Frame-Up: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Theatre

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In the dark I orient myself in a familiar room when I can seize on a single object whose position I can remember. Here obviously nothing helps me except the capacity of determining positions by a subjective ground of distinction. For I do not see the objects whose position I should find, and if someone had played a joke on me by putting on the left what was previously on the right while still preserving their relationships to each other, I could not find my way in a room with otherwise indistinguishably equal walls. But I soon orient myself through the mere feeling of a difference between my left and right sides.

—Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 295

Was it always so difficult to orient oneself, to place oneself, to choose sides, to step into a frame? Consider the scene of The Taming of the Shrew. A woman surveys the scene. A page, dressed up as a woman, surveys the scene. A boy, dressed up as a page, dressed up as a woman, surveys the theatre of which s/he is a part. The character beside him lusts for him. It is, we are told, his part. And so, and yet, "we" lust for the page/woman, the page of woman, the scripted woman. We entertain the sexual longing, enjoy the masquerade of femininity, deny our own construction within this carnivalesque version of aristocratic/sexist/sadistic theatre which gazes at itself and fondles its own power relations. And as we watch these characters watching these plays within plays located somewhere within the always elusive boundaries of The Taming of the Shrew, as we sit silently in the protective darkness and fulfill our role as sanctioned voyeurs, our gaze always returns to that enigmatic construction of a construction otherwise known as Sly's "madam wife." Is s/he not a part of the play s/he observes, since it concludes at the same time as the spectacle in which s/he appears as audience, in which we appear as audience, erasing distinctions between play and reality? And yet is not this ambiguous goddess—both audience and character, male and female, servant and mistress—who reigns over this laby-
rinthine theatre the true guardian of Shrew and its enshrined shrew, the comptroller of the cultural law of difference and the protector of that animal within its confines who remains unconquered?

How uncanny a figure s/he is, calling to mind both how easily we are fooled and how quickly we deny the differences that we know. It is certain that at some level gender uncertainty is engaged by this figure, much as it was when we first disavowed, after having perceived, genital difference. Freud would read in this page proof of the male subject’s perception of the little girl as castrated, and so of the woman as always already a man in drag—the little girl as a little man.1 We may read altogether differently, and find in this character the character of sexual difference itself, a surplus as well as a lack. The guardian of the “truth” of sexuality—which is always withheld because always an imposition—the page flirtatiously, fraudulently suggests consumption and tantalizes with the fiction of difference. Inasmuch as we all mistake, misrecognize sexual identity, we are all, like Sly, taken in by the play. Yet the drama of the page is the drama of language itself, which suggests not only the masquerade that is femininity, but the inevitability of the law of form, the mediation of sexuality by cultural representation, and the power of language to inscribe the raw energy of the drives.

Is the relation of the sexes the quintessential trompe l’oeil? Most of us are familiar with the story Lacan tells of the engendering of the subject through language: a little boy and little girl are seated in a train facing each other and so see opposing sides of the station which they are approaching. “‘Look,’ says the brother, ‘we’re at Ladies!’; ‘Idiot!’ replies his sister, ‘Can’t you see we’re at Gentlemen.’” As Lacan observes: “For these children, Ladies and Gentlemen will be henceforth two countries towards which each of their souls will strive on divergent wings, and between which a truce will be the more impossible since they are actually the same country and neither can compromise on its own superiority without detracting from the glory of the other.”2 Lacan here suggests how language and sexual difference are intertwined; perhaps less important than the misdirection of these little souls is the arbitrary identification of these bodily egos and so the misdirection of their libidinal energies, yet another form of méconnaissance. Lacan draws two identical doors with the words “ladies” and “gentlemen” written under them to remind us that the signifier does not “stand for” the thing, but only makes sense in relationship to another signifier. Similarly, male and female, regardless of biological differences, are products of a linguistic signifying system, so that male is necessarily “not female” and female “not male.” As Jacqueline Rose observes: “In Lacan’s account, sexual identity operates as a law—it is something

1 See Freud’s The Ego and the Id, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 19, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1923) in which, after the little girl sees “her lack of a penis as being a punishment personal to herself and has realized that the sexual character is a universal one, she begins to share the contempt felt by men for a sex which is the lesser in so important a respect, and, at least in holding that opinion, insists on being like a man” (253).

enjoined on the subject. For him, the fact that individuals must line up according to an opposition (having or not having the phallus) makes that clear."³

As identity demands the fiction of closure, so sexual identity requires a fiction which, however fostered by biology or in its service, is essentially linguistic, ideological, and fetishistic. At issue is the representation of sexuality—the way in which libidinal energy is parcelled up and channeled through socially appropriate bodily zones. For Lacan, the assumption of a sexual identity is accompanied by the sacrifice of free libidinal energy necessitated by signification itself, which demands that we be one thing and not another. What Lacan refers to as "castration" is the loss in sexuality resulting from the inevitable mediation of desire by signification. The problem, Rose observes, is that we have "failed to see that the concept of the phallus in Freud's account of human sexuality was part of his awareness of the problematic, if not impossible, nature of sexual identity itself" as a result of which we "lost sight of Freud's sense that sexual difference is constructed at a price and that it involves subjection to a law which exceeds any natural or biological division. The concept of the phallus stands for that subjection, and for the way in which women are very precisely implicated in its process."⁴ Yet another problem, however, is the price we pay for subjection to a discourse which enframes us; how are feminists who pass on a discourse of the phallus implicated in this process, and framed in turn?

My question regards the implacability of the law of place and frame; the potential of theatre for revisioning it and/or the complicity of theatre in this frame-up. Given feminist reimaginings of narrative—particularly psychoanalytic narratives—and feminist reviewings of cinema, especially as seen through a Lacanian lens⁵—we come at last to the question of how theatre figures difference. At issue is the problem of the frame and framing behavior as intrinsic to theatre, the extent to which theatre is always already determined by the frames it puts onstage, and the extent to which theatre provides a means for reframing. Given the longstanding debt of psychoanalysis to classical drama and the centrality of the Oedipus to both disciplines, is a feminist, anoedipal theatre possible, or possibly a contradiction in terms? Given the phallocentric vocabulary of contemporary psychoanalytic theory, is feminist theory which employs Lacan not framed in turn? In question is the potential of feminism, psychoanalysis, and theatre to reflect and effect change—to insert a difference in our construction of the subject and so to make a difference.

Let us break the field with a quotation that by misunderstanding nonetheless gets us to the root of the problem. Jane Gallop writes: "This problem of dealing with difference without constituting an opposition may just be what feminism is all about.

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(might even be what psychoanalysis is about). Difference produces great anxiety. Polarization, which is a theatrical representation of difference, tames and binds that anxiety. The classic example is sexual difference which is represented as a polar opposition (active-passive, energy-matter). All polar oppositions share the trait of taming the anxiety that specific differences provoke”

Gallop succinctly assesses the shared goals of feminism, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction in the postmodernist enterprise, insofar as all are similarly predicated upon subverting the figuration of difference as binary opposition. Structuralism and semiotics, the twin harbingers and now culprits of postmodernist theory, process experiences into polar oppositions which offer an Illusion of Alternatives—nature/culture, passive-active, male/female—rather than a continuum of differences. The deciding gesture for the avant-garde theorist remains Derrida’s critique of the metaphysical basis of the division of the sign into signifier and signified, form and content, writing and speech, representation and presence, as well as his critique of the transcendental signified or sujet supposé savoir—whether Man, God, or History—who stands outside them and guarantees their stability. The problem here is not only the pretense that the signified is somehow immune from commutability, from being transformed into another signifier, but the way in which such oppositions depend as well on a subject who conceives or perceives of these differences while standing somehow outside them. Further, this organization of experience is not only ideologically coerced but coercive, insofar as it tames and binds a larger field of differences through repressive and repressing tactics, and in turn privileges and procures one term at the expense of the other, be it Male versus female or Consciousness versus the unconscious. Deconstructive techniques function to unsteady if not dismantle such oppositions, and the revival of feminist and psychoanalytic theory owes much to their success.

What surprises in Gallop’s formulation is her use of the word “theatrical.” Why is polarization “a theatrical representation of difference”? Whereas the relationship of ideology and genre is hardly Gallop’s subject here, the identification of theatre with a defensive, ideologically complicit ordering of difference constitutes a serious challenge to those for whom theatre offers an epistemological model or mode of inquiry. Is theatre the guarantor of polarities—part and parcel of the “great semiological myth of the versus”—or, as Barthes contends, designed to subvert them? Is deconstruction theatre’s enemy or its double? Is a feminist theatre possible, or possibly a contradiction in terms?

Those in search of the poor monster, dramatic theatre, will discover it miming the role of the scapegoat for Western humanism in a new-fangled postmodern morality play. Accused and found guilty as a machine of the state and an enemy of the people, drama is charged with the job of carrying away the fourfold sins of phallocentrism, humanism, individualism, and representation along with its demise. In this contest

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of the avant-garde with itself on the field of representation, theatre has indeed been hoist on its own petard. Long derided as one of the last bastions of humanism in literary studies, one of the few free zones where character, plot, and even presence itself could travel undisturbed, unsuspected, and unsuspecting, theatre is only now in the process of saving itself by denying itself. Traveling incognito as Performance, denying any relation to the tradition of dramatic theatre upon which it preys, theatre, now sous rature, has become avant-garde. Aristotle is changed for Artaud, Hamlet for Screens. It would seem that such theatre, even sous rature, is going to have difficulty making a comeback.

Postmodernist attacks on traditional dramatic theatre are not wholly unfounded at this point in the western cultural revolution. As with our political party system and our gender system, traditional Western theatre offers us only two stages, comic and tragic, upon which are always playing some version of Oedipus or its sister play, The Taming of the Shrew. A set-up is therefore always being staged as well—one that places its spectators in the position of Kate, Oedipus, and one Christopher Sly, all of whom "cannot choose" but accept the interpellation or hailing that indoctrinates the subject into a confusing and limiting identity, a méconnaissance, a delusion.

If traditional Western theatre rests upon and remains obsessed with the Oedipus—the scene of a founding crime of sexuality and a payment which decisively orders sexuality and gender, Shrew rewrites that scenario for women. To participate in Shrew is to identify the achievement of civilization itself with the domination of women through patriarchal exogamy rites, physical violence, and doublebinding mind games. If we conflate the complementary myths of Oedipus and Shrew, we have the tragedy of the man who discovers his sexuality and the woman who learns to disavow her own in the very apprehension of a repressive patriarchal law. One scenario identifies civilization with male payment for his own sexuality, the other identifies it with male control over disordered female sexuality. Both not only record but promulgate the values of a repressive patriarchal culture.

Tragedy and comedy alike therefore champion what Freudians and Lacanians like to think of as civilization-as-"castration"—a phallocentric concept which equates the organization of human sexuality and gender with the birth of language and repression, and so with a psychic displacing-as-ordering which alienates the subject even as it guarantees it a place in the symbolic order. Whereas cinema is associated with the pre-Oedipal look, and the desire to see oneself seeing, theatre replaces the desiring eye with the blinded eye g(l)azed over. Theatre is an Oedipal affair, the scene of the cut or wound, of the crown that burns its wearer. Theatre enacts the costs of assuming the displacing image returned back by society—the mask which alienates as it procures entry into society. In short, theatrical looking assumes a gaze which is a looking back, if not a staring down.

The Oedipal narrative—which places incestuous desire in the context of a communal law which condemns it—offered Freud a locus for his theories of childhood.

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sexuality and male castration anxiety. In the so-called Oedipal period, the male child's fantasies of being with the mother sexually are accompanied by fears of castration for such desires. These fears signify the internalization of social taboos, whether we term the effect superego development or the ordering and repression of sexuality. When Twelfth Night's "I would you would you were as I would have you be," is replaced by the motto, "that that is, is," we see how comedy as well as tragedy promotes the interpretation of identity as destiny.

As a psychoanalyst and teacher of Freudian theory, Lacan's reading of human psychic development also relies heavily upon traditional narratives of Western drama, and so is colored by the same sense of transcendent law or necessity which limits its potential for envisioning change. Lacan's primary interest is in the splitting and so procuring of the subject in language as it impinges on human psychic functioning. This leads him to be as interested in the instability of sexual identity as ego identity, and to see both as a function as division and repression, of the ordering fictions by means of which the ego as supplement gets set into place. Lacanian theory has proven especially useful for describing how masculinity depends upon woman as both the castrated Other and as externalized lack. And this model of woman as lack constituted the basis of the early analyses by feminist theorists of traditional phallocentric narrative and cinema.

The most influential feminist analyses of cinema and narrative have been set forth by Laura Mulvey and Teresa de Lauretis, both of whom expose the way in which the pleasure of these genres depends upon and in turn develops coercive identifications with a position of male antagonism toward women. Insofar as theatre incorporates many of the scopic and narrative pleasures as cinema, these formulations—however limited—also apply to theatre, and yet may also help to clarify the differences between the ways in which theatre and cinema stage difference. Since the male is traditionally envisioned as the bearer of the gaze, the woman represented as the fetishized object of the gaze (Mulvey), the gaze itself emerges as a site of sexual difference. The classic cinematic gaze splits us into male (voyeur) and female (exhibitionist). Seeing, according to this staging of the cinematic apparatus, is always already a matter of sexual difference. Insofar as classic theatre incorporates not only spectacle but narrative—so that the male is represented as a mobile agent as well as a bearer of the gaze, the female as the object to be actively transformed by him—action as well as sight has implications for the study of gender ideology. Not only pleasure but plot is derived from male fantasies which depend on the scopic and narrative exploitation of woman; she is the linchpin in the system whose losses propel the relay of looks and whose sins move the plot forward. In question, then, is the reliance of theatrical desire on the fetishized spectacle of woman and the narrative of her domination and punishment. Can we ever escape The Taming of the Shrew?

The join of feminism and cinema has clearly proved productive for the critique of traditional cinema and the construction of avant-garde films alike. Yet whereas cinema can challenge or deconstruct the symbolic by dissolving or dispersing the image, traditional theatre is necessarily more tied to the Symbolic—to the ego, the image, the unitary individual. Whereas theatre questions the validity of masks by virtue of their ability to be exchanged, it cannot dissolve or otherwise destroy them. As Shake-
SPEAREAN COMEDY REMINDS US, MASTER AND SERVANT, HUSBAND AND WIFE MAY EXCHANGE ROLES BUT NEVER ESCAPE THE TYRANNY OF ROLES THEMSELVES—WHICH IS, AFTER ALL, SIMPLY A FUNCTION OF THE GAZE, OF BEING AND SO BEING SEEN IN SOCIETY. THEATRAL NARRATIVES APPEAR TO PROMOTE THE VERY IDEOLOGY OF DIFFERENCE THEY EXPOSE AS ARBITRARY—INsofar AS THEIR RELIANCE ON ROLES BASED ON EGO-IDENTIFICATIONS PREVENT IT FROM MOVING OUTSIDE OF ITSELF. IF POETRY EXPOSES THE LIMITS OF LANGUAGE, AND CINEMA OF THE IMAGE, THEATRE EXPOSES BOTH ALONG WITH THE THOSE OF THE EGO AT PLAY IN THE GAZE.


THIS FRAME-UP, THEN, IS A CHALLENGE WHICH MEANS TO EXPOSE THE PARADOX THAT CONSTITUTES THE THEORETICAL STANDSTILL IN FEMINISM, PSYCHOANALYSIS, AND THEATRE STUDIES
alike. It is meant to expose the use of feminism by the avant-garde to stage itself, to invigorate its age-old rethinking of representation. It is meant to expose the way in which paradoxes and en abîme structures contain and entrap change, whether in The Taming of the Shrew or the taming of the gaze that is deconstructive philosophy. It is meant to ask what it means when Derrida writes, "it is not impossible that desire for a sexuality without number can still protect us, like a dream, from an implacable destiny which immures everything for life in the figure 2." If self-reflexivity and theatricality are intermeshed in postmodern theory, this is not, I would argue, because theatre is the place of the abîme, but rather of the interruption of the abîme by a gaze within which explodes its container.

II

Both feminism and psychoanalysis face the central question of how to intervene in the cultural reproduction of sexual difference without always already being entangled in it—a problem posed not only by a play like The Taming of the Shrew but repeated in the writing on Shrew; not only by feminist and psychoanalytic theory but within the theories themselves. What feminism and psychoanalysis share is the goal of reconstructing subjectivity from the disruptive perspective of the unconscious and sexuality, language and ideology, so that it never rests stable or secure. Each discipline acknowledges the primacy of the signifying dependence of the subject on the Other, and is committed to developing ways of re-visioning the subject in relationship to the Other's gaze. Yet that very paradigm has also stymied productive feminist reformulations of subjectivity, insofar as "safe" descriptions of a phallocentric order have taken the place of prescriptions for change.

The play of the constitutive gaze in postmodern theory usually registers as a witty paradox rather than the trap of ideology containing and preventing change. The bind of the constitutive gaze has surfaced most notably in Julia Kristeva's descriptions of the problem of how to convey on the side of language and representation the experience outside of it. Assuming that women have been excluded from the scene of representation—how to place that experience in representation? The constitutive gaze is characteristic of cinema in that it stages the desire to see oneself seeing oneself that never gets outside itself.

If psychoanalysis and feminism similarly expose the arbitrary and divisive construction of subject positions, both are similarly constrained precisely by that which they would change. Contemporary psychoanalytic theory offers an example, inasmuch as feminists who employ Lacanian methodology are in turn framed by a discourse of castration and phallic signifiers which they may well not seek to reproduce. Apropos here is Jane Gallop's assertion that if "the penis is what men have and women do not; the phallus is the attribute of power which neither men nor women have. But as long as the attribute of power is a phallus which refers to and

10 Jacques Derrida, "Choreographies," Diacritics (Summer 1982): 76, from an interview with Christie V. McDonald.

can be confused... with a penis, this confusion will support a structure in which it seems reasonable that men have power and women do not. And as long as psychoanalysts maintain the separability of 'phallus' from 'penis', they can hold on to their 'phallus' in the belief that their discourse has no relation to sexual inequality, no relation to politics."

Those who read Lacan closely answer that his phallocentric discourse is intentionally reflective of the problems he sought to portray. Moreover, they remind us that the specific configurations of the Symbolic are indeed open to change in the Lacanian schema. As Ellie Ragland-Sullivan observes: "We must remember that the Symbolic here does not mean anything representative of a second hidden thing or essence. Rather it refers to that order whose principal function is to mediate between the Imaginary order and the Real. The Symbolic order interprets, symbolizes, articulates, and universalizes both the experiential and the concrete which, paradoxically, it has already shaped contextually." Yet Lacan's Symbolic was developed in the context of a specific historical period of intellectual thought, one heavily influenced by structural anthropology. As Louis Althusser protests, "It is not enough to know that the Western family is patriarchic and exogamic... we must also work out the ideological formations that govern paternity, maternity, conjugality, and childhood."

Insofar as Lacan's writings ignore the material and historical nature of social organization and social change, they betray a disturbing complacency toward structuralist and phallocentric versions of a transcendent law, whether in the form of the phallic signifier, the law of the father, or the law of the symbolic order.

Lacan's Symbolic is heavily dependent upon Lévi-Strauss's account of the origin of our myth of difference in incest taboos, taboos which function to transform a state of "nature" into one of "culture": "The prime role of culture is to ensure the group's existence as a group, and consequently, in this domain as in all others, to replace chance by organization. The prohibition of incest is a certain form, and even highly varied forms, of intervention. But it is intervention over and above anything else; even more exactly it is the intervention." As an exogamy rule, the incest taboo functions to establish a system of social relationships. It replaces the taboo of intrafamilial marriage with interfamilial marriage, and so sets up social roles and values. Of crucial interest here are the mythic and ideological aspects of Lacan's Symbolic Order, since it fails to explain the practice it describes, repeating the very difference it purports to explain. Observes Jacqueline Rose: "Lacan's use of the symbolic... is open to the same objections as Lévi-Strauss' account in that it presupposes the subordination which it is intended to explain. Thus while at first glance these remarks... seem most critical of the order described, they are in another sense complicit with that order."

12 Gallop, The Daughter's Seduction, 97.
16 Rose, "Introduction," 45.
Lacan’s symbolic must be understood both in the context of the structural anthropolo-
gy upon which it drew and the object relations theory against which it defined itself. “Taking the experience of psychoanalysis in its development over sixty years,” observes Lacan expansively, “it comes as no surprise to note that whereas the first outcome of its origins was a conception of the castration complex based on paternal repression, it has progressively directed its interests towards the frustrations coming from the mother, not that such a distortion has shed any light on the complex.”

Lacan perceived the direction of object relations theory at the time as involved in a domestication of Freud’s insights, in particular as involved in replacing the fundamental role of the unconscious, sexuality, and representation in psychoanalysis with the study of the quality of actual maternal care. To stress the importance of his intervention, Lacan introduced a third term, the name of the father, as an interruption of the asocial mother-infant dyad that brings to bear upon it the law of language and symbolic positions.

The context of Lacan’s social role in this drama of psychoanalysis cannot be erased from the theory. Since the popularity of the project of rereading Freud is as much due to the Derridean reading of a Freud implicated in his own readings as to a Lacanian rereading of Freud’s works, the reading of a Lacan implicated in his own theory of the gaze should not be surprising. We now acknowledge, for example, a Freud who represses the idea of repression, who wishes away threats to his theory of wish fulfillment, who refuses to give up the search for primal scenes which he elsewhere acknowledges exist only at the level of fantasied reconstruction, and who denies the bisexuality and gender instability he elsewhere theorizes with conviction. That Lacan could recognize gender ideology at work in his portrayal of the mothering function as asocial—whether in his narrative of maturation as dependent upon the Freudian male’s resolution of the castration complex in the Oedipal phase, or in his equation of the (symbolic) phallus with that which alone ensures civilization—does not make his manipulation of that ideology more palatable. If the law of the father and the phallus is designed to expose place and position as fraudulent, rather than referring to any actual or fantasied father or phallus, the problem is that Lacan is in fact championing an equally irreversible place for his theory of displacement couched in the terms of a phallocentric discourse. And that very discourse reframes mother-infant relations as somehow always already outside language and representation. Lacan’s dramatization of psychoanalytic history, in which the son figure (Lacan) rescues the dead father’s authority (Freud) to intervene and save him from the mother’s tyranny (object relations theory) is nonetheless open to reframing. Can we similarly reappropriate the gaze to take into account the way in which the mother’s “no” functions as a displacing gaze and so displaces in advance the father as the privileged level of representation?

Like Petruchio, and like Freud, Lacan’s work on gender is self-consciously para-
doxical. At one level, he acknowledges the imposture of any cultural configuration of sexual difference posing as either natural or divine. At the same time, he regards

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such imposture as inevitable, as the comic theatre of misrecognitions in which we necessarily exist. Like Petruchio, Lacan articulates the feminist dilemma in terms of the impossibility of breaking the mirror of ideology, yet exemplifies in his “corrected” misogyny the problem of being a part of the problem he would describe. He argues that woman does not exist except as a fantasy or theatrical construct, yet reifies a cultural myth of the exchange of women as the basis of civilization. Lacan equates a particular configuration of social power with the symbolic order, universalizes the Oedipal law, and identifies the paternal metaphor as the privileged level of representation itself, the inevitable third term that must intervene between mother and child, Oberon-like, to bring “nature” to a state of “culture.”

Following Roy Schafer’s analysis of psychoanalytic narratives, Teresa de Lauretis identifies the frame here: “while psychoanalysis recognizes the inherent bisexuality of the subject, for whom femininity and masculinity are not qualities or attributes but positions in the symbolic processes of (self)-representation, psychoanalysis is itself caught up in ‘the ideological assignations of discourse,’ the structures of representation, narrative, vision, and meaning it seeks to analyze, reveal, or bring to light.”18 If Lacan was the analyst most aware of this problem, by necessity he was also implicated by it. Juliet Flower MacCannell rightly warns us of “the tendency . . . to over-identify Lacan’s analysis of the culture of the signifier . . . with his own stance on that culture,” noting that “just as the physician may be said to be apart from the disease s/he discovers, even if s/he has been constrained by it, Lacan’s analysis of the systems formed by the signifier, metaphor, the phallus, stand apart from his own ‘system.’”19 The paradox in reading Lacan derives from the play of playfulness in his style—for he as well as his most ardent supporters acknowledge his partiality and biases, but none can decisively fix the level at which they operate. Even Jacqueline Rose admits: “There is, therefore, no question of denying here that Lacan was implicated in the phallocentrism he described, just as his own utterance constantly rejoins the mastery which he sought to undermine.”20 We need to acknowledge both how Lacan played upon and with his own phallocentrism, and how that pleasure has its costs in a discourse which cannot be reproduced.

“In the psyche, there is nothing by which the subject may situate himself as a male or female being,” asserts Lacan valiantly.21 The very sentence is a marvelous example of what Lacan is talking about—how language directs biology, subverting the sexual drive into an identificatory one precisely by such maneuvers as interpelling the female reader as “he,” “him,” and “man.” Yet insofar as we are not newly enlightened sexist males of the 1930s coyly pointing to the way in which our discourse places and displaces the subject, how can feminist theory support a vocabulary of phallic signifiers?

Teresa de Lauretis rightly critiques Lacanian theory for the way in which its descriptive features all too easily become prescriptive: “in opposing the truth of the unconscious to the illusion of an always already false consciousness, the general critical discourse based on Lacanian psychoanalysis subscribes too easily . . . to the territorial distinction between subjective and social modes of production and the cold war that is its issue.”22 More concerned with misrecognition as sites for change, de Lauretis suggests we redirect attention to the dialectical relationship between the means by which signs are produced and the codes themselves, so that we see meaning as a cultural production “not only susceptible of ideological transformation, but materially based in historical change.”23

Feminist theory has itself been caught up in the double bind of the constitutive gaze. Given the increasing centralization of a group previously defined by exclusion from and oppression by the symbolic order, how is that group to redefine itself without destroying itself? Should it celebrate the scorned values with which it has been identified, abandon those values for those of the ruling class, or challenge the entire structure by which it has been defined, replacing it with a more inclusive sense of difference? As Ann Rosalind Jones reminds us, any celebration of the feminine is problematic in that it assumes an essential feminine to be celebrated, so that “theories of féminité remain fixated within the metaphysical and psychoanalytic frameworks they attempt to dislodge.”24 Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous would have us reverse the negative value assigned to woman, locating her specificity in multileveled libidinal energy, in a feminine unconscious shaped by female bodily drives which make their way in the style of feminist writings.25 Yet Monique Wittig blames néoféminité’s universalizing tendencies for making a fetish of the bar of difference, and so keeping us locked in an oppositional gender structure. Wittig demands that we “dissociate ‘women’ (the class within which we fight) and ‘woman,’ the myth. For ‘woman’ . . . is only an imaginary formation, while ‘women’ is the product of a social relationship,”26 a group identity capable of effecting change. Yet even Wittig’s political theatre, like much political theatre, is accused of various sins, among them denying a gaze that would disrupt its own. Can feminism be associated with action which effects change, assumes the image of woman and yet simultaneously disrupts any fixed image? The paradoxes of Kristeva’s system, from which feminism cannot seem to escape, are very much at issue.

Could it be that feminism has (mis)appropriated the Lacanian gaze, offering readings of traditional drama and film that are incapable of interrogating their Oedipal

22 de Lauretis, Alice Doesn’t, 180–81.
23 Ibid., 172.
basis, and the Oedipal basis of the symbolic? Could it be that feminism and psychoanalysis have been trapped by a constitutive gaze, by a paradox of the frame and the gaze which binds change in repetition and repression, in theories of trompe l'oeil and dompte regarde, in mise en abyme structures which ring hollow? Could it be that there is a radical aspect of theatre, what we might refer to as "theatricality" or "performance," as opposed to narrative drama, that is characterized by a disruptive gaze that never rests secure?

Against the en abyme paradoxes of cinema and deconstructive philosophy we may place the disruptive potential of the theatrical gaze, which is always ambivalent, always displacing one view and threatened by another in turn. The gaze disrupts not from the point of view of the paternal as representation, but from the point of view of a prior maternal gaze. The maternal gaze introduces the infant into the social order since it does not simply offer the infant a stable, cohesive image, but one that changes, that is not always as the infant would have it be, that reacts to the infant's gaze and reflects it differently. Like the mirror stage, the maternal gaze cannot logically be ascribed to a period prior to or outside of representation and the symbolic order. The idea of the contained breaking out of its container, of a deferred disruption always already contained within the mother-infant-dyad, yields a maternal disruptive gaze characteristic of theatre, a gaze capable not only of staging theory, but of shifting and displacing its sites of inquiry, its places of desire. Theatre provides a way of interrupting this self-contained and containing gaze from a point of view both within and outside it, much as the unconscious is the blind spot of our vision which in turn is constructed through and reflected by the gaze of the Other. Insofar as recent feminist performance art poses a challenge to traditional dramatic theatre by foregrounding a subversive force always already within it, and insofar as drama is itself always replaying the battle of presence and representation which occasions it, we must return theatre to its function as a disruptive and displacing gaze.

III

All of which returns us to the question with which we began: Is traditional theatre bound to certain representational models which prevent revisioning its construction of the subject? Since film theory has long ago addressed the limits of the avant-garde exploitation of feminism, a rehearsal of its debates may prove useful here. The problem of a feminist refiguring of representation has been nicely staged in the interaction between Constance Penley and Peter Gidal on feminism and the avant-garde as framed by Stephen Heath. First Penley: "If filmic practice, like the fetishistic ritual, is an inscription of the look on the body of the mother, we must now begin to consider the possibilities and consequences of the mother returning the look." Gidal replies: "The last words of your piece say it all. You search for the simple inversion, the mother looking back. I consider the possibilities of the not-mother, not-father (looking or not)." Heath joins Gidal: "To invert, the mother returning the look, is not radically to transform, is to return to the same economy (and cinema in the fiction film has always and exactly been concerned to consider the possibilities and consequences within the fetishistic ritual, including the constitutive threat of its en-
dangerment, the play of eye and look, vision and lack): the difference inverted is also the difference maintained."\textsuperscript{27}

The subtext in this game of two against one is a doubling of its content—the problem of woman. Since the cinematic look is read by these male theorists as constituted by a threat of the lack in woman (i.e., her castration), she had better not look back, nor, by implication, should Penley. Gidal's impulse is cinematic; he wants to dissolve, destroy images of women. (Is it not more avant-garde simply to delete women from films rather than to present her response to her reflection?) Penley's response is a looking back that looks forward. Her impulse is theatrical—she wants to reverse the look, which entails a rethinking of the limits of the cinematic apparatus, insofar as cinema posits the Absent One—the place of the camera—in the place of the Other as returned gaze in theatre.

Especially disturbing here is the argument that the cinematic look is constituted by a threat of its endangerment which is specifically associated with women's castration—a move which indicates how the Lacanian gaze has been reread through Freudian castration schemas to figure difference in film theory. The Freudian theory of castration explains how the human animal assumes its sexuality in a given social order: in a deferred reading of his (first?) sight of his mother's genitalia, the subject-as-little-boy interprets her "lack" in terms of the threat of the father's punitive, castrating "no" made good. In other words, he associates his mother's "actual" castration with his potential castration. That Lacan rereads this scenario symbolically does not, finally, save it for feminist theory. It harms in that it keeps this sexist construction alive and maintains an association of the look with a negative view of women and her sexuality. The theory is made no more palatable by the argument that, insofar as we are all lacking, woman is even more aware of her incomplete status.

In its stead we might consider the development of gender as identificatory and rooted in the problem of the gaze. The disruptive gaze would derive gender from an interruption of the male's primary feminism, developed in identification with the female as mothering person. Whereas the female subject resolves the mother's "no" by moving from being the mother's desire to imitating the mother's desire, the male in our society is not free to resolve the maternal "no" in this way. Given that the infant cannot always be what the mother wants, nor the mother what the infant wants, given that mothering involves helping the child come to trust in the return of a nurturing other who can leave and disappoint, the development of a way of coping with the mother's "no" is especially pressing for the male. Deprived of the shift toward mimetic desire left open to the female, the male's route can only be a rapid disidentification, resulting in ambivalence toward the nurturing object.

This stance has its precursors in feminist applications of object relations theory. Feminist psychoanalytic theory, in particular the work of Nancy Chodorow, interprets some male behavior as resulting from denied identification with the nurturing or

\textsuperscript{27} Constance Penley's comment and Peter Gidal's reaction are taken from Stephen Heath's essay, "Difference," *Screen* 19 (1978): 97; Heath's comment is from the same essay, 97–98.
mothering figure.\textsuperscript{28} Object relations theory has long suggested that the mothering function is not accomplished by simply drawing the child into an illusion of magical omnipotence but in helping the child accept separateness and disillusion through various “no’s.”\textsuperscript{29} The disruptive maternal gaze is a gaze which reflects back to the child something other than what it wants to see, but which alone makes identity possible. This in turn suggests an interesting reversal; the greater repression is not of the mother’s castration (what the child doesn’t want to see), but of the subject’s loss of face (what the mother doesn’t want to see or can’t see in the child). The reading which denies this argues that the father’s intervention (and not the mother’s “no”) alone ensures the masculinity that the subject desired all along. The repression of the mother’s crucial role in the socialization process is denied.

A more theatrical paradigm would enable women not only to reflect how they perceive they have been perceived, but to look back and forward, to see how their looking back is interpreted and disrupted by another gaze in a continuing theatre of interactive reflections. Lacanian theory has decisively and intentionally limited the potential of the mother’s “no” in a variety of ways, then, and cinematic theory’s use of the gaze has in turn been reduced to nothing short of male castration anxiety. However successful the application of a phallocentric theory for a reading of phallocentric films, such a model stymies the development of film theory and practice in new directions, resulting in such peculiar avant-garde stances as Gidal’s refusal to portray women in his films since she is always already the castrated fetishized object.

\textit{The difference inverted is not always the difference maintained}. To reframe Heath and Gidal via Penley is to point to her place and the mother’s place both within and outside the system, and to observe that neither can be so neatly circumscribed. Since neither Heath nor Gidal proves capable of considering the “possibilities and consequences” of the mother returning the look, except as a reversal of the terms of the male look, which in itself is castrating, they project that threat onto Penley. Asks Heath: “What then of the look for the woman, of woman subjects in seeing? The reply given by psychoanalysis is from the phallus. If the woman looks, the spectacle provokes, castration is in the air, the Medusa’s head is not far off; thus, she must not look, is absorbed herself on the side of the seen, seeing herself seeing herself, Lacan’s femininity.”\textsuperscript{30} If Heath would distance himself here, his framing of Penley implies that castration is indeed in the air—that male fears of a reversal of their own system are being projected onto a rethinking of representation which begins on the other side of the screen.

\textit{The difference inverted is not always the difference maintained}. The reply given by psychoanalysis is not always from the phallus. Penley asks about the possibilities of


returning the look because she realizes that no reversal of the look in the same terms is possible—except when the Woman as a construct of the male Imaginary is doing the looking, in which case she does not look from the point of view of women. Since Penley, following Laura Mulvey, is critiquing film practice as voyeuristic and fetishistic, her question asks for the development of new ways of looking—in essence the reconstruction of the woman’s gaze. The mother’s body is not simply a character in a film returning a look, but at once the material out of which a spectacle is constructed, the spectacle itself, and the means by which a spectator is constructed. To return the look in this context is to break up performance space, deconstruct the gaze, subvert the classical organization of showing and seeing, revision spectatorship, and restructure traditional canons, genres, and personal-political identities.

One argument that stalls this movement is summarized by Stephen Heath when he asks whether it is “possible for a woman to take place in a film without representing a male desire,” since “any image of a woman in a film, by the fact of its engagement in a process of representation . . . inevitably re-encloses women in a structure of cultural oppression that functions precisely by the currency of ‘images of woman.’”31 He quotes Cixous, who observed: “One is always in representation, and when a woman is asked to take place in this representation, she is, of course, asked to represent man’s desire.” Yet Heath ignores the key word “asked”; when women are not asked by men to take place in a representation created by and for men, but occupy and share the sites of production and consumption, a different economy obtains. Women take place, and refigure that taking place, in ways that challenge traditional forms of representation and gratify, as they displace, the spectatorial gaze.

Penley cites the films of Yvonne Rainer, Chantal Ackerman, and Marguerite Duras, which “run counter to the Oedipal structuring of Western narrative form and the imaginary and fetishistic imperatives of the cinematic apparatus,” effecting changes in “narrative organization, point of view and identification” which resituate “both the spectator and the narrator as ‘outside’ the scene . . . not caught up in or radically circumscribed by a masculine gaze or logic of desire.”32 Yet to what extent does this approach lead to a feminism that has so succumbed to its manipulation by an avant-garde as to be virtually indistinguishable from it, more concerned with revisioning representation than with exploring contemporary women’s experiences?

One of the more challenging directions of avant-garde film has been its interest in fragmenting its representational space in the name of a feminist critique. As Jacqueline Rose observes:

> the impetus is clear: the attempt to place woman somewhere else, outside the forms of representation through which she is endlessly constituted as image. The problem is that this sets up notions of drive, rhythmic pulsing, eroticisation of energy pre-representation, a space of “open viewing,” which then makes film process itself socially—and sexually—innocent. Film process is then conceived as something archaic, a lost or repressed content

31 Ibid., 96–97.

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("continent"), terms to which the feminine can so easily be assimilated, as it has been in classical forms of discourse on the feminine as outside language, rationality, and so on; arguments which are now being revived as part of the discussion of psychoanalysis and feminism, the search for a feminine discourse, specific, outside. The dangers are obvious. That such arguments overlook the archaic connotations of these notions of energy and rhythm for women, at the same time that they render innocent the objects and processes of representation which they introject onto the screen, seems again to be not by chance.33

In a critique of Lyotard’s exploration of a nontheatrical representational space, Rose pointedly remarks: “We have to ask what, if the object itself is removed (the body or victim), is or could be such a space of open viewing (fetishisation of the look itself or of its panic and confusion)? And what does this do for feminism? Other than strictly nothing, dropping all images of women; or else an archaizing of the feminine as panic and confusion, which is equally problematic, simply a re-introjection as feminine—the pre-mirror girl—of the visual disturbance against which the image of woman classically acts as a guarantee.”34 It would seem that theatre, via performance, is facing many of the same problems.

IV

Is it a coincidence that definitions of feminism, theatre, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and deconstruction are becoming practically indistinguishable? All define themselves as displacing activities designed to resist the suturing coherence of any fixed place. Julia Kristeva argues that “the very dichotomy man/woman as an opposition between two rival entities may be understood as belonging to metaphysics”35 and offers instead a pulsion between the semiotic (pre-oedipal, prelinguistic energy and desire) and the symbolic (made possible by the semiotic which in turn is repressed for its establishment). To work from the semiotic is to adopt “a negative function; reject everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning, in the existing state of society.” It is to work “on the side of the explosion of social codes, with revolutionary movements.”36 Like Kristeva, Shoshana Felman defines femininity as a “real otherness . . . [which] is uncanny in that it is not the opposite of masculinity but that which subverts the very opposition of masculinity and femininity.”37 Avant-garde feminism’s answer, then, is that woman, like theatre, does not take (a) place (Kristeva), but rather, revisions positionality itself.38 In what sense does a feminism so defined differ from deconstruction? Or from theatre, which manages both to acknowledge the

38 See Kristeva’s “Modern Theater Does Not Take (a) Place,” as well as her interview with Gauthier, noted above, where she identifies “the moment of rupture and negativity which conditions and underlies the novelty of any praxis ‘feminine,’” and adds: “No ‘I’ is there to assume this ‘femininity,’ but it is no less operative, rejecting all that is finite and assuring in (sexual) pleasure the life of the concept” (167).
symbolic and disrupt it from within, to acknowledge and subvert positionality on a continuous basis?

Josette Féral, one of the few theoreticians to explore feminist deconstructive theatre, assumes both are possible—but only when theatre is not theatre *per se*. For Féral, theatre is on the side of inscription in the symbolic, whereas performance is on the side of deconstruction in the semiotic (thus Féral’s “theatre” corresponds to Elam’s “drama,” and her “performance” corresponds to Elam’s “theatre”). Féral finds theatre and performance “mutually exclusive” “when it comes to the problem of the subject,” since “in contrast to performance, theatre cannot keep from setting up, stating, constructing points of view” and depends on a unified subject which performance deconstructs into drives and energies, since theatre assumes and depends on the narrativity and models of representation which performance rejects in favor of discontinuity and spillage. If performance highlights the “realities of the imaginary,” “origins within the subject and allows his flow of desire to speak,” the theatrical “inscribes the subject in the law and in theatrical codes, which is to say, in the symbolic.”

Yet finally Féral is describing a dialectic essential to theatre, not apart from it, which she herself acknowledges by arguing that “theatricality arises from the play between these two realities,” and by describing performance as that within theatre which deconstructs it. Féral observes that “in its stripped-down workings, its exploration of the body, and its joining of time and space, performance gives us a kind of theatricality in slow motion, the kind we find at work in today’s theatre. Performance explores the under-side of that theatre.”

The relationship between performance art and traditional theatre is less a polar opposition than a continuum. We seek in theatre that moment when our looking is no longer a looking (as in film), but a being seen, a return of the look by the mirror image which denies the process. Whereas traditional drama achieves this by setting into motion a series of displacing gazes which succeeds when it disrupts our own gaze without showing us how, performance art puts theatrical construction itself onstage. In *Swan Lake, Minnesota* a stripper performs to a fascinated crowd of men by throwing down cardboard cutouts of her body in various states of undress; the last cutout is a mirror which reflects their gaze. In the performance piece *Waiting*, the author holds up sheets upon which are projected images of waitresses, and then inserts her body and voice in filmed images and narratives of restaurant life, simultaneously positioning herself as author, actor, screen, and the source of their mutual confusion and deconstruction.

Like much theatre theory and practice, Féral’s thesis is itself symptomatic of the battle within theatre to differentiate presence from representation, reminding us that

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41 Féral, “Performance and Theatricality,” 177–78.
42 Ibid., 178.
43 Ibid., 178.
44 Ibid., 176.
insofar as theatre stages presence it enacts the agon between being and representation implied in the concept of enactment, and so gives birth to itself by continually reposing that relationship. Feral highlights this fact by using "theatricality" to designate a class which encompasses both theatricality and performance, and by this doubling rightly tags theatre as a Strange or Tangled Loop. Criticized for assuming that performance reaches a presence outside of representation, she in fact merely observes that "performance seems to be attempting to reveal and to stage something that took place before the representation of the subject even if it does so by using an already constituted subject." This is not, finally, at odds with, but rather an opposing approach to, Derrida's argument that: "Presence, in order to be presence and self-presence, has always already begun to represent itself, has always already been penetrated." Thus the paradox of avant-garde theatre: in seeking to stage a moment outside of representation one cannot evade the play of gazes that constitutes representation.

Following Derrida, Herb Blau reminds us that theatre reveals "no first time, no origin, but only recurrence and reproduction." Traditional mime has long exposed theatre as a machine of Difference which enacts the coding and decoding of the body, the place and displacement of presence, the construction and deconstruction of the gaze, the carving up and branding of presence (thus the ease with which tattoo art and various forms of bodily mutilation make their way into performance art). Theatre has always suggested a funhouse of mirrors we never escape, a precession of simulacra which remind us we can never reach a body outside of representation. Observes Baudrillard, "simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal." Theatre doesn't hold the mirror up to nature, but is the quintessential simulation of simulations, a hyperreality.

Hélène Cixous offers, inadvertently, one of the best definitions of theatre: "men and women are caught up in a network of millenial cultural determinations of a complexity that is practically unanalyzable: we can no more talk about 'women' than about 'man' without getting caught up in an ideological theatre where the multiplication of representations, images, reflections, myths, identifications constantly transforms, deforms, alters each person's imaginary order and in advance, renders all conceptualization null and void." Peggy Kamuf's "a woman writing like a woman writing like a woman" is quintessentially theatrical, feminist, and deconstructive at once.

The performative side of theatre emerges here as a process of staging the disturbance and reversal of the gaze. Theatre is by definition not amenable to narratives

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imported to contain its bent toward subversion. The multiple stages and plots of Renaissance and postmodern theatre alike better convey its function as a philosophical model, insofar as simultaneity of space and action is best suited to its ability to interrupt and stage itself. Observes Mária Minich Brewer: “Theatre allows a philosophical discourse to shift from thought as seeing and originating in the subject alone, to the many decentered processes of framing and staging that representation requires but dissimulates.”

Theatre provides a theoretical model for postmodernism insofar as it is always setting into play the subversion of its insights.

A theatrical model is thus ideally suited to the project of decentering and subverting fields of representation that face postmodern theory. This explains why theatre is the source not only of much of the vocabulary of postmodern theory (framing, staging, mise en scène, rehearsal and repetition, reenactment), but also of many of its key strategies. A refusal of the observer’s stable position, a fascination with re-presenting presence, an ability to stage its own staging, to rethink, reframe, switch identifications, undo frames, see freshly, and yet at the same time see how one’s look is always already purloined—these are the benefits of theatre for theory.

Why is it that theatre alone has always staged identity as unstable, exposing gender and class as a masquerade? Why is it that theatre—so associated with self-reflexivity as to become a means of describing it—manages to avoid the en abyme structure, evade its own closure, and refuse its own frames? Could it be that, insofar as theatre cannot rest in the abyme, but stages the displacing gaze, the bursting of the container by its contents, theatre offers a way of dislodging the current critical standstill whereby we must use language to describe a place outside it?

The question of whether theatre can stage through representation a presence prior to it must be answered through the gaze, which is no less than a discovery of the splitting of subjectivity in its procuring. The gaze is a discovery that one is seen—that one’s look is always already purloined by the Other. “It is not true that, when I am under the gaze, when I solicit a gaze, when I obtain it, I do not see it as a gaze. . . . Painters, above all, have grasped this gaze in the mask . . . . The gaze I encounter . . . is not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other” writes Lacan.

Theatre’s disrupting gaze reflects any look as already taken; it stages presence as already represented, and trapped by another’s look.

Like the shield held up to view Medusa, theatre offers a perspective glass by means of which we see the object of our gaze as always already reflected. Whether in Sophocles’ Oedipus or Duras’s India Song, whether through the displacing gaze of the Medusoid Sphinx or the displaced or out of synch voices of staged characters in avant-garde feminist drama, theatre is always staging the desire to own the purloined place of one’s look. Theatre tells the story of a rape which has always already occurred, thereby involving us in a series of gazes which splits and displaces our own. Whereas film is obsessed with seeing one’s look, as in Hitchcock films which repeatedly distend

and peer within the space of their own voyeurism, theatre is fascinated by the return of one's look as a displacing gaze that redefines as it undermines identity. Theatre calls the spectatorial gaze into play by exhibiting a purloined gaze, a gaze that announces it has always been presented to our eyes; is designed only to be taken up by them. The spectatorial gaze takes the bait and stakes its claim to a resting place in the field of vision which beckons it—only to have its gaze fractured, its look stared down by a series of gazes which challenge the place of its look and expose it as in turn defined by the other. The larvatus prodeo, or mask which points to itself, is the lure of theatre, a gaze which admits it belongs to the Other, only to become the Other of the spectator in turn.

If cinema appeals to the desire to see oneself seeing, theatre appeals to the desire to expose and displace the displaced gaze—that is, to entangle the other's gaze with one's always already purloined image, to reveal the play of one's look as inevitably, incessantly in motion—displaced and displacing in turn. The striptease is quintessential theatre, its stage the battle of the place of one's look. Will the stripper maintain the place of his look as always already purloined, so as to preserve the female spectator's look, or will he look back in a way that displaces her gaze? Theatre's masks announce that the "I" is always already another; its characters assure us of their displacement, announcing, "I am already taken," as in "this seat is taken," or as in, "That was no lady, that was my wife (mother)." Theatre is the place where a male ruling class has been able to play at being the excluded other, to reveal the sense that "I" is an other. If theatre has offered men a chance to identify with the place of a mother's look, to imitate the mother's desire, and to control the woman's looking back, theatre also offers the opportunity to reframe that moment from a point of view alien to it.

The paradox of the frame and the gaze, the problem of the constitutive gaze in relationship to key problems of change, needs to be worked out more fully both within the discourses of feminism, psychoanalysis, and theatre theory, and in the arguments with which they are involved. Feminism faces this problem in the Kristevan paradox of the semiotic and the symbolic; psychoanalysis faces this problem in the relationship of the Imaginary and the Symbolic; but theatre alone is capable of staging the paradox of the frame in a way that subverts it. Unlike feminism and psychoanalysis, theatre has no allegiance but to ambivalence, to a compulsion to subvert its own gaze, to split itself through a reflected image.

Theatre comfortably allies with feminism against psychoanalysis, with psychoanalysis against cinema, and with cinema against itself, without ever finding a resting point except as provisional and always already undermined. Whereas feminism and psychoanalysis seek to reflect the subject from a place where it can never see itself, be it gender, ideology, or the unconscious, theatre provides the tools—the stages, the mirrors, or reflecting gazes—through which perspectives are fragmented, shattered, and set into play against one another. A methodology necessarily tied to no master, theatre is quintessentially deconstructive, and poses a methodological challenge to feminism and psychoanalysis to escape its terms, its goals, its identity.

We close here with an open question, one posed at the end of Lacan's seminar, "The Split Between the Eye and the Gaze." "To what extent," asks X. Audouard,
"is it necessary, in analysis, to let the subject know that one is looking at him, that
is to say, that one is situated as the person who is observing in the subject the process
of looking at oneself?"53 Freud prided himself on his particular positioning in the
analytic setting—"seeing . . . but not seen myself."54 But of course Freud was fooling
himself here, and it this delusion that Lacan would seem to have discovered. Yet
Lacan answers defensively, belittling Audouard and almost purposefully misunder-
standing him: "We do not say to the patient, at every end and turn, 'Now now! What
a face you're making!,' or, 'The top button of your waistcoat is undone.' It is not,
after all, for nothing that analysis is not carried out face to face."55 Yet it is in the
gaze that psychoanalysis, feminism, and theatre meet and revision one another. The
mere presence of the analyst sets up the gaze; the patient knows she is being heard
and watched, and so hears and watches herself differently; the second mirror is in
play, mirroring the first, displacing and placing body, voice, and gaze.

The associations I have drawn here suggest that theatre opens up a constructive
path for psychoanalytic theory and feminist theory to follow—if they are willing to
fully accept the implications of their own displacing gazes. We need, that is, to reread
Lacan against himself, to accept how feminism’s gaze has been purloined, to inter-
rogate the political implications of psychoanalysis. Theatrical reading is ambivalent
reading, dedicated not to varying the look (which simply amounts to critical pluralism)
but to disrupting it, (up)staging theories through one another. It requires that psy-
choanalysis read cinema and theatre read psychoanalysis, and — following the motto
each would prescribe for the subject—that none of these disciplines ever rests secure
in itself.

The question is not, therefore, whether a feminist or a deconstructive theatre is
possible, but how separate, and how theatrical, these strategies really are. Can
deconstruction stand outside of theatre as a technique to be used upon it, or is it
always already within it? To theatricalize one must deconstruct, insert a difference
in a term which splits it, mimics it, then displaces or usurps it. "A woman writing
like a woman writing like a woman" is never the same woman. If neither feminism
nor psychoanalysis can frame theatre, but only mine or mime it, the reason may be
because their techniques have long been trapped inside it. The cost of exit is denial
or repression—or perhaps another frame-up.

Can the contents explode the container? Shrew puns on the paradox of the enclosed
enclosing and so nullifying its frame. Grumio jests that "the oats have eaten the
horses" (III. ii. 201–3), and Tranio plots so that "A child shall get a sire" (III. i. 413).
But can we reframe The Taming of the Shrew, and can we reframe its counterpart,
Oedipus? The work has already begun. Listen—or rather, listen again: "Long after-
ward, Oedipus, old and blinded, walked the roads. He smelled a familiar smell. It
was the Sphinx. Oedipus said, 'I want to ask one question. Why didn't I recognize

53 X. Audouard, "Questions and Answers," following Lacan’s "The Split Between the Eye and
the Gaze," in Four Fundamental Concepts, 77.
my mother?' 'You gave the wrong answer,' said the Sphinx. 'But that was what made everything possible,' said Oedipus. 'No,' she said. 'When I asked, What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening, you answered, Man. You didn’t say anything about woman.' 'When you say Man,' said Oedipus, 'you include women too. Everyone knows that.' She said, 'That's what you think.' 56