to itself, and does not co-incide with the ego, the subject is in Lacanian terms subjected to the defiles of the signifier.

The object of Lacanian (and Freudian) psychoanalysis is speech, the analysand's discourse, and the desire articulated along the signifying chain through this discourse.³ Outside of analysis, in his reading of the a story by Edgar Allan Poe in "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" (1956), Lacan emphasises the importance for the subject of the repetition of a signifying chain of meaning in a symbolic circuit.⁴ He indicates how a reader might approach a text: by following the path of the signifier. "The Purloined Letter" is read by Lacan as exemplifying the symbolic repetition of a structuring fantasy, his linguistic version of the repetition compulsion.⁵

² Jacques Lacan's essay on the "mirror stage" is published as "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" as the first chapter of *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977).

³ See Lacan, *Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*, trans. and commentary, Anthony Wilden (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968) .

⁴ Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,'" trans. Jeffrey Mehlman. *Yale French Studies* 48 (1972): 38-72. For readings of Lacan's reading of Poe's "The Purloined Letter" see Jane Gallop. *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 55-73 and Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy. *The Works of Jacques Lacan: An Introduction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), pp. 91-102.

⁵ For this interpretation of Lacan's reading of Poe's story see Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 114

Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) constructs a metanarrative which co-joins theories of the productivity of language with the constitution of the subject. His narrative of the origins of the subject is not the unified humanist/Cartesian subject, but a radically split subject. He understands the materiality of language actively constructing the child/subject's sexual drives and desires and organising the child/subject's unconscious. For Lacan, subjectivity - the organised coherence of consciousness - does not have a guaranteed stability. The unified, independent, rational and phallic subject is only apparently, not actually, so. According to Lacan the phallic subject is illusory, a fantasy. Drawing out the implications of Freud's analysis of the unconscious, he de-centres dominant notions of human subjectivity often unquestioningly assumed in philosophy, psychology and linguistics. Lacan considered the notion of the acquisition of sexual identity in terms of the development of the ego and/or the maturation of the drives as a myth of subjective cohesion. The Lacanian account of subjectivity is located at the conjunction of his theories of the ego, the mirror stage and the imaginary, coupled with his ideas of the unconscious and the symbolic order. Lacan's work challenges the presumption of an autonomous, pre-existent subject by elaborating his concept of the socio-linguistic (symbolic) constitution of subjectivity. In his development of a theory of the symbolic order, Lacan is indebted to the structuralist linguists Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson.⁶ In the Lacanian sense, we become human subjects through entry into the socio-symbolic realm of language and meaning. Subsequent to the linguistic theories of de Saussure, Lacanian and some feminist psychoanalytic theorists

⁶ Lacan[1953], "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," In *Écrits*, pp. 61-2.

have gone on to stress that the awareness of separation and difference is a key element in the acquisition of self and subjectivity.⁷

Lacan, re-reading Freud, constantly stressed the link between sexuality and desire. Sexuality and desire in Lacanian terms are only ever manifested in, and hidden by, language. For Lacan the meaning of sexuality is only ever in language, drives can only be understood in terms of the representations to which they are attached, and representation delimits the parameters within which sexual life might be experienced. He writes in regard to female sexed subjectivity that: "images and symbols *for* the woman cannot be isolated from images and symbols *of* the woman."⁸ What is required after Lacan, according to Luce Irigaray, is a collective restructuring of both the symbolic and the imaginary in a way that will make a difference to women. Irigaray also harnesses metaphor and metonymy as levers to displace the terms of what she defines as a phallic economy of language and meaning, including the language and fantasies in which Lacan formulates his theories of the subject.⁹

In Lacan's thinking, the Name-of-the-Father (the paternal function signified by the paternal phallus) or third term, severs the (generically male) child from its dual, mutual identificatory relation to the (m)other, sexually differentiates it, and inserts it into the symbolic order (the order of language and meaning) as a socially functional subject. Lacan argues that the Name-of-the-Father,

⁷ See Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and Its Discontents: Meanings, Myths and Modern Sexualities* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), n. 8, p. 130.

⁸ Lacan in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*, eds. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (London: MacMillan, 1982), p. 90.

⁹ See Diana J. Fuss, "Essentially Speaking": Luce Irigaray's Language of Essence." *Revaluing French Feminism: Critical Essays on Difference, Agency, & Culture*, eds. Nancy Fraser & Sandra Lee Bartky (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 94-112.



which embodies and represents the law prohibiting incest and founding patriarchy, provides the support that anchors the subject in the symbolic and prevents it from teetering into the abyss of the Real (the place of birth and obliteration). The father's name is the linguistic representation of the symbolic order. Symbolic functioning demands clear lines of demarcation between self and other, order and disorder, proper and improper. Symbolisation and "proper" social functioning demands a separation between "I" and m(other). For Lacan, signification (the difference between linguistic signifiers) insinuates itself in place of the absent object(s) - primarily the breast, secondarily the (m)other - the object(s) engendering desire. The imaginary signifier, the phallus, in Lacan's narrativisation of the symbolic order and signification, is posited as the universal signifier of desire. In Lacan's formulations speech is as dependent upon the notion of lack as is his theory of desire.

Jacques Derrida asserts, in relation to the proper Name-of-the-Father, that it is always and *a priori* a dead man's name, a name of death (the dead father). For Derrida, the deadness of the father's name exists only with the burial, silencing of, the unnamed mother and repressing anything specifically feminine. He states that:

No woman or trace of woman, if I have read correctly - save the mother, that's understood. But this part of the system. The mother is a faceless figure of a figurant, an extra. She gives rise to all the figures by losing herself in the background of the scene like an anonymous persona. Everything comes back to

her, beginning with life; everything addresses and destines itself to her. She survives on the condition of remaining at the bottom.¹⁰

The phallus, as the universal, master signifier of desire in Lacan's system of signification, comes over time to figure lack (loss of the original object); the lacking/lost object; the (m)other's lack (of a penis); the metonymic movement of desire (for instance phallic enjoyment in language, displacing loss/desire onto the whole body of language), or fantasies of One-ness (imaginarily covering over lack). Elizabeth Grosz observes that Lacan's work makes clear that (patriarchal) subjects attain a social and speaking, "I," position only by confronting the question of castration and a sexual difference conceptualised as the presence or absence of the penis. In relation to phallic signification, Lacan argues that both sexes are constituted as sexually different, as sexed subjects, only with reference to this master signifier. Masculine and feminine positions are a function not of biology but of the very structure of language, that is as either *having* a penis/phallus or *being* a penis/phallus. The two sexes are positioned as such in the mode of being (for the feminine) or having (for the masculine) the phallus. Lacan writes:

But one may, simply by reference to the function of the phallus, indicate the structure that will govern the relations between the sexes.

Let us say that these relations will turn around a 'to be' and a 'to have', which, by referring to the signifier, the phallus, have the opposed effect, on the one hand,

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, trans. Avital Ronell (New York: Schocken Books, 1985) p. 38.

of giving reality to the subject in this signifier, and, on the other, of derealizing the relations to be signified.¹¹

Luce Irigaray re-reads this assertion, claiming:

But one may, by reckoning only with the function of the phallus, set forth the structures that will govern the relations between the sexes. Let us say that these relations will turn around a 'to be' and a 'to have' ... Paradoxical as this formulation may seem, we shall say that it is in order to *be the phallus*, that is to say, the signifier of the desire of the Other, that a woman will reject an essential part of her femininity, namely all her attributes in the masquerade. *It is for that which she is not* - that is, the phallus, - *that she asks to be desired and simultaneously to be loved*. But she finds the signifier of her own desire in the body of the one - who is supposed to *have it* - to whom she addresses her demand for love. Perhaps it should not be forgotten that the organ that assumes this signifying function takes on the value of the fetish.¹²

Grosz also argues that, in spite of Lacan's claims, the phallus is not a neutral term functioning equally for both sexes, positioning them in the symbolic order. For her the word suggests a term privileging masculinity. The valorisation of the penis-phallus (the semiotic and metonymic slippage cannot be denied) and the relegation of female organs to the castrated category of lack are, on Grosz' reading, effects of a socio-political system that also enables the phallus to function as the "signifier of signifiers," giving the

¹¹ Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 289.

¹² Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 61-62.

child/subject access to a sexual identity and a speaking position in culture. For Grosz, the centrality of the position of the phallus as a threshold signifier is symptomatic of an assumed patriarchal context in Freud's and Lacan's work.¹³ She outlines the process by which the phallus, a signifier, becomes associated with the penis, an organ. This involves the procedures by which women are systematically excluded from a positive self-definition and a potential autonomy to define female sexuality independently from the male subject. The relation each sex has to the phallus *qua* signifier maps the position(s) each occupies as feminine or masculine in the patriarchal symbolic order. Moreover, this relation defines the structure of romantic relations between the presumed heterosexual pair. The misappropriation of the penis by the phallus happens when the penis is removed from its merely anatomical and functional role (urination and insemination) to the role of object, the *objet a*, in a circuit of demand addressed to the (m)other. It is then capable of taking on the symbolic role of signifier at the level of desire, an object of unconscious fantasy.¹⁴

Lacan's work, as Grosz observes, can be read as a description of male desire. He leaves unanswered the question as to why the privileged status of the phallus/penis and its necessary symbolisation appear as interdependent in the structuring and unstable securing of human subjectivity. If one reads Lacan literally as transhistorical and transculturalist -"It is in the *name of the father* that we must recognize the support of the Symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the

¹³ Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, p. 122.

¹⁴ Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, p. 116.

law"¹⁵ - then he is of little use to feminists. Lacanian fictions posit the oedipal structuring fantasy as a universal of psychosexual development. While implicitly rejecting the claim that the oedipal complex is limited to the nuclear family, Lacanian theory also implicitly rejects the view that oedipus is a psychic structure grounded in culturally and historically specific forms of praxis. Insofar as the "law" of symbolic functioning relegates "woman" to the castrated category of lack, to the symbolic position of mother, or, as in Lacan's Seminar 20, *Encore* (1972-3), to a position outside of representation (in which case "she" is no longer in the symbolic at all),¹⁶ then the question of a specifically female sexed "I" possessing the ability to signify desire (i.e. a socio-symbolically constituted female subjectivity) is inadequately addressed by Lacan's narrativisation of male subjectivity. Teresa de Lauretis asserts that fantasies of origin like cultural myths have a powerful hold in subjectivity, but are not carriers of eternal truths - are historically structured - and possess the capacity for transformation in relation to social practices and representations.¹⁷ In terms of lesbian subjectivity de Lauretis writes:

Some women have 'always' been lesbians. Others, like myself, have 'become' one. As much a sociocultural construction as it is an effect of early childhood experiences, sexual identity is neither innate nor simply acquired, but dynamically (re)structured by forms of fantasy private and public, conscious and unconscious, which are culturally available and historically specific.¹⁸

¹⁵ Lacan, *Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*, p. 41.

¹⁶ See particularly Lacan, "God and the *Jouissance* of the Woman" and "A Love Letter" in Mitchell and Rose, *Feminine Sexuality*, pp. 137-149.

¹⁷ Teresa de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. xv-xvi.

¹⁸ de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*, p. xix.

The Omelette Myth

Lacan begins his myth of the subject's origin with the infant in an amorphous state prior to speech, experiencing itself as diffused and undifferentiated from the world. It is an "hommelette," a "little man," which, like a broken egg, spills over and spreads itself with no fixed (ego) boundaries. The child experiences its being in the world as a flux and is dominated by ever changing drives. In his formulation of the initial stages of separation Lacan relies on Freud's concept of the ego in "On Narcissism: An Introduction" (1914). The key metaphor of narcissism, the mirror, is taken up by Lacan in positing a literal or mythical moment, which he termed the "mirror-stage," in the child/subject's acquisition of an ego.¹⁹ An important transition stage, the mirror stage occurs when the child is about six months of age. At the mirror-phase, the child, shown its image in a mirror, recognises a self, which, because it is founded on an image, is an imaginary identification. The decisive moment at which the omelette realises (or imagines) the distinction between its own body and the outside (the other, generally the mother) is a moment simultaneous with a permanent alienation in identification. The individual identifies with a wholeness or completeness which can never be attained in Lacanian terms it is a mis-recognised identity. At the heart of identity then, for Lacan, is a ceaseless desire for what has been lost. Any stable or complete identity can only be a mis-recognised one. The decisive moment for the acquisition of culture (entry into the socio-symbolic through language), and gender identity acquisition, the oedipal moment, signifies the repression of

¹⁹ Lacan, *Écrits*, pp, 1-7.

desires. These desires which cannot be realised in culture, never disappear from the unconscious and can constantly re-erupt and displace identities. This imaginary self is supported by the mother whose gaze confirms the separatedness of the I/thou positions. Lacan claims that:

We have only to understand the mirror-phase *as an identification*, in the full sense which analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation which takes place in the subject when he assumes an image - whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytical theory, of the old term *imago*.²⁰

The mirror stage introduces a sense of identity to the child/subject-in-process. This sense of identity is dependent on a sense of separateness from the maternal body and the world of others. The Lacanian mirror stage provides the neonate with at least a bodily boundary defined by its own skin. But, for the Lacanian subject, the unity of this mirror stage identity is precariously unstable, modelled as it is on imaginary identifications. In this, the self is defined through its identification with the image of others. The subject's identity is modelled on an other with whom it confuses itself. On this model, the ego, rather than being unproblematically co-extensive with the (humanist) Self, is being set up as an alter ego. Identity in this sense is produced as constitutively alienated, as internally incohesive. In Lacanian scenarios of the origins of the subject, castration provides a second order condition for the constitution of the speaking subject. Castration severs the child from the (specular) image of wholeness, separating it from too close an

²⁰ Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 2

identification with the image of the (phallic) mother, the image through which the child attempts to displace its experiences of fragmentation. It is not, however, until the acquisition of language, when the child can make explicit its desires to another and enter into social exchanges, that this self becomes formulated, that is, named and defined by its entry into the symbolic:

This jubilant assumption of his mirror-image by the little man, at the *infans* stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependency, would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which I is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as a subject.

This form would have to be called the Ideal-I . . . [Which] situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction . . .²¹

The symbolic is marked by the law of structuration of meanings which Lacan calls the "law of the Father." The structures of language are marked with societal imperatives - the father's rules, laws and definitions, among which are those of "child" and "mother." In order to enter the symbolic order, some elements of the imaginary that cannot be expressed within the symbolic's formulations are repressed, and effectively silenced. Society's injunction is that the immediate gratification of desire must wait. Desire must formulate in the constricting word whatever demand it may speak. This injunction effects the split between conscious and unconscious: "the repression that is

²¹ Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 2.

the tax exacted by the use of language."²² On the question of the Lacanian unconscious and language, Jeffrey Weeks asserts that this direction stresses the significance of a theory of the unconscious as a structure constituted in and through language. In this interpretation, according to Weeks: "the unconscious becomes the way in which we acquire the rules of culture through the acquisition of language."²³

Desire & Signification

Lacan's account of sexuality and desire manifested in language reworks Freud's developmental grid as a model premised on distinctions between (biological) need, demand (for love) and desire in which: "it is in the dialectic of the demand for love and the test of desire that development is ordered".²⁴ Need, demand and desire are effects of the orders of human existence which Lacan calls the real, the imaginary and the symbolic. Moving from the real and into the imaginary and the symbolic is, for Lacan, the child/subject's "development." He writes that: "desire takes shape in the margin in which demand is torn apart from need: this margin being that which is opened up by demand, the appeal of which can be unconditional only in regard to the Other, under the form of a possible defect, which need may introduce into it, of having no universal satisfaction (what is called 'anguish')."²⁵

²² Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 109.

²³ Weeks, *Sexuality and Its Discontents*, p. 130.

²⁴ Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 289.

²⁵ Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 311.

Needs are constant, the requirements of basic human survival (e.g. food, shelter, warmth). The child needs objects, milk for instance, to satisfy its instinctual impulses (hunger). Need in Lacanian formulations is quickly overlaid by a structure of meaning and significance that envelops it in imaginary and symbolic relations. Need is transformed in this trajectory into demand and desire. When the child recognises the absence of the mother, biological necessities are converted into social, imaginary, and linguistic functions. The child's immediate lived relation to the mother's presences and absences (which the infant can not control) is replaced by a relation between linguistic signifiers. The child's passivity is transformed into activity - its attempts to represent (symbolise) the mother's comings and goings - and gain some control (mastery) through language.²⁶

Lacan substitutes linguistics in the place of Freud's biology and instincts. The relation of the subject to the phallus - the signifier of the desire of the (m)other (what everyone presumably knows and can see) - and the access to the symbolic it implies take the place of the genital phase and the subordinating mechanisms which thereafter regulate the relations, or more precisely the non-relations, between the sexes. Beginning with Lacan's re-reading of Freud, patriarchy is shown to be inscribed in the very language through which the child learns to define itself and in which it is confirmed in its gender. Language places the subject in a chain of words which binds it to one

²⁶ In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1919) Freud recounts his observations of a game - the "Fort! Da!" game - which his grandson played with a cotton reel. This object, which symbolically represents the loss of the mother, he threw into his cot and retrieved by means of a thread. During this game the child also begins to verbalize this relation with semi-articulate utterances approximating "here" and "gone". Lacan reads the "Fort! Da!" game as an attempt by the child/subject to control the mother's presences and absences through language. The game turns the child's passivity into active mastery through language. See Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, p. 60.

gender or the other. However, the force of the unconscious can subvert that definition.²⁷ Lacan's revolutionising of Freudian theory is also a systematic claim that the unconscious is more than the source of primal instincts linked at random to ideas and images. For Lacan there is nothing random about it - both the conscious and the unconscious are co-present. The inner structure (the unconscious) maps the conscious conceptualisations. This mapping is governed by linguistic experience.²⁸

For Lacan's subject, phallic enjoyment is achieved in language. It is the enjoyment of mastery, of the ego's imaginary bodily compactness and psychic coherence. The "phallus" is what everyone can (not) see: the symbol of external communal power, the basis of the authority of the symbolic order. Lacan's concept of drive underlies his theory of desire. The libido, fragmented in its origins, gets chained up, invested in and shifted from the fragmented body of the infant onto the whole "body of language," and on to the imaginary unity of the ego's body, which enjoys speaking. The subject gives up the fragmented sexual enjoyment by investing it in a universal symbol: the phallus. The phallus, according to Benvenuto and Kennedy's reading of Lacan, offers (an imaginary fantasy of) One-ness.²⁹

²⁷ For an overview of Lacanian (structural) psychoanalysis and language and what it might bring to textual criticism see Elizabeth Wright "Structural psychoanalysis: psyche as text" in *Psychoanalytic Criticism*, pp. 108-132.

²⁸ Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism*, p. 107.

²⁹ Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy, *The Works of Jacques Lacan: An Introduction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), p. 190.

Signification, sexuality, perversion.

Lacan considers that there is no pre-oedipal sexuality, although there may be pre-genital sexuality. As a general Lacanian premise, human sexuality, that is desire, is always pre-genital, or more precisely, always partial. For him, there is no whole sexual object; fantasy shows that desire always revolves around a part without a whole. The missing part, *objet a*, which appears in Lacan's later texts as a formula for the lost object, has been variously theorised as the penis, the maternal penis/phallus, the breast, and as the maternal body. The *objet a* is not the object of a drive, including oral, anal, and scopic drives, but the cause of desire. In Lacan's texts, language substitutes for the lack of/desire for the maternal body. However, if the phallic signifier has a privileged position in the unconscious, it is not as an *objet a* (penis, breast, faeces) but in being an object which the mother lacks and desires. It is the phallus which, according to Lacan signifies sexual difference. The phallus also signifies the law of symbolic castration for it belongs to the father, the Other who forbids the enjoyment of the mother-child symbiosis. Lacan linked the difference between the sexes to a splitting in relation to the mother's lack of the phallus. Through oedipalisation, male and female children are separated from their first love object, the mother, and positioned within the larger cultural socio-symbolic order. Lacan states that:

The *objet a* is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off as organ. This serves as a symbol of lack, that is to say, of the

phallus, not as such, but insofar as it is lacking. It must, therefore, be an object that is, firstly separable, and secondly, that has some relation to the lack.³⁰

While the *objets a* in Lacan's texts belong to the (m)other, the mother as imaginary object, the imaginary place of enjoyment which it is impossible to symbolise, the phallus (barred in the Mother) belongs to the symbolic Other (the Father). Lacan emphasised, following Freud, that there is only one "masculine" libido or sexual energy. The drives are affected by desire and are split in relation to the absence of the (maternal) phallus. In Lacan's view of the perversions, the barred Other (the Mother) is replaced by the *objet a*. Thus the (male) fetishist identifies the Other's lack (e.g. the father's lack projected onto the "castrated" woman/mother) with the *objet a*: bits of clothing, cast-off shoes. The (female) hysteric identifies the demand (for love) of the Other (the Father) with the father's lack and refuses to be the object of the father's desire. The mother, according to Lacan, then appears to be self-sufficient, while the father appears as castrated. The neurotic defends himself against desire, not wanting to accept the symbolic castration operated by the father. The neurotic's father becomes the dead father, cast off as it were like an old shoe.³¹ For Lacan desire is always played out in the field of sexuality and the aims and objects which sexual drives develop are culturally specific (i.e. are effects of social and familial meanings and fantasies about the child's body and pleasures).

³⁰ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (London: Hogarth Press, 1977), p.103. Also quoted in Grosz. *Jacques Lacan*, p. 80.

³¹ Benvenuto & Kennedy, *The Works of Jacques Lacan*, p. 177.

The Speaking Subject

As the child says "I," it constructs a fiction of selfhood that depends on the syntax of the language into which it has been born. Lacan designates the "I" position as male: ". . . whatever the success of the dialectical synthesis by which he must resolve as I his discordance with his own reality."³² The child's sense of identity is filtered through external views of itself formulated in a language where the "I" position is male. Lacan's thesis is that language, shaped through the law of the father with which the boy identifies, reserves the "I" position (i.e. the speaking subject [position]) for one sex, relegating the "other" to the negative pole. At the point of entry to the symbolic (i.e. the acquisition of language) the residue of the imaginary which cannot find expression in words is repressed in the unconscious. In the Lacanian account of language acquisition the "feminine" in the face of the master signifier can only be defined as lack. The phallus is the crucial signifier in the sexual and social distribution of power, authority and a speaking position. It is also the signifier of lack, of absence, marking castration. As the mark of lack it also signifies presence or possession. In other words, the presence of the term only has value or meaning in opposition to its absence. Lacan writes:

The phallus is the privileged signifier of that mark where the share of the logos is wedded to the advent of desire. 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 that

³² For a critique of Lacan's notion that the "I" is male see Grosz, "The Subject", p 413.

by virtue of its turgidity, it is the image of the vital flow as it is transmitted in generation.³³

Whilst Lacan is conscious always of the subject constituted in and by language, and is careful to say that "one *might* say" nonetheless his masculine and heterosexual metaphors pose certain problematics for a feminist or lesbian feminist reader. By his use of terms such as "he" and even "the little man," he might mean the human subject in a universal generic sense. However, there is a semiotic sense in which these terms, connected to the words "phallus" and "turgidity" and the phrases "what stands out as the most easily seized upon in the real of sexual copulation" and "vital flow" connote very strongly the positing, by Lacan, of the subject as male/masculine and ejaculatory. On the privileging of heterosexual difference in Lacanian discourses, de Lauretis states bluntly that:

In all such [psychoanalytic] arguments, however, nearly everyone fails to note that the Lacanian framing of the question in terms of having or being the phallus is set in the perspective of normative heterosexuality (which analysis and theory seek to reproduce in the subject), with the sexual difference of man and woman clearly mapped out and the act of copulation firmly in place.³⁴

If one were to read Lacan in this manner then sexuality appears to be (normatively) heterosexual or, at least, penile dependent ("most easily seized upon in the real of sexual copulation"), and reproductively procreative ("as it

³³ Lacan, in Mitchell and Rose (eds.), *Feminine Sexuality*, p. 82.

³⁴ Teresa de Lauretis, "Perverse Desire: The Lure of the Mannish Lesbian," *Australian Feminist Studies* 13 (1991), p. 20.

is transmitted in the flow of generation"). "One might say" suggests, as Irigaray does, that one might also say otherwise. Lacan argued that women can enter into the symbolic life of the unconscious only to the extent that they internalise male desire (phallic libido) - that they imagines themselves as men imagine them.³⁵ He claims that:

" . . . if the libido is only masculine, it is only from that place where she is whole, the dear woman - that is to say, from the place where the man sees her, and only from there - that the dear woman can have an unconscious."³⁶

"Woman" according to Irigaray's reading of Lacan is to be excluded from the symbolic as speaking subject: "There is no woman who is not excluded by the nature of things, which is the nature of words . . ." ³⁷, and furthermore "woman comes into play in the sexual relation only as mother." ³⁸ Lacan does not insist that women are excluded *from* words, but *by* words.³⁹ In a masculinist symbolic order males are represented as "men" and females as "mothers" (p. 143). This Lacanian provocation was taken up by Irigaray, who not being excluded by words herself stressed over time the need for women to restructure the imaginary through the symbolic in a way that would make a difference to women. Irigaray has been engaged with the major works of Western philosophical thought, reworking ideas that go unchallenged in the writings of male colleagues, illustrating the historical processes whereby the

³⁵ Lacan, *Encore: Le Séminaire XX, 1972-4* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 90, quoted Ann Rosalind Jones *Making A Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, eds. Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), p. 83

³⁶ Lacan, *Encore: Le Séminaire XX*, quoted Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 93.

³⁷ *ibid*, p.87.

³⁸ *ibid*, p.102

³⁹ Lacan, in Mitchell and Rose (eds.), *Feminine Sexuality*, p. 44.

"feminine" has been defined and debased in male texts. Irigaray is interested in elaborating a theory of enunciation, a theory of discursive production which makes explicit the positions of woman as a speaking subject. Her project is committed to making explicit the sexualisation of all discourses. In *Speculum of the Other Woman* Irigaray makes her anti-Lacanian position clear:

We can assume that any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the 'masculine'. When she submits to (such a) theory, woman fails to realize that she is renouncing the specificity of her own relationship to the Imaginary. Subjecting herself to objectivization in discourse - by being 'female'. Re-objectivizing her own self whenever she claims to identify herself 'as' a masculine subject. A 'subject' that would re-search itself as lost (maternal - feminine) 'object'.⁴⁰

Through the desire of the other in Lacan's terms, the male is affirmed as the possessor of the phallus, of having, rather than being, the phallus. Women, the mother in particular, must be represented as not having the phallus, or as lacking (castrated) in order for men to be defined as having phallic status. It is through the castrated woman's desire for that which they lack, the penis/phallus, that the sexual organ, object of desire, can afford them some access to the realm of phallic (illusory) identity. In his enigmatic meditation on feminine *jouissance* and female sexuality in one of his last major texts, *Encore*, Lacan asserts the impossibility of The Woman as a universal, a claim to essence. For Lacan *The woman is an impossibility because "of her essence she is not all."* Writing this contradictory claim as *The woman*, with *The*

⁴⁰ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum Of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 133.

under erasure, Lacan designates it as a fantasy, the representation of a lack (castration). In other words, in the Lacanian phallogentric economy of the symbolic order and its language women represent *for men* a lack men have disavowed. For Lacan this impossible and negative relation to language which is Woman, is also necessary in that "it is precisely in being not all, she has, in relation to what the phallic function has of *jouissance*, a supplementary *jouissance* . . . a *jouissance* beyond the phallus" ⁴¹

Feminine Homosexuality

On "feminine homosexuality" Lacan had very little to say other than to repeat Freud's assertions that: (i) fetishism is absent in women and (ii) there is only one libido and that it is "marked with the male sign."⁴² Lacan re-tells Freud's structuring fantasy of female homosexuality, namely that of identifying with the father - a challenge set off by the demand for love thwarted in the real. Slipping casually into the phallus = penis mode Lacan asserts that feminine homosexual desire takes on the airs of courtly love:

In that such a love prides itself more than any other on being the love which gives what it does not have, so it is precisely in this that the homosexual woman excels in relation to what is lacking to her.⁴³

In all forms of female homosexuality in Lacan's narrative, the lesbian subject appeals to her quality of being a man - despite having nothing to give - and

⁴¹ Lacan, in Mitchell and Rose (eds.), *Feminine Sexuality*, p. 144-45.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 97.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 96.

takes a feminine object while fantasising "man" as invisible witness to the care which she shows for "the enjoyment of her partner." For Lacan, lesbian sex is a *mise-en-scène* staged for men. In "Lesbian Fetishism?" Grosz points out that for Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalysis, female homosexuality, like male homosexuality, takes on one of two forms, forking paths of infantile development. On the masculinity complex path there is disavowal of women's castration and a refusal to acknowledge the symbolic meaning of sexual difference. The girl will continue to identify with the phallic mother and may see the father as another embodiment of the phallic status of the mother. This retention of the phallic mother is the fate of the male fetishist as well. In refusing to acknowledge her difference from the phallic position, she retains her pre-Oedipal masculinity and maternal love-object. The other, feminine, path to female homosexuality involves acceptance of castration and the temporary transference of libidinal attachment to the father. Instead of then transferring this attachment to another suitable male, this girl seeks a "phallic" woman, that is, a woman with a masculinity complex. One seeks a feminine love-object (as men do) and the other seeks a masculine love-object. This could be described as the homosexual equivalent of complementary normative heterosexuality. Grosz comments that:

the masculine woman takes an external love-object - another woman - and through this love object is able to function as if she *has*, rather than *is*, the phallus. As with the fetishist, this implies a splitting of the ego: it is this which inclines her to feminism itself, insofar as feminism, like any other oppositional

political movement, involves a disavowal of social reality so that change becomes conceivable and possible.⁴⁴

Grosz also reminds us that feminism itself would have to imply that women can and do identify with subjects (traditionally the father) who occupy phallic positions, positions of social, economic or political power, outside of the family. De Lauretis, re-reading Helene Deutsch on female homosexuality, argues that in the constitution of lesbian subjectivity, the father in the oedipal scenario functions as the agent of symbolic castration (interventionary third term) rather than as love-object (object-choice). I will return to lesbian and feminist readings of specific points in Lacan's and Freud's texts in my analysis of constructions of lesbian desire and sexuality in literary and filmic discourses on the subject.

French Feminism.

French feminism, like structuralist and poststructuralist criticism in France, grew out of two closely connected, but quite different disciplines: linguistics and psychoanalysis. Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva were part of a radical deconstructive project that set out to put into question—through Saussurean linguistics, Derridean deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis - the whole philosophical basis of language. They developed systems of analysis which were radically different to those which had been practised in Anglo-American studies. Their aim, rather than raising

⁴⁴ Grosz, "Lesbian Fetishism?", p. 51.

questions about the representation of women in writing, was an interrogation of the very nature of subjectivity itself and the language through which it is symbolised.

Some French feminists sought to dismantle Western metaphysics utilising deconstruction theories formulated by Jacques Derrida. Derrida argued that the basis of Western thought is Phallogentrism (i.e. "man" is the central reference point of an epistemology built on a set of hierarchal oppositions, in which "man" occupies the privileged position). The French feminist theorists moved toward a deconstruction of feminine and masculine modes of writing which associated the feminine with the non-rational, disruptive modes of writing found in (male) modernist fiction and avant-garde poetry. Central to all of the French feminisms is a knowledge of Lacanian theories of the subject as constituted in language, particularly Lacan's theory that the phallus is the universal signifier of desire and that the "I" position (i.e. the speaking subject) which carries authority and self possession is male. Language, the feminists argue, in privileging the phallus, suppresses what is feminine, subjecting it to the symbolisation of a patriarchal system of naming and categorisation.

Irigaray and Cixous in particular develop reading and writing strategies derived from psychoanalysis and deconstruction which attempt to reveal and move beyond the construction of sexual difference and subjectivity posited by the Lacanian model. Their quest, utopian though it might have seemed at the time, is to bring into being that which is not yet written. In practice, Irigaray's writing in particular works to unpick existing binary oppositions of male/female, rational/irrational, heard/silenced using the symbolism of

fluidity and female sexuality to confront the phallogentrism of Western philosophical writings, rather than construct an alternative women's writing which merely flows directly from the body. Cixous' and Irigarays' writing practices, although they do not always involve readings of literary, filmic, or other art texts, can provide textual theorists with categories for creating a post-structural feminist practice where texts are read as discursive constructs rather than reflections of an individual author's experience. Julia Kristeva is committed to developing analyses of the production of a sexed subjectivity. For her, the suppressed feminine emerges in (predominately male) writings of the modernist avant-garde which, by concentrating on language, construct a subject(ivity)- in- process. Kristeva's Lacanian-inflected theories of textuality, appropriated as they have been by Rosemary Jackson for examining fantasy texts, provide a point of departure for a specifically feminist reading of the textual productions of some contemporary lesbian cultural producers.

The implications for women's cultural production, if one accepts the authority of the Lacanian hypothesis that women do not (can not?) exist as speaking (writing?) subjects in the symbolic realm of language and meaning, would seem to further construe women as the mute, silenced "feminine" of both male subjecthood and Western metaphysics. In and as far as women do speak/write, one would assume that they take up a position within the order of language and constructed meaning. For me the question becomes: "How does a contemporary lesbian "I" (speaking/writing subject in the symbolic of language and meaning) construct a lesbian sexed- subjectivity- in- process?" As a way of addressing this question, I propose to mobilise post-Lacanian

feminist psychoanalytical and textual theories to analyse the construction of desire and sexuality at work in contemporary lesbian texts, particularly those which strongly indicate a restructuring of the imaginary by the symbolic in lesbian terms.

Luce Irigaray

Irigaray resists the temptation to psychoanalyse subjects, real or fictional individuals in her writings, and instead uses psychoanalysis as a mode of interrogation of texts, a device for the interrogation of knowledges - knowledges that pose themselves as sexually neutral, as indifferent, universal, or disinterested, when in fact they are the product of men's self-representations. In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray demonstrates how the privileging of what is visible and therefore deemed positive (i.e. the penis elevated to the status of phallus in the symbolic order as master signifier) relegates "woman" to absence in existing structures of psychoanalytical and philosophical discourse. In re-reading Freud, she emphasises his effacement of the pre-oedipal experience that relegates the girl-child's relationship to the imaginary, and which therefore can find no expression in the realm of the symbolic. In this respect a woman, silenced in discourse, is, as Irigaray describes, in the position of the psychotic: "Spoken more than speaking, enunciated more than enunciating, the demented person is therefore no longer an active subject of enunciation . . . He [sic] is only a possible mouthpiece for previously pronounced enunciations."⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Irigaray, *Le Langage des déments* (Mouton: Paris, 1973) quoted by Toril Moi, "Patriarchal Reflections: Luce Irigaray's Looking Glass," in *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), p. 127.

Irigaray utilises the Lacanian distinction between imaginary and symbolic for her own project, using them as critical tools to pose the question of a sexual difference conceived in terms other than those dictated by patriarchy. She attempts to sexualise, to render specific to each sex, the forms that its imaginary and symbolic takes. She asserts that psychoanalysis can only represent the imaginary and symbolic from the boy's point of view; it has no means available to elaborate what the imaginary and symbolic may be in the girl's terms. In the psychoanalytic picture (including the clinical picture) for Irigaray, women are not individuated - there is at most only the place of the mother, or the maternal function. Castration (loss of the original symbiotic relation to the mother and entry into language and the symbolic) is not symbolised for women. What Irigaray's project suggests is that for the oedipal girl to be constituted in the symbolic as subject she would need to be able to signify the difference between herself and the maternal/another female body. Articulation or representation of the lost object as an object of desire within the symbolic by a female subject would require taking up a homosexual position in some form. This recovery would seem only possible if the subject has the means to symbolise the female body as an(other) female body. As de Lauretis observes differentiation presupposes at least two terms, two bodies, two female bodies that are not simply the same but at once similar and different. For de Lauretis "it takes two women, not one, to make a lesbian."⁴⁶ The phallus *qua* penis might be a convenient marker of difference and desire between the male subject and the (m)other, but as a mark of difference between female subjects, between a female subject and female

⁴⁶ de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*, p. 96.

object of desire, a female self and (m)other it would seem inappropriate to the task of signifying desire.⁴⁷

The problematic for Irigaray then is not women as such, but a problem of symbolic representation of, for and by women. In Lacanian terms female sexuality is inseparable from the representations through which it is produced. If, in psychoanalytic discourse, there is only the place of the mother, and if the daughter accedes only to this place, then the critical distance, the pre-condition for signifying desire (loss of the maternal object) is rendered difficult if not collapsed. In her essay "The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry", a rereading of Freud's essay "Femininity" and other Freudian texts, Irigaray in interrogative mode spells out the problem that psychoanalytic discourses pose for the self-representation of female sexuality and desire:

Is it necessary to add, or repeat, that women's 'improper' access to representation, her entry into a specular or speculative economy that affords her instincts no signs, no symbols or emblems, or methods of writing that could figure her instincts, make it impossible for her to work out or transpose specific representatives of her instinctual object-goals? The latter are in fact subjected to a particularly peremptory repression and will only be translated into a *script of body language*. Silent and cryptic. Replacing the fantasies she cannot have - or can only have when her amputated desires turn back on her masochistically, or when she is obliged to lend a hand with 'penis-envy.' There is no longer any question, even at this stage, of a system of fantasies that would correspond to

⁴⁷ See Jyanni Steffensen, *Textual (Re)constructions: Sexual Difference, Desire and Sexuality in Contemporary Female Experimental Writing* (M.A. Thesis, University of Adelaide, 1991), p. 75.

her own instincts, particularly her primary instincts. Nothing will be known about those, except, perhaps, in *dream*. Woman's desire can find expression only in dreams. It can never, under any circumstances, take on a 'conscious' shape.⁴⁸

Irigaray has insisted that it is not a matter of proving Freud wrong, but rather discerning within his analyses the ways in which oedipus fails. This includes a detailed analysis of the repressive mechanisms operating in Freudian texts, that is, applying a psychoanalytic reading to Freudian fictions. Her argument is that in defining femininity in masculine terms, with reference to a masculine standard, Freud represses the specificity of female sexuality. What is entailed in the Irigarayan schema is a major shift of psychoanalytic focus away from the mother-son oedipal dyad regulated by the law of the Father, to a specific emphasis on the resolution of mother/daughter identifications and desires. This is what Irigaray understands as creating a female symbolic and imaginary, an economy of female specific articulated desire. Irigaray has been appropriated by feminist and lesbian feminist theorists to elaborate the possibilities and difficulties that this relation poses for the sexed subjectivity of women.

Irigaray harnesses the link that Lacan forges between psychical and linguistic processes. If language is the key to interpreting psychical life, and if the unity of the ego and the structures and parameters of the lived body rely on signifying practices and symbolic representations, Irigaray's project is a re-traversing of the inscription of subjectivity under the primacy of the phallic

⁴⁸ Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 124.

⁴⁹ Irigaray from an interview given to L. Serrara and E. Hoffman quoted in Elaine Millard, "French Feminisms" in Mills, Pearce, Spaul and Millard, eds. *Feminist Readings/Feminist Reading* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 160.

signifier. She sees the psychoanalytical insistence on the primacy of the phallus and the necessity of women's castration, not as a truth about men and women, but the investment masculinity has in disavowing alterity, in denying even the possibility of an otherness outside their own definitions. Like Lacan she refuses to talk of women, sexuality or desire in terms of any Real, nature or givenness. Rather she seeks an active re-signification of the female body and of the possibility of the female body as a site for the production of knowledge. Irigaray assumes psychoanalysis as a framework from which she can analyse other knowledges and representations, examining their elisions and silences - i.e. examining them from the point of view of the repression of femininity. Using these insights she attempts to (re) write a female specific subject not premised on male representations of the suppressed "feminine". Psychoanalysis in these terms becomes a critical and analytical tool rather than a truthful or descriptive model.

In her readings Irigaray succeeds in undermining the neutrality of philosophical/ psychoanalytical discourse, revealing the process by which the philosopher/ psychoanalyst talks about himself from the security of the subject position. In order to attempt to access the primordial experience of femininity, she suggests, it is necessary to work to disrupt the simple oppositions on which theoretical systems are predicated: "We have to reject all the great systems of opposition on which our culture is constructed. Reject for instance, the oppositions fiction/truth, sensible/intelligible, empirical/transcendental, materialist/idealist."⁴⁹ Having uncovered the impossibility of articulating the feminine in existing structures of language,

⁵⁰ Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 133.

Irigaray initiates the search for another form of expression that might claim some privilege as feminine. She suggests that "writing women" will create that which is as yet inexpressible, a female subject with the potential to create her own meanings rather than be caught in the "masquerade" of femininity: "Psychoanalysts say that masquerading corresponds to woman's desire. That seems wrong to me. I think the masquerade has to be understood as what women do in order to recuperate some element of desire, to participate in man's desire, but at the point of renouncing their own."⁵⁰

Irigaray's movement then is to confront and displace masculine definitions and confines, and to attempt a reformulation of the symbolic. In *This Sex Which is not One*, she deals with the problem of female sexuality and subjectivity not by answering questions, but by a continuing process of interrogation. A textual strategy which she developed and demonstrated most notably in the style and metaphor of "When Our Lips Speak Together"⁵¹ is to pursue the relationship between female sexuality and language to create a different symbolic order. This poetic prose/philosophical text could be read as an attempt to reformulate, symbolically, the mother-daughter relation as a female subject/other female subject relation, although not necessarily a lesbian relation as it has also often been read. Irigaray also makes use of metaphors of fluidity to encompass the way writing flows from a source - decentring and putting all fixed meanings into question: "The object of desire itself, and for the psychoanalysts, would be the transformation of fluid to solid."⁵² To look for evidence of an *écriture féminine* then in Irigarayan terms,

⁵¹ Irigaray, *This Sex*, pp. 205-218.

⁵² Irigaray, *This Sex*, p.113.

implies a text which disrupts expectations of form and genre, or dissolves boundaries, rather than any reflection of woman's experience. What Luce Irigaray proposed was the development of a symbolic register in feminist formulations that would articulate the separation of "woman" from "mother" conceptually and linguistically without necessarily disavowing the pre-oedipal imaginary. Irigaray chose to focus on the infant's entry to sexual difference and argue that there is a space to elaborate a new language for women which enjoys the fluidity of the imaginary and refuses to be subsumed in a fixed and closed symbolic order.⁵³

Juliet Flower McCannell points out that: "the objections to the primacy of the phallic signifier in Lacan's theories have been plentiful, but few feminist linguists have offered systematic alternatives to Lacan's."⁵⁴ McCannell claims that, in part, this is because feminist theory, in accepting language as the primary indicator of the presence of patriarchal values and a sexually divided economy, has tended to concentrate on reforming language use, rather than on the structure of articulation among symbol, fantasy and signifier (especially their knottedness in the unconscious). She cites Kristeva (1980), Irigaray (1985), and Cixous (1990) as emphasising the metonymic, feminine *jouissance* and the desire of the mother - in opposition to paternal metaphor (the proper name of the Father) - as the excess residue unaccounted for by masculine language. In the case of Irigaray, I disagree. What Irigaray was proposing, according to Whitford, was the possibility of restructuring the imaginary (unconscious fantasy) by the symbolic (the order of language) that

⁵³ See Irigaray, *This Sex*.

⁵⁴ Juliet Flower McCannell, "Language," In *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, p. 213.

would make a difference to women. Identity is not limited to unconscious fantasy. These fantasies are themselves structured by the symbolic, they are also social, in language. Irigaray sees and attempts to rewrite/create a female imaginary, not as "one" but as multiple. Whitford argues that Irigaray's is not an attempt to impose a constriction definition on women but "to create a space in which women in all their multiplicity can *become*, i.e. accede to subjectivity."⁵⁵ Whitford also offers an interpretation of the symbolic, the order of discourse and meaning into which all human beings have to insert themselves, as that which enables the subject to break out of the imaginary mother-child dyad and become a social being. For Whitford, then, the symbolic order (of language) itself can function as "third term" which makes symbolic castration possible. More importantly, it can, according to Whitford, be interpreted in a structural sense, as that which enables the imaginary break to be made at all, at any time.

The difficulty of attempting to use Irigaray's concepts as a way into textual analysis is that she concerns herself more often with a practice of writing than in theorising what is already written, unless of course the work is philosophical. *Speculum* constitutes a major critique of male traditional knowledges including those of Freud and Plato. Irigaray's own texts enact a crumbling away of easy distinctions between the critical and creative, the poetic and the theoretical, philosophy and fiction - a practice of writing now termed fictocriticism. However, some of her textual strategies and many of her theoretical insights can and will be utilised to trace recent shifts in the construction of subjectivity and sexuality in texts produced by lesbians which

⁵⁵ Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*, p. 90.

attempt a movement beyond a Phallic unitary, universalised identity position.

Julia Kristeva

Contrary to Irigaray, Julia Kristeva takes literary and artistic texts as an object of study. She examines them in terms of a politics of style that reveals the suppressed "feminine" in male writing, particularly in those whose homosexuality places them outside the mainstream of literary convention, for example, Marcel Proust and Jean Genet. She has developed ways of addressing the workings of a text's unconscious by applying Lacan's principle of the split subject and reinterpreting the imaginary. For Kristeva, at the point where consciousness divides, the "feminine" is repressed into the "semiotic." This is a level of discourse which precedes symbolisation and the oedipal structuring of sexuality. *Revolution in Poetic Language* presents a theory of the processes which constitute language and are also constitutive of the speaking subject. Setting out to understand the signifying process (*signifiance*), Kristeva transforms Lacan's distinction between the imaginary and the symbolic into a distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic. The interaction between these two terms (which are processes, not static entities) then constitutes, for Kristeva, the signifying process.

The subject constructed in Kristevan texts is a subject-in-process. Marked by the rhythms and patterns of sound that are the basic pulsions of the oral and anal drives, the semiotic continuum can be read, she argues, as the suppressed feminine. The semiotic is not an alternative to the symbolic order

but a process at work within that structuration. If the symbolic embodies the law of the father, then the semiotic is that which may disrupt that order from within. In terms of textuality and the constitution of the subject, Kristeva explains the process thus:

These two modalities [semiotic and symbolic] are inseparable within the signifying process that constitutes language, and the dialectic between them determines the type of discourse (narrative, metalanguage, theory, poetry etc.) involved; in other words, so-called 'natural' language allows for different modes of articulation of the semiotic and the symbolic.⁵⁶

Kristeva defines the semiotic as both a space and a process, with an essential connection to the maternal body, which is the same for boys and girls. For the child to enter the symbolic this maternal attachment must be suppressed. However, according to Kristeva, the attachment to the maternal body can never be fully repressed and can be read in textual constructions of the subject-in-process as the poetic dimension which disrupts the (closure of unified meaning in) the symbolic. Like Lacan, Kristeva posits the subject constituted in language as unstable. Kristeva, also following Lacan, speaks in terms of the male child. For her, the speaking subject and the subject in language is always masculine. The Kristevan semiotic is linked to the pre-oedipal primary processes, the basic pulsions of which Kristeva sees as predominately anal and oral, simultaneously dichotomous (life/death, expulsion/introjection), and heterogeneous. The endless flow of pulsions is gathered up in the *chora* (from the Greek word for enclosed space, womb).

⁵⁶ Julia Kristeva, "Revolution in Poetic Language" in Toril Moi, ed. *The Kristeva Reader*, (London: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 92-3.

Of the signifying process Kristeva asserts that "our discourse - all discourse - moves with and against the chora in the sense that it simultaneously depends on and refuses it."⁵⁷ This is also the space where "the subject is both generated and negated, the place where his unity succumbs before the process of charges and stases that produce him."⁵⁸

For Kristeva, *signifiance* (glossing signification and significance) is a question of positioning. The semiotic continuum must be split if signification is to be produced. This splitting of the semiotic chora enables the subject to attribute difference and thus signification to what was ceaseless heterogeneity. Following Lacan, Kristeva posits the mirror phase as the first step that permits the constitution of objects detached from the semiotic chora, and the oedipal phase with its threat of castration as the moment in which the process of separation or splitting is fully achieved. Symbolic operations which enable the social subject to emerge are possible only because the mirror provides a spatial location, separate from the mother. Kristeva asserts that through the mirror stage, the child distinguishes itself from the world and substitutes images and representations for lived experiences. These images become raw materials for a network of signifiers. With the arrival of the oedipal stage the child's separation from its lived experience is complete. The mirror stage initiates the field of signifiers. The castration complex generates signs which render signifiers meaningful. The subject becomes separate by way of always being confronted by an "other": "...the symbolic - and therefore syntax and all linguistic categories - is a social effect of the relation to the other, established through the objective constraints of biological (including

⁵⁷ Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, p.94.

⁵⁸ *ibid*, p.95.

sexual) differences and concrete, historical family structures."⁵⁹ For Kristeva, a missing other (object) implies an impossible subject.

Kristeva agrees with Lacan's assertion that the phallus is the crucial signifier in the subject's acquisition of a voice. The law, represented by the phallus, calls for the child's renunciation of the mother and submission to authority greater than itself or mother. The child must submit to the symbolic father, or phallic law giver. Once the subject has entered into the symbolic order, the *chora* will be more or less successfully repressed and can be perceived only as pulsion pressure on or within symbolic language: as contradiction, meaninglessness, disruption, silences and absences. Semiotic energy as awareness of the attachment to the maternal then hovers on the threshold of the (male) subject's position in the symbolic order, continually threatening disruption and dissolution:

Castration puts the finishing touches on the process of separation that posits the subject as signifiable, which is to say separate, always confronted by an other: imago in the mirror (signified) and the semiotic process (signifier). As the addressee of every demand, the mother occupies the place of alterity. Her replete body, the receptacle and guarantor of demands, takes the place of all narcissistic, hence imaginary, effects and gratifications; she is, in other words, the phallus. The discovery of castration, however, detaches the subject from his dependence on the mother, and the perception of this lack [manque] makes the phallic function a symbolic function - the symbolic function. This is a decisive moment fraught with consequences: the subject, finding his identity in the

⁵⁹ *ibid*, pp.96-7

symbolic, separates from his fusion with the mother, confines his *jouissance* to the genital and transfers semiotic motility on to the symbolic order. Thus ends thethetic phase, which posits the gap between the signifier and the signified as an opening up towards every desire but also every act, including the very *jouissance* that exceeds them.⁶⁰

According to Kristeva, the poet, "avant-garde" transgressor is always male. Men alone can occupy the (unstable) position of speaking subject within and transgressive of the symbolic; they are the speakers/writers/artists who subject the symbolic to its own excesses and possibilities of subversion. She elevates men, those men who risk (through psychosis) their positions as subjects in the symbolic, to viable representations of the "feminine." Women's writing, in Kristeva's theorising, is neglected except where it is used rather conventionally, as in the case of Sylvia Plath's *Ariel* to demonstrate madness and disadvantage. Kristeva claimed in 1974 that women tend to write in one of two ways. They either produce texts to substitute for a family - novels of autobiography, romance, or family history - fantasy substitutes for an actual family, or write as hysterical subjects, bound to the rhythms of the body, unspoken even if represented:

In women's writing, language seems to be seen from a foreign land; it is seen from the point of view of an asymbolic, spastic body. Virginia Woolf describes suspended states, subtle sensations and above all, colours - green, blue - but she does not dissect language as Joyce does. Estranged from language, women are visionaries, dancers who suffer as they speak.⁶¹

⁶⁰ *ibid*, p. 101

⁶¹ Kristeva (1981), "Interview - 1974," *m/f*, 5/6, p.166 quoted Grosz, p.165.

In *Textual (Re)constructions* (1991) I observed that as Kristeva's negative view of female cultural production seemed outdated it was time to reformulate Kristeva's theories of textual production to account for more recent practices in women's (including lesbian) experimental writing. In setting up "aesthetic practices" as her major concern, Kristeva's theory often privileges the textual over the sexual, relegating women and their texts to the silence of obscurity and indifference. This is, and continues to be, a negative feature of her work as is her metonymic shift from the "maternal chora" to the "poetic." For my own readings I wish to situate analytic practices firmly within a feminist frame and concentrate on lesbian subjects as producers rather than as the product of discourse/writing. I will discuss Kristeva's textual production of "lesbian loves" as a form of undifferentiated psychotic subjective structure momentarily.

The fetishist position, the position of the perverse subject, is one that Kristeva confers only on the male avant-garde. For Kristeva poets, as individual subjects, fall under the psychoanalytic category of so-called perverse subjective structures. Kristeva appears to find the fetishist avant-garde writer, whose art practice necessitates reinvesting the maternal chora so that it transgresses the symbolic, the most satisfying in terms of his ability to mobilise the semiotic, poetic function which nonetheless signifies. She states that: "no text, no matter how 'musicalized,' is devoid of meaning or signification; on the contrary, musicalization pluralizes meaning."⁶² Freud, on whose definition of fetishism Kristeva relies, observed that the fetishist, in

⁶² Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, p. 116.

terms of satisfaction with his/her (substitute for the missing maternal penis/phallus) object, very infrequently presented themselves for analysis - he found fetishism to be the most satisfying of the psychosexual perversions ("Fetishism," SE 21: 147-57). For Kristeva however "the text is completely different to the fetish because it signifies; in other words, it is not a substitute but a sign (signifier/signified) and its semantics is unfurled in sentences." In this chapter, following de Lauretis' theorising of lesbian fetishism, and in the chapter dealing with Winterson's *The Passion*, I will contest the Freudian/Kristevan understanding of the fetishist as male, and the fetish as substitute for the missing maternal phallus. There is a difficulty also with Kristeva's collapsing of the "poetic" with maternal space - the "chora." Insofar as the textual poetic is an intelligible discursive signifying practice, often combined intertextually or hypertextually with other modes of signification, Linda Marie Walker, taking a lead from Gregory Ulmer, redefines choral writing as "a mapping across domains" which "organizes any manner of information by means of the writer's specific position in the time and space of culture." For Walker - who states that where Kristeva's notion of "musicalization that pluralizes meaning" is operative hers (Walker's) is Country and Western - the chora is a space of invention, of "work." She writes:

Chora is space, a space in which (a) thing is made, is named. An opening towards something (else) new, perhaps minute. Towards an invention, towards invention as imagining, from the nothing, and from the transitory, and transitional. And the 'nothing' is all that has passed before one's eyes, ears, skin, nose, mouth, as life. And comes to be braided say, and turned inside out, and

laid down, and stays vaguely (fretfully) out of focus, smudged. Is choreography [sic]. And can only be done with 'one's own materials.' The written then is not place(d) - or pinned by the usual co-ordinates, although this must be so, surely - able to be designated this or that: '... choral writing organizes any manner of information by means of the writer's specific position in the time and space of culture.'⁶³

Kristeva's theory of intertextuality is, for my purposes, more suitably taken from her appropriation of Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque text than from her theorising of the maternal chora. I have argued that Jeanette Winterson's appropriation of a modernist symbolic mode - namely the Surrealist predilection for parody, psychosexual perversion and the carnivalesque (which was theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin and revised by Kristeva) - into a contemporary *realismo magico* (fantasy/realist/poetic/historical) narrative constituted taking up the fetishistic position - and transposing several signifying systems into each other and relativising them - without losing intelligibility.⁶⁴ In *Desire in Language* (1980) Kristeva characterises the carnivalesque style, or text, as composed of nonexclusive oppositions producing a dialogic, rather than a monologic discourse. This discursive dialogism is one in which "the two texts [subjects] meet, contradict, and relativize each other."⁶⁵ Kristeva rereads Bakhtin who theorises that

⁶³ Linda Marie Walker, "Writing a bit, taping the gram ... (a bit of writing about Gregory Ulmer," *Broadsheet: Contemporary Visual Arts and Culture* 24/4 (Summer 1995): 10. See also Gregory Ulmer, *Heuristics, The Logic of Invention*. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994) and *Teletheory: Grammatology in the Age of Video*. (New York and London: Routledge, 1989). In *Textual (Re) Constructions* I also analysed Walker's poeticized detective story *Cherished Objects* in a chapter titled "Hewson/Walker: The Undecideable (cherished) Object(s) of Desire", pp. 101-116.

⁶⁴ Steffensen, *Textual (Re) Constructions*, pp. 46-82.

⁶⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Leon S Roudiez. (London: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 78. See also Mikhail Bakhtin. *The Dialogic*

Socratic dialogue, and other dialogical genres, derive from carnivalesque folklore, the traditional European narratives of the people. The structures of the carnivalesque scene, according to Kristeva, were dialogical and defiant in relation to any official monologism claiming to possess a ready-made truth or meaning. Of the carnivalesque she writes: "Its art is one of *articulation* of fantasy, *correlation* of signs."⁶⁶

Fantasy texts

Rosemary Jackson (1981) extends Tzvetan Todorov's - a colleague of Kristeva's as well as also an immigrant from her native Bulgaria - theories and analyses of fantasy texts to include aspects of psychoanalytic theory, including those of Freud, Lacan, and Kristeva's redefinition of the symbolic/imaginary.⁶⁷ Jackson does include the work of female writers, most notably Mary Shelley and George Eliot, as well as that of Franz Kafka, E.T.A. Hoffmann (a favourite of Freud) and Edgar Allan Poe (a favourite of Lacan). In one of the more extensive studies of fantasy literature, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, Jackson theorises that fragmentation of "character" (subject) in fantasy deforms a "realistic" language of unified, rational selves. The subject, according to Jackson's Lacanian reading, becomes ex-centric, heterogeneous, spreading into every contradiction and (im)possibility - fantastic narrative constitutes a decentred discourse of the subject. Jackson

Imagination, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

⁶⁶ Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p. 81.

⁶⁷ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981), particularly chapter 3, "Psychoanalytic Perspectives", pp. 62 - 91. See also Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre.*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975).

continues that fantastic texts which try to negate or dissolve dominant signifying practices, especially character/subject representations, break a "realistic" signifying practice which represents the ego as an indivisible unit. Jackson adds that fantasies try to rupture or *reverse* the process of ego formation which took place during the mirror stage. Although Jackson proposes that the imaginary is inaccessible, she nevertheless suggests that fantasy texts represent an attempt to re-enter the imaginary.

Jackson appears to derive her theory of the fragmented subject from Lacan's fantasy of the "body in bits and pieces" and "the mirror stage". However, Jane Gallop, who reads Lacan's text "to the letter" points out that Laplanche and Pontalis who also read Lacan to the letter insist that the fantasy of the body in bits and pieces is a retroactive fantasy. In an article "The Mirror Stage" in *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, Laplanche and Pontalis explain this fantasy in Freudian terms. This disconnected body corresponds to a primordial, polymorphous autoerotic state prior to the constitution of the ego and narcissism proper. Narcissism, love of an image of the self, is achieved for the first time in the Lacanian mirror stage. The fragmented body then would appear to precede the mirror stage. However, Laplanche and Pontalis then add: "Except for one important nuance: for Lacan, it would be the mirror stage which would *retroactively* bring forth the phantasy of the body in bits and pieces."⁶⁸ Gallop sums up the situation thus:

The mirror stage would *seem to come after* the "the body in bits and pieces" and organize them into a unified image. But actually, *that* violently unorganized

⁶⁸ Laplanche and Pontalis, re-quoted from Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 80.

image only comes after the mirror stage so as to *represent what came before*. What appears to precede the mirror stage is simply a projection or a reflection. There is nothing on the other side of the mirror.⁶⁹

Gallop and Laplanche and Pontalis appear to be proposing, as does Whitford, that the imaginary is an effect of symbolic structuring. While Jackson understands that each fantastic text functions according to its particular historical placing, and its different ideological, political and economic determinants, she insists that the most subversive fantasies are those that attempt to *transform* the relations of the imaginary and the symbolic.⁷⁰ They try to set up the possibility of radical cultural transformation by making fluid the relations between these realms, suggesting, or projecting, the dissolution of the symbolic through violent reversals or rejection of the process of the subject's formation. Jackson appears to understand the symbolic as *The* symbolic: a monolithic, socialising force which produces dissatisfactions and thus attempts at violent reversals. As I read Irigaray, Whitford and de Lauretis, they are suggesting a re-structuring of the dominant patriarchal cultural myths and fantasies that have a powerful hold on subjectivity rather than attempting to re-enter a repressed imaginary. However, in terms of writing fantasy texts as a signifying practice, Jackson concludes that "a fantastic text tells of an indomitable desire, a longing for that which does not yet exist, or which has not been allowed to exist ... as opposed to what already exists and is permitted as 'really' visible."⁷¹

⁶⁹ Gallop, *Reading Lacan*. p. 80

⁷⁰ Jackson, *Fantasy*, p. 91.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

Kristeva, Jackson and Lacan read primarily modernist texts, radical perhaps at the historical time of their production, but by now an integral part of the literary canon. Neither are they particularly interested in feminist cultural practice. In moving successively through the lesbian texts I have chosen for analysis, I will critique and rework many of the textual strategies suggested for analysing the discursive constructions of the subject and the significations of desire by Lacan, Kristeva and Jackson. In terms of moving from intertexts into the more postmodern hypertextual, multi-media productions of VNS Matrix in chapter six, I will also mobilise theories of cinema - particularly science fantasy film and feminist film - as sets of discursive and signifying practices.

Kristeva on Lesbianism.

On a more purely theoretical level, Kristeva's later work turned to an interest in the concepts of abjection (*Powers of Horror*, 1982), maternity, and love. Love, in Kristeva's psychoanalytic sense, is understood as transference love based on infantile narcissistic and imaginary identifications. "Love" for Kristeva is another framework for a discussion of the pre-oedipal/semiotic attachment to the maternal (phallic) body. In "Motherhood According to Bellini," Kristeva suggests that, because the maternal body signifies the loss of coherent and discrete identity, poetic language verges on psychosis.⁷² In the case of women's semiotic expression in language, the return of the maternal signifies a pre-discursive homosexuality that Kristeva also associates with psychosis (incoherence). According to Judith Butler, Kristeva, while

⁷² Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, pp. 235-270.

conceding that poetic language is sustained culturally through participation in the symbolic, fails to allow that homosexuality is capable of the same non-psychotic articulation.⁷³ Kristeva writes:

The homosexual-maternal facet is a whirl of words, a complete absence of meaning and seeing; it is a feeling, displacement, rhythm, sound, flashes, and fantasised clinging to the maternal body as a screen against the plunge. Perversion slows down the schizophrenic and collapsing identities and the delights of the well-known and oft-solicited (by some women) pantheist fusion both brush up against.⁷⁴

In *Tales of Love*, (1987) without irony or question, Kristeva writes on "lesbian loves," invoking both the hysterical whirl of words of which she has accused Woolf and female writers in general, once again casting lesbian sexuality in pre-oedipal fantasy, or more precisely back in the womb: "It [lesbian love] evokes the loving dialogue of the pregnant mother with the fruit, barely distinct from her, that she shelters in the womb."⁷⁵ The lesbian as "fruit" aside, in Lacanian terms this would certainly place the lesbian subject

⁷³ Judith Butler, "The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva." *Hypatia* 3:3 (Winter 1989): 105-117. Butler is, as are de Lauretis and Grosz, severely critical of what she sees as Kristeva's naturalisation of a specific cultural configuration of maternity and her implication that lesbianism is culturally unintelligible. There is a dimension to Kristevan theory in which she posits that access to the semiotic is recuperable in the symbolic by the male avant-garde and by women through maternity. For many feminist and lesbian feminist theorists this simply re-positions women in the Lacanian "only men and mothers exist in the symbolic" representational mode. Lesbian subjects would appear in Kristeva's writings to speak only "baby-babble." This is what de Lauretis terms "pre-oedipal soup." For further discussion of Butler's work see her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge, 1990. See also my discussion of Butler's critique of Kristeva in *Textual (Re)constructions* particularly the chapter on Winterson.

⁷⁴ Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, pp. 329-240.

⁷⁵ Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 81.

completely outside of the symbolic, effectively silenced, gagged by the womb. In this essay, which is on male sexuality and titled "Manic Eros, Sublime Eros: on Male Sexuality," Kristeva, in her conclusion, poses the question: "If, on the other hand, there were a female libido, could one imagine an erotics of the purely feminine?" While reminding us once again, *apropos* Freud that the libido is masculine - adding that the (heterosexual?) woman might place her loves in it through a more or less painful identification with the man, replacing the ideal mother with a super-ego-prompting father - lesbian "love" is re-cast by Kristeva as pre-natal, or barely post-natal, undifferentiated bliss: "...lesbian loves comprise the delightful arena of a neutralized, filtered libido, devoid of the erotic cutting edge of masculine sexuality ... a dissolution, a liquifaction, a merger..." (p. 81). Kristeva describes this "embrace of the baby and its nourishing mother" that is 'lesbian love' as a "non-relationship," as "Relaxation of consciousness, daydream, language that is neither dialectical nor rhetorical, but peace or eclipse: nirvana, intoxication, and silence" (p. 81).

Psychoanalytically speaking, this undifferentiated state is the structuring foundation of psychosis. Indeed Kristeva suggests that from this "nonrelationship" two pathways are opened up. Either they (the lesbian lovers?) take up the erotic mania of the "master-slave" game, are locked into an imaginary game with the phallic mother, or they suffer the psychic death of lost identity which Kristeva describes as a "lethal dissolution of psychosis, anguish on account of lost boundaries, suicidal call of the deep" (p. 81).

In *The Practice of Love* (1994), de Lauretis not only critiques Kristeva again for casting "lesbian loves" in a scenario of maternal-homosexual attachment

bodering on psychosis, but also opposes the feminist critical discourses which argue for more emphasis on the importance of the pre-oedipal mother-daughter relation in the construction of female sexuality. This theoretical move, according to de Lauretis, also flirts with the danger of women's sexuality being eternally construed as infantile, in a state of perpetual pre-oedipal conflict with all of its difficulties over fusion and separation from the mother.⁷⁶ De Lauretis asserts that the articulation of lesbian desire and object-choice cannot be read as an unmediated continuum of the mother-daughter pre-oedipal attachment. Desire for the (mother) can only emerge when the object has been lost, i.e. becomes an object of fantasy with the accession of the subject to language and representation. De Lauretis points out that to confuse lesbian desire *for* women and women-to-women identification - a feminist construction of female sexuality as a continuum, with the maternal mother-daughter bond as metaphor - is to confuse the meaning of "homosexual" with the meaning of "homosocial."⁷⁷ De Lauretis does not deny that the fantasmatic relation to the mother and the maternal/female body is central to the constitution of lesbian subjectivity and desire. She insists, however, that the differential construction and effects in heterosexual and lesbian representations of the mother-daughter relation be analysed. In *The Practice of Love*, de Lauretis, from a definite lesbian stance, states that:

⁷⁶ In the context of de Lauretis thinking this conclusion refers back to her accusation in "Perverse Desire" and *The Practice of Love*, that Kristeva, following Freud and Lacan writes "lesbian love" as dangerously bordering on psychosis - the inability to differentiate from the (M)other - a form of inhibited development or pre-oedipal regression.

⁷⁷ For a detailed discussion of the difference between homosexuality and homosociality see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

Without denying for a moment that the relation to the mother has a fundamental influence on all forms of female subjectivity, I will argue that woman-identification and desire or object-choice do not form a continuum, as some feminist revisionists of Freud would have it. The seduction of the homosexual metaphor derives from the erotic charge of a desire for women, which unlike masculine desire, affirms and enhances the female-sexed subject and represents her possibility of access to a sexuality autonomous from the male. But in the great majority of feminist psychoanalytic writings (Rose, Doane, Silverman, Spregnether, Gallop, Jacobus, etc.), such access is paradoxically secured by erasing the actual sexual difference between lesbians and heterosexual women. This prevents the understanding of lesbianism not only as a specific form of female sexuality but also as a sociosymbolic form; that is to say, a form of psychosocial subjectivity that entails a different production of reference and meaning.⁷⁸

Perversion.

Queer theory has recast gay and lesbian sexualities from the margins of the master narrative of a dominant heterosexuality and reconceptualised them as cultural forms in their own right. As such, constructions of queer sexualities, an alliance of formerly perverse/reverse discourses, though different rather than pathological, must function as part of the social process as interactive, participatory. Before examining some recent developments in reading or theorising lesbian perverse sexualities, I will briefly outline the historically

⁷⁸ de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*, p. xvii.

and discursively shifting meanings of perversion. Emily Apter in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary* sums up perversion thus:

If, after Foucault's institutional deconstruction of the history of sexuality, the whole late nineteenth-century epistemology of perversion has become suspect, then within feminist psychoanalysis it has become doubly so. Depending as it does on heterosexually prescriptive distinctions between 'normal' and 'deviant', the term itself may have become an anachronism, particularly in gay and lesbian studies. Though certain erotic practices traditionally coded as perverse (say, lesbian sadomasochism) may continue to be classified as such in so far as they constitute a transgressive counter-discourse to 'straight' sexuality or refer to mock gender performances (transvestism, strap-on dildos) that release the subject from the confines of repressive sex roles, it is none the less unclear whether gender-revisionist psychoanalysis really needs a clinical definition of perversion in its lexicon (p. 311).

Apter insists that the term "perversion" might work more successfully as a synonym for sexual subversion or as a recuperation of the "deviant" which positively re-inscribes the Latin word *pervertere*, meaning "to twist," "to turn the wrong way." What emerges for Apter in Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) is a meaning of perversion as "deviation from the instinct," generally understood as "lingering," extended forepleasure, or the deferral of (heterosexual) genital sex.

Noteworthy theorists who have utilised psychoanalytic frames of thinking instrumentally for an antihomophobic cultural politic would have to include

Elizabeth Grosz, Teresa de Lauretis, Jeffrey Weeks and Jonathan Dollimore. Weeks, Dollimore and de Lauretis in particular have turned to re-reading Freud.⁷⁹ The Freudian ideas which interest gay and lesbian scholars are not the Freudian notions frequently appropriated in the name of "natural" or "normal" (i.e. procreative heterosexual) sexuality, but the Freudian thinking which initially placed the quotations marks around "normal" in terms of sexual aims and object-choices. De Lauretis and Dollimore, albeit from different directions, have also extensively re-read Freud's theories of the "perversions" as the reverse side of the neuroses rather than as in opposition to "normality." Freud himself quite dispassionately theorised perversions were present, if underdeveloped, in what was then regarded as "normal" sexual aims:

The normal sexual aim is regarded as being the union of the genitals in the act of copulation But even in the most normal sexual process we may detect rudiments which, if they had developed, would have led to the deviations described as 'perversions' (SE 7: 149, quotation marks Freud).

Psycho-analytic research is most decidedly opposed to any attempt at separating off homosexuals from the rest of mankind as a group of a special character. By studying the sexual excitations other than those that are manifestly displayed, it is found that all human beings are capable of making a homosexual object-choice and have in fact made one in their unconscious (SE 7: 145).

⁷⁹ See in particular Weeks, *Sexuality and Its Discontents* especially "The Challenge of the Unconscious," pp. 127-181; Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence* and Teresa de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*. Also see *Pink Freud*, a special Freudian issue of *GLQ*, edited by Diana Fuss, which includes essays by prominent scholars such as Leo Bersani, Laurence A. Rickels, Mary Jacobus, and Valerie Traub.

Jonathan Dollimore in his essay "The Cultural Politics of Perversion: Augustine, Shakespeare, Freud, Foucault" also argues for an historically informed theoretical approach to reading perversions and perverse strategies.⁸⁰ He finds that from both the Freudian perspective (in which perversions are repressed in the socialising of the subject and the reproduction of civilisation), and the Foucauldian perspective (in which psychosexual perversions are constructed as a product which enables power to gain purchase by fastening upon discursively constructed perverse identities of its own making), there is a sense in which these opposed perspectives discover perversion to be central to (Western) culture. From this theoretical point of view one might read homosexuality as integral to heterosexuality (but repressed); a precondition for heterosexuality - the bisexual infant is also homosexual.

Dollimore traces some linguistic and conceptual histories of perversion(s) through analyses of Augustine, Shakespeare, Freud and Foucault. Beginning with the early modern period, Dollimore traces theological and metaphysical meanings of perversions through the Renaissance, reading them as the subordinate term in binary hierarchies in an attempt to replace a psychoanalytic sense of perversion as pathological with one that is more political (and cultural). He finds that perversion is a concept signifying (i) an erring, straying, or deviation from (ii) a path, destiny, or objective which is (iii) understood as natural or right, right because natural. The first OED definition of "perverse" slides from divergence to evil: "turned away from the

⁸⁰ Dollimore, "The Cultural Politics of Perversion: Augustine, Shakespeare, Freud, Foucault" *Genders* No. 8 (Summer 1990), pp.1-16. See also Dollimore's *Sexual Dissidence*.

right way, or from what is right and good; perverted, wicked." He asks why a departure from "the straight and true" should be considered so abhorrent, so wicked and so evil. He quotes Francis Bacon from 1622: for "Women to govern men . . . [and] slaves freemen . . . [are] total violations and perversions of the laws of nature and nations." ⁸¹

Following Jacques Derrida, Dollimore finds that the answer lies partly in the regulation of perversion by the violent binary oppositional hierarchy natural/unnatural. The attribution of violence, perversion, contradiction, crisis is displaced from the dominant, where it is produced, onto the subordinate and especially the deviant - in Bacon's case, onto (assertive) women and (free) slaves. What Dollimore is suggesting is that epistemologically and ontologically, Western metaphysics is based on notions of teleology (the straight and narrow), essence (essential truth), and the universal (absolute truth). Deviations (perversions) from metaphysical fixity are seen as aberrations threatening the very basis of the social order. Conceptually, perversity precedes the psychoanalytic sexological sense of perversion. The psychosexual sense of perversion appears in the OED in 1933 along with two other kinds of perversion - the waywardness of women and religious heresy. Dollimore quips that if one reads theological discourse precisely, rather than perversely, then Eve was the first pervert - pervert being the opposite of convert in theological terms.

⁸¹ Dollimore, pp. 1-16. The Bacon quote is from "Advertisement Touching a Holy Warre," in J Spedding and R.L. Ellis, eds., *The Works*, vol. 7. (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1961-63 [1857-1861]), pp. 33-34.

Within the early history of psychoanalysis the rigid gendering of psychosexual perversion helped to consolidate a binary division of masculine and feminine subjectivities already culturally in operation within religious and patriarchal ideologies. Paradoxically, it is the male who is considered perverse. Women were habitually diagnosed as hysterical, neurotic, frigid, sapphic, narcissistic, melancholic, psychotic - anything but perverse. Freud says, "The abandonment of the reproductive function is the common feature of all perversions. We actually describe a sexual activity as perverse if it has given up the aim of reproduction and pursues the attainment of pleasure as an aim independent of it."⁸² Freud also offers a more specific definition. He theorises perversions as sexual activities which involve an extension, or transgression, of limit in respect "either to the part of the body concerned or to the sexual object chosen" (SE 8: 83). In the first case perversion would involve lingering over the intermediate relations to the sexual object, relations which should normally be traversed rapidly on the path to the final sexual aim; that is, reproduction via heterosexual genital intercourse - in Freudian terms, all forepleasure and no end pleasure. In the second case, perversion would involve choosing as a sexual object an inappropriate object: for example someone of the same sex or an inanimate object.

Idealisation of object and instinct emerge as significant in Freudian and post-Freudian theories of perversions. In *Three Essays*, Freud identified as critical that juncture where the "sexual instinct goes to astonishing lengths in successfully overcoming the resistance to shame, horror, disgust or pain" (SE 7: 313). This argument confirms what is held to be the regressive or

⁸² Freud, *Pelican Freud Library* vol. 1, p. 358.

archaizing impulse manifest in the male subject's putative harkening back to the last moment at which the mother could be regarded as phallic. The arresting of development at the anal erotic stage accounts, in Freud's scheme, for sexual conduct such as the infantilism produced by masochistic rituals of subjection and humiliation. For feminism this concept of regression is particularly problematic since women, typically assigned the pre-oedipal even within feminist psychoanalysis, have long been implicitly infantilised.

Case histories of fetishism, masochism and sadism including those from Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia sexualis* (1886) to Freud's essay "Fetishism" (1927) typically concerned male analysands. Freud in his later essay "Femininity" identified male masochistic characteristics with femininity. The same passive or self-destructive behaviour in women he construed as her essential nature - "masochism, as people say, is truly feminine" (Freud: 1932, p. 102). Similarly, documented cases of female fetishism were called something else, as if, Apter notes, "to protect some exclusive male prerogative" (p. 312). Jacques Lacan's analyst/teacher, Gaetan Gatian de Clérambault recorded the masturbatory fantasies of female silk fetishists in 1908. However, he declared that, unlike their male counterparts, these female fetishists lacked the imagination to symbolically represent the silk so that it stood for an imagined love-connection. In other words, the silk failed as a fetish because the women merely worshipped the cloth's instrumental value as a vehicle of orgasm. One might be tempted to speculate as to whether Clérambault's difficulty was an inability to make silk cloth equal phallic symbol or penis substitute. Female autoeroticism, masturbatory sexual practices, and silk fetishism would seem to have no significance.

Despite the doubts from feminist psychoanalytic theorists, such as Marjorie Garber, that quibbling over the exclusion of female perverts in psychoanalytic history is tantamount to a form of fetish or perversion envy, Apter points out that these omissions "pandered to a tendentious depreciation of the feminine erotic Imaginary typical of the male medical establishment at the turn of the century" (p. 312). Freudian psychoanalytic narratives of structuring fantasies would leave female desire reduced to penis envy or sublimated into a wish for a child (maternity). Lacan's discursive constructions of lesbian subjectivity would leave the subject with the invisible man looking on while she pleased her partner.

If Freud's, Lacan's, and Kristeva's discussions of lesbian sexuality and desire are rare, so too are attempts to theorise them within a feminist psychoanalytic perspective. Lesbian scholarship has been mistrustful of psychoanalysis as a male controlled, or at least dominated, theory, clinical practice and a social discourse on the "inferiority" of women. One of the few lesbian theorists to initially and explicitly re-appropriate, in a feminist perspective, Freud's notion of the masculinity complex in women was Diane Hamer.⁸³ Hamer rereads the lesbian so-called masculinity complex as a psychic refusal, on the part of the lesbian subject, of the "truth" of women's castration. While this assertion is appealing from a feminist socio-political perspective, and works against Freud's notion of female castration as a deficiency in relation to the only biological sex organ of any worth, Teresa de Lauretis argues that "to refuse the meanings attached to castration" within a Lacanian framework (or

⁸³ Diane Hamer, "Significant Others: Lesbianism and Psychoanalytic Theory," *Feminist Review* 34 (Spring 1990): 143-45.

to refuse to rethink its terms) is "to find ourselves without the means to signify desire."⁸⁴ The distinction is a fine one. While Lacan, for all his insistence on recasting desire in linguistic terms is also criticised by feminists, and rightly so, for semiotically collapsing the distinction between the phallus as the signifier of desire back onto the penis, there is also a sense in Lacan's discourses on desire in which lack or loss refers to the (male) subject's loss of the original object of desire - the maternal body. What de Lauretis is driving toward, in my opinion, is that the lesbian subject, in a similar, though not the *same* manner as the male subject, must differentiate between the meaning of the lesbian (her) body and the meaning of the maternal (other) body for desire to (be seen to) emerge. What de Lauretis is asserting is the difference, the psychoanalytic distinction, between identity and desire, between heterosexual women who identify with the symbolic position of "mother" (in her turn occupying the mother's place) and the lesbian subject who signifies her difference from (hence desire for) the feminine /maternal body. In Lacanian terms for desire to emerge, difference must be symbolised. For de Lauretis, to refuse to rethink Lacanian "castration" in lesbian terms is also to refuse to symbolically signify, or represent, a position for women separated from the (to date necessarily) heterosexual position of mother.

Mirroring Hamer's defiant gesture, de Lauretis reappropriates not only the masculinity complex, but also the concept of the fantasy of castration and the fantasy phallus for lesbian subjectivity within the perspective of Freud's negative theory of perversion. She proposes a model of perverse desire based on the perversion that Freud, Lacan, and Kristeva claim was not open to

⁸⁴ de Lauretis, "Perverse Desire", p. 17.

women - fetishism. According to Freud in the major work on the subject, fetishism does not apply to women because, as they have nothing (penis) to lose disavowal would not defend their ego from an already accomplished and accepted "castration." What the male fetishist's ego is defended from is knowledge of the (m)other's castration. The construction of a fetish in the fantasmatic scenario replaces the missing maternal penis/phallus. Freud's classic male fetishist disavows the mother's castration by displacing the signifier of desire metonymically onto clothing or other body parts such as hair or feet. De Lauretis who does not presume that the penis-phallus is the only marker of difference, hence desire, between subject and object, re-works the concept of fetishistic fantasmatic structuring in terms of lesbian desire.

According to Freudian classifications of perversions, fetishism and transvestism are overvaluations in inanimate or partial (body) objects to the exclusion of all other targets of desire. The dismantled - already split or symbolically castrated - body is preferred to a totalised corpus or body at risk of phallic loss. The choice of love-object is neither arbitrary nor convertible. The fetish both motivates the fantasy (of the lost maternal phallus) and directs the questing path of the perverse subject. Within a Lacanian framework Freud's notion of the idealised substitute phallus is interpreted as an antidote to the gaping wound opening around the splitting of the ego. This is qualified by Lacan as lack. For Lacan it is the credulity of the subject, the investment in illusion, rather than his or her misguided sexual aim that qualifies as perverse. Even though, for Lacan, both sexes can *be* lack, this model poses complications in the matter of female fetishism *qua* maternal cathexis.

What de Lauretis proposes is that many lesbian texts inscribe a fantasy of castration but also effectively speak desire and are thus fully in the symbolic, in signification. De Lauretis describes the lesbian fetish as "any object, even an inappropriate object attached to a desiring fantasy, any sign whatsoever that marks the difference and the desire between the lovers."⁸⁵ These substitute objects, according to de Lauretis' rereading and re-writing of fetishism, work for the lesbian fetishist because she doesn't care whether or not the objects re-place (represent) the missing penis. Even Lacan, though he could not accomplish it in his own texts, would not necessarily dispute the disengagement of the notion of castration from its Freudian referent in the biological penis, by making it a condition of signification, of entry into language and the means of access to desire. De Lauretis does not dispute the concept of the phallus as a signifier of desire, what she disputes is that it is necessarily or invariably *The* signifier of desire.

Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit argue that the fetishist did not simply disavow the mother's castration, but understood very well that the displaced signifier did not in any way resemble a real penis.⁸⁶ They puzzled as to why the fetishist did not represent the missing maternal penis with a phallic symbol or object and concluded that the fetishist not only disavows maternal castration but also refuses the meaning of the paternal phallus. They suggest that:

⁸⁵ de Lauretis, "Perverse Desire", p. 23.

⁸⁶ Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *The Forms of Violence: Narrative in Assyrian Art and Modern Culture*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), pp. 68-9.

The fetishist has displaced the missing penis from the woman's genitals to, say, her underclothing, but we suggest that if he doesn't care about the underclothing resembling a penis it is because: (1) he knows that it is not a penis; (2) he doesn't want it to be only a penis; and (3) he knows that nothing can replace the lack to which he in fact has resigned himself.⁸⁷

In this scenario then the fetish object can be seen as representing for the fetishist what the male subject lacks, has lost, the "feminine" maternal body, rather than what the mother lacks - i.e. the penis. De Lauretis suggests that this might be read also as the structuring fantasy of the "masculine" lesbian subject. De Lauretis, rereading Bersani and Dutoit asks that we:

Consider the following statements with the word lesbian in lieu of the word fetishist: 1) the lesbian can see the woman as she is, without a penis, because she loves her with a penis somewhere else; 2) the lesbian knows that nothing can replace the lack to which she has resigned herself; 3) lesbian desire is sustained and signified by a fetish, a fantasy-phallus, an inappropriate object precariously attached to a desiring fantasy, unsupported by any perceptual memory. In other words, what the lesbian desires in a woman and in herself ('the penis somewhere else') is indeed not a penis but the whole or perhaps a part of the female body, or something related to it, such as physical, intellectual or emotional attributes, stance, attitude, appearance, self-representation, and hence the importance of performance, clothing, costume etc. She knows full well she is not a man, does not have the paternal phallus, but that does not mean she has

⁸⁷ Bersani and Dutoit, *The Forms of Violence*, pp. 68-69.

no means to signify desire: the fantasy-phallus is at once what signifies her desire and what she desires in a woman.⁸⁸

De Lauretis theorises this psychic process as one which detaches desire from the *paternal* phallus which she sees as eminently applicable to the signification of lesbian desire. What de Lauretis is reading is the textual signification of desire in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928). De Lauretis makes an excellent case for reading the protagonist Stephen Gordon not as suffering from a Freudian masculinity complex - although she is obviously a "mannish lesbian" - but as employing the "fetish of masculinity" to signify her desire for Angela Crosby. De Lauretis concludes that "unlike the masculinity complex, the lesbian fetish of masculinity does not refuse castration but disavows it; the threat it holds at bay is not the loss of the penis in women but the loss of the female body itself, and the prohibition of access to it" (p. 24). The signs of masculinity, "the lure of masculine clothes" is that they signify both Stephen's difference from, and hence desire for, Angela's "feminine, female body" whilst covering over the "wound to her own narcissism," her own "so strong and so-self-sufficient" (phallic) body (de Lauretis, p. 23). It is not the lack of a penis, or the fantasy of possessing a penis, that motivates Stephen's desire, it is the lack (loss) of a feminine (maternal) body.

What de Lauretis is suggesting in this rereading of the castration complex is the notion of castration as the knife/wound which cuts both ways. Castration anxiety revolves around both the threatened loss of the organ and the imminent loss of the maternal body. This would appear, if one were

⁸⁸ de Lauretis, "Perverse Desire," p. 22.

considering male subjectivity, to put the *male* infant in double jeopardy. The girl, having nothing to lose in the way of organs, would be faced only with the dilemma of negotiating separation from the maternal body and establishing the first outline of an ego in the Lacanian mirror stage. Both Freud and Lacan theorise the ego as an embodied ego. What Stephen Gordon suffers is not a masculinity complex - she already recognises her image in the mirror as phallic - but a "wound to her narcissism." What she lacks, is insufficient in, is a *female* body: "That night she stared at herself in the glass; and even as she did so she hated her body with its muscular shoulders, its small compact breasts, and its slender flanks of an athlete" (book 11, chapter 24, section 6).

In spite of this rather negative view of her bodily image or schema, we learn from the narrator that it is in fact her mother who has linguistically imposed differentiation and separation (castration) on her daughter. Gordon, as narrator is at pains to tell the reader that from a very early age her mother has found her (Stephen's) body "repulsive." What Stephen lacks/desires is not a penis-phallus but a femme's body. This desire is inaugurated through and in language by Anna Gordon, however negatively. Unfortunately this desire, or "bitter" need as Stephen calls it, cannot accede to symbolisation because the order of language and meaning available to Stephen represses or forecloses the possibility of an autonomous and non-reproductive female (homo)sexuality. In Lady Gordon's words Stephen's desire for other women is an "*unspeakable* outrage" (p. 200). What Stephen (and her mother) lack is language, a language through and in which her phallic bodily schema might be reconciled with being a women nonetheless. Identification with the

stereotypically female Victorian feminine body is not open to Stephen. Neither is an easy identification with the real of the male body. Having separated from the maternal body she has no adequate symbolic to signify or bear the female subject's desire in the masculine mode. The split subject is in danger of falling through a gap in the symbolic order. De Lauretis sums up the dilemma thus:

...the problem lies in the definition of female sexuality as complementary to the physiological, psychic, and social needs of the male, and yet as a deficiency vis-a-vis his sexual organ as its symbolic representative, the phallus - a definition which results in the exclusion of women not from the sexuality (for, on the contrary, women are the very locus of the sexual), but rather from the field of desire. There is another paradox in this theory, for the very effectiveness of symbolic castration consists precisely in allowing access to desire, the phallus representing at once the mark of difference and lack, the threat of castration, and the signifier of desire. But access to desire through symbolic castration, the theory states, is only for the male. The female's relation to symbolic castration does not allow her entry into the field of desire as subject, but only as object.⁸⁹

De Lauretis warns that for lesbian feminist theorising to not confront the psychoanalytic concepts of the masculinity complex and the castration complex is to leave the conceptualisation and representation of female/female sexuality and desire grounded in an unsymbolised pre-oedipal imaginary. For de Lauretis, as for Irigaray, it is not female (homo)sexuality that is the problem. The problem, as de Lauretis defines it, is

⁸⁹ de Lauretis, "Perverse Desire," p. 20.

the representation of female homosexuality in psychoanalytic and other fictional and critical discourses. De Lauretis recasts the fantasmatic scenario of castration, through her reading of Hall's text, in terms other than the specular penis/absence economy of difference. Hers is a more subtle and sophisticated formulation of difference, lack, desire, and signification than that enacted in Lacanian texts, although not outside of Lacan's logic. De Lauretis' rewriting of the narrative of the lesbian subject and desire is one which reads the signs of a socio-symbolic constitution of difference between female bodies rather than one in which (hetero) sexual anatomical difference comes to reductively and universally figure sexual difference and desire *per se*.⁹⁰

Fantasy.

Fantasy, in Laplanche and Pontalis' formulation is seen as "the fundamental object of psychoanalysis."⁹¹ By this they mean that fantasy is rooted in the transactional space between private and public realms that psychoanalysis allows access to through the theory of the unconscious - that which posits "the idea of another locality, another space, another scene, *the between perception and consciousness*."⁹² For Victor Burgin, psychoanalysis contradicts the popular belief that fantasies are nothing but wishful scenarios in which a simple subject gains a simple object denied to it in "real life." Fantasy is a

⁹⁰ Another version of this essay by de Lauretis is reprinted as "The Lure of the Mannish Lesbian: The Fantasy of Castration and the Signification of Desire" in *The Practice of Love*, pp. 203-256.

⁹¹ Jean Laplanche and Jean-Baptiste, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, J. Donald and C. Kaplan (London and New York: Methuen), 1986, p. 14.

⁹² Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Hogarth Press), 1977, p. 56, emphasis in original.

complex articulation of both the subject and its unconscious desire in a shifting field of wishes and defence. The "real world," according to Burgin's reading of psychoanalysis, is not all that is real for us, a fact emphasised by Freud in the concept of *psychical reality*, and particularly, for my readings, the "primal phantasies" (e.g. seduction, castration complex, watching sexual intercourse between the parents).⁹³ Primal fantasies devolve upon major enigmas in the life of a child concerning the origin of the subject, of the subject's sexuality and of sexual difference. According to Laplanche these "typical" and ubiquitous fantasies are the precipitate of the early familial complex in which each child finds itself, at once irreducibly unique in its historical, cultural and biographical detail, and universally shared - in that each newcomer to the world confronts an adult world it does not understand.⁹⁴ According to Burgin : "a fundamental consequence is that sexual identity itself is produced through the agency of fantasy."⁹⁵ In other words, according to my interpretation, the child is also caught up in the conflict of the parent's conscious/unconscious fantasies and desires. To this one should add de Lauretis' notion that fantasies are also cultural "public fantasies" and Whitford's suggestion that the symbolic, as third term, might effectively break with the (male) imaginary.

⁹³ Freud states that among the store of unconscious fantasies of all neurotics, and probably all human beings, there is one that analysis almost invariably discloses i.e. the primal fantasy of watching parental sexual intercourse.

⁹⁴ Jean Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis* (Oxford; Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 90-92.

⁹⁵ Victor Burgin, "Fantasy," *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, p. 87.

Off the Couch.

In another bold move, de Lauretis, in *The Practice of Love*, introduces the notion of "discursive consent" (by the analyst, mother substitute/lover) as a way of moving psychoanalysis off the couch:

. . . the notion of discursive consent has implications that far exceed the analytic situation, for it is the representational aspect of the drives, the realm of fantasy, that transforms what Deutsch calls 'the biological urge' into sexuality and desire. Ironically enough, it is only this psychoanalytic notion of fantasy, developed by Laplanche and Pontalis in their reading of Freud, that allows us to theorize beyond a strictly psychoanalytic situation. Off the couch, so to speak, outside the analytic situation, then, the sadomasochistic impulses related to the mother's prohibition of masturbation may be recovered through fantasy in conjunction with public forms of representation, for example in film spectatorship, in reading lesbian s/m fiction, or in a lesbian bar. If, as Foucault has argued, sexuality is produced, rather than repressed, by the proliferation of discourses about it, then permission and consent. . . may mean no more - and no less! - than the production of a discourse (in the widest possible sense of the term) in which sexual activities between women are given representation and signified as desire.⁹⁶

De Lauretis' propositions have radical implications for both psychoanalytic theory and praxis. Theoretically her work, while highly intelligible within a

⁹⁶ de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*, p. 75. Clinically, Freud's view allowed him to explain why men, being more active, are more frequently inclined to the perversions, in which their component sexual drives can be expressed, while women incline more to hysteria or other psychoneuroses in which they have symptoms rather than sexual activity.

psychoanalytic framework, would appear to have travelled some distance from Freud's narration of the case history of "Dora" whose symptom could not speak its desire/fantasy. At stake as well was Freud's inability at the time to put into place for his analysand a symbolic system in which her unconscious homosexual desire could have been signified as such, or in which her symptom might have been convertible through the recovery of memories/fantasies in relation to the (m)other. As I am not a clinician, my project is primarily concerned with investigating the proliferating and complex structuring fantasies and the poly-signification of mobile and perverse desire(s) - textual models of lesbian sexed-subjectivity - as they are inscribed in the socio-symbolic forms of some contemporary lesbian texts.

These are not read as narratives of inhibited development, pre-oedipal regression, or transitory phases on the way to heterosexuality. They are read as representations of lesbian sexuality and desire articulated along different and culturally, historically and subjectively contingent pathways already gestured towards (but ultimately inadmissible) in Freudian theoretical fictions. Readings of these lesbian fictions, of the heterogeneous infantile component drives articulated as fantasy constructs in the symbolic; perversions (for instance sadism or fetishism) and their structuring fantasies; the symbolisation of separation from/difference from the (m)other; the signification of desire through a plethora of signifiers (phallic and non-phallic); and the possibility of fantasy recovery through (lesbian) feminist discursive consent will be mobilised as a critique of Freudian and Lacanian texts. Contemporary theorisations of lesbian subjectivity in this manner would undoubtedly have been puzzling to Freud, and possibly should have

been less so for Lacan who wrote in 1958 - thirty years after the much publicised release of Hall's classic lesbian text - that "feminine" (homo)sexuality: "is to be *realised in the envy* of desire which castration releases in the male by giving him its signifier in the phallus."⁹⁷

For my theoretical purposes it is not a matter of discrediting, overthrowing or dismantling psychoanalytic discourses. After all, perversion and homosexuality are not only present in psychoanalytic narratives and theories, but in some sense can be read as always in dialogue with what they are defined as not - that is normative sexual outcomes. That psychoanalytic discourses might be read and/or understood in dialogue with other cultural discourses on sexuality and desire is also not beyond the scope or the spirit of Freud's and Lacan's projects. Freud finds his oedipal desire in the discourse of female analysands and Theban legends and Lacan his own in the (agency of the) letter (in the unconscious) addressed to Poe's Queen.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Lacan, "Guiding Remarks for a Congress on Feminine Sexuality" (1958, published 1964), reprinted in *Feminine Sexuality*, p. 9, emphasis Lacan.

⁹⁸ Pun intended.

Three

Lesbian Vampires "Love in the Oral Stage?"

The combination of 'lesbian' and 'vampire' is a happy one since both figures are represented in popular culture as sexually aggressive women.¹

Vampire fiction, in English, dates from around 1816. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Dr. John Polidori's *Byronic Vampyre*, published in 1818, are much quoted by literary theorists as seminal works of classic Gothic fiction. By the mid- 1820s it was possible to see dramatic adaptations of both *Frankenstein* and *The Vampire* at the English Opera House in London. Toward the end of the nineteenth century a marked shift occurred in the textual construction of the vampiric figure. This figure became increasingly conflated with the "homosexual" subject emerging concurrently in medical and psychoanalytic discourses. Bram Stoker's late nineteenth century novel *Dracula* (1895) is often cited by queer theorists such as Cristopher Craft as exemplifying a cultural anxiety generated by the appearance and construction of the homosexual subject tied to the "horror" figure of the vampire. There is a scene in this literary work in which the male vampire, Count Dracula, comments that the male protagonist, Jonathan Harker - the investigator of the vampire phenomena in this tale - belongs to him. However, twenty years earlier, a novella *Carmilla* (1872), a story about lesbian vampires and their mother, was published by a little known Irish writer

¹ Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p 59.

called Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu. If this story could be said to exemplify 1870s cultural anxiety, then it is not only "horror" of lesbian subjects which is at stake in this text, but also paternal anxiety about maternal figures (the vampire mother) who not only consent to their daughter's lesbian sexuality and desire but actively help to instigate (name) it.² It is this story of lesbian vampirism, including the construction of the consenting maternal vampire figure and the symbolisation of the separation of the maternal figure from the lesbian vampire subject, that I will analyse in this chapter. I will also examine the "human" female subject who operates in the text as the young lesbian vampire's object of desire. Vampirism in this sense is understood as a metaphor for socio-psychic relations rather than as an actual cultural or sexual practice (i.e. blood-sucking). As mythical creatures vampires do lend themselves to psychoanalytic readings.

The story of *Carmilla* is narrated by the heroine, Laura, in the first person.³ The "author" of the tale, Le Fanu, is male, and indicates in the prologue that the manuscript came to him by way of a certain Doctor Hesselius who had written a paper on the subject of the narrative. The "learned" Doctor described the story to the "author" as "involving, not improbably, some of the

² Catherine Lumby writes in "A Dandy Future" that during the last decades of the nineteenth century the terms feminist and homosexual first came into common usage. By the 1880s, a growing number of women were forsaking married life for bachelorhood and more intellectual pursuits. Lumby adds that the feminist threat was symbolically represented in the numerous portraits of decadent *femme fatales* in the art and literature of the time including Stoker's *Dracula* and Sir John Millais' *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* as images of cold, ruthless and narcissistic women. In 21.C (Autumn 1993), p 61.

³ *Carmilla* was written by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu in 1872. The text is published in *Vampires*, ed. Alan Ryan (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987), pp. 71-138. The text from which I worked is from *In a Glass Darkly: Stories by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu* (publisher and date unknown), pp. 222-288. I have classified this work as a novella, although it is often considered as a short story. Hereafter all references will be marked in the text as page numbers in parentheses. Little is known of Le Fanu's background.

profoundest arcana of our dual existence, and its intermediates." At the time that the story was published in *In a Glass Darkly: Stories by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*, that is, at the time that Le Fanu wrote the "autobiographical" prologue, he states that the woman who originally gave Doctor Hesselius the manuscript was already dead and that there was no way to verify the story. The woman who Le Fanu claims wrote the manuscript is not named. He comments:

She, probably, could have added little to the Narrative which she communicates in the following pages, with, so far as I can pronounce, such conscientious particularity (p. 222).

The reader has no way of determining whether any of this information is "true." Aspects of the plot of *Carmilla*, however, bear a striking resemblance to Freud's theories of the uncanny which unfold in his 1919 essay "The Uncanny" (SE 17: 219 - 256). The narrative of *Carmilla* pre-dates Freud's essay by almost fifty years. Freud's aesthetic (literary critical) reading of E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale *The Sandman* in his text on the uncanny is mobilised by him in the construction of a phenomenologically inflected (male) castration scenario. Freud's narrative of the uncanny tells the story of male subject's ambivalent feelings of desire and fear in this scenario, as well as elucidating the notion of *déjà vu* - the feeling that one has been here before. Freud associates the uncanny with cultural taboos (e.g. taboos on incest and death).⁴ I will return to re-reading Freud's "The Uncanny" momentarily.

⁴ Kate Legge in a short essay "Taboo or not Taboo?" suggests that in late twentieth century western cultures *discussing* death and incest is no longer taboo, but that cultural taboos on incest and cannibalism remain core taboos as cultural practices. See Kate Legge, "Taboo or not Taboo?" *The Australian Magazine* (June 22-23, 1996), pp. 44-46. Legge adds that

In Le Fanu's text *Carmilla*, a young woman - the narrator, Laura - and her father inhabit a remote schloss in an unnamed country. They are reasonably wealthy. A carriage containing a mysterious older woman textually coded as "handsome" and a younger woman (presumed to be her daughter) overturns near Laura's father's castle. The older woman, claiming an urgent mission elsewhere, seduces the father and Laura into allowing her slightly injured daughter to remain in their care. Laura, a motherless and lonely child, is extremely amenable to this arrangement and promptly falls in love with Carmilla, the mysterious woman's daughter. From this point in the narrative Le Fanu constructs a series of scenes in which Laura has what might be described in Freud's later terms as "uncanny" experiences. She realises that she has seen Carmilla before in a dream. In this dream a young woman who resembled Carmilla exactly climbed into her bed. In Carmilla's presence Laura begins to experience powerful feelings of desire and anxiety, of desire and fear, of desire and repulsion. To shorten a longish narrative - it is a "horror" story composed of sub-plots designed to suspend or defer the narrative climax - the dream sequences are re-enacted in Laura's bed-room. Laura becomes wistful and the Doctor, a friend of the father, is summoned. Laura and her father visit another friend of the father, the General, whose niece has recently died. The General tells Laura's father a story of the events which preceded his niece's demise. The story of a mysterious woman with a beautiful daughter who seduced their way into the General's household doubles, again in an uncanny manner, the plot in which Laura is presently involved. In moving towards narrative closure, Le Fanu has the paternal

homosexuality and masturbation are no longer taboo, but that unsafe sex is.

figures discover that Mircalla (the vampire mother's name which is eventually uncovered) and her daughters are in fact vampires (read lesbian vampires). Carmilla, it is discovered, is infecting many of the young women in the village with lust. The maternal vampire is killed by the paternal figures (at which point her offspring also vanish) and Laura returns to living sedately with her father. However, as Le Fanu reports, Laura remembers Carmilla often and with great fondness.

Carmilla could be read as a *noir* tale of lesbian "vampiric" desire insofar as active lesbian subjects, *vampires fatales*, are constructed within the narrative and then punished, in this case fatally, for their sexuality. From a contemporary queer reading perspective one might ignore the narrative and ideological closure of the text and take pleasure in the prolonged mid-section in which a lesbian desiring economy is constructed. As a contemporary lesbian feminist practice, reading Victorian horror/fantasy representations of female same-sex desire might also be construed as eccentric, particularly as *Carmilla* was written by a man. However these "Victorian" cultural myths of lesbian vampirism are re-cycled, particularly within the cinematic apparatus, in the late twentieth century as mainstream, publicly accessible fantasies and representations in dialogue with other, lesbian produced, representations of desire. A queer reading of this narrative has much to offer.

This particular vampire story suggests not only a reading of perverse female desire, but a reading of a perverse fantasmatic oedipal structure in which a phallic function is invested in both maternal and paternal figures. In the non-vampire "families" this function is invested in the paternal figures. In order

that the threat which this queer female "family" poses for the paternal figures' authority to be narratively regulated (by eliminating the vampires in the end), what is threatening in a late nineteenth century format is also constructed in the text. What Le Fanu, with or without irony - I suggest without - constructs is a fantastic female economy of desire in which a female symbolic figure appears to reproduce female vampires generationally, separates them from herself linguistically (anagrammatically), and exchanges them exogamously with bourgeois families represented as father/daughter (paternal) relationships. Read ironically this text might be read as an Irigarayan re-structured maternal genealogical symbolic and imaginary system of meaning in dialogue with a patriarchal symbolic and imaginary structure. The dialogic exchange between the two terms, in which constructions of heterosexuality and homosexuality as well as sexual difference become indistinct in conventional binary terms, can be read through the relationship between sexualities (read "daughters") re-produced in the different systems. I will explicitly read this text against the inclination of some feminist theorists (Creed, Case, Kristeva) to read lesbianism and lesbian vampirism conceptually through imaginary pre-oedipal mother/child symbiosis. Even though the paternal "human" daughter, Laura, is constructed subjectively in this way (she has difficulty distinguishing between fantasies of mother and lesbian lover), the young female vampire is not. She is named, and names herself, in differentiation to/from the maternal vampire, and pursues external objects with some exuberance.

Ken Gelder reads *Carmilla* as an early narrative of the "monstrous" female practice of the "hellish arts." He also reads this story as a "revenge fantasy" of

Victorian vampire fiction's "paternal figures." Ambiguously intertwined with the structuring fantasies of the "male paranoid plot" the young female vampire(s) sexually seduce the paternal figures' daughters.⁵ This behaviour, constructed within Le Fanu's text, is perceived by the textual fathers as threatening. The paternal figures' enraged and dramatic revenge is quite brutal. Gelder points out that these objects of the vampire's desire (the paternal daughters) are less horrified (paranoid or hysterical) by the seductive lesbian vampire than the conservative paternal figures.

Before proceeding to read Le Fanu's text of lesbian vampires in detail, I will outline some of the strategies employed by various theorists towards decoding fantasy-horror, vampire, and lesbian vampire texts. One might say that the most influential late Victorian vampire text was Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1895). Stoker constructs a narrative in which a male protagonist Jonathan Harker - a sort of investigative journalist figure - finds his way to a remote, and Gothically gloomy, castle in Transylvania. He dines with the inhabitant of this decaying dwelling, a Count Dracula. There ensues a scenario in which the Count exhibits a barely sublimated interest in Jonathan as a possible erotic (suckable) object. However, Jonathan falls asleep and dreams of, or hallucinates, a visitation by three promiscuous female vampires. In the morning Dracula has vanished. It has transpired that the strange aristocrat, who is of course a vampire, has fled to England in search of Mina, Jonathan's wife. The Count has seen Mina's photograph during his conversations with Harker. Jonathan follows the vampire Count, and with

⁵ The reading of the "male paranoid plot" in Victorian vampire fiction is from Ken Gelder, *Reading the Vampire* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994). See particularly his chapter "Vampires and the Uncanny: Le Fanu's 'Carmilla'", pp. 42- 64.

the aid of a doctor called van Helsing finally exposes and eliminates the bisexual male vampire. This story circulates even now in contemporary cinema (public fantasies) through Francis Ford Coppola's recent (1992) re-vision of the Stoker narrative, also called *Dracula*, and in Neil Jordan's filmic adaptation of Anne Rice's *Interview with a Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles* (1994).⁶ The latter was also produced by Coppola.

Carmilla, little known outside of specific readings of vampire literature, also has had an extended life as a public fantasy representation of lesbian sexuality, re-worked in Hollywood cinema as recently as *The Hunger* (Tony Scott, 1983), which I will also discuss briefly. Historically and culturally then, in a postmodern popular cultural sense, these early vampire narratives circulate as representations of (mythically inscribed) perverse sexualities, both heterosexual and homosexual, often ambivalently both, alongside of, and in dialogue with, more recent "realist" representations of hetero- and homo- sexualities and desire(s). In a sense history, if understood as chronological, collapses. A vampire movie quoting, in postmodern terms, either *Carmilla* or *Dracula* might be screening in a cinema, or available on video, in almost any western culture in the late twentieth century.

The conflation of vampirism and sexuality is more evident as a construct of nineteenth century literary and twentieth century cinematic fiction than as a specific figure of psychoanalytic narratives. However, these fantasy figures

⁶ Lumby points out that Coppola winks ironically in the direction of the "dark, malvolent forces he depicts" in that he portrays Dracula as a more fascinating choice for the heroine Mina (Winona Ryder) than the insipid Jonathan. The character played by Ryder observes drily when Dracula announces that she must die for them to be united: "I don't care. Just take me away from all this death." Lumby, "A Dandy Future," p. 62.

lend themselves to psychoanalytic strategies of reading. *Dracula* has been read psychoanalytically by Christopher Craft as exemplifying the discursive displacement of male homoerotic desire onto three female vampires. Before returning to contemporary "queer" readings of vampire fiction, of both literary and cinematic texts including *Carmilla*, I will trace briefly the history of psychoanalytic and literary theoretical/ critical discourses as they converge on/in the figure of the vampire. In general there are two quite distinct theoretical trajectories through which the metaphor of vampirism has been explored. These might be summarised as (i) the oral-sadistic pathway originating in Ernest Jones' psychoanalytic reading of the vampire myths of widely varying cultures, and (ii) those readings which follow or critique Freud's aesthetic and phenomenological reading of "horror" stories in his essay "The Uncanny" (1919) (SE 17: 219-256). In more recent feminist critiques, such as those by Barbara Creed, there is a tendency to draw on aspects from both theoretical strategies of reading the vampire. The theorists following the "oral-sadistic" reading strategies tend to locate vampirism in the pre-oedipal. Freud locates the "uncanny" in the (male) castration scenario. I will briefly outline examples of both before moving on to "queer" and/or specifically lesbian feminist readings.

Oral-sadistic vampirism.

The Victorian sexologist, Richard von Krafft-Ebing associated vampirism with sadistic sexuality. He recorded several case history narratives of "sadism in women" which included cutting, blood sucking and biting as sexual pleasures.⁷ However, the earliest psychoanalytic models developed in order to unravel the symbolic meaning and structure of figures such as vampires was that of Ernest Jones in *On the Nightmare* (1931).⁸ His essay "On the Vampire" (1920) remains one of the most extensive classic analysis of the psychological meaning of vampire mythology from a Freudian perspective. A central concept of Jones thesis of nightmare imagery is conflict and ambivalence; attraction and repulsion. The products of the dream-work function to enunciate both a wish and its inhibition. Jones writes:

The reason why the object seen in the nightmare is frightful or hideous is simply that the representation of the underlying wish is not permitted in its naked form so that the dream is a compromise of the wish on the one hand and on the other of the intense fear belonging to the inhibition (p.78).

What is fearful for Jones is bloodsucking which he associates with seduction. Certainly the vampiric figure of fiction is represented as seductive, including Dracula and Carmilla who seduces young women. The deep psychosexual wish uncovered by Jones' analysis is read as incestuous. The desire for this

⁷ Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* [1886] (New York: Stein & Day/Scarborough, 1978).

⁸ Ernest Jones, *On the Nightmare* [London 1931] (New York: Liveright, 1951). Jones' essay, "On the Vampire" [1920] is reproduced in *Vampyres*, ed Christopher Frayling (London: Faber & Faber, 1991): 398-417. See also Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*, p. 67.

incestuous encounter is transformed through denial into an assault - attraction metamorphoses into sadism. The sucking and biting he attributes to a regression from genital to oral stages of psychosexual development. For Jones figures of the nightmare like the vampire attract because they manifest wishes, notably sexual wishes. Jones' Freudian reading of the vampire figure is one which views this particular monster as representing most of the sexual perversions. Belief in vampires is a fantasy, for Jones, that returns to infantile sexual wishes with their concomitant fears, anxieties and guilt; a blend of oedipal love and hate directed towards parents. The vampire may return in fantasmatic form as the hated father, evoking fear, or the incestuously desired mother. Frequently Jones' vampire represents a combinatory figure of both parents, evoking both emotional attitudes together i.e. anxiety/desire. For Jones, as with the early Freudian oedipal narratives, however the relationship between vampire and victim is heterosexually grounded. The vampire's draining love embrace is complicated by forms of sexual perversity which return to the infantile world of "oral sadism" - where sucking (love) turns into biting (hate).

Maurice Richardson also suggests that the starting point for a psychosexual analysis of vampire superstitions is Freud's dictum that "morbid dread always signifies repressed sexual wishes. In vampirism they become plainly visible."⁹ Richardson reads Bram Stoker's *Dracula* somewhat crudely as a quite blatant demonstration of the oedipus complex. He states that from a Freudian perspective it could be seen as a "kind of incestuous, necrophilous, oral-anal-sadistic all-in wrestling match."¹⁰ Vampiric sexuality for

⁹ Maurice Richardson, "The Psychoanalysis of Count Dracula," *Vampyres*, p. 418.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

Richardson, with all its sucking and biting, belongs to the unconscious fantasy world of infantile sexuality with its Freudian polymorphously perverse tendencies.

With respect to the nightmare John Mack, writing in *Nightmare and Human Conflict*, has argued that the hard-line Freudian position is too narrow and that "the analysis of nightmare regularly leads us to the earliest, most profound, and inescapable anxieties and conflicts to which human beings are subject: those involving destructive aggression, castration, separation and abandonment, devouring and being devoured, and fear regarding loss of identity and fusion with the mother."¹¹ I will return to the castration scenario readings of horror and vampire fiction shortly as these also have a substantial history predominantly related to Freud's reading, in his essay "The 'Uncanny'" of E.T.A. Hoffman's story *The Sandman*.

Returning to the seduction and incestuous scenarios for a moment, Noël Carroll, in a more recent analysis of the vampire figure in cinema argues that, given the structure of repression, the psychic censor must be paid its due in order for pleasure to be obtained from the wish-fulfilment of psychosexual desires. Extrapolating from both Jones and Freud's willingness to regard popular fiction as a species of wish-fulfilment, Carroll, in relation to the female spectator/reader's position sums it up thus:

The apparent seductiveness of Dracula is no misperception; Dracula is enacting a wish, indeed an incestuous one. The audience can deny this to her censor, by

¹¹ John Mack, *Nightmare and Human Conflict* (Boston: Little Brown, 1970).

pleading, in her own defense, that she is horrified by the vampire. But this is really a dodge. The repulsion is the ticket that allows the pleasurable wish-fulfilment to be enacted.¹²

Noël Carroll theorises the oedipal fantasmatic in standard heterosexual terms; the female child/subject's deepest psychosexual incestuous wish is gratified (albeit under the guise of repulsion) in relation to the father/Dracula. However what Christopher Craft unpacks in his reading of *Dracula* is the textual displacement of male homoerotic desire. Dracula's deepest wish in Craft's reading of the text is to "vamp" Jonathan Harker.¹³ Carroll also has nothing to say, within his theory, of what the fantasy structure of cinema offers a female spectator - and in Freud's later terms about a female unconscious psycho-sexual structure in which attachment to and fantasies about the mother predominate. In *Carmilla*, the attraction/repulsion, desire/anxiety mode enacted textually by the object of desire, Laura, in relation to the vampire Carmilla appears as rather innocuous compared to the destructive rage unleashed by the father(s) on the queer female vampires.

Uncanny Desires

Tracing the theoretical and fictional threads connecting psychoanalysis, vampirism and sexuality raises question of horror, perversion, castration, anxiety, desire and the uncanny (the fantasmatic unconscious). These constitute the most common themes explored in literary critiques of

¹² Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York & London: Routledge, 1990), p. 170.

¹³ Christopher Craft, "Kiss Me With Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," *Representations* 8 (1984): 107-31.

horror/fantasy texts including work by Franco Moretti and Rosemary Jackson. Jackson claims that Freud recognised the counter-cultural effects of the uncanny when he associated the uncanny with taboo, in particular with the taboos of incest and death. Since the uncanny articulates fantasies of taboo-transgression, it may be regarded as a literature of subversion. Conversely, for Jackson, it could also serve to reinforce order by supplying a vicarious fulfilment of transgression, neutralising the subversive impulse.¹⁴

Anthropologically and psychoanalytically, the questions of incest, taboos, prohibitions, horror and the uncanny were broadly raised by Freud in *Totem and Taboo* (1912-13, SE 13). The key essays are "The Horror of Incest" and "Taboo and Emotional Ambivalence." Freud concludes that since taboos are mainly expressed in prohibitions, the underlying (unconscious) presence of a *positive* current of desire might be obvious. For him there is no need to prohibit something that no one desires to do, and a thing that is forbidden with the greatest emphasis must be a thing that is desired (p.69).

Characteristic of taboo prohibitions, then, for Freud, is a degree of psychic ambivalence - a degree of play or conflict between the unconscious (repressed) desire and the (cultural) prohibition whose origin may be unknown but whose effect manifests as dread/fear/anxiety of/about punishment. In the late twentieth century homosexuality is said by some to no longer be a cultural taboo, although it is certainly constructed as such within conservative ideologies and discourses. Incest is still considered as such (i.e. culturally taboo). What I am leading to critically is that vampirism, including lesbian vampirism, is often read as an analogy for the

¹⁴ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981), pp. 70-72.

psychoanalytically defined notion of psychic incest (i.e. as the collapse of the subject back into the pre-oedipal imaginary relation with the phallic mother, as the death of subjectivity). Read ironically or queerly there is at least a major thread in Le Fanu's late nineteenth century narrative of vampirism in which a lesbian vampire is constructed with a desiring subjectivity.

Julia Kristeva also re-reads Freud's *Totem and Taboo* in *Powers of Horror* (1982) For her, as for Freud, the discursive subject is male.¹⁵ In Kristeva's writing blood is a significant abject (taboo) object - an object of horror. Blood, or blood-sucking activities, also constitute significant signifiers in vampire tales. Abjection, for Kristeva, is that which does not "respect borders, positions, rules," that which reveals the "fragility of the law;" it is the place "where meaning collapses." She writes that:

We call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it - on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger. But also because abjection itself is a composite of judgment and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and drives (p. 4).

In her theory of abjection, Kristeva elaborates Freud's notion of the uncanny as taboo. Abjection is the horror of not knowing the boundaries distinguishing "me" from "not-me," a primary uncanny which precedes the horror of castration, and which is generated by the repulsive fecundity of the maternal body sensed by the embryonic superego. Fear and dread of being

¹⁵ Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

overwhelmed by that body give rise to feelings of abjection and rituals of purification. The writer of abjection is, for Kristeva, a kind of imagined "safeguard" against collective narcissistic fantasies, such as those entertained by feminism in its power-seeking identification with an imaginary phallic mother.

Monstrosity and fear of the fantasised phallic mother re-appear in the writings of Franco Moretti. He theorises that "vampirism is an excellent example of the identity of fear and desire;" an interfusion of sexual desire and the fear of erasure of the integral self.¹⁶ Furthermore, in his chapter titled "Dialectic of Fear," Moretti invokes Freud to diagnose what is inscribed in the monstrous metaphors of Frankenstein and Dracula; he argues that the fears and desires metaphorically inscribed in these narratives are very specific psychic and sexual fears. What Moretti perceives in his reading of the figures of Dracula and Frankenstein is fear of the (fantasised) phallic/castrating mother.

Formations of the uncanny have been historically as well as structurally and phenomenologically defined. Tzvetan Todorov outlines the transformation of the uncanny since the gothic, from forms of the marvellous (the supernatural) to those of the purely fantastic (the inexplicable) to the uncanny (the fantasmatic unconscious).¹⁷ In terms of narrative structuring Todorov, writing in *The Fantastic*, asserts that the essential condition of fantastic fiction is a duration characterised by readerly suspension of certainty. In his work

¹⁶ Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Form* (London: Thetford, 1983), p. 100.

¹⁷ See Jackson, *Fantasy*, pp. 24-25.

on the supernatural, Todorov maintains that the central diegetic force in these stories/myths/tales is their atmosphere - an atmosphere of proximity. Settings in fog and gloom connect the disparate elements of the structure through a palpable, atmospheric "touching." Todorov identifies a sense of eeriness, a disorientation of perception and uncertainty as keys to the textual fantastic:

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is a victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination - and the laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality - but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us.

For Todorov, the fantastic lasts as long as that hesitation. Within this aura of uncertainty, Todorov identifies some of the fantastic themes of the self: "the fragility of the limit between matter and mind;" the "multiplication of the personality; collapse of the limit between subject and object." The fantastic plays upon the insecurity of the boundaries between "I" and "not-I." Judith Mayne, writing on the classic vampire film *Nosferatu* (1922) agrees with Todorov. She describes this "twilight" as "dangerous territory where opposing terms are not so easily distinguishable."¹⁸ I would argue further that vampirism represents not the indistinguishability of subject and object -

¹⁸ Judith Mayne, "Dracula in the Twilight" Marnu's *Nosferatu* (1922," *German Film and Literature: Adaptations and Transformations*, ed. Eric Rentschler (New York: Methuen, 1986), p. 27.

after all vampires and their human objects are signified as different - but collapses the rigid boundaries between the conventional (including psychoanalytic) terms of masculine and feminine forms of sexuality, and between the conventional binaries of heterosexuality and homosexuality.

Queer Vampires.

Christopher Craft in "'Kiss Me with Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*", makes the connection between monstrosity, (homo) sexual desire and Freudian narratives. He writes:

When Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu observed in *Carmilla* (1872) that 'the vampire is prone to be fascinated with an engrossing vehemence resembling the passion of love' and that vampiric pleasure is heightened 'by the gradual approaches of an artful courtship', he identified clearly the analogy between monstrosity and sexual desire that would prove, under a subsequent Freudian stimulus, paradigmatic for future readings of vampirism.¹⁹

Central to Craft's reading of the vampire metaphor in *Dracula* is his notion of distortion and displacement, the displacement of (male) homoerotic desire and anxiety. The representation of desire is distorted under a mask of monstrosity. This combination of displacement and distortion is also characteristic of Freud's readings of cultural/social (and psychic) taboos. In Craft's deconstructive reading, the all but invisible desire between the male protagonists, Dracula and Harker, is displaced onto and through vampiric

¹⁹ Craft, "Kiss Me With Those Red Lips," p. 107.

females. The moment of suspense/fear is the moment when the vampires are about to "kiss" him (Harker). But, for Craft, the vampiric "kiss" is also penetrative: "Dracula's daughters offer Harker a feminine form but a masculine penetration" (Craft, p.110). In many respects, Craft's attempt to read deconstructively what he perceives as gendered sexuality is admirable. However, he offers no explanation as to why "kiss" signifies "feminine" sexuality and "penetration" signifies sexuality as "masculine" in the first place. "Feminine" sexuality as passive/seductive and "masculine" sexuality as active/penetrative are effects of cultural representation and stereotyping including Freud's (Lacan's and Kristeva's) persistent positing of libido as masculine and Freud's stereotyping of "feminine" sexuality as passive/receptive. However, as Craft has collapsed "kiss" and "penetration" at the site of the (active) female vampire figure and read passivity/receptivity at the site of the male recipient of the penetrative kiss (Harker) then conventional forms of cultural representations of sexual difference and sexuality become blurred by transposition. This is further complicated by Craft's suggestive reading of the female vampires in this scene as surrogates for Dracula. In other words it may be a hetero-sexual or a male homosexual scene. In this sense actively desiring and sexual heterosexual women and a homosexual man are constructed as equivalent figures.

In psychoanalytic terms "kiss" and "penetration" might suggest the difference, or loss of the distinction, between an oral fantasmatic "moment" and a phallic fantasmatic "moment" within which sexuality and desire might be inscribed. In this sense oral moments and phallic moments are not understood teleologically but as undecidable or combinatory i.e. sexuality and desire are

inscribed in an oral-phallic scenario. In this configuration also, orality is less tied to "feminine" sexuality as opposed to "masculine" genital sexuality. One might also say that fore-pleasures and endpleasures are not necessarily understood as teleological. One might extend this to all constructions of sexualities metaphorised as vampirism. Insofar as vampiric sexuality is fantasmatically oral (the mouth) and penetrative (the teeth) for all vampires, male and female, and that sexual practices take place at the site of the neck (which both males and females also have), then all vampire subjects (and their objects) could be said to inscribe their sexuality within an oral-phallic fantasmatic moment at the site of the neck. In other words male and female hetero-, as well as male and female homo-vampires could be said to have their sexuality constructed in the same fantasmatic. What might be said to disappear in this scenario is not the notion of penetrative sexuality *per se*, but the penis-phallus as the only penetrative part-object or as the only sign of difference. One might very well argue that female vampire "teeth" are simply a metaphor for female imaginary penises, but this does not explain why male vampires have metaphoric penises if they already possess the referent organ. Penetrative part-objects (teeth) might refer to penises in vampire scenarios, but they might also refer to other penetrative part-objects (e.g. hands, fingers). Mouths might be read as equivalent to ani or vaginas. To say that sexuality and desire are constituted in an oral-phallic fantasmatic scenario or "moment" is not to say that the subject and object of desire in this scenario are the *same*, that the subject and object have collapsed into One, that exchange does not take place or that difference(s) are not symbolised. What it means, for my reading, is that forms of hetero-sexualities and homo-sexualities, female sexualities and male sexualities, can be constituted and understood in a

similar imaginary/symbolic system of meaning. The terms of difference as absolute difference (say between heterosexuality as pro-creative and homosexuality as sterile) can be read as deconstructed. Vampire sex belongs to a different symbolic order.

The Freudian phenomenological "moment" of vampirism to which Craft refers is the moment of suspense between desire and sexual gratification - the suspenseful moment of psychic ambivalence between erotic impulses and compensatory anxieties. According to Craft, the gothic novel, of which Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is the basic model for this formal structuring, is characterised by a triple rhythm. The first movement is a generative moment (the need to produce the monster); then follows a prolonged middle and a moment of expulsion (a terminal moment) to destroy the monster and terminate the narrative. It is during the prolonged middle, interposed between the antithetical gestures of admission and expulsion, that the (gothic) text affords its ambivalence a degree of play intended to produce a pleasurable and thrilling anxiety (Craft, p.107). In Craft's reading of *Dracula* he observes that "the sexual threat that this novel first evokes, manipulates, sustains, but never finally represents is that Count Dracula will seduce, penetrate, drain another male" - Jonathan Harker (Craft, p.110). Dracula's unfulfilled desire to vamp Harker, "This man belongs to me," (Craft, p. 53) is diffused and deflected onto Dracula's surrogates, the weird vampiric sisters. It is they who eventually "penetrate" and drain Harker with the "vampiric kiss." It is in the prolonged middle of the text that the "queer" moment, the moment when Dracula might seduce another male, appears. However, the three vampire sisters who finally seduce and penetrate Harker

heterosexually, are also coded as active, promiscuous and perverse, in terms of their female sexual practices and pleasures. That is they can be read against Freud's discursive practices of describing /constructing "feminine" heterosexuality as passive or pro-creative.

It has been suggested by several gay and lesbian theorists, including Craft, that upsurges in vampiric figures historically co-incide with moments of cultural anxiety about sexuality - the emergence of the homosexual as a sexual identity and an object of psychoanalytic investigation in the early twentieth century, and the AIDS crises of the late twentieth century are excellent examples. Cultural anxieties could be said also to co-incide with the 1880s emergence of feminism as well as its 1960s re-surgence.²⁰

Contemporary cultural texts continue to conflate homosexuality with death, taboo, the abject and "vampirism." In novels and films, the vampiric figure is just as often represented as lesbian or gay; vampire myths construct homosexuals *per se* as the embodiment of evil sexuality. Contemporary media representations continue this metaphorical/mythical construction. Ellis Hanson also connects vampirism, Freudian psychoanalysis and homosexuality. In his essay "Undead" he writes:

I have a suspicion that notions of death have been at the very heart of nearly every historical construction of same-sex desire. Typically, in media representations of AIDS, I find neither people who are living with AIDS nor

²⁰ For a comparison of the common cultural themes and anxieties between the nineteenth and twentieth *fin de siècle* periods, see Lumby, "A Dandy Future," pp. 61-63. While cultural anxieties have some common ground e.g. of women, of homosexuals, Lumby argues that in the late twentieth century the proliferation of technology and the circulation of information makes the censoring of alternative representations and images to dominant conservative ones almost impossible.

people who have died with AIDS. What I find, rather, are spectacular images of the abject, the dead who dare to speak and sin and walk abroad, the undead with AIDS. I find a late-Victorian vampirism at work, not only in media constructions of AIDS now, but in the various archaic conceptions of same-sex desire which inform the present "Face of AIDS." We have not yet broken our bizarre link with the undead, even though this link found its most profound manifestation nearly a hundred years ago in the concomitant appearance of literature's two most notorious vampires: Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Sigmund Freud's homosexuals.²¹

Lesbian Vampires

Similarly, female hetero- and lesbian vampires, as well as other "monstrous" female figures, have appeared historically and culturally in periods of crisis and anxieties around gender identity, particularly during historical waves in the socio-political movement of women. In her essay on lesbian filmic vampires Bonnie Zimmerman details the re-emergence of the lesbain vampire in 1970's Hollywood cinema.²² The textual conflation of lesbian desire with vampiric figures continues in both fictional writing and in cinema.

Zimmerman in "Daughters of Darkness: Lesbian Vampires" traces "a surprising phenomenon of the 1960s and early 70s: the lesbian vampire film."²³ Lesbian vampires, according to Zimmerman, have a long and worthy history in literature, legend, and film. She cites two major sources for the

²¹ Ellis Hanson, "Undead." In *inside/out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 324.

²² Bonnie Zimmerman, "Daughters of Darkness: Lesbian Vampires." *Jump Cut* 24-25 (March 1981): 22-25.

²³ Zimmerman, "Daughters of Darkness: Lesbian Vampires," p. 23.

lesbian vampire figure. One is the Countess Elisabeth Bathory - the Vampire Lady of the Carpathians - a sixteenth century Hungarian aristocrat who reputedly tortured and murdered 650 virgins, bathing in their blood to preserve her youth. The second source is Le Fanu's "Carmilla," the story of the Countess Millarca Karnstein, who lives through the centuries by vampirising young girls.

One of the earliest classic vampire films, Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1932) is an adaptation of *Carmilla* purged of all suggestions of lesbian sexuality. *Dracula's Daughter* (1936) includes a subtle lesbian encounter between a reluctant vampire woman and a young female servant. *Blood of Dracula* (American International, 1957) constructs a classic stereotype of the schoolgirl/teacher lesbian relationship. *I Vampiri* (1957), *La Danza Macabra* (1963) and *La Maschera Del Demonio* (also called *Black Sunday*, 1969) also feature female vampires who exhibit varying degrees of interest in their own sex. Two films based on "Carmilla" - Roger Vadim's *Et Mourir de Plaisir* (*Blood and Roses*, 1960) and *La Malediccion de los Karnsteins* (*Terror in the Crypt*, 1963) combine conventions of the gothic horror genre (e.g. mysterious castles, aristocratic characters) with surrealist dream sequences and fantasy landscapes. Whilst, according to Zimmerman, pre-1970s lesbian vampire films display a subtle juxtaposition of erotic and macabre imagery, after 1970 sexual, pornographic and violent connections become more explicit. A trilogy of English Hammer Films based on "Carmilla" - *The Vampire Lovers* (1970), *Lust for a Vampire* (1971), and *Twins of Evil* (1971) - combine classic conventions of the lesbian vampire genre with overt sexuality, blood and narcissism. The lesbian vampires only have sex with images like themselves.

Stephanie Rotham (*The Velvet Vampire*, 1971) introduces a feminist twist: the vampire takes time out from her pursuit of a female victim to attack a rapist. Jean Rollin's *Le Frisson des Vampires* (1970) constructs the vampire subject as a "butch" lesbian complete with fetishistic signifiers such as metal chains and black leather boots. During the 1980s, the lesbian vampiric figure appears in English in texts by self-professed lesbian writers and filmmakers. It is one of these contemporary texts, "The Vampire" (1988), by American s/m writer Pat Califia that I will analyse in the next chapter.

Sue-Ellen Case in "Tracking the Vampire" traces the theory of ambivalence between fear and desire, between subject and object, characteristic of vampire texts directly back to Freud's paper on the uncanny in which he reads E.T.A. Hoffman's horror story *The Sandman* as an analogy of the structuring fantasy of castration. For Case, Freud unlocks the code of the prohibition against "proximity" through the notion of the double and of doubling processes, such as the feeling that we have been somewhere before. The uncanny haunts Freud. He writes:

To many people the idea of being buried alive while appearing to be dead is the most uncanny thing of all. And yet psycho-analysis has taught us that this terrifying fantasy originally had nothing terrifying about it at all, but was filled with a certain lustful pleasure - the fantasy, I mean, of intra-uterine existence (p. 397).

This fantasy of the blissful pleasure of pre-natal existence, of the collapse of, or the "before" of, subject/object division, uncannily resembles Kristeva's discursive construction of this intra-uterine pleasure, this *jouissance*, as a

jouissance of the maternal. Case asserts that if, for Lacan, sexuality is dominated by the phallus in a trench coat, for Kristeva, it is dominated by the masked mother.²⁴ She claims that: "The feminist allocation of this lascivious pleasure of proximity with the mother is simply a bad hangover from too much Freud." Case wishes to retrieve "lustful pleasures" from the maternal space where Freud and Kristeva have located them and to reallocate *jouissance*, lascivious pleasure, proximity, to the lesbian vampires. The lesbian "vampire" for Case is "queer, is the taboo-breaker, the monstrous, the uncanny."²⁵ Case writes:

On the brighter (or the darker) side of things, in tracking the vampire, we can here re-imagine her various strengths: celebrating the fact that she cannot see herself in the mirror and remains outside that door into the symbolic, her proximate vanishing appears as a political strategy; her bite pierces platonic metaphysics and subject/object positions; and her fanged kiss brings her the chosen one, trembling with ontological, orgasmic shifts, into the state of the undead (p.15).

While there is a logical case to be made for attempting to rescue the concept of lascivious pleasures from Kristeva's exclusive mother /child (maternal) fantasised landscape, Case then places the lesbian vampiric subject gleefully *in* this scenario, i.e. outside of the symbolic. Kristeva, as I have observed in the previous chapter, also fantasises lesbian sexuality as pre-oedipal:

²⁴ Sue- Ellen Case, "Tracking the Vampire." In *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3: *Queer Theory* (Summer 1991): 14.

²⁵ Case, "Tracking the Vampire,"p. 3.

Lesbian loves comprise the delightful arena of a neutralized, filtered libido, devoid of the erotic cutting edge of masculinity. Light touches, caresses, barely distinct images fading one into the other, growing dim or veiled without the bright flashes into the mellowness of a dissolution, a liquefaction, a merger. . . Relaxation of consciousness, daydream, language that is neither dialectical nor rhetorical, but peace or eclipse: nirvana, intoxication, and silence. When such a paradise is not a sidelight of phallic eroticism, its parenthesis and its rest, when it aspires to set itself up as absolute of a mutual relationship, the nonrelationship (sic) that it is bursts into view.²⁶

This fusion theory of female/female sexuality, which Case repeats, is what de Lauretis scathingly refers to as "pre-oedipal soup." The psychoanalytic assumption would seem to be that as women do not have a phallic, integral self then they have no self to lose, hence liquefaction is an unproblematically pleasurable "nirvana." Rather than attempt to read, theorise or construct lesbian sexual pleasure in the symbolic, Case ultimately repeats Kristeva's theoretical move of placing lesbian sexuality in the imaginary.

Returning momentarily to Ernest Jones' work on vampirism, questions of oral sadism and incestuous desire remains today among the enduring components of reading lesbian vampires. Barbara Creed in her reading of *The Hunger* - a 1983 film directed by Tony Scott - writes that "the female vampire's world signifies darkness, the undead, moon, the tomb/womb, blood, oral sadism, bodily wounds and violation of the law [against incest]."²⁷ Creed

²⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans, Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 81.

²⁷ Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 71.

claims that the lesbian relationship as represented in *The Hunger* emphasises orality, death, and incest, which work to cement the mother/child relationship - in abjection rather than *jouissance* in this case - rather than bring about the separation necessary for the institution of sociality and the law. She reads the figure of the oral-sadistic mother vampire as one refusing the separation necessary for the introduction of the third term as described in Freud and Lacan. I agree partially with Creed that the lesbian vampire in this film is represented as abject, particularly if one reads retrospectively through the narrative closure of the final scenes in which Miriam (Catherine Deneuve), the lesbian vampire figure, disintegrates into an old crone and turns to dust. From a Kleinian feminist perspective it is tempting to read the metaphor of vampirism through a mother/vampire and lover/child oral-sadistic fantasmatic scenario. Ultimately Creed reads lesbian vampirism through Kristeva's concept of blood as a signifier of the abject maternal body, and the lesbian lovers as violating the symbolic order of castration/separation by collapsing the boundary between self and other.²⁸ By recuperating lesbian sexuality back into a mother/child pre-oedipal fantasmatic economy, Creed neatly circumvents discussing lesbian sexuality and desire at all, although the quotation that I have used epigraphically is taken from the beginning of the chapter in which she discusses lesbian vampires.²⁹ This insistent feminist practice of reading lesbian sexuality and desire through the all too familiar, by now, conceptual space of the pre-oedipal mother/child relation, simply repeats Case and Kristeva. Unlike de Lauretis and Irigaray, who insist that female castration/separation from the

²⁸ See Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, p. 91.

²⁹ See Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, chapter five "Woman as Vampire: *The Hunger*" and particularly the section titled "The Lesbian Vampire," pp. 67-72.

maternal landscape, and the emergence of desire between women, be articulated, represented, symbolised, or Craft who reads "queer" pleasurable moments in an otherwise heterosexual text, Creed's reading of the lesbian vampire does neither. What Creed's reading misses is that the two women in the same bed in *The Hunger* are signified differently i.e. the difference/separation between them is enunciated quite distinctly within the film diegesis. What Creed's, Kristeva's, and Case's reading of lesbian pre-oedipality, whether abject or blissful, seems to imply is that lesbians (or Scott who constructed this film) can not tell the difference(s) between women.

There is at least one sexual scene between women in *The Hunger* which might be enjoyed by a queer reading spectator, but which Creed reads as a sign of oral-sadistic abjection. Long before this scene the two female characters in question, Miriam and Sarah (Susan Sarandon) are constructed over an extended period in this film as not only different to each other, but as near polar opposites. To begin with Sarah/Sarandon is coded as heterosexual, as a scientist, as human, as mortal. Miriam/Deneuve on the other hand is signified as bi-sexual (also lesbian), immortal, a vampire, independently wealthy. One would be very hard pressed to find a film theorist analysing a heterosexual scene in which the protagonists exhibited such differences and reading it as a pre-oedipal mother/child scenario (although this may very well be appropriate in some circumstances). Freud himself implies that boys grow up to be heterosexual men seeking a mother substitute. The narrative trajectory, and the suspense, in *The Hunger* is driven by the differences between the two female protagonists. The rational scientist, Sarah, both

pursues and is seduced by the vampire because she is fascinated by Miriam's strangeness, her difference.

One might very well argue that in what Creed interprets as an "oral-sadistic" imaginary scene of Miriam - Sarah in *The Hunger*, and which I interpret as a sexual scene between two different women, that it is the spectator/voyeur who is re-positioned by a primal scene in which the origin of the subject can not be located in the fantasy of heterosexual coitus. In one of Freud's fantasies of the origins of the sexed subject, the child sees (in fantasy or reality) its parents having intercourse. In this cinema fantasmatic the child/spectator-subject is confronted by a primal scene as lesbian. The fantasy of the origins of the subject in heterosexuality are displaced. The spectator might very well find her/himself in a world of sexual fantasies and representations that it doesn't necessarily understand, and in which it has to find/re-find its way. In other words, the spectator is suddenly confronted, in the prolonged middle of this vampire text with a very "queer" adult sexual "primal scene" in which the subject has no origin. These questions are not raised by Creed. The problem overall appears to be that we lack the capacity to imagine a symbolic order in which relations between adult women are conceivable outside of mother/child imaginary scenarios and in which we might gain a perspective from which to challenge other fantasies of origins of the subject. I shall turn now to *Carmilla*, a dark tale with a queer middle in which a lesbian daughter appears individuated from the maternal landscape. Carmilla also appears as an actively desiring lesbian subject in promiscuous pursuit of exogamous objects signified as "human." This story is a cultural

myth. In de Lauretian terms, so are psychoanalytic constructions of female sexuality.

Carmilla

In Le Fanu's text, the heroine Laura invokes the father, or psychoanalytically speaking, the Father's Proper Name in the opening paragraph: "My father is English, and I bear an English name, although I never saw England (p. 223). The narrator Laura, who bears the father's name, continues:

My father was in the Austrian services, and retired upon a pension and his patrimony, and purchased this feudal residence, and the small estate on which it stands, a bargain (p. 223).

The scene of much of the narrative action is the father's estate. Laura continues: "Over all this the schloss shows its many-windowed front, its towers, and its Gothic chapel" (p. 223). This "scene" suggests both phallic structures (towers) and dark and shadowy places (Gothic chapel). The Gothic chapels attached to this and the neighbouring castles - such as that owned by a General Spielsdorf and the deserted Karnstein chateau - are also places of burial for dead family members. The Karnsteins, unknown to the reader at this point, are the vampire family-next-door. At this textual point, Laura returns to the construction of her "family:" "I and my father constituted the family at the schloss" (p. 224). Her mother, "a Styrian lady," had died when the heroine was an infant. As a substitute for this loss, Laura has a "good-

natured" governess who: "... in part supplied to me the loss of my mother, whom I do not even remember, so early I lost her" (p. 224).

This narrating of the nuclear family constellation mother/father/child suggests a psychoanalytic reading of oedipal scenarios. The loss of the mother (i.e. the Freudian-Kleinian originary object of desire) and the bearing of the father's name strongly suggests what might be termed a typical Freudian narrative of oedipal fantasmatic structures. The subject could be said to be ambivalent, caught between the desire for unity with the mother and fearful of the father's castration threat which impels the subject into the symbolic. This double play of fear and desire is crucial to the reading of the construction of Laura in *Carmilla*. Carmilla, the lesbian vampire, on the other hand, is not constructed as imaginarily re-connectable to the mother (as lost object), or psychically or emotionally ambivalent. While the image of Carmilla appears in Laura's subjective scenarios as metonymically and fantasmatically connected in the text to the maternal (back to the mother) through a chain of governesses and other female figures, Carmilla is constructed as non-ambivalent and clearly separate(d) from her (vampire) maternal body. What is constructed in this narrative are two young women who become involved in a homosexual relationship. Each is constructed with a different subjective structure.

Within the Freudian-Lacanian narratives of the constitution of the sexed subject, the female subject might be construed as in double jeopardy. The male child, threatened within symbolic castration, must separate from the (incestuous) relation to the (m)other's body. In lieu, he is symbolically

promised, as an adult like his father, a woman of his own. For the male subject then, within normative heterosexual subjecthood, the unconscious desire for body-to-body contact with another female body in place of the original object of desire (the maternal body) is fantasmatically realisable (never realised) by metonymic displacement:

Psychoanalysis has shown us that when the original object of wishful impulses has been lost as a result of repression, it is frequently represented by an endless series of substitute objects . . . (Freud, "Contributions to the Psychology of Love," SE 11: 188-9)

Within this narrative structure, the female child, if she is to accede to normative heterosexual subjecthood, the desire for the maternal body must be foreclosed. In this she would be, as some French feminists might say, "doubly castrated." Any "return of the repressed" desire for an(other) female body would be eternally prohibited by the father's law. The maternal body - the lost object initiating the metonymic chain of substitutions (including language) - must be relinquished by the female child forever (foreclosed). A female child exiting the oedipal scene repressing, but not foreclosing, the relation to the maternal/another female body would, like the male child, be subject to bouts of castration anxiety. In other words her pleasure in the desire for another female body would be intermingled with castration fear. I might further suggest that her castration anxiety might in fact be more terrifying in these psychoanalytic terms in that she has no future promise in lieu of the initial relinquishment to pacify her. Her relation to any female body (not just the maternal body) is prohibited under threat from the

symbolic Father's Law. If a female subject refuses the father's law (against incest) and insists on her desire for other female bodies she is, according to Freudian psychoanalytic narratives, a female homosexual locked in a regressive relationship with the phallic mother. I would argue that this is precisely what *Carmilla* is about. At least it is what the construction of Laura is about. In Laura's paternal world every female body is connected in a metonymic chain to the mother's body, the imaginary maternal body. Every contact with Carmilla is riddled with anxiety. However in Carmilla's female vampire symbolic, to which I will turn momentarily, female bodies are differentiated. The female object of Carmilla's desire (i.e. Laura) is not connected to the lost maternal (vampire) body, it is a different (human) body. Carmilla, the lesbian vampire can be read in this text as telling the difference between female bodies. Her sexual contact with, desire for, Laura does not return her imaginarily to one-ness with the maternal landscape and its attendant castration anxieties. Carmilla forecloses on the mother's body and is precipitated into a symbolic order where other names for women and female desires are imaginatively invented. In this text, this is vampire desire. This distinction is a fine one. Laura can be read as a Freudian female homosexual, locked into an imaginary relation with a fantasised phallic mother. Carmilla can be read as a de Lauretian lesbian. Laura pines for the lost mother and (mis)takes her in Carmilla, and suffers severe bouts of anxiety. Carmilla is happily scouring the neighbourhood with an eye out for the next "human" sexual object.

Having situated herself in a Victorian paternal familial structure, Laura recalls an event from her childhood which might certainly be construed as a

"return of the repressed." Waking one night and finding herself deserted by the nursery-maid, Laura hallucinates a young woman kneeling beside her bed with "her hands under the coverlet" (p. 225). She continues:

I looked at her with a kind of pleased wonder, and ceased whimpering. She caressed me with her hands, and lay down beside me on the bed, and drew me towards her, smiling; I felt immediately soothed, and fell asleep again. I was wakened by a sensation as if two needles ran into my breast very deep at the same moment, and I cried loudly. The lady started back, with her eyes fixed on me, and slipped down upon the floor, and, as I thought, hid herself under the bed (p. 225).

Laura's initial delight in being soothed by the close proximity of another female body is replaced by anxiety, fear and eventually terror after she is awakened by the needles penetrating her "breast:" "The morning after I saw the apparition I was in a state of terror, and could not bear to be left alone, daylight though it was, for a moment" (p. 225). This initial movement from pleasure to anxiety is repeated later in an "uncanny" event in which this young woman of Laura's dream again re-appears. This childhood scene or fantasy also remains indelibly vivid for the narrator/heroine:

I forget all my life preceding that event, and for some time after it is all obscure also, but the scenes I have just described stand out vivid as the isolated pictures of the phantasmagoria surrounded by darkness (p. 226).

The text of *Carmilla* returns to the present time and to Laura's relation to the father. Laura is nineteen. Whilst she and her father are out walking, they witness a carriage accident. This scene also is constructed by the narrator Laura as exciting/painful:

The excitement of the scene was made more painful by the clear, long-drawn screams of a female voice from the carriage window.

We all advanced in curiosity and horror; my father in silence, the rest with various ejaculations of terror (p. 230).

The occupants of the over-turned carriage are a tall, very pale, older - but still "handsome" - woman, dressed in black velvet, and her daughter. This daughter, Carmilla, is also an adolescent and, at this time, either dead or at least unconscious. The very pale woman confides to the father that she is on a "secret" mission of some urgency and must flee the scene. She asks the father to care temporarily for her daughter who, it transpires, is only stunned. Laura is immediately entranced by the incredibly beautiful Carmilla, and the two young women have an "uncanny" and ambivalent Freudian experience told from Laura's perspective:

But this almost instantly lighted into a strange fixed smile of recognition.

There was a silence of fully a minute, and then at length *she* spoke; *I* could not.

"How wonderful!" she exclaimed. "Twelve years ago, I saw your face in a dream, and it has haunted me ever since."

"Wonderful indeed!" I repeated, overcoming with an effort the horror that had for a time suspended my utterances. "Twelve years ago, in vision or reality, I

certainly saw you. I could not forget your face. It has remained before my eyes ever since" (p. 236)

This uncanny shared dream, which horrifies Laura and delights Carmilla, turns out to be the one in which the two young women were attracted to each other and climbed into bed together. It is also the dream/hallucination which provoked Laura's first major anxiety attack. Carmilla, on the other hand, is delighted to find the woman of her dreams (she has many as it turns out) and does not suffer from "castration" anxiety. Freud, in his essay on the uncanny (1919) defines these experiences as belonging to "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of the old and long familiar;" that is, something "old established in the mind," but "alienated from it only through the process of repression" (SE 17: 373). Freud notes, particularly in reference to fairy tales, that the fictional representation of uncanny events is not in itself sufficient to produce the effect of the uncanny: "that feeling cannot arise unless there is a conflict of judgement as to whether things which have been surmounted and are regarded as incredible may not, after all, be possible; and this problem is eliminated from the outset by the postulates of the world of fairy tales" (SE 17: 373). Freud is insisting on "uncertainty." Freud was reading Hoffmann's story *The Sandman*, and has been accused by feminist critics such as Jackson and Cixous of repressing certain features of the narrative in order to identify and justify a single coherent meaning i.e. that experiences of the uncanny relate to male castration anxiety.³⁰ Freud's re-

³⁰ See Jackson, *Fantasy*, p. 67. At the centre of Freud's analysis of *The Sandman* is his interpretation of Nathaniel's phobia about "eyes." He fears Coppélius-Coppola because of their unconscious association with the sandman. Freud interprets this phobia as revealing a terror which constitutes a "castration complex" - a fear that paternal threats to punish the boy's sexual activities might be realised.

telling of Hoffman's tale is that the story's uncanniness is attributable to "the anxiety belonging to the castration complex of childhood" (SE 17: 354).

Hélène Cixous observes that Freud's reading reveals his own anxieties and repetition compulsions. What is at stake for her in the uncanny is the fragility of identity and the instability of boundaries:

It is the between that is tainted with strangeness . . . What is intolerable is that the Ghost [or Vampire] erases the limit which exists between two states, neither alive or dead; passing through, the dead man [sic] returns in the manner of the Repressed. It is his coming back which makes the ghost what he is, just as it is the return of the Repressed that inscribes the repression.³¹

For Cixous, it is in this "confusion of life and death" in the "supremely disquieting idea: the phantasm of the man buried alive: his textual head, shoved back into the maternal body, a horrible pleasure" that castration takes on its significance. In other words, it is a fear of (re)merging - "the realization of the desire which in itself obliterates a limit" - with the maternal landscape (the *heimlich*). In reading Cixous and Freud, there is a sense in which the female subject must also accede to the symbolic through separation from the "maternal landscape" with all its attendant castration anxieties and horrible pleasures in re-merging. If the uncanny, as Freud asserts, is about the "terrifyingly familiar" rather than the unfamiliar, then the lesbian subject would presumably experience unmitigated anxiety at the return of the repressed/familiar same sex body. In other words, the question of loss of identity, with its attendant "horrors and pleasures" becomes crucial.

³¹ Hélène Cixous, "Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche*." *New Literary History* 7 (1976): 525-48.

However, it is Laura who experiences the return of the same-sexed body as anxiety provoking in this text, not the lesbian vampire.

In *Carmilla*, the figures which return metonymically to Laura are female vampires rather than male "ghosts." In this return, there is also a traceable transformation of the figure. The ghostly figure of the lost mother/object is substituted by various other female figures including finally Carmilla. This rather elliptical reading of the text suggests that it is not only fear of too close an identification, a fusion with the (m)other that is articulated in this text, but also the emergence of female desire for another female object, i.e. lesbian desire. The textual metonymic chain begins with the "lost mother" (maternal body/object). Immediately the "governess" is substituted, then a "finishing governess" who speaks French. Returning elliptically to childhood, and in the absence (temporary loss) of both the governess and the nursery-maid, the "young woman of Laura's dream" appears in the text. She uncannily re-appears as Carmilla, in the company of her mother, the Countess Karnstein, who also speaks French. More importantly, Carmilla is transformed into a lover. The lost mother as object of desire returns metonymically in Laura's scenario as an active young female seducer. In other words, in Laura's subjective scenario, Carmilla appears in a long line of metonymic displacements from mother to lover. For Laura, Carmilla is a mother substitute. The narrator Laura is, and remains throughout the tale, "emotionally ambivalent" toward Carmilla:

Now the truth is, I felt rather unaccountably towards the beautiful stranger. I did feel, as she said, "drawn towards her", but there was also something of

repulsion. In this ambiguous feeling, however, the sense of attraction immensely prevailed. She interested and won me; she was so beautiful and so indescribably engaging (p. 237).

Having overcome her "faint antipathy" ("the momentary horrors") Laura recounts the relationship between the two nineteen-year-old women as increasingly eroticised with a "strange excitement that was pleasurable" mingled with a "vague sense of fear and disgust." Laura describes the terror of the fantasy of re-merging into the maternal landscape/body:

It was like the ardour of a lover; it embarrassed me; it was hateful and yet overpowering; and with gloating eyes she drew me to her, and her hot lips travelled along my cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, "You are mine, you *shall* be mine" (p. 240-41).

Laura experiences this seduction as hatefully overpowering and likens it to the ardour of a lover. However Laura has no language for female-female sexuality. She suspects that Carmilla is a man in disguise. For Laura then, sexuality is understood as hetero-sexual. Relations between women are imagined as overpowering and hateful (i.e. as metaphors for relations with the fantasised phallic mother). Laura, sounding remarkably Freudian in so far as she suspects that Carmilla might be a man, or the phallic mother, speculates theoretically on the meaning of this "extraordinary manifestation:"

. . . I strove in vain to form any satisfactory theory - I could not refer them to affectation or trick. It was unmistakably the momentary breaking out of suppressed instinct and emotion. Was she, notwithstanding her mother's

volunteered denial, subject to brief visitations of insanity; or was there here a disguise and a romance? I had read in old story books of such things. What if a boyish lover had found his way into the house, and sought to prosecute his suit in masquerade, with the assistance of a clever old adventuress. But there were many things against this hypothesis, highly interesting as it was to my vanity (p. 241).

Young peasant females from the surrounding village begin dying from a strange complaint called "oupire." Carmilla is suspected of walking in her sleep. In fact it is Carmilla who is infecting the village girls with "oupire." Laura has "strange sensations" in *her* sleep. These sensations include warm lips caressing her throat or sharp needles penetrating the same spot. This alternate caressing/penetrating of Laura's throat in the night leaves her somewhat distracted. The Doctor is summoned to examine her. The Father and the Doctor are perturbed. They also discuss Laura's "case" outside of her range of hearing. This situation in which the paternal figures are textually constructed as the authoritative subjects-supposed-to-know is also a repeated motif in *Carmilla*. The father, the doctor, the priest presumably *know* what Laura's "suffering" is all about. She is kept in the dark, more or less:

Later in the day the doctor came, and was closeted with papa for some time. He was a skilful man, of sixty and upwards . . . And so they walked on, and I heard no more. I did not then know what the doctor had been broaching, but I think I guess it now (p. 246).

At this point, the General, also a friend of the Father, arrives and relates a strange tale. His story is about a beautiful young woman, Millarca, her

Mother - a mysterious masked Countess - and his young niece. The masked mother leaves Millarca in the care of the General. His niece is entranced by Millarca, and strange events begin to manifest in the night. The niece falls ill. An old physician and a clergyman are consulted and the General is told that Millarca is a vampire. The General conceals himself in his niece's bedroom and sees Millarca, as a "large black object" crawl over the foot of the bed and up to the "poor girl's throat." He attempts to kill the monster, but she escapes and the "victim" dies. The General is sworn to avenge himself on Millarca and her mother who is revealed narratively to be the not-so-dead neighbour Mircalla, the Countess Karnstein:

We had not long resumed our drive, when the General began to talk, with his usual soldierly directness, of the bereavement, as he termed it, which he had sustained in the death of his beloved niece and ward; and then he broke out in a tone of intense bitterness and fury, inveighing against the "hellish arts" to which she had fallen a victim, and expressing, with more exasperation than piety, his wonder that Heaven should tolerate so monstrous an indulgence of the lusts and malignity of hell (p. 265).

The sexual relation between the vamp Carmilla and the ambivalent Laura is constructed as a "monstrous lust" and a "hellish art" by the paternal figures who presume knowledge of female desire. It is also the General who observes that Carmilla and Millarca are anagrams of Mircalla. It is here in the text that something interesting begins to emerge. Up until this point little is known about Carmilla. In Laura's scenario she is constructed as a substitute for the mother. What is finally revealed through the paternal figures'

discovery of the maternal vampire's identity is the difference between Laura's castration anxiety response to Carmilla (the imaginary maternal body and female lovers are the same - overpowering) and the symbolic/imaginary order of the female vampires (mothers and lesbian daughters are differentiated linguistically and go separate ways). The "vampire" mother has a Name, and reproduces her daughters linguistically. The daughters are anagrammatically, symbolically, differentiated from the mother even though the letters making up the names are the same:

The vampire is, apparently, subject, in certain situations, to special conditions. In the particular instance of which I have given you a relation, Mircalla seemed to be limited to a name which, if not her real one, should at least reproduce, without the omission or addition of a single letter, those, as we say, anagrammatically, which compose it. *Carmilla* did this; so did *Millarca* (p. 287).

Mircalla is the maternal vampire who travels about the countryside disposing of her daughters. They are named as linguistically similar but not the same. The daughters Carmilla and Millarca also "do this." The female vampiric family might be read as a perverse oedipal structure. Carmilla, it is revealed narratively, has a mother, but no father. The fatherless family would appear to be symbolically unthinkable and intolerable within a symbolic constituted by patriarchal law(s). The problem would seem to be that daughters are no longer exchanged by men, or between men, in an economy of desire premised on paternal law. The vampiric mother is signified as phallic, powerful, actively desiring, naming, and precipitating her daughters into language and exogamous symbolic exchange without the intervention of a

father. In other words this maternal figure embodies the phallic function of naming and designating the terms of difference. The lesbian body in this symbolic order (*Carmilla*) is not the same as the maternal body. What can be read as constructed by Le Fanu in this text are two different economies of symbolic/imaginary meaning. In Laura's imaginary every female body is a maternal body with which one is in danger of re-merging. In the female vampire's symbolic order this is not the case.

The powerful and phallic maternal vampire figure obviously poses a threat of some magnitude to the paternal figures. The offending signifier would appear to be her head, or more significantly for psychoanalysis and vampirism, "her murderous throat." The throat signifies a boundary, or *the* boundary, between mind and body. The throat as signifier in *Carmilla* doubles in meaning. It is both the privileged imaginary site of lesbian sexuality in this text and the imaginary site of knowledge about it. Lesbian penetration and caresses (seduction) are sited here. De-phallicising or castrating the older woman is displaced onto the throat -her head is cut off. Laura complains of choking after her nightly, and initially ecstatic visitations from *Carmilla*. For Laura the vampiric/penetrative "kiss" travels metonymically upward from "hands under the bedclothes" to needles piercing her breasts and ultimately to her throat. Freud also reads Dora's hysterical choking "Fragment of an Analysis" as displaced genital pleasure (SE 7: 1-22). Dora hystericises part of her body, according to Freud, as a form of retaining her maternal pre-history, refusing to abandon it in exchange for the father's law. It lodges in her throat. Freud initially reads this phallicisation of the throat as disgust at Herr K's sexual advances but becomes ambivalent as he uncovers her unconscious

homoerotic desire for Frau K.³² Female subjects' desires are signified in Freud and Le Fanu's tales through the trope of orality. However, it is only in Laura's throat that the words stick. Drives for power, to name and exchange, are also localised at the site of the throat in the female body of the vampire in this text. The maternal vampire throat is also the phallus which designates meaning and difference. For order to be restored the offending part, the mouth, which names, is severed. The signifier "throat" cuts both ways in the text. For Laura, as for Dora, who do not have a symbolic system for naming lesbian desire, the body is hystericised in relation to Freud's confusion of female object of desire and imaginary phallic mother. Carmilla on the other hand neither pines for her mother, nor connects Laura in fantasy to her mother. Millarca and Carmilla are constructed as linguistically separate(d) entities. Carmilla neither experiences castration anxiety over re-merging with an imaginary maternal body or with Laura. Carmilla's objects of desire are not connected in fantasy to Millarca's body. They are outside the "family" constellation, external and different objects. Carmilla disappears at the close of the story and Laura's "nightly sufferings" discontinue. She remains with the father but Carmilla remains in her memory. The object of desire is again lost, but not forgotten. Laura concludes her narrative thus:

... and often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing-room door (p. 288).

Ken Gelder - who notes his difficulty as a man in retrieving traces of positive representations of lesbians in a story written by a man - nevertheless points to

³² See Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989), p. 134-35.

a gap in the narrative conclusion which remains unclosed. He suggests that this story refuses finally to dismantle the attraction Laura finds in Carmilla. Laura is never totally "horrified" by Carmilla even following knowledge of the lesbian vampire's "true" identity.

The tripartite narrative structuring of the gothic novel with its prolonged middle between the generative and terminal moments is certainly applicable to reading the text of *Carmilla*. It is in this prolonged middle that Craft's thesis of the play of ambivalence between pleasure and anxiety is reproduced in the body of the text and, one might add also, the heroine, Laura and possibly Todorov's reader. To a certain extent, Todorov's thesis of "uncertainty" in the fantastic is signalled almost from the outset (i.e. the uncertainty over the authorship of the story, whether it was written by Le Fanu or the unnamed woman). A specific female homosexuality or lesbian desire is certainly never "named" in the text by the writer. The reader is left in a state of uncertainty as to what exactly is happening between the two young women sexually after a certain point. The boundary between female adolescent attachment (friendship) and eroticised protestations of love, on the one hand, and active sexual desire (Carmilla visiting Laura's room during the night) would seem to be one of the most textually "fragile." It is around this slippage that the most excessively fantastical manifestations of the "unnatural" or "supernatural" in this story occur. Not only is Carmilla in bed with Laura but apparently is promiscuously seducing and penetrating all of the young women in the neighbourhood. It is at this textual point that Carmilla is transformed from a charming and beautiful young woman into a monster (in the paternal figures' terms), a practitioner of the "hellish arts."

What may or may not be genital sexuality is displaced bodily and metonymically upwards - the cheeks, breast and throat. It is also represented as alternately caressing (kisses) and penetrative, displaced onto teeth (the sharp needle-like piercing). Like Craft's reading of *Dracula* this can also be understood as a slippery and fragile border between what orthodox psychoanalytic discourses seek to define as separate spheres of masculine (phallic) sexual desire and receptive (passive) feminine sexuality. Even displaced to non-genital sites, lesbian vampirism is constructed as penetrative (masculine) and seductive/caressing (feminine) dislodging the binarism of conventionally understood and represented distinctly separate sexualities, normatively understood in heterosexual terms.

Tzvetan Todorov's thesis of the fantastic in Gothic novels is that it enables the representation of repressed and censored themes. "The fantastic" is a label of a literary genre defined by Todorov in his book of the same name. The central effect of this genre, a matter of plotting, he terms "fantastic hesitation." Todorov's paradigm of the fantastic in fiction is where a text supports two alternative readings: a supernatural one and a naturalistic one - the latter explaining the anomalous events in the story psychologically; the former accepting those events as real. The hesitation then is in choosing between supernatural and naturalistic explanations. The hallmark of the pure fantastic proper in literature is when neither interpretation is narratively conclusive. Subgenres of the fantastic plot structure include the "fantastic-uncanny" and the "fantastic-marvelous." The former refers to narratives that are resolved in favour of a naturalistic (or scientific) explanation and the latter to those that ultimately go with the supernatural explanation. *Carmilla* could certainly be

classified as a "fantastic-marvelous" text. For instance earlier textual explanations for the deaths of young village girls are medical - "oupire" is a strange new disease - and Carmilla's apparent ability to disappear and re-appear through his daughter's locked bedroom door is accounted for plausibly by the father. It is only toward the conclusion of the narrative that Carmilla's vampiric, read lesbian, and hence "supernatural," abilities are revealed. Following from Freud's notion of the uncanny (the fantasmatic) that: ". . . the uncanny is nothing else than a hidden, familiar thing that has undergone repression and then emerged from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfills this condition" (SE 17: 241), contemporary theorists think of cultural categories as repressive schematisations. Rosemary Jackson in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981) writes that:

. . . fantastic literature points to or suggests the basis upon which the cultural order rests, for it opens up, for a brief moment, on disorder, on to illegality, on to that which is outside dominant value systems. The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made absent.³³

Before moving on to reading a more contemporary lesbian s/m vampire text one might conclude with Barbara Creed - resonating in this instance with Irigaray or Gelder - that the female vampire is considered monstrous, but also attractive, precisely because she does threaten to undermine the formal and highly symbolic relations of men and women essential to the continuation of patriarchal society. Because female, and - like Count Dracula - a seducer *par*

³³ Jackson, *Fantasy*, p. 4.

excellence, the lesbian vampire is doubly dangerous. As well as transforming her victims into blood-sucking creatures of the night (she does not necessarily destroy her victims), she also threatens to seduce the daughters of patriarchy away from their proper roles.³⁴

However, while this might be said to be so, the theoretical pathway by which Creed, Case, and Kristeva arrive at the concept of lesbian vampirism, or in Kristeva's case lesbianism, as a transgression of borders is to locate this transgression fundamentally and implicitly as a transgression of the "taboo against incest." That is, lesbian vampirism is posited as analogous to imaginary pre-oedipal mother/child fusion. Even if Kristeva re-vises, re-values or up-grades this nonrelation (her term) from one of abjection to one of *jouissance* - from Thanatos to Eros - the problem of representing lesbian sexuality and desire in these terms remains. I interpret this theoretical model to be a claim that lesbianism, particularly as it is told through the metaphor of vampirism, is a refusal to enter the symbolic, a refusal of the third term, a refusal of separation and difference. What I am arguing is that lesbian vampires can tell the difference between vampire mothers and daughters, between lesbian vampires and their "human" female objects of desire, but that they refuse to enter a patriarchal imaginary/symbolic order within the terms of the sign "woman" as "mother." Regardless of what Le Fanu might or might not have intended in writing the vampire figure of Carmilla he nonetheless constructs an active lesbian subject who could hardly be said to be intent on becoming a mother. Maternal (female symbolic) vampires produce lesbian vampires in this text linguistically. What lesbianism, represented through the

³⁴ Creed, *The Monstrous - Feminine*, p. 61.

trope of vampirism, refuses to reproduce in the vampire symbolic, is reproduction understood as heterosexual motherhood. What the lesbian vampire reproduces in and for other female subjects through seduction and infection (penetration) is perverse (non-procreative) forms of adult female sexuality.

What Craft is telling, and I agree, is that vampirism confuses the boundaries, not necessarily between subject and object, between self and (m)other, as a form of psychic or erotic incest, but confuses the boundaries between masculinity and femininity, between heterosexuality and homosexuality as they are represented within the a phallogentric imaginary and symbolic order. Male and female vampires can both penetrate and kiss, male and female objects of desire can be receptive. Male and female recipients can become vampire subjects in their turn. They can then kiss and penetrate other objects of desire. "In turn" implies turning away, separation. Each vampire becomes another individual vampire finding its way, and its objects, in the world. It does not become One with the original vampire, that is, take its unique place or merge with it. What is implied in the metaphor of vampirism is not only the emergence of desire but a notion of desire as mobile and directed toward other (potentially) multiple objects. Male vampires can kiss other males on the neck. Female vampires can penetrate female humans. In the first instance difference is already told between the terms "vampire" and "human." This is so in both the prolonged narrative mid-sections of *Carmilla* and *The Hunger* regardless of the ultimate *noir* closure of these texts.

Four

"Why would the lesbian lovers care if a whip is a penis if reproduction isn't the aim?"

In this chapter I will continue tracking representations of a lesbian vampire who, in this instance, is also constructed as a proficient sadist. The text examined in this chapter is Pat Califia's short story, "The Vampire" (1988). By way of comparing some aspects of the representation of lesbian sadomasochism in Califia's tale, I will also briefly visit German lesbian film maker, Monica Treut's *Seduction: The Cruel Woman*. Pat Califia is a self-professed lesbian s/m writer. The female protagonists in "The Vampire," Iduna and Kerry, have no narrative families of origin. In this novel it is not the object of the female vampire's desire, Iduna, who experiences moments of ambivalence between fear and desire, but the vampire Kerry. Sex with a "victim," for this vampire is reported initially in this tale to be out of the question. In this text the expected terms of the vampire subject/object of desire positions are disturbed in that it becomes clear gradually that the (traditionally presumed) object of the vampire's desire is the one who is actively pursuing the vampire. It is Iduna, the eager "victim" who seduces the vampire. The naming of this character, Iduna (I done her) suggest something of a ironic re-writing of traditional vampire myths by Califia, as well as a camp construction of the thrilling anxieties of seducing a "stone-

butch" sadist.¹ In the closing moments of this short story the lesbian vampire/sadist concedes that: "Sex doesn't seem to be out of the question after all, does it?"² Califia's text will be read counter to Freud's narrative of the origin of sexual perversions, "'A Child is Being Beaten:' A Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversion" (SE 17: 175-204).

"The Vampire" was first published in *Macho Sluts*, an anthology of "erotic fiction" by Califia, in the U.S.A. in 1988. In the introduction to *Macho Sluts*, the author asks: "What, then, are my choices, as a writer and a sadomasochist?" (p. 9). Generically, the narrative is an intertext of realist fiction, lesbian sadomasochistic narratives, and vampire fantasies. Most of the subjects and scenes are constructed in contemporary social realist narrative mode. Vampire subjects are obviously read as fantasy, mythical or metaphorical figures. Califia also appropriates language, stylistic conventions, and narrative themes from other popular cultural, and sub-cultural, signifying systems. These include "horror" stories, gay male erotica and pornographic representation. In the introduction to the *Sluts* anthology, Califia suggests that: "This book will be accused of being pornographic and thus misogynistic, a piece of hate literature" (p. 10). Her writing is not what might generally be classified as of a "high" literary standard. Whether her "trashy" writing style is intentional or not is not ascertainable directly from the text. In her introduction to *Sluts*, Califia observes that:

¹ "Stone butch" is a lesbian sub-cultural term for a lesbian coded as extremely phallic (self-contained), cold, ruthlessly indifferent, and remote who never, as far as is known, has sex with anyone.

² Pat Califia, "The Vampire." *Macho Sluts* (Boston: Alyson, 1988), p. 262. Hereafter all references to "The Vampire" will be given in the text as page numbers in parenthesis.

People who wring their hands because obscenity laws have been used to hassle the publishers of D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce are correct to bemoan the chilling effect this had on including sexuality in 'serious' (i.e., non-pornographic) fiction. But they miss another crucial point. Because the censors are even more afraid of well-written porn than they are of expletive-ridden drivel, publishers shy away from pornographic manuscripts that are too literary because, in the past, this has incurred the wrath of the authorities (pp. 12-13).

Califia, it would appear, is concerned with prohibitions (taboos) within the socio-symbolic realm of law. What the writer is referring to is censorship as it is historically constructed and practised, both legislatively and within publishing institutions. Other lesbian theorists of s/m textuality, such as Julia Creet, claim that lesbian s/m writing constitutes a rebellion against what she terms "Maternal Law."³ This law she defines as a set of prohibitions against certain sexualities allegedly imposed in the name of contemporary feminist orthodoxies. Whilst no direct parallel can be drawn between psychic structures and the cultural constructions of law(s), there is, nonetheless, a sense in which psychoanalytic theories and discourses are debated and shift historically, as do the social and cultural laws pertaining to censorship. None of this would preclude a psycho-linguistic reading of Califia's particular textual construction of lesbian desire, sexuality, and sexual practices.

The plot of "The Vampire" is not difficult. The scene of action in the first part is a gay male s/m bar or night-club called Purgatory. The central female protagonists are Iduna - coded as attractive, but with some biological oddities

³ Julia Creet, "Daughter of the Movement: The Psychodynamics of Lesbian S/M Fantasy." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3.2 (Summer 1991): 135-159.

such as ageless, poreless skin - and Kerry, a female "top" whose irregularities include prominent canine teeth. Although Kerry is a regular in this bar no one but Iduna appears to have ever noticed the unusual teeth. Iduna witnesses a situation in which Kerry whips an unsuspecting macho-male "out-of-towner," a stranger in this part of town, into a grovelling and bloodied masochist. Iduna intercepts Kerry as she exits the club, and attempts to speak to her. Kerry endeavours to avoid this confrontation. Iduna pursues her somewhat relentlessly. Kerry attempts to counter this strategy by walking into a dark alley, only to find her pursuer barring her way at the other end. Narratively, it is gradually revealed that Kerry is a vampire who is being seduced by an actively willing "victim." It also becomes apparent that Kerry, unlike classical vampires, possesses the ability to open a vein, suck enough blood for her needs, and re-suture the wound, leaving the "victim" undead. What transpires is that Iduna was aware of this particular vampire trait from the beginning of the seduction scenario. This vampire story also takes on sexually explicit overtones, through fantasies and genital activity, in relation to the blood-sucking exchange between the female protagonists.⁴ The difference between them, "castration," is marked symbolically, with a knife, in the form of a V carved into Iduna's breast.

Califia's text deviates from classic vampire narratives in that it introduces elements of explicitly constructed sexual perversities such as fetishism and sadomasochism. In Richard Krafft-Ebing's terms, outlined in the previous

⁴ One can only remind readers that blood-sucking activities should not be regarded as actual safe-sex practices. Califia, as a lesbian activist, takes care in her published work to remind readers of what does and does not constitute safe-sex practices. I can only re-iterate that this is a work of fantasy-fiction, and that if one is considering sex with a vampire then blood-sucking as foreplay should be avoided at all costs.

chapter, blood-sucking as an erotic activity in itself has certainly been classified as a specific perversion grounded in oral-sadism. What then are the connections between metaphors of vampirism, lesbian sexuality, desire, sadomasochism and Freudian narratives of subjective structuring fantasies as they are inscribed in, or re-worked, in this text? Some of these questions, excluding vampirism, have been taken up by Parveen Adams in "Of Female Bondage" (1989). What connects her psychoanalytic narratives of lesbian sadomasochism to questions raised by Clafia's s/m vampirism is Adams' insistence that the masochistic scenario relies on both fantasy and suspense. Suspense and fantasy - or the fantastic in Tzvetan Todorov's sense - are also textual conventions of the vampire sub-genre of horror. In other words the mythical scenarios of vampirism and the psychoanalytic scenarios of sadism and masochism could be said to share some identifiable conventions (fantasy and suspense) whilst not being identical scenarios. While vamping the object of desire might be said to be sadistic, sadistic activity in the psychoanalytically defined fantasmatic scenarios is not confined to biting and blood-sucking practices. The more traditionally understood practices of sadism locate suspense in "suspending" the other (with ropes) or whipping. Adams asks:

What precisely are the similarities and the differences between the lesbian sadomasochistic woman and the traditional heterosexual masochistic man?

They can be summed up in a sentence: the similarities lie in the scenarios which involve fetishes, whipping, bondage, all that goes with the factor of fantasy and

suspense; the differences are that lesbian sadomasochism appears not to be compulsive, can just as easily be genital or not, and is an affair of women.⁵

Suspense is, for Adams, a major characteristic of the psychic structuring of masochism. She writes that: "suspense then is a mark of disavowal within the masochistic scene."⁶ Noël Carroll (1990) isolates suspense as "a key narrative element in most horror stories."⁷ This is difficult theoretical territory that might be solved by detouring through Roland Barthes' theories of textuality which I will do momentarily. One might hesitate to draw direct connections between narrative textual structuring and the psychic structures of fetishism and masochism. Nevertheless both psychoanalytic and literary theorists have unpacked suspense and fantasy as major elements in both sexual perversity and the genre of vampiric horror. Cristopher Craft isolates the vampiric "moment of suspense," forever delayed, in *Dracula* as the point at which Dracula might homoerotically penetrate Harker. This moment is forever delayed and textually displaced onto the "vampiric kiss," textually displacing and disavowing direct genital sexuality between men. The vampiric "kiss" as already noted also disavows sexual difference in the conventionally understood psychoanalytic sense of masculine penile penetration/ feminine receptive passivity. It is constituted within an oral-phallic fantasmatic moment which might apply to male and female, hetero- and homo- vampires. This could also be said of the movement of desire between Laura and Carmilla as read in the previous chapter. The homoerotic

⁵ Parveen Adams. "Of Female Bondage," *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Teresa Brennan, (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 262.

⁶ Adams, "Of Female Bondage," p. 252.

⁷ Noel Carroll *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (London & New York, 1990), p. 128.

vampire, like the fetishist, organises sexuality somewhere other than the penis-phallic genital field. The classic Freudian fetishist disavows that the mother lacks the phallus merely because she doesn't have a penis. It would appear, according to Craft's reading, that homosexual male vampires might also suspend disbelief in the phallus. Harker waits passively and trembling, in a state of interminable suspense, for Dracula's "kiss." The kiss, though penetrative is not directly genital. That Harker is a man, defined through possession of the phallus, is textually denied. He waits passively, in the feminine position, for Dracula's surrogate's penetrating kiss:

Lower and lower went her head as the lips went below the range of my mouth and chin and seemed to fasten on my throat . . . I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the supersensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of the two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I closed my eyes in a langorous ecstasy and waited - waited with a beating heart.⁸

The prolonged, interminable "moment" of suspense inscribed in Calafia's story is one in which the reader does not yet know that Iduna possesses knowledge of Kerry's ability to *not* suck the desired objects to death. This moment of desire and anxiety enacted between Dracula and Harker, between Laura and Carmilla in *Carmilla*, and between Kerry and Iduna in "The Vampire" is echoed in Roland Barthes' characterisation of textual suspense in his essay "Structural Analysis of Narrative." Barthes speculates that:

⁸ Bram Stoker, *Dracula* [1897] (New York: Dell, 1979), p. 52. Re-quoted from Christopher Craft's essay, "Kiss Me With Those Red Lips: Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," *Representations* 8 (Fall, 1984): 110.

Suspense is clearly only a privileged - or "exacerbated" form of distortion: on the one hand, by keeping a sequence open (through emphatic procedures of delay and renewal), it reinforces the contact with the reader (the listener), has a manifestly phatic function; while on the other, it offers the threat of an uncompleted sequence, of an open paradigm (if, as we believe, every sequence has two poles), that is to say, of a logical disturbance, it being this disturbance which is consumed with anxiety and pleasure (all the more so because it is always made right in the end). "Suspense," therefore, is a game with structure, designed to endanger and glorify it, constituting a veritable "thrilling" of intelligibility: by representing order (and no longer series) in its fragility, "suspense" accomplishes the very idea of language . . .⁹

Noël Carroll contends that suspense in fiction is a form of anticipation, not without pleasure, when something desired is at stake. Whatever is at stake, for him, has a "psychological urgency" partly because the outcome is uncertain. Conventional elements of suspense then are the play or conflict between desirability and uncertainty.¹⁰ Barthes' textual notion of suspense as distortion, coupled with Carroll's theory of desirability and uncertainty bears an uncanny similarity to the Franco Moretti/Craft concept of vampirism outlined in the previous chapter. Craft insists on distortion: "the representation of desire under the defensive mask of monstrosity," betrays a fundamental psychological ambivalence identified by Franco Moretti when he writes that "vampirism is an excellent example of the identity of desire and fear."¹¹

⁹ Roland Barthes, "Structural Analysis of Narrative." *Image-Music-Text*. (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977), p. 119.

¹⁰ See Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, p. 137.

¹¹ Craft, "Kiss Me With Those Red Lips," p. 107.

Also somewhat theoretically unnerving is the uncanny resemblance between the Freud/Adams definition of fetishistic masochism and Carroll's literary and philosophical theory of the "suspension of disbelief" which he outlines in "Fearing Fictions: On the Paradox Thereof and its Solution."¹² Carroll, in one sentence, connects masochists and vampire killers when he writes:

"Obviously, in the case of horror, we would not be secure in our enjoyment of the spectacle if we believed in its reality. Were the illusion theory true, horror would be too unnerving for all save heroes, consummate masochists, and professional vampire killers."¹³ What Carroll is asking is how we derive pleasure from reading or viewing vampire fiction without succumbing to the impulse to rush out of the cinema and take "practical measures to secure one's life or loved ones."¹⁴ He argues that by virtue of some sort of psychological operation our knowledge that Dracula does not exist is somehow thrown out of gear in a way that enables us to respond to depictions and descriptions of him with emotional conviction, "as if we believed Dracula lived."¹⁵

This psychic mechanism, this "suspension of disbelief," is also the one isolated by psychoanalytic fiction writers as the one employed by fetishistic and masochistic sexed subjects. Adams, re-reading Freud, sees the fetishism that produces the fetishist as also at the root of other traditional perversions (e.g. sadomasochism and male homosexuality). Psychoanalytically speaking the fetishist is the one who "suspends disbelief" in the maternal phallus. The

¹² See Carroll, "Fearing Fictions: On the Paradox Thereof and Its Solutions." *The Philosophy of Horror*, pp. 64-87.

¹³ Carroll, p. 64.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

fetishistic position is one characterised by the French phrase *je sais bien mais quand même* (I know very well ... but all the same). Carroll's ideal reader/viewer who believes/disbelieves in the existence of Dracula or vampires performs a similar operation to the classic fetishist who both believes/disavows the existence of the mother's phallus. In a post-Freudian psychoanalytic sense, disavowal is the fetishist's refusal of the meaning of sexual difference according to oedipal law i.e. a refusal of the meaning of the paternal phallus. Adams reworks Freud's narratives through Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit:

One could say that the fetishist does not know whether the mother has the penis or not, or one could say that the fetishist knows that she does not have the real organ and can only ever have the 'penis [which] is no longer the same as it was before.' This penis, no longer the same, is the fetish, that which the fetishist now desires. Since the mother has not got the penis which signifies the phallus she has nothing which links her with the fantasy phallus. Since the mediating substitute is missing, desire is 'cut off' from the phallus; henceforth anything can become the object of desire.¹⁶

What Adams means is that the substitute fantasy object from which the fetishist derives pleasure does not necessarily have to be a penis-phallic symbol at all. Bersani and Dutoit puzzled as to why fetishistic fantasy objects often did not in any way resemble the paternal penis-phallus. For the fetishist, the fetish itself is the sexual object and it is different from both the penis and the maternal phallus. The Adams and Bersani/Dutoit model of

¹⁶ Adams, "Of Female Bondage," p. 258.

perverse fantasmatic scenarios differs from the Freudian clinical pathological one with its elements of compulsion, rigidity and repetition. For them the perverse subject's desire is detached from the penis-phallus, both paternal and maternal, and mobilised into other scenarios and representations of difference. This does not mean that the phallus does not operate as a third term in the organisation of sexuality. Rather, the perverse subject refuses to distinguish between the mother and the father as far as having/not having the penis-phallus is concerned. The difference necessary for desire and sexuality is constructed on some other basis. The axis of difference will come to be represented by other sorts of differences. According to Adams, the entry into desire is necessarily through castration and it is in the perversions that we see the possibility that the form desire takes will be freed from the penile representation of the phallus into other representations. This point will be central to my discussion of lesbian sadomasochism and vampirism in this chapter, and to the discussion of lesbian fetishism in the next.

Returning momentarily to the more classic psychoanalytic and fictional scenarios of fetishism we re-enter Califia's text. Certainly for the traditional heterosexual male masochist, the woman is invested with a fetish phallus (e.g. whips). Sacher-Masoch's classic fetishist/masochist subject, Severin, the hero of *Venus in Furs*, cannot be whipped unless his female partner is dressed in furs. In terms of contemporary pornographic imagery and sadistic/masochistic practices and representational fantasies the classic fur signifier has, to a large extent, been replaced by leather or latex ones. Whips remain. Gilles Deleuze, writing in "Coldness and Cruelty," a commentary on Sacher-Masoch's novel *Venus in Furs* also theorises the connections between

fetishism, masochism and suspense. Suspense is most obviously enacted in the wish to be hung or suspended. Deleuze theorises the process of disavowal as positive: as a point of departure "for radically contesting the validity of that which is."¹⁷ For many contemporary theorists there is something intrinsically feminist about the refusal to believe that the woman/mother is "lacking." For Deleuze, fetishism suspends belief in and neutralises the given in such a way that a new horizon opens up beyond the given and in place of it. The fetish is an image or substitute for the female phallus: the means by which we deny that the woman lacks a penis. The fetishist's choice of a fetish is determined by the last object he saw as a child before becoming aware of the missing penis (a shoe or an article of clothing).

Pat Califia opens her fictional vampire/sadomasochistic text by constructing just such a scenario. Purgatory, coded as a somewhat "sleazy" nightclub, and a dark alley nearby replace the traditional dark and gloomy Gothic castle or crypt as the scene of the action. Despite the fact that there are "about sixty men and a score of women" (p. 243) present, the women are signified as dominant in this context. A host of fetishistic-phallic signifiers is introduced in the opening paragraph all attached to the female figures:

Most of the women (other than the one who was naked and being led around on a leash) were clad in the high fashion of the bizarre - leather skirts, spike heels, PVC corsets, thigh-high boots, studded wristbands or belts, black latex evening gowns (p. 243).

¹⁷ Gilles Deleuze, "Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty," in *Venus in Furs* (New York: Zone Books, 1989), p. 31.

Most of the women also carry whips: ". . . perhaps toying with a whip around her waist or keeping time with the music with a riding crop in her gloved hand" (p.243). Women with whips are ironically over-coded in this text, particularly in relation to the stone butch character, Kerry. What Califia constructs is a scene of female "mistresses" and "dominatrices" and largely male "submissives." Apart from what the author represents as a "handful of scruffy lesbians," a "few slumming well-built leathermen," a "few expensively attired tourist couples" - and Teddy the barman - this is obviously a scenario of female sadists and male masochists. Califia sets the scene explicitly:

Occasionally a dominatrix would focus her gaze on a particular man and beckon him forward to kneel, get her a drink, light her cigarette, answer some insulting question, and kneel again (p. 243).

The character Teddy operates in this contemporary vampire text in much the same manner as a hunchback figure who appears in *Carmilla*. He is located narratively as slightly peripheral to the main narrative trajectory and the plot, but serves the function of outside observer and commentator on some of the idiosyncratic features of the major players. In *Carmilla*, it is a hunchback "clown" who brings to the readers attention the fact that Carmilla has needle sharp teeth. It is the character Teddy in Califia's text who "shared a brief, unpleasant laugh with Iduna" (p. 248), and who signals to the reader that Bill the macho-male is about to have his sexual fantasies shattered by Kerry's whipping. Califia textually establishes a hierarchy of female "tops" who are variously described as "a dark-haired, dignified mistress," a "very lovely, very young professional who styled herself The Goddess Domina," "calm as self-

assured" and "a gorgeous bitch-goddess." (p.244). Older male "bottoms" are dismissed as "slack-bellied submissives." Teddy, as mediator and observer, tends to undercut this hierarchical construction by commenting that the Goddess Domina is also an "incompetent drunk" and an "ungrateful, spoiled twit" (p. 245).

It is at this textual point that Kerry enters Purgatory. She is signified as a transvestite, or at least dressed in a "masculine" fashion - full black and brown leathers, short hair. She is mistaken by the patrons who "do not know" who she is for "just a skinny little boy" (p. 245). The two most significant players in this scenario who witness Kerry's entrance are Iduna and Bill. Iduna is coded as "feminine" in the *femme fatale* sense - pale skin, alabaster breasts, low-cut gown, deep-red lips etc. It is here that Califia begins her textual strategy of constructing a difference between a classic male masochist who is finally "beaten" and a lesbian sadomasochistic subject who ultimately seduces, has sex with, a vampire.

In his 1919 paper "A child is being beaten," Freud defines the masochistic position through the grid of neurosis. The fantasmatic scenarios in which "a child is being beaten" are analysed by Freud in standard oedipal terms; they concern a male or female child with an incestuous desire for the father. Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis (1973) re-analyse this fantasy using much the same language as literary theorists of vampiric genres. They define fantasy (or phantasy in their terms) as an "imaginary scene in which the subject is a protagonist, representing the fulfillment of a wish (in the last analysis, an unconscious wish) in a manner that is distorted to a greater or lesser extent by

defensive processes."¹⁸ In other words the unconscious homoerotic wish might be distorted by monstrosity. In fantasy desire is not the object that the subject aims at, but rather a sequence or scene in which the subject has a part to play and in which permutations of roles and attributions are possible. Fantasies, for Laplanche and Pontalis, are scripts (scenarios) which are capable of dramatisation -usually in visual form.¹⁹ In reading Freud's analysis of the sadomasochistic fantasy of "a child is being beaten" they point to the "syntactical changes which this sentence undergoes." The place or position of the child/subject undergoes linguistic slippage or various permutations of position in the scene from actively pleasurable and defensive (sadistic), "A child is being beaten" (it is not me but a rival child being beaten by an authority figure) to passivity and the internalisation of hatred (masochism) in "My father is beating me." Julia Creet (1991) identifies a third form - one in which the child derives satisfaction from identifying with a subject outside the self. In other words, from the lesbian psychoanalytic theorist there is defined a slippage through guilt and identification from the sadistic position to the masochistic one. For Creet the difference between the sadist and the masochist is not a difference in kind but rather a difference of position.²⁰ She reads Freud as positing a cycle whereby the sadist learns the experience of pain as a masochist and then returns to a sadistic position from which she derives pleasure from identifying with the person on whom she inflicts pain. This would imply not a difference in kind between the psychic

¹⁸ Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 314. "Phantasy" in psychoanalytic terms is generally understood to mean unconscious wishes. "Fantasy" is used more frequently to designate conscious scenarios. As the two concepts are considered to be connected I have used the term "fantasy" to cover both.

¹⁹ Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, p. 318.

²⁰ Creet, "Daughter of the Movement," p. 149.

structuring fantasy of masochism and sadism, but a difference in positions in the fantasy scenario. In an earlier reading of the fantasy, Freud had suggested that masochism is "actually sadism turned around upon the subject's own ego." ("Instincts and Their Vicissitudes [1915], SE 14: 127).

In her essay "Film and the Visible," Teresa de Lauretis also analyses, following Laplanche and Pontalis, the tripartite Freudian fantasy "a child is being beaten."²¹ She also insists on theorising lesbian sadomasochistic fantasies using the transitional unconscious term, "seeing oneself" in the passive/active, sadistic/masochistic form. Gilles Deleuze, on the other hand, argues that a sadist is a sadist and a masochist is a masochist. He is reading Sacher-Masoch's classic male heterosexual masochist, Severin. Deleuze insists that the male fetishist/masochist has symbolically abolished the father and disavows his function. Simultaneously, he disavows the mother by fetishistically phallicising her ("the mother lacks nothing"). This refusal of the oedipal order collapses when Severin is whipped by a character known only as "the Greek" and reality, the aggressive return of the sadistic father, disrupts the "magic" of his masochistic scene. Deleuze proposes another reading of the traditional male masochist: "It is not a child but a father that is being beaten." This he explains as the likeness of, identification with, the father being beaten out of the (male) child. Metaphorically, it might also be read as the father being beaten: abolished from the symbolic. In conclusion Deleuze concedes that the masochist's disavowal of the mother's lack of a penis puts her on a parallel representational track with the father whose virility (for the sadist) is suspended also in disavowal (that the penis equals the phallus). Sex(ual)

²¹ Teresa de Lauretis, "Film and the Visible." In *How Do I Look?: Queer Film and Video*, ed. Douglas Crimp and Bad Object Choices (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), pp. 223-291.

difference is erased. Deleuze suggests: "We might say that the masochist is hermaphrodite and the sadist androgynous . . ." ²² His point is that the boy and the girl also can project themselves into either role as these roles are, as it were, de-gendered.

Pat Califia constructs a permutation of the fantasy in which the paternal figure Bill is finally beaten by the boy/girl subject, Kerry. The desubjectivised position, the objective voyeuristic position, is occupied by Iduna/Teddy who both experience sexual pleasure in watching the beating scenario. Kerry, whose name is obviously gender ambiguous, is either masquerading as, or mistaken by others as, a boy. He/she nonetheless is constructed by Califia as a "top" sadist which in Deleuzian/Creet terms can be understood as the inflation of the father above the law, as well as an identification with this position. Kerry's entrance to Purgatory initially disarms a leatherman, Howard:

It was just a skinny little boy, wearing brown leather, no less, with a Muir, which of course was black. The tight pants were tucked into knee-high boots, the sleeves on the leather shirt were rolled up in concession to the summer night, and the peaked cap was ornamented with a silver skull and crossbones on the front. The leather was the colour of dried blood. The boy had short, black hair and an olive complexion. A cat-o'-nine-tails and two flails were threaded through the large key ring on his left hip. There was a dagger stuck in his belt behind his right hip and another, smaller, tucked in his right boot. "I didn't know you were into chicken, Gill?"

²² Deleuze, "Coldness and Cruelty," p. 68.

Gill sighed. "That's Kerry," he explained. "Have you ever seen her work?"
Her? . . . (p. 245).

This scene, reminiscent of the one in *Carmilla* where Laura, having no language for lesbian sexuality, reflects on the possibility that her seducer Carmilla might be a boy masquerading as a girl, is textually interrupted by Califia's introduction of Iduna. Iduna and Teddy both "know" who Kerry is (i.e. that she is a sadist without peer). Iduna also certainly knows she is a vampire: "Iduna looked lovingly at that full mouth and the two tiny puckers in it over the prominent canine teeth. She was sure no one else could have spotted these minute irregularities, or known why there were two places where Kerry's lips could not quite meet" (p. 247). Teddy, who is a discriminating "minder" of whips for the phallic-sadistic female patrons he most admires "would have been glad to provide a similar service for Kerry, but she never let any of her whips out of her hands" (p 247). Both Iduna and Teddy are positioned by Califia as voyeuristic and sexually (genitally) desiring during the "beating" scene. Iduna retains the attraction/fascination and follows Kerry from the club. Teddy ultimately is repulsed by Kerry's thrashing of the naive, macho-masquerading, patron Bill: "Shit!" Teddy said, and slammed his beer down on the bar. He turned to complain to Iduna, but she was not there" (p. 250). The beating scene takes place between Kerry and an initially "unknowing" patron named Bill who comments to Kerry: "Why Ah don't reckon yew could even make a dent in my hide," he chuckled. "Probably be a waste of time. Ah kin take quite a lot, yew know. Wouldn't want to embarrass a lil gal like yew - yew are a gal, ain'tcha?" (p. 248). Almost everyone in this text has difficulty identifying Kerry as either male or

female, except for Teddy and Iduna. What ensues narratively is a long scene in which the undecideably sexed Kerry kicks Bill to the ground, lifts him off the floor with one hand, hauls him up to the whipping ladder and administers a severe thrashing. Bill endures the whipping until Kerry draws blood:

Bill let go of the ladder and turned around as soon as the first stroke drew blood, but the woman behind him was so fast, she inflicted a dozen times nine crimson and overflowing welts, each bleeding bouquet placed an even distance from its mates, before he could get out of her way. As he turned to face her, she continued to flog him overhand, catching his shoulders, then changed direction and came down hard across both of his tits. The welts instantly visible, even in the club twilight" (p. 249).

Bill, by this time is pleading with Kerry to stop and attempts to kiss her ring. For his pains she kicks him in the face. Oblivious to his tears and apologies, Kerry merely looks at his blood "that ran in thin but eager trickles to the floor" turns and exits with her blood-stained cat (whip). Like Sacher-Masoch's masochist hero, sexual reality - this "gal" really is a sadist - breaks into Bill's fantasy that he is in charge of the woman and that it is he who does or does not endow her with the phallus: "Ah kin take anythin' yew can dish out, sister." Kaja Silverman - reading Deleuze reading Freud on masochism - has this to say about male masochism:

In inviting the mother to beat and/or dominate him, he [the male who fantasizes himself in the 'feminine masochistic' position] transfers power and

authority from the father to her, remakes the symbolic order, and 'ruins' his own paternal legacy. And that is not all. As Freud remarks of his two [male] patients in ' "A Child is Being Beaten" ' the conscious phantasy of being disciplined by the mother 'has for its content a feminine attitude without a homosexual object-choice.' It thereby effects another revolution of sorts, and one whose consequences may be even more socially transforming than eroticism between men - it constitutes a 'feminine' yet heterosexual male subject.²³

What disturbs both Bill and Teddy in Califia's text is that fact that Kerry "really" beats Bill. She ruins the part of his fantasy that "knows very well" the mother, the woman, does not have the phallus. Kerry is established as the "top" sadistic subject - a masculine rather than a feminine sadistic subject. She not only thrashes Bill but remains totally indifferent to his suffering. This female sadist has no identificatory position in relation to the male masochistic subject on whom she inflicts pain. Textually, Bill ceases to exist as soon as Kerry exits Purgatory. His function in the text, it would seem, is simply to establish Kerry's subject position in Califia's scenario. I will return to this scene, and a strikingly similar variation on it which appears in the German film maker, Monica Treut's *Seduction: The Cruel Woman*. The triangulated structure in which a female voyeur desires a female sadist, whose phallic attributes are established in relation to a male masochist, is repeated in Treut's film. This triangulated structure positions or signifies the female subjects as different from each other - one as sadist, one as voyeur. The third term separating them can be read as the "beaten" (castrated) male body. The

²³ Kaja Silverman, "Masochism and Male Subjectivity." *Camera Obscura* 19 (1988): 57.

relation that occupies the remainder of Califia's text is that between the two female protagonists, Iduna and Kerry. What is inscribed in, and by, this structure is a significant difference in the positioning of the two female subjects in the fantasy. One watches, and sexually desires, the (sadistic-phallic) other. The "beaten" body of the male masochist operates to position the women according to their differing perversely structured subjectivities. Inhabiting this lesbian desiring fantasy then are a *femme fatale* voyeur (possessor of the sadistic gaze) and a female phallic-sadist who beats the figure masquerading as paternal-phallic, rather than the conventional sadist and masochist.

The scene of action in "The Vampire" shifts to the exterior of the nightclub, to an alley way adjacent to Purgatory. For the remainder of the narrative only Iduna and Kerry are present. The vampiric signifiers, which have been absent from the text during the sadistic/masochistic exchange between Kerry and Bill in which whips are prominent, also re-appear. Iduna observes:

She tilted the glass to her lips and let a half swallow of wine run out of the corner of her mouth. It was just a little purple to be blood, that tiny rivulet, the few drops clinging to her lips (p. 250).

Similarly, but in reverse, to Carmilla and Laura who are almost instantly enamoured of each other - although Laura is also repelled - the space between these female subjects is initially quite hostile on Kerry (the vampire's) part. In fact Kerry experiences the confrontation with Iduna as she is leaving the club as extremely unpleasurable. The sadistic phallic signified female subject

maintains her distance from what she construes as "feminine" subjects, and which she (mis)takes in Iduna:

Kerry snarled and went sideways to get by, angry, almost pushing the woman who had arranged this strange tableau for her. A man who had behaved that way might have gotten a broken jaw for his bad manners. But she was known for her chivalry. It was part of a code she thought all true leathermen (regardless of gender) should obey. Let women make do with their feminine wiles and plots and foibles. She did not want to become entangled in them (p. 250).

Kerry's phallic attributes are textually overdetermined. She carries several knives plus her "whips swinging at her hips" (p. 251) and the knife scabbard bumping the small of her back. She differentiates however between male and female objects of her fantastmatic sadistic desire: "she could rarely be persuaded to treat women like sides of beef" (p. 250). She sidesteps Iduna but the latter persists in her active pursuit of the female sadist as her desired object-choice. Kerry's binary thinking in terms of her construction of sexual desire is premised on a system of dualisms female/sadist : male/masochist. The text indicates a gap in her psychic structuring of these binaries: "she had omitted to learn who this impudent blonde (whom she had certainly seen many times before) was" (p. 250-1). Iduna, who one might presume to be a masochistic subject in a classical masochistic sense, takes up another position in this scenario, that of active and desiring participant. The vampiric signifiers become more insistent in a scene which ironises traditional vampire myths by including a weather report:

Surprise! There at the mouth of the alley was her pursuer, somehow ahead of her and once again blocking her way. She was wearing a satin cloak with a red lining, and a sudden gust of wind (uncharacteristic for the season) lifted it and spread it out until it fluttered about her like wings. Her breasts gleamed like alabaster, even in the absence of street lights and moonlight (p. 251).

Kerry's phallic control, despite her contempt for her "opponent," wavers when addressed directly by Iduna: "Startled, Kerry blurted, 'What the hell are you talking about?' then bit her lip and repented not keeping silent" (p. 251). The sadomasochistic scenario/fantasy inhabited by the two female protagonists is structurally different from that of the Kerry/Bill episode in which the male masochist might be said in a Freudian sense to avoid a homosexual object choice by substituting the beating mother for the father. The sexual scenario between the two females also posits a homosexual object choice - an overt one. There are early indications that this scene is not going to be a "beating" scene in the usual sadistic/masochistic sense: "[Kerry] did not consciously plan to use [the blades] on the other woman" (p. 251). What Iduna wants or desires from Kerry is something of another order which, nonetheless, is connected to sexual gratification: "You haven't fed for months now. You still draw blood, but you don't allow yourself to taste it" (p. 252). The reader at this stage is unaware that Iduna is not just another "feminine" masochist. The suspense involved in pursuing a vampire, constructed as sadist, is almost certainly a fantasy made for a masochist.

The fantasy scene between the two women, constructed by Califia, is to be a

vampiric (a sucking) rather than a beating scene, at least at this point from Iduna's perspective. Blood also signifies heavily in this scene for both protagonists. Kerry regains some control and remains silent although wondering if she had spoken whether she might hear herself above the "noise her blood was making, roaring in her ears" (p. 252). There are textual indications that Iduna is about to usurp control of the scenario, to change the action and signification - not outside the psychoanalytic "beating" fantasmatic scenario but within yet another permutation of it.

In the Freudian narratives the beating action (conscious) of the sadistic scene - the father "beats" the male child - is said to repress the genital (unconscious) action - the father (incestuously) loves the male child. Califia brings the vampiric action, with its sucking metaphor, which may be genital or related to the originary object of desire for the child - the breast - together with the "beating" fantasy. The scene is constituted in an oral-phallic "moment":

I think I'm the only one who's noticed. It's so much a part of your legend, this penchant you have for flaying someone with your cat-o'-nine-tails until the walls and innocent bystanders are spattered with blood, or using your knife to release the hot, sticky, salty fuel that feeds the heart, the lungs and the brain. It appals everyone so much that they don't realize you've ceased to put your lips to the wound, to swallow what you've set free, or clean your blade with your tongue . . . (p. 252).

Freud's analysis of the common fantasy of "a child is being beaten" proceeds by unearthing an increasingly elaborate scenario that structures this

utterance, revealing a system of desire where the subject has successively or simultaneously taken up multiple identification positions. According to D. N. Rodowick's (1991) reading, Freud demonstrates that fantasy life unfolds *across* positions of sexual difference.²⁴ In his 1919 essay "A Child is Being Beaten" (SE 17: 175-204), Freud isolates three stages of the fantasy, two conscious and one unconscious. Each stage is differentiated according to whether the subject is genitally male or female. Freud claims that the male version of the fantasy derives from an inverted (homosexual) oedipal situation and that the female version derives from "normal" oedipal relations. The objective of the fantasy is genital arousal and onanistic gratification. In the Freudian narrative scenarios of the beating fantasy there are three basic factors in common between the fantasies of men and women. The fantasy represents a "perversion" in the form of an exaggerated development of a single drive component, namely sadism. It is a premature infantile struggle toward the choosing of an object. Secondly, the fantasy is a product of the phallic phase of sexual development before oedipal conflicts and castration. In the first stage of the fantasy, the differentiation between active-sadistic and passive-masochistic, on the one hand, and masculine or feminine identification on the other, is not clear. This, according to Rodowick, is the central problem and conflict that the fantasy desires to articulate and resolve. In other words, the infant is as yet "ungendered" and confused as to an "appropriate" sexual object choice.

In both the "male" and "female" versions analysed by Freud the unconscious version for both the boy and the girl is "I am being beaten/loved genitally by

²⁴ D. N. Rodowick, *The Difficulty of Difference: Psychoanalysis, Sexual Difference, and Film Theory* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991).

my father. . . " For the boy this implies an unconscious incestuous homosexual oedipal attitude and desire, for the girl it is obviously only an incestuous oedipal one. Both Freud and Rodowick elide any discussion of a permutation of the fantasy in which there is an unconscious homosexual attitude for the female child. Logically, there cannot be an unconscious homosexual and incestuous situation for the female child because the first stage of the fantasy for both boys and girls is, according to Freud's constructions in analysis: "My father is beating. . ." The mother it would seem has no symbolic authority, for Freud or his female analysands, to wield the phallus even in fantasy. It is not even that the figure of the mother, a figure of maternal authority, is entirely absent in these scenarios.

The boy child, according to Freud's interpretation, can transgress the paternal order by substituting "I am being beaten by my mother. . ." The female child apparently cannot, or does not, effect this ontological leap of parental cross-gendering, even in fantasy. The third permutation (conscious) of the female fantasy is "My authority figure is beating the anonymous boy. . ." What is astonishing about this differentiation between boy's and girl's fantasies, despite the insistence by Rodowick of cross sexual difference identifications and the absence of a specifically female authority figure in the girl's fantasies, is that it is the male who places himself ultimately in the masochistic position in relation to the beating figure(s). Rodowick concedes that the girl's version remains active, voyeuristic and sadistic:

Moreover, unlike the male version, the third strata [sic] of the female version is neither clearly nor simply masochistic. Split between two desires, an

extraordinary situation is produced where the structure of disavowal characterizing the first stage is recapitulated and intensified by the division of mental life motivated by repression in the third. The phantasy is once again *sadistic* in a specific sense: it overdetermines the sadistic component attached to voyeurism. Note for a moment how some of the most cherished axioms of psychoanalytic film theory fall to ruins. In both the pregenital and post-oedipal phases of feminine sexuality, the desire of the little girl has a powerful relation to components that are simultaneously active, sadistic, and voyeuristic. The subjective structure of her gaze inspires a powerful relation to desire.²⁵

Despite this attempt to re-read Freud in a way that undermines the assumption that women have a privileged relation to masochism and men to sadism, it still does not explain why it is that it is the boy's version only which replaces the father figure with the mother, thus endowing, as Freud asserts, "the women who are beating him with masculine attributes and characteristics" (SE 17: 200). If one were to read *across* sexual difference, as Rodowick suggests, there is a different permutation of the female version which both Freud and Rodowick either ignore or refuse to construct in their analyses. Rodowick claims that in the girl's version of "My authority figure is beating the anonymous boy. . . ," the girl voyeur nonetheless identifies with the beaten boy. In other words she can, and does, cross-identify in a pre-oedipal (or post-oedipal) ungendered manner. Logically, then she could also substitute a mother figure for a father figure, as does the boy. The "authority figure" permutation surely leaves this place open for cross-gender substitution. Version three of the girl's beating fantasy could be read as: "My

²⁵ Rodowick, pp. 81-2.

mother is beating the anonymous boy. . . [therefore she loves (genitally) only me]"

The idea that a boy might make, albeit in unconscious fantasy, a homosexual object choice is thinkable to both Freud and Rodowick. The idea of a girl/subject making a female object choice is not. This would mean imagining that the father's phallus is not universally desirable to female children/subjects, or by extension to women/mothers. Both Adams and Creet, in theorising lesbian sadomasochism, posit a position for a female subject in relation to Maternal Law and desire. This position is left open in the Freudian/Rodowick interpretation as "My authority figure. . ." but never taken up as meaning a maternal or female symbolic authority figure. Califia re-writes the Freudian fantasy according to this permutation. Kerry, the established authority figure in the Purgatory scenario, is signified as undecidable in classic gender terms. She is certainly signified fetishistically as a phallic female. This might be read fantasmatically as (1) a disavowal of women's "lack" of a penis/phallus (Freud); (2) as placing the mother on a par with the father (Deleuze/Adams) or (3) identifying with a person outside of oneself (Creet). In Califia's text one can read the female "beating" fantasy thus:

1. (cs): "My father/mother, Kerry, is beating the other child[whom I hate . . .]"

11. (uncs): " I am being beaten/loved (genitally) by my mother/father . . . "

111. (cs): "My mother is beating the anonymous boy, Bill . . . [therefore she loves only me]"

The situation in which a female sadistic-gazing voyeur takes a phallic female sadist as an object-choice would be incomprehensible within Freud's psychoanalytic scenario. Califia changes textual strategy by recombination. The female voyeur becomes also the active vampire chaser and seducer of the phallic female figure. In this way Califia re-writes a potentially possible sexual exchange premised on difference and possession of the phallus without re-constructing a female "feminine" masochistic subject. Both Kerry and Iduna are sadistic/phallic/active but signified differently from each other and occupying different positions in the female/female fantasy s/m scenario.

What gives Iduna an advantage over the masochist Bill who obviously misunderstood Kerry's desire: "Wouldn't want to embarrass a lil gal like yew..." (p.248), is her own voyeuristic sadism. She is both observant and knowledgeable about Kerry's desires, and mobilises this mastery effectively in the seduction -of-the-vampire scenario. While initially Iduna textually appears constructed as "being the phallus" - presumably for a masculine subject who "has" the phallus - it is gradually revealed that Iduna has a phallus of her own - knowledge. She is signified as an epistemological well researched *femme fatale*. She is the subject-who-knows about female, or at least Kerry's, repressed desire to be "beaten/loved" by the (m)other. Iduna re-iterates her pursuit of the vampire which will ultimately, in this story, release the vampire's desire:

'I have been an archivist of your legend ever since I came to the city. In fact, your legend is what brought me here . . . I've been collecting all the stories about

you, verifying what I can, making observations of my own. I'm always interested in legends even if the people who inspire them are not really of mythic proportions. But when I realized just how legendary you truly are, I began to keep very close track of you . . . (p.253).

Kerry's phallic sadism is about to be undermined or modified by Iduna. The psychoanalytically defined repressed wish to be beaten/loved (genitally) by the (m)other is about to be symbolically articulated and displaced as desire for the other/object through a series of exchanges between herself and Iduna. Bill unwittingly positions Kerry in his male masochistic fantasy as the beating mother without taking account of Kerry's unconscious desire to be loved by the (m)other. This fantasy is about to be re-inscribed as lesbian desire, fully articulated in the symbolic and culminating in non-anxiety ridden lesbian genital pleasure. The female sadistic and male masochistic fantasmatic scenarios, including psychoanalytic fictional ones, of desire do not co-incide. Iduna has different ideas. Kerry, still believing herself to be in control as a phallic subject is nonetheless wary of the blonde who "like most women did not seem to be able to hold her tongue" (p. 252). Kerry is about to re-define the scene:

Was this some crazy kind of come-on, then, from a dominant who wanted to bottom for her? Kerry had received many invitations like these. Perhaps she was being paranoid. But if that was the case, her rule was that the other must make an explicit request. It would be insulting to anticipate such needs in a colleague. So they watched each other in renewed silence, taking measurements, making calculations (p. 252).

Iduna merely requests a cigarette. Kerry is momentarily and metaphorically disarmed. She forgets about her "blades" and tosses a pack of cigarettes and a silver lighter towards Iduna. Iduna catches them with one hand, takes a cigarette, lights it, and tosses the pack and lighter back. Kerry returns them to her breast pocket, waits two heartbeats and capitulates to the exchange. She takes them out again and lights a cigarette for herself. This "minor victory" is not lost on Iduna who sees it as the establishment of a small amount of "common ground" (p. 253). It also initiates textually a series of exchanges of phallic signifiers between the two female subjects that metonymically substitutes the "slim blade" which Iduna keeps between her breasts for the sheathed ones that Kerry carries in her boots and strapped to her waist. This transformation of the phallic symbol/signifier from "masculine" to "feminine" and from below the waist to breast becomes crucial in the castration scenario as it is to be played out between female subjects. It also has repercussions for the textual transformation of repressed homoerotic desire in the classic vampire text, in that the castration scenario is marked, separation from the imaginary phallic mother is symbolised, and desire signified.

Following the shared cigarette scene, Iduna pulls out her own phallus - the knowledge gained whilst investigating her object - and displays it at great length before this same object. Kerry now occupies the voyeur/sadist position. Both still occupy a phallic position of sorts. Unlike Bill, who felt confident enough about occupying the masochistic position in relation to Kerry because she was "just a girl," Iduna is not so foolish. The sexual

"reality" - that Kerry is a phallic- sadist - is already inscribed in Iduna's cautious manipulation of the fantasy scenario in which she wishes to accomplish her objective and satisfy her erotic desires without being devoured/beaten:

Now they both knew the game, her question and the answer, and Iduna saw the mirrored shades removed for her benefit, saw herself regarded by cold eyes, eyes surrounded by darkness, eyes that already saw her dead in six different positions (p. 253).

If beaten and loved are noncontradictory terms in the unconscious, then Iduna wants to evoke Eros in the symbolic order without provoking Thanatos: "Now, she spoke as if to a lover, which of course is the most dangerous audience of all" (p. 254). Kerry remains in the voyeur/watchful position, does not go for her blades. Iduna, despite her anxiety at this point - "it was horrid to feel her own [blood] turn to cold sludge"- continues her display of phallic-epistemophilia. She ends with an explicit reference to Kerry's sexuality: "You do not have sex, ever, with anyone that I've been able to locate and, given your reputation, I would imagine that someone who had come close enough to even lie about it would have claimed they had made love with you by now" (p. 255). Kerry replies "that sex with a victim is out of the question" (p. 255).

This scene is one of seduction, the vampiric scene rather than the sadist "beating" scene played out by Kerry and Bill. The fantasmatic oedipal scene, the scene of castration, which, according to Freud follows on from the

sadistic-anal phase, is to be played out between female subjects. This is the "phallic" phase. In a normative psychoanalytic sense, the girls should exit the oedipal scenario as a fully-fledged masochist, having given up her investment in ever "having" the phallus. Iduna hands Kerry a knife: "From between her breasts she pulled a very slim blade" (p. 255). Kerry, who has been somewhat disarmed by Iduna's epistemological display regarding her legendary vampiric desires, is immediately hostile again: "before it was fully exposed, Kerry had a knife in her hand, poised for use" (p. 57). The knowledge that Iduna has exposed is that Kerry's vampirism, her desire for blood, stops short of killing the victim. This vampire possesses the uncanny ability to open a vein, suck enough blood for her needs, and neatly re-suture the wound. The Freudian/Kleinian "oral-sadistic" unconscious psychosexual fantasy of being devoured by the phallic mother is re-written by Califia. However, handing this sadistic/phallic vampire a knife constitutes a moment of textual (castration) suspense. Iduna offers Kerry her wrists which Kerry refuses. Iduna keeps probing, "looking for the weak spot, the turning point" of Kerry's desire:

Iduna despaired. Her head drooped, and Kerry almost felt sorry for her. Then inspiration struck. 'Or could it be that you would rather drink your life from a woman, hold her in your arms, slit her throat with your teeth, then eagerly gulp down what wells up around your mouth - yet you refuse to let yourself have me because you would enjoy it too much and then want it and need it again? Are you afraid that you would lose control if you got what you really want?' (p. 258)

Iduna finally re-inscribes the mark of female castration in the form of a V on

her own breasts displacing it upward from the genitals. Blood/milk flows for Kerry to suck. This time Kerry succumbs: "There was a tongue lapping between her breasts, but what was there was quickly consumed, and then there were sharp teeth biting, and warm, soft, strong lips pressing around them, sucking" (p. 258). This scene both shadows and re-inscribes consciously the upward displacement from genitals to throat of a sublimated homosexuality in classic vampire texts such as *Dracula* and *Carmilla*. In a series of textual displacements, Califia metonymically moves the signification of lesbian desire in the opposite direction to that of the classic text. Castration is moved from female genitals to breasts. It is re-inscribed on the breast within a "maternal" symbolic in which women do not lack the crucial signifier, textually signified as erotically charged - the objective being genital arousal - and then moved back to the female genitals *as sexual*: "Sex doesn't seem to be out of the question after all, does it?" the vampire said (p. 262). The blood sucking activity of the oral-castration scene is re-written as foreplay and lesbian desire and sexuality is signified as explicit lesbian genital sexual activity:

Iduna slipped on the gravel, and immediately the hand left her breast and a strong arm was wedged between her legs, the hand clasping the small of her back, holding her the way a mother holds an infant. She realized by the mushy feel of her panties against Kerry's leather sleeve that she was wet down there, as wet as the mouth that fed on her. Her assailant realized it, too, because she ripped at her panties, literally clawed them to pieces, and then she was being crammed full, opened terribly, spread far too wide, almost lifted off her feet by the force of the fucking, and it hurt so much for so long that she came, came

even as the canines sank another notch into her cuts and drank fresh blood for the deepened wound. Which penetration made her come? She did not know (p. 259).

As Parveen Adams has observed, lesbian sadomasochism may be genital or not. What it does do is re-inscribe a position in the "beating" fantasy for the female child that is transgressive of the psychoanalytic assumption that the phallic figure is always the father and that female unconscious desire is only incestuous and not homosexual. Freudian psychoanalysis forecloses, rather than disavows, such an attitude in "normal" female oedipal development toward sexuality. But to foreclose on this permutation - to render it not consciously retrievable for analysis - simply makes the ambivalences of attraction and anxiety between female subjects incomprehensible. "The Vampire," like other contemporary lesbian writing, textually re-inscribes the pre-oedipal relation to the Maternal - for the girl child - into a more appropriate desiring sexual relation between female subjects. In this case, the textually transformed relation is that of Maternal Law and desire organised around thoughts of beating (in the Freudian scheme a residue of the sadistic-anal phase) and castration (phallic), with overt overtones of sexual penetration (genital). Kaja Silverman argues that the girl's fantasy may in fact be more "perverse" than Freud recognised.²⁶ Neither of Califia's female subjects occupy the identificatory position which Freud designates as "feminine masochism," as fantasised in psychoanalytic discourses. But neither is Califia's re-writing of the girl's fantasy as "straight" as Freud, and other male psychoanalytic critics, assume. In Califia's text the

²⁶ Silverman, "Masochism and Male Subjectivity," pp. 48-50.

masculine/feminine binary of sexual difference is put under erasure - both her subjects are female/phallic. They are however signified as different, and castration is marked in the text, both from the Mother, and from each other. This suggests a more current psychoanalytic formulation in which the subject's sex/ gender/ sexuality has no existence outside of the acts or performances that constitute it. This notion of sexuality and desire is constituted as mobile across sexual difference in fantasy as well as in performance in the text. Carol J. Clover, analysing another genre of horror fiction states that:

The slasher film is in this respect [women as well as men can come by knives or power drills, and men as well as women can have holes drilled or bored into them] rather like the vampire film, which, through its symbolic displacement of 'real' or genital sex onto mouths and necks, with which women and men are equally well endowed, allows for a full set of transgressive gender exchanges.

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Califia textually displaces the signification of difference, and the emergence of desire, away from a specific phallic moment/scene. Difference(s) between women and the movement of desire between lesbian subject and object are displaced onto hybridised fantasmatic moments (e.g. oral/phallic or oral/anal-sadistic moments). These are re-inscribed within a scenario of seduction and lesbian genital sex, allowing for a re-emergence of the elided unconscious permutation of homosexual desire in the girl's beating fantasy as a symbolic order inscription. Califia's textual re-configuration of female

²⁷ Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, And Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 157.

desire transgresses the paternal dictum - i.e. that only the father's penis/phallus is desired - and reinscribes desire in a scenario inhabited by female subjects who are signified as phallic, as powerful, whether in possession of a penis or not.

Seduction: The Cruel Woman.

In the latter part of this chapter I will examine, briefly, another contemporary discursive construction of lesbian sadomasochism, specifically the female sadist from Monica Treut's independently produced feature - length film *Seduction: The Cruel Woman* (1985). This text shares some narrative themes with Califia's text (e.g. the triangulated structure of phallic females and a masochistic male, the symbolisation of female castration). This film also might be read as a continuation, or afterword, of Califia's text. What happens, one might ask, after the lesbian sadomasochistic lovers have inscribed their desire within the symbolic order? In many ways, Treut's film might be read as an answer to this question. In Lacanian representational terms, the lesbian sadist's lovers (female and male in this case) must desist in their demands for love (from the fantasy phallic mother) and remain interminably, and mobile, in desire. Treut, as in her other films, particularly *The Virgin Machine*, parodies the concept of "feminine" romantic love. In the case of *Seduction* though it is the male lover (the masochist) who becomes hysterical when the cruel woman will not concede to his demands that she love him, and marry him. Like Califia's text there is a certain ironic and comic enunciative position/voice detectable in Treut's film's diegesis. In this section I will examine, through various feminist political and film theories as

well as psychoanalytic discourses, the possible positions for a spectator in relation to this visual discourse on lesbian sadomasochism.

Seduction tells the story of Wanda (the cruel woman of the title) who operates a performance art gallery where scenarios of perverse sexualities are enacted for an audience. Many of her current and former lovers appear in the performances which she devises and directs. Collectively this group of Wanda, who narrates the performances, and the other artists, lovers, and friends who also perform, are referred to as the "ensemble." Wanda (played by Mechthild Grossmann) is coded as *femme fatale* in expensive retro- 70s "chic" designer clothing. She might also be read as a configuration of the imaginary phallic mother to whom all demands for love are addressed. She might also be read as a female symbolic figure who insists on, and symbolically represents in performance, castration/separation. One performance in particular, near the beginning of the film, stages a fantasmatic scenario of female castration called "The Bleeding Rose." The performance art gallery, in which the entire film is shot, is newly opened and a male journalist, played by Peter Weibel, enters the scene to interview her. After she has shown the writer, who is impeccably dressed in a business suit, some of the exhibits - including a video of herself discoursing theoretically and philosophically on perverse sexualities - she shows him a bathroom decorated with chains, spikes, and various other sadistic scenario paraphernalia. The journalist, who is besotted by Wanda's knowledge of the history of sexual obsessions and perverse sexualities, takes up residence in this bathroom. He is never shown leaving in the entire film. He insists that his desire is to be Wanda's toilet. She treats him indifferently: "Well do it." In

many ways her relation to the writer functions to establish Wanda's position in the narrative and sets the scene for the construction of her subjectivity as "the cruel woman." The body of the text deals with the shifting relationships between Wanda and several lovers (or by now ex-lovers) to whom she also exhibits sexual and romantic indifference. She tells the journalist: "Sexuality in a sense no longer interests me." She mostly refuses the sexual demands of her various ex-lovers. Specifically, she refuses their escalating demands for love. Each one is disappointed and frustrated to some degree, but each finally concedes. Sexuality for Wanda remains only in her lesbian fantasies to which the spectator has privileged access. The last lover to concede, her male ex-lover, Gregor (Udo Kier) persists to the end, becoming more hysterical as she becomes more indifferent. These are some of the most comical, and sometimes alarming, scenes in the film. He threatens theatrically to commit suicide. When this fails to elicit any response from the super-cool Wanda, he shoots at her during a performance. The bullet only grazes her hand and she laughs at him. He finally gives up the demand that the phallic (m)other love only him and marry him, and resigns himself to interminable desire. The two female lovers, Justine (Sheila McLaughlin) and Caren (Carola Regnier), concede somewhat more gracefully. What Justine demands from Wanda in particular is sex, while Caren wants passion. They all remain working in the ensemble at the close of the film. What is signalled from the outset, and foregrounded in this film, is a construction of sexuality as fantasy, and perverse sexual fantasy as performance.

Rachael Moss, writing of Treut in "Romantic Tropes in *Virgin Machine* " - *Virgin Machine* (1988) is the third of Treut's films - suggests that:

Monica Treut's position as the director and writer of *Virgin Machine* is of particular interest in the way in which the relation between her text and herself produces a discourse from within, and for, a specific social group. Her position is important in the way she defines herself and is seen as Lesbian. She has been described as " ... an amalgam of looks - hard core punk leather dyke with distinct chic. She's an aggressive intellectual ... "28

Seduction opens with an epigraph from Jean Baudrillard: "Seduction as an illusion, as the devil of passion, undermines the powers of eroticism by the powers of majestic play." In her dialogue with the journalist, Wanda tells him that "perversions are only misunderstandings." Following the screening of herself as a documentary film style talking-head telling the history of obsession on video (within the film) the writer takes up fantasising in the lavatory/bathroom. Wanda has told him that: "To do something really surprising is art." Wanda remains indifferent to the journalist's desire to suddenly do something really surprising (offer to be her toilet). The journalist misses the irony of the situation in that, for Wanda, acting out perverse sexual scenarios is not anything surprising. She tells him that her profession is being cruel and that his (writing) is not exactly harmless. What is suggested by Treut's introduction to this film, is that sexuality, and particularly perverse sexual fantasies, have their own history and narratives, and can be known and staged for an audience as a business. In other words, in this film diegesis (which foregrounds both performance -within- film and

28 Rachael Moss, "Romantic Tropes in *Virgin Machine* " is a chapter from Moss' honours thesis (South Australia: Department for Information and Communications Studies, University of South Australia, 1993), pp. 68-73. Quote from p. 70. The comment defining Treut as 'Lesbian' is from Wallace, 1989, p. 13.

video -within -film) perverse sexual fantasies are public as well as subjective, are discursively and performatively constructed, and have their own history and themes -like writing. It is when the journalist asks Wanda if the staged scenarios in the gallery are the personal fantasies of the members of the ensemble that she retorts that perversions are only misunderstandings. For my thesis this film enunciates, through the narrator and director of the staged performances, Wanda, narratives of female castration scenarios and narratives of desire. These stories are articulated within the relationships between Wanda and her female lovers, and are enacted symbolically in the theatre-within-the film.

Rachael Moss records that Treut wrote her doctoral thesis on images of women in the [literary] works of the Marquis de Sade and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch and that this background informs a distinctive theoretical positioning of her work. This might be said to be more so with *Seduction* than with *Virgin Machine*, in that it appears less than co-incidental that two of the central lesbian protagonists/subjects of *Seduction* are named, with postmodern irony, Wanda (a character from Sacher - Masoch) and Justine (a character from Sade).²⁹

²⁹ Wanda is the name of both Sacher-Masoch's female protagonist from *Venus in Furs* (1870) and the name assumed by Aurora Rümelin who married Masoch in 1873. The first English translation, by Marian Phillips, Caroline Hébert, and V. Vale, of Wanda von Sacher-Masoch's *The Confessions of Wanda von Sacher-Masoch* was published in 1990 by Re/Search Publications, San Francisco. Aurora/Wanda self-represents herself as a feminist. In an era when single women had mainly two survival options, bodily labor or prostitution, Wanda wrote a scathing indictment of the institution of marriage whose laws reduced the woman to the property of the man. Justine is both a character/subject from, and the title of, one of Sade's major works, *Justine* (1797) of which he characteristically disclaimed authorship. See Simone de Beauvoir's introduction to Sade's *120 days of Sodom* (London: Arrow Books, 1966), p. 17.

In Sacher-Masoch's classic novel of "male masochism," *Venus in Furs*, Wanda is the major female protagonist. She is constructed as the hero Severin's mistress in more than one sense of the word. He convinces her to take up the role of dominatrix in the enactment of his fantasies of submission to a powerful woman. Justine, from the Marquis de Sade's *Justine and Juliette* is constructed as the ultimate virtuous young woman - a beautiful and penniless orphan - who is passed from evil-doer to evil-doer in an increasingly black fairy-tale. Caught in a web of rapists, murderers, human vampires, sadistic monks, and incestuous fathers, she refuses to compromise her own virtue, even to prevent her own death. Like her sister Justine, Sade's Juliette is educated in a convent before being orphaned. Unlike her sister she learns sensuality rather than piety from the Abbess, a libertine lesbian who has been sent to the convent against her will. After leaving the convent, Juliette embarks on a licentious career as a thief, prostitute, faithless lover, and poisoner. Juliette participates in a series of murderous orgies in the Sistine Chapel before robbing the Pope and fleeing with her lesbian lover.³⁰ Treut casts an ironic eye at Sade and Masoch in *Seduction*. Wanda in this film is signified as a highly intelligent woman, an epistemological authority on the history of discourses on sexual perversion. Justine, her visiting North American former lover, is certainly not signified as "virgin." All of the scenes in which the spectator has privileged access to Wanda's private fantasies/memories (while lying in the bath for instance rather than directing performance) involve explicit sexual activities between Justine and Wanda. Before analysing how Treut constructs a female enunciative position in

³⁰ For a synopsis of the Good Girl/Bad Girl coupling in Sade's text see Catherine Lumby, "Fatale Attraction" *World Art* (1994), p. 36. Lumby also summarises Pat Califia's place in the feminist debates over pornographic representations, and the debate itself.

relation to narrative fantasies of female, as well as male, entry into desire, I will turn briefly to feminist film theories, the political and theoretical debates over the meaning of lesbian sadomasochism, and some lesbian feminist theoretical re-writings of lesbian sadomasochism.

The Cruel Cinema.

The question of "identification" in cinema is, as Carol J. Clover observes, the subject of voluminous theoretical writings.³¹ In 1975, Christian Metz launched a new era of psychoanalytic film theory with the question: "What contributions can Freudian psychoanalysis make to the knowledge of the cinematic signifier?" Metz's new question proceeded from the post-structural assumption that the film's signifying system could not be considered apart from the human subjects constructed by cinema's signifying system.³² Metz described the subject of the medium, especially in its narrative form, as an effect of splitting, division and loss parallel to the subject's entry to the Lacanian symbolic. In this system, the basic filmic apparatus experience was envisioned as a sort of imaginary union, the film narrative being compensation for the split subject and the lost object. Compensations for the subject's "lacks" include Metz's various descriptions of the specific nature of cinematic voyeurism and the disavowal structure of fetishism at the heart of the cinematic impression of reality.³³ In terms of identification, commentators following Metz, tend to distinguish between primary identification (with the

³¹ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, p. 7-9.

³² Christian Metz [1975], *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977). For a brief overview of both Metz's theory and feminist film theory see Linda Williams, "Film Theory," *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, pp. 118-122.

³³ See Linda Williams, "Film Theory," *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 119.

camera) and secondary identification (with the character -subject of empathic choice). Clover suggests that both are fluid, character-identification on the psychoanalytic grounds that competing figures resonate with competing parts of the subject's psyche (e.g. masochistic victim and sadistic monster), and camera-identification on the cinematic grounds that the camera can entertain different positions with ease.³⁴ These positions include not only character-subject positions, but also the omniscient, or transcendent, position.

Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey famously maintained - although she later modified her position - that the cinematic gaze (constitutive of primary identification) is not gender -free, but structured by male or masculine perceptions. This is particularly revealed when the camera's object is a woman. The cinematic apparatus, according to Mulvey, looks at woman in two ways, both defending against her "castration," and both of which presuppose a male gazer. Firstly, there is the sadistic-voyeuristic look, whereby the male gazer salves his unpleasure at female lack by seeing the woman punished, and a fetishistic-scopophilic look, whereby the gazer salves his unpleasure by fetishising the female body in whole or part.³⁵ Many feminist film theorists and critics have questioned Mulvey's influential, and somewhat rigid, pleasure/unpleasure dichotomy, while others - Rose (1988), Doane (1987), Modleski (1982) - have turned away from the basic oedipal model of the "normal" male as ideal viewer.

³⁴ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, p. 8.

³⁵ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16 (1975): 6-18. Re-printed in (among other places) her *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981). Mulvey's model in its original formulation, allows for female spectatorial pleasure only as a male-identified or "transvestite" activity. In her later modification she suggests a psychosexual model for the cross-gender "visual pleasure" of the female spectator. See "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946)." *Framework* 15-17 (1981): 12-15. Reprinted also in *Visual and Other Pleasures*.

In 1984 Teresa de Lauretis advanced the notion of the construction of female spectators through oscillation between masculine and feminine discursive positions.³⁶ Kaja Silverman has explored the theoretical dimensions of Mulvey's original project of describing masculine visual pleasure. In so doing she discovered moments of rupture in which the mastery of the male gaze fails to disavow lack and encounters a breakdown of its mastery.³⁷

Silverman's work, in *The Acoustic Mirror*, goes on to theorise within the domain of the symbolic what Mulvey and other theorists have attributed to the imaginary or the pre-oedipal; a negative oedipal complex which tells the female version of oedipal desire in the daughter's relation to the mother.

Turning to lesbian theory and politics for the moment, Julia Creet, in discussing lesbian sadomasochism as a cultural representation and/or sexual practice, has theorised that this sexed subjective position occurs in response to the maternal (read feminist) "no" to active female sexuality. This requires reading feminism (the mother) as always already phallic, as all powerful.

³⁶ Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

³⁷ Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988). For a more recent, and more thorough, analysis of the discursive construction(s) of a passive (masochistic) male subjectivity in literature and film see Silverman's *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*. D.N. Rodowick and Carol J. Clover also argue that "horror" film is, in many respects, generally "assaultive" (sadistic) to audiences, female and male spectators alike. Clover also argues convincingly that in "schlock" (low-budget, low-myth, slasher) horror films there has emerged since the 60s what she terms a "Final Girl," who without the aid of male rescuing figures, "castrates" in the final scenes sadistically inclined males without allowing for any redemption (position of disavowal) for male spectators -no "male cover." Clover argues that because horror is a marginal (read: non-middle-class white) genre viewed by the sons (and daughters) of women-headed families, and for whom "sufficient" female figures are more plausible, the predominantly male youth audience is as likely to "cheer" the Final Girl as he is likely to identify with the sadistic rapist on whom the Final Girl exacts revenge. See Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, p. 231.

Theoretically, this makes the possibility of even imagining any form of feminism as a maternal symbolic or consenting agency to active female sexualities difficult. What Creet is constructing/ describing as maternal law is feminism, or a particular form of feminist orthodoxy, that would refuse sexuality to the daughter, or at least refuses any form of sexuality for women that is not morally acceptable. Lesbian sadomasochism, as a discursive construction or social practice, in Creet's terms could be read then as a refusal of, or rebellion against, this phallically inscribed maternal law.

In the first of his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Freud refers to sadism and masochism as "sexual aberrations."³⁸ The terms "sadism" and "masochism" were coined by Krafft-Ebing in 1886 and are derived from the names of two authors, the Marquis de Sade and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. Masoch apparently, as noted by Deleuze, was disturbed when his name was used by Krafft-Ebing to designate what Ebing classified as a sexual perversion.³⁹ Freud reads Krafft-Ebing as using the terms to mean bringing "into prominence the pleasure in any form of humiliation or subjection" (SE 7:

³⁸ In his own inimitable way Freud himself is at pains to include "sadism" and "masochism" under the rubric of more or less "normal" sexuality. He writes that "sadism and masochism occupy a special position among the perversions, since the contrast between activity and passivity which lies behind them is among the universal characteristics of sexual life" (SE 7: 159). "Sadomasochism" is not a term which Freud tends to use, preferring to discuss the two concepts separately, although he suggests that the two terms are linked, that a sadist is always in some degree a masochist, and a masochist is engaged in encouraging sadistic acts against him- or herself. Sadistic and masochistic scenarios in most psychoanalytic narratives are independent of one another. Gilles Deleuze in his introductory essay to a 1989 re-print of Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* [1870] also suggests a re-separation of the term sadomasochist into its constituent parts. Deleuze also insists on returning to the literary rather than to the clinical origins of the syndromes and symptoms classified under the names of "sadism" and "masochism." He finds no justification for assuming their complementarity or dialectical unity. For Deleuze both sadism and masochism tell a story - different stories. See Gilles Deleuze. *Coldness and Cruelty*, pp. 130-32.

³⁹ See Gilles Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty*. This text is published in the same volume as a recent edition of Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*. (New York: Zone Books, 1989), pp. 9-138. See also Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* [1893] (1978).

157) rather than merely pleasure in pain or cruelty - i.e. "algolagnia". Pain, in this reading, may not be the motivating factor or desired result of sadism or masochism. Rather, according to Karin M. Cope, "sadism or masochism may deliver other satisfactions deriving from mastery (sadism) or the fantasy of being childlike or helpless (masochism)."⁴⁰ Cope suggests that within a psychoanalytic context, lesbian sadomasochism re-engages the complexity and range of erotic wishes and activities. She insists that "lesbian S/M is important because it refuses a simple one-sided conflation of violence, men, male-identification, rape, pornography and perversity."⁴¹ For her, lesbian sadomasochism, as both practice and polemic, re-opens the question of female sexuality and agency. For women to remain passive to their victimisation is, for Cope, tantamount to collaborating with it. She suggests that a way of fighting back may be by appropriating the signs of that victimisation and putting them to new uses. The debate, then, is not only about power and sexuality, but also about language and the symbolic, the political status of particular signs. The questions that Cope poses are concerned with how women might take up and re-deploy the signs of masculinity and femininity, and the ways in which women might re-negotiate power, violence and sexuality. Cope thinks that merely saying no would leave the power to signify in the hands in which it already lies.

Teresa de Lauretis discusses, in Freudian terms, the question of maternal (the analyst's, mother's or lover's) consent to the girl's masturbation through the concept of "consent to [sexual] activity."⁴² In the passage which I quoted in

⁴⁰ Karin M. Cope, "Sadomasochism." *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, p. 385.

⁴¹ Cope, "Sadomasochism," p. 390.

⁴² de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*, p. 73.

chapter two in relation to de Lauretis' provocative suggestion for moving psychoanalysis "off the couch," she considers the possibility that sadomasochistic impulses related to the mother's prohibition of masturbation may be recovered through fantasy in conjunction with public forms of representation (e.g. viewing films, reading lesbian s/m fiction, in a lesbian bar).⁴³ Feminist film theorist, Linda Williams, reminds us that de Lauretis, writing in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (1984), also introduced the important concept of the social experience of historical women brought to the film viewing situation. This concept, Williams adds, has been deployed in a wide variety of ways by feminist theorists and critics.⁴⁴

One might add to Willam's observation that feminist film makers too, such as Treut, might deploy film theories (e.g. concepts of the gaze) in the production of film texts. Treut utilises the device of theatre-in-film to disrupt the seamlessness with which identificatory suturing processes are mobilised in most mainstream film productions. The "realist" scenes of relations between the characters are constantly interrupted by scenes in which the same actors appear in the theatre, in different costumes, and acting in a different style. The spectator is reminded that the subjects in the film are actors. Treut also constructs for female (and male) spectators an image of a powerful woman (even though we know she is an actor) who is knowledgeable about the history of discursively and culturally produced sexualities, and who is not surprised by any sexuality or sexual fantasy. Moreover this female figure is shown within the film as able to understand and manipulate the signs of sexuality in her own theatre productions.

⁴³ de Lauretis, p. 75.

⁴⁴ Linda Williams, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 120.

Seduction can be read with de Lauretis' suggestion that "consent" to female sexuality might be given to spectators in the viewing of such films as Treut's; with Cope in that the signs of masculinity/ femininity and sadism/ masochism are redeployed by Treut; and against Creet's argument that lesbian s/m is merely a rebellion against feminist orthodoxies. Treut appears, at least through the narration of her character Wanda, to understand female (and male) sexuality as historically constructed within a whole range of discourses including religious and literary fictional ones. What Treut does in this film is redeploy the sign of sadism as female mastery of sexual matters. She does not construct sadism as violence. Unlike Califia's text in which the subject Kerry is positioned as phallic by whipping the naive male figure Bill, Wanda is positioned as phallic in Treut's text through her epistemological ability. It is her authoritative discourse on sexuality and perversion that "beats" the journalist.

Treut can also be read as re-deploying the narrative of the subject's entry into desire in female terms. One of the earliest scenes in the film is one in which Wanda, dressed impeccably in 1970s *femme fatale* mode, stages or symbolises a female "castration" fantasmatic scenario in her theatre. She also acts as master of ceremonies. This highly ritualised performance is enacted before the gallery audience within the film, the cinema audience, and Wanda's watching lovers. The spectator is positioned in the place of each female and male lover (Caren, Gregor, Justine) in turn as they watch this symbolised primal scene. The cinema spectator also sees at times from the transcendent, objective camera position, the theatre/gallery audience and the lovers

watching the ritual performance and the enacted ritual itself. This performance-in-the-film is called "The Bleeding Rose" and entails a pair of female performers one of whom cuts the outline of a rose into the other's upper shoulder blade with the point of a knife. This symbolisation of castration, marked on a female body at sites other than the genitals - as it is in Freud's scenarios of female castration - strongly resembles the marking of the V on Iduna's breast in Califia's vampire s/m text. A female member of the *Seduction* theatre/gallery audience cries silently. Immediately following this scene Treut begins to introduce in turn the film scenes in which each of Wanda's three suitors (two female and one male) begin to articulate their demands - for love, for passion, for sex. In turn, throughout the remainder of the film, these claims on the imaginary phallic mother Wanda are refused. Wanda can be read as operating as the imaginary figure of the phallic mother from the lovers' points of view. She herself is not constructed by Treut as even interested in granting these impossible demands. In other words Wanda is fantasied by each of the lovers, in one way or another, as the all powerful (m)other able to make good whatever it is that they might think they lack. Each imagines that one-ness with Wanda will ease their angst. Wanda refuses to be positioned in these fantasies as the One. On the contrary Wanda can be read as a symbolic female figure, one who precipitates the clamouring greedy lovers back into desire and resignation to their "lack." The ritual of castration, of separation, is enacted in Wanda's theatre for the cinema spectator as well as the characters in the film diegesis. Wanda is not constructed by Treut as attempting to fill up her "lack" by fusing sexually or romantically with other subjects. Wanda remains in language, in work as compensation for the lost object of desire the (m)other. This does not mean

however that she morally disapproves of "sex." She is constructed as, by now, indifferent to sex but not indifferent to manipulating discourses about, and signs of, sexuality in performances in her gallery. She wishes that her lovers would seek sexual and romantic gratification elsewhere. Treut constructs Wanda as a symbolic female figure with the phallus who designates positions in desire.

Lesbian sadomasochism and theory.

One of the few feminist psychoanalytic theorists to specifically take up the question of lesbian sadomasochism and desire was Parveen Adams. Adams, who, in 1989, began to theorise the construction of a perverse lesbian sexuality, that is, sadomasochism, as not being centred around the paternal phallus, states that "in practice the boy and the girl will have a different relation to the phallus because of anatomical differences".⁴⁵ She agrees that within a Freudian/Lacanian framework the oedipal scenario is theorised as the moment of differentiation into masculinity and femininity. Its resolution revolves around the question of castration, a lack represented by the phallic signifier, a castration that presupposes the phallus as a reference point. Both the boy/subject and the girl/subject have to submit to castration to allow the emergence of desire, that investment of the object with erotic value which makes the object relation possible. The object's erotic value is dependent on the question of who has the phallus. Adams appears to agree with Lacanian analyst Moustapha Safouan that, in Lacanian terms, the whole economy of

⁴⁵ Parveen Adams, "Of Female Bondage." In *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 248.

desire is rooted in the phallus and this phallus is attributed to the father. Safouan is explicit about the phallus (ideally) as an attribute of the father: "in fact the function of the ideal [a model with which the subject identifies at first] insofar as it penetrates the whole economy of desire, is rooted in the promotion of the phallus i.e. precisely, of that whose insufficiency is discovered for the boy and its non-existence for the girl, at an early age in an attribute of the father."⁴⁶ For Adams, the Lacanian narratives posit desire as engendered by anatomical difference, or at least there is a sense in psychoanalytic theory in which sex (biology), sexual difference (sociological gender) and sexuality are inextricably bound. Adams argues that despite local variations - men may sometimes be said to be feminine and women may sometimes be said to be masculine - generic differences between men's relation to the phallus and women's remains, particularly in Lacanian theory.⁴⁷

In practice, according to Adam's readings, the boy and the girl will have a different relation to the phallus because of the anatomical difference between the sexes. A gendered difference would not matter were it not for the fact that, for the girl, her sex and gender work to obstruct her entry to desire. For her the oedipus complex admits of no solution; everything that looks like a solution is secretly wrecked by *Penisneid* (penis envy). For girls, the castration complex precedes the oedipus complex. Once she is within the latter, Freud gives her three options. Fundamentally, the choice is one of remaining within the oedipus complex and not acceding to desire: "a general

⁴⁶ Moustafa Safouan, "Is the Oedipus Complex Universal?" *The Woman in Question*, eds. Parveen Adams and Elizabeth Cowie (London and New York: Verso, 1990), p. 280.

⁴⁷ Adams, "Of Female Bondage", p. 248.

revulsion from sexuality" (SE 21: 229); or of an exit from the oedipus complex which nonetheless remains marked by the desire for the paternal phallus, a problematic entry into desire: "to an incredibly late age she clings to the hope of getting a penis some time" (SE 21: 229). Adams' analyses the Freudian layout of female sexualities thus:

. . . we can imagine a group of post-castration-complex girls lounging about within that haven of refuge, the Oedipus complex. Actually, to be more precise, some of the girls aren't so comfortable. The castration has been a trauma, they know they will never have the male genital again and they are utterly despondent (read: retreat from sexuality). Some distance away is the exit to the oedipus complex, the gateway to desire. These girls are oblivious of its existence; they stare vacantly in another direction. Another group of girl's face their fathers; they are not resigned to their loss and they noisily demand what they want (read: penis envy). These girls also do not see the sign saying 'Exit from the Oedipus Complex.'" But there are some who do and they discover one of two ways out. Some see that a baby would be a good substitute for what they want (read: femininity) and some, realizing that the father won't give them the male genital, decide to give up loving him . . . they identify with him (read: masculinity complex) (p. 249).

The latter, those with a masculinity complex, yield up their demands and can exit. Adams concedes that they accede to desire but now, thanks to the fantasy that they possess the male organ, they will suffer from a castration anxiety "of some magnitude" (p. 249). Freud claimed that: "This 'masculinity complex' in women can also result in a manifest homosexual choice of object" (SE 21: 230). According to Adams: "It is one thing to say that the Oedipus

complex is the source of all neuroses; it is quite another to recognize that the Oedipus complex pathologizes femininity and feminine sexuality" (p. 249). By the oedipus complex neuroticising the girl Adams means both traditional female heterosexuality (femininity) and traditional female homosexuality (the masculinity complex).

Adams attempts to circumvent the domination of the paternal phallus, particularly the way it compromises female homosexuality, by detouring through what she calls a "new sexuality" i.e. lesbian sadomasochism. The question that Adams is posing in this essay is whether lesbian sadomasochism can be considered a case of perverse organisation of sexuality and whether, if so, must it be considered pathological. What Adams then explores in clinical and theoretical psychoanalytic discourses are the similarities and differences between the lesbian sadomasochistic woman and the traditional heterosexual masochistic man. The similarities lie, for Adams, in the scenarios which involve fetishes, whipping, bondage, all that goes with the factor of fantasy and suspense. The differences enumerated by Adams are that lesbian sadomasochism appears not to be compulsive (pathological), can be genital or not, and is an affair of women. What Bersani and Dutoit's narrative of fetishism as "the penis somewhere else" offers lesbian sadomasochism for Adams is not a pathological disavowal of sexual difference but the mobilisation of desire.

In Adams' story of the lesbian sadomasochist there is imagined an erotic plasticity and movement. Adams writes of the lesbian sadomasochist that: "she constructs fetishes and substitutes them, one for another; she multiplies

fantasies and tries them on like costumes".⁴⁸ According to Adams, the lesbian sadomasochist has succeeded in detaching herself from the phallic reference and orienting her sexuality outside the phallic field which suggests to her that the question of sexuality has finally been divorced from the question of gender. This attempt to theorise lesbian sadomasochism is in many ways commendable but ultimately unsatisfactory. It is not at all clear what Adams means by "outside the phallic field" or that the lesbian sadomasochist has separated sexuality from gender and is "able to enact differences in the theatre where roles freely circulate."⁴⁹ For Adams this is a sexuality which is not centred around the paternal phallus and which remains outside the familial and social order. Paradoxically, Adams concedes in conclusion, a sexuality as transgressive as lesbian sadomasochism, can only accede to a psychological reality in a complex relation to some fledgling piece of external reality. However, Adams offers no examples or analyses of any "fledgling piece of external reality."

While Lacanian analyst Joan Copjec agrees that paying attention to the structures of fantasy restores the subject to a fuller view, since the fantasy displays the subject's desire, she has difficulty with the idea of the subject taking up different and contradictory positions. She states that "there is something troubling in the way the consideration of fantasy has tended often to limit itself to the polemical observation that, in the fantasy scenario, the subject takes up and shifts between different and even contradictory positions, here a female position, there a male one."⁵⁰ Copjec suggests that

⁴⁸ Adams, p. 262.

⁴⁹ Adams, p. 265.

⁵⁰ Joan Copjec, "Cutting Up," *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 241.

while it is important to be reminded of the psychoanalytic claim that the sexed positions one occupies in fantasy and other discourses are not determined by one's anatomy, it is unclear where the emphasis on shifting positions can lead us. Copjec warns that we should not confuse the limitlessness of the replaceable objects of the subject's desire with a limitlessness of the subject. In a Lacanian sense, and for Copjec, "*the subject of desire is finite, limited.*"⁵¹ Fantasy, then, defines these limits, not the subject's infinite dispersal. What must be observed in fantasy for Copjec is not simply the range of positions assumed, but how these different positions are structured so as to define by circumscription the absence at the fantasy's centre. This absence holds the fantasy and the subject in place, limits the subject. Copjec proposes that this absence, the "kernel of nonsense" around which the subject weaves its fantasies, its self-image provides the link between the subject and social discourses. What she asserts is that merely arguing for the multiplicity of identificatory positions provided by fantasy is polemical rather than analytical. Copjec insists that the analyses of particular films as fantasies is more suggestive than polemic alone would ever allow them to be. What Copjec is ultimately arguing is that feminist analysis, and politics, depends on the existence of a psychical semi-independence from patriarchal structures. For this reason the fantasy which displays the subject's desire, psychical reality, should not be eliminated by its virtual absorption by the social. A feminist analysis, or politics, should not on the other hand eliminate social reality which is conceived merely as a realisation of a given psychical relation between men and women.

⁵¹ Copjec, p. 241, emphasis Copjec.

De Lauretis like Copjec might be read counter to Adams' claim that lesbian desire is not centred on the paternal phallus, that sexuality is "divorced" from gender, and that the lesbian subject multiplies fantasies, and operates in a theatre where roles freely circulate. In re-reading a case history of one of Helene Deutsch's female homosexual patients, de Lauretis theorises the lesbian subject as one who does not take the father, as Freud claims, as love-object. In this scenario, the father operates as phallus, as third term. De Lauretis, who in re-reading two dreams reported by one of Deutsch's female homosexual clients says "this phallus . . . is no longer attached to the paternal body, though its symbolic function is nevertheless necessary."⁵² The dreams involve Anna Freud (Freud's daughter, also a psychoanalyst) wearing men's clothing and Helene Deutsch smoking a cigar. There was a photograph of Freud himself with a cigar on Deutsch's desk. By condensing the image of Anna Freud with Deutsch (two female analysts) one arrives with de Lauretis at an image which might be read as the mythologically ubiquitous "mannish lesbian" smoking a cigar. What de Lauretis means by a phallus no longer attached to the father's body is integral to how she thinks through lesbian desire via the notion of a "non-paternal fantasy phallus (I will call it a fetish)."⁵³ In the constitution of lesbian subjectivity in this particular case, de Lauretis argues that the father in the oedipal scenario is not turned to as love object but operates as phallus (symbolic agent of castration and allocator of positions in desire).

De Lauretis does not dispute the Lacanian notion of a (fantasy) phallus as a signifier of desire. What I believe de Lauretis is suggesting in her re-reading

⁵² Teresa de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*, p. 73.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

of Bersani and Dutoit, as I outlined it in chapter two, is how the signification of desire, particularly in the psychic processes of perversions (i.e. fetishism), is freed (mobilised) from penile representations of the phallus. These substitute objects, according to de Lauretis' re-reading of fetishism, work for the lesbian fetishist as signifiers of desire anyway because she "doesn't care" whether or not the objects re-place (represent) the missing penis. If in de Lauretis' first scenario - the re-reading of Deutsch's narrative of the female homosexual subject- the oedipal father operates *as* phallus (agent of castration) and, in the second case - reading Radclyffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness* - the object of desire is a "femmes" body then it is not that the lesbian subject does not take up a position in desire in identification with the male subject as the lesbian subject does not take the penis as her object of desire. The father in the first fantasy scenario *is* the phallus, as third term, although the signifier of desire is not to be found in his body.

This does not however, as Adams vaguely suggests, place the lesbian subject, perverse (i.e. as fetishist, sadist, or masochist) or otherwise, outside the phallic, social, or familial field. What de Lauretis is attempting to theorise is a psychic process which detaches the story of lesbian desire from the *paternal* phallus. She is not however jettisoning the meaning of the phallus as it operates in the fantasy of castration scenario and without which the subject would not be constituted in desire (lack, difference) at all (i.e. would have no desire). While it might be tempting to read Treut's *Seduction* through Adams' concept of a theatre where roles freely circulate, I would argue that this is not necessarily what is happening in Wanda's theatre. What she stages, symbolises, in this theatre is the meaning of castration i.e. the meaning of the

phallus. I would suggest that what is constructed in Treut's discourse on a female/lesbian sadist is closer to de Lauretis' notion of a woman who does not desire the penis but takes the father as phallus. I would argue that in reading this film one might extend the meaning of the phallus in Margaret Whitford's terms to mean the symbolic order itself (i.e. language itself severs the child from the maternal body). In Treut's scenarios Wanda, like Iduna in Califia's short story, uses language, symbolisation, and knowledge as her phallus. These may be traditional attributes of the father, or at least traditionally attributed to the father, but in Treut's case Wanda is shown to be able to manipulate knowledge about, and signs of, sexuality, sexual difference, and perversion in her own laboratory/theatre. She is also constructed by Treut as able to utilise knowledge as a symbolic means of turning her lovers away from investing fantasies of "the One" in her. Treut, like Califia, offers the reader/spectator images of very powerful female subjects who have no difficulty telling the semiotic and epistemological difference between penis and phallus.

Five

Floating Phalli: Fantasy Fetishes in Winterson's The Passion.

In this chapter I will examine Jeanette Winterson's magical realist novel, *The Passion* (1988).¹ This reading will focus specifically on the webbed feet, cod-piece, red hair, and detachable heart of the protagonist Villanelle and the way in which these objects circulate between desiring subjects in this text. From a psychoanalytic perspective these signifiers of desire will be read as fantasy fetishist objects. My analyses of Winterson's text will be read back into Freud's narratives of (male) fetishism outlined in his major essay on the subject "Fetishism" (1927) (SE 21: 147 - 57). The "heart" operates in Winterson's scenarios as an object of exchange between Villanelle and her female lover. The cod-piece draws the gaze of the villain of the story, the Cook, and the heroine's feet and hair are significant fetish objects for a young male subject, Henri. From a lesbian feminist point of view I will mobilise Teresa de Lauretis' work on the concept of the lesbian "fantasy phallus" in reading Winterson's text critically back through Freud's fictions of fetishism.

In his essay "Fetishism," Freud mentions the case of a man with a fetish for athletic support-belts, as well as male "perverts" who enjoy cutting off female hair (*coupeurs de nattes*) (SE 21: 156,157). Theft (kleptomania), a female

¹ Jeanette Winterson, *The Passion* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988). Hereafter all references to the text will be given as page numbers in parentheses.

perversion according to Louise Kaplan's readings, also appears re-imagined in *The Passion* as a characteristic activity of a heroine who thieves both purses (genitals and wealth) and soldiers' uniforms (male drag).² Transcendent in relation to all of Villanelle's detachable fetish-object signifiers (*objets a*), and to which they might all be said to be symbolically and parodically subsumed in this novel, are her folding fan-like toes. These enable her to walk on water. In Winterson's somewhat bizarre scenario, this signifier can be read as the heroic female subject's fantasy or magical phallus. Freud accounts for fetishism as a perverse subjective structure which, within his terms (i.e. male horror of castrated female genitals), he applies most readily to the explication of perverse male fantasies. Winterson re-writes a female subject whose bodily part-object is neither imaginarily castratable or exchangeable. This object can be read as operating textually in the symbolic order of *The Passion* as the heroine's fantasmatic signifier of some power and privilege.

Susan Rubin Suleiman writing in "Daughters Playing: Some Feminist Rewritings and the Mother," describes Winterson's earlier writing as thematising "in a wonderfully comic way, the antipatriarchal impetus of feminist parody."³ Suleiman opens her essay with two epigraphs - a quotation from Winterson: "She said stories helped you to understand the world," and one from Sigmund Freud: "Humour is not resigned; it is rebellious."⁴ The epigrammatic linkage of Winterson and Freud which opens Suleiman's text seems suggestive of a certain feminist humour, both on the

² See Louise J. Kaplan, *Female Perversions: The Temptations of Emma Bovary* (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

³ Susan Rubin Suleiman, "Daughters Playing: Some Feminist Rewritings and the Mother", *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 163-169

⁴ Suleiman, p.163

part of Winterson's writing and as a strategy of feminist critical re-reading of Freud's texts. There could be said to be no characters, either female or male, in Winterson's text who are *not* constructed as psychosexually perverse, some classically in Freudian style, and some post-phallically.

The narration of *The Passion* is divided between Henri, a young soldier in Napoleon's army, and Villanelle, a Venetian female transvestite who deals cards in a casino dressed as a young man, and who possess the ability to walk on water. Both of the narrators tell the reader that: "I'm telling you stories. Trust me." (p.13, p. 69). In Venice, which might constitute a metaphorical locus of the Lacanian notion of the Other (i.e. the place of the signifier) in this novel, the heroine's ability to walk across canals might be considered a distinct advantage. The text of *The Passion* could be described generically as fantasy/fiction. It is structured narratively in four parts: "The Emperor," "The Queen of Spades," "Zero Winter," and "The Rock." The first segment is narrated by Henri, the second by Villanelle, and the third and final parts by both.

The plot of *The Passion* is relatively straightforward. In the first part "The Emperor," Henri joins the army because he admires and identifies with Napoleon (i.e. he imagines that the Emperor Napoleon possesses the paternal phallus). Beginning at the foot of the symbolic ladder, one might say, Henri becomes the Emperor's personal "chicken chef." The "Queen of Spades" section concerns Villanelle whose mother bungles a ritual offering on the night of her birth. She is born with webbed feet, the legendary inheritance of Venetian boatmen's sons. In other words, it is said but not necessarily known

in Venice, that boatmen have webbed feet which are passed down from father to son. Villanelle's mother in haste and confusion at the time of Villanelle's birth transposes part of the ritual which must be performed to guarantee giving birth to a boy into the one that would guarantee a girl. Villanelle enters the world as a girl with Venetian boatmen's feet. Cross-dressed as a man to obtain work, she deals cards at a casino where she meets, and falls in love with, a mysterious masked woman. Of this encounter Winterson's heroine says: "It was a game of chance I entered into and my heart was the wager" (p.94). This *étrangère*, this strange woman, steals Villanelle's heart and keeps it in an indigo jar in her voluminous clothes closet. A passionate though brief sexual affair ensues between the two women which Villanelle eventually terminates. The woman remains with her husband and Villanelle marries a rich, violent man, the cook. Co-incidentally this villain is Henri's former army superior. Villanelle escapes from this situation but is recaptured and gambles at cards with the cook for her freedom. The deck is stacked and she loses. In Winterson's re-writing of historical narratives, her heroine is sold to General Murat and sent to work as a *vivandiere* for Napoleon's officers during his aborted attempt to conquer Russia.

Henri and Villanelle meet during this account of the Emperor's march on Moscow. Henri is disillusioned by this time with "the little Father," Napoleon, and deserts the army accompanied by Villanelle. She leads him to Venice, a city of mazes, where she convinces him to retrieve her lost heart. This he does. Villanelle then refuses to give it to him. During a violent confrontation with Villanelle's former husband, who is still seeking revenge for having been abandoned and robbed by the heroine, Henri stabs him and

removes his heart. Henri is in trouble again, and is again rescued by the red-haired Villanelle. In these rescue scenes either the touch or sight of the female heroine's red hair soothes Henri's (castration) anxiety. Red hair signifies in Henri's fantasmatic the missing maternal body. However in this scene he also discovers that in the Venetian symbolic order it is Villanelle who has a paternal phallus i.e. she can walk across canals. The hapless murderer is finally captured by the police and imprisoned on an island. When Villanelle obtains his release through bribing the judiciary, he refuses to leave because she, although pregnant by this time, will not marry him. He remains incarcerated on the island. Villanelle, now accompanied by her red-haired daughter, keeps rowing her boat. Like Laura in *Carmilla*, Villanelle is in the end unable to forget her former female lover.

Winterson's text could be read intertextually, with and against, the Freudian myth of the oedipal family and his discourses on fetishism. It can also be read against the Lacanian insistence on the universality of the penis-phallus as the signifier of desire. In terms of literary signifying systems the text might also be read through the symbolic modes of writing appropriated by the writer - namely the Surrealist predilection for parody and the carnivalesque text as theorised by Mikhail Bakhtin and revised by Julia Kristeva. Kristeva characterises carnivalesque texts as composed of nonexclusive oppositions producing a dialogic, rather than a monologic discourse. This discursive dialogism is characteristic of the writing of *The Passion*. The novel traverses the boundaries of generic signifying systems between fantasy texts, realist fiction, and historical narratives (e.g. those of the Napoleonic era). Winterson's writing in this novel could also be read as quoting from the

Shakespearean Renaissance themes of cross-dressing and gender confusion (e.g. *Twelfth Night*), and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* with its magical realist style and lesbian transvestite themes. The plot, re-appropriated from these various systems and re-written intertextually by Winterson, is readable within what might be termed a poetic or mythic realm of signification. In addition Irigaray's theory of "femininity" as masquerade (i.e. as being the phallus) conceptually connects to notions of "carnival" in Winterson's writing. In *This Sex Which is Not One*, Irigaray claims that the organ that assumes this signifying function (i.e. "being" and "having") takes on the value of the fetish.⁵ In Winterson's case this scenario is played out in reverse. Venice is, in the context of Winterson's novel, "the city of disguises." Villanelle herself frequently masquerades as "having the phallus." Winterson constructs several characters, particularly the villain, whose repressed male homoerotic desire circles the heroine's cod-piece. Textual uncertainty is raised through the articulation of several other player's desires in Villanelle's games of disguise as to what exactly is under her codpiece (i.e. penis, clitoris, money). The reader knows that Villanelle's "real" phallus is concealed in her boots. This text can be read as a female constructed parody of masculinity and of paternally inscribed desire in carnivalesque and psychosexually perverse i.e. transvestite style. Insofar as *The Passion* re-writes and re-visions mobile female desire, it can be read as a parodic resignification of the phallic (masculine) textual subject and the fantasmatic scenarios and narratives of Freudian fetishism. Freud's own narratives of fetishism contain suggestive logical inconsistencies which have been mobilised as points of departure by

⁵ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 62.

various psychoanalytic theorists in the construction of multiple fantasmatic scenarios for different sexed subjects.

Freud constructs the exemplary fetishistic signifier in psychoanalytic terms as whatever fantasmatically replaces the mother's lost or castrated penis for an ambivalent male subject/child within his castration scenario. In classical Freudian narratives the male fetishist disavows the mother's castration by displacing desire metonymically onto clothing (e.g. underwear) or parts of the body (feet, noses). In Freud's fictions of male castration scenarios the missing maternal penis is also sometimes imagined by the boy to be lost or misplaced (i.e. it is fantasised as detachable). Above all, this floating penis is an imaginary object, an entirely fantasmatic object. As I have pointed out in chapter two, de Lauretis in her feminist reading of Radclyffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness*, suggests that a "feminine" imaginary body might be imagined as lacking (missing) for a female, in this case lesbian, subject, and that the notion of fetishism might therefore be appropriately applied to readings of female sexed subjectivity.

In the case of *The Passion*, Villanelle's webbed feet operate textually as an uncastratable signifier - they are literally, like women's bodies, non-detachable, irremovable. The midwife present at Villanelle's birth endeavours to cut off "the offending parts" with a knife but fails (p. 52). Winterson's transposition of phallic signifier from penis to "webbed feet," and from male to female anatomy both acknowledges and subversively re-writes the male phallic/female castrated Freudian discursive dichotomy. Although Winterson puts the clitoris back into symbolic circulation, the polymorphous

movement of the signifier enacted in Winterson's fiction strategically deconstructs other potential dichotomous dualities (e.g. phallic/vulval signification) by substituting a bizarre - except for aquatic mammals or birds perhaps - signifier that does not find its referent in male *or* female human genitals or other bodily organs. In other words Villanelle's feet can be read, literally, as entirely fantasmatic objects. Winterson can be read as underscoring the Lacanian point that no one has the phallus, and that the phallus is certainly not the penis. Kaja Silverman suggests that modern male sexuality would seem to be defined less by the body than by the negation of the body. Sexuality has been sublimated into a relation with the phallus. The phallus, Silverman writes, which in earlier historical moments seemed to "to fit as smoothly over the penis as a condom" has also undergone abstraction.⁶ It no longer seems merely a theatricalisation of the organ it indisputedly represents, but has become a signifier for symbolic knowledge, power, and privilege. Silverman concludes that access to the phallus is still predicated upon possession of the penis, but the relation between the two is, in Saussure's sense, increasingly arbitrary. The relation between penis and phallus must be constantly mediated by ideal male representations. Winterson deconstructs the Napoleonic paternal phallus, suggesting slyly that even Josephine can beat Napoleon at billiards: "He was the most powerful man in the world and he couldn't beat Josephine at billiards" (p. 13). Billiards is described by Winterson elsewhere in the text as "a game with balls."

⁶ Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 24-25.

Winterson couples her predilection for phallic parody - constructing jokes about Napoleon's balls and Villanelle's uncastratable interdigital webbing - with her appropriation of a heterogeneous "polyglossic carnivalesque" textual style of writing. Fetishistic signifiers multiply at an astonishing rate in this relatively short novel, many constructed with equivocal meanings. Mikhail Bakhtin writes: "parodic-travesty forms. . . destroyed the power of myth over language; they freed consciousness from the power of the direct word."⁷ Parody, according to Bakhtin, had the salutary effect of establishing a distance between language and reality. Kristeva's idea of intertextuality subsumes parody as one of its forms. Winterson's repeated parodying of the Napoleonic phallus can be read as disconnecting the semiotic conflation of the phallus from the penis (a male referent). Simultaneously, Winterson's text might be read as subverting monological phallic law by opening up the scene of signification (i.e. the locus of the imaginary) onto a Saussurian scene of increasingly arbitrary connectedness between signifier and signified (e.g. the meaning of the phallus attached to webbed feet), and onto a scene of "potential infinity" in relation to the signification of desire. The carnival scene for Kristeva is a spectacle without a stage: a game where two texts meet, contradict and relativise each other. Kristeva conceives a carnivalesque discourse as one "disputing the laws of language based on the 0-1 interval, the carnival challenges God, authority, and social law; insofar as it is dialogical, it is rebellious".⁸

⁷ See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 60.

⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans., Leon S. Roudiez (London: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 79.

In terms of the interconnectedness of discursive and signifying systems in Winterson's writing, she also subsumes the Surrealist themes of psychosexual perversion into the carnival scene. Winterson doubles the concept of carnivalesque writing with carnival as an image of Venice. In *The Passion*, the scene of Venice is constructed as a city of canals, of mazes, of disguise, masquerade and games. Winterson also sets the scene within the commonplace legendary myth of *fin-de-siècle* decadence and excess. Villanelle says: "Since Bonaparte captured our city of mazes in 1797, we've more or less abandoned ourselves to pleasure. . . We became an enchanted island for the mad, the rich, the bored, the perverted. Our glory days were behind us but our excess was just beginning" (p. 52). The last sentence of "The Queen of Spades" section reads: "It is New Year's Day, 1805" (p. 76). Winterson's lesbian lovers, transvestite heroine, and other perverse subjects are narrated against a backdrop of end of the century revelry, the sacking of the city by Napoleon, gambling, and theft. Villanelle in transvestite guises plays at games of chance in the casino: "The ball began at eight o'clock and I began my night drawing cards in the booth of chance. Queen of spades you win, Ace of clubs you lose" (p. 55). Sometimes she wins (the masked female object of her desire), and sometimes she loses (and is sold to the army). Winterson constructs a female protagonist who re-deploys the signs of sexual difference. She plays both scenes of sexual difference (i.e. masculinity and femininity), both scenes of sexuality (i.e. lesbianism and heterosexuality), and both scenes of bodily referents (i.e. clitoris and penis). Speaking of textuality and presumably the phallic (male) subject, Kristeva asserts that: "A carnival participant is both an actor and spectator; he loses his sense of individuality, passes through a zero point of carnivalesque activity and splits into a subject of the spectacle and an

object of the game".⁹ In theorising transvestite roles, Mary Jacobus, reading Shoshana Felman, asserts that: "transvestite roles become 'travesties of a travesty,' since there is no unequivocal gender identity to render ambiguous in the first place, but only the masquerade of masculine and feminine."¹⁰ Villanelle is proficient at this game.

In reading *The Passion* one might be more inclined to push Kristeva's notion of intertextuality toward the concept of hypertextuality. The intermeshing of multiple discursive systems (poetry, biblical myth, romance, realist fiction, fantasy, historical narrative, Renaissance fiction etc.) might be categorised as a metatext of postmodern pastiche and quotation. Parody too is characteristic of postmodern textuality. The narrative pathways through the text are complex and multiple. In terms of reading for fetishistic signification the text can be thought of as hypertextual in that, as with electronic forms of writing from which the idea emerged, each page might have "buttons" leading not to one single next page but to many possible pages. If one "clicked" on repeating signifiers - for instance heart, boots, or purse (female and male genitals) - one might find oneself in any number of scenarios (pages) in which this particular signifier takes on different meanings depending on its context and criteria of use. In a similar manner Freudian narratives of fetishism can also now be read hypertextually. One might press a "button" in Freud's classic scenarios and arrive at a different scenario constructed by Elizabeth Grosz, Silverman, de Lauretis, Marjorie Garber etc. The subject-in-

⁹ Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p. 78.

¹⁰ See Mary Jacobus, "Reading Woman (Reading)", *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, eds. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1991), p. 944. See also Shoshana Felman, "Reading Femininity," *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981): 28.

process in Winterson's text might also be said to be the postmodern fragmented subject rather than the Cartesian phallic unified subject. Villanelle's sexed subjectivity is constructed as multiple, shifting and her desire is, in the context of this novel, constructed as poly-signified.

In terms of imaginarily and symbolically signifying sexual desire Winterson puts the clitoris back into play - de-represses it. In psychoanalytic terms and according to Elizabeth Grosz, the lesbian fetishist empowers the clitoris as a means of not giving up the phallus, and like the male fetishist, substitutes for the phallus an object outside her own body.¹¹ Villanelle is a thief. She steals "purses" which in the context of *The Passion* signify not only wealth (the phallus) but also female genitals. She challenges a soldier to a game of billiards with a wager attached. Villanelle muses: "And if I lost? I had to make him a present of my purse. There was no mistaking his meaning" (p. 69). Immediately before this dialogue, the heroine has said that she could never resist a purse. Emily Apter, defining clitoral hermeneutics, which she sees as a point of departure in feminist psychoanalytic thinking from Freud's famous definition of the clitoris as a "real small penis" (SE 21: 157), states that:

As a poetic of the as yet unseen or ignored, clitoral hermeneutics thus emerges as the not-so-distant cousin of a feminist unconscious, de-repressed and made visible in a flash of interpretive insight or, alternatively, assimilated to a hitherto taboo lesbian erotics. *Qua* detail, the textually re-presented clitoris also comes to be associated with a repertory of images historically used to represent femininity: ornament, jewels, trinkets, make-up and masks.¹²

¹¹ Elizabeth Grosz, "Lesbian Fetishism?" *differences* 3/2 *Queer Theory* (Summer 1991), p. 51.

¹² Emily Apter, "Clitoral Hermeneutics," *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, ed.

Trinkets, jewels, make-up and masks figure frequently in Winterson's text. Like purses, jewels signify both wealth (socio-economic power) and lesbian desire. Villanelle's desire for the rich woman is signified by a pair of earrings. But this heroine also steals (desires) male purses (phallic wealth). In a sense then in this novel where many fetishistic signifiers becomes slippery, male and female genitals become equivalent phallic signifiers, both are written as equivalent to the signifiers for wealth (gold). In turn both male and female subjects such as Henri and the female lover have vested and passionate interests in Villanelle and her part-object fetishistic imaginary phalli (e.g. her red-hair, her feet). What Winterson inscribes in this text is an elliptical and complex textual circuitry in which the signifiers of desire can be sexual or economic, often undecideably both. Men (the cook) and women (the lesbian lover) in Winterson's novel can be signified as wealthy or powerful. Villanelle, who is not wealthy, steals purses. Louise Kaplan, narrating kleptomania, claims that there is a mythology of psychoanalytic understanding, an amalgam of partial truths based on the usual misrepresentation of the genital difference between males and females, that frequently is itself unanalysed.¹³ Kleptomania, according to Kaplan's reading of this psychoanalytic mythologising, is frequently thought of as a prototypical female perversion analogous to fetishism, a prototypical male perversion. This misrepresentation by analogy is derived from the idea that females are genitally lacking, that is suffering from penis envy, and the stolen commodity represents an item of vengeance, a compensation for the stolen or missing genital of value. The fetish in male fetishism is an item of genital

Elizabeth Wright (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), p. 50.

¹³ Kaplan, *Female Perversions*, p. 285.

reassurance, a substitute for the woman's missing penis and a guarantee against castration anxiety. In answer to the troublesome question of why some kleptomaniacs are male, this psychoanalytic theorising, according to Kaplan, asserts that men who steal are attempting to acquire the superior genital equipment of the father. Kaplan constructs "stolen goods" as signifiers of absence and loss:

The psychoanalytic mythology that the stolen goods in kleptomania are stolen penises persists in the face of considerable evidence that the item filched by the kleptomaniac has a symbolic structure very much like the structure of any other fetish. In fetishism, the blue velvet bathrobe, the green earrings, the fur wrap are memorials to absences and losses from every level and dimension of experience. In kleptomania, the stolen goods are also versatile memorials to a variety of absences and losses¹⁴

Kaplan defines these absences as love, wholeness, belonging and well-being. She defines losses as the loss of imaginary infant omnipotence and loss of actual power experienced by certain adults. For her, the border between fetishism and kleptomania is artificial. The penis envy interpretation of kleptomania arises out of the same socioeconomic conditions as commodity fetishism, which encourages human subjects to use things as substitutes for feelings and other subjects. In this psychoanalytic/Marxist synthesis Kaplan insists that: "fetishism allows material goods to substitute for feelings." In this sense, kleptomania is an aspect of fetishism, "just like any other perversion," and not a distinct disorder based on penis envy rather than castration

¹⁴ Kaplan, p. 285.

anxiety.¹⁵ For Kaplan kleptomania in both sexes then signifies a desire to escape from threats to their psychic survival than with erotic pleasure. In Kaplan's system of meaning penis envy is replaced by gold envy, a (Marxist) signifier of commodity fetishism. Villanelle works at the casino cross-dressed because it is the only way she, as a woman in early nineteenth century Venice, can find work. Her mysterious lesbian lover is wealthy, or at least married to a wealthy man who is frequently absent, but who does not deny his wife a share of his fortune. A pair of earrings operates in the text to signify desire between the two women. However given Apter's claim that jewels poetically signify the clitoris, and Kaplan's that commodity fetishism (gold) replaces genital signifiers, then "jewels" can be read in Winterson as an undecideable signifier. There is a difference in socio-economic status between the lovers. Difference, hence desire, can be measured in economic and sexual terms. When Villanelle states that: "Josephine has most people's jewels" (p. 115) it is clearer (perhaps) in this context that jewels signifies wealth. Wealth then is also a phallic signifier in this text, a sign of difference and desire. Winterson's constructions of fetish objects with equivocal meanings could be said to foreground the fictionality, the artificiality or theatricality of the mono-symbolic penis-phallus semiotic nexus and its elevation as *the* imaginary signifier of desire. Lesbian desire is signified in *The Passion* in sexual and socio-economic terms. The earrings are given to Villanelle as a sign that the masked woman also desires her. Villanelle does not return them. Winterson also constructs penile and gold signifiers ambiguously as they operate between Villanelle and the villain. He keeps his money stuffed in his crotch. She wears a cod-piece to taunt him. In this novel some fetish objects operate

¹⁵ Kaplan, p. 286.

as signifiers of sexual and economic exchange, as trade, what Kaplan calls perverse transactions, substitutes for feelings. Feelings are signified in Winterson's novel through the trope of detachable hearts. I will return to these relationships and the stories of fetishism in detail shortly. Firstly I will detour through some psychoanalytic and other fictional discourses on bisexuality.

Bi-sexuality.

Villanelle's sexual desire in *The Passion* is signified as mobile and operates between herself and male and female others: "I am pragmatic about love and take pleasure with both men and women, but I have never needed a guard for my heart. My heart is a reliable organ" (p. 61). It should be noted that in this text Villanelle's heart is, according to her, her most valuable "thing" and is only lost to the lesbian lover. Sexually Villanelle is, self-admittedly and pragmatically, bi-partisan. In the period between 1896-1904, Freud arrived at the conclusion that all human beings were bisexually constituted. Freud's insistence on this constitutional bisexuality of *homo sapiens*, together with the precariousness of infantile sexual development, might have led one to expect from psychoanalytic discourses a spectrum of adult sexualities in which a multiplicity of characteristics such as masculine, feminine, active, passive, heterosexual and homosexual are variously conjoined. Malcolm Bowie suggests that "in such a spectrum, adult bisexuality might be expected to occupy a privileged place, as representing an unusual equilibrium between the homosexual and heterosexual passions of childhood and a fertile contact

with the primal polymorphousness of human desire"¹⁶ The difficulty for Freud of his own "discovery" of a "psychical bisexuality" (SE 9:157-66) was that it threatened to undermine the entire oedipal scenario as a psychological model of sexual difference, premised as it was on the conspicuous biological fact of possessing or not possessing a penis. Psychical bisexuality continued, for Freud, to "embarrass all our enquiries into the subject and make them harder to describe." In the posthumously published *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis* (1940) Freud was still constructing a "great antithesis" model of sexual difference: "we call everything that is strong and active male and everything that is weak and passive female" (p. 188). While Freud understood that a lasting heterosexual object-choice resolution of the oedipus complex was by no means a straightforward achievement, his descriptions of the routes by which the complex can be resolved nonetheless are marked by normativisation. From the original bisexual disposition, male children are expected to become masculine, female children feminine and all, in due course, adult heterosexuals. Homosexuality and bisexuality, while psychoanalytically intelligible as responses to the oedipal situation are unthinkable in orthodox Freudian terms as satisfactory solutions to it.

Within contemporary psychoanalytic thinking, bisexuality might provide a neutral seeming ground on which a gender-neutral model of the psyche might be constructed. Many feminists however have castigated this view as a facile denial of sexual difference. Freud has been accused of re-appropriating bisexuality under masculinity - defining it in masculine terms - and granting privilege to castration fears and male sexuality. In "The Laugh of the

¹⁶ Malcolm Bowie, "Bisexuality", *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, pp. 28-29

Medusa," Hélène Cixous calls for "another bisexuality" that would multiply "the effects of the inscription of desire over all parts of my body and the other body, indeed, this other bisexuality doesn't annul differences, but stirs them up, pursues them, increases them".¹⁷ Luce Irigaray remains skeptical about this seemingly utopian de-phallicisation and re-inscription. Her whole work is based on the notion that the sexual economy is monosexually phallogocentric. Bisexuality in this economic model is not a genuine option. Irigaray proceeds through a long detour of undermining phallo-logic and a concomitant and massive construction and revaluation of a "feminine" sexual economy. For Irigaray, in the present socio-symbolic system of meaning there is only one sex and that sex is male. Irigaray insists that you can't have a relation between one term. For her a revaluation of a "feminine" economy would constitute a second term and therefore the possibility of a dialogue between two terms. Irigaray argues that Cixous' concept of multiplying the effects of the inscription of desire over all parts of the female body would be tantamount, in Freudian terms, to multiplying the inscriptions of a "mutilated creature" or in Lacanian terms multiplying the effects of lacking the means of support to represent one's desire in the symbolic. What Irigaray means is that if there is only one privileged signifier of desire modelled on the penis, and woman is seen as a defective man i.e. castrated, then multiplying the effects of phallic desire all over women's bodies would inscribe "mutilation" all over her body not just her sex organs. What Irigaray wants is the symbolisation of a specifically "feminine" desire before the concept of bi-sexuality can even be

¹⁷ Hélène Cixous [1975], "The Laugh of the Medusa", trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *New French Feminisms*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), p. 254.

thought. Bowie, following Irigaray, also warns of the difficulties inherent in positing bisexuality as a model for sexuality *per se* at this time:

...the original material from which sexualities are made may well be bisexual, and bisexual conduct may well be an option for an increasing number of individuals, but the major problem is still that of understanding and counteracting the unjust privileges that Western societies still accord to the sexuality of the heterosexual male.¹⁸

Bowie points out that there have been moments when feminist and psychoanalytic views of bisexuality seemed about to converge fruitfully. Virginia Woolf produced both a proto-feminist polemic and an individual strain of bisexual and transexual literary fantasy within the intellectual context (i.e. the Bloomsbury group) of responsiveness to Freud's writing. It would be difficult to continue an analysis of *The Passion* without reference to Woolf's *Orlando*. There are certain intertextual resemblances that are noteworthy. *Orlando* was written in 1927, the same year as Freud's essay on fetishism and two years after his essay on the psychic consequences of anatomical differences between the sexes. Woolf dedicated this magical realist novel to Vita Sackville-West to whom she wrote: "But listen; suppose Orlando turns out to be Vita; and its all about you and the lusts of your flesh and the lure of your mind"¹⁹ Sackville-West delighted in going about London and the Continent dressed as a man, seducing women, and "getting away with it."

¹⁸ Bowie, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, pp. 30-31.

¹⁹ Virginia Woolf [1928], *Orlando, A Biography* (London: Vintage, 1990), p. vii.

Orlando is a story about a young man of the same name who grows up (over four centuries) to be a woman, or rather is "magically" transformed into a woman mid-way through the narrative. Woolf introduces Orlando at the start of the story as unequivocally "he" in relation to his anatomical sex: "He - for there could be no doubt of his sex . . ." (p.3). One could construe his phallic sadistic behaviour as "masculine": "[He] was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters" (p. 3). Although Woolf constructs Orlando as unequivocally male/ masculine she follows this description with a note of ambivalence: ". . . though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it" (p. 3). Orlando could be said to be a transvetite. Though male and masculine, he dressed in a "feminine" manner. Orlando wakes one day on another temporal plane, that is in another century, as a woman. However, it is not just any woman which Woolf's male character becomes. As a man Orlando has desired women; but as a woman Orlando also desires women. Woolf's subject has been transformed into a lesbian who nevertheless whips off her pearls and dresses as a man when she has to attend to business in London (p. 119). Woolf writes:

And as all of Orlando's loves had been women, now, through the culpable laggardry of the human frame to adapt itself to convention, though she herself was a woman, it was still a woman she loved; and if the consciousness of being the same sex had any effect at all, it was to quicken and deepen those feelings which she had had as a man (p. 103).

Penelope J. Engelbrecht writing in " 'Lifting Belly is a Language': The Postmodern Lesbian Subject" claims that Woolf's construction of the character

Orlando does not offer a "realistic lesbian Subjectivity."²⁰ For Engelbrecht, Orlando "textualized a kind of lesbianism embodied in theoretical, cumulative androgyny." By this she means that as a transsexual, Orlando mediated the patriarchal subject and object, but only sequentially, over the course of centuries, and that Woolf's text so successfully "splits" the lesbian into male and female subcharacters that the "lesbian Subjectivity" is deeply submerged. Each character represents the lesbian as "demi-man," not as woman. She complains that:

We have often relied uncritically on patriarchal modes of thought and a phallogocentric lexicon - sometimes subordinating them, sometimes reacting against them, but rarely functioning independently. For example, during the 1920s, Radclyffe Hall embodied her version of lesbian(ism) in a Stephen Gordon who reflected current psychological and sociological opinions of lesbians as espoused by Havelock Ellis and other patriarchal authorities. . . Similarly, Virginia Woolf's concurrent *Orlando*. . .²¹

Although the words "phallogocentric" and "phallogocentric" are evoked with frequency throughout this essay, there is no mention within the body of the text or the footnotes of Jacques Derrida who coined this term, although Engelbrecht does mention a debt to deconstruction. Neither is there an acknowledgement of Lacan's contribution to the concept of the speaking, desiring subject position in, and by, the symbolic order of language, or of the speaking "I" as inherently unstable. Engelbrecht appropriates the Lacanian

²⁰ Penelope J. Engelbrecht, "'Lifting Belly is a Language': The Postmodern Subject" *Feminist Studies* 16/1 (Spring 1990), pp. 85-113. Upper case letters, Engelbrecht.

²¹ Engelbrecht, p. 95.

speaking, naming "I" to the side of the lesbian subject, or rather to the side of two speaking lesbian subjects, without acknowledging that the lesbian "I" might be constituted in difference to the maternal (same female) body.

Engelbrecht asserts that: "Specifically, phallogocentric subjectivity relies on an essential visual distinction of binary (sexual) difference between subject and object (phallus/absence) which is inimical to lesbian(ism), because two lesbians display no such physical distinctions".²² This lack of difference, any difference, can not, according to a Lacanian reading, engender any subject at all.

Jacqueline Rose emphasises in her reading of Lacan that language simultaneously installs the subject in sexual difference, and sexual difference in the subject: "For Lacan, men and women are only ever in language. . . All speaking beings must line themselves up on one side or the other of this division, but anyone can cross over and inscribe themselves on the opposite side from that to which they are anatomically destined."²³ The division to which Rose refers is that of sexual difference (gender), but the division might be extrapolated to include sexuality difference (i.e. differences in sexual orientation). Rose's Lacanian reading particularly emphasises "the availability to all subjects of both positions in relation to that difference itself". Rose then reads bisexuality as standing for "the very uncertainty of sexual division itself and as inseparable from "the division and precariousness of human subjectivity" (Rose, pp. 12, 29). Of this dilemma Woolf writes that: "In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male and female likeness, while

²² Engelbrecht, p. 87.

²³ Rose, *Feminine Sexuality*, p. 49.

underneath the sex is the very opposite of what it is above. Of the complications and confusions which thus result every one has had experience." (*Orlando*, pp. 188-89). As previously stated, Freud also expresses uncertainty, in the face of feminist protests, over the fixity of hierarchical anatomical sex-distinctions. He writes that he is willing to agree that the majority of men fall far short of the masculine ideal. He adds that all individuals due to their bi-sexual [pre]disposition and cross gender inheritance: "combine in themselves both masculine and feminine characteristics, so that pure masculinity and femininity remain theoretical constructions of uncertain content" (SE 19: 258).

Mary Jacobus reads *Orlando* psychoanalytically in relation to the reader/text nexus. She states that "reading woman" becomes a form of autobiography or self-constitution that is finally indistinguishable from writing (woman). Putting a face on the text and putting a gender in it "keeps the male or female likeness" (in Woolf's words) while concealing that "vacillation from one sex to another" which both men and women must keep, or keep at bay, in order to recognise themselves as subjects at all.²⁴ If, according to Jacobus, there is no literal referent to begin with, the production of sexual difference can be regarded as textual, like the production of meaning. Jacobus is reading the textual constitution of woman as written, and that of the reader as read (gendered) by the text. Once we cease to see the origin of gender identity as anatomical or biological - as given - reading "woman" can be posed as a process of differentiation. In Freudian terms, the subject acquires both gender and subjectivity through the oedipal and castration complexes; in Lacanian

²⁴ Jacobus, "Reading Woman (Reading)", pp. 4-5.

terms, the subject's entry into the symbolic order, and hence the subject's gender, are determined by relation to the phallus and by taking up a predetermined position within language.²⁵ Jacobus continues that "in order to read as women, we have to be positioned as already read (and hence gendered)." What reads us is a signifying system that simultaneously produces difference (meaning) and sexual difference (gender).

Engelbrecht wishes to read for/ be read as having an unequivocal, unambiguous "realistic lesbian Subjectivity," an intersubjective, mutually desiring, two lesbian selves. However, it is never clear in Engelbrecht's writing how desire emerges between these two selves. While it would seem foolish to suggest that the penis as literal referent for the phallus operates in the relation female subject/other (female) self, the subject must take up a position in relation to some notion of the Lacanian phallus to be constituted as a desiring subject at all. If anatomical referents make no sense as signifiers of difference in lesbian desiring subjectivity, then some other object must operate textually and fantasmatically around which desire emerges. In de Lauretis' historically and culturally contextualised reading of *The Well of Loneliness*, which Engelbrecht dismisses along with *Orlando*, the heroine Stephen Gordon is read semiotically and culturally by herself and others (i.e. her mother) as "phallic/masculine." Her body, in the mirror is reflected back as hard, muscular, masculine. What she is read by de Lauretis as desiring, in herself and her female lovers, is the (ideal) Victorian "feminine" body. Gordon is lined up on the side of the masculine subject, regardless of what genitals she has. What she lacks, historically and culturally, is a symbolic

²⁵ See Rose, pp. 1-57.

order which would bear the meaning of her phallic body and the meaning of lesbian desire in the masculine mode.

For my reading de Lauretis' project is closer to Irigaray's in that she insists that the symbolic be re-structured to bear the meaning of specifically female desire(s). This imaginary/symbolic re-structuring might bear female desire in masculine mode (de Lauretis), or any number of "feminine" modes (Irigaray). What Irigaray means by "feminine" desire is the signification in the symbolic of the differences between mother and daughter, between women. De Lauretis is also working in this arena although, in the case of Hall's subject Stephen, de Lauretis is arguing that the symbolic order bears the inscription of the mother's (the "feminine") body. The daughter's female phallic body finds only "unspeakable" negation. Nevertheless the difference is told. Desire moves between two points. The difficulty with Engelbrecht's notion that difference can only be told in the symbolically hierarchised interval between male and female genitals misses the point. It is the valorisation of one term over the other, and the subsuming of the second into the first, (for Irigaray) that is the problem, not difference *per se*. Desire, in the Lacanian terms which Engelbrecht is utilising, can not emerge between two lesbian subjects who are signified as identical. There could be, as Irigaray would say, no difference between one term. As de Lauretis would say, these would merely be two women in the same bed. As far as Winterson de-represses the clitoris and elevates it to an equivalent symbolic position to the penis, one can say that Winterson's text enacts a dual symbolic system of sexual organ - signifiers. On the other hand, Winterson also constructs differences between women, between her lesbian lovers. Winterson like

Irigaray, de Lauretis, and Kristeva insist on at least dialogic terms. By constructing a "feminine" economy of desire (i.e. the lesbian relation in this case) Winterson puts another viable economy of desire for women (other than heterosexuality) into symbolic play. In both of Villanelle's relationships (i.e. to her lesbian lover and to Henri) difference, hence desire, is signified. In each pair both parties desire something in the other. Even in her relationship with the Cook an imaginary exchange takes place. Utopian though it might be within Irigaray's conceptualisation of the current socio-symbolic order, Winterson discursively constructs a fledgling bi-sexual symbolic order. The Venetian symbolic does bear the meaning of Villanelle's body in the masculine (her feet-phallus) as well as in the feminine (her detachable heart) mode. Like Woolf's *Orlando, The Passion* is engaged with transforming signifying systems for the female subject, in the process of which many ambiguities arise around the dichotomies masculine/ feminine, and hence the textual inscription of sexual difference shifts throughout the novel. The idea that the signifier of desire does not have to be the penis-phallus (i.e. the marker of difference between "men " and "women" which also assumes heterosexuality) is also opened up. I will now turn to the construction of the lesbian fantasy-phallus and other fetish fantasy scenarios.

Fetish stories in psychoanalysis.

Three of the oft-cited characteristic themes of classic narratives of Freudian fetishising subjects are scopophilic horror of maternal castration, disavowal, and substitution. Constructing imaginary horror stories for boys in his major essay on fetishism, Freud writes: "Probably no male human being is spared

the fright of castration at the sight of a female genital" (SE21-154). Freud provides the founding formulation for castration fantasies and their place in his narratives of the origins of sexed subjectivities. In Freud's scenario the little boy learns to fear castration only after he has seen the female genitals. Since until that moment he assumes, according to Freud, that everyone has a penis, woman's anatomical difference impresses him as a lack or absence. He disavows what he has seen until some later point, when he is threatened with castration if he persists in a forbidden activity. He then recalls and acknowledges the earlier spectacle, resolving the violent emotions it arouses in him through "horror of the mutilated creature or triumphant contempt for her," his sexual other (SE 19: 252). Louise Kaplan, writing in *Female Perversions*, asks us to consider what kinds of mental strategies would enable a perfectly sane, observant, curious, alert, intelligent boy to adopt such peculiar notions about the female genitals. From a Lacanian/feminist position one can say that boys are born into a culture in which such fantasies of female genitals already exist. In reading Henri's fantasy fetish scenario from Winterson's text, I will return to this point.

Elizabeth Grosz asserts that fetishism, in psychoanalytic terms, is a refusal to acknowledge, a disavowal of, maternal castration.²⁶ Grosz, as do most feminist readers of Freud, claims that in Freud's understanding, it is a response to the mother's lack of a (male) genital open only to the boy - the girl having no motivation to sustain the fantasy of the maternal phallus. However in an addition to his epistemophilic drive theory in 1920, Freud claimed that it was possible to speak of a female castration scenario insofar as

²⁶ Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, p. 57.

both male and female children form a theory that women no less than men originally had a penis, but lost it by castration (SE 7: 195). On this reading girls as well as boys can endow the mother with an imaginary phallus. However, in general Freud constructs castration and fetishistic fantasmatic scenarios in his writing in male terms. Wishing to deny the possibility of his own impending castration the boy disavows what he has seen. Disavowal entails both simultaneously affirming (the mother has been castrated) and denying (if she is I might be too) his scopophilic observations. He replaces the missing genital with a substitute, a fetish. In the sense that the maternal phallus is missing, the male subject accepts castration; in the sense that he substitutes an object (shoe, stocking, fur, hair, etc.) he denies it. In his essay "Fetishism" (1927) Freud disavows that fetishism can have ground in the separation of the child from the mother's body (at birth) and insists that fetishism be grounded in the idea of castration fright at the sight of female genitals (SE 21: 155). As with most of his writing however, ambiguities arise between his various narratives of fetishism. For instance in the *Three Essays* he merely states that the substitute object "bears an assignable relation to the person it replaces and preferably to that person's sexuality" (SE 7: 153). "Separation from the maternal body" and "relation to the person it replaces" have been taken as points of departure for feminist re-writings of fetishistic scenarios which I will explore along with Winterson's writing of lesbian (and male) subjects.

Case history narratives of fetishism typically concern male analysands. Documented cases of female fetishism such as Lacan's teacher Clérambault's stories of female silk fetishists were, as Emily Apter suggests, usually called

something else in order to protect some exclusive male prerogative.²⁷ Apter makes a case for maternal fetishism in her analysis of Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document*. This form of "maternal" fetishism, told from the mother's perspective, fetishises the separation of the child from the maternal realm through the collection of signs of that separation. e.g. baby memorabilia. Louise Kaplan argues that all perversions are products of gender stereotyping and, as such, are caricatured representations of femininity and masculinity. Kaplan insists on reading perversions as sex specific - fetishism, transvestism, masochism, sadism, voyeurism for males and kleptomania, homovestism, extreme submissiveness, and anorexia for females. Kaplan defines fetishism as a sexual scenario in which the basic requirement or obligatory precondition for sexual arousal is that the fetishist have in his possession an inanimate object - a leather boot, a lace handkerchief, a black corset - or that he obtain a sexual partner who is willing to wear the inanimate object. Variations, according to Kaplan, include wearing the fetish himself or fetishising a part of the sexual other's body - breasts, ankles, earlobes, a special shine on the nose. Kaplan also documents hair and fur fetishism as popular nineteenth century perversions, now anachronistic. Despite the doubts from feminist psychoanalytic theorists, such as Marjorie Garber, that quibbling over the exclusion of female perverts in the history of psychoanalytic discourses is tantamount to a form of fetish or perversion envy, Emily Apter argues that these omissions: "pandered to a tendentious depreciation of the feminine erotic imaginary typical of the male medical establishment at the turn of the century."²⁸ Several feminist theorists have examined the question of female fetishism in discourses on lesbian sexed

²⁷ Emily Apter, "Perversion", *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, p. 312.

²⁸ Apter, "Perversion," p. 312.

subjectivity. Naomi Schor, in her analysis of George Sand; Teresa de Lauretis in her examination of Radclyffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness*, and Elizabeth Grosz in her essay "Lesbian Fetishism?" all suggest that there can be a form of female fetishism and that lesbianism might provide its most manifest expression. In "Lesbian Fetishism?" Elizabeth Grosz initially expresses ambivalence about whether the existence of a perversion such as fetishism in women is possible:

While in one sense I do not want to disagree with this claim - in psychoanalytic terms it makes no sense for women to be fetishists, and it is unimaginable that women would get gratification from the use of inanimate objects or mere partial objects *alone* - in another, more strategic and political sense, it seems plausible to suggest, as Naomi Schor does in her analysis of George Sand, that there can be a form of female fetishism and to claim, further, that lesbianism provides its most manifest and tangible expression.²⁹

According to Schor's reading of traditional psychoanalytic rhetoric female fetishism is an oxymoron.³⁰ Female fetishism, according to Schor, is invisible because it is "naturalised" as the *norm* of human sexuality. For her, the Freudian denial of female fetishism establishes as *natural* the female desire that the male body contain the phallus. What Schor is getting at is Freud's claims that all girls suffer from penis envy and henceforth desire one or a substitute for the one that they don't have. In other words all women fetishise the penis that the man has. In fact Freud did make one exception to

²⁹ Grosz, "Lesbian Fetishism?", p. 39. Emphasis Grosz.

³⁰ Naomi Schor, "Female Fetishism: The Case of George Sand". *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 365.

his narratives on predominantly male fetishism. He asserts that all women are clothes fetishists. He says:

In the world of everyday experience, we can observe that half of humanity must be classed among the clothing fetishists. All women, that is, are clothes fetishists. Dress plays a puzzling role in them. It is a question again of a repression of the same drive, this time, however, in the passive form of allowing oneself to be seen, which is repressed by clothes, and on account of which, clothes are raised to a fetish. Only now we understand why even the most intelligent women behave defenselessly against the demands of fashion. For them, clothes take the place of parts of the body, and to wear the same clothes means only to be able to show what others can show, means only that one can find in her everything that one can expect from women.³¹

This statement attributed to Freud underscores Naomi Schor's reading of female fetishism in the Freudian sense as oxymoronic. In the same manner in which Freud constructs masochism as marked only in men - remarkable in man in that masochism is "truly feminine" - he disavows fetishism in women only insofar as it is all one can expect of women. It is unremarkable; all women use clothes to cover over and display what they can not display - the superior male organ. Female castration/ lack/penis envy is naturalised by Freud in this text through the idea of universal female fashion fetishism. Little girls, according to Freud, "notice the penis of a brother or playmate, strikingly visible and of large proportions, at once recognise it as the superior counterpart of their own small and inconspicuous organ, and from that time

³¹ Louis Rose, ed. and trans., "Freud and Fetishism: Previously Unpublished Minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society", (*Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 57 1988): 156.

forward fall a victim to envy for the penis" (SE 19: 252). She turns away from her original object choice, the mother- who also doesn't possess this valued organ - and henceforth desires the one that the father (or the man) "has". Of course, the little girl can't have this one either and converts her penis-envy into "a wish for a child." Freud however, does signal another option for women, the masculinity complex, which he claims may "put great difficulties in the way of their regular development towards femininity" (SE 19: 253). In a then surprising move for an analyst who generally has nothing to say about female fetishism, he begins to describe a process for women in which he uses the characteristic fetishist word "disavowal:"

Or again, a process may set in which I should like to call a 'disavowal', a process which in the mental life of children seems neither uncommon nor very dangerous but which in an adult would mean the beginning of a psychosis. Thus a girl may refuse to accept the fact of being castrated, may harden herself in the conviction that she does possess a penis, and may subsequently be compelled to behave as though she were a man (SE 19: 253).

What begins to emerge already in feminist readings of the gaps and contradictions in Freud's fictions of fetishism is not one, but two theories of female fetishism. This point is crucial to my readings insofar as Winterson constructs almost as many different fetishistic fantasmatic scenarios as she constructs subjects who inhabit them. I will return to female fashion fetishists, and what is concealed in clothes closets in relation to Villanelle's lesbian affair with the masked woman. There are even multiple possible narrative pathways for male fetishists indicated in a "button," a Lacanian *point*

de capiton, in Freud's narratives (e.g. disavowed homo-eroticism). The paternal body as pleasure body, not phallus, is denied in Freud's narratives and returns in Henri's scenario's of fetish cake-dicks. These threads I will also follow in relation to some of Winterson's characters, namely the cook and Henri. Returning to the scenarios of lesbian fetishism, Elizabeth Grosz in "Lesbian Fetishism?" takes Freud's point about female disavowal as a point of departure for constructing a lesbian scenario. She compares the male fetishist to the woman with a "masculinity complex" by way of their common disavowal of castration:

Freud suggests that although the masculinity complex may not necessarily imply lesbianism, nevertheless many lesbians can be classified under this label. Where the so-called "normal" path to femininity involves accepting her castration and transferring her libidinal cathexes from the mother to the father (via penis envy), with the accompanying transformation of her leading sexual organ from the clitoris to the vagina (with its associated position of passivity), the woman suffering from the masculinity complex retains the clitoris as her leading sexual organ and the position of activity it implies.³²

It is this empowerment of the clitoris as phallus, and the substitution of an external object which differentiates the lesbian fetishist in Grosz' terms from the narcissist and the hysteric, both of whom phallicise or fetishise their own bodies thus "not really preserving the fetishistic structure of the displacement of phallic value from the mother's body to an object outside of one's self" (p.51). The woman with a "masculinity complex" takes an external love-object

³² Grosz, "Lesian Fetishism?", p. 50.

- another woman - and is able to function as if she *has*, rather than *is*, the phallus. As with the fetishist, this implies a splitting of the ego, but Grosz remains adamant that the female fetishist would not be satisfied with a partial or inanimate object, but rather chooses another subject. Grosz can be read as denying, like Lacan, Clérambault's female masturbating silk-fetishists because he could not make silk equal penis-phallus. In Freudian terms "silk" might involve the subject with the "feminine" body.

Lacan does acknowledge Irigaray's assertion that the phallus indeed can take on the value of a fetish. In moving from penis to phallus, from literal anatomy to the unconscious and representation, Lacan addressed the question of fetishism in relation to the phallus as the signifier or mark of desire.

Commenting on Freud's insistence on "the absence in women of fetishism," he notes that the "imaginary motive for most male perversions is the desire to preserve the phallus which involved the subject in the mother." For Lacan, fetishism represents "the virtually manifest case of this desire." He concludes that this desire, that is the desire to preserve the maternal phallus, "has a different fate in the perversions which she [woman] presents."³³ Again following Freud, Lacan locates both this desire and this perversion in "the homosexual woman." For Lacan it is the lesbian who follows a path of desire analogous to fetishism in that she "excels in relation to what is lacking to her." He takes this as a sign of the path leading from feminine sexuality to desire. Majorie Garber concludes that it is "the trajectory of desire which is at issue here - the position of the "homosexual woman" as not the object but the subject of desire."³⁴ "Having" the phallus, having the fetish, becomes a matter

³³ Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality*, p. 96,

³⁴ Marjorie Garber, "Fetish Envy", *October* 54 (Fall 1990) p. 47.

of one's position in the symbolic register and in the economy of desire. According to Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalytic narratives men have the phallus; men have the fetish. What is at stake, according to Garber, is the ownership of desire. Several lesbian feminists, including Grosz, de Lauretis and Diane Hamer, see a direct correspondence between feminism as "a political movement based on the refusal to accept the social truth of men's superiority over women, and lesbianism as "a psychic refusal of the 'truth' of women's castration."³⁵ Hamer explicitly reappropriates, in a feminist perspective, Freud's notion of the masculinity complex in women. When she attempts to define lesbian desire, in Lacanian terms, she runs into the castration complex:

Classically, lesbians are thought to pretend possession of the phallus . . . and are thus aligned, albeit fraudulently, on the side of masculinity. In this rather simplistic account lesbian desire becomes near impossible; desire cannot exist *between lesbians*, since they are both on the same side of desire, or, if a lesbian does experience desire, it is bound to be towards a feminine subject who could only desire her back as though she were a man. However, as I have suggested, lesbianism is less a claim to phallic possession (although it may be this too) than it is a refusal of the meanings attached to castration. As such it is a refusal of any easy or straightforward allocation of masculine and feminine positions around the phallus. Instead it suggests a much more fluid and flexible relationship to the positions around which desire is organized.³⁶

³⁵ Grosz, "Lesbian Fetishism?", p. 52.

³⁶ Diane Hamer, "Significant Others: Lesbianism and Psychoanalytic Theory", *Feminist Review* 34 (Spring 1990), p. 147.

De Lauretis, while not entirely disagreeing with the notion of "refusing the meanings attached to castration" finds this solution problematic. Within a Lacanian framework, symbolic castration and the phallus as signifier of desire go hand in hand. For de Lauretis, to reject the notion of castration (to refuse to rethink its terms) is "to find ourselves without symbolic means to signify desire."³⁷ In her essay, "Perverse Desire," she reappropriates, following Hamer, castration and the phallus for lesbian subjectivity in the perspective of Freud's negative theory of perversion. She proposes a model of perverse desire on the one perversion that Freud often insisted was not open to women - fetishism. What de Lauretis refuses is the unquestioned Lacanian assumption of positions in desire allocated by the paternal phallus. She reads against the implicitly normative heterosexual codings and meanings of sexual difference (masculinity and femininity) employed in the Lacanian model. On the question of perversion, de Lauretis states that:

if perversion is understood with Freud as a deviation of the sexual drive (*Trieb*) from the path leading to the reproductive object, that is to say, if perversion is merely another path taken by the drive in its cathexis or choice of object, rather than a pathology (although, like every other aspect of sexuality it may involve pathogenic elements), then a theory of perversion would serve to articulate a model of perverse desire, where perverse means not pathological but rather non-heterosexual or non-normatively heterosexual.³⁸

³⁷ Teresa De Lauretis, "Perverse Desire: The Lure of the Mannish Lesbian", *Australian Feminist Studies* 13 (Autumn 1991), p. 17.

³⁸ De Lauretis, "Perverse Desire", p. 16.

What de Lauretis is proposing is that what a lesbian wants in a woman and in herself, is not a penis but the whole or part of the female body or something metonymically related to it such as physical, intellectual, emotional attributes, stance, attitude, appearance or self-representation, hence the importance of performance, clothing or costume. This lesbian, according to de Lauretis, knows she is not a man, does not have the paternal phallus, but that does not mean she has no means to signify desire. The lesbian fantasy phallus for de Lauretis is simultaneously what signifies lesbian desire and what the lesbian subject desires in a woman.

In theorising the signification of the fetish in lesbian desires, de Lauretis insists that the lesbian subject knows full well that she is not a man and that she does not have the paternal phallus. Nor she adds would her lover want it. But this, asserts de Lauretis, does not preclude the signification of the lesbian subject's desire or the signification of what her lover might desire in her. De Lauretis constructs the notion of the lesbian fantasy fetish. She writes that the fetish in this case is what signifies the lesbian subject's desire and that it is both an imaginary or fantasmatic "object," a cathected signifier, whose erotic meaning derives from its placement in a subjective fantasy scenario. Furthermore de Lauretis defines this fetish fantasy object as deriving its meaning in an historical context of cultural *and* subcultural discourses and representations. For example she writes that: "It could be the masquerade of masculinity and femininity of the North American butch-femme lesbian subculture, or what Newton calls the 'male body drag' of

Stephen Gordon in the *Well of Loneliness*. . . "39 She argues that it might very well be the image of a white flower.

The object and the signifier of desire are not anatomical entities as are the genitals with which they are usually associated. Elizabeth Grosz argues that, in spite of Lacan's claims, the phallus is not a neutral term functioning equally for both sexes, positioning them both in the symbolic order. The valorisation of the penis-phallus and the relegation of female sexual organs to the castrated category of lack are, for Grosz, effects of a socio-political system that also enables the phallus to function as "the signifier of signifiers," giving the child access to a (sexual) identity and a speaking position within culture.

In Winterson's text even male subjects such as Henri in his pursuit of the elusive Napoleonic phallus imagines that the penis might be just an organ of pleasure: " He said I was lucky, that I would be working for Bonaparte himself, and for one brief, bright moment I imagined a training as a pastry cook building delicate towers of sugar and cream" (p. 6). Luce Irigaray writes that: "When the penis itself becomes simply a means of pleasure, indeed a means of pleasure among men, *the phallus loses its power*."⁴⁰ Of the semiotic obfuscation of penis and phallus, and in answer to Lacan's assertion that the phallus can play its role only when veiled, Jane Gallop counters:

³⁹ Teresa de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love,; Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indianana University Press, 1994), pp. 228-229.

⁴⁰ Luce Irigaray, "When The Goods get Together" in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), p. 108. Emphasis Irigaray.

To clear all this up is to reveal/unveil the Father's Phallus as a mere 'penis', as one signifier among others, prey to the contingencies of the letter, of the materiality of signification, alienated from the referent.⁴¹

For de Lauretis the object and the signifier of desire are fantasmatic entities, objects or signs that have somehow become attached to a desiring fantasy and for that reason may be inappropriate to signify those anatomical entities. Even Freud admits that the fetish (such as feet or hair) was inappropriate for sexual purposes (SE 7: 153). Furthermore de Lauretis in her interpretation of fetishism adds that the fetish is precarious - not fixed or the same for every subject, and even unstable in one subject. What this suggests is that the fetish signifier is mobile and temporally changeable.

De Lauretis states that if there is no privileged object of desire, and that if objects of desire are substitutes for objects of desire, then desire nevertheless with its movement between subject and object is founded on difference - "the difference and separateness of one from the other."⁴² De Lauretis is re-reading Freud's assertion from the *Three Essays* that "the sexual instinct is in the first instance independent of its object" (SE7: 148), through Bersani and Dutoits's speculations that "the objects of our desires are always substitutes for the objects of our desires,"⁴³ and Lacan's idea of desire grounded in difference. What signifies desire for de Lauretis is a sign which both elides

⁴¹ Jane Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction*, (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 99.

⁴² De Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*, p. 229.

⁴³ Bersani and Dutoit, *The Forms of Violence*, p. 66.

and remarks that separation in describing "both the object and its absence."⁴⁴ This sign, for de Lauretis, is the fetish.

De Lauretis takes her meaning of the term "object" from Laplanche and Pontalis rather than from Freud's use - for example in "object-choice, "object of the drive." De Lauretis' re-reading of the term "object" designates it as a sign, that is as an object *plus* its absence. It is a sign in that it stands for the lost object. This psychoanalytic meaning of object can be traced through "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality."⁴⁵ In this essay Laplanche and Pontalis are re-tracing Freud's theoretical model of desire which they call "the Freudian fiction." This model of desire for Laplanche and Pontalis is an analytic construction or fantasy which tries to cover over the moment of separation between "before" and "after" while still containing both. This is the mythical moment between the pacification of need and the fulfillment of desire, between the two stages represented by real experience and its hallucinatory revival, between the object that satisfies and the sign which describes both the object and its absence. Laplanche and Pontalis term this a "mythical moment at which hunger and sexuality meet in a common origin."⁴⁶ In the scenes between the lesbian lovers - which I will analyse in detail later - Winterson designates this space, this interval or moment, "the silent space which is the pain of never having enough" (p. 96), "the silent space full of starving children" (p. 96), a space in which "the greedy body clamours for more" (p. 67). What Laplanche and Pontalis want to make clear

⁴⁴ De Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*, p. 229.

⁴⁵ Jean Laplanche and Jean-Baptiste Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality" in *Formations of Fantasy*, eds. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986). pp. 5-34.

⁴⁶ Laplanche and Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality" , p. 25. Also see de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*, p. 230.

is the distinction between the real object (the milk in the first stage) and the sign (the second stage hallucinated breast). This sign describes the now lost or absent object (the breast with milk). De Lauretis interprets this reading as meaning that in the first stage the child is with the mother; in the second it is alone. In the second stage the fantasy and desire (loss) are instantiated together, by separation and in memory (fantasy). In de Lauretis' reading of perverse lesbian desire it is not the lost object(s) *par excellence* (the breast with milk, or womb) that is at stake but something that is nonetheless a purely fantasmatic object - a fetish. Freud himself concedes that girls can imagine a lost (maternal) penis i.e. an *entirely* imaginary object. What de Lauretis is reading is Radclyffe Hall's construction of a lesbian subject mortified by her lack of, hence desire for, a Victorian ideal "feminine" body - a body like the (m)other's. But this female body is, for my reading of de Lauretis' narratives of perverse lesbian desire, a representation, a sign of woman - a purely fantasy body/object of desire.

If the Lacanian term "castration" designates the paternal prohibition of access to the (m)other's body with its fantasy of unity, and if, as de Lauretis reasons, the term "phallus" designates the sign that signifies the subject's desire to recapture plenitude through (hetero)sexual union, then the notion of castration and some idea of phallus are necessary to an understanding of the forms of subjectivity. While psychoanalytic fictions insist that the paternal phallus alone is the signifier of desire (presuming heterosexuality), Bersani and Dutoit say it is a fantasy - phallus, i.e. an *entirely fantasmatic object*. An entirely fantasmatic object is conceptually more similar to Freud's maternal penis (the fetish object *par excellence*) in that it is an object, a sign, for which

there is no original lost object. It is rather an originally lost object, a Baudrillardian object (a simulacrum) without an original.

What emerges out of this long digression through psychoanalytic stories of fetishism is the possibility that fetishist fantasmatic scenarios might be read as just that - i.e. multiple stories. The fetish as sign might signify, for any individual subject, the absence of, hence desire for: (i) the imaginary maternal body; (ii) the imaginary paternal body; (iii) the entirely imaginary maternal penis; (iv) the entirely imaginary paternal phallus, and so on. It may tell the story of the lack, of and desire for, symbolic representations of power (gold).

I shall argue that Winterson imaginatively constructs both female and male subjects with significant fetishistic investments and scenarios, often to comical effect. The name Villanelle is surely a punning construction of a French feminine pronominally signified, predominantly understood as masculine, villian - as well as a poetic form. Villanelle the Venetian says: "I don't hate the French. My father likes them. They've made his business thrive with their craving for foolish cakes" (p. 53). Henri, as an army chef, develops a passion for "confectionary towers" (cake-dicks or pleasure-penises) as his investment in the Napoleonic (father's) phallus begins to falter. One might argue that Winterson's subjects are constructed with vested interests in a plethora of objects which may or may not resemble maternal and/or paternal imaginary phalli or both (for instance fan-shaped boatmen's feet), as well as in male and female bodies, bodily part-objects, and items of clothing not always necessarily in a hetero-sexual order. For instance, the

cook is constructed with an inordinate passion to know and not to know what is under Villanelle's cod-piece. Inasmuch as it could be - from his point of view in (mis)taking Villanelle for a boy - a penis, his scopic horror in this imaginary scene is not so much related to female castration but to (his) disavowed male homo-erotic desire. Henri invests imaginary wholeness (with the maternal body) in Villanelle's red-hair and boots, particularly in moments of psychic and bodily danger. These signs for him mean safety. Villanelle says at one point: "I'm responsible and all the red hair in the world and all the money I have won't stop him hurting you" (p. 139). The difference between, hence desire for, the lesbian lovers is signified on both sides by various objects and bodily parts (e.g. earrings, detachable hearts, Villanelle's magical feet, clothes). Each character imaginarily lacks something, each (mis)takes it, invests desire fetishistically, in the other. In my readings of *The Passion* I will tease out these various fantasmatic scenes of both male and female Winterson subjects and the fantasy fetish signs through which their desires are signified. In this section I will return to various points in the psychoanalytic stories of fetishism and follow narrative pathways suggested by Winterson's construction of individual subjects and their specific scenarios.

Henri: Foot and hair fetishes.

Winterson signals something about Henri in the first few pages. After he has left home to join the Napoleonic forces he says: "I was homesick from the start. I missed my mother" (p. 6). Throughout *The Passion*, the male subject Henri is constructed by Winterson as having a growing attachment to

Villanelle's hair and a certain fascination, almost obsession, with her feet. At least he becomes determined to discover what is hidden in or by her boots, which she never removes. Henri says: ". . . there was something I wanted too; why had she never taken her boots off? Not even while we stayed with the peasants in Russia? Not even in bed?" (p. 109). Both these passions - with Villanelle's bright red hair and the contents of her boots - follow upon his realisation that Napoleon does not necessarily have the (paternal) phallus. Henri says: "I saw a mirror of my own longing and understood for the first time my own need for a little father that had led me this far" (p. 81). Henri is twice rescued by Villanelle, once from the icy wastes of Russia where the soldiers have followed Napoleon in his futile attempt to defeat the Czar, and once by walking on the canal towing their boat after the oars have been lost in the altercation with the cook. It is at these moments when what might be read as classical Freudian, late nineteenth century, male fetishist objects/signifiers, such as hair and feet, become so salient for him. In a 1910 footnote to the *Three Essays*, Freud specifically mentions hair and feet as (male) fetish objects, paying particular attention to the olfactory significance of both: "Both the feet and hair are objects with a strong smell which have been exalted into fetishes after the olfactory sensation has become unpleasurable and been abandoned" (SE 7: 155). In his later essay on fetishism, he has abandoned his thesis of the (repressed) pleasure of smelling in favour of scopophilic observations of castrated female genitals. In the same set of 1910 footnotes in which he introduces olfactory pleasures as regards the choice of a fetish, Freud also says nothing about "castrated" female genitals. He notes that, as well as the foot: "The shoe or slipper is a corresponding symbol of the *female* genitals" (SE 7: 155, emphasis Freud).

Winterson constructs a male subject with specific and special interests in both (female) hair and feet. In the scene in which Henri looks up after he has killed the cook and sees Villanelle towing their boats to safety, he says: "Her boots lay neatly one by the other. Her hair was down. I was in the red forest and she was leading me home" (p. 129).

For Henri, Villanelle's red hair operates as a significant and repetitive fetish object. Following the scenes in which Villanelle rescues him from Napoleon's folly, Villanelle has sex with Henri. This sexual encounter is initiated by the heroine who takes charge of the situation. Henri, it is revealed doesn't know how. This scene is remembered frequently by Henri after he is imprisoned. It is always the same moment in the scene that he remembers. What signifies this moment for Henri is: "Her hair as she bent over me, red with streaks of gold, her hair on my face and chest and looking up at her through her hair. She let it fall over me and I felt I was lying in the long grass, safe." (p. 103). In his 1927 essay "Fetishism" Freud also suggests something about the positioning of the subject as well as the choice of fetish object - a movement from the bottom to the top, a certain posture, a glance upwards:

One would expect that the organs or objects selected as substitutes for the penis whose presence is missed in the woman would be such as act as symbols for the penis in other respects. This may happen occasionally, but is certainly not the determining factor. It seems rather that when the fetish comes to life, so to speak, some process has been suddenly interrupted - it reminds one of the abrupt halt made by memory in traumatic amnesias. In the case of the fetish, too, interest is held up at a certain point - what is possibly the last impression

received before the uncanny traumatic one is preserved as a fetish, or part of it, to the circumstances that the inquisitive boy used to *peer up* the woman's legs towards her genitals. (SE 21:149).

This "looking up" at Villanelle through "her hair" places Henri in a classical Freudian position in a classical male fantasmatic scenario, and with a classical Freudian fetish - hair. Finally incarcerated on the prison- island for murdering the Cook, Henri muses: "I am still in love with her. Not a day breaks, but that I think of her, and when the dogwood turns red in winter I stretch out my hands and imagine her hair" (p. 157).

Kaja Silverman, reading Freud and marginal male subjectivities, describes the classical fetishist as "a man who remains incapable of accepting woman's lack, and who continues to disavow what he has seen."⁴⁷ The fetishist might substitute for the missing penis an adjacent object - a shoe, a garment, another part of the female anatomy. It should also be noted that Freud was struck by the idea that the fetish object was something other than a straightforward phallic symbol. A high-heeled shoe or a whip might suffice as a fetish. For Freud, the phallic shape was never the *deciding* factor in the choice of object. Typical Freudian fetishes might include shoes and boots, other leather goods, a fur piece, a corset, a velvet bathrobe, a rubber apron, lace underwear, pink satin slippers or an athletic support-belt. Despite the obvious "feminine" characteristics of these fetishistic objects, Freud, according to Louise Kaplan, was leading to the "startling proposition" that the fetish does not represent a

⁴⁷ Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, p. 13.

penis but "a substitute for a penis." The pervert does not model his fetish however on the basis of just any chance penis. Freud writes:

but... a particular and quite special penis that has been extremely important in early childhood but had later been lost. That is to say, it should normally have been given up, but the fetish is precisely designed to preserve it from extinction. To put it more plainly, the fetish is a substitute for the woman's (the mother's) penis that the little boy once believed in and - for reasons familiar to us - does not want to give up (SE 21: 152).

With the fetish firmly in place in the classic Freudian scenario woman then constitutes no threat to the male fetishist subject because her difference or lack has been psychically erased. However, although the fetish conceals female lack, its presence also signifies the male subject's knowledge of that lack. Majorie Garber describes the Freudian male fetishist as someone who both believes in the "reality" of castration and refuses to believe it. "*Je sais bien,....mais quand même.. .*" says the little boy in Octave Mannoni's example: "I know, but all the same. . ." Fetishism is a compromise between castration and its denial. The fetishist split always preserves the two positions. If there were ever a decision in favour of one of the two positions there would be no need to construct a fetish.⁴⁸ Both Silverman and Garber argue that classical Freudian male fetishism is both a substitution and a displacement (Garber) or a substitution and a projection (Silverman). In other words, the male subject projects loss or castration onto another body- the female body - as a defense against knowledge of his own castration or lack (insufficiency). Kaplan states

⁴⁸ Garber, "Fetish Envy", p 48.

it more bluntly: "...the reasons the little boy does not want to give up his earlier beliefs about his mother's genitals have more to do with the boy's fantasies, wishes, and anxieties than with the mother's genital insufficiencies" (p. 49). For Silverman, reading Kristeva, there is a loss which precedes the subject's entry into language and the retroactive constitution of that imaginary loss as penile castration anxiety. This loss is the male subject's separation from the maternal body. This, as has been pointed out by many feminists, is already implicit in Freud's denial that fetishism is concerned with separation from the maternal body.

In "Fetishism," Freud is at great pains to anchor fetishism to female lack - to establish fetishism as a male defense against the female condition of castration - "the wound to her narcissism" (SE 19: 253). However, in this same paper he uses the adjective "uncanny" to describe the spectacle of woman's castration. In his essay on the "uncanny" he describes this sensation as "something familiar and old-established [in the mind] ... which has become alienated from it through the process of repression" (SE 17: 241). The male subject experiences woman's wound as an assault upon his own subjectivity, a threat of like retribution. The violence, "horror of the mutilated creature," of this reaction and the extremity of the measures which must be taken to neutralise it suggest to Silverman that the image of woman is uncanny because it also reflects the male subject's own disavowed lack.

Rereading Freud through these feminist theories of lack as detachment from the imaginary maternal body, it might be said that it is not that the little boy looks up and sees that the mother lacks a penis, but that he looks up and sees

that he has become separated from the mother's body. Why Freud did not come to the conclusion that looking up at "feminine" hair imaged the (male) child at the maternal breast, or that an obsession with "feminine" feet imaged a crawling (male) child - in either case separating from the mother's body with attendant anxieties - is indeed puzzling. When Villanelle and Henri first become lovers, Villanelle covers him with her body. He looks up at her hair and he becomes safe again (in the red forest) - re-attached imaginarily to the female (m)other's body. Apart from Villanelle's hair, her feet are also salient objects for Henri. When Villanelle asks Henri to steal back her heart from the masked woman, he asks by way of exchange to see her feet. Henri is determined that "on [his] arrival in her enchanted city to find out more about these boatmen and their boots" (p. 109). Henri could be said to have a fetishistic investment in boots, particularly Villanelle's. She finally reveals her non-detachable webbed toes to him when she removes her boots to rescue them from the enraged cook. Villanelle's feet, boots, and hair as significant fetish objects come together for Henri when he is in danger after having killed the villain. Villanelle finally reveals the very thing that Henri's substitute objects stand for, the maternal body/paternal phallus- her female boatman's feet - the Venetian signifier of desire, power and privilege. In his moment of both having committed a murder and its imminent discovery by the law Henri says:

We hid the boats in a stinking passage where the garbage tugs go and Villanelle put her boots back on. It's the only time I've ever seen her feet and they are not what I'd usually call feet. She unfolds them like a fan and folds them in on themselves in the same way. I wanted to touch but my hands were covered in

blood. We left him where he lay, face up, his heart beside him, and Villanelle wrapped me to her as we walked, to comfort me and to conceal some of the blood on my clothes. When we passed anyone she threw me against the wall and kissed me passionately, blocking all sight of my body. In this way we made love (p. 136).

Henri's fetishistic investments in Villanelle's red hair, and her boots which contain the magical feet, could be read as signifying imaginary (maternal) safety as an alternative to his initial investment in the Napoleonic (paternal) phallus which has led him into the sub-zero winter Russia and almost certainly an immanent death from cold and starvation. Henri's fetish objects are classic male ones, but it is not just sexual arousal that is at stake in his relation to Villanelle. It is the integrity of his bodily and subjective self, his life, that is compromised. It is during Henri's moments of maximum castration anxiety, that is when he is in danger of losing his life, not just his penis, that Villanelle comes to his rescue. In these textually fantasmatic moments her red forest of hair and her boots, which she removes only to walk on water, appear as metonymically displaced signifiers of the imaginary maternal body which incorporates the (traditional) paternal phallus. In terms of the construction of Henri's fetishistic subjective structure this means "coming home," "being led home" or "feeling safe." In a Lacanian sense, the male subject Henri in this text might be read as not having acceded to desire, resigned himself to lack/desire as interminable. He remains at the conclusion of the novel "in love," incarcerated in the island-prison re-playing continuously in fantasy the moment of incorporation into Villanelle's red forest/body.

The Cook and Cod-pieces.

Jacques Derrida, who also reads Freud on fetishistic scenarios, observes that it may be possible "to reconstruct from Freud's generalization a 'concept' of fetish that can no longer be contained within the traditional opposition *Ersatz/non Ersatz*, or even within opposition at all".⁴⁹ In other words, in Derridian terms, there are examples of clothing fetishes that are "undecidable" and render the wearer's gender unknowable. Winterson's construction of a female transvestite subject with a fetish for codpieces and Freud's narrativising of a male athletic support-belt fetishistic subject might both be considered within these fantasmatic scenarios. Marjorie Garber's central argument in "Fetish Envy" is that fetishism is a kind of theatre of display - an enactment of the fetishistic scenario in which Freud's "penis", the anatomical object, though understood through Lacan's "phallus," the structuring mark of desire, becomes literalised as a stage prop, a detachable object. No one has the phallus. What Garber is reading is the fetishising of cross-dressing (transvestism) in Shakespearean writing and Renaissance theatrical representation. Her main focus is on the fetish object which signifies both female and male lack *par excellence* - the codpiece. Winterson constructs a female subject Villanelle who also has a vested interest in wearing this particular item of clothing. On the other hand one might say that the cook, for whom Villanelle and her cod-pieces are objects of desire, is constructed subjectively by the writer as displaying more than a passing interest in the heroine's predilection for wearing cod-pieces. In "Fetishism" Freud narrates a story of a male fetishist with an infatuation for athletic

⁴⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, p. 232.

support garments which double as bathing drawers. In the fantasmatic scene which Freud constructs for his male patient he also suggests that the garment might signify male castration (lack) as well as female lack. He writes of (male) fetishists that:

There are many and weighty additional proofs of the divided attitude of fetishists to the question of the castration of women. In very subtle instances both the disavowal and the affirmation of the castration have found their way into the construction of the fetish itself. This was so in the case of a man whose fetish was an athletic support-belt which could also be worn as bathing drawers. This piece of clothing covered up the genitals entirely and concealed the distinction between them. Analysis shows that it signified that women were castrated and that they were not castrated; and it also allowed for the hypothesis that men were castrated, for all of these possibilities could equally well be concealed under the belt - the earliest rudiment of which in his childhood had been the fig-leaf on a statue (SE 21: 156-157).

For Garber, this is where the transvestite comes in as a figure or metaphor for the undecidability of castration, a "figure of nostalgia for an originary 'wholeness' - in the mother, in the child" (p.49). The fetishistic patient is sometimes in fact a transvestite. For Garber, the transvestite comes in "not as a mask, or masquerade, or male *or* female, but as a theoretical intervention" (p. 49). For her the transvestite is the equivalent of Lacan's third term, not "having" or "being" the phallus, but "seeming" or "appearing." She concludes that:

the fetish, like the transvestite - or the transvestite like the fetish - is a sign at once of the lack and its covering over, as in the case of Freud's patient's athletic support-belt - a garment very similar to devices worn, as it happens, by some present-day female-to-male transvestites (p. 49).

Garber describes the codpiece as "bizarrely, a sign of gender undecideability", since it is the quintessential gender marking of "seeming" and thus interposed between "having" and "being" the phallus. This is the space occupied by Garber's transvestite. The codpiece is "the thinking man's (or woman's) bauble, the ultimate detachable part." (p. 50). The codpiece, according to this reading, confounds the question of gender, since it can signify yes or no, full or empty, lack or lack of lack. For Garber, the codpiece is the stage equivalent of Freud's equivocal underpants, a theatrical figure for castration or a theatrical figure for transvestism itself. She says "We might call it a foundation garment" (p. 50).

The Passion is full of such transvestite fetishistic "baubles." Winterson begins a careful construction of a female transvestite figure and the circulation of fetishistic objects in complex structures mapping out the movement of desire within these structures. One of these structures involves Villanelle with the villain, the cook. When they first meet, Villanelle is dressed in male drag:

I went to work in the casino, raking dice and spreading cards and lifting wallets where I could. There was a cellarful of champagne drunk every night and a cruel dog kept hungry to deal with anyone who couldn't pay. I dressed as a boy because that's what the visitors liked to see. It was part of the game, trying to

decide which sex was hidden behind tight breeches and extravagant face-paste. .
. (p. 54).

As well as the cod-piece the masquerading Villanelle also wears white face powder and "vermilion" lipstick. She is also described by Winterson in the casino scenes as having a beauty spot in "just the right place," concealing her breasts in a voluminous pirate's shirt and wearing a moustache (p. 55).

Villanelle is signified as both "feminine" and "masculine," as overtly undecideable in sexual difference terms, specifically in terms of the gaze. Winterson plays with this image/figure of a female transvetite in relation to the villain (the cook) of the story. The codpiece becomes the signifier that recurs most prominently in the relation between these two subjects. The cook appears at the casino where Villanelle is dealing cards in games of chance. The game enacted between these two characters is one of guessing who "has" the phallus. In Winterson's fetishistic fantasmatic scenarios the phallus is metonymically linked to both penis and clitoris (purse):

He has funds. He must have. He spends in a moment what I earn in a month.
He's cunning though, for all his madness at the table. Most men wear their
pockets or their purses on their sleeve when they're drunk. They want everyone
to know how rich they are, how fat with gold. Not him. He has a bag down his
trousers and he dips into it with his back turned. I'll never pick that one.
I don't know what else is down there. [. . .] He wonders the same thing about
me. I catch him staring at my crotch and now and again I wear a codpiece to
taunt him. My breasts are small, so there's no cleavage to give them away, and
I'm tall for a girl, especially a Venetian (p. 56).

The fat, rich man covers over his genitally insufficient referent the penis by stuffing his crotch with money. Obviously the penis just will not do- is lacking- in relation to its value as phallus in this instance. If Villanelle is a girl then his penis would do to mark his possession of the phallus, his difference from her. Conversely she might be a boy in which case she "has" a penis/phallus of her own, thus collapsing the difference. The added embellished of the "purse" perhaps it will doubly mark his difference from Villanelle both as a girl -without -a-penis or as a young boy lacking not a penis but wealth. Villanelle, knowing the game, immediately raises the stakes - she wears a codpiece to taunt him. Given that a codpiece disguises actual male genitals with padding, both embellishing them and opening a gap between the real penis and its exterior "appearance," Villanelle also might have money stuffed in her drawers. He father reveals that Villanelle steals purses - trades in phallic signifiers: "He's never thought it odd that his daughter cross-dresses for a living and sells second-hand purses on the side. But then, he's never thought it odd that his daughter was born with webbed feet" (p. 61). The fat villain ultimately makes a sex-distinction decision.

Villanelle says:

My flabby friend, who has decided I'm a woman, has asked me to marry him. He has promised to keep me in luxury and all kinds of fancy goods, provided I go on dressing as a young man in the comfort of our own home. He likes that. He says he'll get my moustaches and codpieces specially made and a rare old time we'll have of it, playing games and getting drunk (p. 63).

There is something in this passage which also suggests an implicit male homosexual fantasmatic desire on the part of the male subject. In spite of his having marked Villanelle as a "woman," the cook insists that she masquerade as a man. In "Fetishism," Freud again alters the trajectory of fetishism as a consequence of male scopophilic horror stories about woman's lacking genitals and suggestively constructs male fetishism as a sign of repressed male homosexuality. Of the fetish as a substitute for missing female organs Freud writes: "We can now see what the fetish achieves and what it is that maintains it. It remains a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it. It also saves the fetishist from becoming a homosexual. . . "(SE 21: 154). Freud goes on to suggest scenarios in which male castration anxiety does result in overt male homosexual object-choice, while the fetishist endows women with the substitute organ to make them tolerable as sexual objects. For Freud homosexuality and fetishism are instigated by castration anxiety, and both imply a turning away from the mother. The fetishist turns to a woman with a fantasy phallus. As a device that "wards off" homosexuality, fetishism can be read as also implicitly valorised by Freud as a kind of vaccination against desire of man for man that Freud is incapable of recognising in and for itself (that is, as anything other than as a defense against the fantasy of castration). Fetishism emerges in this guise as a repressive defense against male homosexuality. Emily Apter takes this notion further. She contends that this reading of Freud also allows the fetish to function as a visual incentive, a target for the gaze that loves to look (even as it looks away). Winterson mirrors this gesture of male looking at that which it doesn't wish to see: "I catch him staring at my crotch and now and again I wear a codpiece to taunt him" (p. 56). Apter suggests that the fetish

becomes an ambivalent site on which the possibility of a (male) homoerotic encounter is held out, as well as the mark of society's punishment for any such actual encounter - that is, emasculation. Apter theorises the tropes of oscillation, uncertainty, displacement, and de-repressed negation that circle around a charged, eroticised object as decipherable as textual expressions of the epistemological affinities and tensions between homosexuality and fetishism (p. 212). In the centre of his essay on fetishism, Freud glances at male homosexuality and almost immediately deflects his gaze back at the fetishist. For Winterson's villain, Villanelle's codpiece becomes the eroticised object around which his desire circulates. Villanelle recounts: "We could travel the world he said. Just the three of us. Him, me and my codpiece" (p. 96).

Villanelle & The Masked Woman.

Whilst the Cook's homo-erotic desire is circling the heroine's codpiece, Villanelle's desire emerges in a different fantasmatic scene. In *The Passion*, the heroine's heart is a fantasmatic object. This sign tells the story of Villanelle's desire for the "feminine" other body. Louise J. Kaplan defines the fetish as a concrete representation of an imaginary phallic trophy. For Kaplan, it can be any desirable or valued object that is detachable, replaceable, and capable of circulating from one person to another. Insofar as the anatomical penis is imagined as detachable, displaceable, and replaceable, it is no different for Kaplan than feces, children, gifts, amulets, money - all of which can be fetishised. She concludes that all exchanges of desire that use human beings or parts of human beings as though they were phallic trophies that can be

given or taken away are perverse transactions.⁵⁰ Perverse or not, Villanelle's detachable heart is placed (either given, lost, or stolen) in a imaginary circuit of exchange between herself and a mysterious woman. For Villanelle, in Winterson's words, the heart is that "valuable, fabulous thing" that we are not always conscious of and that we keep behind a secret panel hidden away from prying eyes: "those prying eyes may sometimes be our own" (p. 94). Villanelle's concealed "work-hard heart that laughed at life and gave nothing away" (p. 94) becomes the wager in a game of chance between herself and the masked woman: "It was a game of chance I entered into and my heart was the wager. Such games can only be played once. Such games are better not played at all" (p. 94). Winterson introduces the figure of a masked woman. Villanelle says:

It's getting late, who comes here with a mask over her face?

Will she try the cards?

She does. She holds a coin in her palm so that I have to pick it out. Her skin is warm. I spread the cards. She chooses. The ten of diamonds. The three of clubs. Then the Queen of spades.

'A lucky card. The symbol of Venice. You win.'

As with the ghost of Hamlet's father on the battlements of Elsinore, the masked woman then mysteriously vanishes. Villanelle still dressed in her casino disguise (as a man) searches for a sign of the woman. She is accosted by a soldier carrying two glass balls who asks if she wants to exchange them for hers. She is again (mis) taken by a male soldier for a boy. (p. 60).

⁵⁰ Kaplan, *Female Perversions*, p. 198.

Villanelle is tired of this game, which she only plays out with the rich, fat man and finally finds the sign of the woman she is seeking - an earring which the woman who has beaten her at cards has left for her. On their next meeting the earring appears before the woman. At the time Villanelle is sitting at a cafe before work, minus her moustache, when a waiter brings her the other earring. Villanelle now has the pair. The woman again appears: "And she stood before me and I realised I was dressed as I had been that night because I was waiting for work. My hand went to my lip. 'You shaved it off,' she said" (p. 65).

Villanelle transvestite disguise, which works well for drawing the male homo-erotic gaze, becomes a source of growing anxiety for her as her lesbian sexual desire emerges in this text. She fears that the woman is attracted to her thinking that she is a man. The woman, as it turns out, is attracted to her as a woman whose male drag in this context allows its wearer some independence and mobility. The earrings initially signify Villanelle's desire for the other woman as it emerges in this text. It does not become apparent to the reader until much later that in exchange for the earrings, which Villanelle keeps, she has literally (this is a fantasy text) lost her heart which the woman keeps stored in a indigo jar in the bottom of her over-sized clothes closet. I will return to this point momentarily. Elliptically throughout the text of *The Passion* the signifiers earrings and detachable hearts, the objects of exchange between the female lovers, are textually linked. At a much later point in the narrative - after Villanelle has decided not to continue the lesbian affair, but before she sends Henri to re-possess her missing heart - she meets a young man while travelling with the cook and the cod-pieces. Villanelle's most

valuable, irreplaceable "thing" is revealed to the reader as having been lost.

Winterson writes:

'Here,' said Salvador, 'look at this,' and he took out a box enamelled on the outside and softly lined on the inside and on the inside was his heart.

'Give me yours in exchange.'

But she couldn't because she was not travelling with her heart, it was beating in another place.

She thanked the young man and went back to her husband, whose hands crept over her body like crabs.

And the young man thought often of a beautiful woman on that sunny day when the wind had pushed out her earrings like fins. (p. 98)

It is not known by the reader until now that Villanelle has kept the earrings. In the lesbian relation hearts and earrings as respective signs of female desire for the two subjects are exchanged. Each "loses" a valuable object to the other. The female object of Villanelle's desire is both married and wealthy, and is constructed by Winterson as having a classic Freudian "feminine" clothes/fashion fetish. However what emerges in Winterson's scenarios is not that the woman fetishises clothes to display that which she does not have (the penis) on one hand, and cover the lack over on the other. In Winterson's text what emerges from the closet, hidden away under the female object of Villanelle's desire's multitude of dresses, is the heroine's (missing) heart. This then is the entirely fantasmatic object which signifies Villanelle's sexuality and desire as that which involves her, in de Lauretian terms, with the

"feminine" body. The figure of the masked woman in Winterson's text can be read as figuring both the imaginary mother and the female lover.

The missing organ even later in the course of Villanelle's adventures is retrieved (stolen back for her) by Henri. In Winterson's text it is in this scene (in the clothes closet) that Henri's investment in (imaginary maternal) red hair is linked textually as similar to Villanelle's sign of desire for the other woman. Henri finds Villanelle's heart buried in the unnamed woman's closet. He describes this closet as the vast walk-in type "racked with dresses of every kind, smelling of musk and incense. A woman's room" (p. 120). This room also contains little glass phials inside of which "were the aromas of pleasure and danger". Back in the imaginary Henri feels no fear in this woman's closet. He wants to bury his face in the clothes and thinks immediately of Villanelle's red-hair, his favourite fetish object. He speculates whether Villanelle had also felt this way about the sweet-smelling, seductive woman. The figure of the mysterious woman with the voluminous closet can be read as signifying for Villanelle the imaginary mother, in a similar manner to that in which Villanelle's red hair is a sign of the absent imaginary maternal body for Henri.

Villanelle's heart is located in this scenario in the feminine (maternal) imaginary closet with all its "aromas of pleasure and danger." Within Lacanian psychoanalytic mythologising the girl, like the boy, must repress the desire for the mother in order to take up a speaking subject position, an "I" within the symbolic order. The question is how this will be accomplished if the girl lacks the organ-signifier with which she might identify with the

father, with paternal authority, and with which she might mark difference from the mother? To accede to desire, to operate in accordance with the symbolic this primary homosexual attachment must be represented, or symbolised, in the symbolic. The figure of the masked woman, the masked other (the ghost), in this text figures both the mother and the female other (lover). The question then becomes how the lesbian subject signifies difference, hence desire, in relation to both?

In *The Passion*, the section writing the relation between Villanelle and the mysterious woman - "The Queen of Spades" - might be read as the girl's oedipal story of sexual differentiation and desire. The signs of difference between the female lovers (i.e. fantasmatic objects plus desiring fantasies) are marked in Winterson's text by a plethora of multiplying objects/fantasies including the earrings and Villanelle's predilection for masquerading as a man (i.e. wearing moustaches and soldier's uniforms). (All of Villanelle's fetish objects (male drag) might be said to refer back to that object which marks her as different from the beginning from the mother and father, as well as from male and female lovers - her fantasy fetish- phallus feet. Winterson constructs a perverse fetishistic signifier which is and is not a paternal phallus. What is implied in Winterson's text is that the signifier of desire might be any object attached to a desiring fantasy, that it is multiple for any one subject, and can change over time. In other words fetishistic signifiers might substitute for fetishistic signifiers ad infinitum. The signifiers of desire are potentially infinite. The webbed feet, as well as all the other costumes and objects which operate in the relation between the two women, become a mark(s) of difference and desire between Villanelle and her female lover.]

Winterson's text could be said to literalise the concept of the fetish as an entirely fantasmatic object, and as a sign which marks the differences between the female lovers. Read in dialogue with psychoanalytic narratives they can be seen and understood as parodic, particular in relation to the organ-signifier the penis-phallus as the mono-logic signifier of desire. That her subject Villanelle, webbed-feet notwithstanding, accedes to desire, becomes a symbolic subject, is underscored by Winterson. Villanelle with her webbed-feet and mobile and poly-signified desire(s) finally terminates her relationship with the female (m)other:

I could gamble on another night, reduce myself a little more, but after the tenth night would come the eleventh and the twelfth and so on into the silent space that is the pain of never having enough. The silent space full of starving children. She loved her husband (p. 96).

In the scene in which Villanelle separates herself finally from the object of her desire, she is watching the woman sitting alone and wonders whether she is trying to understand how the past had led to the present. Winterson's female subject, in lesbian mode, wonders: "Was she searching for the line of her desire for me?" (p. 75). Winterson's construction of a lesbian subject might be read through both de Lauretis' narrative of perverse lesbian desire and Irigaray's project of re-constructing a "feminine" sexual economy, an imaginary and symbolic register in which difference and desire between women (beginning with mothers and daughters) is symbolised. What de Lauretis is suggesting for my reading is that the lesbian subject, in a similar,

though not the same manner as the male subject, must differentiate between the meaning of the lesbian body and the maternal (other) body for desire to (be seen to) emerge. What de Lauretis is asserting as well as Irigaray is the distinction, the psychoanalytic distinction, between identity and desire, between heterosexual women who might identify with the symbolically designated position of "mother" (in turn occupying that place), and a lesbian subject who signifies her desire as difference from and in that place. This perverse desire, in Lacanian and de Lauretian terms, signifies the lost "feminine" (maternal) body, a fantasy, a patriarchal representation of the female body. Nevertheless in Lacanian terms for desire to emerge, difference must be represented in the symbolic. For de Lauretis, to refuse to re-think "castration" in lesbian terms is also to refuse to symbolically signify, or represent, a position for women separated from the heterosexual position of mother. [What Winterson constructs is a female subject whose sexuality and sexed subjectivity are constituted within multiple scenarios including a re-structured, symbolically articulated, "feminine" economy which is not "as-one" with a masculine phallogocentric economy. While Villanelle is articulated as occupying the place of object of desire in male/masculine imaginaries (Henri's, the cook's), she is also articulated by Winterson as subject of desire in a symbolically articulated economy of imaginary desire elsewhere (i.e. between a female subject and a female (m)other). However, disappointment in the mother's and daughter's lack of the appropriate (male) genital does not move Villanelle from one imaginary economy to the other - after all Villanelle possesses her own imaginary phallus. One might say that Winterson constructs a lesbian subject, not as an alternative stable (phallic) identity for women, but as a position from which to parody (de-nature) the penis-phallus

connection and its place in an assumed hetero-sexual economy of sexual difference grounded in absence: lack. The writer also constructs for the reader a lesbian relation that is as significant as (if not more so) any other relation. Between Villanelle's relation to the lesbian lover and her relation to Henri there is also the echo of the Irigarayan concept of bi-sexuality, that is, some dialogue between two economies of desire. Winterson's Venetian imaginary and symbolic order bears the meaning of both these economies.

Six

"Is this testing whether I'm a replicant or a lesbian, Mr. Deckard?"

"Is this testing whether I'm a replicant or a lesbian, Mr. Deckard?" - Rachel (Sean Young) to Deckard (Harrison Ford) in *Blade Runner*.

In this chapter and the next I will examine, from a lesbian feminist and psychoanalytic perspective, the construction of the figure of the female cyborg from the genres of science fiction and cyberpunk, both film and new media texts. The major works analysed in this context are the mainstream, Hollywood film(s) *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982/92), and a cyberfeminist computer game and multimedia art installation titled *All New Gen* (VNS Matrix, 1993). From a psychoanalytic perspective, the construction of a fantasmatic oedipal scenario and the female subject/cyborg's place in this configuration is detectable and readable in both texts. From a feminist psychoanalytic point of view, it is the construction of the female subject/cyborg's desire, sexuality and sexed subjectivity in terms of sexual difference with which this chapter is concerned. This is particularly so in relation to desire and identification as they are textually enacted (or elided) in relation to the imaginary maternal body/female subject nexus. I will argue that the construction of the fantasmatic oedipal scenario differs quite radically between these two texts on the narratological level, as well as within the textually constructed economy of the female cyborg's desiring subjectivity. The relation

between the subject and the imaginary maternal body in *All New Gen* can be read as a cyber-feminist re-writing of the same relation as it is constructed, or appropriated, in *Blade Runner*. This chapter will specifically examine the textual construction of the female replicants Rachael, Pris and Zhora from *Blade Runner*. Chapter seven will analyse the trio referred to as the DNA Sluts from *All New Gen* - The Princess of Slime, Patina de Panties and Dentata. In *Blade Runner*, the cyborg subject Rachael's hetero-sexed subjectivity is constructed for her within the film narrative according to a phallogentric law embodied in the head(man)/womb (mother) of the mega-corporation, Tyrell. The hypertextual *All New Gen* will be read as a postmodern cyberfeminist parody on the phallogentric signification of masculinist cyberpunk texts such as *Blade Runner*. *All New Gen*, a female signified "omnipresent intelligence" - a maternal phallic matrix one might say - constitutes in VNS' scenario a virtual space in which female desire and sexuality are constructed as agentic, mobile, multiple (including lesbian), and poly-signified. After outlining the plot of *Blade Runner*, I will briefly rehearse some of the terms and conceptual frameworks within which cyborg configurations in science fantasy and cyberpunk narratives might be read.

Blade Runner : *the plot*.

The film *Blade Runner* has been retrospectively assimilated and categorised as part of what has become known as the "cyberpunk" movement which emerged in the 1980s. First released in 1982, and again in 1992 (the director's cut), *Blade Runner* has generated something of a

cult following among fans of science-fiction/cyberpunk cultural fantasies and mythologies and scholars alike.¹ Scott constructs the film narrative of *Blade Runner* in a techno-fictional milieu coded as Los Angeles (USA) in the year 2019. The scrolling text immediately following the opening credits of the film contextualises the story that is to follow:

Early in the 21st century, the Tyrell Corporation advanced robot evolution into the nexus phase - a being virtually identical to a human - known as a Replicant.

The Nexus 6 Replicants were superior in strength and agility, and at least as intelligent as the genetic engineers who created them.

Replicants were used Off-world as slave labor in the hazardous exploration and colonization of other planets.

After a bloody mutiny by a Nexus 6 combat team in an Off-world colony, Replicants were declared illegal on earth - under orders of death. Special police squads - Blade Runner Units - had orders to shoot to kill, upon detection, any trespassing Replicant.

At least three Nexus 6 replicants - Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer), Zhora (Joanne Cassidy), and Pris (Darryl Hannah) - manage to return to earth (L.A.) in order to find their "maker/creator," Tyrell. Tyrell is the head of the mega-corporation, also called Tyrell, which manufactured the replicants. Tyrell functions figuratively in this text as what Zoë Sofoulis might call a Big Mother corporation -that is, Tyrell might be read as a

¹ *Blade Runner* has its own WWW Internet site, "2019: Off-World," Stanford University. <http://kzus.stanford.edu/uwi/br/off-world.html> or can be accessed through "Cyberspace and Critical Theory," English 112, Brown University. <http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/hypertext/landow/cpace/cspace.or.html>

mythic combinatory phallic father/maternal body.² The rebel replicants' mission is to have what they consider a lack in their DNA engineering/replication modified. Replicants have a pre-programmed life span of only four years. According to the narrative logic of the text, this in-built obsolescence is necessary as it has been discovered that after a time replicants have a tendency to develop emotions. Emotional affect within the discursive signifying system of *Blade Runner* functions as a signifier of the "human." This replicant mutation makes it almost impossible eventually to "tell the difference" between humans and replicants.

Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford) is the blade runner - a sort of futuristic *noir* detective - whose task it is to detect and eliminate the escaped replicants. Because the replicants resemble humans in appearance in this film, the process of identifying replicants is elaborate. Because the replicants are played by actors who also resemble humans, a critical distance might also be more difficult to achieve. Mirroring, narcissistic, and scopophilic identification might have been less available to the spectator if the replicants had been, say, played by robots - i.e. mechanical objects of any shape or size. The identification process for detecting androids within the film diegesis consists of a battery of questions. The Voight-Kampff test is designed to determine who is, or who is not, a replicant. At the Tyrell Corporation, Deckard is introduced to Tyrell's latest replicant, Rachael (Sean Young). Rachael, signified in this semiotic system as a more

² Zoë Sofoulis, "Slime in the Matrix: Post-phallic Formations in Women's Art in New Media." In *Jane Gallop Seminar Papers*, ed. Jill Julius Matthews (Canberra: Australian National University, The Humanities Research Centre, 1994), p. 99.

sophisticated model than the Nexus 6 rebel androids, does not know that she is, in fact, a replicant. It is during this scene that Rachael poses the question: "Is this testing whether I'm a replicant or a lesbian, Mr. Deckard?" This question, which is logically inconsistent within the overt objectives and meaning of the Voigt-Kampff test, nevertheless could be read as answered within the film diegesis. It is a queer - in more than one sense of the word - question, a rebus-like puzzle. Like a dream question it condenses two fantasmatic scenes of the cyborg/ subject's origins and desires: (i) "Am I a replicant (a machine) or a human?" and (ii) "Am I a heterosexual woman or a lesbian?" Critical commentary and analyses of this high tech *noir* film has focused predominantly on the former question, engaging intertextually and critically with current social and political discourses on science and technology as well as on science fiction narratives.³ My reading will focus primarily on the second question.

The narrative trajectory of the body of the film is concerned with the process whereby Deckard progressively tracks down and eliminates - within the signifiatory field of classic *noir* male subject anxiety - the two phallic female robots Pris and Zhora. These "replicant retirements" constitute the most violent scenes of the entire film. Of the male replicants, Leon is killed by Rachael, thereby saving Deckard's life, and Roy Batty, the replicant leader, who also ultimately saves Deckard's life, dies a "natural" replicant death. His pre-programmed four years expire at the very moment that he finds himself with the power to eliminate the

³ See for example Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, "Technophobia," *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, (ed.) Anette Kuhn (London and New York: Verso, 1990), pp. 58-65.

detective. Deckard, the human, who has developed some empathy for some replicants - namely those who have saved his life - escapes himself in the final scenes of the first released cut with Rachael, the machine. It is this narratological and figurative meshing of "human" and "machine" - co-incidentally mapped in this instance onto the fantasy of the hetero - sexed couple - which could be read as placing this film within the cultural and literary framing narratives of "cyberpunk."

It is Deckard's relationship to all three female replicants, as they are constructed in this text, and what these relationships signify in terms of constructions of desire, fantasy, sexual difference, and sexuality that (re) positions this film, for my argument, as a classical narrative of the masculinist phallic subject. While in contemporary *noir* mode the female replicants are coded as phallic (i.e. strong, intelligent, instrumental, sexual), two, Zhora and Pris are eliminated by the hero Deckard. Rachael within the narrative closure of the film is inducted quite literally into this futuristic symbolic order as a object/machine of male heterosexual desire/instrumentality.

Direct castratory threats to Deckard are displaced from Tyrell, who could be read psychoanalytically as the phallic parent, the corporate body in this text, and onto the replicants Pris and Zhora. None of the replicants, save Rachael, who is not aware that she is an android, possess, within this signifying system, a mother. The imaginary maternal body is re-coded in this mythical symbolic order as already appropriated postmodernly into the masculine corporate head/body of Tyrell. Rachael's mother, who

appears only as a photographic representation, is declared a "fake," an image and memory supplied to her by her "creator," Tyrell. I would argue that the threat of castration posed for Deckard's constructed subjectivity, comes not from the specularly overt source the phallic father -Tyrell is after all signified as male - but is displaced onto the female replicants from the specularly, textually and resonantly absent phallic mother of a masculinist imaginary. There are no female subjects signified as human in this film. The cannibalised imaginary mother re-appears figuratively and mythically in various guises in this contemporary cyber-narrative - coded as the biblical Eve, as the spider mother/woman, and as a gothic punk "vagina dentata." Rachael is re-positioned discursively as the properly "feminine" symbolic order object of male desire. Rachael's initial demand to know whether she is being asked if she is a lesbian might be read as resonating a gap in the logic of the text.

Before analysing *Blade Runner* in detail, I will briefly outline the discursive framework within which cyber-constructions might be read. The figure of the cyborg is generally understood in science fiction film theory and the new technology narratives of cyberpunk as a subject who is "part human and part machine."⁴ What is signified as, or understood as, the "human" varies according to the context and ideological

⁴ See Constance Penley's reading of the "cyborg" in the film *The Terminator* in "Time Travel, Primal Scene and the Critical Dystopia," in *Alien Zone*, p. 118. This essay by Penley is a slightly shorter version of an article published under the same title in *Camera Obscura* 15 (1986). *Mondo 2000* gives a definition of "cyborg" as a science-fictional shortening of "cybernetic organism." The idea [fantasy] is that in the future humans may have more and more artificial body parts - arms, legs, hearts, eyes, and so on. The logical conclusion of this process in cyberpunk narratives is that one might become a brain in a wholly artificial body. The step after that is to replace the "meat" brain with a computer brain. See "Cyberpunk" in Rudy Rucker, R.U. Sirius & Queen Mu, *Mondo 2000: A User's Guide to the New Edge* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), p.66.

underpinnings of specific texts. The combination, or opposition, of human/machine is variable from text to text. For instance, according to Constance Penley, a specific science fiction text, either literary or cinematic, may advance an "us versus them" argument, man versus machine, a Romantic opposition between the organic and the mechanical/technological. On the other hand, a text might focus on the partial and ambiguous merging of the two poles of the dichotomy - a hybrid formation of constructed elements. The former configuration is typical of texts concerned to construct a Romantic triumph of the organic over the mechanical, (*Terminator*) or the nihilistic recognition that we have all become automata (*Metropolis*). Hybrid discursive constructions, such as *Blade Runner*, are more common to what Constance Penley has termed the "critical dystopia."⁵ *Blade Runner* can be read as neither ideologically technophilic nor technophobic. Scott attempts to construct some equivalence between humans and machines. Deckard says: "Replicants are like humans, they can be a benefit or a hazard." This discourse can be read as critical of megacorporate control of technology (i.e. critical of techno-cultural power relations). A third ideological position would have to include those texts which ultimately construct the alien/cyborg as superior to earthlings/humans in both intelligence/reason and sentiment (*Friendship's Death*), or offering to humankind a promise of redemption (*Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, 1977). Many texts display complex hybridisations of, or responses to, all three ideological formula. The ultimate outcome, in classically constructed texts, becomes apparent in how the text effects narrative closure.

⁵ Penley, "Time Travel," p. 118.

For instance, in Scott's *Blade Runner* - based on the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick⁶ - what signifies as "human" includes a capacity for emotional affect and a store of memories. Humans, in Dick's and Scott's narratively constructed future socio-symbolic order, allegedly - at least initially - possess both characteristics, replicants do not. For this defect, replicants must either be controlled or "retired" (killed). However, in this tale, the genetically engineered replicants resemble humans so closely in appearance that differences between humans and machines are not immediately apparent, certainly not visually. The plot is further complicated by the fact that after a certain period of time, replicants have a tendency to develop a capacity for emotional responses. In this postmodern fantasy text the boundaries between the imperfect simulacra and the human begin to blur. At one point Deckard says: "Replicants weren't supposed to have feelings. Neither were blade runners. What the hell was happening to me?" The narrative closing of the 1982 film version, according to Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner resolves the initial oppositions, and the ensuing dilemmas with a compromise formation - a somewhat utopic ending between a human, Rick Deckard, and a machine, Rachael.⁷ The point that Ryan and Kellner are making is that the film *Blade Runner* implies that the supposedly ontologically authoritative categories such as the individual, nature, the family, and sentiment are indeterminate. These categories have alternative political inflections that revalorise their meaning according to the criteria of

⁶ Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968).

⁷ Ryan and Kellner, "Technophobia," p. 59.

context and use. For them *Blade Runner* ends in a way that foregrounds the construction of alternative meanings by moving away from the cinematic as well as ideological literality that allegedly reduces constructed social institutions to a natural or ontological ground of meaning. The use of figural techniques such as substitution and equivalence, especially the equivalence of human life and technology - of Rachael the machine and Deckard the human at the end - are cited by Ryan and Kellner as an example of reconfigured meanings which foreground the constructedness of conservative ontology and ideology. Questions about the social and discursive constructedness of categories of sexual difference and (hetero) sexuality, of why the human in the *Blade Runner* figural scenario is equivalent to "man" and the machine is equivalent to an ultimately submissive "woman," and that these two figures bond in the closing scenes in a "happy [heterosexual] marriage of humans and machines" is not taken up by Ryan and Kellner. I shall return to the "plot" of *Blade Runner* and the significance of Rachael's (lesbian) question in more detail momentarily.

Within the framing narratives of cyborg subjective constructions the English writer and filmmaker Peter Wollen's 1976 novel *Friendship's Death* includes a central male character who is an alien (i.e. from a planet other than earth). In the filmic version of this novel, also titled *Friendship's Death* (1987), this alien character's sex has been changed to female. This figure is also genetically or mechanically engineered, and resembles humans (inhabitants of earth) in appearance, but identifies with other machines. In one scene the alien/cyborg character sympathises with

a typewriter which the journalist/narrator is using with some force.⁸ One might also argue that the major protagonist from the *Alien* trilogy of films - also by Ridley Scott - is also configured as a cyborg. This female character, Ripley, although both signified as a "human" and an inhabitant of earth, is supported in her quest to destroy the alien monster, by a whole plethora of "machines" including a computer called "Mother" and a mechanical exo-skeleton within which she is less vulnerable to attacks by the monstrous alien/ mother.⁹ The *Star Wars* trilogy of films has robotic characters who, on the other hand, do not resemble humans in appearance at all - they look like machines, but display essentially human qualities within the signifiatory field of the "human" constructed in this film.

The construction of the combinatory figure of the female cyborg has a long history in literary and filmic texts. These include female robots, (fembots) androids, replicants and the more recent cyborg constructions of the postmodern or technotronic age.¹⁰ The prototypical textual model for

⁸ For a more detailed reading of the female alien from Wollen's film see Mandy Merck, "From Robot to Romance," *Perversions* (London: Virago, 1993), pp. 177-195.

⁹ For a deconstructive psychoanalytic reading of the science fiction horror film *Alien* (1979) as a complex representation of the monstrous-feminine in terms of the maternal figure as perceived within a patriarchal ideology see Barbara Creed, "Alien and the Monstrous-Feminine", *Alien Zone*, pp. 128-141.

¹⁰ Theorists of science-fiction film and cyberpunk narratives frequently distinguish between these categories of fantasy figures/subjects. Rachel, from *Blade Runner*, is, technically speaking a replicant, a genetically engineered or synthetic humanoid. Claudia Springer insists that the replicants in *Blade Runner* are androids, not cyborgs, because they are genetically engineered organic entities and contain no technological components. Given the female replicant Rachel is "man" made, technologically produced with programmed memories, and who nonetheless mutates into something indistinguishable from an emotional "human" (a personality construct) in the context of *Blade Runner*, she might conceptually and metaphorically be classified as a cyborg - a fusion of the human and the technological. For a critique of the interchangeable use of the terms robot, android and cyborg, see Claudia Springer, "Muscular Circuitry: The Invincible Amoured Cyborg in Cinema," in *Genders 18 Cyberpunk: Technologies of Cultural Identity* (Winter 1993), p. 87.

scientific, technological and/or genetically engineered figures might be Mary Shelley's patch-work monster from her novella *Frankenstein* (1818) which constitutes a framing narrative for many contemporary science fiction and cyberpunk narratives. Often cited texts, and specifically female androidinal figures, include Villiers de l'Isle Adam's novel *Tomorrow's Eve* (1880); the mechanical doll, Olympia, from E.T.A. Hoffman's *The Sandman*, analysed by Freud and filmed by George Melies (1903) and Powell and Pressberger (1951); Czech dramatist Karel Capek's 1921 play *R.U.R.*; the female robots from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926); Peter Wollen's novel (1976) and film (1987) *Friendship's Death*; Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (1977); the replicants from Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982 and 1992); and the female cyborg Eve from Duncan Gibbins' film *Eve of Destruction* (1990).

One of the classical psychoanalytically related scenarios of the cyberpunk science-fictional construction of (masculine) subjectivity is the anxiety/desire model enacted in relation to the fantasy of the permeability of body boundaries. In cyberpunk texts, organs are replaced, and various technologies are implanted into bodies and perceptual organs. Male critics of William Gibson's writings typically hail them as original efforts that rescued science fiction from a moribund patch of the late 1970s and early 1980s.¹¹ According to Zoë Sophia, this ignores the women writers whose

¹¹ William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (Ace, 1984), is perhaps the most cited literary work of [male] cyberpunk science fiction. *Neuromancer* is part of Gibson's "Sprawl trilogy" which also includes *Count Zero* (Ace, 1986), and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (Bantam, 1988). See *Mondo 2000*, p. 70. Bruce Sterling, author of *Mirrorshades* is also mentioned frequently as one of science-fictions cyberpunks. Writing about cyberpunks in the introduction to *Mirrorshades*, Sterling defines cyberpunk as, "An unholy alliance of the technical world and the world of organized dissent - the underground world of popular culture, visionary fluidity and street-level anarchy." See *Mondo 2000*, p. 68.

work preceded Gibson's cyberpunks.¹² These include the multiply disabled heroine who finds a fantastically powerful body once her brain is installed as the operative core of *The Ship Who Sang* (Anne McCaffrey); the pilots and scientists who undergo radical surgery and receive bionic implants in Vonda McIntyre's *Superluminal*; and Omali, a black woman who hacks her way into the informational core of a gigantic extraterrestrial entity in *Up the Walls of the World* by Alice Sheldon (who publishes as James Tiptree Jr.).¹³ For my argument, I would add VNS Matrix's computer generated DNA Sluts from *All New Gen* (the 1990s), with their access to the matrix as omnipresent intelligence; their identification with a penetrating virus; their G-slime fuel; and their laser-beam clitorally signified phalli with which to cut into the grids of the imperialistic, militaristic data banks of Big Daddy Mainframe. Sophia, who also publishes under the name of Zoë Sofoulis, has written extensively on the work of VNS Matrix.¹⁴ I shall return to both texts, plus writing from other cyberfeminist theorists such as Donna Haraway and Sadie Plant later in this chapter. In "Virtual Corporeality," Sophia/Sofoulis reminds us again that the genre of novelistic scientific discovery and creation in which science fiction film and cyberpunk narratives could be said to have originated, was founded by a woman- Mary Shelley.

Anne Cranny-Francis writing in "Feminist Futures: A Generic Study," also invokes the literary conventions and textual strategies pioneered by

¹² Zoë Sophia, "Virtual Corporeality: A Feminist View," *Australian Feminist Studies* 15 (Autumn 1992), p. 16.

¹³ Also see Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," *Australian Feminist Studies* 4 (Autumn 1987):1-41. Haraway cites many of the same feminist science fiction writers and their constructed cybernetic organisms.

¹⁴ See Sofoulis, "Slime in the Matrix," pp. 83-106.

Mary Shelley which are still available to the contemporary feminist writer/reader of science-fictional texts. These she enumerates as including: (i) engagement with - and critique of - current scientific and technological discourses; (ii) the narrative displacement of space and/or time; (iii) the character and viewpoint of the alien/monster/cyborg; and (iv) a narrative structure complicated by intersecting or framing narratives - intertexts.¹⁵ Recent feminist science fiction writing, according to Cranny-Francis, offers an often transgressive challenge to the genre. She points out that feminist writers rework or redeploy generic conventions in ways which foreground their normative operation, whilst enacting a different feminist discourse. The reader is discursively repositioned, and implicated in a renegotiation of her/his own subjectivity which may or may not align with the feminist discourse enacted in the text. In relation to science fiction cinema intertexts Cranny - Francis writes:

The intertexts of a contemporary practice of feminist science fiction cinema would include: science fiction writing and its generic conventions; feminist cultural practice; and cinema itself - particularly science fiction film and feminist film - as a set of discursive and signifying practices.¹⁶

In relation to the new media practices of VNS Matrix, I would also include the hypertextual construction of the computer game - its interactive player mode of multiple narrative pathways - and also its extratextual dimensionality as part of a multi-media installation. These too constitute a set of postmodern cyberfeminist signifying practices. I will tease out

¹⁵ See Anne Cranny-Francis, "Feminist Futures: A Generic Study," *Alien Zone*, p. 224.

¹⁶ Cranny-Francis, p. 219.

Cranny-Francis' points about feminist discursive and signifying practices and the positioning of the spectator in relation to *All New Gen*. While *Blade Runner* could not be said to be a feminist film, it does lend itself to a feminist, and lesbian feminist, critique.

As Zoë Sophia/Sofoulis reminds us of the female science fiction writers who worked with cyborg figures, so Thomas Foster in "Incurably Informed: The Pleasures and Dangers of Cyberpunk" alerts us to the fact that one of the most significant, and overlooked, writers of cyberpunk texts was also a woman - Pat Cadigan.¹⁷ According to Foster, Cadigan's novel *Synners* (1991) raises the question of the relations between new technologies, their impact on gendered identities and the cultural logic of postmodernism.¹⁸ Cadigan was one of the science fiction writers who emerged in the 1980s under the generic term "cyberpunk." More recently cyberpunk has emerged as more than a term for writers and print text. It is now employed across a range of media and cultural practices. The term is generally understood as a framework for conceptualising a set of relationships to new technologies. In psychoanalytic terms this would include an understanding of the complex relationships between shifts in cultural effects under the impact of new technologies and concomittant shifts in subjectivities. For instance, Foster points out that the postmodern crisis of universality implied by cyberpunk fiction tends paradoxically to universality (i.e. assumes that the postmodern crisis affects all social subjects equally and in the same fashion). Of the

¹⁷ See Thomas Foster's introduction, "Incurably Informed: The Pleasures and Dangers of Cyberpunk," in *Genders* 18, pp. 1-10

¹⁸ Foster, p. 1.

postmodern "crisis" in general and the questions raised by Cadigan's novel, Foster writes:

The postmodern condition of forced signification or being incurably informed is an effect of the postmodern critique of universality - that is, a critique of the unmarked and therefore normative subject position of the middle-class, white male individual.¹⁹

The social situation constructed in cyberpunk fiction is, for Foster, one in which all subjects signify for others, in which all bodies function as signifying surfaces. The usually universally signifying (unmarked) male body, and phallic (disembodied, transcendent) subjectivity, in other words, finds itself in crisis. In cyberpunk texts, this situation is usually represented as one of fragmentation or balkanisation. Cadigan's novel imagines the global village divided into a set of "new suburbs" inhabited by subcultural identities and new social subjects each with their own idiolect or language. Cyberpunk science fiction poses a world in which cultural diversity and the formation of specific cultural identities is an explicit problem. Foster raises the question of whether this realignment of the global village constructed by cyberpunk writers offers women and men opportunities to rethink categories of gender and their relation to sexual identities. Foster identifies three sometimes overlapping analytic approaches to cyberpunk fiction.²⁰ He states that cyberpunk has been studied as a science fiction genre, as a variety of postmodern fiction, and as

¹⁹ Foster, p. 2.

²⁰ Foster, p. 6.

a site of analysis for cultural studies. Foster claims that there has been very little specifically feminist cultural criticism on the topic.

In the same edition of *Genders* in which Foster's analysis of Cadigan's *Synners* might be read as answering to some extent Sophia/Sofoulis' argument concerning the invisibility of female constructors of cyborg figures/cyberpunk texts, other feminist theorists and critics such as Claudia Springer and Cynthia J. Fuchs argue that most male, popular cultural, literary, filmic, and televisual constructions of the cyborg figure re-map assumptions about masculinity and femininity (as well as other cultural identities such as race) onto these new technological figures.²¹ One might add in this context that, in the case of *Blade Runner* assumptions about (hetero) sexuality are also mapped onto the technological figure of Rachael in answer to the implied Freudian epistemological and fantasmatic question, "What sex am I?" My reading of this science fictional text is an attempt to answer the overt question posed by the replicant Rachael to the "human" subject Deckard on their first meeting: "Is this testing if I'm a replicant or a lesbian, Mr. Deckard?"

²¹ See Eva Cherniavsky, "(En)gendering Cyberspace in Neuromancer: Postmodern Subjectivity and Virtual Motherhood," pp. 32-46; Kathleen Biddick, "Humanist History and the Haunting of Virtual Worlds: Problems of Memory and Renumeration," pp. 47-66; Stephanie A. Smith, "Morphing, Materialism, and the Marketing of *Xenogenesis*," pp. 67-86; Claudia Springer, "Muscular Circuitry: The Invincible Armored Cyborg in Cinema," pp. 87-101; and Cynthia J. Fuchs, "'Death is Irrelevant': Cyborgs, Reproduction, and the Future of Male Hysteria," pp. 113-133. All in *Genders* 18 (1993).

Science-fiction: Generic themes.

Feminist film theorist Annette Kuhn, in her introduction to *Alien Zone*, works through the history of the development of genre criticism within film theory.²² Science fiction cinema, Kuhn notes, has an immense popular following, but has proved theoretically, critically, and as a specific genre, hard to pin down. Firstly it overlaps intertextually with other genres, particularly fantasy and horror, and secondly there has been the manifestation of a theoretical and critical elitism which regarded popular media and generic forms as not worthy of critical attention. However, in contemporary science fiction cinema (from the late 1970s), two films, *Alien* (1979) and *Blade Runner*, have attracted extraordinary amounts of critical commentary and analysis. *Alien* has particularly been analysed and critiqued by feminist film theorists and cultural critics. These films, as Kuhn notes, were equally fascinating to spectators/ audiences. Kuhn also points out that genre criticism within film theory was motivated originally by a populist impulse, and had a sociological edge.²³ These two qualities - populism and social concern - have remained, although the theoretical trajectory of genre criticism has shifted away from sociology to psychoanalysis as the dominant explanatory mode. This could also be

²² Annette Kuhn, "Cultural Theory and Science Fiction Cinema," introduction to *Alien Zone*, pp. 1-11. Kuhn traces the history of the development of science fiction generic theory and criticism in literature. Apart from the obvious visual and auditory dimension of film, and the specific aspects of the cinema as apparatus, there are features at a textual level common to both science fiction film and writing. These include themes, narrative point of view and iconic accoutrements. Kuhn points out also that science fiction writers have been less shy than film theorists about discussing science fiction as a genre. For other writings on genre and cinema see Edward Bascombe, "The Idea of Genre in American Cinema", in Barry K. Grant (ed.), *Film Genre: Theory and Criticism* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarcrow Press, 1977); Christine Gledhill, "Genre", in Pam Cook (ed.), *The Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 1985).

²³ Kuhn, "Introduction," *Alien Zone*, p. 2.

said of film theory generally. In 1980, Steve Neale revived genre criticism, transforming its theoretical ground to take account of recent developments in film theory.²⁴ This form of genre criticism was concerned with meaning, or signification, and the ways in which spectators are addressed and subjectivities formed in the interaction with film texts. This model remained exploratory in terms of genre; references to particular film genres mainly served as illustration for a more general argument.

According to Kuhn, genre criticism of the late 1960s and 1970s was preoccupied almost exclusively with traditionally male genres - gangster films and the western. Under pressure of developments in feminist film theory, other genres have subsequently received critical attention. These include *film noir*, the musical and the Hollywood melodrama. However, this was not necessarily to advance genre criticism, but rather to address issues or questions of female narrative agency, woman as spectacle and female spectatorship.²⁵ Other genres, though popular with audiences and commercial film marketing groups, were slow to gain critical attention. These genres with high popular, but relatively low critical profiles, included comedy, horror and science fiction. There have been readings of a number of individual films from the science fiction genre, but these tend to be precisely textual analyses rather than contribution to genre theory and criticism. I am labouring the point of genre here, because what has emerged, often through other routes, in genre theory are identifiable themes. In science fiction films, one such significant theme, one might

²⁴ Steve Neale, *Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1980).

²⁵ See Kuhn, p. 4.

say the most significant one, is the conflict posed between science and technology, on one hand, and "human nature" on the other. This point becomes crucial when discussing theories and criticisms concerned with scientific and new technological discourses and specifically cyberfeminist theoretical positions. As Alice Jardine reminds us, discussions about technology and the body, for example, proceed as if men's and women's bodies had been constructed and represented in the same way throughout western philosophies and histories.²⁶ Claudia Springer suggests that cyborg films exist within our culture's larger discursive conflict over gendered metaphors for technology.²⁷

Putting aside the visual aspect of cinema for the moment, much of the narrative thematic examination of science fiction as a genre derives from literary writings. Apart from the thematic conflict surrounding technology/human, generic indicators might include spatial and temporal displacement. As Anne Cranny-Francis points out this convention has been significantly exploited in the development of feminist science fiction writing practices.²⁸ For Cranny-Francis, the narrative displacement of time and space, allows for the textual construction of a fantasy literature (or film) which can show us female subjects in entirely new or strange surroundings. These (often utopian) tales place a female space or time-traveller in a fantasy non-patriarchal environment (Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*), or bring into the contemporary (earth) environment an alien whose subjectivity has been formed in a non-

²⁶ See Alice Jardine, "Of Bodies and Technologies", *Discussions in Contemporary Culture* 1, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), pp. 151-158.

²⁷ Claudia Springer, "Muscular Circuitry," *Genders* 8, p. 93.

²⁸ Cranny-Francis, "Feminist Futures," *Alien Zone*, p. 222.

patriarchal environment (Joanna Russ, *The Female Man*). This narrative textual strategy has been used to reveal and critique patriarchal discourses. This stance, or viewpoint, might also be considered a science fiction genre indicator.

At the level of narrative theme and viewpoint, Kuhn notes that new themes are referred to in writing on science fiction cinema. The genre's longstanding preoccupation with narratives involving masculine mastery over nature and creation manifests itself in stories involving the "birthing" of human substitutes by corporations rather than by the Frankenstein/mad scientist villains of earlier fiction/films (*Alien*, *Blade Runner*). This masculine appropriation of creation/birthing, and the production of monstrous offspring by both male and female protagonists in science fiction horror films, has been critiqued by feminist film theorists such as Barbara Creed.²⁹ The displacement of the maternal body is a factor in my analysis of the construction of female subjects in *Blade Runner*. The re-placement, or re-writing of the imaginary or mythical maternal body/phallic mother as matrix also constitutes a pivotal point in examining the techno-constructions of VNS Matrix's *All New Gen*, an entity in many guises. Taking a different line to Creed, Sofoulis suggests that the masculine corporate body appears as something like the pre-oedipal mother, a (Kleinian) combined parent-figure whose body might be plundered for resources and appropriated for other, perhaps feminist,

²⁹ For instance see Barbara Creed, "From Here to Modernity: Feminism and Postmodernism", in *Postmodern Screen* 28/2 (Spring 1987): pp. 47-67. For further work in this area see Alice Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), and Jean-François Lyotard, "A Response to Kenneth Frampton", in *Theory and History of Literature 10 The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester University Press, 1984).

purposes. Sofoulis imagines that: "in relation to its heterogeneous and gigantic body, the human might appear as a part-object themselves, (sic) or a small invader."³⁰

Kuhn continues that cutting across themes common to science fiction genres are a plethora of signifying iconographic motifs and accoutrements - unfamiliar technologies, futuristic devices (e.g. time-machines), spaceships, robots, computers and the like. Whilst literary definitions of science fiction might offer some thematic considerations which are useful to genre film theory - its construction of particular types of fictional worlds, narrative viewpoints and mode of address - it is in the cinematic image that science fiction is most signified as a genre. Reading a film necessarily involves looking at it. In cinema, narration and visibility (and sound) are welded together. Cinematic codes, "languages", specific to science fiction, but not necessarily at work in other genres, are evident in special effects of sound and vision. It could be argued, says Kuhn, that science fiction is the most "cinematic" of all genres. It is not only that science fiction film must be seen and heard in an auditorium; but also because the technology of cinematic illusion displays the state of its own art in science fiction films. The films themselves are often about new or imagined future technologies. Kuhn, re-writing Marshall McLuhan, quips that: ". . . this must be a perfect example of the medium fitting, if not exactly being, the message."³¹

³⁰ Sofoulis, "Slime in the Matrix," *Jane Gallop Seminar Papers*, p. 99.

³¹ Kuhn, p. 7.

The postmodern aesthetic of *Blade Runner* is described by Giuliana Bruno as "the result of recycling, fusion of levels, discontinuous signifiers, explosion of boundaries, and erosion."³² In the architectural layout of the futuristic city of Los Angeles (2019) pastiche is most dramatically visible where postmodernism could be said to meet postindustrialism. This fantasy future film does not aesthetically realise an idealised, technological order. The city is not represented as an ultramodern, orderly layout of skyscrapers and ultracomfortable, hypermechanised interiors. Juxtaposed with the high-tech and neobaroque lighting, is postindustrial decay and waste - garbage into which the characters constantly step. The vision of decay is set in an inclusive hybrid design. The city is called Los Angeles, but it might be Tokyo or Hong Kong. The geography is imaginary; a synthesis of architecture quoting from real cities, Roman, Greek and Oriental classical architecture and mythology, postcards, advertising and movies, a product of geographical and temporal condensation and displacement. The inhabitants of this pastiche city of excess scenography are coded also as eclectic crowds of faceless people - Oriental merchants, replicant part makers, punks, and Hare Krishnas. The language they speak, "city-speech" is a "mish-mash of Japanese, Spanish, German, what have you." Overlooking the city as a recurring motif in *Blade Runner* is the "Japanese simulacrum," a huge advertisement which alternates a Japanese female face coded as seductive and a Coca Cola sign. Bruno writes that this [representation of] postindustrial urban explosion, the melting of futuristic high-tech into an intercultural scenario, recreates a world in which one travels without moving - the Orient occupies the next

³² Giuliana Bruno, "Ramble City: Postmodernism and *Blade Runner*," *Alien Zone*, p. 185.

block. For her the aesthetic of *Blade Runner* is China(in)town. Against the backdrop of the huge image of the Japanese woman, Deckard is seen frequently attempting to track the replicants through the many Chinese artisans and sub-contractors who manufacture or trade in replicant body parts. One must add that Tyrell inhabits the high-tech business district; the (white) petit bourgeois have moved to the suburbs or "off-world;" and the disabled white (J.F. Sebastian) and the oriental replicant-part makers inhabit the decaying or overpopulated inner urban neighbourhoods. So dense is the postmodernist retro-, high-tech, intercultural and film genre quotation of *Blade Runner* that one might say that every relation in the diegesis produces an exhibitionism rather than an aesthetics of the visual.

Before moving into a reading of the construction of female desire and sexuality in *Blade Runner*, there is one further specifically feminist point that I will make. In her introduction to *Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, E. Ann Kaplan remarks that feminist psychoanalytic film criticism has focused on interpreting texts, perhaps because the female critic has an investment in understanding how she came to be positioned as she finds herself. Much feminist criticism looks at themes (such as mother-daughter narratives or oedipal triangles) in order to understand "how patriarchal signifying systems have represented such relationships."³³ It is clear to Kaplan that the feminist critic is talking about constructions, and using psychoanalytic theory to illuminate them. For her it is difficult to show how certain patriarchal signs work without resorting to thematic analysis. Psychoanalytic theory is in this case described as used by

³³ E. Ann Kaplan, "Introduction: From Plato's Cave to Freud's Screen," *Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 15.

patriarchal texts as a discourse to confine woman to limited representations. Despite the proliferating rhetoric on the postmodern implosion/explosion of signs, the idea that the social situation constructed in cyberpunk fiction is one in which all subjects signify for others and in which all bodies function as signifying surfaces, and that the narrative invention of the replicants in *Blade Runner* is almost a literalization of Baudrillard's theory of postmodernism as the age of simulacra and simulation - all of this still does not explain why the only sign of sexuality in *Blade Runner* is represented as a simulation of heterosexuality.

Reading Blade Runner.

Generically, *Blade Runner* might be described as a techno-noir film in the critical dystopian mode common to many science fiction films dealing with questions of technological development. This science fiction film intersects intertextually with *film noir*, the hard-boiled private detective genre, the horror film, and the Hollywood romance. The scenography of this film is constructed as one of urban, postindustrial/postmodern decay and deals with conflicts surrounding the potential to abuse power by those who control advanced genetic technology. This filmic scientific and technological discourse is not positioned as ideologically technophobic or technophilic, concluding narratively with a compromise formation between some replicants and some human subjects. The supposedly ontological binaries underpinning this contemporary *film noir* are the dichotomous and oppositional ones of good/evil, technology /human, culture/nature and masculine/feminine with some complex

hybridisations across categories. Some technologically reproduced replicants, and some humans are signified as "humane" and some replicants and their producer are signified as "inhumane." Difference is constructed along an axis that is not entirely confined to sexual difference. Heterosexuality is ultimately reconfigured as a universal - i.e. an unmarked category.

Constance Penley, feminist film theorist and critic, argues in "Time Travel, Primal Scene and the Critical Dystopia", that in the psychoanalytic realm of the unconscious and fantasy, the question of the subject's origin, "Where do I come from?" is followed by the question of sexual difference, "Who am I (What sex am I?)."³⁴ For her, the narrative logic of classical film is powered by the desire to establish, by the conclusion of the film, the nature of masculinity, the nature of femininity, and the way that these sexual differences are complementary rather than antagonistic. "But", she adds, "in film and television, as elsewhere, it is becoming increasingly difficult to *tell the difference*."³⁵ Penley poses the questions of what makes men and women different as they become less differentiated by the division of labour, and how classical film can still construct the difference crucial to its formula for narrative closure. Penley finds the answer in science fiction film. The configuration of sexual difference required by classical filmic constructions is displaced from the difference between men and women onto the difference between humans and aliens. The question of sexual difference, whose answer is no longer "self-evident", is

³⁴ Penley, "Time Travel," *Alien Zone*, p. 123.

³⁵ Penley, p. 123, emphasis Penley.

displaced onto the more remarkable difference between the human and the (alien) other.

It could be argued, and is by Penley as well as Michael Ryan and Douglas Keller in "Technophobia," that this question is posed significantly and centrally in *Blade Runner*.³⁶ Penley states further that this questioning of the difference between human and other is sexual in nature in the way that science fiction films frequently reactivate infantile sexual investigation.³⁷ One of the other Freudian questions that is posed for the viewer of *Blade Runner*, according to this theorist, is "How do replicants *do it*?" The answer would appear to be heterosexually. This raises questions about the textual construction of cyborg sexuality and sexual practices as well as questions of desire, sexual difference, and sexuality difference. These I will answer in relation to both *Blade Runner* and *All New Gen* in the course of my argument. The Freudian fantasmatic question of the origin of the subject and its sexuality can be read as central to both, particularly the reconfiguration of the imaginary maternal body and the construction of the female cyborg subject's sexuality. The question raised by the character Rachel as to whether she is a replicant or a lesbian has been ignored by all *Blade Runner* critical commentators, feminist or otherwise. For Anne Cranny-Francis, the central question of *Blade Runner* becomes: "Who is not a replicant?"³⁸ Ryan and Kellner argue in "Technophobia" at length that *Blade Runner* deconstructs, or hybridizes, the oppositional categories human /technological, reason /feeling, and

³⁶ Ryan and Kellner, "Technophobia", *Alien Zone*, p. 63.

³⁷ Penley, p. 123.

³⁸ Cranny-Francis, p. 226.

culture /nature. As "feminist" film theorists and critics they offer the following statement:

Although the film contains several sexist moments (Deckard more or less rapes Rachael), it can also be read as depicting the construction of female subjectivity under patriarchy as something pliant and submissive as well as threatening and 'castratory'. (The female replicants are sex functionaries as well as killers).³⁹

I would argue that the construction of sexuality and sexual difference in *Blade Runner* is more complex, more subtle and more problematic for a queer reader/spectator than this short reference suggests. Leaving aside for the moment Deckard's sexual practices - "more or less rapes" - and the reductive reading of constructed female subjectivity, albeit under patriarchy, as "submissive as well as castratory," there is a significant factor in terms of both narrative closure and the constructed difference *between* female robots in the body of the text that Ryan and Kellner overlook. In classical *noir* mode, the female subjects who are signified phallically (threatening and castratory) in this film (i.e. Pris and Zhora) are brutally eliminated by Deckard. Neither is signified as either submissive or pliant in relation to the blade runner. On the contrary, they both engage actively and strongly with Deckard in their desire to prolong their lives. Rachael, who *is* ultimately signified as submissive sexually to Deckard and phallic only in relation to Leon (who is threatening Deckard), is re-couped within the narrative logic of the text as feminine (passive and pliant) in relation

³⁹ Ryan and Kellner, p. 63. Quotation marks and parentheses, Ryan and Kellner.

to Deckard's (masculine) instrumentality in both inducting her linguistically and gesturally into an allegedly futuristic symbolic order as a heterosexual object of masculine desire, and in engineering their escape.

Fembots

Although Deckard engages in psychological combat with all four of the rebel replicants, he does not in fact kill either of the males. The force employed in overcoming his two female antagonists suggests strongly to me that they have been constructed as posing a far more serious threat to the blade runner's constructed subjecthood or subject position. Why? David Desser notes that *Blade Runner* borrows from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* the idea of the "robot."⁴⁰ He suggests that in both films the concept of the double, or doppl ganger, signifies "the dark side," the Other. Fear of the replicants is, for Desser, fear of the unconscious. This is typical of the explanations put forth for the prevalence of the doppl ganger motif in German Expressionist cinema of which *Metropolis* is an excellent example. According to Desser, *Metropolis* inaugurates the tradition of urban dystopias in the cinema.⁴¹ In this film the doppl ganger effect is overtly linked to the problem of sexuality, specifically female sexuality. The robot created by the "mad scientist" figure, Rotwang, is the "evil" double of Maria. The human Maria is associated with children, with virginity, and she inspires her fellow workers, and the hero, with love. On the other

⁴⁰ David Desser, "Race, Space and Class: The Politics of the SF Film from *Metropolis* to *Blade Runner*", *Retrofitting Blade Runner: Issues in Ridley Scott's Blade Runner and Philip K. Dick's Do Androids Dream Of Electric Sheep?*, in Judith B. Kerman (ed.), (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1991)

⁴¹ Desser, p. 114.

hand, the sight of the sexualised robot Maria causes the hero to faint, literally, from the very force of her libido. This evil (sexualised) female robot incites the capitalists to frenzied lust when she dances at the Yoshiwara club; and turned loose in the subterranean world, she incites the workers to violence. Desser insists that this doubling of Maria is an index of male fears and anxieties about female sexuality: "a reproduction of the universal ambivalent archetype of Woman: Virgin/ Whore."⁴²

Desser draws parallels between *Metropolis* and *Blade Runner*, or more specifically between *Metropolis* and Dick's novel. In the novelistic version Pris and Rachael look exactly alike. While this specific element of the representation of female sexuality is not present in the film, the female replicant figures might still be read as revealing or constructing male imaginary anxieties in relation to female sexuality. Rachael is represented as the "healing woman" who saves Deckard's life. Zhora, represented as a stripper, and Pris as a "pleasure" model replicant, both pose serious threats to Deckard. Both are represented as dedicated killers. Desser asserts that these ambivalences and contradictions built around the representations of female figures characterise fears of the Other. This Other is often held to be both inferior and superior as in the Whore/Madonna phenomena. This dichotomy also surrounds the construction of the replicants in relation to humans in *Blade Runner*: their superior strength and intelligence is mitigated by their alleged inferiority, their lack of emotion.⁴³

⁴² Desser, p. 113.

⁴³ Desser, p. 114.

Pris and Zhora.

Of the four rebel replicants, other than Rachael, it is the two females, Pris and Zhora, who are represented as posing the most dangerous threat to Deckard's selfhood. Neither of the male replicants, Leon or Roy Batty, are actually eliminated by the blade runner. On the other hand the scenes in which both Zhora and Pris are detected, identified and disposed of by Deckard are among the most spectacularly fetishised in terms of forceful action, slow-motion camera effect, the length of the scenes and the lingering effect of the camera work. Deckard finally tracks Zhora to a "sleazy" nightclub where she is working as an exotic dancer, accompanied by a genetically reproduced (simulated/replicant) snake. Simulacra or not, the reference to the biblical Eve is not lost on a feminist spectator. Not only is Zhora signified as excessive sex (for the man), in *Blade Runner* terms she is also classified as a "combat model." She realises, one step ahead of Deckard's persistent questioning, that she has been "unmasked" - her "true" replicant identity uncovered. After knocking Deckard to the ground, she escapes on foot. He, being merely human and no match for her in agility or strength, can not overtake her. In a long chase sequence which follows, the hero shoots Zhora several times in the back. She dies finally, after having crashed her way, in spectacular slow-motion, through a series of plate-glass shop windows. Naomi Wise, reviewing *Blade Runner* in *San Francisco*, has this to say of this sequence of scenes:

When Deckard discovers Zhora (Joanna Cassidy) - replicant *fatale*, designed for a murder squad - conventionally employed as a snake-

charming spectacle, his smarmy cover as moral guardian is so unconvincing, his incompetence so at the mercy of her strength, that her nude realization and terror-stricken escape defeats the scopophilic intention to fetishize her as a castrating freak. The claustrophobic chase and slow motion retirement of Zhora as she crashes through the glass windows of a department store Christmas fantasy is an assassination beyond murder.⁴⁴

The scenes in which Pris - signified as a "military/leisure model" or sex functionary replicant - and Deckard battle to the death of one or the other, is even more visually spectacularised as a cinematic "action" sequence. Initially, Pris (played by Darryl Hannah) surprises the blade runner with an incredibly athletic series of cartwheels which culminate in her leaping onto his shoulders and holding his neck/head in a strangle hold with her legs. Having freed himself from this "vagina dentata" position, he resorts again to the gun and shoots Pris. She dies in an extended scenario of screaming, thrashing, and bodily disintegration.

One could argue superficially that this is an "equal opportunity" film in which female subjects are signified as equally, or more, intelligent, strong and agile as/than male protagonists. The film event is prefaced by a statement which indicates overtly that the replicant characters are in this regard either equal or superior to the film's "humans." Despite recent developments in film theory and criticism which posits the potential for cross-identification between cinema spectators and screen protagonists regardless of the sex of either - and it must be remembered that replicants

⁴⁴ Naomi Wise, *San Francisco* 24/8 (August 1982): 23.

are represented in this high-tech milieu in more or less human realist terms (they are played by actual human actors) - the problem of why it is that two of the female replicants are constructed as posing a greater castratory threat to Deckard's subject position remains within the narrative logic of this film. The female and male replicants are differentiated in their respective relation to the central male human character Deckard. This construction of sexual difference along a male/female axis occurs only in this relation. In relation to each other, the male and female rebel replicants are signified as equally phallic (i.e. strong, intelligent, resourceful, instrumental) in engineering their escape from off-world labour conditions and in attempting to redress the restrictive temporal effects of their DNA replication. This difference in reading is overlooked by most theorists critiquing this text. The focus is either on the perceived deconstructive thrust or mediation along the human/technological divide (Ryan and Kellner) or, in feminist critiques, concerned more generally with how sexual difference is displaced onto human/alien differences in contemporary science-fiction films (Penley). The specifics of how the female replicants are represented and differentiated has not been a point of critical debate. They are either homogenised with the male replicants along the human/replicant negotiated divide or simply homogenised as female replicants. In classic noir mode, only Pris and Zhora are signified as castratory (i.e. independent, excessively sexual, "evil") in relation to the subject position constructed for the hero. Rachael, in spite of her question(s) as to whether she is a replicant or a human on the one hand, or a heterosexual or a lesbian on the other, is oedipalised linguistically by Deckard, and for the

spectator, in later scenes as a "proper" patriarchal woman (i.e. virginal, submissive, heterosexual). Despite the often complex deconstructive hybridisations and combinatory signification (undecideability of meaning) enacted generally across male and female replicants (both can be strong or submissive); humans and replicants (both can be rational or emotional); and the intertextual and supposedly destabilising generic coding (both noir and romance), Desser's observation of the doppelganger effect overtly linked to the problem of female sexuality remains in *Blade Runner*. Pris-Zhora can be read as the "evil" double of Rachael. In other words, some female simulated humans are coded as "evil" (Pris-Zhora), and some are coded as "good" (Rachael) in relation to the central male human-replicant. Thus far in this mythico-imaginary-symbolic system of meaning we have constructed for us these signs for "woman"- (i) an imaginary maternal body incorporated into the phallic father figure; and (ii) a imaginary castratory phallic mother displaced onto two phallic symbolic order female robots signified respectively through images of an imaginary "vagina dentata" and the mythologically ubiquitous Eve from the male hero subject's perspective. Within the narrative trajectory of this text there are, at this point, no representations of woman, no non-threatening (to the man) significations of female bodies, left standing, literally, save Rachael. It is not that sexuality categories, say heterosexual/homosexual, are constructed and then mediated into undecideability as are the categories human/replicant in this text. What Scott constructs within the narrative are representations of female heterosexuality as, on the one hand "excessive," and on the other hand "enough" for the man. The question as to whether she is a replicant or a lesbian, raised in the earlier

interrogation scene between Deckard and Rachael, is still suspended - resonating an absence or a gap in the body of the text.

Vivian Sobchack, writing in "The Virginity of Astronauts: Sex and the Science Fiction Film," sums up, through a reading of Foucault, the difference between psychoanalytic film criticism and other critical discourses in terms of the analysis of absences. She states that: "critical discourse, however, is not as a rule tuned to the analysis of negatives, of absences, of traces left by repression." Generally critical discourse, according to Sobchack, looks at what is represented as present, whilst psychoanalysis looks at what is there but represented as absent. Michel Foucault writes that psychoanalysis:

points directly..... not towards that which must be rendered gradually more explicit by the progressive illumination of the implicit, but towards what is there and yet is hidden, towards what exists with the mute solidity of a thing, of a text closed in upon itself, or of a blank space in a visible text.⁴⁵

Oedipal Scenes and Questions in Blade Runner.

In terms of fantasmatic oedipal scenarios in *Blade Runner* it is usually the diegetically inscribed oedipal conflict between the phallic father Tyrell, the figure of corporate power and authority, and his replicant son Roy Batty, the leader of the renegade replicants, which is of interest to commentators.

⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 374.

Roy blinds and kills Tyrell when it becomes apparent to Roy that Tyrell not only will not, but can not yet in scientific terms, modify or make good what Roy lacks (i.e. a normal human life-span). The illusion of the father's phallic attributes is revealed in this scene i.e. the father's power is revealed as imaginary. Psychoanalytic film critic Giuliana Bruno observes about this oedipal conflict in *Blade Runner* that Roy Batty refuses the symbolic castration which is necessary to enter the symbolic order; he refuses, that is, to be less powerful than the father. According to Bruno Roy commits the Oedipal crime; he blinds and kills his father. Bruno, conflating the crime against the father with the perpetrator's self-punishment, concludes that Roy thus seals his (lack of) destiny, denying himself resolution and salvation. While it may be that Roy has indeed sealed his lack of a destiny, Bruno over-looks the implication within this re-written oedipus of the revelation of the paternal figure's lack (of power to replicate longevity in androids). Of other oedipal scenarios constructed in *Blade Runner*, Bruno has this to say:

Of all the replicants, only one, Rachael, succeeds in making the [Oedipal] journey. She assumes a sexual identity, becomes a woman, and loves a man: Deckard, the blade runner. Rachael accepts the paternal figure and follows the path to a 'normal', adult, female, sexuality: she identifies her sex by first acknowledging the power of the other, the father, a man. ⁴⁶

In many ways Rachael's oedipal scene *vis-a-vis* Deckard replicates the Tyrell/Roy Batty scene although the outcomes are constructed differently.

⁴⁶ Bruno, p.190.

Deckard moves narratively into the father's place. Bruno again overlooks the implication in these filmic scenarios that the paternal figures (the father, Deckard, the more powerful others) might also lack. While Rachael is certainly positioned, both linguistically and gesturally, by Deckard, in the symbolic order of this text as a heterosexual woman, there appears a resonant gap in the narrative logic (the scenes in the lift) which can be read to imply that Rachael has the power to circumvent the paternal voice, the father's symbolic interdict that her desire is heterosexual, i.e. that she desires Deckard. I will return here after I have detoured through some questions raised within scientific and technological discourses: the question raised by Rachael as to her sexual identity during her Voight-Kampff interrogation, and the manner in which she might be said to have assumed her (hetero)sexuality in the *Blade Runner* symbolic order.

French- Canadian techno-artist and theorist Mireille Perron writing in "On Artificial Intelligence and Sexual Difference" in *Bioapparatus* constructs intertextual narratives between psychoanalytic, feminist, and scientific discovery narratives:

Intelligent machines have vague yearnings. They find themselves on analysts' couches telling the same old story: Oedipus, a story as invasive as certain people's doctrine. Not knowing how to block their ears on time, scientific analysts, out of spite, put out their eyes. Feminist analysts will not ever be able to make them see clearly. This is the final blow to scientific observation. Notwithstanding, to the great confusion of the blind

scientists who stubbornly lock themselves in, post-Oedipal feminist theories continue to accumulate in the recesses of research centres. Perhaps a vain hope, it seems that this blindness, long transmitted from one generation to the next, is not necessarily carried in the genetic code.⁴⁷

What Perron is responding to - ironically one might say - is the question raised in discourses on artificial intelligence, namely: "Can machines think?" Alan Turing, co-inventor of the computer, raised the question of whether machines could think and have experiences like a human being. Artificial intelligence experts have argued that a sufficiently complex computer could be every bit as conscious as we are. Turing conceived of a test in which a concealed machine is interrogated and attempts to convince the questioner that it is in fact a human being. If a machine can mimic human responses so well as to fool you or me then, Turing reasoned, it could be said to be conscious.⁴⁸ Perron points out, from a poststructural rather than a humanist position, that given the promiscuous response evoked by the question of artificial intelligence, no one had responded with: "Yes, your machines can be seen as intelligent to the extent that, like the men who conceive them, one perceives the survival of all sexual stereotypes as proof of intelligence." What Perron is asking is not whether machines can think, but rather the Foucauldian question: How, or like whom, will they think? In Turing's discourse the term "human" is unmarked, the entity assumed to be stable and its meaning universally understood. Perron then reformulates the problem

⁴⁷ Mireille Perron, "On Artificial Intelligence and Sexual Difference", *Bioapparatus* (Banff: The Banff Centre for the Arts, 1990), p. 56.

⁴⁸ See Paul Davies, "Return to Consciousness", *The Australian*, May 22, 1996, p. 24.

in terms of a game called "the difference game." Her hypothetical game is a variant on what she calls the [Turing?] "imitation game" in which an interrogator has to determine which of two people, whom he can not see, is the man and which is the woman. Perron then postmodernises the "hypothetical game" by suggesting that the "difference game" would be played with a variable number of subjects of unstable identity and sexuality. The object of the game is for the examiner to determine, via questioning, the mutating potentialities of her/his partners. Perron then poses the question: "What happens if the partners are cybernetic organisms (cyborg - an organism that is both biological and technological)?"⁴⁹ How and like whom will a cyborg think?

One might add here other generic indicators of science fiction or cyberpunk narratives - "interrogation tests" and "difference games." In *Blade Runner* the interrogation test is administered in order to "tell the difference" between humans and replicants in terms of emotional responses to the killing of animals. During Rachael's test scenario the human in this instance resembles a man and the machine resembles a woman. Rachael, who is constructed as the more intelligent machine in this scenario, can be read as interventionally deconstructing assumptions about sexuality underpinning a question designed to evoke a response to a bear-skin rug (i.e. a killed animal). This question is framed within a scenario (i.e. there is a nude girl lying on the dead bear skin) which assumes that (i) sexuality is heterosexual and (ii) that desire is masculine. VNS Matrix also construct a variation of the question and answer

⁴⁹ Perron, p. 56.

"difference game" in their *Game Girl* interactive computer hypertext. The player is asked to click on multiple choice questions: (i) Are you a female? (ii) Are you a male? (iii) Don't know. The player proceeds down different cyberspatial narrative pathways depending on the answer clicked. In this game one can return at any time to the menu questions and choose another. Variations on Turing's human/machine "imitation game" and Perron's "difference game" (unstable and mutating categories of gender/sexuality) could be said to have become generically encoded into cyberpunk discourses in one form or another. I will return now to oedipal narratives and the interrogation game as they are played out in science fictional mode in *Blade Runner*.

Rachael and the oedipal fantasmatic

Even though Rachael, as a replicant, has no childhood, her oedipal scenario is symbolically constructed for her by Deckard. As Giuliana Bruno might say this oedipalisation of Rachael could be read as a literalisation of Freud's narrative of the pathway to normative heterosexual femininity. During their first meeting in Tyrell's corporate offices, Deckard is induced by Tyrell to administer the Voigt-Kampff test to Rachael. She directly questions his judgement: "Have you ever retired a human by mistake?" He hesitates before answering in the negative - long enough to imply doubt that he can always conclusively tell the difference between a human and a replicant. He regains control within the structure of his official (within the law) position as blade runner/interrogator (the subject who knows). In this instance, the subject who knows, or who can

know, who is a replicant or not. The question/answer sequence begins with Deckard administering questions designed to provoke a response in relation to animals - specifically to evoke an emotional response to scenarios involving cruelty to animals. After question/answer sequences aimed at testing Rachael's responses to butterfly collections, calf-skin wallets and a live wasp the line of the interrogation switches to questions about sexual responses. The dialogue between Deckard and Rachael proceeds thus:

Deckard: You're reading a magazine. You come across a full page nude photo of a girl . . .

Rachael: Is this testing whether I'm a replicant or a lesbian, Mr. Deckard?

Deckard: Just answer the questions.

Rachael: (Silence)

Deckard: You show it to your husband. He likes it so much he hangs it on your bedroom wall.

(Voice over, barely audible: "bush outside your window ... orange body, green legs")

Rachael: I wouldn't let him. I should be enough for him

The slippage in the text, from questions about emotional responses concerning cruelty to animals to questions of sexuality occurs, according to William M. Kolb, in the transference of the film script to the screen. He claims that:

Rachael's precise responses to the Voigt-Kampff test contrast sharply with Leon's effusiveness. Her reaction to the question of receiving a calf-skin wallet, i.e. reporting it to the police, suggests that animals are highly prized in this society. When Deckard mentions a full-page photo of a nude girl, she responds sarcastically and glances at Tyrell, who appears to be enjoying himself. In the script, Deckard says, "You show the picture to your husband. He likes it and hangs it on the wall. *The girl is lying on a bear skin rug.*" Rachael's reaction is supposed to be in response to the killing of animals rather than the husband's behaviour.⁵⁰

Kolb reasons that it is the omission of the reference to dead bears in the film text which changes the direction of Rachael's responses i.e from the killing of animals to male (hetero)sexual desire. What Kolb omits in his meta-narration of the scene is Rachael's exact response to Deckard's mentioning a photo of a nude girl - other than to say that Rachael responds sarcastically. What Kolb avoids mentioning is that Rachael actively intervenes into the Voight-Kampff line of questioning designed to measure her responses to male (her husband's) desire (dead bears after all aren't mentioned in the film text) with a demanding question of her own about *lesbian* desire. Rachael actively interprets the line of questioning as possibly being about female (in this instance, lesbian) desire long before the question of her (assumed heterosexual) reaction to her husband's (assumed heterosexual) desire signified in relation to images of naked women ever comes up. Kolb's analysis of the dialogue in this scene replicates Deckard's constructed response to Rachael's raising of the

⁵⁰ William M. Kolb, "Blade Runner: Film Notes," *Retrofitting Blade Runner*, p. 159, emphasis mine.

question of active lesbian (female) desire, i.e. silence. He doesn't answer her question. Kolb locates the switch to questions about sexuality and sexual desire in the segment of text about the man (the husband's behaviour) not in Rachael's question about lesbian desire. What this analysis implies is the by now all too familiar Freudian assumption that libido is somehow masculine or originates in the male. The Voigt-Kampff line of questioning would seem to assume that the female interviewee would not only be heterosexual but also married. Rachael is constructed in the scene as not only actively changing the direction and topic of the questions, but can be read as actively destabilising the construction of heterosexuality underpinning the test questions. She responds ironically as though the question was designed to evoke female responses to images of naked women directly. Whether or not Rachael was meant to respond to images of dead animals or to her alleged husband's sexual desire in my reading becomes somewhat extraneous to the point. Rachael's demanding question about (possibly) lesbian desire can be read as driving a wedge into the construction of heterosexual desire ultimately reproduced both in the Voigt-Kampff questions and in this "test" scene.

The inclusion of the apparently nonsensical, and in the film text just barely audible, voice-over line - "bush outside your window ... orange body, green legs"- in this scene is also curious. In the screen script the "orange body, green legs" takes the place of the "lying on a bear skin rug" line which was meant to end the question beginning with the proposition that you [Rachael] are looking at an image of a nude girl. The "orange

body, green legs" refers to a spider which is metonymically linked later in a scene between the blade runner and Rachael to Rachael's simulated memories of her biological mother. During the Voight-Kampff interrogation, Rachael is unaware that she is a replicant i.e. that Tyrell is her incorporated parent. The veiled reference to this spider/mother is also inserted in the text between Rachael's intervention into the construction of (assumed) heterosexuality with her counter question about (potential) lesbian desire i.e. before Deckard's completes the assumption that images of nude girls signify heterosexual male desire -"you show it to your husband." The mother/spider, both textually and aurally has all but disappeared between these two sexed subject positions. Barely a trace, with no apparent meaning at this stage, is left - "bush outside your window orange body, green legs."

Spider woman

This spider/mother returns again, more fully articulated within the *Blade Runner* text during the next meeting between Deckard and Rachael. This meeting takes place in Deckard's apartment. He is again initially off-guard. The only access to his apartment is via a voice recognition, and activated, elevator - activated by his voice, that is. However, when he exits the lift, Rachael is already waiting for him. He is unnerved although no explanation of how Rachael breached the building's security system by activating Deckard's voice recognition elevator is forthcoming. Inside the apartment, Deckard regains control. He tells Rachael, cynically, that she is a replicant, that her memories of her childhood are false:

Rachael: You think I'm a replicant. (She shows Deckard a photograph). Look, It's me with my Mother.

Deckard: Yeah? Remember when you were six? You and your brother snuck into an empty building through a basement window. You were going to play doctor. He showed you his and when it got to be your turn, you chickened and ran? Remember that? Ever tell anyone that, huh? Your Mother, Tyrell, anyone, huh? You remember the spider that lived in a bush outside your window..... orange body, green legs? Watched her build a web all summer and one day there's a big egg in it. The egg hatched. . .

Rachael: The egg hatched and one hundred baby spiders came out and they ate her.

Deckard: Implants. Those aren't your memories. They're somebody else's, they're Tyrell's niece's.

In response to Rachael's obvious distress at this revelation, Deckard claims that he has made a bad joke, and tells Rachael to: "Go home." Linked metonymically within Rachael's constructed (false) childhood memories are an image of a mother; oedipal epistemophilic research ("you show me yours. . ." etc.); and a fantasmatic scene of spider/mother cannibalisation. Within the narrative logic of this film text, Rachael is a replicant, the memories are not hers. They are supplied by the corporate body/head Tyrell. As Giuliana Bruno has pointed out, Rachael - replicant or not - is represented as in the process of making a classical Freudian oedipal journey. She is about to assume a sexual identity, become a woman and follow the path to a "normal," adult, female, sexuality. In order to complete this journey successfully, Rachael must accept the paternal figure and his word - the law of the father. The pre-oedipal attachment to the

maternal body, and specifically, desire for the maternal body (i.e. as female other body) must be given up. Rachael must accept her castration, and identify her sex by acknowledging the power of the other, the father, a man. Bruno claims that: "In this tension between pre-Oedipal and Oedipal, Imaginary and Symbolic, the figure of the mother becomes the breaking point in the text."⁵¹ The mother for Bruno represents the trace of a dream of unity, of its impossibility. The mother is there as that which has been given up. The imaginary exists as a loss. Rachael's imaginary mother in this scene is re-configured as the prolifically fecund biological female body - the spider mother/woman who gives birth to hundreds of off-spring who cannibalise her body/resources. In this reconstructed oedipal narrative Rachael must relinquish her attachment to the imaginary grotesque biological maternal body and accept Tyrell as her corporate manufacturer, her techno-parent. Rachael can, according to Bruno, resolve her oedipal conflict by accepting, in turn, Deckard and his word as her authority figure. I will return to the missing maternal figure shortly. There is a third meeting between Rachael and Deckard, again in Deckard's apartment. It becomes apparent that Rachael not only does not know that she is a replicant, she also does not know what it is to be a (heterosexual) woman. She is instructed explicitly and forcefully by Deckard. Kolb describes the scene:

Deckard slams the door before Rachael can escape again. He shoves her forcefully into the blinds and then, more patiently, kisses her. But Rachael has no memory to know how to kiss a man.⁵²

⁵¹ Bruno, p. 190.

⁵² William M. Kolb, *Retrofitting Blade Runner*, p. 165.

In the demand and response sequence that follows, Deckard instructs Rachael in, and inducts her into, the symbolic order as a (hetero)sexual woman:

Deckard: "Now you kiss me!"

Rachael: "I can't rely on. . . "

Deckard: " Say, 'Kiss me!'"

Rachael: "Kiss me."

Deckard: " Say, 'I want you.'"

Rachael: "I want you."

Deckard: "Again!"

Rachael: "I want you. Put your hands on me."

This scene has been interpreted apologetically by an array of commentators included the actor Sean Young (who played Rachael) and a production executive, Katherine Haber.⁵³ From a feminist psychoanalytic perspective, this "moment" can be read as signifying Rachael's capitulation to the law of the father, to phallogocentric law as it is defined in *Blade Runner*. She becomes a "normal" (read heterosexual) woman. Ryan and Kellner have argued that, despite the fact that Deckard "more or less" rapes Rachael, this is not "really" a sexist text. No mention is made of its not really being a heterosexist text. One of the psychoanalytic justifications for the "not really sexist" argument is that ultimately Deckard is constructed as

⁵³ See Kolb, p. 165; Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz, *Critical Studies in Mass Communications* (6/1 March 1989), p. 69; Phil Edwards, *Starburst* 51, p. 20; and Ryan and Kellner, *Alien Zone*, p. 63.

becoming more human (less phallic) through his relationship with Rachael. Rachael supplies for him "the feminine pole," an alternative to the law of the phallic father, thus creating a space of difference in which he takes on his castration (becomes less rigidly phallic), more "feminine," caring, emotional. Within the narrative logic of this text, this constitutes the male subject Deckard as more fully "human." I would argue that this still constitutes a phallogocentric, or masculinist argument, in that it only re-defines what it means to be a man in the context of the *Blade Runner* text. Not one of the male critics who have read this text questioned why the "woman" Rachael should be positioned in this role, which is after all a role "for the man" - to aid his becoming more feminised, more human. What of the female figure in this scenario? The woman is left with no other position than the imaginary feminising pole for the phallic male subject. If she were to display her own masculine (phallic) characteristics she would, presumably, according to the narratology of this text, be brutally dealt with (i.e. as were Pris and Zhora). The constitution of a "new" subject applies, or is permissible, in the discursive context of *Blade Runner* only to the male subject. This new subject, this more whole human subject, is not only re-embodied as male, but is constituted within the imaginary fantasy of the heterosexual couple.

The Third Term.

One of the commonly recurring characteristics constructed for replicants and humans from *Blade Runner* is the universal lack of mothers. This point has been noted by several film theorist/critics in passing, primarily in relation to the father/son oedipal dyad(s) (i.e. Tyrell/Deckard or Tyrell/Roy Batty). I would argue that it is not so much that Rachael lacks a female mother as that the symbolic order into which she is inducted lacks a third term, a symbolic representation of a desirable object other than the father's son, Deckard. The fantasy of the oedipus narrative is central to orthodox Freudian theory. The oedipal triangle involves mother, father and son. Of classical Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalytic narratives Naomi Segal states that they have little place for a theory of motherhood.⁵⁴ In the oedipus complex, the development of the subject depends on surpassing, or overcoming, the mother-child dyad - the imaginary realm. This is accomplished with the real or fantasised intervention of the father. The child/subject is inducted, via the law of the father, into social life - the symbolic realm of language and meaning. The mother's position/role is essentially to be outgrown or repudiated. Proximity to the maternal body in psychoanalytic discourses betokens psychosis or fixation. Desire for the mother, or identification with the mother's/maternal body, in Lacanian terms, is forbidden to the nascent (masculine) subject. It is during the crucial stage of entry into the symbolic that sexual difference will eventually become meaningful for the male subject. The father's interdiction (castration threat, real or construed) is only temporary in

⁵⁴ Naomi Segal, "Motherhood," *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, ed. Elizabeth Wright (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), p. 266.

terms of constituting a sexed subjectivity. The loss of access to the maternal body is a transient loss. As an adult the (hetero)sexual male demands access to another female body in lieu of having successfully negotiated the relinquishment of the Father's desired object/ woman. His reward is a woman of his own. For him sexed, or gendered, subjectivity is constituted eventually between the law of the father and the feminine realm (access to another/different body). For the (normative) female subject access to another female body is not offered as a reward. In this narrative of female oedipalisation there is no symbolic place for a desired female object/ body.

Later in his career Freud discovered that the daughter's relation to the mother was not symmetrical to that of the son (SE 21: 225-243). The son's heterosexuality was congruent with his deepest and earliest passions, while the daughter was required to reject the first love-object totally. The centrality of the mother-daughter relationship was a crucial construct of feminist psychoanalytic discourses on female sexed subjectivity. One of the most important figures in revising Freudian-Lacanian accounts, or lack of accounts, of the mother-daughter scenario was Luce Irigaray.

Central to Irigaray's work is her theorising of the maternal genealogy and its absence in western thought. In *Blade Runner*, Rachael not only lacks a mother - daughter relationship - she lacks a mother, period. Irigaray's critique of Freudian narratives claims that this absence in psychoanalytic theory is detrimental to both mothers and daughters (i.e. women).⁵⁵ The only culturally meaningful images of the mother for the daughter in

⁵⁵ See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985).

psychoanalytic narratives are the phallic mother, a terrifying figure of omnipotence whom the daughter must flee to ensure some autonomy and identity for herself, or as the castrated mother, a mother lacking or deficient with whom the daughter does not wish to identify. It is from this mother that the daughter turns in humiliation and hatred to the father. For Irigaray the establishment of symbolically articulated mother-daughter relationships is essential to women's autonomy and identity, as women and not just mothers.⁵⁶ What Irigaray is suggesting is horizontal, rather than vertical, relationships. For this to transpire, women's desire for, and love of, the mother must have a culturally meaningful voice and recognition. Responsibility is transferred to the symbolic order rather than mothers.

I would argue that it is not just a viable representation of the mother articulated in the symbolic order of *Blade Runner* that Rachael lacks so much - that too - as an alternative figure to that of the father, or father/son dyad, through which to constitute difference and a sexed subjectivity. She is constructed in the film within a context in which she is symbolically offered one law, and one body, that of the male subjects through which to constitute a sexed identity. The coded as erotic and desired body of any female subject is not represented for her in her acquisition of an adult sexed subject position in this techno-noir universe. How can she tell the difference between a male object of her desire and a female object of desire if she does not know that which she lacks? (i.e. a viable symbolically articulated female object of desire). In the context of

⁵⁶ See for instance, Margaret Whitford's reading of Irigaray's concept of a maternal genealogy in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, p. 263.

Blade Runner the imaginary maternal body is textually abjected for, rather than by, Rachael. It is re-presented as a grotesque biologically fecund spider-body that has been incorporated into (re-placed and/or controlled by) the masculine producer of human-replicants. The only other representations of female subjects in this futuristic landscape are the overly determined phallic figures of Pris and Zhora i.e. threatening to the male subject Deckard.

What might be read in this film as a representation of Rachael's oedipalisation is accomplished in a sequence of scenes throughout the narrative in which Deckard linguistically and gesturally puts into place for Rachael *Blade Runner's* variation of the law of the father. This occurs regardless of whether the subject Rachael had a "real" mother or not. As a genetically reproduced being she obviously does not have a mother, or maternal source of origin, other than Tyrell. She is nonetheless inducted into a mono-sexual symbolic order as a properly "feminine" heterosexual subject and object. She is instructed to desire Deckard and to accept that she be desired by him. Within the imaginary-symbolic system of this film there are no female bodies coded as desirable objects for a female subject. Neither Rachael nor the spectator has direct access to a ficto-future symbolic order in which a specifically female body/object is signified as desirable to and for female subjects. In spite of the cyborg character Rachael's having enacted what might be construed as a deconstructively interventionist strategy of questioning the discursive reproduction of sexuality as heterosexuality, and desire as male-masculine, in the Voight-Kampff scenario, in closing the text Scott re-coups this female figure

within a mono-sexual scenario. For a queer reader the question, "Is this testing whether I'm a replicant or a lesbian, Mr. Deckard?" might still be suspended, resonating a gap or absence in the text.

Giuliana Bruno claims that with Rachael the theory [of Baudrillardian simulation] enacted in this film has reached perfection. She is, in Bruno's reading, the most perfect replicant because she does not know whether she is one or not. According to Bruno Rachael simulates her [hetero]sexuality. She adds that since the Deleuzian theoretical discussion of the simulacrum is the negation of both the original and the copy, the replicant is ultimately the celebration of the false as power and the power of the false. Bruno concluded that "The replicants turn this power against their makers to assert the autonomy of the simulacrum."⁵⁷ However, it is not clear to me at the conclusion of either the 1982 or the 1992 version of the film how Rachael the replicant can be read as turning this power (i.e. that heterosexuality has no original and the copy is also negated) against her maker to assert the autonomy of the simulacrum. This is to say that Rachael asserts her autonomy from Tyrell by simulating heterosexual female desire for Deckard. Rachael can also be read as simulating heterosexuality insofar as it is the only representation of sexuality or access to the order of signification that is constructed for her. How does this challenge the "norm" of simulated heterosexuality for replicants? Although Rachael is the character who attempts a re-arrangement of the signifiers of heterosexual male desire as a signification of lesbian desire in the Voight-Kampff scene, she is ultimately constructed in the film as a

⁵⁷ Bruno, p. 188.

female replicant simulating what is represented as the heterosexual "norm" in this film. Read as a queer moment Rachael's question constitutes an interruption to the narrative construction of heterosexuality in the film text. Read classically, her pre-oedipal epistemophilic question, "What sex(uality) am I?" is answered symbolically and emphatically by Deckard as, "Female replicants are heterosexual." There remains a tiny gap in the narrative closure of *Blade Runner*, particularly the 1992 version. In the final scene of the original (1982) cut Deckard and Rachael are seen romantically fleeing the decaying city into an idyllically coded landscape north of L.A. In the 1992 director's cut this scene is missing. Rachael and Deckard are seen in the final shot entering the lift in his apartment block - the lift activated electronically by Deckard's voice. This is the same lift that Rachael has operated without the spectator or Deckard ever discovering how she did it. What can be read into the gap is that Rachael knows how to by-pass Deckard's (the father's) voice.

In Thomas Foster's postmodern cyberpunk terms this film has something to offer the spectator by way of a re-negotiation of the terms "human" and "machine." However, insofar as "man" is subsumed in "human" and "woman" in "machine," masculinist sublimations in this discourse on techno-cultural production remain problematic. In terms of a postmodern re-negotiation of the meanings of sexual difference and of sexuality difference it remains, apart from Rachael's (Perronian) question, a closed narrative. For a queer reader Rachael's question provides a point of entry for deconstructing the conservative ideological assumptions underpinning

the construction of sexuality and sexual difference in the *Blade Runner* text.

Seven

"The clitoris is a direct line to the Matrix."

In this chapter I will analyse the cyberfeminist high-tech hypertext *All New Gen* by VNS Matrix (1993). This contemporary cyberpunk narrative can be read as a critique of the masculinist techno-cultural discourse inscribed in *Blade Runner*. Films like *Blade Runner* have been retrospectively assimilated and categorised as part of what has become known as the "cyberpunk" movement which emerged in the 1980s. The term cyberpunk, which had its origins in literary production, is now applied to a broad range of representational media and cultural practices (e.g. films, comic books, role-playing games, hacking, and computer crime). According to Thomas Foster, this textual and cultural movement emerged as a new formal synthesis of a number of familiar science fiction tropes. These he enumerates as: direct interfaces between human nervous systems and computer networks; the related metaphor of cyberspace as a means of translating electronically stored information into a form that could be experienced phenomenologically and manipulated by human agents jacked into the network; artificial intelligence, including digital simulations of human personalities that could be downloaded for computer storage; surgical and genetic technologies for bodily modification; the balkanization of the nation-state and its replacement by multinational corporations; and the fragmentation of the public sphere

into a variety of subcultures. Foster proposes that cyberpunk gave narrative form to what could be called the "posthuman" condition. In this form of fiction, cybernetics and genetic engineering combine to denaturalize the category of the "human" along with its grounding in the physical body.¹

Given that dominant western epistemologies, including psychoanalytic discourses on the subject, have posited the "human" as the self-sufficient phallic male subject with impermeable body boundaries, then one can only surmise that cyberpunk fiction represents a crisis in subjectivity for male subjects. Paradoxically, this conflict is exacerbated by a western ontology which fixes unified masculinist subjectivity as transcendent in relation to the (objectly feminised) materiality of the body. Cyborg constructions imply both penetration (of bodily boundaries) and reproduction (i.e. femininity). In order to be made hard (invulnerable), the masculinist body, paradoxically, must be penetrated - by technology (knowledge, information), by biological implants, by genetic manipulations. In terms of contemporary science fiction "cyberpunk" texts, Bruce Sterling cites the thematics of "body invasion" as characteristic of this fiction, and cyborg imagery as the most explicit form given this thematics. The cyberpunk understanding of technology as "pervasive," "utterly intimate," as "under our skins" and "inside our minds" informs this writing about media technologies and computer interfaces just as

¹ Thomas Foster, "Meat Puppets or Robopaths?: Cyberpunk and the Question of Embodiment," in *Genders* 18 (1993), pp. 11- 31.

much as its representations of mechanical prostheses, surgical alterations, and genetic engineering.²

What then is a feminist cyborg? Zoë Sofoulis writing in "Slime in the Matrix: Post -Phallic Formations in Women's Art in New Media" also claims that mythic figures are not just science-fiction creatures, but are "part of technoscience's renatured reality."³ These figures, according to Sofoulis, increasingly exceed the representational capacity of a phallogocentric system. For her, high-tech masculine maternity is a key example of a "post-phallic" formation. It is not that men aren't still in power, but that power has become more incorporating/incorporated. The figure of Tyrell from *Blade Runner* could be said to be represented in just such a manner - as the womby Big Mother corporation headed by the Father/creator of the cyborgs. Reading post-phallic formations suggests to Sofoulis the possibility of adding a third term to wholeness/lack. Along with the imaginary and symbolic, she theorises the addition of a mythic ratio in which the masculine corporate body appears as something like the pre-oedipal mother. This combinatory parent-figure body might be plundered for other purposes - perhaps feminist purposes. Sofoulis, in reference to *All New Gen*, writes that: "one way for women to imaginatively enter the big body of technology is for the 'micro' option, for example by identifying with a virus that can penetrate and corrupt the data banks of 'Big Daddy Mainframe.'"⁴ *All New Gen*, to which I will now

² Bruce Sterling, "Preface," in *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*, ed. Bruce Sterling (New York: Ace, 1988), p. xiii.

³ Zoë Sofoulis, "Slime in the Matrix," *Jane Gallop Seminar Papers*, ed. Jill Julius Matthews (Canberra: Australian National University, 1994), p. 99.

⁴ *Ibid.*

turn, might be read as a re-writing, appropriating the language and narratives of cyberpunk, of a post-oedipal story for "posthuman" viral girls. "Oh, suck me off," a line from the *All New Gen* soundtrack, together with their evocation of "slime" as a significant signifier, might give some indication of how VNS construct a female sexed cyborg decentred subjectivity. While an art/technology text produced by this cyberfeminist collective obviously does not compete with the dominant Hollywood corporate produced and distributed narratives of technology in either state of the art aesthetics or technical effects, it nonetheless critically challenges mainstream technophilic and techno-phallic discourses.

All New Gen

This section of the chapter will specifically examine postmodern reconfigurations of female and/or lesbian desire through an analysis of the relations between female subjects, the imaginary maternal body, and the father's symbolic law as they are constructed in the VNS Matrix's multimedia hypertext.⁵ I will argue that the abjection of the imaginary maternal body, in fact the abjection of the body, any body, as "feminine" as the ground on which western, white, middle-class, male, individualist narratives of subjectivity are premised is radically re-worked in this text.

⁵ Gareth Branwyn defines multimedia as the integration of communication elements drawn from different media (text, sound, video, animation). The co-ordination of these elements and the corresponding interactions with the user are accomplished through a computer. Elements may reside within the computer, or the computer can control other storage/playback devices such as VCRs, videodisc players, and TV monitors. See *Mondo 2000; A User's Guide to the New Edge*, p. 182. *Mondo 2000* also offers a concept of hypertext as: "The idea of hypertext is that one has an electronic document in which each page might have buttons leading not to one single next page but to many possible next pages. Hypertext can include sounds, images, film clips, and computer demonstrations as well as words," p. 148.

The "maternal" imaginary realm is re-written by VNS as a cybernetic and cyberspatial matrix, an infinite network of communications and "informatics" (information exchange). The subject(s) of this text, unlike the postmodern (male) subject-in-crisis are constructed as embodied in a clitorally and slime signified feminised entity, but nonetheless transcendent or different (desiring) in relation to the female body/subject symbolically signified as mother or even as "human." This difference, hence desiring relation, between female entities is constructed within a fantasy, utopic scenario in which subjectivity is constituted without repressing, disavowing or abjecting the relation to the maternally signified techno- body. In VNS' hypertext the matrix is re-signified rather as a pleasurable site for both the construction and practice of an erotics of a female signified subject, and as a site of epistemological production and pleasure in that knowledge (informatics). VNS Matrix invite the participant in their game to "Enjoy." This multimedia hypertext constructs a mutating female subject who is not signified within the symbolic order of *All New Gen* as Mother, Virgin or Whore, - the staple representations of "woman" from traditional science-fantasy texts - and who also resists a Paternal Law signified in this context as the militaristic and capitalist control of the socio-symbolic order through imperialist deployments of new technologies. Appropriating from the "future languages" of cyberculture, VNS represent - within their constructed fantasmatic - the (maternal) matrix, *All New Gen*, as "omnipresent intelligence" who will not only "push your gender construction to destruction," but will "launch you on a dangerous journey to screw up Big Daddy Mainframe."⁶ One is

⁶ VNS Matrix, *All New Gen* catalogue (Adelaide, South Australia: Experimental Art Foundation, 1993).

as likely to be invited to identify with a virus or as a "slime-pod," all variations of the *All New Gen* entity.

One might say that the text(s) constructed by VNS - four Adelaide and Sydney (Australia) based techno-artists⁷ - could be read in the context of science-fantasy literary, filmic and new media genres as techno-poetic representation(s) of female desire(s), sexual practices, and female subjectivity constituted within a galaxy of signifiers rather than a structure of dominant or dominating signifieds. For instance, sexuality in this scenario is not constructed as heterosexual, neither is it replaced by dominant representations of lesbian desire or sexuality. Within this "futures" fantasmatic, the female subject(s) are represented as active agent(s) of their own desires. The signification of desire is associatively networked across a semiotic grid or web in which erotics, politics, cultural production, and adventure are produced within the same linguistic framework. For example one might be invited to "slime" one's way into the data banks of Big Daddy Mainframe in order to subvert the system of "informatics of domination" or "slime" one's way into another body in a libidinal and/or mutating subjectivity sense.

The spectator/interactor might gain access - physically and conceptually - to the text by several entrances, none of which is declared authoritatively to be the main one. Before venturing to outline the convergence of critical theory and technology from which the concept of hypertext as a signifiatory system of reading and writing emerged, I will briefly outline

⁷ The VNS Matrix cyberfeminist artist collective are Josephine Starrs, Francesca da Rimini, Virginia Barratt and Julianne Pierce.

the "plot" of *All New Gen* (insofar as a non-linear text could be said to have one) and describe briefly the manner in which the multi-media production was presented insofar as reading the text depends on how the spectator negotiates the installation space and its various intermeshed discourses.⁸ The major elements within the installation/exhibition include a computer game, *Game Girl*, designed and programmed by VNS which the spectator can "play," a sound installation with aural text which can be heard via individual headphones, a black curtained "room" named the Bonding Booth in both English and Japanese - and in which the spectator could view a poetic pornographic video of lesbian s/m desire; a small photographic "shrine" to the Oracle Snatch; and a billboard size poster comprised of computer generated visual imagery and VNS' Matrix's Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the Twenty-first Century. This "manifesto," which contains one of VNS' most quotable assertions - "the clitoris is a direct line to the matrix" - is also available to the reader/viewer in Spanish.⁹ Given the overall trajectory of my analyses, I will return to the significance of the lesbian s/m video after outlining the narrative structure and plot of *All New Gen* and setting up a framework derived from both theories of hypertext and cyberfeminist theories within which the text might be read.

⁸ *All New Gen* was exhibited at the Experimental Art Foundation (South Australia) from 21 October to 21 November, 1993. I have utilised my viewing of this particular showing of the work as the basis of my analysis in this chapter. The arrangement of the installation may have varied in exhibition at other galleries.

⁹ The Spanish translation of VNS Matrix's manifesto is by Claudia Raddatz.

All New Gen: as conceptual subject and narrative plot.

The "plot" of *All New Gen* might best be articulated or summarised through VNS' introduction to the computer game and through the synopsis supplied for the spectator/reader in the catalogue which accompanies the exhibition. This catalogue is presented as a fold out series of perforated, tear-off, postcards. Some contain computer generated visual images from the game, and some contain text which outlines the cyberfeminist conceptual framework from within which the artwork and the plot emerges. The reverse side of the catalogue postcards contains "safe sex" warnings such as: "Don't gamble with sexually transmitted diseases. Get tested."

The spectator of the exhibition and/or player of the computer game is addressed from the outset as female. The entity *All New Gen* is envisaged and constructed by VNS as "she." They write in the catalogue: "All New Gen - who you can never quite pin down, no matter where you interface with the matrix as she is omni-present which is to say that she's in language too . . ." ¹⁰ Before entering the installation space, the viewer/reader is invited through the catalogue text to identify with the subject *All New Gen* (ANG). This sexed female entity is conceptualised and defined by VNS, appropriating from the language of cyberpunk, as an "omnipresent intelligence, an anarcho-cyberterrorist with multiple guises whose main aim is to virally infect and corrupt the informatics of domination and terminate the moral code." One is invited by the artists

¹⁰ VNS Matrix, *All New Gen* catalogue.

to join ANG who leads a band of "renegade DNA Sluts - Patina de Panties, Dentata, and the Princess of Slime," as she grants the wish for " (s)heroic quests, exuberant eroticism and serious politics."¹¹ Thom Corcoran writes that "within the hyper-aesthetics of 'new' technological frameworks, VNS do not merely envision a 'post-real' world but also a post-gendered domain of erotic action."¹² He points out that [sexual] difference is placed on the plane of the "contested zone" which, within the aesthetics of VNS' visual representation of cyberspace is envisioned as one of a series of free floating Deleuzian plateaus set in black infinite space. On this plateau or virtual zone, the spectator/interactor is invited to "play" with the omnipresent ANG and the DNA Sluts who: "not only push your gender construction to destruction but launch you on a necessary and dangerous journey, the aim of which is to screw up Big Daddy Mainframe."¹³ The "plot" is outlined for the spectator/player at various points on the multiple pathways through the computer game. It reads, in part:

In this game you become a component of the matrix, joining ANG in her quest to sabotage the databanks of Big Daddy Mainframe . . . All battles take place in the Contested Zone, a terrain of propaganda, subversion and transgression. Your guides through the Contested Zone are renegade DNA Sluts, abdicators from the oppressive superhero regime, who have joined ANG in her fight for data liberation . . . The path of infiltration is treacherous and you will encounter many obstacles. The most wicked is Circuit Boy - a dangerous techno-bimbo . . . You will be fuelled by G-Slime. Please monitor your levels. Bonding

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Thom Corcoran, "' Lost in Cyberspace' or Remaking the Modern?" Hons. thesis. School of Communication and Information Studies, University of South Australia, 1994, p. 54.

¹³ VNS Matrix, *All New Gen* catalogue.

with the DNA Sluts will replenish your supplies . . . Be prepared to question your gendered biological construction . . . Be aware there is no moral code in the Zone (VNS Matrix, *Game Girl*).

Before analysing how female (including lesbian) bodies, sexuality, and subjectivity are constructed - and desire signified - within the *All New Gen* hypertext, I will outline some of the recent historical developments in philosophical, psychoanalytic and linguistic theories (including cyberfeminist theories) which have arisen from the confluence of postmodern thinking about culture, text, representation, the subject, and technology. In this section I will examine specifically the re-signification of the (laser beam) clitoris as not only a signifier of female desire, but also as a signifier - within the futurist fantasy scenario of the *All New Gen* hypertext- of power and authority. This lethal weapon functions in this plot as something of a techno- grid cutting/infiltration tool - a fantasy phallus. In order to outline a theoretical framework within which this text might be read I will begin with the convergence of critical theory and technology as it is articulated in the discourses on hypertext by U.S.A. theorist and practitioner George P. Landow.

Hypertext and Critical Theory.

Landow comments that when designers of computer software and writers such as Theodor Nelson examine the pages of *Glas* or *Grammatology*, they encounter "a digitalized, hypertextual [Jacques] Derrida." He counters dialogically that when literary theorists examine Nelson's *Literary Machines*, a work on computer technologies, they encounter a

deconstructionist or poststructural Nelson. According to Landow these "shocks of recognition can occur because over the past several decades literary theory and computer hypertext, apparently unconnected areas of inquiry, have increasingly converged."¹⁴ Landow asserts that those working in computing will know the ideas of Nelson and that those working in literary and cultural theory will be familiar with those of Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes. These writers, like many others, argue that we must abandon conceptual systems founded upon ideas of centre, margin, hierarchy and linearity and replace them with ones of nodes, links, networks and multilinearity. According to Landow, most proponents of this conceptual shift see electronic writing as a direct response to the strengths and weaknesses of the printed book. Hypertext promises to embody and test aspects of theory, particularly those concerning textuality, narrative, and the roles or functions of reader and writer. Hypertextuality, continues Landow, embodies poststructural conceptions of the open text which in many ways becomes easier to demonstrate in electronic, rather than print, media. Electronic writing (hypertext) is fundamentally an intertextual system which has the capacity to emphasise intertextuality in a way that a page-bound text in a book can not.

Roland Barthes, writing in *S/Z*, asserts that an ideal textuality is composed of blocks of words (or images) linked by multiple paths, chains or trails in an open perpetually unfinished textuality. Computer hypertextuality parallels almost precisely Barthes' notion of textuality described in terms

¹⁴ George P. Landow, *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 2.

of links, nodes, networks, webs, and paths. The networks, says Barthes, are multiple and interactive without any one of them surpassing the others. This Barthesian text is a "galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one. . . ."¹⁵ The codes mobilised in Barthes' ideal textuality are indeterminable. He concedes that systems of meaning can take over this plural text, but that their number is never closed. In Barthes' reconceptualisation of (hyper)textuality, the text becomes a writerly rather than a readerly text. The goal of a literary work (of literature as work) for Barthes is to make the reader become a producer, rather than a consumer, of the text. Readerly texts for Barthes are classic texts.¹⁶ The multiplicity of hypertext calls for an active reader. A hypertext system then is one which permits the individual reader to choose his or her own centre of investigation.

More than any other contemporary theorist, Jacques Derrida uses the terms link, web, network, matrix, and interweaving.¹⁷ Unlike Barthes who emphasises the readerly text and its non-linearity, Derrida could be said to emphasise textual openness, intertextuality, and the irrelevance of distinctions between inside and outside a particular text. George Landow suggests that Derrida's notion of dissemination might also be a description of hypertext. Derrida writes that: "Along with an ordered extension of the concept of text, dissemination inscribes a different law governing effects of sense and reference (the interiority of the 'thing,' reality, objectivity,

¹⁵ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), pp. 5-6.

¹⁶ Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 4.

¹⁷ See Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 63, 96, 98, 149.

essentiality, existence, sensible or intelligible presence in general, etc.), a different relation between writing, in the metaphysical sense of the word, and its 'outside' (historical, political, economical, sexual, etc.)."¹⁸ One more writer who might be said to have foreshadowed the experience of writing and reading in hypertext is Mikhail Bakhtin whose concept of the polyphonic novel also influenced Julia Kristeva's conceptualisation of intertextuality. Bakhtin has written about the dialogic, polyphonic, multivocal novel, which he claims "is constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other."¹⁹ Bakhtin illuminates hypertextuality, according to Landow, from the vantage point of its instantiation of a voice. Bakhtin claims that in the Dostoevskian novel non-participating "third persons" are not represented in any way. There is no place for them, compositionally or in the larger meaning of the work. Landow writes in relation to Bakhtin's observation that:

In terms of hypertextuality this points to an important quality of this information medium: hypertext does not permit a tyrannical, univocal voice. Rather the voice is always that distilled from the combined experience of the momentary focus, the lexia one presently reads, and the continually forming narrative of one's reading path.²⁰

¹⁸ Derrida, *Dissemination*, p. 42.

¹⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 18.

²⁰ Landow, *Hypertext*, p. 11.

Landow asserts that as readers move through a web or network of texts, they continually move the centre - and hence the focus or organising principle - of their investigation and experience. Hypertext, in other words provides an infinitely re-centrable system whose provisional point of focus depends upon the reader. The reader in a Barthesian sense becomes an active, or interactive reader. One of the fundamental characteristics of hypertext is that it is composed of bodies of linked texts which have no primary axis of organisation. The entity that is the metatext (what in print technology is the book, work, or text) has no centre. The user of hypertext makes his or her own interests the *de facto* organising principle for the investigation of the moment.

Landow employs the term hypermedia, which he uses interchangeably with hypertext, to extend the notion of the text in hypertext by including visual information, sound, animation, and other forms of data.²¹ One might say that as a signifying system, or as sets of signifying systems, *All New Gen* employs many, or all, of the hypertextual and hypermedia conceptualisations and practices outlined above. As such it is difficult to describe this multimedia installation as having a narrative, a central plot or even a centre. The manner in which this hypertext might be read or experienced by the spectator, reader, or player is open to any number of possibilities. For instance it might be read as a discourse on perverse sexualities if one visits the video and acoustic sites within the installation. The billboard site might be read as a political discourse (manifesto) on feminist art practices. The computer game reads as a science-fiction story

²¹ Landow, *Hypertext*, p. 4.

about a band of cyber-girls infiltrating dominating data systems and spreading a "virus of the new world disorder." The game can also be read as a feminist critique of the discourse and practices of mainstream and phallogocentric cyberculture. Moving back and forth between various sites - no order is designated - may produce for the player- reader any number of other readings. The sublimation of libido required in the Freudian sense for heroic quests (cultural production) constructed at the computer site might be understood as re-surfacing in the video/sound sites. The linguistic networking between all of the sites might for some readers intermesh the various texts/discourses. Or they may be read as separate(d). Before moving to a psychoanalytic reading of the re-signification of the clitoris, slime, desire, the maternal body, and female sexuality in the context of *All New Gen*, I will briefly run through some of the writings from cyberfeminist theorists within which such a reading of VNS' hypertextual production might be situated. I will begin on a cautionary note from Alice Jardine and Michel Foucault.

Alice Jardine, Michel Foucault.

Alice Jardine, writing in "Of Bodies and Technologies" states that the fields of theories and practices covered by the words "the body" and "technology" are enormous.²² Firstly for Jardine there are questions of gender and women, especially to the extent that both are frequently absent from discussions of technology and the body - as if men's and women's bodies had been represented in the same way throughout western

²² Alice Jardine, "Of Bodies and Technologies", *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), pp. 151-58.

philosophies and histories, as if women (as historically constructed bodies) had had control over the technology. In Jardine's account, technology always has to do with the body and thus with gender and women in some form. She asserts that sexual difference is present when we investigate technology at the level of male fantasy as with the virgin and the vamp, where technology is represented as an asexual virgin mother, neutral, obedient and subservient to man, or as vamp, castrating phallic woman, threatening and out of control. For Jardine sexual difference is present as well at the level of philosophy and language. For her gender is relevant etymologically: it is clear that somewhere in the past *tek* - the etymological root of both technology and *tecnology* [sic] - meant not only fabricating and weaving but also begetting and giving form. Questions of bringing forth and revealing link technologies, according to Jardine, as first and foremost challenges to Mother Nature. Finally, gender is relevant psychohistorically: the maternal has been a crucial imaginary and symbolic order trope in the psychohistory of male technological fantasy, and also in the more recent histories of the ways in which, she says, machines and women have come alive and to identity at approximately the same time.

Jardine also reminds us that Michel Foucault has left us with a metaphorical, but still powerful, description of how bio-technico power emerged in the seventeenth century as a coherent political technology. The concern with the human species became a concern with the body to be manipulated with new technologies of discipline. He has demonstrated how, in the nineteenth century, the classical concern with the species and

the body united with a concern for sex, producing new disciplinary technologies and techniques of power, surveillance and punishment. These Foucauldian political technologies have, in Jardine's estimation, presently combined with the still anthropological and instrumental sense of technology as both mechanical and cybernetic within a technologic run by technocrats who consider rationality only in terms of efficiency. Jardine, in her essay "Of Bodies and Technologies," is concerned that we are being programmed for new and sometimes frightening megamachines and with their effects on the flesh.

Cyberfeminists

Techno-feminist or cyberfeminist theorists, such as Donna Haraway, Sadie Plant and Zoë Sophia/Sofoulis, imagine and articulate a different relation between body and machine, and between women and technology. This theoretical trajectory is based less on an hierarchical dualism between dominant megamachines and submissive bodies and more on a transgressive strategy and politics which imagines and constructs a perverse alliance between women and machines. Taking Jardine's observation that women and machines have come alive and to identity at approximately the same time, Sophia's observation that women and computers (for man) are structurally equivalent, that is, user-friendly, and Plant's recounting the tale of a paranoid man on television who thundered that "women and robots are taking our jobs," cyberfeminism simply points out the subversive alliance between women and all non-human intelligent activity, and also the extent to which these connections

have always been in place. Taking up a cyberfeminist-with-attitude position, Sadie Plant writes in "Cybernetic Hookers" that women and machines have become disloyal - they have begun to think for themselves. Plant, who might be described as a cyberpunk feminist, defines a cyberfeminist end of the millenium as the "Empire of the Senseless" whose replicants say: "Fuck him, he was only a man. Men, especially straight men, aren't worth anything. Anymore. In this city, women are just what they always were, prostitutes. They live together and they do whatever they want to do."²³ Plant defines woman as neither man-made with the dialecticians, biologically fixed with the essentialists, nor wholly absent with the Lacanians. She is, for Plant, in the process "turned on with the machines."²⁴ She writes:

Cyberpunk and chaos culture are peppered with wild women and bad girls, transgressions of organization, the freaks and mutants who find their own new languages, the non-members, the nomads, the sexes that are not one; leftovers from history; those who have slipped past its filters too soon and accessed the future before its time; hybrid assemblages of what were once called human and machine on the run from their confinement to the world of man and things. Cyborgs and aliens, addicts and trippers burn past security and through the ice of a culture devoted to spectacle, hacking the screens and exceeding the familiar. Avatars of the matrix; downloading from cyberspace. They are no longer human. Perhaps they never were.²⁵

²³ Sadie Plant, "Cybernetic Hookers," paper delivered at the Future Languages day of Artist's Week, The Adelaide Festival of the Arts, 1994. Published in the *Australian Network for Art and Technology Newsletter* (April/May 1994), p5.

²⁴ Plant, "Cybernetic Hookers," p. 5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

In many ways VNS' hypertext remains critical of the male-centred rationales of cyber-culture, while appropriating the languages of this culture, and re-writing the female techno-body within the spirit of Donna Haraway's influential, and self-admittedly utopic, essay, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s."²⁶ Haraway writes that she is constructing an argument for the cyborg as a fiction mapping social and bodily reality and as an imaginative resource which might suggest some fruitful couplings. For her Foucault's biopolitics is a flaccid premonition of cyborg politics, a very open field. She argues for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction. In Haraway's conceptualisation the cyborg body, linked postmodernly to pleasure, is located in the interplay of surfaces, intertexts and generic dialogisms. Haraway's proposed cyborg subjectivity might be said to be decentred and unstable, i.e. non-phallogocentric. In terms of Haraway's textuality, Anne Cranny-Francis comments that the text proposes no integrative, integrated, seamless, narrative (of the subject), but a fragmented positionality whose political counterpart is affinity not identity.²⁷ Haraway writes that:

The cyborg is a creature in a post-gendered world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western

²⁶ Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," *Australian Feminist Studies* 4 (Autumn 1987): 1-41.

²⁷ See Cranny-Francis, "Feminist Futures," *Alien Zone*, p. 227.

sense; a final irony since the cyborg is also a powerful apocalyptic telos of the 'West's' escalating domination of abstract individuation, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency, a man in space. An origin story in the 'Western' humanist sense depends on the myth of original unity, fullness, bliss and terror, represented by the phallic mother from whom all humans must separate [. . .] The cyborg skips the step or original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense. This is its illegitimate promise that might lead to subversion of its teleology in star wars.²⁸

For Haraway the cyborg is committed to partiality, irony, perversity and intimacy. A cyborg world might be one in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory positionality. Haraway asserts that some differences are playful and that some are poles of world historical systems of domination. She defines "epistemology" as knowing the difference. Furthermore she reminds feminism that technological determinism is only one ideological space opened by the reconceptualization of machine and organism as coded texts through which we might engage in the play of writing and reading the world. "Textualization" of everything in post-structural, postmodernist theory has, according to Haraway, been damned by Marxists and socialist feminists for its utopian disregard for lived relations of domination that ground the "play" of arbitrary reading. However, she insists, post-modern strategies like the cyborg myth subvert myriad organic wholes - the certainty of what counts as nature. A source of insight and a promise of

²⁸ Haraway, "A Manifesto," p. 3.

innocence is undermined, says Haraway, "probably fatally." The transcendent authorisation of interpretation is lost, and with it the ontology grounding "Western" epistemology. For Haraway, the alternative is not cynicism or bad faith i.e. accounts of technology determinism destroying "man" by the "machine" or "meaningful political action" by the "text." Who cyborgs will be is a radical question. The answer to this question, she asserts, is a matter of survival.²⁹ On the question of cyborg "sex," Haraway suggests that it restores some of the "lovely replicative baroque of ferns and invertebrates (such nice organic prophylactics against heterosexism). Cyborg replication is uncoupled from organic reproduction."³⁰

Cathryn Vasseleu writes in "Virtual Bodies/Virtual Worlds" that in virtual reality, the site of reproduction is relocated from the maternal body to the matrix of cyberspace.³¹ One of the feminist questions asked by Zoë Sophia in "Virtual Corporeality: A Feminist View" is: "What place does the female body have in cyber-space?"³² She initially answers this question in the negative: "Femininity and maternity are present, but displaced onto masculine and corporate technological fertility." Sophia is not simply conflating the biological (female) and the sociological category of gender (woman) with "femininity" and "maternity." What Sophia is specifying is a masculine excess which finds expression in feminine and

²⁹ Haraway, p. 5.

³⁰ Haraway, p.2.

³¹ Cathryn Vasseleu, "Virtual Bodies/Virtual Worlds", *Australian Feminist Studies* 19 (Autumn 1994): 166. Vasseleu defines "Cyberspace" as the space within the electronic network of computers from which virtual realities can be made. "Virtual realities" she defines as computer generated systems which use cyberspace to simulate various aspects of interactive space (i.e. they are inhabitable computer systems of space).

³² Sophia, "Virtual Corporeality," p. 15

techno-maternal figures, for instance the "womby red brain-womb" of the computer HAL from *2001: A Space Odyssey* or the womby computer Mother in *Alien*. One might add the big mother corporate head, Tyrell, "creator" of replicants, from *Blade Runner*. Instead of a female-identified woman, Sophia suggests, we find an Athenoid (daddy's girl), or an emotionally remote, machine-woman. She adds that we also regularly find a "fembot" like the false Maria in *Metropolis* who is commissioned as a sexy tool of a male-dominated state. Women in these masculinist scenarios are represented as signs or objects, but not usually as the possessors or subjects of knowledge. If women and computers are structurally equivalent (i.e. user-friendly) in a masculinist imaginary, then cyberspace can be imagined within the male computer hacker's imagination as a maternal or a feminine body - a matrix - to be penetrated, cut up and manipulated in quests to appropriate and control resources. However, on the other hand, argues Sophia, the prospect exists from a feminist perspective for adopting more dialogical and negotiated styles of interacting with computers and other material semiotic actors. One possible source of fascination with artificial intelligence and technobodies for feminists, women science-fiction writers and techno-artists, suggests Sophia, is that "if these artificial second selves can be loved and accepted as powerful, resistant, speaking subjects, so too might women, long acclaimed as monstrous to conventional categories of self and other."³³ Speaking of the monstrous (maternal) woman one might also recall the slime-spitting and interminable egg-laying as signifiers of the feminine alien/mother from the film *Aliens*. Science fiction film narratives often

³³ Sophia, "Virtual Corporeality," p. 16.

imagine the techno-maternal body as the clean and proper body as distinct from the slime-exuding imaginary bio-maternal body.

In her recent (1994) essay Sofoulis mobilises Melanie Klein's theories of part-objects (e.g. breast, penis); Klein's relocation of primary castration as the loss of the breast (for which the penis might then be a substitute); the "epistemophilic phase" (imaginary research into the mother's body for good objects [e.g. penises, babies, faeces]); and the "femininity complex" of boys as a framework for reading masculinist techno-art mythical productions such as "womb-brains." Sofoulis asserts that whereas phallogocentric explanations focus on the boy's discovery of woman's lack, equally decisive for subsequent cultural production is the mother-identified pre-oedipal boy's discovery of his own lack of maternal organs of breasts, vagina and womb.³⁴ In Klein's narrative of the "femininity complex" of boys, maternal/female organs are targets of envy and appropriation. But, Sofoulis adds, following Klein, this maternal identification and envy is denied and compensated for by an over-valuation of the phallus and oedipal identification with the father.³⁵ Sofoulis continues that the disavowed elements of maternal identification and organ envy are sublimated into "cultural activities in which men play out fantasies of intellectual and technological productions as forms of reproduction, where inventions are brainchildren of 'fertile' minds and men can unite with technologies to produce monsters without the aid of

³⁴ Sofoulis, "Slime in the Matrix", p. 91.

³⁵ *Ibid.* See also Melanie Klein [1928], in *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1975), p. 191.

women."³⁶ What Sofoulis is driving towards with Klein here is the formulation of a realm of the mythic along with those of the imaginary and the symbolic. What Sofoulis suggests is that within the context of the idea that maternal identification and envy is repressed from the symbolic order, it is not repressed from cultural production generally, but is rather sublimated into the mythic. This domain of the mythic includes, for Sofoulis, both technology and art. From this perspective, Sofoulis reasons, the oedipus complex provides a partial resolution of the boy's femininity complex. It eases the boy's journey into male dominated spheres of cultural production where pre-oedipal fantasies are legitimated as culturally valued activities conducted in the Name-of-the-Father and signified as phallic. Sofoulis asserts that on closer scrutiny these cultural productions of art and technology bear the marks of a more polymorphous system of significations and fantasies (e.g. anal, oral, maternal).³⁷ If, as Sofoulis points out, the imaginary "femininity complex" of the boy (i.e. his envy of, and fantasmatic appropriation of maternal/female organs) is sublimated in the cultural production of mythic "womb-brain" configurations then one might speculate as a corollary that in a feminine mythic the appropriation of missing male organs might apply. In "Slime in the Matrix" Sofoulis suggests just that: "If masculine sublimation in technoculture has been about acquiring the missing feminine organs (e.g. to make magical brain-wombs), the VNS Matrix images mythically develop the slogan 'Give a girl a spanner' and suggests that feminine sublimation might involve the appropriation of the phallus as a magical

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷*Ibid.* p. 92

symbol."³⁸ In many respects this is precisely what I have argued, through Teresa de Lauretis' insistence that feminist analysts rethink the Freudian/Lacanian idea of the castration complex; the mechanisms of (female) fetishism; and the female "masculinity complex," in reading the construction and significance of the fantasy fetish phallus in Winterson's *The Passion*. Webbed feet which allow female heroines to walk on water do suggest a mythical/magical realm of cultural and fantasy production.

Cunt metaphors.

If one were to trace a feminine mythic order through a corollary of Sofoulis'/Klein's maternal organ envy and "femininity complexes" of boys, then one need only return to Freud's discourses on female sexed subjective development. In Freud's discursive narratives of female sexual development the idea of "penis envy" for girls could not be said to be repressed. It is to the contrary, according to Freud, a ubiquitous, if not universal, characteristic of the pre-oedipal female phallic stage. In summarising the Freudian narrative of normative female development, Naomi Segal writes:

Motherhood is the goal of female development; but only via a series of losses, relinquishing the preferred erotic organ (the clitoris), the first-desired parent and, finally, the wish for a penis, in favour of a compensatory desire for a child from father or husband.³⁹

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 100.

³⁹ Naomi Segal, "Motherhood," p. 266.

One can see quite clearly that a symbolic order which reproduces rigidly segregated sexual differences and normative "feminine" hetero-sexed subjectivity for women represses the clitoris, desire for the maternal body, penis envy, and female homosexuality. Although Freud attributed "penis envy" to all girls this envy of the paternal organ must be successfully repressed on the tortuous oedipal journey for girls toward a culturally appropriate adult form of female subjectivity. In Freud's story of the female child/subject, he speculates that the girl discovers that she as well as her mother are castrated, and turns to the father or father substitutes as love objects, possessors of the superior, hence desired, organ (signifier of power and desire). This turning (to the paternal), this "penis envy" Freud attributes, as symbolically unmediated, to the girl's optics rather than to her entry to a socio-symbolic in which the meaning of, fantasies about, and "laws" (language) constituting female bodies, sexual drives, socially desirable object choices and goals already exist. According to Elisabeth Young-Bruehl's reading of Freud's *Three Essays* up until the 1924 revisions, it can be assumed that before the integration of pre-oedipal component drives under the primacy of the genitals in the service of reproduction, auto-erotic (active pleasure seeking) oral, anal, genital (clitoral and penile), and epistemophilic activity was the same for boys and girls.⁴⁰ It is obvious, however, from Freud's 1915 construction of the sexual theories of children that epistemophilic activities in children produce different results for boys and girls. Boys assume that everyone has a penis. Girls to the contrary can see the difference between genitals

⁴⁰ Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Freud on Women: A Reader* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1990), p. 121.

and their respective values very easily and immediately fall into penis envy and fantasise being boys themselves. Girls who refuse to give up the wish for, or fantasy of, acquiring the missing organ one day are marked by Freud as suffering from a "masculinity complex." These female subjects in Freud view tend toward feminism and homosexuality. In 1924 Freud added to the *Three Essays* a "phallic" stage of infantile genital organization in which its difference from adult genital organisations is marked by the primacy of the phallus. In the symbolic order of adult sexuality, for both sexes, only two genitals, the penis and the vagina, come into account (SE 19: 142). The clitoris as a primary signifier of adult female sexuality is repressed in the symbolic organisation of adult sexuality. One would expect then, within the framework of Sofoulis' reading, that in feminine sublimations in cultural productions not only would the paternal organ be fantasmatically appropriated but that the missing clitoris would also be re-appropriated as a leading metaphor for technocultural production and as a signifier of sexual desire. However this trajectory is already discernible in Freud's narratives on the masculinity complexes of female homosexuals. On this path to female homosexuality, as defined by Freud and re-read by Elizabeth Grosz, there is a disavowal of women's castration, a refusal to acknowledge the symbolic meaning of sexual difference. The girl will continue to identify with the phallic mother and may see the father as another embodiment of the status of the mother. This retention of the phallic mother is the destiny of the male fetishist as well. In refusing to acknowledge her difference from the phallic position, the female homosexual retains her pre-oedipal masculinity and maternal love-object. For Freud, female homosexuals refuse the normal path to

femininity via acceptance of castration and the transfer of libidinal cathexis from mother to father (via penis envy). They retain her pre-oedipal phallic (active) sexuality and retains the maternal figure as a model for later object attachments. In other words she retains the clitoris as her primary sexual organ and continues to love maternal figures. In this fantasmatic scenario, both mother and daughter could be said to be signified as phallic (powerful) and the clitoris is dragged into the symbolic order as a primary signifier. Insofar as this fantasmatic scenario could be said to endow female subjects with the magical phallus as well as retain the clitoral signifier, then the female subject could be said to be signified in part-object (Kleinian) terms as a cunt-prick.⁴¹ This is not to suggest that VNS' multiple scenarios can be, or should be, read in exclusively lesbian terms. It is to suggest that the re-writing and re-reading of paternal-maternal signifiers does not necessarily have to be arrived at through re-imagining (in reverse) masculine sublimation in cultural production in Kleinian terms. The groundwork for girls' fantasmatic "masculinity complexes" (phallic appropriation) and refusal to repress clitoral signification at the same time is already inherent in Freud's discourses on female homosexuality.

⁴¹ See Jane Gallop's reading of a passage in Lacan's *Ecrits*, pp. 735-6 in which Lacan poses the question: "Is it this privilege of the signifier [the phallus] that Freud is aiming at by suggesting that there is perhaps only one libido and that it is marked with the male sign?" Immediately following this rhetorical question Lacan uses at least four words beginning with the prefix "con" which Gallop points out means "cunt" in colloquial French. In other words every time Lacan asserts the privilege of the phallus the sublimated cunt emerges in his text. Gallop refers to Lacan as "a ladies' man," "a shameless floozie," and a "cunt-prick." Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction* (London: MacMillan, 1982), p. 31.

Unlike Freud who, in Dora's case, called a pussy a pussy, almost missing the point of the unconsciously homosexual oral intercourse between Dora and Frau K., VNS (Venus) Matrix call a cunt a cunt frequently and explicitly: "we are the modern cunt." Freud claimed that the only way to speak to girls and women about sexual matters was to do so directly and dryly: "I call bodily organs and processes by their technical names . . . *J'appelle un chat un chat* (SE 7:48). VNS deploy "pussy" as a form of greeting as in "Salutations, pussy." Bodily organs and technical processes including cultural and technological production are resignified by this witty foursome - proclaiming themselves as "mercenaries of slime," as "cybercunts" - as extremely wet. References to female genitals and bodily secretions figure significantly in this context both metaphorically in the feminine sublimations in technoculture ("we make art with our cunts") and in the re-writing of female sexed subjective and libidinal investments ("I slide into her"). *All New Gen* can be read as a re-invention, a re-visioning and reconfiguration of (mutating) female subjectivities. The "cunt" signified scenarios are not deployed as sites for the production or reproduction of maternity or symbolically inscribed motherhood for women. They are redeployed as a site for the construction of libidinal pleasures, in sex, in horizontal rather than oedipal (vertical) relationships, in technological production, in sexy technology - a feminised and feminist erotics of technocultural production and politics. Cyberspace in VNS terms is re-appropriated from a symbolic order of masculine rationalist high-tech domination and recoded as feminine. The name of the game, in VNS appropriations of future languages, is "in-filtration and re-mapping the possible futures outside the (chromo)phallic patriarchal code." In this

imaginative game of infiltration and subversion, of Big Daddy Mainframe, of masculine techno-production and its discourses, VNS appropriate paternal organs, spermatic metaphors, and metaphors of viral infection as well as those references on female genitals and bodily processes. The DNA Sluts are imaged as sort of pumped-up barbie dolls ("muscular hybrids") with great laser beams shooting from their genital area. These may be read as magical phalli (undecideably clitoral or penile). Spermatic and penetrative metaphors are utilised in imaging the mutating female subject as a virus which infiltrates/ impregnates the techno-body of Big Daddy's imperialistically and militaristically deployed data banks.

Gamegirl (slimy) sexuality.

The signification of slime in *All New Gen* might be said to give re-newed meaning to Irigaray's use of metaphors of fluidity and the feminist concept of *écriture féminine*. Irigaray utilises metaphors of fluidity to encompass the way writing flows from a source. What she is suggesting is not that meaning be put under erasure, but that all fixed meanings be decentred and put into question. In "The 'Mechanics' of Fluids" Irigaray inquires rhetorically if the object of desire itself, and the object for psychoanalysts, would be the transformation of fluid to solid.⁴² For her an *écriture féminine* implies a text which disrupts expectations of form and genre, or one which dissolves boundaries. This textuality is not a reflection of woman's experience, neither is it a form that is confined to, or produced by, women writers. What VNS and other feminist cultural

⁴² Luce Irigaray, "The 'Mechanics' of Fluids", *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 113.

producers give form to is a textuality based in metaphors of flow, of sliding into, in addition to metaphors of penetration and cutting up. Mythical magical female phalli allow for the spermatic option as well. Irigaray argues for a space to elaborate a new language for women which enjoys the fluidity of the imaginary and refuses to be subsumed in a fixed and closed symbolic realm. This new imaginary/symbolic register in feminist formulations might include Sofoulis' concept of the mythical, a terrain of representation in which ambiguous, transgressive, and impure signs regularly occur. "Slime" is mobilised by VNS Matrix as a recurring and insistent signifier. Within the context of the virtually real *Game Girl* adventure to infiltrate BDM one is told: "You will be fueled by G-Slime. Please monitor your levels. Bonding with the DNA Sluts will replenish your supplies." (VNS, *Game Girl*). One of the DNA Sluts is named the "Princess of Slime" giving new meaning to those traditional cultural myths/fantasies structuring female subjectivity, the fairy-tale. In their "Cyber-feminist Manifesto" VNS describe themselves as "the future cunts" and "mercenaries of slime."

As an "impure" sign, this cyberfeminist resignification of slime can be read as a counter-point to Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection elaborated in *The Powers of Horror*. In her discussion of biblical abomination Kristeva lists three major categories of taboo: food taboos; bodily changes and the end of the body in death; the female body and incest.⁴³ Kristeva argues that these taboos are designed to perform the tremendous forcing that consists in subordinating maternal power (historical or fantasmatic,

⁴³ See Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror : An Essay in Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 91.

organic or reproductive) to symbolic order. By constructing the maternal as a abject being, the symbolic order forces a separation of the mother/infant dyad necessary to guarantee its power and legitimacy. In "Slime in the Matrix," Zoë Sofoulis points out that many feminist cultural analysts have taken Kristeva's concept of abjection as a way of defining certain kinds of categorical in-between-ness. VNS Matrix's deployment of the term/concept "slime" can be read as the signification of sexual desire within a oral fantasmatic which nonetheless also articulates the symbolic separation/differentiation of female sexuality from the mother/child scenario. In their "Cyber-feminist Manifesto" the foursome write that: "the clitoris is a direct line to the matrix, VNS Matrix, terminators of the moral code, mercenaries of slime, go down on the alter of abjection, probing the visceral temple we speak in tongues." In the way in which Pat Califia can be read as ironising and re-signifying the oral-sadistic mother/child dyadic fantasmatic scenario imposed on constructions of lesbian desire by theorists such as Barbara Creed and the "bliss" model imposed by Julia Kristeva, VNS, referencing Kristeva's theory of abjection ("we go down on the alter of abjection") construct a textual scenario of oral sex ("probing the visceral temple we speak in tongues"). "Probing the visceral temple . . . in tongues" might be also be read as an evocation of either heterosexual or lesbian cunnilingus. It might also be read as "French kissing" within the signification of erotic practices for any sexuality. "Probing the visceral temple" might be read as penile/vaginal penetrative hetero-sex or digital/vaginal (hetero- or lesbian) sex; or as lesbian dildonics; or as the spermatic probing of magical orifices (mouth-cunts) by gamegirls with magical phalli. "We speak" suggests a re-

articulation, a re-signification of sexed subjectivity and subject positions within the symbolic/imaginary. As mercenaries of slime VNS position themselves in this manifesto text somewhere between an Irigarayan maternal genealogical and vulval metaphoric framework ("the clitoris is a direct line to the matrix"); Kristevan discourses on the separation of the phallic subject from the visceral maternal ("on the altar of abjection"). Bodily secretions, slimy substances are what fantasmatically and metaphorically permits movement between them.

The polymorphous, perverse, and multiplistic signification - including sliding (sliming), magical phallic penetration, and viral infection - of desire and sexualities are enacted and hypertextually cross-referenced throughout the sites of *All New Gen*. Mutation or affinity (horizontal relationships) rather than the familiar imaginary undifferentiation or the symbolic, rigidly phallic impermeability of bodily/subjective boundaries of oedipalisation scenarios, is suggested in the bonding booth site. The video soundtrack tells us that: "She willingly slid into the other she had always felt herself to have been. She could use her body to connect with the network of her choice." The forms of sexuality and affiliation (networking) suggested in this female /female bonding fantasmatic are coded as perverse "she decodes my perversity in nanoseconds." The images on the video in the bonding booth are explicitly lesbian images. The images on the screen are coded visually as "poetic pornography" - soft focused, pink hued, and graphically sexual. The images of the lesbians engaged in various sexual scenarios also wear various items of s/m gear e.g. metal studded leather straps. The soundtrack, also poetically

evocative, continues the appropriation of the language of cyberpunk: "I am infected by her." The spectator in this curtained room is invited to watch and enjoy the video or to do whatever comes to mind after removing one's shoes on entering. The entire floor of the booth is covered with thick soft foam matting.

On another of the conceptually Deleuzian plateaus in this game - the Alpha Bar - one might, on the other hand, become complicit in another construction of female sexuality articulated in a female voice-over coded as intimate and seductive. The female voice, to which the spectator/player gains access through the individually intimate mechanism of headphones, could be said to simulate both "phone-sex" and "dildonics" a favoured cyberpunk terms for computer or virtual sex. One eavesdrops in a way on a seductive female voice persuading Circuit Boy - the "dangerous techno-bimbo" and side-kick/son of Big Daddy Mainframe - to let himself be "buttfucked." Not only is sexuality and desire signified through polymorphous bodily organs but also through deconstructed sexual practices, sexualities and sexed subject positions. One might say here too, as in the bonding booth scenario, that symbolic order differentiation between various sexualities and sexual practices is breached. The seductive and spermatic (through the ear) female voice entreats "Circuit Boy. I know you're there. I can sense you. Let's strip you of your defences. Show me your algorithms now. Circuit Boy. Come here. Come and let me buttfuck your cute little chrome-plated ass, honey. I want you. Circuit Boy. I'm waiting." What one could say with any certainty is that the goal of this proposed sexual encounter is not

"motherhood" although in terms of technocultural production for the future it might suggest some fruitful couplings. The scenario suggests homo-erotic (both male and female) practices and well as hetero-erotic practices - i.e. girls with magical phalli or lesbian dildonics. The female phallic/seductive subject could be a girl with a dildo, with a magic phallus, or a fantasmatic homosexual boy. Circuit Boy might be "feminine" (a girl in this scenario), a girl/boy and the seducer might be read as a girl/boy too. What VNS' writing opens up are re-combinable and open possibilities of the signification of subjectivities and sexualities. The video soundtrack in the bonding booth informs players in this game, utopically I would suggest, that: "We move through this post-real world at the speed of thought."

However, as de Lauretis insists, the elaborations of conscious and unconscious fantasies into images and narratives (the scenarios, scripts and stage settings) of the subject's desire - initially shaped by parental fantasies and subsequently refashioned with material from the external world - are cultural myths and fantasies open to historical and cultural changes. The fantasies of origin are cultural myths that have a powerful hold in subjectivity. They are however not eternal truths, but historically and culturally structured as well as structuring each subject's history. Fantasies, like cultural myths, can be transformed along with historical and cultural change. Representations of the origins of sexuality are seen by de Lauretis as both private and public forms of fantasy that are open to reconfiguration.⁴⁴ What my reading of VNS Matrix's hypertext suggests is

⁴⁴ Teresa de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. xv-xvi.

an intervention into, and an imaginative restructuring of the fantasies and discourses which underpin masculine technocultural production in feminised and feminist terms. It can also be read as an imaginative restructuring of the fantasies and cultural myths which underpin the positioning (discursive and otherwise) of female (and male) subjectivity and sexuality. One might say that VNS have put a cunt (or a spanner) into the phallocratic techno-cultural reproductive machine.

Conclusion.

In conclusion I will summarise the multiple and heterogeneous contemporary discourses and modes of signification through which lesbian desire is articulated and sexuality represented. As I stated in my introduction this is not a definitive model through which any singular lesbian sexed subjectivity is to be understood. I have re-written both the lesbian produced texts that I have read as well as Freud's texts, drawing out certain aspects of both and diminishing the significance of others. My aims and objectives have been to reorganise the terms through which discursively articulated lesbian subjectivity has been represented in psychoanalytic, critical, and other fictional discourses.

I will begin with a summary of some of the general historically and culturally familiar themes which emerge in both Freud's psychoanalytic as well as contemporary lesbian discourses. These include *fin-de-siècle* cultural themes of perversion and decadence, particularly in relation to (community anxieties about) homosexuality and women. Whether one agrees with these assertions, it is hard to dismiss the powerful parallels between the themes of the last decades of the nineteenth century and the themes which pre-occupy western society in the closing decades of the twentieth i.e. the social rise of women and homosexuals, the demise of the family, sexually transmitted disease, the sexual abuse of children, and the decline in religious values. In many ways *fin-de-siècle* western themes can be understood as culturally re-assuring in

their cyclical re-appearances. The contemporary lesbian produced narratives can be read, inflected by postmodern irony, as twisting these narratives, including Freud's 1905 *Three Essays*, Moebius like, to feminist political, cultural, and subjective advantage. One might say as a general trend that some late twentieth century lesbian texts re-write Freud's passionate fictions of perversion and the polymorphous and multiple object-choice potential of the subject - the first and second sections of *Three Essays* - while ignoring the third, the ideologically conservative narrative closure of the sexed subject in Freud's text into the ultimate goal of reproductive heterosexuality. In other words contemporary lesbian cultural producers of discourses on sexuality and desire can be read as re-reading and re-writing Freud queerly.

What can also be discerned as a familiar cultural trope, also ironically re-written in lesbian and feminist texts, is the (film) *noir* construction of *femme fatale* figures- the figure of the sexually threatening female. This mythical figure re-appears generically in the guise of vampires, dominatrixes (sadists), and fembots alike. These female figures have both symbolic and imaginary significance in western cultural mythologising of active forms of both female heterosexuality and homosexuality. Many of the lesbian producers whose work I have analysed cast a parodic or ironic wink in the direction of these figures, re-appropriating them also to feminist advantage i.e. constructing female sexed subjects seen to be "getting away with it." These *femme fatale* figures can also be read as queerly reconfigured.

For instance in Le Fanu's text of lesbian vampires the seduction scenes between women precede the scenes in which the offending female vampires

are eliminated in the name of a paternal law and narrative closure. In Califia's text the scene in which the paternal phallic figure who assumes (he has) control of female sexuality is "beaten" is followed by the lesbian seduction fantasy scenes, the symbolised "castration" (separation) fantasy scene, and the sexual scenes. The lesbian vampires conduct their own ceremonies of symbolisation in a narrative that does not include the active or necessary intervention of the paternal penis-phallus as marker of difference and designator of positions in desire. The perverse component positions in desire - sadism and voyeurism - taken up by the lesbian protagonists are constructed relative to the "feminine" (signified as masochistic, non-phallic) body of the male subject.

Califia re-casts her castration fantasy in orality (vampirism) without re-writing the familiar psychoanalytic fantasy of "being devoured by the imaginary phallic mother" in terms of either *jouissance* or abjection. Rather, her reconfiguration of this fantasy of the emergence of desire can be read through the Laplanche and Pontalis concept - already implicit in both Freud's and Lacan's writings - of separation in an oral fantasmatic. In the construction of this fantasy, the maternal breast is already hallucinated by the child as a lost (fantasmatic) object, a sign of the absence of the (m)other. Califia, following many psychoanalytic feminist theorists, including Kleinians, textually recasts oedipus in an oral fantasmatic moment. The breast as a lost (desired) object is ritually and symbolically marked in Califia's vampire scene as also the site of female/female "castration" (separation and difference). It has proved exceedingly difficult for some feminist theorists to envision, for instance, the site of the breast rather than the ubiquitous

genitals, as a fantasmatic locus of female difference. Following Kristeva, the tendency has been in theoretical terms to re-cast lesbian desire in the imaginary mother/child fusional narrative mode. However, Califia mobilises the vampire breast as a site of a symbolic gesture, having articulated with some complexity and care the difference in subjective structuring fantasies between the two female subjects. As voyeur and sadist the lesbian lovers do not inhabit a single fantasy - they are not articulated as One. Califia's fantasy structure of lesbian desire is triangulated by a third term -the non-phallic male body- and the breast, rather than the penis, emerges as an eroticised (lost and desired) maternal object. The meaning of the paternal phallus is textually "beaten."

Many of the psychoanalytic fantasies of the origin of sexuality as a social as well as a subjective construction can be read as historically and culturally transformed by contemporary lesbian cultural producers. The fantasies which are redeployed and renegotiated include most noticeably the fantasies of castration and the "masculinity complex." It is not that lesbian writers, film makers, and artists do not redeploy the signs of "masculinity," it is that "masculinity" is not re-written by them as a prerogative of the male subject. Phallic signification is appropriated in many cases to the side of female subjects. It is transformed in the process through terms which semiotically disconnect the concept of phallus from the biological referent penis. This is so in both Califia's and Treut's construction of the female sadistic figure as a figure of epistemological mastery i.e. of female figures who "have" the phallus which is certainly not a penis. One of Freud's other polymorphously perverse component drives, female epistemophilia - one might say anal-sadistic

mastery - is also appropriated to the side of the powerful figure of Wanda from *Seduction* by Treut. This lesbian film maker codes her (sometimes) lesbian protagonist as an authority on the history of discursive constructions of sexual perversion and fantasy. Treut can be read as re-writing Sade's and Sacher-Masoch's as well as Freud's texts through Foucault's concepts of power/knowledge and his narratives of the sexual perversions as discursive and cultural constructs. Treut also re-constructs Sacher-Masoch's female figure as the one who designates Lacanian positions for male and female subjects in desire. This might be read as the symbolic (maternal) "no" to the impossible demands for exclusive "love." Wanda insists on the accession of her subjects /lovers to desire. What Treut also articulates in this film text is a form of female sublimation in epistemological and artistic cultural production, a position attributed, in Freud's and Kristeva's conceptualisations, for instance, exclusively to male subjects. Wanda is constructed as an authority on sexuality not as *in* the sexual. As de Lauretis would say it is not that women are excluded from sex, but that they are constructed within masculinist phallogocentric discourses *as* sex (for the man). What women have been frequently excluded from, or by, is discourses on sexuality in its active forms. From a feminist perspective, and to his discredit, Freud never rescinded his structuring fantasy that all that is libidinally active is male-masculine and all that is passive/receptive is to be called female-feminine.

In entirely fantasmatic terms the "castration" scenario is also re-worked through Jeanette Winterson's construction of her magical realist heroine Villanelle in *The Passion*. The figural webbed feet constitute a sign of

independence and mobility for a female Venetian. They operate textually as well as a marker of difference between the lesbian subject and the other female subject who is the object of her desire. An important aspect of Winterson's writing in this novel is her construction of a form of female bisexuality. Although it is possible to argue that her female protagonist is more significantly constructed as a lesbian subject, the often difficult and recalcitrant psychoanalytic notion of bi-sexuality is also broached in Winterson's text. This conceptualisation of a bi-sexual female subject can be read through Irigaray's philosophical work as the construction of a fledgling dialogue between two economies of desire, one heterosexual and the other homosexual. Read in dialogue with Freud's, and multiple feminist and lesbian feminist, narratives of fetishism, Winterson's text can also be mobilised to tease out the logical inconsistencies of Freud's construction of (male) fetish scenarios. Each subject might be seen as inhabiting, or inhabited by, a different variation of these fantasies all of which are indicated, but not followed through, in Freud's work. These include scenes of male homoerotic desires i.e. the fetish as sign of the male subject's involvement with the paternal body or the paternal penis, as well as the female subject's fantasmatic sign of the lost involvement with the maternal body.

While Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* can be read as a sometimes complex intervention into the discourses of technoculture, this futurist cyberpunk fantasy does not offer female (or male) spectators much in the way of renegotiating sexual differences or sexualities in postmodern terms. The relation between Deckard and Rachael can be read as almost a direct quote of Freud's narrativised scenes with Dora. Deckard ostensibly ignores Rachael's

interventionist question about lesbian sexuality, and in successive scenes insists that she desires him as a substitute for the techno-father Tyrell. The parallels between this story and the story of Freud and Dora is startling. The gap left in the text by Rachael's question might be still harnessed by a lesbian spectator or reader to deconstruct the narratives of heterosexuality and sexual difference enacted in Scott's text.

VNS Matrix offer, as does Treut's film *Seduction: The Cruel Woman*, a contemporary variations of female sublimations in technocultural productions through scenes in which female entities are constructed as intervening strategically in the reproduction of techno-power and, as VNS would say, chromo-phallic patriarchal codes. Also redeploing the signs of masculinity and femininity and the conventional signifiers of masculine desire (the penis-phallus), VNS Matrix offer the players of their computer game re-visioned active female cyborgs who penetrate and disorder the register of Big Daddy Mainframe. The pathways to sexuality, to the sexual object, in the *All New Gen* art installation are constructed as multiple and renegotiable in postmodern terms by recombination (e.g. by combining signifiers of male homo-erotics with female hetero-desire for instance).

Read in terms of the discursive signifying systems deployed by the various writers, techno-artists and film makers one can discern a definite shift from classic realist linear narratives to postmodern forms of inter- and hypertextuality as a textual strategy. Forms of fantasy literature (e.g. science-fiction and vampire myths) are also conspicuously and generically appropriated and modified from a feminist perspective. Many of the texts

examined, including *Blade Runner*, *The Passion*, and *All New Gen* are composed almost entirely of intertexts - as a form of postmodern textual pastiche and quotation. This also allows for multiple points of departure for reading and re-writing these texts.

Taken together, the lesbian texts analysed in *Queering Freud*, can be understood as disassembling [Freud's teleological narratives of sexuality back into their constituent polymorphous parts, multiple object-choices and structuring fantasies.] These separate(d) elements are re-inscribed by the various lesbian cultural producers - in both symbolic and imaginary terms - as culturally and subjectively appropriate and intelligible articulations of female, particularly lesbian, desire and sexuality. What reading lesbian texts can provide is female figures, subjectively and culturally intelligible within feminist and lesbian feminist psychoanalytic and theoretical frames of reference, who are signified as powerful and sexual in their own right rather than appearing as defective men.]

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