LACAN'S GAP: SEXUAL IDENTITY AND THE PROBLEM OF "CONNECTEDNESS"

CHRISTINE EVERINGHAM, Department of Sociology, Macquarie University

Abstract

Feminists have been attracted to Lacan's linguistic reading of Freud because it seems to offer a theory of subjectivity and sexual identity which has no anatomical limitations. This paper draws out the problematic nature of this project, arguing that the attempt to circumvent the necessity for paternal authority, or the imposition of "the law of the father", is doomed to fail because no alternative social bonds can be gleaned from his work. This is because Lacan does not go far enough in his linguistic re-interpretation of Freud. He does not, and cannot, take his linguistic reading into the pre-oedipal stage itself, where alternative forms of sociality might be found, because he remains contained within an individualistic model of psychic development. A communicative, interactive framework is required, capable of locating the agency of the (m)other and the significance of her potentially critical and reflective efforts to "read" the cries of the child.

Certain major questions addressed by feminist scholars interested in the socialisation process have revolved around the constitution of male and female sexual identity. The emphasis has been on drawing out and elaborating concepts which might reveal the constraints on definitions of what it is to be male and female. In the early phase of second wave feminism, role theory was extensively used to highlight how socialisation processes confined young girls within narrow definitions of femininity. Young girls were encouraged to break free from gendered stereotypes in order to achieve their full human potential.

However, the humanist subject sought after by this early wave of contemporary feminists became an object of feminist challenge itself in the 1980s. Under the influence of poststructuralist and postmodern modes of analysis, the humanist subject was shown to be a phallocentric construct, a subject who achieved liberation by denying difference and aspiring to an aggressively individualistic, self-interested, masculinist subjectivity (Lloyd, 1984). Feminists now had to re-conceptualise the feminist project to accommodate women's sexual specificity and socio-cultural diversity.

Role theory proved inadequate for this task, grounded as it is in a conception of two already constituted sexualities, male and female (Connell, 1987, 29-32). Instead, many feminists turned to psychoanalytic theory to account for patriarchy, in terms of how male and female sexual identities were actually constituted. Psychoanalysis addresses questions concerning the constitution of the sexed subject which role theory simply assumes.

At first sight, the co-option of Freudian concepts to explain patriarchy may seem an inappropriate move, given the numerous feminist critiques of Freudian psychoanalysis as a discourse legitimating women's oppression (Firestone, 1970; de Beauvoir, 1974; Friedan, 1974). However, Mitchell's reading of Freud, in the light of Althusser's theory of ideology and Lacan's re-writing of Freud as a theory of language, appears to provide a more promising grounding for a feminist theory of a liberated subjectivity (Mitchell, 1974).

Feminists, influenced by the French feminist writers and the problem of women's difference, have also been attracted to Lacan because of his emphasis on signification (Moi, 1985). What is central in his theory of socialisation is the representation of sexual difference in the symbolic system. Power is embedded in these systems of representation of sexual identity.
differ~ence, rather than derived from sexual difference itself (Grosz, 1990, 20). Thus, Lacan goes much further than Freud in depicting sexuality and subjectivity as social products, and thereby open to change. Whereas Freud’s theory poses some bodily, or anatomical, limitations, feminist Lacanian sympathisers claim that Lacan’s model rids Freud’s theory of any such biological determinism (Grosz, 1990, 9). Lacan is attractive to postmodern and poststructuralist feminists precisely because his theory seems to offer the possibility of a theory of subjectivity that has no anatomical limitations.

This paper explores the possibilities opened up by this feminist re-reading of Freud and draws out the problematic nature of these efforts in the light of my own attempts to problematise maternal-infant connectedness, using a communicative model of psychic development to locate the (m)other as a subject in the nurturing process (Everingham, 1994). I will argue that the attempt to use Lacan to circumvent the necessity for paternal authority, or the imposition of the "law of the father", is doomed to fail because no alternative social bonds to those depicted by Freud can be gleaned from his work. Lacan does not, I suggest, go far enough in his linguistic re-interpretation of Freud.

Lacan does not, and cannot, take his linguistic reading into the pre-oedipal stage itself, where alternative forms of connection might be found, because he remains contained within an individualistic model of psychic development. An individualistic, developmental model of the psyche cannot locate the agency of the (m)other and the significance of her critical and reflective efforts to "read" the cries of her child, nor the alternative forms of human subjectivity that might be constituted through these interpretive efforts.

Moreover, Lacan’s discursive socialisation model appears to be "liberating" for women only because feminist sympathisers using his model have divorced the constitution of sexual identity and desire from the imperatives of the broader socialisation process which needs to accommodate the fact of human dependence. "Subversion" becomes the primary mode of challenge to the system, but only because these theories ignore the human need for "other" and the resolution of this need in the early maternal-infant relationship.

Both Freud and Lacan tie the constitution of sexual identity and desire to the formation of the superego, or moral conscience, which emerges as the outcome of the oedipus complex. Thus, it is not just the constitution of sexual identity and desire which is at stake here, but the very "civilising" of children as social beings, the creation of any social bonds at all. As yet, feminist re-workings of Freud, using Lacan, have not been able to give us a satisfactory account of how children can become socialised without the motivation of fear, anger and hostility associated with the oedipus complex and the power derived from the father’s position of authority within the nuclear family.

FREUDIAN DILEMMAS

From both a Freudian and Lacanian perspective, the child’s resolution of the oedipal dilemma is foundational for the constitution of the child’s sexual identity, as well as being the child’s entry point into the social, or symbolic world. This process, in both Freud and Lacan, is tied to the child’s recognition of sexual difference and the powerful and contradictory emotions that are induced by this experience.

The oedipal situation arises when the child wishes to achieve sexual satisfaction with the first love object, the (m)other. The way appears to be barred by the father. The boy child experiences intense hostility to the father, but also fears the father’s power, which he associates with the potential for castration. The way out of this dilemma is for the boy child to identify with the obstacle preventing the satisfaction of his desire. He identifies with the father in the
hope that one day he can be like his father and possess a woman like his mother. This whole dilemma and the emotional complexes which arise from this dilemma provide the boy child with his sexual identity as male, like his father (Freud, 1962, 21-23).

However, these emotional complexes also form the basis of his super-ego, his moral conscience and his desire to be "good". The more powerful the father-figure, the greater the domination of the super-ego over the id (1962, 24-25). Thus, his broader induction into social life - his very sense of right and wrong - is intimately tied up with the recognition of sexual difference and the perceived power invested in the authority of the father to castrate him.

The girl's induction into societal law is also tied to her recognition of sexual difference and the perceived power held by the father. In her case, however, the primary motivating force is envy, rather than fear. She also becomes aware of sexual difference through noticing what she and her mother both lack. She wants a penis too, and is angry with her mother whom she holds responsible for her lack. This anger turns her away from the mother, towards the father. In order to achieve the father's love, she identifies with the mother, hoping that this way she can eventually have a baby, as a substitute for a penis and win the love of a man like her father. [1]

Critical theorists have used this account of the internalisation of paternal authority to depict how an authentic subjectivity might be conceived, that is, a subjectivity able to develop and sustain a critical perspective. For example, this account was the cornerstone for the theory of an authentic subjectivity put forward by the Frankfurt philosophers. These philosophers, most notably Horkheimer, claimed that the internalisation of paternal authority within the bounds of the nuclear family structure provided the individual with the psychic potential to resist mass culture. The stronger the authority of the father, the stronger the super-ego and the greater the potential for the development of personal autonomy and personal authenticity. Thus, the psyche is actually seen to benefit through having a strong, powerful figure to identify with - and rebel against. In their view, the internalisation of paternal authority was assumed to be necessary for the individual to develop an authentic subjectivity.

The Frankfurt philosophers used this Freudian model as their basis for critique of the process of societal rationalisation. They argued that as the state expanded according to the logic of instrumental reason, it also took over the functions of the family and undermined the authority of the father. As an outcome of this intrusion by the state, and the breakdown of the boundaries between the family and the state, a new personality type would emerge, a "narcissistic" personality, a self-centred individual unable to take a moral stand against the pressures of mass opinion. Without the benefits of the struggle with the father, they believed that the individual would not be able to offer any resistance to these extra-familial, impersonal forms of authority (for example, see Horkheimer, 1972).

From a feminist perspective, this account of the achievement of an authentic subjectivity by men is necessarily at the expense of the subjugation of women within the bounds of the nuclear family. Joel Whitebook (1985, 147) succinctly articulates this tension in the work of the Frankfurt philosophers:

This brings us to another way of formulating the central aporia of early critical theory: they sought an individual who could rationally and autonomously oppose the authoritarianism of the existing order, but the only way they knew to achieve rational autonomy was through the internalisation of paternal authority. Thus, strangely enough, with the transition from the patriarchal family of the liberal phase to the more permissive one of the post-liberal period, they were forced to mourn the passing of the authoritarian family.

The thesis of the undermining of paternal authority has been reiterated in a number of forms since initially put forward by Horkheimer in 1936. Mitscherlich and Lasch have been particularly influential in their portrayal of contemporary society as "fatherless" and therefore...
"narcissistic". In her critique of the thesis of the fatherless society, Jessica Benjamin (1978) points out that the Frankfurt School's dependence on the internalisation of paternal authority for their construction of an authentic subjectivity is an outcome of relying on Freudian drive theory. Within the confines of the Freudian model, the only path to authentic self-hood derives from the power struggle with an authoritarian father-figure. There is no other way of envisaging human agency, in the form of an independent, moral conscience. Can Lacan's rewriting of Freudian theory get round this dilemma?

**LACAN'S TWO-STAGE DEVELOPMENT OF SUBJECTIVITY**

a) The mirror phase.

Lacan's theory of the development of subjectivity elaborates on two critical stages, the mirror stage which lays the foundation for the formation of the Ego and the oedipal stage during which the child is inducted into the symbolic order. Lacan's (Chapter 1) elaboration of the mirror phase addressed what he perceived as a gap in the Freudian model of the emergence of the Ego. In Lacan's view, the Freudian explanation of the development of the Ego did not adequately explain how the Ego became invested with libido, with the sexual energy required to allow the Ego to become an object of gratification, or source of pleasure, for itself. The investment of libido in the Ego is an important stage in the socialisation of the child because it allows the child to experience pleasure through its own actions.

Freud (1953, 92) had developed the theory of narcissism to explain this phenomenon. He saw sexual energy as mobile and able to be withdrawn from objects and directed inwards, as for example, in auto-eroticism (e.g. thumb sucking). When the Ego makes its appearance, as a result of the substitution of the reality principle for the pleasure principle, the Ego is able to become an object of gratification for itself. It does this by way of introjection. It takes on properties of the object it has been forced to abandon, making good the Id's loss by saying, "Look, you can love me too - I am so like the object" (Freud, 1962, 20).

After the oedipal phase, the Ego-libido is primarily directed by the Super-ego. The ideals which are set up in the Super-ego act as a measure by which the Ego judges its performance and it is in satisfying these ideals that the Ego-libido attains gratification. This is important because it helps to explain the pleasure children get from being "good".

Thus, in Freud's account, object-libido is transformed into narcissistic libido through the "abandonment of sexual aims". The Ego becomes invested with libido through a process of sublimation (Freud, 1962, 21). Lacan perceived a gap here. What occurred to direct the libido inwards, at oneself? His answer was the mirror stage, which occurs between approximately 6-18 months. This phase denotes a gestalt experience by the child when the child first recognises itself as a whole person, separate from (m)other.

It is an identification, whereby the child assumes an image of itself, as visualised in a mirror. However, the image that the child identifies with is only a mirror-image. The child's recognition of itself as autonomous is thus an experience of misrecognition of its real identity because what it in fact recognises is itself viewed as a reflection of "other" - a self constituted by the gaze of the (m)other. The child is not other, and neither can it yet be autonomous. Nevertheless, it is this gestalt experience of a boundary between self and (m)other that, according to Lacan, excites the child, giving the child pleasure and investing the Ego with libido.

What is crucial here, is the pleasure that the child derives from this gestalt experience. According to Lacan (1977, 1-2), the child's assumption of the mirror-image is a "jubilant
activity", a "jubilant assumption". But why should this be so? Lacan's explanation here is quite unsatisfactory. He claims simply that this is a generic (universal) human experience arising from our human "primordial Discord" (1977, 4). The human species is born into a state of "anatomical incompleteness" (1977, 4), since the human infant is dependent on others, due to the "specific prematurity of birth in man" (1977, 4). Moreover, the human infant still has "humoral residues of the maternal organism" in its body. What gives the infant its experience of jubilance, then, is the sudden realisation that it can be freed from this state of dependence on (m)other.

In my view, this explanation is inadequate. Lacan and Freud cannot provide an adequate explanation of the investment of the ego with libido because their subject is viewed as an isolated subject. Along with Nancy Chodorow and Jessica Benjamin, I believe that the answer to this fundamental question concerning the emergence of the desire for an autonomous subjectivity, can only be explained in relation to the subjectivity of the (m)other. It is her recognition of the infant and her valuation of the infant's autonomy, within the context of her attempts to lay down her own needs and interests as a separate person, that the child comes to derive pleasure from its own experience of autonomy. And none of this is generic. Rather, it involves locating the mother as a subject in her own right in the nurturing process, in a particular socio-cultural milieu that also values individual autonomy. And this cannot be done within an individualistic model of psychic development.

What is crucial, then, in the acquisition of the child's desire for autonomy is the extent to which the (m)other herself values autonomy and enhances her child's opportunity for autonomy through the attention she pays to the child's "demands". What is also of significance is the extent to which the (m)other values, and can successfully assert, her own claim to autonomy (Everingham, 1994, Chapter 5). However, within an individualistic model of psychic development, only one, isolated subject can be located. It is not surprising, then, that the experience of recognition, as depicted by Lacan, can only be conceived in the form of misrecognition. The alternative I explicate in Motherhood and Modernity, is to conceive the process of recognition as one of mutual recognition, whereby the (m)other develops a perspective of her child based on both the actions of the child, who is able to exert a considerable amount of influence on the subsequent actions of an "attentive" (m)other, and her value-laden interpretations of these actions.

Because Lacan cannot take language back into the pre-oedipal stage through a communicative, intersubjective framework, agency can only be understood in the form of "misrecognition". To understand how recognition is always misrecognition for Lacan, it is necessary to understand how Lacan re-interprets Freud's model of psychic development within his linguistic model. In Freud's account, the infant's instinctual impulses do need to be interpreted by another as concrete needs before they can be satisfied. Human-beings do not experience "instincts" in any socially unmediated way (Freud, 1978, 177). Nevertheless, although not spelt out by Freud, there would appear to be some bodily limitations directing this interpretive process. Not any object will satisfy a crying infant - hence Freud's reference to a real sense of the infant's agency in his well known comment "His majesty, the baby!"

However, in Lacan's account, these anatomical limitations on the interpretive process seem to disappear, along with any sense that the child's actions have any real influence on symbolic systems at all. Infants are portrayed as powerless, as not having any potential to influence the (m)other's subsequent actions in any significant way. It is the "gap" between the "real" needs of the child and the interpreted "demands" of the child that is highlighted, thus underplaying the potential for the child to shape the actions of the (m)other and contribute to the symbolic system.

What the infant ends up demanding, then, can only be that which can be articulated in the language of (m)other, a language which, apparently, has been developed in a symbolic
world impermeable to the concrete actions of infants. Since the "real" needs of the infant can never be "truly" recognised, human agency comes to be conceived within the Lacanian model as coincidental to the development of a language form that is apparently detachable from the real actions of infants.

Desire is understood within this model to be constituted through "lack". Lacan, like Freud, does not problematise maternal-infant connectedness but simply assumes that a syncretic unity with the (m)other is part of the natural order. There is no axis upon which different modes of connectedness might be theorised, modes which might construct different forms of subjectivity, different ways of relating to others. Rather, the only contingent dimension in the constitution of the child's subjectivity is that which constitutes desire and it is only here, in the constitution of desire as lack, that a challenge to the symbolic order can be found.

This challenge has the potential to arise because what is expelled in the constitution of desire remains linked to the "real" in the unconscious where it remains, repressed but inherently unstable with a potential to subvert the system. It seems, then, that the best that we can hope for within the Lacanian model, so far as "authenticity" is concerned, is subversion of the system. Hence the convergence with his theory and the post-modernist enterprise for the de-stabilising of an authentic subjectivity altogether and the idealisation of desire as the primary motivating force of social change.

b) The oedipal stage

Even given that subversion now becomes the goal, to what extent does this objective escape the limits of anatomy? Lacan (1977, Chapter 8) follows the Freudian scheme of the oedipal dilemma, even if he makes it clear that it is not the anatomical organ, the penis, that is fundamental but the power that the penis represents, the phallus. But what motivates the boy and girl to accept the law of the father, if not the actual presence or absence of the penis?

Feminists have found the Lacanian version of the oedipal dilemma useful in explaining women's positioning as "other" in the symbolic system. The boy, in accepting the law of the father, and identifying with the father, can then become a speaking subject. He is the authentic subject, having been given an authorised speaking position. In identifying with the mother, the girl's subject position is that of "other". She is forced to accept the powerlessness embedded in her relationship to the symbolic order. Elizabeth Grosz describes the outcome of the oedipal dilemma for the girl in Lacanian terms:

In one sense, in so far as she speaks and says "I", she, too, must take up a place as a subject of the symbolic; yet, in another, in so far as she is positioned as castrated, passive, an object of desire for men rather than a subject who desires, her position within the symbolic must be marginal or tenuous: when she speaks as an "I" it is never clear that she speaks (of or as) herself. She speaks in a mode of masquerade, in imitation of the masculine, phallic subject (1990, 71-72).

It is this model of the exclusion of women from the symbolic order, a model which defines women as lack, as man's "other", that has proven fruitful for feminists attempting to explain how patriarchy is reproduced. The feminist acceptance of role theory during the early stages of second wave feminism was based on the assumption that the aim of socialisation for both boys and girls was the constitution of the universal, rational subject defined by humanism. Lacan's work brings this subject sharply into focus as itself a phallocentric construction.

This is a subject that reproduces patriarchy through the constitution of female identity as "other". What is specifically female is by definition unauthentic. The feminist project, therefore, shifts from removing those barriers which inhibit women's achievement of the
subject status of males, to advocating a self-determined femininity - women defined in their own terms, rather than in relation to men. But how can this be possible within the Lacanian model, which remains dependent for its theory of socialisation on the presence or absence of the penis?

ELIZABETH GROSZ ON THE FEMINIST CO-OPTION OF LACAN

According to Grosz (1990, 145), if Lacan does conceive of woman as lack, as castrated, as "other", then feminists have defended him on the basis that he shifts the ground away from the penis per se to the meaning of sexual difference in our society. It is not men so much as the socio-economic linguistic structure that is responsible for the reproduction of patriarchy. While this appears more open to change than the anatomy of men, nevertheless, Grosz argues, the law of the father may be equally unchangeable if conceived in universalistic, ahistorical terms:

As Lacan recognised, the symbolic order is not simply an abstract or external system of signification whose phallic status is purely discursive. The symbolic is the field within which our lives and social experiences are located. Unless the symbolic order is conceived as a system where the father and the penis are not the only signifiers of social power and linguistic norms (even if they are the dominant ones here today), feminism is no better off with Lacan than without him.

How, then, does Grosz address the question of an alternative symbolic system that at the same time provides a power relationship capable of inducing psychic differentiation of the child, the development of a moral conscience and an "authentic" subjectivity for both men and women?

Grosz appears to bend towards Irigaray's use of Lacan. Although very much influenced by his psychoanalytic assumptions, Irigaray (1993a) realises that this discourse is itself a phallocentric one and reads Lacan as a text that can be de-constructed to reveal these assumptions. Her aim is to provide a model of representation for women as women. This does not involve developing a new woman's language. Rather, it involves breaking out of existing systems of meaning, with their oppositional structures confining women within an either/or logic as man’s counterpart. Her preference is for a both/and logic, for plurality or multiplicity.

Where, then, is this alternative representational system to be found? According to Irigaray (1993a), it cannot be found in Freudian psychoanalysis because libido is, by definition, masculine, with women’s sexuality being conceived within male parameters. It seems, then, that it is necessary to retreat to the pre-symbolic, to "elsewhere" (1993b, 77), the other side of the mirror where women’s earliest formative relations and positive identification models - the pre-oedipal mother-daughter relationship - have been effaced and repressed.

The problem is, that it is not possible for women to speak about this without reinforcing phallocentric discourses, "For to speak of or about woman may always boil down to, or be understood as, a recuperation of the feminine within a logic that maintains it in repression, censorship, nonrecognition" (1993b, 78). While Irigaray accuses men of not being able to hear the voice of women as women because of the valorisation of certain modes of representation, the only hearing possible for a specifically female representation of women’s sexuality is one which cannot be articulated and therefore never understood. All that is possible is a disruptive strategy, "the jamming of the theoretical machinery"(1993b, 78) to expose phallocentric assumptions. But to what extent does Irigaray remain within these masculine parameters herself by claiming that women have made no contribution to the symbolic system as women?

In my view, Irigaray fails to escape masculine systems of representation because of her desire to free the definition of women's sexuality from its association with nurturing. This objective is understandable, given the naturalisation of nurturing activity in psychoanalytic
theory and in much mainstream social theory (Everingham, Chapter 3). But I would argue that it is precisely this naturalisation of nurturing as a process located outside the symbolic that is the root cause of the dilemma. By claiming that women’s sexuality can only be grasped as a subversive form of sexuality, prior to its structuration during the oedipal crisis, Irigaray is reinforcing the notion that the pre-oedipal relationship with the mother is outside the symbolic.

The significance of women’s agency as (m)others, as contributors to the symbolic system, is impossible to grasp within theoretical frameworks of the socialisation process which begin by removing early maternal-infant interaction from the cultural. Lacan continues this masculinist tradition with his pre-oedipal/oedipal; pre-symbolic/symbolic dichotomies. Irigaray replicates this problem through her non-recognition of women’s contribution to the symbolic system through their mothering activity. Any theory of women’s sexuality which attempts to locate a potential subject position for women in the pre-oedipal maternal-infant relationship must first problematise early maternal-infant connectedness. When this is done, the relationship falls within the symbolic and can no longer be assumed to be "irrational" and inevitably subversive to the symbolic system.

THE PROBLEM OF CONNECTEDNESS

Both Freud and Lacan grounded their accounts of socialisation in an assumption of maternal-infant connectedness, or "symbiosis" as it is often called. Neither Freud nor Lacan addressed the problem of connectedness. It was simply an "original state" that could be assumed. As an original state, connectedness could then be assumed to have only one form. It was described by Freud (1973, 6) in absolute terms, as a state which plays no active role in the structuring of the psyche. It is simply preserved intact, as a "primitive" aspect of the mind from which men must move away in a linear direction towards autonomy if civilisation is to be maintained. Moreover, since it is women that are associated with this "oceanic" feeling of oneness, Freud (1973, 40) regarded them as a potentially "retarding and restraining influence". Their involvement in the process of connectedness while nurturing was thereby constructed in opposition to activity which actively and consciously produces social bonds.

Even psychoanalytic traditions which focus more on the mother-infant relationship, such as object-relations theory and self-psychology, continue this opposition by assuming that there is a "correct" answer to the problem of knowing what an infant’s cries mean. It seems that it is possible for (m)others to provide a perfect caregiving environment, where the infant’s needs can be totally satisfied. This is simply the other side of the coin to the Lacanian view that there is only "misrecognition". The problem is, that while object-relations theorists and theorists in the tradition of self psychology are attempting to overcome the limitations of the individualistic psychic developmental models, they continue to assume that infant’s actions have a correct reading which mothers need to identify in order to satisfy the child. They do not accommodate the linguistic, or interpretive, dimension of mothering. In the end, these models resolve the question of how (m)others come to know what their infant’s cries mean mystically, through references to maternal instinct, or an unproblematic "parental empathy" (Everingham, 1994, Chapter 3).

Poststructuralist positions influenced by Lacan do see "needs" as having to be interpreted as concrete "demands" before being met. They are, however, unable to take the linguistic process back into the pre-oedipal period, because they continue to use individualised action schemes. Infants cannot be given any agency since there is no sense in which their actions appear to make any difference to what materialises as a "demand". It is the presumed gap which is theorised rather than the link between the real "need" and the concretised "demand".
The problem is that existing psychic developmental theories are not derived from models of communication and cannot accommodate two subjects in interaction. What has tended to happen then, is that nurturing activity is conceived as goal directed action rather than interpretive action, and (m)others have come to be regarded as tools of either nature or culture. Depending upon one’s perspective, (m)others either learn their infant’s "real" needs by tuning into nature and out of culture (object-relations and self-psychology), or act as the instrument of the patriarchal social order by tuning into culture and out of nature.

In either case, the (m)other’s actions do not appear to have a reflexive component, responding critically to the concrete actions of the child. Connectedness thereby seems to have only one form, which is naturalised, while conflict is given the whole task of psychic differentiation and the production of morality and civilisation per se. Moreover, it is this assumption, that only conflict shapes psychic development and morality, which is at the core of the pre-oedipal/oedipal and pre-symbolic/symbolic dichotomies and it is this assumption which prevents us from grasping the continuities between mind and body, nature and culture.

**CONCLUSION**

Lacan’s linguistic version of Freudian psychoanalysis may fuel emancipatory visions of a subjectivity that knows no anatomical boundaries or limitations. However, what sort of society would enable this emancipatory vision to materialise?

So long as the feminist deployment of psychoanalysis considers only questions relating most immediately to the constitution of male and female sexual identity and desire, without due consideration for the nature of the social bonds which are the outcome of the construction of sexual identity, their emancipatory vision will remain ghost-like, unable to materialise in any concrete form.

The alternative is to demonstrate the links and continuities that exist between nurturing and socialisation processes by problematising "connectedness". This is Lacan’s gap, a gap that exists because he was unable to locate the (m)other as a subject in her own right while involved in nurturing activity. When the (m)other is located as a subject, early maternal-infant interaction and socialisation cannot be so neatly separated into pre-symbolic/symbolic, pre-oedipal/oedipal forms. While this does not yield a theory of women’s sexuality that is totally detachable from considerations of male sexuality nor totally amenable to rational transformation, it has the advantage of revealing a new sphere for human agency, since nurturing is de-naturalised and brought into the social world where its critical potential can be more fully realised.

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**Note**

[1] Freud (1962 22) originally believed that the psychic development of the female was "precisely analogous" to the male. See Mitchell and Rose (1983, 16-17) for a Lacanian re-reading of penis envy.


Irigaray, L. "This Sex Which is Not One." This Sex Which is Not One. N.Y.: Cornell Paperbacks, 1993(a): 23-33.


