



The Logic of SEXUATION

From Aristotle to Lacan

ELLIE RAGLAND

The Logic of SEXUATION

SUNY series in Psychoanalysis and Culture
Henry Sussman, editor

The Logic of SEXUATION

From Aristotle to Lacan

ELLIE RAGLAND

State University of New York Press

Published by
State University of New York Press, Albany

© 2004 State University of New York

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission. No part of this book may be stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means including electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior permission in writing of the publisher.

For information, address State University of New York Press,
90 State Street, Suite 700, Albany, New York 12207

Production, Dana Foote
Marketing, Anne M. Valentine

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ragland-Sullivan, Ellie, 1941—

The logic of sexuation : from Aristotle to Lacan / Ellie Ragland.

p. cm. — (SUNY series in psychoanalysis and culture)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7914-6077-0 (alk. paper) — ISBN 0-7914-6078-9 (pbk. : alk. paper)

I. Sex (Psychology) 2. Lacan, Jacques, 1901— I. Title. II. Series.

BFI75.5.S48R34 2004

I55.3—dc22

2004041706

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Dedicated to my mother, Lucile Stowe Ragland, and my brother, Gene Ragland,
with love and gratitude for their support and encouragement

This page intentionally left blank.

CONTENTS

Preface and Acknowledgments ix

I

“On the Signification of the Phallus” (1958)
According to Lacan I

2

Freud’s “Female Sexuality” (1931) and “Femininity” (1932):
Oedipus Revisited via the Lacanian Pre-Oedipus 29

3

Feminine Sexuality, or Why the Sexual Difference Makes All the Difference:
Lacan’s “For a Congress on Feminine Sexuality” (1958) 65

4

A Rereading of Freud’s 1925 Essay:
“Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction
between the Sexes” through Lacan’s Theory of Sexuation 91

5

The Place of the Mother in Lacanian Analysis:
Lacan’s Theory of the Object, or Castration Rethought 143

Conclusion 179

Notes 193

Index 209

This page intentionally left blank.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) may be considered the most important thinker in France since René Descartes and the most innovative and far-ranging thinker in Europe since Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud. Lacan's formation was that of a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst in the Freudian school. His return to Freud's theories, however, and particularly his rethinking of Freud's early observations on symbols, language, and sexuality led him to a rereading of Freud's texts that is so comprehensive and so radical that it virtually constitutes a new vision of man. Lacan's further work on sexuality and sexuation links *jouissance* (libidinal enjoyment) to language in a way that redefines the two kinds of knowledge that constitute what we call mind, but with the mind depicted as inseparable from the body. He, thereby, makes sense of Freudian libido as mental/bodily energy that functions as the subject of desire and the object of enjoyment.

Lacan's teaching put an end to an era when it was possible to talk about the human subject without reference to the ethos of the language, desire, and *jouissance* that structure it and, hence, condition all conscious and unconscious perception. In this sense, Lacan's revolutionary theories in psychoanalysis have immediate relevance for philosophy, linguistics, literary theory, gender theory, and the wider disciplines in the human sciences and humanities. Traditional philosophical dilemmas regarding the nature of the perceiving subject and its relation to objects, the status of human knowledge, the way knowledge is constituted as a dialectic, the meaning of sexuation as a binding together of sexuality and culture in subjective sets of identifications of fantasy and unconscious memory, the structure of discourse, and the scope of freedom are all problematized and given a new meaning in startling fashion by Lacan's psychoanalytic teaching.

The purpose of this book is to lay out the complex and elusive ideas of Jacques Lacan regarding the meaning of the phallus, the sexual difference, feminine sexuality as different from masculine sexuality, and the place of the mother in Lacanian teaching. This is no small task because in redefining these terms Lacan constructed a new theory of what knowledge is, and an extensive theory of how *jouissance* forms a separate knowledge system, as powerful as the more familiar system of representations. At stake is a finding that surprises. The limit of rationality and freedom is psychosis. The logic in play is that the psychotic has never inscribed the signifier for sexual difference that

causes the lack-in-being from which desire as a structural motivating principle is born. In this sense, psychosis becomes an empirical proof of Lacan's theories regarding the differential distinction of all subject positions as a response to the phallic signifier and to the lack-in-being that he names castration.

Lacan's theories require a three-dimensional logic to make sense. Conscious, typical binary thought simply obscures the structure of the unconscious, made up as it is of the symbolic, the imaginary, the real, and the symptom. Thus, any theory that grapples with Lacan's ideas by reducing them to one of his myriad thoughts risks not understanding the breadth and scope of this teaching. Lacan's claim that individuals make the world of their thought equal to their own conscious understanding of it is validated in such truncated readings of Lacan. The challenge for any reader is how to approach this dense thought and unfamiliar use of language to ascertain what Lacan meant. In this book I hope to have shed some light on this difficult aspect of Lacan's teaching such that psychological and philosophical studies that perplex over the referent and the cause of a given effect, for example, will have found answers to these age-old questions in Lacan's work.

My goal of rendering Lacan's theory of sexuation accessible to any study of his work presents a theory that broadens and deepens the study of gender, insofar as one's sexuation joins culture/language to mind/body by an interweaving of castration and the interpretation of sexual difference. Lacan argued that there is no signifier for gender in the unconscious. Given that there is no preordained male or female subject, there cannot be transgendered subjects either. Jacques-Alain Miller has offered the theory that biological boys and girls try to take their sexual identities from the Mother <> Father parental couple, while unaware that the Male <> Female sexual couple is not reducible to the parental couple. Lacan gives us the Masculine <> Feminine couple wherein the masculine has to do with identification within the symbolic order of language and social conventions while the feminine has to do with identification within the real order of the seemingly impossible to say or grasp. Masculine and feminine identifications are not, then, equatable with biological sex. While the material of the symbolic and the real will differ from culture to culture, one may find that males who are obsessionals in terms of desire are marked by feminine traits, while girls who are hysterics are marked by masculine identificatory traits.

The hope has been expressed that a chronological ordering of Lacan's teachings by historical periods will provide final clarity and insight. This is, certainly, a seductive idea and one that has been applied to Freud's texts. But such a tactic implies a linear progression in insight. Lacan taught that such a manner of reading Freud has led us to undervalue the majesty of Freud's scattered and elusive discoveries. Although one can, as Jacques-Alain Miller has demonstrated, trace clear periods of focus and development in Lacan's teachings, any periodization also follows Lacan's flight from institution to institution. This attests to the political, dangerous nature of Lacan's words. But what is truly gripping and unsettling is that Lacan often waits years to answer a question posed twenty years before. His pronouncements continually double back on themselves and

consequently defy chronology. I have respected chronology in the sense that I have sought to show how Lacan's theories regarding the phallus, castration, femininity, masculinity, and the object make sense of Freud's own impasses in his study of feminine sexuality. I have started with Lacan's essay on "The Signification of the Phallus" (1958) and ended with his *Seminar IV* on *The Object Relation*, having studied his "Congress on Feminine Sexuality" (1958) and his *Seminar XX* (1972–1973): *Encore*, in between.

Finally, I should like to record here my gratitude to the University of Missouri for a year's sabbatical leave during which I wrote this book. I am also grateful to my mother, Lucile Stowe Ragland, for sharing her home with me and to my brother, Gene Ragland, for finding me office space in which to work. Thanks go, as well, to the Lacan Study Group with whom I have worked for two years for their suggestions and questions in reading portions of my manuscript. Thank you Gregg Hyder, Filip Kovacevic, Zak Watson, and Jack Stone. Further, I would like to thank the members of the Guild House at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor for the super coffee they provided me while I was writing. I also appreciate help with typing up variations of my editings from Christy Houle and Vickie Thorp. Other friends and colleagues with whom I had discussions are too numerous to name. But I thank them one and all.

This page intentionally left blank.

I

“On the Signification of the Phallus” (1958)

According to Lacan

Masculine (Symbolic)	Feminine (Real)
HOMME (L'UN)	FEMME (L'AUTRE)
$\begin{array}{c} \exists_x \cdot \overline{\Phi_x} \\ \forall_x \cdot \Phi_x \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{c} \overline{\exists_x \cdot \overline{\Phi_x}} \\ \overline{\forall_x \cdot \Phi_x} \end{array}$
$\begin{array}{c} \S \\ \Phi \leftarrow \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{c} S(\cancel{A}) \\ \uparrow \\ a \\ \downarrow \\ \cancel{A} \end{array}$

The idea that either Freud or Lacan can contribute anything new to an understanding of the sexual difference has been rejected by many American feminists and psychoanalysts as well. By retracing the history of one small disagreement, we shall try to put that view into perspective with the hope of redressing a balance that advances the study of psychoanalysis as a theory of how mind is constituted and linked to the body. In his return to Freud, Lacan maintained that not only does conscious thought emanate from unconscious thought, moreover, it bifurcates into four different ways of thinking depending on how the sexual difference is interpreted: (1) the “normative” masquerade, (2) the neuroses (obsession and hysteria), (3) perversion, and (4) the psychoses. These are structurations of desire that join mind to body, and are not meant here as pathologies or descriptions of varying sexual behaviors.

One of Lacan’s principle theses is that while there is a sexual rapport in the animal world that seems to be based on instinct, humans have never had such a rapport because of the perturbations caused by the linkage of fantasy and language to the phallus (Φ) and castration ($-\Phi$), as well as to the objects that first cause desire. Thus, each person’s most basic partner is his or her own unconscious Other, not the other of the relationship. Lacanian scholar and analyst Geneviève Morel goes so far as to call

this an equation and principle thesis in Lacan: “‘Sexual non-rapport’ is an equivalent of the ‘phallus.’”¹ Contrary to Freud, Lacan stressed that the “meaning of the phallus” is linked to the fact that the penis is not the phallus.

The psychoanalytic debates of the twenties and thirties among Karl Abraham, Karl Jung, Karen Horney, Hélène Deutsch, Ernest Jones, Melanie Klein, Hannah Segal, and other post-Freudians could not make sense anymore than could Freud, of his theories on feminine sexuality and the phallus. Each analyst had a different theory of how feminine sexuality differed from masculine sexuality, and what the stakes truly were in what Freud called *Realität* (psychic reality). Although these debates were passionate, they never derived a thesis that elaborated a logic of psychoanalysis, not in Freud’s essays such as “Some Psychic Consequences on the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes” (1925), “Female Sexuality” (1931), and “Femininity” (1932), nor in those written by his colleagues.² Since those days, psychology, sociology and poststructuralism, among others of the “social sciences,” have taken up the question of the meaning of the sexual difference, but have not evolved a logic such as Lacan’s. Lacan sought to make “scientific” sense of the *sexual difference* itself, not only within the field of psychoanalysis but by borrowing from other fields and, thereby, extending the meaning and scope of psychoanalysis, logic, epistemology, and science, among other areas of study.

The three Freud essays just mentioned bring up the question that bothers many readers of Lacan. Why would he return to, or retain, Freud’s use of the provocative word *phallus*? If we scrutinize some of the disagreements regarding the term *phallus*, starting with Lacan’s differing from Freud over the meaning of the word itself, perhaps we can shed light on why some contemporary feminist thinkers such as Luce Irigaray and others have (mis-)taken Lacan for Freud, arguing that he equated the word *phallus* with the biological male organ, as Freud generally did. Lacan maintained that, from early childhood on, individuals distinguish among the penis as a real organ, the phallus as an imaginary object, and the phallic function of “no” as causative of a lack-in-being (or castration). So far-ranging is Lacan’s thinking here that he gradually equates the early perception—within the first few months—of the sexual difference with the construction of a dialectical base of “mind”: The latter emanates, strangely enough, from the structuration of desire between losing an object and wanting its return. Paradoxically, gender-based “essentialist” misreadings of Lacan’s thought remain closer to Freud’s biological reductionisms than to Freud’s continual efforts to separate psychic reality from biological realities and exterior sensory data.

In this regard, Ernest Jones wrote: “I think that the Viennese could reproach us [Freud and his followers] with too high an evaluation of primordial fantasy life, at the expense of exterior reality. To that we will answer that no serious danger exists that analysts will neglect exterior reality insofar as it is always possible for them to underestimate Freudian doctrine on the importance of psychic reality.”³ In that multiple issues are raised in any consideration of what links psychic reality to the body, Lacan

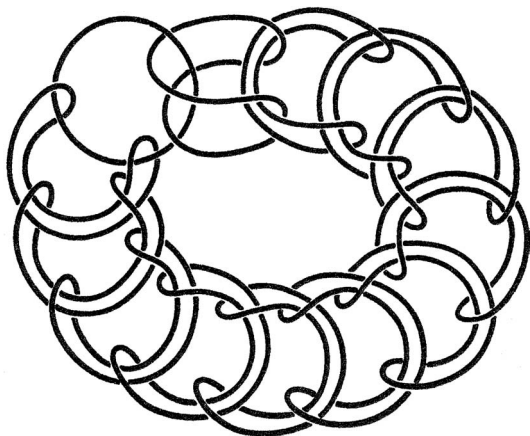
followed Freud's own efforts to decipher the meaning of the phallus. But Lacan's attention to Freud here is also merely a touchstone for another investigation—for answering the question of what constitutes "reality." Lacan points out that even for Freud the concept of reality remained simplistically split between exterior reality of sense data (*Wirklichkeit*) and interior psychic reality (*Realität*).⁴

Freud first made this distinction in *The Project* for a scientific psychology in 1895.⁵ By 1889 he had put together the idea of a contrasted pair: *Realität* versus the wish or dream. Equating *Realität* with the *objective* psychic reality that accomplishes a desire or wish, he agreed that human psychism emanates from there. Lacan argued that one sees in Freud's equation of psychic reality with a fulfilled wish the incipient notion of a reality-based ego that marks Freud's second topology; there the ego serves as the mediator between the id and the superego. Be it as a wish or an interceding ego, Freud maintained that the nature of psychic *Realität* is specified in its being constituted by the realization of a desire (Westerhausen, p. 34). Moreover, the wish or dream accomplishes an objective concerning the *Realität*. But in what would the realization of dream desire consist? Freud admits in *Traumdeutung* (*The Interpretation of Dreams*) that he does not know.⁶

But Freud had another notion of reality as well, one following a "master discourse" kind of logic. He believed that the observable objects of the world bore the "reality" of the interpretation(s) he attributed to them. For example, he did not doubt that the "ideal couple" was derived from the oneness or unity of the mother and infant dyad and was, indeed, an objective reality. In this, he was a kind of phenomenological "empiricist" who took his own observations and interpretations to be positive facts, although he continually emended his interpretations in footnotes, addenda, and through an essay style of constant correction of his own erroneous views.

From the start of his teaching, Lacan began to restructure Freud's binary splits between reality and fantasy, (biology and psyche, and so on). This culminated in his own equation of fantasy with reality, wherein he proposed that unities of "natural" rapport between mother and infant only exists at the level of imaginary fantasy. So strong is this fantasy, Lacan insisted, that it eventually becomes the pervasive myth of a totalized essential Woman—a kind of Ur-mother—who is thought (in Kleinian fashion) to contain the object(s) that Lacan says cause desire—the gaze, the breast, the urinary flow, the feces, the voice, the (imaginary) phallus, the nothing, and the phoneme. The mother's constant temporal comings and goings are experienced by her infant, not so much as organ losses, but as a fading away of the grounding whose force field is the surface of the infant's own skin. The infant takes its body to be an imaginary consistency or a surface cut into by the real of the holes created by maternal absences and disappearances.

Jeanne Lafont refers to this simple topology of the one-dimensional border (or edge) and the hole as being written like this:



The hole and its edge are the base grammar of the real. In other words, the real is the “reality principle” which one is always pushed to retrieve, refind, and expel because it “ex-sists” outside the pleasures of imaginary bodily consistency and is felt as a rupture of well-being and homogeneous comfort.⁷ Because the real was first created by the traumatic effects of loss, it must continually be mastered in that it is the central structure of being. Thus, its first form is that of a central void (\emptyset) that continually shatters or, at least, perturbs an incipient ego’s sense of consistency and continuity. Insofar as language gradually fills the holes, as well as being disrupted by them, it contains its own material referent in the “letter” (*l’être*) of being, as opposed to the signifier of language. No pregiven metalanguage serves as the source of thought and memory, then. Rather than emanating from deep thought, language ties itself to the unary traits of imaginary identifications, real affects, symbolic conventions, and symptomatic sublimations of an ideal “Father’s Name” linked to a mother’s enigmatic desire and jouissance—Lacan’s formulae for the “Oedipus complex.”

The Lacanian phallus is an imaginary copula, then, seeming to join the two sexes for reproduction and/or love. But in the unconscious, the phallus is not inscribed as a link to language. It is, rather, an effect of difference. Patients of Freud’s attested, in fact, to its imaginary properties of semblance or fantasy, Lacan taught. But they did not conceptualize the phallus as lying behind the masks that make the visible seem to be itself, and behind the words that try to name the real, while, instead, they repress, deny, repudiate, or foreclose it. For this reason alone, Lacan denounced Aristotle for basing logic on the grammar of language (Morel, pp. 97–98). The reality of language lies in its duplicity, not in its truth. In the late fifties Lacan portrayed the phallus as a mask, and “normative” sexual prescriptions of a given culture as a comic masquerade. One sees why he would claim that we see the masquerade at work more clearly in Greek and Roman art, or in Rabelais in the French Renaissance, than in contemporary Western

art where the Father's Name signifier has come unhooked from the law, thus forestalling comedy at its own expense (Morel, p. 21). Such comedy is to be found, nonetheless, in television sitcoms and in other genres as well.

Later, we will return to the importance of Freud's efforts to distinguish between a truly *real* psychic reality (*Realität*) and one that accounts in a radically different way for external reality (*Wirklichkeit*). He makes the distinction precisely on the issue of the phallic phase. Indeed, Freud's claims regarding the phallus are responsible for the furor regarding such a notion that raged within the psychoanalytic movement of his day. For the moment, we will leave aside what Lacan called Freud's connections of desire to reality, to focus, rather, on Freud's first mentions of the phallus in 1923, 1924, and 1925 when he added the idea of a new libidinal stage of evolution he called the *phallic phase*, common to both sexes. In the heated debates that took place among analysts from 1920 to 1935 regarding the phallic phase, the key issue was their attempt to understand the true nature of the phallus in relation to the action of accomplishing a desire. As we know, the disagreements were wide flung: Karl Abraham and Melanie Klein viewed the phallus as an imaginary part-object that could just as easily be symbolized by the breast as by any other organ; Karen Horney, Ernest Jones, and Karl Jung argued for equal and equivalent principles of male womb envy and female penis envy, the Elektra complex equaling the Oedipus complex, and so on.

Lacan returned to these biologically oriented debates to note that the organ was always erroneously taken to be the-thing-in-itself. He argued that this phenomenological view kept the analysts in question from answering their own queries. Approaching the question of the sexual difference, not from the viewpoint of organ reality, but as something to be understood from the representational and libidinal registers of the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real, Lacan, nonetheless, paid honor to Freud for having seen and articulated the idea that unconscious phenomena are at issue in the enigmatic meaning of the sexual difference. Beyond serving as a mask over the sexual difference, or as an abstract signifier that marks it—that is, as a propositional function—the "meaning of the phallus" is also a real sexual genital jouissance ($\Phi+$) that links the body to conscious acts and thoughts via an everflowing unconscious language of fantasy and desire.

However, Lacan's linking of the body to language by way of unconscious fantasy, is never a light-hearted notion. He calls the fantasy a "canker" that appears in the guise of enjoying the body—enjoying the Other as body, as well—in such a way as to disorganize one's experience of one's own body. This is a very different idea of the body as fantasized (imaginary body) from Descartes's concept of it as a *res extensa* imagined in a pregiven space. For Descartes's whole body, Lacan substitutes a body that necessitates another kind of space: a topological space that is not limited to the three dimensions of the imaginary, symbolic, and the real (Morel, pp. 22–23.)

Stressing that Freud never clarified his many thoughts on the phallus, Lacan points to "The Infantile Genital Organization: An Interpolation into Theory of

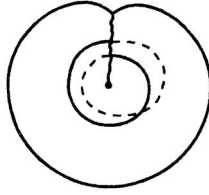
Sexuality" (1923) where Freud called the phallus an imaginary object. Throughout all his texts commenting on the phallus, Freud alternated between describing it as illusory—an imaginary object or illusory psychic reality—and as the masculine genital organ. Like Elizabeth Grosz and others, psychoanalytic theorist Anne Bertram has, somewhat accusatorially, suggested that it was Lacan—not Freud—who introduced the distinction between the penis and the phallus.⁸ Indeed, in many English mistranslations of Freud's precise terms, one would not necessarily know that the distinction is Freud's own. In his article "The Infantile Genital Organization" (1923), for instance, one easily sees that Lacan's literal and correct reading of Freud's German would never have resulted in his claiming to introduce contrasts between the penis and the phallus if they had not already been clearly present in Freud.⁹

However, it was Lacan who added the proposition that the phallus orients "sexuality"—and, thereby, mentality—in a minimal number of interpretations of the sexual difference that are based on how a child identifies with the signifier and "agency" of the Father's Name, as transmitted by the mother's unconscious desire. This proposition claims that one's sexual identity has a (phallic) basis in terms of which the sexual difference has been interpreted as a castration to be repressed, denied, repudiated, or foreclosed. For example, the obsessional (neurotic) takes knowledge as his master signifier— S_2 reduced to S_1 —as the phallic mark of his power. The hysteric (neurotic) identifies with her father, or a very close replica of him, in an equation of identity, knowledge, and "being" with sexuation: $\$ \rightarrow S_1$. The "normative" subject of a given social order takes the values and masquerades of the reigning symbolic Other as the "phallus" to please, or to be: \emptyset/Φ . The perverse subject identifies with being the object (*a*) that would fill the Other's lack, which he equates with bringing jouissance to The Woman, or her feminine stand-in: \emptyset/a . The psychotic forecloses the phallic "no" which imposes a lack-in-being on other subjects, resulting in the identification of a whole subject with a whole Other: $S \cong O$.

These are the different pathways desire may take vis-à-vis the castrating "no" pronounced by the real father of jouissance, thereby dividing the sexes by placing an incest taboo on the infant/mother dyad. In his later seminars Lacan argues that the "no" creates holes in the symbolic, placing gaps or impassés between signifiers, and "cuts" in(to) the supposed consistency of the imaginary body, cuts whose effects create erogenous zones of desire at the surface of the real of flesh.¹⁰ In other words, the losses of the primary object-cause-of-desire bring together the "psychic" operations of the desire to replace a lost trait or pleasure and the construction of the field of the partial drives (the invocatory, oral, and anal drives), all referred to the primary scopical one.¹¹ The second-level effect of the phallic interdiction is a "no" to being All One sex, an androgyn.

The result of the anatomical difference is interpreted in the imaginary and symbolic such that neither sex "has" the phallus, and neither sex "is" it. The masculine/feminine opposition is not a binary difference then. Rather, a subtle dialectic of desire

organizes itself around the phallic signifier whose effects are primary, but which functions subsequently as a third term: a signifier without a signified Lacan says $(\Phi)/-$. Moreover, the third-term effect produces a quadrature, mathematically speaking. That is, three cannot cohere topologically at the place or site where the third category (the real) "ek-sists" on the inverse side of a cross-cap



or Moebius strip [8] without making a kind of hole *and* knot at the point of the twist or turn. Lafont says:

The cross-cap is a Moebius Strip where the hole would be reduced to a point, ignored and invisible. It is also the adjunction to a Moebius strip of a particular stopper, named $[(a)]$ by Lacan, and which has the particularity of being bilateral itself both in carrying, not only the central point which structures the cross-cap, but also the double buckle of a Moebius strip. That is to say that it is at the center of this dialectic between the hole and its edges. (*Topologie lacanienne . . .*, pp. 18–19)

Indeed, any male or female may well *pretend* not to have "it" ("phallic" power or its desirability) even though one has "it"—be it as a corporation president or the mother in the kitchen running it (Morel, p. 26). In this sense, the phallus is commensurate with the master signifier (S_1). By reading on the obverse of the power/desire dialectic, by aiming askew, one sees the Freudian distinction between the penis meaning a biological organ and the phallus taken as a psychic reality. Lacan first valorized this concept of the phallus, not realizing, perhaps, that it would lead him to found a new concept of the phallus. Lacan's reconceptualization occurs, paradoxically, not at the point where the terms *penis* or *phallus* are used interchangeably, but at the points where Freud used the terms interchangeably in trying unsuccessfully to distinguish between *Realität* and *Wirklichkeit*.

Freud's concept of *Realität*, Lacan argues, shows the phallus to be an imaginary representation of an object of desire—the penis, the father himself, or a baby—and in *Wirklichkeit*, the phallus is a datum of biological reality in the sense of an organ that enjoys: that is, the penis itself. Lacan argued that Ernest Jones's errors were good examples of how all the post-Freudians of the twenties and thirties made egregious mistakes in proposing their own imaginary delineations. Indeed, their interpretations reduced psychoanalysis to the positivistic study we now call psychology.¹²

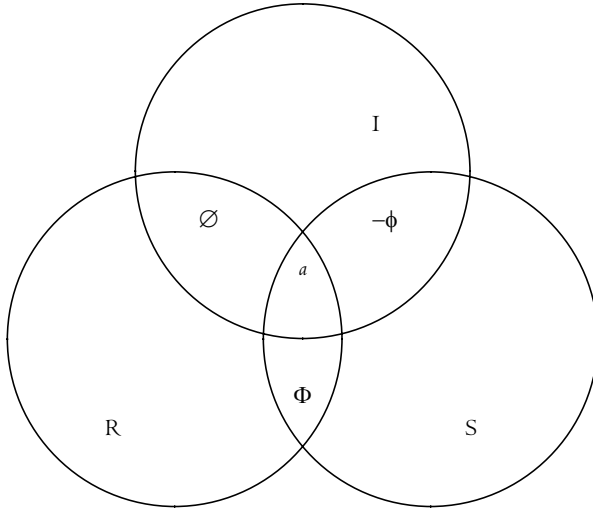
Jones, Lacan said, simply could not figure out how to give a symbolic status to the phallus. For Lacan, “symbolic status” always implied a logic of the signifier as that which implies lack ($\$$) by representing a subject for another signifier. Going back to Aristotle’s logic of class and attribute, Lacan argues that language remained insufficient and an obstacle to explaining the questions Aristotle raised. Lacan stressed, rather, Gottlieb Frege’s, Ludwig Wittgenstein’s, and Ferdinand de Saussure’s findings: That the signifier always differs from itself—($a \neq a$); “a” does not equal “a”. “I” does not equal itself from one speech act to the next: Frege, for example, was discontent with the linguistic expression “subject attribute.” Lacan returned to Freud’s laws of the unconscious—condensation and displacement—and Jakobson’s discovery of metaphor and metonymy as the two principle axes of language, to demonstrate that the laws of the signifier *are* those of metaphor and metonymy. This means, as Geneviève Morel puts it, that “according to its context, the signifier can take on any value” (Morel, pp. 29–31). By exchanging the logical terms *function*, *argument*, *agent* for the grammatical ones, *subject*, *verb*, *attribute*, Lacan also borrowed “arms” from Frege for showing how logic unsticks itself from grammar. In this context, in the 1970s, Lacan proposed the phallus as a function of a sexuated subject (Φ) where “x” represents the subject (Morel, p. 31).

By not imagining the quadratic complexity of psychic reality, Jones claimed one can reconcile the irreconcilable: One could easily join *Realität* to *Wirklichkeit* in a simplistic, analogical reductionism. In his articles on feminine sexuality, for example, Jones takes the phallus to be a penis and reduces the function of the organ to penetration. Desire—conceived of as the accomplishment of a reality or a wish as Freud implied in describing *Realität*—was relegated by his followers to the level of a real (as in factual reality) or natural satisfaction. Thus, Jones’s concept of wish as desire has nothing to do with the unconscious desire Lacan intuited in Freud, and defined as the gap or splitting between the need for satisfaction and the demand for love in “The Signification. . .”.¹³ Lacan wrote in 1958:

By a reversal that is not simply a negation of the negation, the power of pure loss emerges from the residue of an obliteration. For the unconditional element of demand, desire substitutes the “absolute” condition: this condition unties the knot of that element in the proof that love is resistant to the satisfaction of a need. Thus desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting.

Indeed, the unique constitutive reference for unconscious desire is that language be oriented by the primordial objects-cause-of-desire whose symbol—the *a*—lies at the heart of the three jouissances whose logic Lacan formalized in the Borromean knot where orders of the real, symbolic, and imaginary intersect. Between the symbolic and the real, he placed the symbolic phallus (Φ), equated with the language and concepts of reality given by a local/universal order. Between orders of the symbolic and imaginary,

he placed the imaginary phallus ($-\phi$) by which he marked castration as a gap between a thing and its name, thereby representing a point of lack in the subject that gives rise to a "sense" (*sens*) beyond signification ($\$$). And between the imaginary and the real, he situated the Other *jouissance*, sometimes marking the primary real of chaos and fragmentation, with a void at its center (\emptyset):¹⁴



In the 1950s, desire becomes the unconscious question in the mother's discourse that refers itself to the signifier of the Father's Name, in reference to the third part of this dialectic: The child as phallus, or object of desire. In his last formula for the paternal metaphor (or Oedipal complex), Lacan rewrote Freud's Oedipus complex to argue that one "identity" solution to the lack-of-being-whole, created by the sexual divide, is to seek to fill the void left in its wake by simulacra of the lost object (*a*) through identifications.¹⁵ The object (*a*) is proximate to unary traits (S_1)—indivisible, single strokes of identification—taken from the real, imaginary, and symbolic orders. Thus, the unary trait's own absolute density is a coalescence of traits from each of these orders, with a preponderance of emphasis given to the "force field" of which every drive is in ascendance over another.

And the drives emanate from what Lacan, in 1960, described as the first eight objects-cause-of-desire, which are both constitutive of an Ur-lining of the subject and without specularity or alterity. In "*Le sinthome: un mixte de symptôme et fantasme*," Miller describes the barred subject as a void: One goes from the hole made by the perception of the sexual difference, the imaginary $-\phi$, to the subject emptied of enjoyment ($\$$); that is, one goes from the hole made by the loss of the object *a* to the lack of enjoyment (from \emptyset to $\$$), insofar as its absence reflects traits of a positivized identity, but without representation.¹⁶ In his Seminars on James Joyce, Lacan maintained that Joyce sought to fill the void by making the real voice suture all the crevices in being and body: \emptyset/a .¹⁷

Indeed, the object a in the center of the Borromean unit articulates, as well, the Φ ; the $-\phi$; and the \emptyset : three castrations or negations. These are the three holes connected to each of the three jouissance(s). Lacan's innovation lies in his showing that the hole of the unconscious is inserted by the symbolic, which leaves positivized traces at the site of the object. Giving radically new meaning to any "materialist" theory of language, Lacan argues that the hole made by the phallic divide is one no imaginary fantasy can ever repair. The split between the sexes— $\Phi/-$ —makes the "object" itself only ever "partial"—the negativized phallus is imaginary ($-\phi$); the word can never equal the voice or the "letter" in saying it all in the symbolic; the hole in the Other (\emptyset)—the Other not existing as such—acquires a pseudoexistence of alienation, given that language names affects, images, and concepts (Lafont, p. 116).

Ernest Jones depicted the phallus as an imaginary object, structured in the same mode as any other object. Thus, Jones's "phallus" has no properties of lack in the image ($-\phi$); in what the word depicts ($S_1 \rightarrow S_2$), nor in some supersexual libidinal phallic function ($\Phi x; \exists x; \Phi$). Lacan gives three meanings of lack to the phallus, meanings on which its privilege depends. In this sense, Jones's "imaginary" is not Lacan's: Symbolizing the lack in the image $I(\text{mage}) (\sqrt{I})$ by the *square root of the negative*, Lacan makes the image that which only partly represents what it is trying to incarnate. This matheme states the proposition that part of its meaning is always lacking in the image.¹⁸ While Jones opened the door wide to object-relations theories by making of the phallus a positivized partial object—the things-in-itself, marked by moral attributes, both external and internal, and good or bad—Lacan argued that such an inside/outside distinction is always a subjective imaginary modeled on a false image of the body. The body's seeming wholeness is divided by the image of an outside and inside, giving one the idea of volume, of the container and the contained. "In their complexity," Lacan writes in 1973, "knots are well-designed to make us relativize the supposed three dimensions of space, founded solely on the translation we give for our body in a solid volume."¹⁹ Lacan pointed out that the place of the object (a) is not *in* the mother's body, as object-relations theories claim, but *in* the fantasy. Jones's error, paradoxically, is that of any critique that attributes to the phallus qua penis the *function* of properties equatable with character attributes. Lacan accorded the phallus a function, proposing for it the status of the key signifier by which both sexes interpret their sexuality as lacking (or not) in reference to the mother's unconscious desire regarding her own sexual difference.

Giving new meaning to Freud's "The Ego and the Id" (1923), Lacan also redefines Freud's invention of an imaginary order by equating its formation with that of the ego. He follows Freud in viewing the ego as first and foremost a bodily ego. Unlike Freud, however, he argues that the ego is not merely a surface "entity," but is itself the projection of a surface.²⁰ Lacan's rethinking here is of a piece with his explanation for why we see the body in a solid body form. Although anatomy lends itself to such an interpretation, the body actually takes on that form "for the sake of our gaze" (*S. XX*, p. 133). By that he means that we see the body as whole in order to avoid seeing it as lacking, lack, paradoxically, being precisely that which the gaze shows. In "Painting,"