

THE LALANGUE OF PHALLOI: LACAN VERSUS LACAN

justin clemens

CHE VUOI?

Deficiency in judgment is just what is ordinarily called stupidity, and for such a failing there is no remedy. An obtuse or narrow-minded person to whom nothing is wanting save a proper degree of understanding and the concepts appropriate thereto, may indeed be trained through study, even to the extent of becoming learned . . . it is not unusual to meet learned men who in the application of their scientific knowledge betray that original want, which can never be made good.

- Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*

Towards the end of his most recently published book, *Metastases of Enjoyment*, Slavoj Žižek helpfully includes what he calls a "self-interview," which (somewhat ironically) presents itself as a work of correction and clarification. One of the (non) questions that Žižek thereby puts to himself concerns the relationship in his work between Lacanian doctrine and popular culture. To which he answers, "the idiot for whom I endeavor to formulate a theoretical point as clearly as possible is ultimately myself."¹ Which is also going provide the justification for this article as well: the confused and mystified idiot at whom it is directed is first of all myself. However, as will hopefully also become apparent, idiocy or stupidity is to be rigorously distinguished from banality, simplification, or facileness for a number of reasons, some in fact strictly to do with Lacanian dogma, some to do with other, perhaps nameless factors.

When I originally envisaged this article, I thought that I would speak about the notorious Lacanian mathemes and diagrams, but my itinerary was immediately and inexplicably diverted - I at once found my exegesis split between two of Lacan's more famous papers, one which stands close to the beginning of Lacan's career, "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience" (hereafter referred to as "The Mirror Stage"), the second near its end, "Encore."² If any number of major Lacanian theorists have recently begun to emphasize Lacan's "final phase" over those preceding, in the name of a new and very different account of the status of the Real, my own trajectory in this article will be very different indeed: on the contrary, I wish to argue that "The Mirror Stage" essay has, almost uncannily (as they say), already predicted and destined the emergence of the famous "for-

UMBR(a)

mulas of sexuation," supposedly only adumbrated much later. As already intimated, then, this paper is going to array Lacan against himself by claiming to return Lacan to himself, by means of a debased and distanced Antipodean echo of Miller's 1993-1994 Paris seminar "Lacan contre Lacan." Which hopefully explains - at least in part - the "colonic end" of my title, "Lacan versus Lacan," which I'd like to be understood in the sense of "Kramer versus Kramer," as a sort of ressentimental Hollywood melodrama.

Finally, I will suggest various linkages that can be made between Lacan and classical rhetorical theory, in order to produce a matheme to which Lacan himself might not assent, but which certainly follows him in his later program of preposterous quasi-mathematical formalization. Hence, also, the "Paris End" of my title, which refers to Lacan's notion of "la lalangue," the pre-significatory *jacassement* that underpins all discourse and being, and which is linked to *jouissance*, the death-drive, traumatic enjoyment, etc. etc. To reiterate: the ludicrous aspect of my strategy here is hopefully not merely the index of a subjective insufficiency, but rather derives from the inadequation and idiocy of two different institutional discourses (that of psychoanalysis and of the university) with respect to each other. Indeed, according to Elisabeth Roudinesco, Lacan begins to produce his mathemes at the very moment that Lacanian psychoanalysis begins to be taught in the state-fueled and driven French university system: the mathemes thus function as the constitutively foreign "alimentary particles" of *psychoanalytic* knowledge, and precisely insofar as they fail to conform to the standard exigencies of academic research and teaching. Further, they also necessarily fail (albeit in a very different way) vis-a-vis psychoanalysis itself: the mathemes succeed only to the extent that they are miserably deficient³ . . .

"A TRICK DONE WITH MIRRORS . . ."

Idiocy, once again, is not something that one might possibly avoid, but rather an empty slot in the subjectivity-machine: Lacan himself constantly refers to "the ineffable, stupid existence" of the barred subject, which remains always an imbecilic and therefore culpable bystander of its own life. Naturally, however, the subject witnesses and participates in its own life very differently according to which sexual position it assumes, and for Lacan, how one comes to be sexed is a tragedy-comedy of failure. As Judith Butler puts it: "Lacan disputes the primacy given to ontology within the terms of Western metaphysics and insists upon the subordination of the question 'What is/has being?' to the prior question 'How is 'being' instituted and allocated through the signifying practices of the paternal economy?'"⁴ If, as many recent commentators have pointed out, Lacan's characterizations of the interminable failures attendant upon sexuation change dramatically throughout his career, just as many critics are still hung up on the characterization of male and female as ideal positions to which of course any particular instantiation must necessarily fail to measure up. However, such a view, while not altogether incorrect, remains at the level of what Lacan called the

Imaginary, or mirror-stage, in his famous article of the same name: furthermore, as I shall argue, such a view is also predicated on what is quite an egregious misreading of the scope and status of the Imaginary.

For if it is true, as Liz Grosz puts it, that "The Mirror Stage" is Lacan's "first, and most accessible, intervention into the 'reading' of Freud,"⁵ it is also precisely because of this essay's supposed ease and accessibility that few people - including Grosz herself - can be bothered taking the time to actually read it. For if there is not one commentator on the mirror-stage that does not recognize the centrality of "misrecognition" in that essay, there are a number of only-too-familiar errors that crop up again and again: for example, the common emphasis on the dyadic nature of the mirror-stage (as opposed to the triadic structure of the Symbolic), or on its nature as a spatial and/or temporal stage through or across which one passes and which is thereby finally *surpassed*.

I wish to suggest that these accounts remain significantly insufficient in that they conflate or confuse the various levels at which this misrecognition occurs. I am now going to proceed to an account of the very precise ways according to which I think the mirror-stage functions: I will list, somewhat tendentiously, eight analytically distinct "orders of misrecognition" (this list is perhaps not itself exhaustive) which are nevertheless tied together in various ways in practice - the psychotic, for instance, will get knotted according to procedures that radically differ from those of the pervert or the neurotic. Before proceeding further, however, it is also important to stress the dimension of genuine "identification" in the mirror-stage drama: the infant at this moment, and as if for the first time, identifies itself as a delimitable being-in-the-world, and thus one object among others. Again, Lacan makes clear that he is playing also on the ambiguity of the word "identification": the child identifies *as* and identifies *with*. However, and this is a point to which I will return below, it is also crucial here to emphasize the "active" and "performative" nature of this identification, which is by no means the simple registration of a fact, but has rather simultaneously the status of cutting and suturing. Thus, for Lacan, identification and aggression are born together, as an asymmetrical doublet - as Catherine Clément puts it: "aggressiveness is constitutive of the subject."⁶ Finally, I wish to note here a common criticism that has often been directed against the mirror-stage: that the very notion of "misrecognition" presumes that there is already a subject that misrecognizes its own image, when this notion was invoked principally to explain how the subject came to be formed in the first place - thereby catching Lacan in a vicious circle. To give another, related ex-

ample of common critiques of the mirror-stage: it supposedly also presumes a distance between the child and its image, although distance itself will only be produced as such after the mirror-stage. However, these criticisms tend to miss what is precisely the point - "misrecognition" for Lacan should rather be conceived as a paradoxical structural exigency that dissimulates itself as a recognition for the subject produced as an effect that masquerades as its own quasi-cause. More simply, one could say that this is a structure that seems to contradict logic: for rather than the model preceding its image, the mirror-stage image precedes its putative model, that is, the body of the infant. The "primordial dehiscence" of the subject is thus the "non-identical Siamese twin" of a fundamentally bifurcated temporality, and the mirror-stage thus ought to be read not only as the paradoxical event which constitutes the subject, but as the essentially impossible "moment" at which space and time themselves come into (non)being. It's a bit like scientists talking about the Big-Bang . . .

THE EIGHT ORDERS OF MISRECOGNITION, OR: THE COMPASS OF DISORIENTATION

The first order of misrecognition is very simple, and is primarily a spatial one: the kiddy, "caught up in the lure of spatial identification,"⁷ sees its image "over-there" as if it were "over-here." The first order of misrecognition thus involves what one might call a "stationary transport," and a misrecognition of the fact that, as Sartre put it in a different context, "the ego is outside in the world, like the ego of another."

The second order of misrecognition is the child's mistaking its own fragmentation for a unified self. Now throughout the essay Lacan is at pains to demonstrate what he calls "a real prematurity of birth in man," in that the infant cannot at the moment of the mirror-stage stand up by itself, or control itself in any consistent manner, but is rather held up by means of an artificial prosthetic device.⁸ Thus the supposedly single entity the child sees in the mirror is by no means simple: it is, as several commentators note, already an aggregate and an artefactuality. The misrecognition thus consists in the child overlooking the external, material supports of its image and covertly mis-assigning the exterior nature of the support to the vitalism of a self-generating interiority. The infant thus misrecognizes this image as a manifestation of an interior self-sufficiency, rather than the directorial effects of a domestic *mise-en-scène*, which require, to give only the most minimal of determinations, a baby-walker, a stage, a reflecting surface. This confusion of inside and outside is generated on the basis of a misrecognition of part for whole. Which also means, in Clément's words, that "the identity of the subject, then, is a kind of prosthesis. Something added, something that did not exist at birth that helps you to stand up straight within yourself. It is a carefully located form, the form of the totality of the body, which the child sees for the first time in the mirror."⁹

The third misrecognition follows from the above: the image is misrecognized as human, despite the fact that it is rather an artifact and, in Jane Gallop's words, "a trick done with mirrors."

This misrecognition thus illicitly renders the inhuman human by giving a face to a Thing.

The fourth order of misrecognition devolves from the fact that the image of unity that the mirror reflects for the child comes, for Lacan, from the future: in Marcel Duchamp's words, "the apparition is the mold of the appearance." Or, to put it another way, the mirror-stage is the moment at which the *hommelette* thinks that it is *already* Humpty-Dumpty and in control of its movements and destiny. Furthermore, the image itself is nothing other than the prefiguration or promise of the phallus or Name-of-the-Father that is linked, in Lacanian terms, with the realm of language, the Symbolic, the unconscious, a stage which "succeeds" that of the Imaginary. The child looking into the mirror is thus, quite literally for Lacan, looking into the future *per speculum in aenigmate*, and the mirror-stage or Imaginary is itself governed by a strange temporal structure, that of the already/not-yet. Hence the fourth order of misrecognition: the futurity of the image is misrecognized in the time of the *now*. As Grosz puts it: "It is during the identificatory blurring of self and other that . . . the penis becomes regarded as a 'detachable' organ . . . [and thereby] *prefigures* the function of the phallus. It produces the penis as an object of signification, rather than a biological organ" (my emphasis).¹⁰

If the fourth order of misrecognition involves the mistaking of a promise for an already accomplished fact or possible manifestation, the fifth order involves the misrecognition of the *status* of this promise. To be more precise: the promise of the phallus that the mirror gives to the infant is in fact the promise of a promise, and not something that might ever receive actualization. For Lacan, of course, the phallus itself does not technically exist and remains eternally elusive and out-of-reach. The phallus, in this particular order, names nothing other than the effaced and necessary failure of a promise to ever coincide with itself. Thus, the fourth order misprision of futurity neatly flips over into the fifth: not only does the child mistakenly think that the future is now, but it also implicitly misrecognizes the future as something that *can possibly* become a now.

If the promise is thus always a promise of a promise, then the kid also mistakes what the promise seems to hold out: the child greets its apparition with jubilation. But, as everyone knows, what is promised is not reconciliation or harmony or any such cause for jubilation, but rather the phallus in its role as castration: fear and trembling and a sickness unto death Indeed, Lacan's lifelong suspicion of reformers and revolutionaries stems precisely from his

analysis of the ideals that such reformers claim as their good: the desire to reform is always for Lacan doubled by, and complicit with, a disavowed aggression and pleasure in the suffering of others through a misrecognition of what precisely it is that the phallus promises. This is also a peculiarly Nietzschean point: the second book of the *Genealogy of Morals* revolves around the fraught relationships between memory, terror, and the promise. This is the sixth order of misprision: a misrecognition that proceeds by inverting the image's significance and value.

Up until now, I have pretty much been treating the Imaginary within its own terms, or rather, within the terms that Lacan himself sets up as crucial to the drama itself. But, as any number of commentators have pointed out, and several of the orders canvassed above suggest, the mirror-stage - which supposedly predates the child's acquisition of language - is nevertheless only accessible within the terms of the Symbolic. Now this point, apparently rather banal in itself, has a number of quite important and complex consequences. Lacan himself explicitly announces the fictionality that governs the unfolding of the mirror-stage, the dramatic quality of the event.¹¹ Given that, in the Symbolic, there are supposedly no oppositions or fixed points, this Symbolic characterization of the Imaginary can only hold if it is the Imaginary (which is held to think in dualisms and according to the primacy of vision) is here covertly ventriloquizing the Symbolic. In other words, the Imaginary masquerading as the Symbolic comes to make the distinction between Imaginary and Symbolic as if this distinction was something that preceded it, and then effaces or conceals the traces of its own processes. And if this is the case, then the mirror-stage cannot simply be something that is traversed and surpassed, but something that "persists," and further, something that cannot simply precede the acquisition of the Symbolic. I have already alluded to this paradox in my above delineation of the fourth, fifth and sixth stages, in which an apparition of the phallus to come is in a very specific sense already present - the Symbolic itself is already /not-yet prefigured in the Imaginary, but all this occurs from the point of view of the Symbolic itself or rather the Imaginary-masquerading-as-the-Symbolic-in-the-Symbolic. Thus the very notion of a "mirror-stage" is itself already a misnomer, and this is the seventh misrecognition I wish to mark here, the flawed if necessary misrecognition of the mirror-stage *as* stage. This misrecognition is more complex than the six preceding in that, though it is self-reflexively aware of its own status as fiction and misrecognition, everything nevertheless necessarily proceeds as if it were not. The event that is the "mirror-stage" therefore undoubtedly occurs, but cannot ever be satisfactorily grasped.

Which leads us to the eighth misrecognition, perhaps even more thoroughgoing and convoluted than the last: the mirror-stage is impossible, and does not exist. This misrecognition is at odds with the seventh, which still presumes that, despite the impossibility of naming the event without injustice, there subsists something unnameable to which the appellation "mirror-stage" thereby unsatisfactorily refers. Rather, the eighth misrecognition is founded on a self-reflexive recognition of the preposterousness of asserting its existence: as simply as possible, Lacan can say anything that he damn well pleases about the mirror-stage, precisely because his assertions in this

regard, as an apocryphal American psychiatrist is said to have remarked of psychoanalysis in general, "are just not testicle."

I now want to link these two later forms of misrecognition with what Lacan says in his famous 1973 seminar *Encore*, about the formulas of sexuation. My account of these formulas derives primarily from the reading offered by Joan Copjec in her essay, "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason," but I have also implicitly drawn upon the accounts of theorists such as Charles Shephardson, Alice Jardine and Catherine Millot.¹²

$$\begin{array}{cc} \exists x \Phi x & \exists x \bar{\Phi} x \\ \forall x \Phi x & \forall x \Phi x \end{array}$$

I will deal with the male side of the table first. "There is at least one x not submitted to the phallic function / All x's are submitted to the phallic function" ($\exists x \Phi x / \forall x \Phi x$). Man is, therefore, complete: paradoxically, given that the limit that founds his consistency is elsewhere. This "x" is, of course, no one other than the primal father of *Totem and Taboo*, who, in the berserk Freudian anthropology, oversees his sons that are the primal horde, restricting their access to the women of the tribe. The brothers get together, kill this "master of enjoyment," and then belatedly realize that daddy is stronger dead than he was when alive. Furthermore, it is necessary to emphasize the complexities of this murder. In order for the brothers to re-enter the system they are already part of, it is not only a question of killing the father but, paradoxically, of simultaneously *excluding* themselves from the (Symbolic) system by way of the very same gesture that permits their inclusion. Now this anthropological fantasy underwrites the male side of the table in two ways: 1) it is just that, a fantasy; 2) it is not a fantasy in the sense of wishful thinking or of an absurd and offensive content, but rather an empty and fractured frame that is organized according to eminently logical exigencies, and devolves from logic running up against its own limits (I will come back to this question of *logic* below). As Copjec puts it, "The initial cause cannot be tolerated by, or disappears from, the mechanical field that it founds" (38). In other words, one can certainly make claims about what constitutes man, who unquestionably exists, but "his ex-sistence, or being, remains inaccessible nevertheless, since it escapes the conceptual or Symbolic field in which his existence takes shape" (40). In more strictly psychoanalytic terms, the male side is, in Copjec's words, "an illusion fomented by a *prohibition*" (41), that is, castration. Again, the paradoxical nature of this prohi-

UMBR(a)

biton must be stressed: castration is not simply the fear of losing an organ (the phallus), because Lacanian doctrine hinges precisely on the impossibility of ever really "having" this organ. Rather, the threat of castration functions precisely because it makes no sense - the terror which such an injunction inspires is not the terror of a possible loss, but the terror that devolves from the tautological incoherence of its demand. "You could never have had the phallus, therefore you can lose it." According to Lacan, since man possesses the phallus only in the mode of dispossession, castration-anxiety is delusory, and furthermore, a self-reflexive delusion: those sexed male in some sense already know this. However, it is precisely because the fear is *redundant* that it works: and this is why recent rereadings of Lacan through Kant often invoke the Kantian dynamic sublime - whereby one is terrified from a position of absolute safety. The links between the male side of the table and what I called the seventh order of misrecognition are thus clear: man exists, but his being remains inaccessible. Furthermore, this argument emphasizes why the phallus - as a famous piece of graffiti at a major Melbourne train station neatly puts it - must always be considered as "a pleonastic neoplasm."

With regards to the female side of the table, we are confronted, as Copjec puts it, not by a contradictory opposition, but rather by contraries. "There is not one x that is not submitted to the phallic function/Not-all x is submitted to the phallic function" ($\exists x \bar{\Phi} x / \bar{\forall} x \Phi x$). If contradiction entails a mutual exclusivity at the moment that it divides the entire field, contraries, though still mutually exclusive, nevertheless leave open the possibility of a third option that escapes the determination of both - it is thus a question of extremes rather than reciprocal exclusion. "The negation, which bears this time only on the predicate, does not exhaust all the possibilities, but leaves behind something on which it does not pronounce. For this reason both statements may simultaneously be false" (Copjec, 30). Woman, for Lacan, does not exist, and according to Copjec this must be read as a Kantian indefinite judgment, that is, as "an affirmation of a negative predicate." To extend this chain of reasoning, "this means that everything can be and is said about her, but that none of it is subject to 'reality testing' - none of what is said amounts to a confirmation or denial of her existence, which thereby eludes every Symbolic articulation" (35). Thus - and this is a point echoed by any number of recent accounts - woman functions as the *failure* of the limit that is castration in the Symbolic economy, and can therefore appear within the Big Other only as the constitutively inconsistent 'not-all' formulated by Lacan. Hence also woman's "impossibility" and non-existence, but also her freedom - she "escapes" the law precisely by inhabiting it absolutely.

What must be emphasized about these final two misrecognitions is their paradoxical imbrication: while the first six work "together" as it were, the final two are in fact at once mutually exclusive and yet simultaneously "ghosted" by their other: one fails in either the male way or the female way, but never both at once. They are, thus, not positive misrecognitions in any straightforward sense, but can rather only materialize in a "negative presentation" (as Kant says of the sublime), as the specific mode of failure of the first six. In Copjec's words, again, "The sexual relation fails for two reasons: it is impossible and it is prohibited. Put these two failures together, you will

never come up with a whole" (41). In other words, there are not exactly eight misrecognitions, but rather seven plus one which, in Lacanian arithmetic, equals not eight, but six plus one minus one ($7+1 = 6+1-1$).

CATACHRESIS, METALEPSIS, CATALEPSY

I outlined above eight very specific and analytically distinct ways in which misrecognition functions for Lacan in and around the mirror-stage essay. When I was discussing this paper with a few other people, it was suggested to me that these orders of misrecognition might be conceived of according to the terms of classical rhetorical analysis or tropology, and thus as a sequence of rhetorical tropes.¹³ Such a procedure is, as will quickly become apparent, at once absolutely in accord with Lacan's own procedures (eg. his development of metaphor and metonymy) and wildly divergent. So if, as Samuel Weber puts it, "Lacan's 'return to Freud' . . . draws attention to itself, not so much as a faithful rendering of a self-identical original, but as a turn of phrase or trope,"¹⁴ let's return to Lacan by returning to Lacan. Allow me to list the orders again, and provide a quick explanation of the linkages I am going to effect amongst them.

1. The spatial "stationary transport" effected by the first order, of the over there/over here, is an perfect example of *metaphor*.
2. The prosthetic supplementation of the second-order misrecognition involves mistaking a part for a whole: this is precisely the definition of the trope of *synechdoche*.
3. The third order, which involves the personification of a radically inhuman image as one's own corresponds to *prosopopoeia*, perhaps more popularly known as anthropomorphization, which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as "a rhetorical figure by which an inanimate or abstract thing is represented as a person, or with personal characteristics."
4. The fourth-order misrecognition, which consists of the making-now of the phallus yet-to-come and is thus an anticipation of the future, corresponds to the trope of *prolepsis*.

5. The fifth-order misrecognition was a misrecognition of the status of this future, and of the fact that the promise that the phallus holds out was a promise of a promise. This redoubling links the fifth order with the trope of *metalepsis* or transumption which Quintilian characterizes as providing "a transition from one *trope* to another . . . It is the nature of *metalepsis* to form a kind of intermediate step between the term transferred and the thing to which it is transferred, having no meaning in itself, but merely providing a transition."¹⁵ (He goes on to remark that "it is by no means to be commended (. . .) I can see no use in it except . . . in comedy").¹⁶ Or, in Harold Bloom's words: "we can define *metalepsis* as the trope of a trope, the metonymic substitution of a word for a word already figurative."¹⁷ Promise of a promise, a trope of a trope . . .
6. The sixth-order misrecognition proceeded by mistakenly inverting the significance and value of the phallic apparition - what else is this but the trope of *antithesis*, defined by the OED as a "direct or striking opposition of character or functions." Or, as the dictionary has J. Smith reporting it in 1657: "Antithesis is sometimes a figure, whereby one letter is put for another . . . in order to make the word or phrase more *melodious*."
7. The seventh misrecognition, which resided in the necessarily flawed characterization of the mirror-stage as a distance to be traversed, or a moment to be passed through, a stage on which one is seen and begins to see, corresponds to the trope of *catachresis* or misnaming. I have already argued above that the seventh and eighth orders of misrecognition are qualitatively different from the preceding six, though they can only work by dissimulating themselves as if they worked in the same way. As we have already seen vis-a-vis the male side of the table, though "man certainly exists, his being remains inaccessible." In other words, it is precisely a question of words: "existence is not a predicate," and any predications or propositions that one might adduce with respect to man necessarily fall short of the mark. It is thus possible to rewrite this side of the table in rhetorical terms: as a deictical failure that, while recognizing its own status as a necessary failure, nevertheless sustains itself on the paradoxical presumption that the unnameable referent 1) exists somewhere, but elsewhere (i.e. the primal father); 2) is retroactively produced and uncontrollably transformed in and by the very act of naming. The male failure is thus a catachretic one.
8. The eighth order presents the entire scene as if it, despite all the complexities and complications, takes place despite its impossibility: this is thus an absolute *irony* - for as you rabbit on straight-faced about the limits of history and sexuality, what you are referring to has no claims to existence whatsoever. Which is not, of course, to say that the event does not occur, but rather that everything transpires precisely *because* of its non-existence. Again, though irony is a self-reflexive trope, all the commentators on irony agree that irony cannot function unless there is the possibility that it can be taken "literally" or overlooked: hence, it also fails in two senses - if one recognizes the

irony, one is left with only the slick patina of a nothingness which masks a nothingness, while if one does not, the failure itself fails to materialize as failure. We can thus refigure the so-called female side of the table in the terms of irony.

The rewriting of the mirror-stage and the formulas of sexuation in terms of rhetorical tropes also enables the opening of a series of unexpected connections, and an appreciation of Lacan's distance from the common *doxa* of post-structuralism. First of all, whereas various post-structuralists have attempted to contest the supposed primacy of logic (caricaturely characterized as the ultimately forlorn attempt to identify and ground Being) by recourse to the ruses of an agonistic or playful rhetoric, Lacan inverts and complicates the relationship between the two. For Lacan, it is precisely *rhetoric* that attempts to ground Being, whilst logic (qua the formulas of sexuation) is simply the modality of rhetoric's inevitable failure in this regard.

Now, there are obviously a number of ways in which the orders of misrecognition can be organized and reorganized, and the structure that I am about to offer is by no means necessarily the simplest or most elegant. Let me reslot these eight tropes into four pairs, and offer some justification for doing so (Harold Bloom slots his six tropes into three pairs, following the Lurianic Cabbalistic triadic sequence: contraction-catastrophe-restitution: unsurprisingly, what his sequence cannot account for is sexual difference). I am going to call each pair a phallomatrix, thereby efficiently combining the senses of phallus, mother, generation, domination (dominatrix, phallomatrix), quantification (speedometer, phallometer), and mathematical vector analysis.

1. *Phallomatrix of Stationary Transport*: metaphor/prolepsis: smooth homogeneous time and space.
2. *Phallomatrix of Supplementarity*: synechdoche/metalepsis: disjunctive, surplus time.
3. *Phallomatrix of Uncanniness*: prosopopeia/antithesis: space/time oscillates uncontrollably into its uncanny other, in a sort of unhinged Hegelian sublation.

These three phallomatrices work at the level of history itself, and are

thus able to generate objects of predication and desire in an everyday sense: one can quite easily slot historical evidence into the matrices, which regulate the transformations that occur at the intersection of the an-existent barred subject and the similarly lacking Big Other. However, the final “pair” are rather a “dispair” (in the senses of not-pair, despair, disparity and disappearance) in that they cross each other (being mutually exclusive and, indeed, qualitatively different) and thus cross out the preceding six, on the basis of which they can nevertheless appear in the first place. They thus “double-cross” the first six tropes, as aforementioned, as two different modalities of the *same failure*: - the failure of rhetoric to coincide with itself or ground Being. As Copjec points out, they cannot provide or produce objects that might become the subjects of predication: rather, they simultaneously open up and fracture the very field of history which determines their actualization as they escape its spatio-temporalization. Despite, then, both subject and Other being empty sets or idiotic zeros, it is paradoxically at their intersection that a transient and evanescent positivity erupts into its own traumatic dissolution. Indeed, the intolerable suffering necessarily attendant upon sexuation derives from the nailing of any subject to this particular cross.

But what is the point of rereading or rewriting Lacan in this way? Here are some rather elliptical answers:

UMBR(a)

1. It provides a way of reading Lacan against himself that at once assents absolutely to all of his procedures and propositions and nevertheless demonstrates an irreducible primordial schism in his own discourse. Hence the motivation for refiguring the orders of misrecognition as tropes: compared to the consequent lush tropical profusion, Lacan’s own later rewriting of the Symbolic order in terms of metaphor and metonymy begins to look miserably impoverished, and on its own terms. Indeed, in *Écrits* Lacan at once explicitly unhinges and covertly confirms what is held to be his own characteristic practice in a much under-cited passage: “Ellipsis and pleonasm, hyperbaton or syllepsis, regression, repetition, apposition - these are the syntactical displacements; metaphor, catachresis, autonomasis, allegory, metonymy, and synecdoche - these are the semantic condensations in which Freud teaches us to read the intentions . . . out of which the subject modulates his oneiric discourse.”¹⁶ However, despite Lacan’s seeming contestation of his own practice here, he still propounds or maintains a distinction between syntactics and semantics, which he elsewhere associates, respectively, with displacement and condensation - in other words, syntax works metonymically, and semantics metaphorically. A very bizarre claim, then, given that Lacan here identifies both metonymy and metaphor with semantic condensation, and thereby ensnares himself in an vicious circuit of untenable nominations. Indeed, the mistake, if that is what it is, is too marked not to be deliberate, and the most generous reading of this passage is a reading that would see the passage as an example of the very oneiric discourse to which it refers: there is no contradiction in the unconscious, and the truth must speak through error, that is, by means of the impossible ruses of an ungrounded tropology. Further on this point: Lacan’s

delineation of the three orders of the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic can now be read, not as the primary matrices of subject-formation, but rather as his own secondary narcissistic revisions of a less structured, more primordial, more offensive tropology.

2. This rewriting enables the production of a Lacanian matheme that on the one hand, evades the criticisms of Lacan offered by everyone from Deleuze and Guattari to Judith Butler and, on the other, can conversely provide an account of the ways in which these readings tend to miss the mark. For example, Deleuze and Guattari (hereafter referred to by the acronym "DAG") claim, against psychoanalysis that "The three errors concerning desire are called lack, law, and signifier. It is one and the same error . . ."19 and that

If desire produces, its product is real. If desire is productive, it can be productive only in the real world and can produce only reality. Desire is the set of *passive syntheses* that engineer partial objects, flows, and bodies, and that function as units of production. The real is the end product, the result of the passive syntheses of desire as auto production of the unconscious. Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is, rather, the *subject* that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject unless there is repression. Desire and its object are one and the same thing: the machine, as a machine of a machine. Desire is a machine, and the object of desire is another machine connected to it.²⁰

In other words, the Lacanian principle that "all desire goes from one lack to another" derives, for DAG, from an illicit initial affirmation of the primacy of the subject and its constitution through repression, rather than beginning from desire itself. As such, psychoanalysis is not so much incorrect as it is caught up in a normalizing misrecognition of the fact that desire is in fact more primordial than the subject which, though it seems to give rise to it, is just one secondary by-product of machinic desire. However, it seems that DAG is here simply a very poor reader of psychoanalysis: psychoanalysis does not simply conceive of desire as lack, but rather *simultaneously* as both lack and a productive positivity. As I have argued above, the tropes, prior to any subjectivity whatsoever, produce both the subject and its objects as themselves simultaneously lacking and as bloated plenitudes; furthermore, the subject itself is never thereby simply "fixed," as DAG claims, whether by repression or otherwise. When Lacan talks then of desire as going from one

lack to another, he does not simply mean that desire is that of a subject that lacks an irretrievable and phantasmatic object, but rather that the lacks between which a positive desire shuttles are precisely subjects themselves. Not only, then, has DAG formulated as a reproach to Lacan an argument gleaned from Lacan himself, but DAG thereby completely reduces the subtlety and ambivalence of Lacan's position, in order to produce a crude and reductive formulation of its own which is then confusedly offered as "preferable to psychoanalysis."

It is also possible to use the orders of misrecognition to renegotiate the fraught relationship between Slavoj Žižek and Judith Butler, who for a number of years now have been engaged in a peculiar exchange of "love-letters," whereby each criticizes the other's brilliant misunderstandings of Lacan.²¹ Once it is recognized that the dominant rhetorical figure that underwrites Butler's work is in fact catachresis (the male failure), and that Žižek's characteristic mode is in fact irony (the female failure), the dispute between the two reduces to this: they are both absolutely correct about the other's supposed misreadings, but only to the extent that they (necessarily) miss the fact that the other's implicit account of how Being is un/grounded is at once infinitesimally close *and* infinitely distant - irony and catachresis being eternally fated to miss the other on which they depend. Hence also, the ambivalent fascination that I predict Žižek and Butler will continue to exert upon one another

3. It provides a nifty way of circumventing the interminable differend between historical and a-historical critiques as well as negotiating the tension between universal categories and particular examples, without either lapsing into strictly psychological explanation on the one side or sociological reductions on the other. Since the phallomatrices are, rather, "predictive after the fact," all they do is offer a set of transformations that represent the emergence of historical events and their failure in a format that would be intolerable both to the individual subject thereby formalized, as well as to the Big Other. The matrices thereby provide an account of the very specific, non-generalizable ways in which subjects attempt to plaster over their own necessary failures to achieve identity, by means of a non-totalizing quasi-mathematical typographical formalization that thereby "regulates" the fleeting subjectivity-effects that are produced at the null intersection of two empty sets.

- 1 S. Žižek, *Metastases of Enjoyment* (London: Verso, 1994) 175.
- 2 See J. Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. A. Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1980) and J. Lacan, "God and the *Jouissance* of The Woman" and "A Love Letter" in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (New York: Norton, 1982) 137-161.
- 3 Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan and Co.: A History of Psychoanalysis in France, 1925-1985*, trans. J. Mehlman (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990) 562-564.
- 4 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1989) 43.
- 5 E. Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1990) 31.
- 6 C. Clément, *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, trans. A. Goldhammer (New York: Columbia UP, 1983) 95.
- 7 *Écrits*, 4.
- 8 *Écrits*, 1.
- 9 Clément, 91.
- 10 Grosz, 117.
- 11 My analysis in this section derives in no small part from the accounts of the mirror stage given by Samuel Weber in *Return to Freud: Jacques Lacan's Dislocation of Psychoanalysis*, trans. M. Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) and by Jane Gallop in *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca: Cornell UP 1985).
- 12 See Joan Copjec, "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason," and Charles Shepherdson, "The Role of Gender and the Imperative of Sex," both in *Supposing the Subject*, ed. Joan Copjec (London: Verso, 1994), Alice Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) and Catherine Millot, *Horsexex*, trans. K. Hylton (New York: Autonomedia, 1990).
- 13 I would like to thank, in particular, Jonathan Carter for this suggestion; Liam Leonard and Bridget Bainbridge ought also to be recognized here.
- 14 Weber, 5.
- 15 Quintilian, VIII, vi. 37-38, 323.
- 16 Quintilian, VIII, vi. 37 and 39, 323.
- 17 H. Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980) 74.
- 18 *Écrits*, 58.
- 19 G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. R. Hurley et.al. (New York: Viking, 1977) 111.
- 20 Deleuze and Guattari, 26.
- 21 See, for instance, Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993) esp. chapter 7, or Slavoj Žižek, "Identity and Its Vicissitudes: Hegel's 'Logic of Essence' as a Theory of Ideology," in *The Making of Political Identities*, ed. Ernest Laclau (London: Verso, 1994) 71, n. 9, and Žižek, *Metastases of Enjoyment*, 202-203.