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TO KEEP ON KNOWING MORE (?): SEMINAR XVII, *THE OTHER SIDE OF PSYCHOANALYSIS*

by

JOHN D LOWTHER

Under the Direction of Calvin Thomas

ABSTRACT

This is an explication of Lacan's Seminar XVII. The introduction situates the Seminar in its time and in relation to other theories of discourse. In part one I examine the changes which it brings to a variety of ideas already known in Lacan's oeuvre such as Jouissance, Master Signifier(s) and Oedipus. Part two looks the four discourses in detail after considering the positions common to each. I provide accounts of each discourse as taking place internally to a subject and between subjects. The coda examines areas where further research is possible, reviews and critiques some scholarship on this seminar and inquires into the use value of the discourse theory, both generally and as a means of getting beyond Lacan.

INDEX WORDS: Jacques Lacan, Discourse, Seminar XVII, Theory of the four discourses, Discourse of the master, Discourse of the hysteric, Discourse of the university, Discourse of the analyst, Jouissance, Knowledge, Master signifiers, Unary trait, Oedipus, Father, Structuralism, Mirror stage, Hegel, Subject supposed to know, Subject

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JOHN D LOWTHER

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INTRODUCTION

> *…the difficulty endemic to translating me into academic language will also blight anyone who, for whatever reason, tries their hand at it…*
>
> *– Jacques Lacan*

In 1969-70 Lacan gave his seventeenth (recorded) seminar, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*. The date is worth considering as this comes in the wake of 1968, and while Lacan is still very much conducting a seminar aimed at the training of would-be analysts, broader social and political issues are both in the air and on his mind. Discourse, too, as conceptual object was very much discussed in these years. Foucault's *Les Mots et les choses* (translated as *The Order of Things*) appeared in 1966 and Lacan is known to have recommended it to the attendees of his seminar (Foucault's *Folie et déraison*, known to English language readers in an abridged version as *Madness and Civilization*, also appeared in 1966). In 1966, Louis Althusser wrote "Three notes on the Theory of Discourses." In that same year his student and collaborator Pierre Macherey published the book he is best known for, *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire* (*A Theory of Literary Production*) which, while not using the term "discourse," is very much concerned with precisely how it is that specifically literary discourses are both produced and reproduced in and through ideological and cultural space. And the notion of discourse is by no means absent from Lacan's earlier seminars; it can be found with multiple listings in the index of all but one of the seminars currently available in official English

translation.[1] Furthermore, "the famous [l]acanian[2] formula, 'the unconscious is the discourse of the other'" first appeared some sixteen years earlier in 1953 (Evans 44). In the years after 1970, Lacan will continue to use and revise his conception of discourse, although now mostly with reference to what he puts forth in this seminar. Seminar XXI also briefly discusses discourses and offers "a *second* way of talking about the different kinds of discourses" (Fink 1995, 130), a means whereby social discourses such as science and religion (not the four discussed here) are considered in light of the registers, Real, Symbolic and Imaginary. As the idea of specific unique discourse*s* (note the plural) only takes on a formalized shape in this seminar, and as Lacan's comments in Seminar XX and in *Television*, while interesting, are revisions of what is put forth here, and as Seminar XXI is not available in an official version and only begins to suggest a *significantly* different use of the term, my discussion will focus on Seminar XVII, making only occasional references to other works in Lacan's oeuvre.

It is not uncommon in my experience when using a psychoanalytic concept in a context outside of the clinical setting to hear questions raised as to why it should be the case that ideas developed to help alleviate an individual's suffering should still have conceptual purchase when one is speaking about culture more generally. Those familiar with psychoanalytic modes of literary and cultural criticism may or may not be immune to this query, but as this seminar is concerned both with the practice of psychoanalysis and discourses as social phenomena, I would like to address the question here in the introduction. Following the discussion in Stavrakakis' *Lacan and the Political*, I'll offer two common objections to psychoanalysis as a cultural, as

---

[1] It is Seminar XI *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* which does not list "discourse" in its index.

[2] In the paper I will not capitalize lacanian or freudian for the simple reason that such capitalization reifies the bodies of work involved and positions Lacan and Freud as masters, something that this seminar will problematize and which I would argue is ultimately less true of the spirit of their thought as well.

opposed to an individual heuristic. The first concerns a certain sort of reductionism, whereby wide-scale social ills are explained (away) as simply the collective forms of individual pathologies. It is this sort of impulse that might "[attribute] war to outbreaks of repressed aggression," thereby "[reducing] (…) the level of the social, the 'objective' level, to an analysis at the level of the individual, the 'subjective' level" (Stavrakakis 1). It is precisely these sorts of reductive misuses of psychoanalytic thought that should be avoided. The second objection is from analysts themselves, who wonder what pertinence psychoanalysis has to political and social issues given the unique setting of the analytic relationship. Jacques-Alain Miller remarks, "[y]ou must ask yourself if it's not an abuse to speak of politics from the analytic point of view, because it is a highly individual act to enter analysis" (qtd. in Stavrakakis 2). What Lacan brings to these questions, which Freud did not, is the notion of the subject. The lacanian subject is premised upon "a 'socio-political' conception of subjectivity not [reducible] to individuality, a subjectivity opening a new road to the understanding of the 'objective'" (Stavrakakis 4). Simply put, the lacanian subject, by virtue of its constitution in and by language, is itself a social product and in turn, as a social product, the unique particulars of subjects' desires and the sufferings these impose can be read back on to the social. As neither project, the understanding of the individual psyche nor the understanding of the social realm, is ever, or can ever be complete, seeing the construction of each as a two way street of sorts is necessary. In another lexicon I might argue that the lacanian subject deconstructs the binary of individual (subjective) and social (objective). I hope that this thesis will demonstrate that Lacan's discourses, too, effect a similar deconstruction, or as I would prefer to phrase it, that the discourses are mutually constructive of subjective and objective levels.

Seminar XVII, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, offers many new and surprising articulations of both familiar and not so familiar aspects of Lacan's thinking. Arguably, his best work always does this as each year terms already in play in his oeuvre are reached by different routes, under the pressure of different inquiries, giving each of them something of a new twist. That said, the twists in Seminar XVII are at times relatively dramatic. And, as is so often the case, much of what is distinctly new here arises as a result of its delivery and elaboration alongside a new formal model, graph or matheme. In what's generally called his "theory of the four discourses" there are four, small, seemingly uncomplicated, quadrille graphs, named for the Master, the University, the Hysteric and the Analyst.

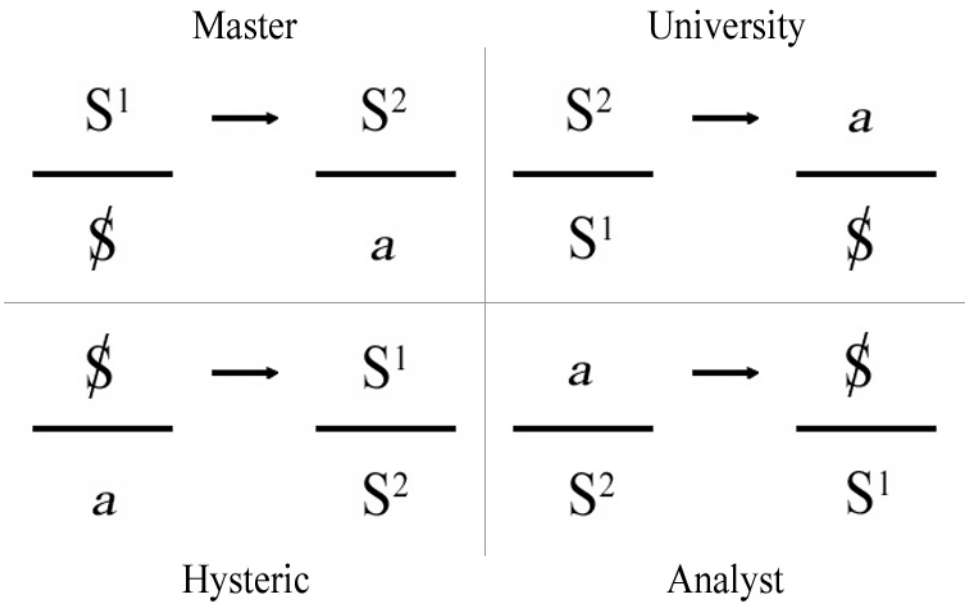

Figure 1. The Four Discourses.

All of the formalized objects that interrupt the lacanian text—from the dazzling, aesthetically gorgeous Graph of Desire to any of the stark algebraic mathemes—seem so invested, even cathected, with immanent meaning that, "feeble beings" that we are, who "need meaning"(15)

ridden by the desire to know, our "epistemological drive"(106)[3], we cannot *not* desire them. Exactly *how* we desire objects of this sort varies. They may delight, mesmerize, frustrate, anger, turn us away or, perhaps, in some fashion, enlighten us. They might even be thought of as little *objects a*. Whatever the case, these small squares of four circulating terms seem perilously easy to grasp in comparison to certain other schemas and graphs found in the *Écrits* or other seminars, and while some access to what each of these four means or perhaps, encodes, is available through a reading of the seminar or more schematically (and problematically) in the secondary literature, precisely what one might then *do* with them is not entirely clear. While the question of what they are for plagues me, Lacan is clearly *using* them and as this seminar breaks so much ground within both familiar and unfamiliar territory, it seems *useful* to think about what sorts of relations they formalize. The attempt to articulate what is presented in each of the discourse graphs can produce divergent, even mutually exclusive propositions. Even when on is attending only to Lacan's own statements this problem appears. Then, should one factor in the explications offered in the secondary literature, coming to any sense of certainty is quite difficult. I am perhaps, in the terms of the seminar, awash in S2, the battery of signifiers, in hope of finding an S1, a master signifier that compels the step from nonproductive to productive befuddlement.[4]

Initially, I approached the discourses in much the same way as I had had the most success previously with his writings, by extrapolating, guessing and projecting from my limited sense and experience of the analytic setting. Lacan's seminars are, after all, directed to the training of analysts. But there are many currents within this seminar and they refer to non-analytic

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[3] All citations from Seminar XVII will appear simply as a number in parenthesis throughout.
[4] "Befuddlement" is the term as I recalled it. I thought I had heard Dr. Calvin Thomas use in a lecture. Checking with him I learned that I was misquoting his use of Gayatri Spivak who refers to "moments of productive bafflement" (273). I've opted to retain my term, but offer the citation for Spivak nonetheless.

experience often enough that the additional ground to cover is immense (from Wittgenstein to Old Testament prophet Hosea, Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew* to Levi-Strauss' *Structural Anthropology* to cite but a few). So, while Lacan's discourses will get a lot of attention in the second part of this paper, the sometimes radically divergent things he has to say about a few of his already known concepts and some basic groundwork for the discourse theory will occupy me first. In the final section of this paper, the coda, I will gesture toward the many lines of inquiry that this paper doesn't even begin to pursue but which all seem fruitful to me. I will discuss some of the misuses of the discourses that I have noted. It is also in coda that I will consider the problematic question of what the theory of the discourses might be good for, if indeed it can be shown to be good *for* anything. The assumption at issue is that a theory, by definition, should allow us to explain or perhaps to predict *something*, or perhaps that it might *reveal* some otherwise hidden dynamics, and I am far from certain that it does either of these or, indeed, that Lacan intends for it to do so. Taking this attitude toward the "theory" on offer here would seem to require its user to operate in the University discourse, and it is very clear that Lacan is neither a fan nor a supporter of the discourse of the University. Pertinent here too is that nowhere does Lacan call this "The Theory of the Four Discourses," instead this appellation is only to be found in the secondary literature about this seminar and in use by authors who attempt to *apply* the discourses in one fashion or another. The tangled history surrounding the notion of "applied psychoanalysis" must be heard in that italicization.

PART ONE: DISCOURSE — KNOWLEDGE/JOUISSANCE — MASTER SIGNIFIERS/UNARY TRAIT —OEDIPUS/FATHER

Discourse

Lacan says that in the previous year's seminar he was able to "ascertain what discourse is about, as a necessary structure that goes well beyond speech, which is always more or less occasional. (…) a *discourse without speech*" (12). Discourses are thereby *not* occasional, they are always already there, unless of course history itself could be counted as an occasion, though it would seem that for Lacan this is not the case as he does discuss the shift from the older Master discourse to a University discourse in the modern world, and the discourse of the Analyst only emerges with psychoanalysis and it is only in the wake of psychoanalysis that it becomes possible to discern the discourse of the Hysteric. By using the word *discourse*, Lacan is laying stress on the transindividual character of his topic. Speech, by contrast would be occasional, even as utterances would partake of the imperatives that derive from discourse. Dominiek Hoens writes that "'[d]iscourse' is Lacan's most elaborate way of formalizing an alternative to the idea of 'intersubjectiviy' that presupposes a (relative) autonomy and independence of the subjects involved" (91). Hoens also clarifies the place of discourse, saying that it "stands between language (langage) and speech (parole)" adding that the former "is a necessary condition for discourse" but that discourse "can exist without speech" (91). Remarking on the discourses' formalization (in the graphs above) Lacan says that "nothing has been abstracted from any reality" as it is "already inscribed in what functions as this reality" (14). Discourse "underpins" our reality and "is one of its arches" (14-5). Again, Hoens sums up the relation very well, writing;

> [D]iscourse stands between language and speech [which] allows Lacan to add a third dimension to his linguisterie. As is well known, language refers to the

> synchronic, paradigmatic, and atemporal system of signifiers that is the condition for any speech act. Speech is the diachronic, syntagmatic, and temporal concatenation of signifiers. Discourse stands between the two, referring to the point where the two intersect. This point of intersection is the point where language gets subjectified (and where a human being becomes subjected to language) and the starting point of any possible speech act. (93-4)

With the foregoing in mind, we can perhaps take more from Lacan's own discussion of discourse. The clearest and really the only extended discussion of what a discourse is occurs quite early on in the seminar;

> [D]iscourse can clearly subsist without words. It subsists in certain fundamental relations which would literally not be possible without language. Through the instrument of language a number of stable relations are established, inside which something that is much larger and goes much further than actual utterances [énonciations] can, of course, be inscribed. There is no need of the latter for our conduct, possibly for our acts, to be inscribed within the framework of certain primordial statements. If this were not so, what would we make of what we keep rediscovering in our experience, and especially in our psychoanalytic experience— […] what would we make of what keeps appearing in the guise of the superego? (13)

The preceding passage is very rich. If we think about the moment of castration in the lacanian sense, something that will be schematized for us in the Master's discourse, we can see how at the moment a subject emerges in language certain things become, to some degree, *fixed*. What these things are, these stable relations, are the discourses themselves, but preeminently – "both

phylogenetically and ontogenetically" (Fink 1995, 130) – that of the Master. We might think of these discourses without speech as subtending any and all speech acts and language practices in roughly analogous fashion to that in which the questions troubling the hysteric and the obsessional, questions which underpin their respective symptoms, might be phrased, respectively, as "Am I a man or a woman?" (Lacan 1993, 171) and "Am I alive or dead?" (ibid 179-80, also see Evans 126)**.** These questions are not conscious preoccupations of these neurotics save in the last instance, but they can be ferreted out of neurotic speech by implication. That is to say, that subtending the hysteric's simultaneous demand for and scorning of any perceived master and the obsessional's endless doubts and vacillations about self-worth and anxieties over influence and unoriginality one can perceive the uncertainty about one's sexuation or the fear that one is doomed to simply repeat the master, as a kind of death within life, or a living non-existence. And to again reference the inaugural moment of the subject's ascension and submission to language (which is also the moment of its creation as such), discourses too depend upon language and the structures that they inaugurate give credence to the notion of an existent Other (even if the discourse of the analyst aims at overcoming this fantasy, it does so by means of working against the analysand's belief in the Other). This, I take it, is what Lacan means when he suggests that evidence of the discourses continually recurs in the *guise* of the superego. Why in the *guise of* instead of simply, *as* the superego?

First we must note that superegoic injunctions are not utterly unavailable to consciousness and are certainly more discernable to the conscious ego than the inchoate insistent *gimme's* of the id. Crucial here too is that the id and the superego are closely aligned and share access to unconscious desires that consciousness (or that part of the ego which is conscious) simply does not have: "the ego is essentially the representative of the external world, of reality,

the super-ego stands in contrast to it as the representative of the internal world, of the id" (Freud, 36). The id and superego are also tied more closely to that repetition that strives, that *drives* the subject toward jouissance. And as Lacan says about that knowledge that we have yet know nothing about, its only function is to lead us toward death; "the path toward death is nothing other than what is called *jouissance*" (18). Additionally, "the only discourse there is […] is the discourse of jouissance" (78). As such my answer to the question is that it is jouissance that appears in the *guise of* the superego and animates the deployment of language and hence the further inscription of one or the other of the discourses into the "reality" of the world, "at least the one we are familiar with" (24). In claiming that jouissance is "the only discourse there is," Lacan is not situating it as the über discourse but observing that without jouissance as the motor force, none of the discourses function. One must recognize here that all of these things – the unconscious and all that gets repressed (as it is all structured like language), the superego, any enunciation possible using the battery of signifiers, the Other, desire and jouissance – are implicated in each of these discourses, where the structure of their relations finds a formal articulation. But jouissance is the crucial element in this as "[d]iscourse is constantly touching on it, by virtue of the fact that this is where [discourse] originates. And discourse arouses [jouissance] again whenever it attempts to return to this origin" (70).

Knowledge/Jouissance

In Seminar XVI (1968-9), Lacan had "had occasion to call the Other's *jouissance* 'knowledge'" (14). This position, only elaborated in Seminar XVII, is in seeming conflict with his earlier formulation of jouissance, circa Seminar VII, as that which cannot be figured in the signifier and which is of another order, that of the Real. It is such a conception of jouissance that

prompts Lacan's earlier claim that "jouissance is prohibited [interdite] to whomever speaks, as such" (2006, 696). What is at issue here is that by characterizing jouissance as knowledge, either knowledge [S2], that is to say signifiers, must be in some situation imbued with jouissance, or (or perhaps *and*) the signifier, heretofore an index of the Symbolic, must also have a Real as well. In Seminar XVII, Lacan discusses this vis-à-vis Marx, saying that jouissance emerges from the signifying relation only as a surplus jouissance or a loss (excess or waste) in precisely the same fashion that Marx adduces the significance of surplus value as the worker's loss under capitalism (20, 50). This operation is also demonstrated in Hegel's master/slave dialectic (51) and in Plato's *Meno* (22). Knowledge then "is a means of *jouissance*. And […] when it is at work, what it produces is entropy. This entropy, this point of loss, is the sole point, the sole regular point at which we have access to the nature of *jouissance*" (50-1). Why is this the case? Jouissance as that which we had before we became speaking beings is no longer accessible to us (if it ever was), and is strictly speaking, *impossible* to attain. At the same time the jouissance that is attained, in the form of *plus-du-jouir*, is a surplus jouissance produced by our ascension to language. Following the paths of repetition in an attempt to regain impossible jouissance we produce an excess jouissance that is not the one we had been searching for, even as it is the one we get. Jouissance is not a comforting thing, is not to be confused with pleasure. It is something that the body of the subject "pays" for, and "if one pays in *jouissance* […] it is very urgent that one squander it" (20).

How does knowledge get tangled up in jouissance? Lacan remarks that "[k]nowledge initially arises at the moment at which S1 comes to represent something" (13). He furthers this claim by saying that "it's a logical articulation that is at stake in the formulation that knowledge is the Other's *jouissance*—the Other's, of course, insofar as—since there is no Other—the

intervention of the signifier makes the Other emerge as a field" (15). The narrative runs something like this: when the not-yet-subject accedes to language it is marked by the signifier, an S1 and, specifically in this originary moment this S1 [master signifier] is the unary trait. It is this inscription that brings about the subject, transforming in the same moment, S2, the battery of signifiers into the Other. Marked by this master signifier the subject cannot but repeat and "[r]epetition bears a certain relationship to what is the limit of this knowledge, and which we call *jouissance*" (15). It is because of this that "the term *jouissance* enables us to show the apparatus's point of insertion" (15). The *apparatus* Lacan is referring to here is the signifiying chain and all the imperatives that emerge from it for the subject, specifically those of the unconscious. The most thorough-going, but far from the easiest, illustration of these imperatives in Lacan's work is found in what has been called the "Postface" to the "Seminar on the Purloined Letter" (2006, 30; also see the admirable explication of it in simplified form in Fink 1995, 165-72). The route that brings Lacan to these formulations is somewhat ironic. After many years of reiterating his dissatisfaction with the translation of *trieb* as "instinct" in the English language editions of Freud, he makes a seeming about-face and looks to instinct to clarify just how it is that unconscious knowledge persists. "Popularly, the idea of instinct is indeed the idea of knowledge—knowledge such that we are unable to say what it means, but it is supposed to result, and not without good reason, in the fact that life subsists" (16). This knowledge as instinct, the knowledge we have but do not know, is precisely the death drive (16). This leads to a somewhat surprising equation, not offered by Lacan but following from what he has said; if knowledge as instinct *is* the Other's jouissance, then it follows that the Other's jouissance *is* the death drive. The only way that I am able to make sense of this is by holding strictly to Lacan's very specific and idiosyncratic sense of knowledge, which does not correspond to our everyday

vernacular sense of the term. Lacan is aware of the potential confusion his use of *knowledge* might engender and remarks that "we are no doubt leaving behind what knowledge authentically is, what is recognizable as knowledge, and referring to the limits, to the field of these limits as such" (15). The key term in the preceding quote is *field*; with this Lacan denotes not "what knowledge authentically is" but the networks of invisible and unconscious imperatives that come along with knowledge because of its articulation via the signifier. Before I move on, let me note that this lacanian conception of knowledge is problematic. While Lacan *does* distinguish between "two aspects of knowledge, the articulated aspect and this know-how that is so akin to animal knowledge, but which […] is not totally devoid of the apparatus that transforms it into one of most articulated networks of language" (21-2), elsewhere in the seminar and rampantly in the secondary literature this conceptual distinction between knowledge as that which we don't know that we know and knowledge as something consciously held in a kind of positivity is not made clear, conflated, or perhaps never fully grasped at all. As I read him, Lacan himself is somewhat guilty of this, though to be *guilty* of this charge, Lacan would have to be a master himself, someone at all times equal to his own utterances and not split by his submission to language; in other words, a *subject supposed to know*.[5]

There is some danger of distortion of Lacan's intent by virtue of the ironic use of *instinct* here. The temptation is to recuperate his claims about knowledge as some variety of human

[5] This idea, that of a *subject supposed to know*, will come up more than once below. The idea has various articulations within Lacan's oeuvre, but it generally refers to the position imputed to the analyst by the analysand in the clinical relationship. As the analysis progresses the analysand begins to suppose that the analyst knows their meaning of their slips and dreams, that the analysts grasps all that they are so confused about. The make of the analyst a master, someone not divided by the signifier. It is by a manipulation of this supposition that in time, if the analysis succeeds, the analysand comes to realize that the analyst knows nothing, that the only subject who can be supposed to know the truth of the analysand's psyche is analysand him- or herself. This realization is precisely akin to recognizing that the big Other does not exist. Dispensing with this supposition is, I would argue, another instance where psychoanalysis as praxis, has significant effects at the individual (subjective) and social (object) levels discussed previously.

nature, or worse yet, as a common sense. Stress and attention must be placed upon *akin* when he speaks of "this know-how that is so akin to animal knowledge." Lacan is not claiming the varieties of know-how that we have, depend upon, and yet cannot fully articulate are inborn human traits. Restricting our discussion here to knowledge that is at least potentially conscious, we might imagine riding a bicycle as an example. It is not that this action cannot be fully articulated in language, merely that such an articulation is rarely given and hardly called for. Speaking of such a practice we tend toward phrases like "I understand the basic principles" or simply "I know how." The knowledge as instinct that Lacan is addressing here is of this kind. Standing next to a bicycle and seeing the local chainsaw killer approaching we do not stop to think about how it is that we know how to ride a bicycle, we just do. But this knowledge and many other similar forms of knowledge are still cultural products and not animal instincts. In discussing discourse Lacan mentions that "our acts" may be inscribed therein. Thinking about our know-how with regard to actions is perhaps an easier way of conceptualizing a "discourse without speech" (13). *Common sense* is a rather nebulous designation, but if one imagines it as a type of knowledge that is free of ideology or language imperatives, then it is clear that this is not what Lacan has in mind either. Knowledge is marked S2 and is the field of the Other as such, and because of this there can be no question of its being equated with animal instinct or common sense.

Master Signifier & Unary Trait

These terms have already appeared above and will come up again in the discussion of the discourses in part two of this paper. What I want to note here is what changes significantly in Seminar XVII with regard to these concepts. Lacan no longer treats the master signifier [S1] as

singular and allows instead that master signifiers "can be any signifier at all" (124). In addition, "in expressing itself toward those means of *jouissance* that are what is called knowledge, the master signifier not only induces but determines castration" (89). S1 has here effectively replaced the Name-of-the-Father. This shift to a plurality of master signifiers "can be understood in terms of the evolution of [Lacan's] theory of the Name-of-the-Father to the Names-of-the-Father to, finally any signifier whatsoever as long as it is produced as an S1 […] It is clear that we are a long way from the exclusive signifier of the Name-of-the-Father" (Verhaeghe 2006, 44). And what is also distinctly new in this is that knowledge, in the specific sense outlined above – *knowledge as instinct* – is intimately bound up with the subject's jouissance from the very outset. Lacan elaborates as well on the unary trait, whose function is that "of the simplest form of mark, which properly speaking is the origin of the signifier" and further "that everything that interests us analysts as knowledge originates in the unary trait" (46). The unary trait is "the commemoration of an irruption of *jouissance*" (77). We would be right to understand the unary trait as the first but not the last or only master signifier that sustains the subject. It is master signifiers and the unary trait above all that are subject to repetition, and which are thus found to be the initiating causes of jouissance as surplus or waste (48). Lacan calls repetition "the precise denotation of (…) the unary trait." (77). But, both the unary trait and master signifiers are still signifiers and necessarily prone to all the foibles of language. "[L]anguage […] cannot be anything other than a demand, a demand that fails. It is not from its success, it is from its repetition that something of another dimension is engendered, which I have described as a loss—a loss whereby surplus *jouissance* takes body" (124). We are all marked by our very own unary trait, though perhaps it would be better to say that we are marked as *its* very own. It is undependable and its demand always fails, but this does not cause us to stop repeating

it as its repetition is not something we weigh consciously in some sort of cost/benefit analysis; rather its repetition is what maintains us as subjects of language. "[I]n this very repetition, something is produced that is a defect, a failure" (46). This product, failure or waste, this surplus jouissance, is inscribed not upon the subject – which is but an effect of language – but upon the *body*. The body of the being who speaks is what is made to bear this surplus, which is why the surplus jouissance must be *squandered* as quickly as possible, as to contain it would be very quickly unbearable (20). Verhaeghe provides a clear narration of the new picture of subject formation in via master signifiers and jouissance which Lacan gives us in this seminar, "jouissance takes place in the body, through invasions. These invasions acquire markings [the unary trait and all subsequent master signifiers] ; they are inscribed on the body through the intervention of the Other" (2006, 31). Crucial to keep in mind here is how this recasting of subject formation makes the linkage between the signifier and jouissance constitutive of subject formation, and as follows from this the connection between knowledge and jouissance is similarly constitutive.

Oedipus & the Father

This seminar signals a radical shift in Lacan's thinking with regard to these ideas. Lacan suddenly begins to treat Freud's Oedipus as "myth" and "dream" (99, 113, 118). And dreams, just like myths, are what? Lacan's answer is "manifest content," which would naturally require interpretation (113). Responding to Lévi-Strauss' recently published *Structural Anthropology* with its critique of the primacy given to *this version* of Oedipus in psychoanalysis (Lévi-Strauss 213), Lacan essentially accepts Lévi-Strauss' critique while simultaneously pushing psychoanalysis toward a *beyond* of the Oedipus and, in some senses, parting company with

structuralism in the process. He does this in part by reading Sophocles with the myth of the primal horde and Freud's Moses for the revelations that derive from their mutual contradictions, all the while keeping the insights of Freud's hysterics and all of their weak, failing and fallible fathers in mind. Verheaghe writes that Lacan will "redefine the Oedipus complex as a cunning social institution that replaces jouissance with something that has a different origin, that is, this plus-de-jouir" (Verhaeghe 2006, 34). There is a clear correspondence here between the Real that precedes the constitution of the subject and symbolization (jouissance) and the Real which exceeds symbolization (*plus-du-jouir*) as indexed through paradoxes and other instances of the Symbolic's inherent incapacity for totalization. The result is very nearly an abandonment of the Oedipus complex and its disassociation from the notion of symbolic castration. What remains for the Oedipus complex and the father of the primal horde is to be positioned as myths that emerged in the place of truth (in the Analyst's discourse), and given, as all truths must be, as a half-saying (99, 104). Verhaeghe characterizes what Freud did with these notions as "giving form to neurotic desire and elevating it, moreoever, to a supposedly historical reality" (2004, 40). What replaces such myths for Lacan is an articulation of the structure involved via "the new reference points unfolding in this seminar: the introduction of a new concept of knowledge, S2, the split between it and truth, and importantly, the concept of the master, which has 'only the most distant of relationships' to the concept of father" (Grigg, 67).

The father is persistently, at times overwhelmingly, at issue here, specifically the Real father[6] as agent of castration (124), a sort of "structural operator" (123) who "is nothing other than an effect of language and has no other real" (127). And this Real father whose only Real is

[6] Here and throughout, I will insist on capitalizing Real, Symbolic and Imaginary when these words specifically denote the three registers so ever-present in Lacan's theory. Please note that I will not be changing the citations of the seminar or secondary authors in this regard.

as an effect of the signifier, an effect which amounts to a structural operation binding upon all speaking beings, what is its function? Its function is the transmission of castration to each new speaking being (121). Lacan suggests that Freud's insistence upon the Oedipus complex and the Father of the primal horde is an attempt to save the father as deserving, in spite of all, to be loved, and thus, to sustain his function (119). "[T]he dead father is what guards *jouissance*, is where the prohibition of *jouissance* started, where it stemmed from. The fact that the dead father is *jouissance* presents to us as the sign of the impossible itself" (123). But Freud's insights here are limited. If the Oedipus complex emerges as a result of the clinic of hysteria and the myth of the primal father's murder from the clinic of obsessional neurosis (Grigg 66-77), then as with the structuralist critique we are still dealing with versions, with myth. Consequently "affirming the real father as impossible" in the Oedipus complex or the narrative of the primal horde is destined to mask from us "the function of the real father that is nothing but a structural effect of language" (125). The reason why this is the case, in my understanding of it, is that to be *impossible* is a symbolically-grounded determination (even as the Real is *impossible* from that vantage), and the Symbolic is constituted by lack, whereas the Real father at issue here, by virtue of being in the Real, is not subject to lack at all, is instead, once again, a Real that is in excess of symbolization (see 122-6 for the discussion upon which my explanation depends). This Real father is, again, "nothing other than an effect of language and has no other real" (127). At issue here is the idea that language has effects in the Real, even if the Real resists symbolization.

There are some consequences to this which might seem paradoxical. Castration, in the strict lacanian sense of the word, folds back into the Real father here as "an effect of language" that "has no other real." If the real father's task is to ensure the castration of each new subject of language, the sense of a shell game in progress emerges. What does the term Real father do for

Lacan? Jacques-Alain Miller notes that the first unique marking by a master signifier "marks a subject with an ineffable singularity" (20) and as this mark is an effect of the Real father, we can begin to think about what the term is doing. Grigg narrates it thusly; "[w]hat Lacan calls the real father is invoked as the agent necessary to explain the contingency of the encounter with castration; the real father is a contingent agent of a universal operation" (60). The conceptual gain to be had in the use of this term then is that without it Lacan risks having symbolic castration be understood as a sort of structuralist universal. But wait – isn't it? The issue here is not that Lacan wishes to postulate subjects who operate in language and yet are not subjects to it. Only that clinical practice and general life experience illustrate repeatedly that castration is by no means universal in its effects upon subjects. The idea of the Real father is a way for Lacan to preserve both the universal aspect of castration and to respect the singularity of each case thereby explaining "why there is not identity across cases, why there is contingency in the universality of language" (Grigg 60). In spite of this I am moved to wonder if it would not be more concise (can this even be asked of Lacan?) to designate this as a Real effect of becoming a subject of the Symbolic which has for every subject the character of singularity and dispense with the problematic associations and conceptual confusions signifiers like "father" and "castration" (not to mention "phallus") bring with them? I would argue that it would and that the very word "father" might be productively expunged from this discussion, as Wittgenstein's famous ladder that one can discard after using. But Lacan is not discarding it and as mentioned above, it is only by spending much time on this ladder that he reaches the conclusions that he does. Whatever else one might argue about these issues, it is worth pointing out that the Real effect in question is theorized quite thoroughly in the discourse of the Master without need for me to refer to the Real father at all. Additionally, my references below to castration are there to

link the discussion to Lacan's earlier work and respect his terminology in this seminar more than for any inherent need for that term either.[7]

[7] Here I am also reminded of Dany Nobus' assertion to me in conversation a few years ago that he felt certain that lacanian theory would not suffer any significant loss if the term "phallus" was excised from it entirely, that the conceptual gains from it were to be had already via other terminological means in the later Lacan.

PART TWO: THE (THEORY OF THE FOUR) DISCOURSES (?)

Every commentary I have encountered on Lacan's discourse theory, and his own introduction of it in Seminar XVII, begins by discussing that of the Master, whose discourse is implicated in the Seminar's proper title, as it is on the *envers* or *other side* from the discourse of the analyst. The discourse of the Master also provides the model for the subject's emergence in language. In spite of, or perhaps because of this, I prefer another entry point, one whereby we would first see what the positions within the graphs denote as these are *relatively* invariant in their meanings in each of the four discourses.

$$\frac{\text{agent}}{\text{truth}} \longrightarrow \frac{\text{other}}{\text{product}}$$

Figure 2. The Positions in the Graphs

Already, with just these positions we have many aspects of Lacan's freudian return formalized. As is generally the case with Lacan's mathemes the bar between top and bottom represents a blockage or obstacle that tends to keep what is above separate from what is below. Here as well we can generally read the top level as conscious and the bottom level as unconscious or repressed (or top as manifest, bottom as latent). Also crucial to keep in mind is that what makes the discourses work, what animates them, is in every instance jouissance (70) and that the jouissance produced, surplus jouissance, is always *displaced*. Following Joan Copjec's reading of this, I understand this displacement of jouissance and affect (anxiety) as indicative that the subject's desire and jouissance are constitutively out-of-phase with one another (Copjec 93). The top half of each graph is also directed, in that what appears in the position of agent orients a demand toward some other (indicated by the arrow). This demand, as we learned above, always

fails; it is thus, *impotent*. The relation between truth and product is always barred, although Lacan is not consistent in notating this every time he reproduces the graphs. This relation, or irrelation, we can justly call *impossible*. Thus, part of what the discourses illustrate are that impotence and impossibility cannot be eradicated from the workings of discourse, and that to assume potency and possibility is to systematically refuse to recognize these impediments.

Whatever is found in the position of *agent*, or dominant, names the discourse by virtue of how it functions vis-à-vis the other. Agent directed toward other presents the fantasy of full conscious communication, that which the unconscious both subtends and interrupts. That which is repressed [truth] marks the agent, and qualifies the agency through the agent's denied or disavowed submission to the signifier and hence desire (which, it should be remembered, is for Lacan always *unconscious* desire). Agent over truth on the left side thus presents the spaltung that is denied as the truth of the unconscious, that we are castrated beings, is repressed.

The *other* has many nuances here but the central pair of these are big Other and *any* other or others targeted by the fantasy of full conscious communication mentioned above, or put another way, by the vector of desire (the unconscious motivator of our conscious demands). Below the other we see the product, the production of the other of which the other is not (always) conscious, and which he, she or they are driven to produce by the demand of the agent. This product is thus an excess, loss or surplus and when this position is occupied by object *a*, as it is in the Master's discourse, it is strictly correlated with what Marx names as surplus value.

But the *product*, the waste product that is, of the other can also be a master signifier [S1], knowledge [S2] or a barred subject [$]. What is important to recognize here is that, while this product can be recuperated to serve the agent of the discourse, it cannot, strictly speaking, be what the agent's demand aims at. Or at least this is what the division of conscious and

unconscious here would seem to imply. As we shall see below, there may be reasons to qualify this claim. The position of product in each of the discourses is also "where Lacan situates [the jouissance] produced by a discourse" (Fink 1995, 133). And as we learned above, jouissance is the motor force of each of the discourses, thus attending carefully to what appears in this position will help to unlock the stakes of each of them.

And what of *truth*? Books wait to be written about what Lacan means by "truth" and so I broach this knowing that I will be unable to account for it. That said, I think that we might conceive of truth in the four discourses as being that which drives the agent, from behind his back, from outside of his consciousness. This is akin to, but still meaningfully distinct from, the way that a subject is driven by the death drive. The distinction to keep in mind here is that the discourses concern not the subject generally but the agent and thus this agent's performance of the role each discourse provides. Subjects whose structure of desire is neurotic or perverse can nonetheless speak or act within the discourses of Master, University, Hysteric or Analyst without this altering the fundamental structure of their own desire. That one of the discourses is that of the Hysteric might lead one astray in that regard, but note that there is no discourse of the Pervert or discourse of the Psychotic. Not even the other variety of neurosis, that of the obsessional, has a discourse. The master [agent] is driven quite literally by the repression of their divided nature, the hysteric [agent] by the Real in the form of *object a*, the university [agent] by the ghostly and ineradicable superegoic imperative of the master to "[k]eep on knowing more and more" (105) and the analyst [agent] by (unconscious) knowledge itself as it emerges in the analytic encounter. But crucial here to keep in mind is that the truth that appears in this place on the lower left of each graph is *not* the "truth" of philosophy or science or empiricism or of any imaginable truth tables ever constructed. Following Fink's account we might begin to think of truth for Lacan as

the hole that is found in every whole: a hole that is “unfillable” (1995, 134). So truth here is not of the true/false variety, is not measured against any Symbolic precedent, instead it must be thought of a cause that cannot be accounted for, a cause understood “as that which disrupts the smooth functioning of lawlike interactions” (Fink, 1995, 140).

Before moving on to the specifics of discourses, and keeping in mind what was said in part one of this thesis about the notion of discourse in use here, it might helpful to consider one more way of thinking about what is common to each of them;

> [T]he four discourses sketch four different routes though which the subject can elaborate four different forms of social bonds around this impotence to obtain total satisfaction. This is as much as saying that there are four ways of circling around the Real at those points where the Symbolic fails. (Verheaghe 2004, 117)

The Discourse of the Master

$$\frac{S^1}{\$} \longrightarrow \frac{S^2}{a}$$

Figure 3. The Discourse of the Master

This is the foundational discourse of the four. The most compelling reason why this is the case is that it schematizes the moment of the subject’s emergence. Whatever other discourse a subject might speak or act within, this one maintains logical priority. Lacan also situates it first in historical sequence and spends a good deal of the seminar discussing how in the historical shift to the university discourse, what he claims we all live under now, knowledge [S2] arises and assumes the position of dominant. The master’s essence is to rely upon the signifier function,

S1 and "the slave's own field [otherwise known as] knowledge, S2" (21). As Lacan develops this we are asked to overlay the hegelian-kojèvean dialectic of the master and slave over the familiar lacanian dicta that a signifier represents a subject for another signifier. As seen here, a master signifier [S1] represents the barred subject [$] for any other signifier [S2]. Hoens' states this very clearly as the "condition of possibility of any subject is the intervention of the signifier, formalized as S1" (91). This representing for another signifier is "a relation of reason" and also "the foundation of what is known, of what is quietly articulated as the little master as the ego" (30). So this discourse is both the discourse of premodern political rulers *and* the discourse of the ego. "A real master […] doesn't desire to know anything at all—he desires that things work" (24). This lack of desire to know is constitutive of the master, for if he did know what he (as barred subject) desired then "he would not be a master" (32). Why is this the case? My answer is that the essence of the master (the conviction that one's signifier encompasses one's being) would be undermined if the master were to grasp that he or she was in fact a $, a divided being who knows what it doesn't consciously know and desires what it doesn't consciously desire. That this master is, and in fact must be, castrated, is the truth of this discourse but it must remain "masked" for it to function as such (117). There is still more to be said here.

Why else would an awareness of castration undermine the master's discourse? This hinges on meaning, or to the use the term of the seminar, *sense*.

> Sense, if I may say so, is responsible for being. It does not even have any other sense. The only thing is that it was observed long ago that this is insufficient for carrying the weight—the weight, precisely, of existence. A curious thing that non-sense carries the weight. (56-7).

The fantasy that sustains both the ego and the master is of being "the I identical to itself" (62)

and to judge this to be the case one must hold a conviction that this makes *sense*. But sense or meaning is a byproduct of signification. So while all that we can make sense of about our own being is arrived at through signifiers, as we know already from Lacan's past work, signifiers cannot equal being if they are to function as signifiers at all. This is how I understand the passage above: sense is responsible for being and it cannot bear that burden; being is simply too much for it; non-sense on the other hand has no responsibility to it but nonetheless "carries the weight." Our being persists in spite of sense's failure, but in order to represent ourselves to an other we use the "I." In so doing, our actions speak to our lingering belief that we are identical to ourselves no matter what we say in other contexts, even if we have perhaps been through analysis or by some other means come to conclude that we are not self-identical. If I as little master [ego], am going to issue a demand to make you, the other, work, I, as subject of the sentence, must present as self-identical. This is a stipulation of the signifier and a requirement of the discourse.

Thus far I have discussed the relation of agent [S1] to other [S2] and made reference to the truth of the agent, that it is not a self-identical S1 but in fact a barred subject [$]. The masking of this truth is required for entering language and being represented by a signifier to another signifier. "This is our starting point for giving meaning to this inaugural repetition that is repetition directed at *jouissance*" (48). What is the desire that the master has but doesn't know? It is the desire for the original lost object; every demand is in some sense an expression or elaboration upon this initial loss, a demand to be returned to this jouissance that we suppose ourselves to have had. But the jouissance that (unconsciously) we aim at will not turn out to be the jouissance that we get; instead it will be jouissance as waste, loss or excess, in short, surplus jouissance. This is the product in the master's discourse, the object *a* that appears in the lower

right hand side of the graph. Now Lacan will go to some length to illustrate how it could be that the surplus jouissance of the slave can be recuperated by the master as a form of positivity, and how this requires the intervention of the philosopher to instill in the master the desire to know. Lacan deploys Hegel, Marx and Plato to illustrate how it is that the philosopher is able to extract the know-how of the slave (what the slave knows but doesn't know) and transform it into articulated, abstract, conscious knowledge.[8] This whole account, it seems to me, is there to help us understand the transition to the discourse of the University. I prefer to narrate the workings of the discourse of the Master somewhat at odds with Lacan.

If a discourse is a form of "social bond" and if all speech acts arise within one or the other of these discourses, then one must speak within one of these even when talking to oneself. As such, I propose to think about how the master's discourse operates within one psyche as I feel that this provides a useful way of conceiving of the role of surplus jouissance. In doing so I feel somewhat as if I am going out on a limb as neither Lacan nor any secondary materials that I am aware of make this move. Let us propose to consider all those who have accepted the signifier *poet* as an S1. They can utter, with some sense of conviction, the sentence "I am a poet." What is repressed, what lies under the bar, is the degree to which they can never live up to the full implications of this signifier. But in an attempt to do so, they marshal their know-how, S2, as to what a poet is, should, or *ought* to be. This knowledge [S2] is above the bar and hence conscious. This knowledge is derived, if this needs pointing out, from the Other (from everything they have

[8] There is something of a discrepancy here which I will address in the coda, but lest it be thought that I am unaware of it at this point, or that my narration of the discourse below disagrees with Lacan's narrative, the issue is about the slave's know-how. This S2 is above the bar and it should be considered as conscious knowledge, or at least conscious know-how. But at the same time this know-how is a form of S2 that the slave knows but does not know. Perhaps the earlier riding a bicycle example could help here and we could see the philosopher as articulating, after having asked many question of the slave, a dependable and accurate lecture on *How To Ride a Bicycle*. That is at least the only way that I am able to make sense of this.

ever learned of what poets and poetry are), is mobilized in an attempt to solidify their S1, *poet*. Now acting the role of the slave commanded by the master signifier *poet* they do what it is they think poets do. This process is ongoing and relentless and precisely as stringent as their own desire to be equal to their signifier and for their signifier to mean. In this process they do a lot of work, they struggle, they revise, they throw out the crap and now and then they write something that – as judged by themselves or others – seems to ratify their equivalence to their S1, "poet." But the surplus here is not derived from any poem deemed a success, as this is always fantasmatic, a failure not recognized as such, an impotence[9] denied, but by the total of wasted effort, struggle and failed attempts that lie behind the entire labor to prop up their S1. The jouissance they aim at is that which would result from their merger with their S1 but it is this surplus jouissance that they receive instead. This leads to the paradoxical notion that writing poems does not make anyone a poet, and given the impossibility of any $ ever equaling S1, that nothing can. Naturally this doesn't stop anyone from trying. That they continue to try attests to the persistence of the (little) master's (the ego's) discourse.

The Discourse of the Hysteric

$$\frac{\$}{a} \longrightarrow \frac{S^1}{S^2}$$

Figure 4. The Discourse of the Hysteric

> What the hysteric wants […] is a master. […] She wants the other to be a master, and to know lots of things, but at the same time she doesn't want him to know so

[9] I initially typed im*poet*ence!

> much that he does not believe she is the supreme price of all his knowledge. In other words, she wants a master she can reign over. (129)
>
> What hysterics ultimately want one to know is that language runs off the rails concerning the magnitude of what she as woman is capable of revealing concerning *jouissance*. But this is not what matters to the hysteric. What matters to her is that that other called a man know what a precious object she becomes in this context of discourse. (34)

Lacan maintains the gender specific language here that in other places he qualifies in various ways, such as "the subject, whether feminine or not" (99). I am convinced that the default ascription of feminine to hysteria (and masculine to obsessional) is a distortion-become-habit. As such, in my discussion below I am going to reverse the pronouns such that she is the master and he, the hysteric. What is the hysteric's gripe? What is behind the multitudinous forms of hysterical demand? The passages above lay this out pretty well, but some contextualization is certainly possible. The hysteric is suspicious of language, he cannot take it for granted, and to the extent that others do so, or seem to him to do so, he is troubled and provoked. "It is around the symptom that the hysteric's discourse is situated and ordered" (43). Thus the hysteric, whether he knows it or not, is always challenging the signifier as not being up to the task of representing the subject, whether himself or any other. The hysteric's symptom, however particular it may be, always betrays a linkage to this fundamental inability of the signifier to represent being.

Let me again narrate one, necessarily limited, way to think about this discourse. She, the master, speaks. She speaks with conviction, seeming to have no doubt about her words being up

to the tasks she sets them. He, the hysteric, makes demands. These demands present themselves as questions. He may consciously think that he desires answers to all his questions but what he desires is to force her, who he takes to be a master, to reveal what she lacks (that she is castrated). He also wants to crack the rational façade of the master, to show how, in spite of the appearance of simply telling-it-as-it-is that secretly she *gets off* on her claim to mastery. In spite of the aggression that comes with insistent hysterical demand it could be seen to have a motive that would affirm the subject (the presumed master in this encounter) as divided and thus, paradoxically, to be an expression of compassion. Though, it is doubtful that anyone situated as a master by an hysteric feels these demands in this way.

But what about the lower portion of the graph? The hysteric wants to reveal the master's secret (surplus) enjoyment and thus her sham of mastery. That enjoyment is obscene and thus any master enjoying such needs to be more fully and totally castrated to prevent such obscenity from taking place. Why is it obscene? Because, in speaking from her S1, the master's commands do not locate the precious object *a* in his, the hysteric's, ineffable being, but in how he can be put to work for the master's enjoyment. If this were to be for purely symbolic ends, and the master got no enjoyment from it, the hysteric would in theory be satisfied. But of course the hysteric is only satisfied by having an unsatisfied desire. *That* is what he desires above all else. If the master reveals any hint of enjoyment that the hysteric has been set to work, then the master cannot truly be a master in his eyes. Instead what the master should enjoy, if she is to enjoy anything, is the hysteric's ability to reveal her lack, a process which produces knowledge in the unconscious. "[T]he desire to know is not what leads to knowledge. What leads to knowledge is […] the hysteric's discourse" (23).

But wait a moment. In *whose* unconscious is this knowledge produced? Does the hysteric

force others to produce knowledge as a sort of byproduct of the repeated attempts to satisfy the demand made? Or, following the assumptions made about the master's discourse above, wherein this can be an entirely *internal* discourse, does the hysteric produce this by and for himself? Might we also ask whether the valuation that Lacan places on the hysteric's discourse suggests that he fails to keep his own distinctions about knowledge clear at all times? In saying that only the discourse of the hysteric leads to new knowledge Lacan seems to imply knowledge as a positivity, a conscious gain in the world. Here the instances where he refers to Hegel as the most "sublime" hysteric are a case in point (35). It is hard not to read these as if they implied that Hegel's philosophical corpus in some sense *is* the knowledge that he produced. But S2 in this discourse is under the bar, hence unconscious. I am unclear on why having *more* unconscious knowledge, no matter how *new* it might be, is to be valorized. Likewise, can we meaningfully read Hegel's works as they were produced unconsciously? If that is possible, does it change their content? Are we are meant to overlook the bar that marks this knowledge as unconscious. If that is that case then the narrative is pretty clear and (as Lacan seems to be doing with Hegel as noted above) we can localize this once more, within a single individual. A graduate student struggles with Lacan, the harder he tries to pin him down to some meaning which doesn't squirm away the moment after it is noticed, the more hystericized he becomes. It doesn't matter whether the student wishes to adequately explain what is there or if he wishes to find the lack, the flaws, the blindspots in the theoretical edifice, he will *create* knowledge, almost in spite of himself. And let it be said, Lacan's texts practically require this of any reader who wishes to do much of anything with them.

Whether we read this as an internal discourse situation or one between two individuals or one between an agent and the society at large as other, it is worth noting that the hysteric gets

off on, that is, obtains jouissance from, the production of knowledge. Let's walk through another version of this, this time trying to maintain the unconsciousness of an S2 below the bar. Let us say that I am speaking to myself in the discourse of the Hysteric, how might that transpire? Object *a* is in the place of truth; I do not see it or know it as such; I feel, at best, only the insistence of my symptom, but more likely I am troubled by language I have previously used *as if* I was convinced I knew what I meant and meant what I said (that I was the master). Imagine that in some moment the night before I said to an other, *I love you*. The next day I am hystericized by this statement, my internal monologue perhaps running as follows; *How could I say that? How do I know? I don't even know what love is! Do I even know who I am? And I've known this person for two months or so, how can I know her well enough to* love *her? We just chat online, I've never even heard her voice! Am I out of my mind?* etc. Then, whether in an internal call and response or by waiting on the internal hysterical demands to subside, a counter movement begins where justifications, arguments, rationalizations, professions of a feeling that is more than words, affirmation of gut instinct, and much else are deployed in response. If the discourse is successful, if it truly hystericizes "me," my (necessarily failing) labors to produce a ground or rationalization for "love" through demands will instead produce a surplus jouissance in the form of S2 [knowledge] in my unconscious. This surplus could be pleasing or not, ecstatic or excruciating, but it will nonetheless subtend any answer to the question of whether the *I love you* can ultimately be upheld by the subject that I am. However it turns out, I will surely get off on the struggle involved. But let me be as clear as I can here. In saying that this new S2 in the unconscious will subtend any answer to this, I am not suggesting that this new knowledge will give me the answer to whether I do or do not love; that would be to recuperate it as conscious knowledge. The rationalizing, little master, my ego, may decide in favor or against this *I love*

you, regardless of whether the "answer" in the unconscious is *yay* or *nay* or *maybe* or *I don't know*. As such the *subtending* I refer to has to do with the psychic consequences for myself as agent [master] of proclaiming love for another.

The Discourse of the University

$$\frac{S^2}{S^1} \longrightarrow \frac{a}{\$}$$

Figure 5. The Discourse of the University

The university discourse is undoubtedly the most discussed in the secondary literature. In part this is because Lacan characterizes the current historical moment as being under the generalized sway of this discourse. It is the discourse both of the state socialism of his time and the burgeoning capitalism of the American empire as was. It is the discourse of the scientific and medical establishments, education and government, military and business, technology and every aid organization from the United Nations to the United Way. A simpler way of saying this perhaps is that it is the discourse that breeds bureaucracy and that establishes and rationalizes the values of any possible knowledge economy.

> What occupies the place [of the agent] is this S2, which is specified as being, not knowledge of everything [*savior de tout*]—we've not reached that point yet—but all-knowing [*tout-savoir*]. Understand this is what is affirmed as being nothing other than knowledge, which in ordinary language is called the bureaucracy. (31)

In the lacanian or post-lacanian literature we find much discussion of the imperative to *Enjoy!* A critique of the discourse of the university formalizes and underpins those discussions,

even as in many instances I think that they stray from Lacan in pursuing their own ends, and ironically where they often stray is into the very discourse they diagnose. But, let it be said, I too am operating firmly within the presumptions of the university discourse here, doing my part to *keep on knowing more*, even as I am hystericized again and again.

Let's back up to the master's discourse for a moment. As was discussed above, Lacan maps Hegel's master and slave onto this and also refers to Plato and Marx. In each case the master/ruler/capitalist commands the slave/proletarian to make things work [S1→S2]. As the slave learns to do this, he develops know-how but not abstract knowledge of the principles of his work. Enter the philosopher who, on behalf of the master, questions the slave and derives from his answers the general principles involved. This knowledge [S2], conscious knowledge at this point, has thereby become the master's knowledge. On a hypothetical factory floor we can imagine the same thing taking place: the workers become better at what they do, and they have to, as they are pitted against one another in competition for their survival. An innovation made by one will soon enough be used by others and eventually mandated by the capitalist at the top. This knowledge born of work, just as wealth in Reaganomics (inverting its rhetoric), "trickles up," if, that is, it doesn't simply *flood* uphill. But something happens over the course of time and Lacan explicitly lays much of the blame for this transformation at the feet of philosophy, whereby the old form of master, the one who doesn't desire to know *how* it works only *that* it work, ceases to be so common and the form of the "modern master" takes hold in the university discourse (31). This is precisely analogous to the historical shift from monarchies to representative governments in that the monarch was master because he just *was*, but once a constitution and so forth is in place the master is but a placeholder within symbolic space; a master with a term of office.

So how does the university discourse work? The agent, knowledge in the sense of that which is consciously knowable and fantasmatically masterable, commands an other [S2→*a*] not simply to know, to understand what is commanded, but to *enjoy* this knowing. Here one might recall the phrase often delivered with a smirk both to children and to students complaining of the work asked of them; "it's good for you!" This is what Lacan has in mind by referring to students as the "astudied," uniting *object a* and "student" in this neologism (105). In doing so the agent of the university discourse, this "new tyranny of knowledge" (32), is driven onward by the demand of the master, now unconscious, inaccessible and *dead*, to "[k]eep on knowing more" (105). The command to enjoy is identical even as it seems different. The reason for this is that whether the agent of the university discourse commands that an other learn or understand some specific content or engage in some action that "knowledge" has deemed to be good for the other or productive of happiness, what is being demanded is that the other's jouissance be served up in response. *You must do this and you must not only get something out of it, you must get off on it too.* But there is a wrinkle here as this jouissance above the bar is neither the jouissance of the lost object regained nor is it the surplus jouissance that is the product of the master's discourse; instead it is "an imitation" (81). But this is also part of what makes the university discourse effective, subjects desire the neat and tidy, non-threatening jouissance that is mandated whether it be reflected in the smiles of models as they interact with consumer products or the less quantifiable esteem that is believed to result from academic achievement. This lure, Lacan notes, "can catch on. One can do a semblance of surplus *jouissance*—it draws quite a crowd" (81).

With the product we come to the somewhat ambiguous downside of the university discourse. This discourse is driven by S1 in the place of truth; "[t]he myth of the ideal I, of the I that masters, of the I whereby at least something is identical to itself, namely the speaker, is very

precisely what the university discourse is unable to eliminate from the place in which its truth is found" (63). But, S2 in the dominant, through the lure of a simulated jouissance, has the "unheard of pretension of having a thinking being, a subject, as its production. As subject […] there is no question of its being able to see itself as the master of knowledge" (174). What exactly is the problem here? As I understand it (and I have doubts about my understanding) the issue is that the other in this discourse is doomed to fail and to suffer as a consequence further alienation. Recall that in the master's discourse the demand of the master always fails, and though this impotence is not recognized as it would upset the master's function, neither is it inscribed as failure upon anyone else. But in the university discourse the inability to be the master of a "simulated" knowledge-as-jouissance that is commanded is something at which we all must fail. I fail to find ecstacy in my new iPod and I fail to present myself as master of Lacan's thought in this paper[10] and I fail, always, to enact myself as a perfectly enjoying, that is, *knowing* being. This discourse allows us to insert jouissance into the old adage that *the more I learn (pursue knowledge) the more I realize how little I know* and, perhaps to update it as follows, *the more I pursue enjoyment the more I realize how little I enjoy.* In the university discourse, so far as jouissance is concerned, more is less.

But there is some ambiguity here as well. Recall that the barred subject [$] appears in the place of production and that this place is also that surplus jouissance. In one reading of this discourse, it is the agent [S2] who would recuperate this surplus as a value, not the other [*a*] who produces it and pays for it. Recall here the way that the capitalist benefits from the surplus value generated by the proletarian's labor. But in what sense does this recuperation take place for the agent in the discourse of the University? What needs to be shown is not simply that the other's

[10] The irony involved in knowing that I may nonetheless earn a *Master's* degree from this work is rich.

body is made to produce jouissance in response to the agent's demand, but also that this product accrues as value to the agent. Paul Verhaeghe in *On Being Normal and Other Disorders* makes frequent use of the university discourse in his critical engagement with the psychiatric and especially the psychopharmacological establishments. My example here comes from Verhaeghe, though I extrapolate to answer the question about the recuperation of surplus by the agent (see 2004, 89-91). The scenario is as follows. A patient suffers from something and goes to a psychiatrist. This psychiatrist is of the belief that the suffering of this patient is a matter of his brain chemistry being in some sense "out of balance." The psychiatrist as agent in this discourse does not address the patient as a subject but as an object [S2→*a*]. Further the agent here *knows* what it is that is wrong with the object, his accumulated knowledge provides this information. The agent here operates from an unconscious conviction [S1 below the bar] that while he may not yet have all the answers, may not know all there is to know about brain chemistry and the etiology of mental suffering, that it must be knowable. The suffering patient, treated as object, is produced as a freshly alienated subject [$]. So again, why does this alienation emerge in the place of jouissance/production? How does the suffering patient of this example get off on this process while nonetheless suffering further alienation? Verhaeghe has this to say;

> [I]f a certain psychopathology has an organic explanation, then there is no such thing as a guilty party. There are only victims of accidental gene combinations, of external, nonhuman toxins, and so on. The parties themselves are not to blame, that's the ultimate message. However, should the same disorder have a psychological etiology, then we would have to look for a cause in the psyche itself, and hence for a causal agent, either in the environment or, more frighteningly, in the mirror. (2004, 90-1)

The alienation here is that in being marked by a signifier in this scenario is to accept that mark as one's own. Here we might think of the HMO jargon of the "pre-existing condition" to get at this. Then consider that that signifier might be "Bipolar Personality Disorder" or "Borderline Personality Disorder" and the consequences of acceding to such a mark, allowing it to *go down on your permanent record*. To do so is both alienating as it negates the subject's agency with regard to the suffering at issue and at the same time "he or she is acquitted" (Verhaeghe 2004, 91) of any responsibility for it. For any patient that embraces this, and especially if the use of psychopharmacology relieves or lessens the suffering involved, then the surplus jouissance here is positively inflected. But what about those who are not helped by the drugs on offer? Or those whose sufferings are not the result of brain chemistry but of a lack of self-understanding or perhaps by "real world" issues? Imagine three patients all being treated for depression, diagnosed as such and given SSRIs as treatment for this. Patient A was not academically successful, works a low-paying low-prestige job, is a single mother and has simply had some bad luck. Patient B has followed the course laid out by his wealthy family, resulting in a high-paying and secure job with all the markers of social success. Patient C was depressed and moody as a child and this depression has been ongoing through his life regardless of periods of achievement and failure, and a livable, if not lavish lifestyle. Without ruling out the notion that the chemistry of the brain could well become in some unclear sense "out of balance" in any or all of the scenarios depicted here, is it not also clearly possible that the depression suffered is *not* a result of brain chemistry? Is it not possible that patient C is an obsessional neurotic unable to live out his life save as a form of living death? Is it not possible that Patient B, in acceding to the course laid out by him for the parents betrayed his own unconscious desire? Is it not possible that drugging away the depression of Patient A amounts to little more than helping her to resign

herself to the status quo and to be better able to imbue “Welcome to Wal-Mart” with a convincingly cheery tone? Is it not possible that for each of these patients that they made choices and continue to make choices that sustain their own suffering?

To the extent that patients accept their diagnoses and take the drugs and are helped in some way to suffer less, the knowledge [S2] the agent in the university discourse speaks through is further ratified. This is value that derives from the surplus jouissance of the patient in such a discourse situation for the psychiatrist as agent. And to the extent that the patient in question is not helped, does not experience a decrease in suffering, the S1 of the agent [S2] is not threatened, the answer is simply that a different drug must be tried. Knowledge in this discourse is never revealed as lacking as it is in some sense *rigged*, any result functions to a greater or lesser degree as self-confirming.

Sadly, but inevitably, psychoanalytic thought can easily be mobilized as a university discourse internally or between a subject and others. If I treat Lacan as master, believing that his diagnostic structures are inescapably true and dare to diagnose myself [S2→*a*] as having the structure of desire of an obsessional neurotic, I put myself at great risk. To the extent that I accept this signifier, “obsessional,” I reduce the unique particularity of my own psyche and read it simply as an expression of this structure as a type. It must be said that this strategy fits perfectly the obsessional’s subtending question referenced above; *Am I alive or am I dead?* It does so by allowing me to frame all that I do and say and feel as simply a playing out of what Lacan the master discovered in this structure. The ambiguous surplus here is that with each new symptom I fit into the mold, I confirm my S2, my knowledge of Lacan, and as my own object and other I get off on being able to mark myself, to be able to say “I *am* that” with a sense that

the master agrees and the fantasy that my signifier has equaled my being.[11]

The Discourse of the Analyst

$$\frac{a}{S^2} \longrightarrow \frac{\cancel{S}}{S^1}$$

Figure 6. The Discourse of the Analyst

> For the analysand who is there, in the $, the content is his knowledge. We are there in order to get to the point where he knows everything that he does not know even as he knows it. […] For the psychoanalyst the latent content is on the other side, in the S1. For him the latent content is the interpretation that he is going to give, insofar as it is, not this knowledge that we discover in the subject, but what is added on to it to give it a sense. (113)
>
> To be effective this effort, which we make to extract, in the form of imputed thought, what has in effect been lived by him who, on this occasion, well deserves the title of patient, must not make us forget that by virtue of the signifier connection the subjective configuration has a perfectly mappable objectivity which founds the very possibility of the assistance we bring in the form of interpretation.
>
> There, at a given point of the link, namely the altogether initial one

[11] It should be remarked here that this narrative bears little to no resemblance to what takes place in an analysis. Should your psychoanalyst *ever* say that you are an hysteric or obsessional or pervert, you can be sure that your analyst has left psychoanalysis and moved into the discourse of the University.

> between S1 and S2, it is possible for this fault we call the subject to open. There, the effects of the link, which as it happens is a signifier link, operate. Whether this lived experience [*vécu*] that is more or less correctly called thought is or is not produced somewhere, something is produced there that derives from a chain, exactly as though it were thought. (88-89)

As with each of the discourses discussed thus far I am going to try to concretize this one in a narrative account, even as I am convinced that this is simultaneously a diminishment of the breadth of the discourse's structural implications. It is at least an entry point. The agent of this discourse is *object a*. The analyst speaks, occasionally at least, to the analysand [$a \rightarrow \$$]. These utterances cannot always be found to have been interpretations by the analysand, but this is the aim. As time passes and the analysand has said more and more, and had his speech interrupted time and again as slips and so forth have been noted by the analyst, something develops, or perhaps it would be better to say, *intrudes*. This something is knowledge [S2], which we see in the place of truth under the bar on the side of the agent. "It's on his side that there is S2, that there is knowledge—whether he acquires this knowledge through listening to his analysand, or whether it is acquired, locatable knowledge, which at a certain level can be limited to analytic know-how" (35). On the basis of this arisen knowledge or know-how the analyst in time offers more than just questions or citations of the analysand and instead proposes what might turn out to have been interpretations.

> Interpretation […] is often established through an enigma. It is an enigma that is gathered as far as possible from the strands of the psychoanalysand's discourse, which you, the interpreter, can in no way

> complete on your own, and cannot consider to be an avowal without lying. (37)

In this discourse it is still the case that that which is found in the place of truth is what motivates the discourse of the agent. But there is also a difference here in that we see a more overt link, albeit circuitous, between the S2 of the agent/analyst and the S1 of the analysand, the movement is the same, truth to agent to other to product, but in this discourse the S2 which motivates the analyst's words has to be felt by the analysand. Contrast this with the discourse of the Master wherein the master's repressed truth cannot *come through* the discourse to reach the other without this undermining the efficacy of the discourse itself. Whatever the case, S2 must emerge in the form of an interpretation, often, as noted above, an enigmatic one. The analyst is unable to ratify this as accurate. For the analyst it cannot be an avowal without this avowal being a lie. This is because it is only the divided other [$], who can make such an avowal and then only if they recognize that a new master signifier [S1] has emerged in their own unconscious. In this discourse the other is addressed as already, necessarily, divided, which accounts for the confusions and perplexities that analysands experience in analysis. The analysand cannot help but speak in such a way that they take him- or herself to be, at least linguistically, coherent, an "I," whereas the analyst's commands attempt to speak from the place of the real of their desire, from what the analysand knows but does not know (44). When this works, if indeed it does, "it is possible for this fault we call the subject to open" (88). This affective experience of one's own subjectivity as split can be devastating as it undermines the consistency of the fantasy we all partake in, of being equal to our I. The new S1 that arises in the unconscious of the analysand has the potential to be liberating as it offers the possibility of a new relationship to one's desire, which could function to lessen the suffering that its inevitable repetition would entail. Also

important in this conception is the possibility that this new S1 might, by virtue of having been given, become accessible to the consciousness of the analysand in all its meaningless material word*liness* and non-signifying dimensions. Why meaningless? Because at this moment, if this is the final or perhaps crucial moment of the successful end of one's analysis, then this signifier is no longer something that is *of the Other*, invested with meaning and backed up by the inescapable webs of the Big Other's obscure implacable intentions. It has reverted to what it always was to begin with, before any such fantasy took hold; it is simply one signifier out of the whole battery of them, a grouping whose plural noun would be "a stupid" of signifiers (Nobus and Quinn 136). This would be the moment of traversing the fantasy (that being can be signified), of de-supposing the subject supposed to know (recognizing that it is the analysand that does the real work of interpretation), and seeing that the big Other does not exist (that it is sustained only by fantasy).

The discourse of the Analyst *is*, like all the other discourses, a social bond, but I find it very difficult to provide examples of it working so clearly either internally or between an agent and a collective other. In the coda I discuss efforts on the part of Samuels to think this discourse in the pedagogical situation. Here I would like to mention the difficulty I see in providing an internal narrative of this as well. Let us say, if only to make this as easy as possible, that I am a subject with much experience in analysis. To the extent that one gathers this experience one seemingly unavoidable effect is that slips of the tongue, whether one's own to those of others, become much more noticeable. It has surely happened to me that I made a slip of the tongue, noticed it, and repeated it back to myself, momentarily stopped by this, and responding to it as I would had my analyst repeated it to me. In such moments I have attempted to do precisely what I would have done in analysis: free associate upon the slip. But these moments are always very

brief. It seems a near impossibility to consistently both free associate, saying whatever occurs to oneself, *and* to listen not to the intended meaning of one's own speech but only to the signifiers themselves, to listen for all the other things they might signify. As such it seems that if this discourse is possible within a single psyche, it is not something that one can sustain for long. Further I cannot escape the sense that even in such moments when it appears to be operating, that my own unconscious interferences, the ways that I systematically cannot *hear* certain contents in my own speech, prevent it from functioning as it would in the clinical setting. All of this leads me to conclude that the discourse of the Analyst is distinctly different from the other three. It is predicated upon a unique situation, framed by rules that no other discourse situation I know of holds to, and unlike the other three seems to preclude anything akin to what we generally mean by the word conversation. Admittedly, Lacan doesn't show any concern for the discourses in relation to conversation, and positions the discourses between speech and language, as the point where they intersect. But given that I can without great difficulty see the other discourses unfolding in the course of actual or imagined conversations, this difference seems telling.

CODA: AVENUES UNTRODDEN AND QUESTIONS UNANSWERED

Knowledge

There seem to be inconsistencies in Lacan's account with regards to "knowledge." In section one I laid out the connections between knowledge and jouissance, detailing how these are a significant shift from his previous perspective wherein jouissance and the symbolic were absolutely unconnected by definition. Generally speaking, I think this shift is a marked improvement as I am convinced that we do *get off* on language. But the inconsistencies have to do with the two forms of knowledge that Lacan cites, unconscious knowledge and a sort of unabstracted know-how and, on the other hand, the articulated, abstract and generalized knowledge which is consciously held. Here is the rub: if the graphs present the unconscious below and the conscious above, then we run into some serious difficulties with the hysteric's discourse, where as we saw above, to make sense of the account that Lacan gives we must assume that the S2 produced by the discourse, which is below the bar, must be conscious. Then again, in the master's discourse S2 is in the place of the slave who we are told knows this knowledge *without knowing it*, it requiring the philosopher to transform it into abstract principles. This makes the S2 above the bar into knowledge which could reasonably be understood as *unconscious* (in the discussion of the discourse of the Master above I proposed one way to rationalize this). In the discourse of the University this issue could seemingly go either way and in the discourse of the Analyst it seems that for the discourse to work, for the analysand to accept the interpretation as a new S1, that even here it must be in some fashion accessible to consciousness. All of this leads me to wonder if knowledge is simply whatever Lacan needs it to be for each discourse.

Faced with a passage like this, “the desire for knowledge bears no relationship to knowledge (…) A radical distinction, which has far-reaching consequences from the point of view of pedagogy” (23), it seems that I would first have to ask *which* “knowledge” Lacan is talking about. If the desire for positive, conscious knowledge has nothing to do with unconscious knowledge I am rather nonplussed, to the point of wondering *so what?* But then when he mentions pedagogy it seems that we would have to be talking about articulated conscious knowledge in both instances, though once more a *so what?*comes to mind. This time it hinges on what “relationship” means in the passage above. If I desire to know about life on other planets and my desire is said to have no *relationship* to any actual knowledge about life on other planets, I will read this as saying that my desire or lack thereof has no effect on whether there is or is not any such knowledge to be had. In a word, *duh.* But does Lacan mean to suggest that my desire to know about life on other planets is not really about that at all, but something else? On whole I think this *is* what he is saying, that the desire for knowledge is actually motivated by jouissance and not knowledge. But this brings us back to our first problem again wherein my desire for positive conscious knowledge about life on other planets doesn’t relate to the unconscious determinants of that desire, which leads us back once more to *So what?* In the clinical setting, where the pursuits of some analysand are causing him or her suffering, I can readily imagine why uncovering something of what drives these pursuits would be worthwhile. Likewise, for example in the situation of racism, it could potentially be useful to illustrate the ways that the racist’s beliefs about the other are means of racist enjoyment. But what might unconscious knowledge or desire have to do with pedagogy? Surely psychoanalysis is not a pedagogical practice, and education as generally understood is not concerned with teaching the unconscious. So why should this statement have *any* repercussions for pedagogy? Finally, Lacan *does*

acknowledge that as S2 moves from discourse to discourse "that the knowledge is not the same" (35), but given how precious and few are the clues given as to precisely *how* S2 changes from discourse to discourse, it seems that a conceptual muddle is inevitable unless Lacan's ideas are developed further and with greater rigor.

Structuralism

It is commonly said that lacanian psychoanalysis is structuralist. This has some basis and yet also deserves a good deal of scrutiny. To my mind, one can very profitably get a sense of what Lacan means by the Symbolic order by reading Levi-Strauss and Marcel Mauss. The set of combinatory rules that structuralists uncover in one cultural practice after another are very much part and parcel of Lacan's concept of the Symbolic order. In Seminar XVII we see Lacan concede to the pertinence of Levi-Strauss' critique of the Oedipus complex. A critique which reads it as simply another *version* of the myth and in no sense a foundational articulation of the truth. But in accepting this point, Lacan attempts to move beyond it as well. Oliver Feltham reads Seminar XVII as an extended attempt on Lacan's part to think through the problematic that preoccupied so many post-structuralist thinkers; how to move beyond static structures and theorize structural (historical) change. Feltham sees Lacan as trying out a multitude of answers to how this happens and finally settling on a theory of "cuts" in which rather than any sort of hegelian or neohegelian dialectic at work to bring about the shift from discourse to discourse, that instead something radical, unique and "absolutely contingent" is taking place (Feltham 190). It is this conception that one finds in Zizek and Badiou and in many of the thinkers of systems theory such as Luhman and Prigogine (Feltham 191-2). Tracing the debts and differences between Lacan and structuralism on the one hand and between these others and Lacan is

certainly a task that offers many avenues of inquiry. But something troubles me here as well: Feltham provides a compelling narration of these successive attempts on Lacan's part which culminate in the theory of cuts, but, in reading the seminar I fail to see where Lacan explicitly abandons any of the "failed" attempts unless one generalizes a great deal from his comment early on in the year that there will be many instances of saying, of some formulation of his, that "[i]t's perhaps not the right one" the insistence or repetition of which he claims is "a good indication of the dimension of truth" (15). If I hold Lacan to the standards of philosophy, or simply those I impose on my English 1102 classes, his successive answers make for a situation of logical contradiction. Is this a problem or not and if it is a problem how serious is it?

Hegel

Hegel is a constant reference point in this seminar. In the interests of sticking to my own task here I have not given much attention to Hegel's shifting roles herein. Suffice it to say that Hegel is everywhere and that what Hegel signifies changes from instance to instance. Hegel is used as an exemplar of the discourses of hysteric (35), university (200) and master (90) at different moments. Mladen Dolar treats these issues in "Hegel as the Other Side of Psychoanalysis," but as solid and persuasively argued as I find this article, it left me with many questions. If Hegel, not the person mind you, but the texts thereof, can shift from one to the other of the discourses with such ease, how does that happen? It is clear that individuals can move from one discourse to another, else there would be no way to be an analyst or to be hystericized and so forth. But is it simply a matter of making our consciously produced speech accord with our sense of the upper portion of the graph? That would seem to my mind to imply that we have fully conscious control over which of these discourses we are operating within, but that seems to

negate the lower halves of the various graphs, those areas wherein truth and product are unconscious. Also given that Lacan can only be treating Hegel as text in spite of his tendency to refer to him as person, how confident can we be in discussing unconscious determinants and outcomes in “Hegel”? I take it as one of the fundamental rules of psychoanalytic thought that people, subjects submitted to language, have an unconscious, but that texts *do not*, even as I recognize that relatively little “psychoanalytic criticism” observes this fundamental. I know that this assertion of mine will raise a few eyebrows as so much very fine criticism presumes the opposite.[12] There is a great deal more to be said about Lacan and Hegel in this seminar and these are just the most insistent concerns that emerge for me.

The Mirror Stage?

The mirror stage is never once mentioned in this seminar. I bring it up because I think this absence is worth thinking about. Much more work would be needed to truly support the

[12] This topic is outside the scope of my thesis. But it's a clear point of divergence between my thinking and much literary use of analytic thought. The notion of a textual unconscious cannot be equated to the unconscious at stake in the psychoanalysis of a human subject. The crux here would be jouissance. A text may facilitate *in its readers* all manner of associations. Then, bracketing the reader (if we truly can) a case can be made for disparate internal references in a text, which point consistently outside of themselves in a specific way(s). What Marjorie Perloff uncovers in Stein's poem “Susie Asado” is this type of procedure minus any claims about the unconscious (Perloff 70-7). This is relatively common in poetry, but the point could be generalized. Consider John Ashbery. Consider the unending allusiveness of John Ashbery, which never seems to ground itself in any sort of master signifier that would allow one to offer an interpretation with any claim to necessity. But interpretation is still possible. One can find many pieces that, though used in other ways, can all be shown to point or allude to something not there in the text - this object/concept/whatever - would be something *like* an unconscious determinate of the text. And this is *akin* to the way in which a phrase uttered with one intention in analysis can be turned around to shed light on other things unrecognized. The crucial difference is this; in analysis, the decision that such and such a slip of the tongue or curious phrase has repercussions which allow for the emergence of more personal, often painful, insights into our actions and feelings is made by the analysand. The release of jouissance on the part of the analysand is the indication of the pertinence of an interpretation. This experience is not necessarily rational or meaningful in and of itself, rather it marks a point where, for a moment, a network of cathected signifiers is felt. While a text can certainly provoke jouissance in a subject who engages with it, this jouissance cannot (in my view at least) be something that is *in* the text. Another way of saying this is that the text is not sitting there enjoying itself, we bring the enjoyment or fail to. Given the foregoing, a textual "unconscious" could remain a useful metaphor, but one which would need to be used with care. Surely the nature of the "unconscious" is not the same in each situation. To conflate the two, I argue, invites confusion and does a disservice to both subjects and texts.

following supposition, but I offer it as I am convinced that this support could be found. My reading of this seminar and my incomplete knowledge of what Lacan is up to after this period suggest to me that he is consciously moving away from the account of subject formation that the mirror stage article embodies. There are a number of reasons for this as I see it. That account, while describing a Symbolic moment, is still rooted primarily in the Imaginary and difficult to untangle from it. Here in Seminar XVII we see in a Symbolic structural moment, the subject's simultaneous accession to language, division by same and binding to jouisssance as an inscription that will be carried forward and *added to* via the incorporation of additional S1s. This new model opens into a future and allows for changes and accretions in ways that the mirror stage account doesn't. It's also not presented as a discrete chronological "moment," but as a structural one. I think that one could demonstrate that nothing is lost in this new account save for the primacy given in the mirror stage to the Imaginary, and that what is gained is a way to conceive of the subject's entrance into language as more than simply a great leap and instead as an *ongoing* binding and rebinding to jouissance via the signifier. This ongoing nature of subject formation (subject accretion?) is also what prompts his pluralization of S1s in this seminar.

These revisions to Lacan's theory provide us with ways to think through the vicissitudes that a subject faces with regard to language and the differing stances one can assume in that regard. As with his move beyond structuralism discussed above, Lacan here can be seen to be reconstructing his theory to account for change. Finally, I think that Lacan is trying to evade the limitations that narrative accounts, premised as they are upon an affective phenomenology, seem always to bring with them. Why? Well, if his earlier accounts and the uses therein of the mother and father repeatedly risked recuperation into patriarchal lines of thought and their associated travails such as maternal blame, this new structural model recasts the parents not as mythically

important beings via their own desires and effects but as, in a sense, the cogs of a social apparatus whose roles they have little option but to play no matter what subjective distance they take from them. In Lacan's later seminars it is precisely his relationship to the implicit phenomenology that lingers in those earlier narrative accounts that is at issue.[13] Why? Because it tends to overshadow the structural relations by delimiting the ways in which the models themselves are understood. A prime example here is the way that, by means of a story of sorts, about a child and a mirror and a mommy behind its back, one tends to grasp what is at stake in the mirror stage. The trouble is not that this account is in itself false, only that it is but one of a myriad of ways of staging a structural occurrence that must take place for all speaking beings whether they have parents, or parents of the genders of this account, or mirrors, or any of the signifiers of the story-version. One might say that to always start from such a narrative-phenomenological account, specifically through its mobilization of an affective and Imaginarized understanding of what is at root a structural issue is strictly analogous to repeatedly beginning with the penis when trying to think the phallus, or beginning with one's biological father when trying to grasp the real father as a structural operation of language that *has no other real*. The movement into topology might be seen as the culmination of this impulse within Lacan's thought as when using a mobius strip or some such figure as a theoretical representation the opportunity of affective-phenomenological-narrative *understanding* is nearly eradicated.

[13] Also worth reflecting on at this point is Lacan's early, if limited engagement with phenomenology *ala* Merleau-Ponty and Sartre and how as of Seminar XI he becomes very clear about how phenomenology is not pertinent to psychoanalysis (1981, 71-6).

Subject Supposed to Know

Is Lacan the master of his own thought? It would seem that this cannot be the case, but to say that he is not and to read him as yet another divided subject, while potentially liberating, also seems to beg for spurious applications of bits and pieces of his thinking without consideration for how they fit together into larger configurations (not that this doesn't happen already when he is, as so often is the case, treated as master). For the last couple of years I have been haunted by this problem and my study of Seminar XVII has only heightened the question for me. Here is the issue as I see it: in academic modes of discourse (notice that I am not saying "in the university discourse" though it is certainly operant here) one is beholden to the general principle of authorial intention that states that divergent interpretations of what an author *meant* by some work have at least the *potential* to be resolved with reference to the primary text in question. This is seemingly at odds with the old saw of new criticism, the "intentional fallacy" but it isn't really, it simply treats author and text as one (just as Lacan treats Hegel, it seems to me). This basic conviction is what I operate with in my teaching and is the standard I most often hold myself to in my academic work and writing. But with Lacan's thought (or Derrida's or Freud's or Stein's for that matter) we are presented with many very good reasons to distrust the imputed *intentions* that are so often brought into play when deciding what some text or other means. Lacan in this seminar repeatedly argues, or if that is a bit of exaggeration, he at least *asserts*, that truth can only be given in a half saying, that totalities are impossible to contain in thought, if they are even coherent ideas in and of themselves. And yet, instilled with the academic ethos as I am, as I write on Lacan or deploy his ideas I assume otherwise. I assume that this or that reading of his thought deserves priority as it accords better with what Lacan has

actually written. This is what allows me without a qualm to ignore Ragland and value Fink, to be suspicious of McGowan and extol Verhaeghe, to quip that Butler misreads Lacan while generally remaining positive about Zizek even as I see many errors and inconsistencies in his work. How is this situation not simply a restaging of the notion of Lacan , Fink, Verhaeghe , Zizek or whomever being a *subject supposed to know*, a subject who is a master, equal to themselves, whose thought must, in some never to be given demonstration, prove to be totalizable and internally coherent? Or is the academic use of psychoanalytic thought, first and foremost beholden to the academic ethos I sketched above and only ever *psychoanalytic* to the extent that it not let psychoanalysis place that basic dictum in doubt?

What do I actually believe here? The fact of the matter is that I believe that the majority of writers on Lacan are absolutely under the sway of Lacan as master, as subject supposed to know and that as such *we* are failing, profoundly, to actualize the potentials that his work opens up. I say "we" because as much as I would like to blaze the trail out of that position, I am not at all sure that I have done so. Notice also that I do not say that *he* opens up. The man is dead. What remains are his texts in whatever varying states they come down to us. I would like to say that what is needed is, to borrow a phrase frequently employed by Zizek, to take Lacan more seriously than he took himself, that is to get beyond Lacan so that we might better see what he has actually contributed. But even in that statement I cannot help but detect the presupposition of some self-consistent body of knowledge and thus another avatar of totality. Likewise I am troubled by the idea that my position here would license anyone to interpret Lacan *willy nilly* and assert that what he or she was doing was *lacanian*. Perhaps I might say that I am still driven by an unconscious desire for Lacan to be the master of his own thoughts even as intellectually I find that idea implausible. But is not my last sentence exactly what Lacan is talking about with

regards to the university discourse's having, as its repressed truth, the dead master who commands us to "keep on knowing more"? Through my mind now flits the phrase, "the true Dadas are anti-Dada," and, while tangential, it is pertinent here, and perhaps worth thinking about in this connection, but, sadly, it offers no resolution of the difficulty and only throws it back, once more, into my lap.

Discourses Producing Discourses?

There are moments in Lacan's discussion that leave me profoundly confused. Speaking of the analyst's discourse, he remarks, "it is fairly curious that what he produces is nothing other than the master's discourse, since it's S1, which comes to occupy the place of production" (176). Now, I sense in reading this passage that Lacan is preoccupied with where his speech is leading him as his comment concludes with "perhaps it's from the analyst's discourse that there can emerge another style of master signifier" (176). From this comment one might be inclined to think that Lacan sees psychoanalysis as having a potentially liberating potential for a new form of the social bond. It does seem that he at least entertains this possibility. But the earlier part of the passage poses some problems as well. Here we see one discourse produce another, the S1 that appears as product is said to institute the master's discourse. In the context of the individual psyche I can assimilate this to what I offer above as my narrative of the analyst's discourse. But Lacan's aims seem grander than a change in the subjective configuration of any single individual and would seem to imply that every discourse produces a discourse at work in the world generally. That of the master produces the analyst's, that of the university produces the hysteric's and the vice versa for each. In some instances I can invent a narrative that would make sense of these claims, but I am painfully aware of how much creative liberty I am taking with my little

explanatory stories in order to impose coherence. Also, if that which appears as the product of a discourse becomes a discourse itself, then why should it have been the University discourse that followed that of the Master rather than the Analyst's? And there is something else troubling me here. Let us grant that the analytic cure works to produce a new S1 in the unconscious of the analysand, perhaps even to make this S1 momentarily conscious. Why would it follow that this would produce another instantiation of the discourse of the Master? If a new S1 emerges in my unconscious, and I act on this as agent of a discourse, this new S1 would be under the bar and an S1 under the bar would suggest that I am using the discourse of the University rather than that of the Master. If on the other hand what was unconscious is made conscious, perhaps I could be the agent of a new Master discourse, but as the final interpretations of the analytic cure feature signifiers in their pure meaningless material word*liness*, what sort of a discourse could this be? If it were internal, as one of my examples above illustrates, perhaps this discourse could be helpful and efficacious for me as subject. But why it should be a viable new discourse for anyone without my specific and particular subjective history, I do not know. I am forced to conclude that while the logic of there being a product in each discourse is fairly sound, the notion of the product of each discourse being another discourse as suggested above is not coherent.

The "Theory" of the Four Discourses

I hope that the foregoing pages have provided something of an introduction to this seminar and its seemingly central subject, the four discourses. I have attempted to provide both plausible (if problematic, limited, etc) narratives of how one might conceive of them and to shine some light on what may or may not be inconsistencies in Lacan's discussion. The longer I have spent with them the more the (seeming) inconsistencies have proliferated. I excluded from

discussion at least as many issues as I have opted to bring up here for reasons of space and using as a rule of thumb to discuss only those issues that were in some sense new in Lacan's thinking or that bore directly upon the discourses, and then, only if illustrating what I thought problematic was not going to require extensive reference to texts other than Seminar XVII. My personal goal here has been to determine what use value the discourse theory might have.

I have concluded that the vast majority of secondary work misunderstands the discourses at a fundamental level. An excellent example of this is Samuels, though a very well meaning author and one who is pursuing pedagogical issues that directly parallel experiments I have made in/on my own classes, he utterly misses the boat. Samuels is interested in operating as teacher from within the discourse of the Analyst. He would do this by refusing to be a master or to resolve questions of better or worse interpretations for his students. His article is interesting and I think further work along these lines *is* worth pursuing, but the classroom simply does not have the same dynamics as the analytic relationship and operating as the agent in the discourse of the Analyst [*a*] does not simply consist in frustrating the student's [$] desire to be ratified by an authority. The analytic relationship, as discussed above, requires certain ground rules in order to function. I cannot imagine a way in which pedagogical objectives could ever be given to students if one were to act as analyst in the classroom. Likewise, while I do think that many students look to the teacher as a form of master [S1] , this form may well be that of the "modern master" (31) of the university discourse [S2]. Perhaps this would not change the reasons why Samuels' proposal fails, but that he assumes only that students desire a master suggests a lack of nuance on his part. The unconscious also must be assumed as freely accessible to consciousness for Samuels' discussion to hold together at all. And even if we allow that, we are still left in a position of needing the knowledge created below the bar for the agent [teacher] to be offered as

enigmas to students, yet be derived from their speech and for them (really? *all* of them?) to accept these enigmatic pedagogical interpretations as new S1s.

Another instance is Bracher who proposes to use the discourse theory and other lacanian ideas to offer a psychoanalytic cultural criticism. Here, while I often find that he makes valid points and that his mobilization of the discourses is not without interest, that he too fails utterly to keep in mind that half of each of these graphs is meant to be unconscious and thus *not* readily available to us. When I say *not available* I am saying that while it is the case that I often think I hear something in an individual's speech that is unconsciously motivated, that as Lacan reminds analysts above, I cannot avow this as truth without deceit. If psychoanalysis were so easy to use to discern the unconscious determinants of other's actions outside of the analytic relationship, I would argue that there would never have been a need for analysis as traditionally practiced. The unspoken presumption of Bracher's work is that the unconscious is not barred, is not hard to access and indeed, all it takes is to apply some psychoanalysis to it from the armchair, so to speak. And then, even as I like and agree with much of what Bracher has to say, the *so what's?* re-emerge insistently. Am I in the least surprised to hear that the political speeches of Reagan operate within the mold of the master's discourse or that those of Jesse Jackson unfold within the hysteric's? No, I'm not and I suspect that you are not either.

Verhaeghe offers a very convincing account of the discourses as inscriptions of invasions of jouissance upon the body of the subject. I have made some use of this above. In *On Being Normal and Other Disorders* he presents many examples of how one might see the dangers of conjoining the university discourse with psychiatric and especially psychopharmacological treatment. These are perceptive and compelling uses of the discourse theory that could be generalized in many other areas. In "Enjoyment and Impossibility: Lacan's Revision of the

Oedipus Complex" he suggests that the discourses provide a way to conceive of the structuration of the primal repressed, that which is never un-repressed or made available to consciousness (Verhaeghe 2006, 35-6). This is a fascinating idea for the clinician, but I am not at all sure how it might be applied otherwise. Feltham, who I also used above, presents Lacan in this seminar as preoccupied with the issue of structural change. He too offers a very compelling reading of the seminar text and makes many insightful linkages and parallels to other thinkers and issues. I find him just as convincing as Verheaghe, but then I wonder, can both of them be correct? Can the discourse theory simultaneously be a theory of the possibility of change within a broadly structural model *and* a theory of the inscriptions of jouissance upon the body and the structuration of the primal repressed? Lacan would be some master, then, would he not? But given the claims I offered at the beginning of this thesis concerning how the notion of subject and discourse here are mutually constructive of the subjective and objective levels, can I rule this out?

As I mentioned near the beginning of this text, Lacan never once calls this the "theory of the four discourses," and I see that as a telling fact. I find myself wiggling uncomfortably within one sort of disavowal after another. I want to say something like, "yes it's a theory but not one you can use for anything" or, reversing that approach, "yes it explains certain things and offers some ways to predict others but only if you already know something of what it would be able to tell you." Having spent many hours with these questions I do see that one might, with care, use the discourse theory to at least guide one in asking where to look. But in light of my comments above about not treating Lacan as a subject supposed to know, on what basis can I dispute anyone who decides that this *is* a theory and that it can be unambiguously *applied* to things and that what it produces is *knowledge*. In fact, if I do not wish to treat Lacan as master and subject

supposed to know then I am forced to acknowledge that this might be the best thing to do in order to get beyond the deadlock of Lacan the master. What disturbs me though, is that to do so, I have only one choice of discourse in which to do this, that of the university.

When I was wrapping up the paper that serves as the basis for this thesis I spoke to a good friend of mine about it. He, like me, is a poet. He, like me, has been interested in Lacan for some time, and we had the same analyst for some years. He, unlike me, has gone back into analysis. I was making a somewhat comic narrative of my frustrations (or my *surplus jouissance*) with the seminar and the writing of the paper and he said, speaking about the seminar text itself, "Yeah, but isn't it all improv?" This started me thinking about my nine (then seven) or so years of doing experimental poetry as an improvisory practice. Lacan's twenty-seven years of seminars do not share a great deal in common with the improvised poetry that I engage in, but I maintain the conviction, especially evident for me in considering the unlicensed transcriptions of his seminars, that Lacan was *improvising.* Now and then when I perform, someone is provoked by something I say during a piece and approaches me afterwards to ask about my intentions or even to argue against a position they felt sure that I was espousing. This is difficult for me, as more often than not, *I do not know* what I said moments before. There is certainly a good deal of cognitive labor going on when one works as I do, but the format brings about a situation of being *optimally challenged*, by which I mean that as with downhill skiing or some such activity, it is often all I can do to keep going and I have no time to plan things out or take considered views in hindsight. My friend's comment also got me to thinking about how I have gone back a year or more after an improv piece was recorded and finally listened to it again only to be stunned by something I said, to find it perhaps intellectually exciting *and* utterly foreign to anything I can recall ever having thought previously. Alternately it might appear painfully revealing of what I

now know was about to happen in my life but which it would seem I couldn't have had advance knowledge of or I certainly wouldn't have done what I had since done. It's easy to say that this is all *projection* but I find that a rather facile answer that obscures more than it reveals.

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