

‘[D]ifferent even from our “own” differences’: Racial Signification and the Legacy of Lacanian Sexuation

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Abstract

Jacques Lacan concluded his 20th seminar in 1973, seven years after the publication of *Écrits* and the notorious Johns Hopkins conference that would become *The Structuralist Controversy*. Yet, in our contemporary moment, American academics still struggle to contend with the implications of what Lacan brought to the United States in 1966 and spoke to crowds of Parisian students in 1973. Strains of academic philosophy, such as those of Rebecca Tuvel, present a crude parity between race and gender that Lacanian theory contradicts. Theorists like Jane Gallop, Joan Copjec, Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, and Antonio Viegó have done crucial work in using Lacan to address questions of race and gender. Lacan argues that sex is determined by one’s relation to *jouissance* and the Symbolic Order rather than biology or social construction. Furthermore, I will continue in the tradition of Seshadri-Crooks and Viegó to distinguish between the psychic structures of sex and race. I will also dispute the claims of Tuvel’s ‘In Defense of Transracialism’ (2017) from a Lacanian perspective and in doing so demonstrate the usefulness of Lacan in disciplines such as gender studies and critical race theory.

Keywords: *Lacan, psychoanalysis, gender studies, feminism, critical race theory*

Identity need not be authorized by law or society at large. There is no judicial or social formation that could produce categories to accommodate the capaciousness of the subject. Despite this, law and society perpetuate a fantasy of identitarian wholeness. Philosophers like Rebecca Tuvel, in her essay ‘In Defense of Transracialism’ (2017), seem content to work within the confines of that fantasy. Psychoanalysis argues otherwise. As Juliet Mitchell writes in *Woman’s Estate* (1971), ‘[Freud] saw psychoanalysis as revolutionary, shocking, subversive – a plague that would disrupt society.’¹ Lacanian psychoanalysis takes up these revolutionary, shocking, and subversive ideas and develops them in opposition to the position Tuvel takes up. Tuvel is satisfied treating race and gender with an uncritical similarity based on their status as ‘social constructs’. Lacanian psychoanalysis is one way to put the lie to the premise of their fundamental likeness. Furthermore, Tuvel authorizes the law and society at large to adjudicate the legitimacy of identity.² Lacan and contemporary Lacanian theorists have done tremendous work to disentangle identity and power.

¹ Juliet Mitchell, *Woman’s Estate* (London: Verso, 2015), 167.

² Lee Edelman, *No Future* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 16. I position Lacan against Tuvel’s liberal vision of society following Edelman’s argument. Edelman writes: ‘The right once again knows [...] that the true oppositional politics implicit in the practice of queer sexualities lies not in the liberal discourse and patient negotiation of tolerances and rights, important as these undoubtedly are to all of us still denied them, but in the capacity of queer sexualities to figure the radical dissolution of the

Before addressing identity and its relation to society and power, I must account for how Lacanian theory opposes arguments that posit an insufficiently proven parity between race and gender. Lacan is not the only path to challenge this parity between race and gender in philosophy and cultural studies, but Lacanian theory remains valuable in combatting such parallelism. Lacan positions sex³ in relation to the psychic formations that make his brand of psychoanalytic writing distinct. Suzanne Barnard offers lucid accounts of Lacan’s theories of sexuation in *Reading Seminar XX* (2002):

Lacan’s account of sexuation cannot be grasped via dominant academic discourses of sex and gender. In fact, the Lacanian real can be understood precisely as the traumatic cause on account of which any attempt to reduce sexual difference to biology, phenomenology, or cultural construction is doomed to fail.⁴

Barnard goes on, explaining that Lacan argues for understanding sex ‘not in terms of chromosomes, body parts, choice of sexual partner, or varieties of sexual practice but in terms of one’s position vis-à-vis the Other and the kind of *jouissance* one is able to obtain.’⁵ Complementing Barnard, I offer brief accounts of the Lacanian concepts of *jouissance*, the Other, and the Real. *Jouissance* is most clearly explained in *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1986). Lacan positions *jouissance* in opposition to Freud’s pleasure principle, writing that ‘[the pleasure principle] keeps us a long way from our *jouissance*.’⁶ Just a few sentences before, Lacan accounts for *jouissance* even more succinctly: ‘if we continue to follow Freud in a text such as *Civilization and Its Discontents*, we cannot avoid the formula that *jouissance* is evil. Freud leads us by the hand to this point: it is suffering’.⁷ *Jouissance* is always transgressive, destructive, and threatens the constitution of society and the subject. It is ‘painful pleasure’ that comes as ‘the result of transgressing the pleasure principle’.⁸ Lacan’s Other is the ‘radical alterity [equated] with language and the law, and hence the big Other is inscribed in the order of the symbolic.’⁹ The Other is intrinsically connected to the Symbolic Order. The Real is addressed by Lacan in *Seminar II* (1978). According to Lacan, ‘[t]here is no absence in the real.’¹⁰ The Real is distinct from the reality one experiences. Likewise, ‘the real [...] is what resists symbolisation absolutely.’¹¹ *Jouissance* and the Real¹²

contract, in every sense social and Symbolic, on which the future as putative assurance against the *jouissance* of the Real depends.’

³ Suzanne Barnard, ‘Introduction’, in *Reading Seminar XX*, ed. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 10. ‘The terms *sex* and *gender* are rarely used in Lacanian parlance. When they are referenced, *sex* is usually understood as an imaginary-symbolic construct deployed in certain contexts to mark the subject’s ‘civil status’ as a sexed subject, or else to refer to concrete sexual acts; *gender* is typically understood as a function of identification with idealized norms regarding sex.’

⁴ Barnard, 4.

⁵ Barnard, 5.

⁶ Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: Book VII 1959-1960*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), 185.

⁷ Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 184.

⁸ Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 2007), 91-92.

⁹ Evans, 133.

¹⁰ Jacques Lacan, *The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis: Book II 1954-1955*, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: Norton, 1988), 313.

¹¹ Jacques Lacan, *Freud’s Papers on Technique: Book I 1953-1954*, trans. John Forrester (New York: Norton, 1988), 66.

¹² For more on the Real, see Evans, 159.

share the quality of making normal societal and social functioning more difficult as they mark the Other as incomplete.

With these explanations foremost in mind, exploration of Lacan's account of sexualization can begin in earnest. What is at stake in Lacan is nothing less than accepting the radical alterity within the psychic formulations of sex, and recognizing that he understands these to be psychic formulations rather than definitive (biological or social) categories. Sex, in Lacan's view, is ultimately opposed to any kind of organizing principle based on reason, even though he seems to endorse a binarism between feminine and masculine *jouissance*. Despite potential binarism, Lacan's formulation of sexualization gives an account of sex (irreducible to the sex/gender system) that is distinct from race, ethnicity, and nationality. Various interlocutors, such as Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks and Antonio Viegó, have offered Lacanian interventions into racial subjectivity and social positioning. Others, such as Hortense Spillers, take a more broadly psychoanalytic approach to race. These theorists all agree that race is never reducible to a social function that is identical to the social function of gender. It is that reductive reading of race and gender, and the relation between them, that produces harmful parallels between transgender identity and so-called 'transracialism'. Lacan offers a powerful antidote to this parallelism.

To characterize my valuation of Lacanian theory in relation to race and gender, I will quote Seshadri-Crooks:

I suggest that race should be understood in its particularity as something that is neither totally like sexual difference, which is indeterminate and exceeds language, nor purely symbolical or cultural like class or ethnicity. Race resembles class in that it is of purely cultural and historical origin, but it is also like sex in that it produces extra-discursive effects.¹³

Seshadri-Crooks and Viegó draw heavily on Joan Copjec's *Read My Desire* (1994), particularly the chapter 'Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason'. Part of what Copjec argues in that essay is a certain impossibility of sex. Even the most progressive formulation of sex/gender is constantly contested and revised because neither sex nor gender, whether biological or constructed, can ever fully signify what a given subject embodies. These categories cannot be absolute. In Copjec's words, 'Sex is the stumbling block of sense.'¹⁴ At the very essence of sexual difference is a falsehood, that one could be everything 'man' and 'woman' entail all at once. As Medhavi Menon remarks in *Indifference to Difference* (2015), 'we are all different even from our "own" differences.'¹⁵ In Copjec's view, these categories of difference are not determinate, but rather recognitions of failure. 'Woman' and 'man' cannot give any insight into any sort of fundamental nature about a given subject. These categories are not even necessarily knowledge as such. Copjec writes, '*male and female, like being, are not predicates, which means that rather than increasing our knowledge of the subject, they qualify the mode of the failure of our knowledge.*'¹⁶ Seshadri-Crooks's use of Copjec, here, is to make clear another difference: not between woman and man or female and male, but

¹³ Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, *Desiring Whiteness* (London: Routledge, 2000), 4. Hereafter cited as *DW*, with page references.

¹⁴ Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire* (London: Verso, 2015), 204.

¹⁵ Medhavi Menon, *Indifference to Difference: On Queer Universalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 125.

¹⁶ Copjec, 212.

rather between race and sex/gender. In Seshadri-Crooks’s view, the failure of knowledge that sex/gender represent is particular. Race is a different structure, a different construction, and a different failure.

But before getting to the Lacanian argument to distinguish race and sex/gender, there is more to say about Lacanian sexuation in relation to contemporary gender studies. Barnard offers a lucid account of sex in Lacan:

Sexual difference must be understood in terms of a loss *inherent* in the structure of the subject rather than something that is imposed on the subject from the outside. It is, then, the nature of the losses constituting subjectivity as such that precludes one ever wholly becoming one’s sex, ever achieving one’s gender, or ever accomplishing one’s sexuality. Hence, sexual difference can be understood to stand for that which forever eludes the grasp of normative symbolization. The obsessive individual and cultural reiterations of the “surface” of sexuality – the seeming reality of the sexual relationship, as it is divided into binaries such as male and female, masculine and feminine, hetero- and homosexuality, and so on – only cover over this fundamental dehiscence of the sexual subject.¹⁷

Important here is the idea that ‘sexual difference [...] forever eludes the grasp of normative situation’ and the assertion of a ‘fundamental dehiscence of the sexual subject’. Following Lacan, the sex/gender distinction is a false one, and rather than sex/gender as social constructs, they are products of a fantasy of a wholeness that does not exist. Declaring one’s gender and claiming the authority of biology or cultural signification is predicated on that fantasy. One is never entirely one’s gender identity but is (socially or physically) compelled to aspire toward it. In the case of transgender identity – which calls into question this notion of authority and seemingly supports the Lacanian perspective of removing aspects of sexual difference from signification – one encounters the problem of upholding society’s status-quo that requires the civic language of ‘biological sex’ for legal legitimacy. The political necessity of engaging in that civic discourse causes problems in theorizing trans (or trans*¹⁸) identity and curtails trans epistemology. The same papering over of sex/gender occurs in what Talia Mae Bettcher calls ‘the “wrong-body” model’,¹⁹ rather than allowing for a possibility that the expression of transgender identity is an insurgent power that refuses the logic of any binaries of sex or gender and refuses certain social and psychic compulsions. However, to explain how a Lacanian position refuses binaries of sex or gender, one must account for the ostensible binarism of the masculine and feminine position in sexuation.

One might be sceptical of the potential for plurality in Lacan’s formulation of sex, which includes the ostensible binary of masculine and feminine *jouissance*. Marie-Hélène Brousse offers a compelling counterpoint to any scepticism in her dialogue with Jack Halberstam, ‘Queering Psychoanalysis’ (2016):

I think Lacan is generally misunderstood on this point because he gets out of the binary opposition which, despite their efforts, seemingly continues to organise sexuality in much gender studies and feminist theory. From the point of view of psychoanalysis, gender has

¹⁷ Barnard, 11.

¹⁸ Marie-Hélène Brousse and Jack Halberstam, ‘Queering Psychoanalysis’, *The Lacanian Review* 2 (2016): 25. Halberstam writes: ‘For me, the term “trans*” is a much better and more open signifier because it does not presume in advance what constitutes the transitivity claimed by the body. It also uses the diacritical mark, *, to hold open the space created by the challenge to binary formations. I use this term about myself.’

¹⁹ Talia Mae Bettcher, ‘Trapped in the Wrong Theory: Rethinking Trans Oppression and Resistance’, *Signs* 39.2 (2014): 383.

nothing to do with sexual jouissance. Fucking has nothing to do with identity. Jouissance does not require, does not care about, and may even be opposed to a 'choice of gender', be it assigned, as in traditional society, by domination, or, in our own society, by an individual choice (by a mark or by a will). But, in both cases, desire and pleasure are not to be taken for granted! And each – L, G, B, T, and others – manages to invent his, her, or [their] own way.²⁰

Brousse adopts as uncritical a position toward Lacan as one could imagine, but her position seems far fairer than some of the criticisms Halberstam offers in response. However, in *The Daughter's Seduction* (1982), Jane Gallop offers a yet-unsurpassed engagement with Lacan while maintaining a rigorous commitment to feminism. Despite the untimeliness of Gallop's meditations, precious little of Lacan's work had appeared in English by 1982, 'Encore *Encore*' makes a compelling case for the value of Lacanian sexuation despite the patriarchal logic sexuation has been accused of perpetuating. At the end of the chapter, Gallop concludes:²¹

Lacan is close to Freud's 'making use', but he pushes a little harder. 'One must make use. But really use them up, really wear these old words, wear them threadbare, use them until they're thoroughly hackneyed' [...]. What a way of ruining exchange value by use!

Perhaps this explains the annoying and embarrassing insistence of 'phallus' and 'castration' in Lacan. Maybe he's using them up, running the risk of essence, running dangerously close to patriarchal positions, as to wear 'phallus' and 'castration' out, until they're thoroughly hackneyed.²²

Gallop voices her trepidation but seems to give the text a fair treatment nonetheless. But it is Lacan himself who makes the best case for the value of his work, self-evident in his *Seminar XX* (1975). Brousse's point about binarism and Gallop's contention about the 'annoying' and 'embarrassing' diction of Lacan are not incompatible. Lacan himself calls the 'old words' he uses 'stupid'. But he seems intent on problematizing the binaries of sex and calling into question what is taken for granted about how sex is made legible on the body. Defining sex vis-à-vis psychic structure, rather than biology, upends the visual and binary logic of sex and gender. Lacan seeks to wrest from the law the authority to dictate sex based on how a body is visually perceived. Following from Lacan, in contrast to 'the "wrong-body" model' of transgender identity, it is fair to say that Lacanian 'sex' has nothing to do with the body at all. There should be no assumption that one's psychic structure will be reflected by one's body. A person assigned male at birth is not promised a life of more psychological distress simply based on the supposed incongruence between being assigned male at birth and harbouring a 'feminine structure' according to Lacanian sexuation.²³ It is true that Western society

²⁰ Brousse, 29.

²¹ Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge: Book XX, Encore 1972-1973*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1999), 60. Gallop's quotation of Lacan's *Seminar XX* predates its publication in English. Bruce Fink offers an arguably superior translation of the same section, 'One must use things like that, old words, as stupid as anything, but really use them, work them to the bone.'

²² Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 55.

²³ Paul Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, trans. Bruce Benderson (New York: Feminist Press, 2013), 397: 'I don't recognize myself. Not when I'm on T, or when I'm not on T. I'm neither more nor less myself. Contrary to the Lacanian theory of the mirror state [*sic*], according to which the child's subjectivity is formed when it recognizes itself for the first time in its specular image, political subjectivity emerges precisely when the subject does not recognize itself in

promises a more difficult life for those with nonnormative gender identities. But a different world, perhaps, would mean something different for the psyche and the body.²⁴ The body is irrelevant to one’s sex.

Though I have made a case using Lacan to suggest a fundamental incongruence between one’s psyche and one’s body, Lacan posits a parallel lack of complementarity between the sexes themselves or between any two sexual partners. Lacan argues in *Seminar XX* that ‘there’s no such thing as a sexual relationship’.²⁵ Lacan’s oft-quoted maxim has a multitude of valences.²⁶ Lacan assumes no fundamental reason why any couple should be paired and challenges the possibility of any sort of natural harmony. The sexual relationship is always fantasmatic,²⁷ rather than two subjects having an unmediated encounter. It is precisely this dimension of fantasy that characterizes the phallic *jouissance* of Lacanian sexuation. So, deriving any pleasure from the act of copulation relates to how subjects get their various forms of *jouissance* rather than anything having to do with their partners. But beyond the argument about the act of sex, it is also an argument about sex itself. The sexes that exist have no necessary relation to one another, antagonistic or harmonious. There is no reason why, for example, men and women, coupled as they are by compulsive heterosexuality, should be partners. The impossibility of the sexual relation is consistent, no matter the subject position of the partners involved.

One of the most important aspects of Lacan’s claim that there is no sexual relation is the notion of the not-whole. Lacan contends that any configuration of sexual relationship cannot produce the wholeness that it fantasmatically promises, nor can it ever offer the ‘full’ *jouissance* forever withheld to the speaking being as the ‘Other *jouissance*’. Lacan uses women (in terms of psychic structure, rather than referring to a biologically sexed or socially gendered subject) to explicate this point:

The fact remains that if she is excluded by the nature of things, it is precisely in the following respect: being not-whole, she has a supplementary *jouissance* compared to what the phallic function designates by way of *jouissance*. You will notice that I said ‘supplementary.’ If I had said ‘complementary’ what a mess we’d be in! We would fall back into the whole.²⁸

Here, Lacan seems to diagnose the symptom of a heteropatriarchal culture that excludes women ‘by the nature of things’. This diagnosis would indicate, as Gallop argues, that

its representation. It is fundamental not to recognize oneself. Derecognition, disidentification is a condition for the emergence of the political as the possibility of transforming reality.’

²⁴ Patricia Gherovici, *Transgender Psychoanalysis: A Lacanian Perspective on Sexual Difference* (London: Routledge, 2017), 21: ‘the pathologization of non-normative expressions of gender and sexuality persists as a form of discrimination and violence. Since gender incongruence is not in itself a pathology, sex realignment should not be considered a cure or a treatment.’

²⁵ Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, 12.

²⁶ Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, 34. ‘What is written is not to be understood. That is why you are not obliged to understand my writings. If you don’t understand them, so much the better – that will give you the opportunity to explain them.’

²⁷ Alan Sheridan translates Lacan using ‘phantasy’ and ‘phantasmatic’, following James Strachey’s *Standard Edition* translation of Freud. However, both Dennis Porter and Bruce Fink have departed from that translation, rendering Lacan’s use of the French *fantasme* as ‘fantasy’, although Fink retains the usage of ‘phantasmatic’. My usage of ‘fantasy’ and ‘phantasmatic’ is to clarify the point that I am referring to ‘fantasy’ in the particular Lacanian variation, accounting for his expansions on the Freudian notion of ‘phantasy’ from 1957 on, as well as for consistency with the Porter and Fink translations.

²⁸ Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, 73.

Lacan is more self-aware of his relationship to patriarchal culture than his critics would like to admit. Lacan's disposition here provides connective tissue for an encounter between psychoanalysis and feminism, between sexualization and sex/gender. In addition, it is from the basis of the 'Other *jouissance*', or the supplementary *jouissance*, that Lacan comes to posit the idea of *lalangue*.²⁹ *Lalangue* is the dimension of discourse that Spillers and Viego argue is the vehicle for racial becoming and signification. But it is Seshadri-Crooks who lays the foundation for thinking about race and psychoanalysis.

As I quoted earlier, Seshadri-Crooks echoes Copjec's claim that sexual difference is a particular failure of knowledge. That particularity distinguishes sex and gender from race such that one should not assume they are identical constructs, or even similar ones. But Lacan's intervention into gender is, in part, about race – even if Lacan may not have realized it himself. Another Lacanian explicator, Bruce Fink, notes this crucial connection in his chapter, 'Knowledge and *Jouissance*', from *Reading Seminar XX*. The crucial element of difference between the masculine side and the feminine side of Lacanian sexualization is the relationship of each psychic structure to a particular kind of *jouissance*. The so-called masculine subject, fully castrated and interpellated into the symbolic order, has access only to phallic *jouissance*. On this, Fink writes:

I would like to suggest that we try to understand 'phallic' as 'fallible,' to hear the fallibility in the phallus. Phallic *jouissance* is the *jouissance* that fails us, that disappoints us. It is susceptible to failure, and it fundamentally misses our partner. Why? Because it reduces our partner, as Other, to what Lacan refers to as object *a*, that partial object that serves as the cause of desire: our partner's voice or gaze that turns us on, or that body part we enjoy in our partner.³⁰

But on the feminine side of sexualization, that psychic structure has access to another sort of *jouissance*. Phallic *jouissance* is still accessible to the so-called feminine subject, but the feminine subject also has access to an 'Other *jouissance*' (which Lacan refers to, above, as supplementary). Fink suggests that the Other *jouissance* is the *jouissance* a given subject believes they are entitled to. Fink also poses this question in relation to prejudice:

Do we really see other people around us who seem to enjoy more than we do? Perhaps occasionally. The argument often has been made that racism, sexism, homophobia, and religious intolerance are based on the *belief* that some other group enjoys more than another group does, whatever that group may be. Yet that belief usually is based on next to nothing: racists have rarely, if ever, seen any such thing in the peoples they discriminate against, but that does not stop them from believing it.³¹

In this case, it is that fantasy of the Other *jouissance* that is a constitutive part of racism and perhaps even race itself. It is not necessarily that the Other *jouissance* is fantasmatic (although Fink certainly leaves that possibility open³²), but that the belief of other

²⁹ Evans, 97. 'Lacan coins the term *lalangue* (from the definite article *la* and the noun *langue*) to refer to these non-communicative aspects of language which, by playing on ambiguity and homophony, give rise to a kind of *jouissance* [...]. *Lalangue* is like the primary chaotic substrate of polysemy out of which language is constructed'.

³⁰ Bruce Fink, 'Knowledge and *Jouissance*', in *Reading Seminar XX*, ed. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 37.

³¹ Fink, 34.

³² Fink, 43. 'Has Lacan introduced all kinds of fantasies of his own in this theorization of *jouissance*? The same old fantasies?'

groups having privileged access to this Other *jouissance* that is the fantasy. This fantasy subtends certain strains of discrimination and prejudice.

This notion of discrimination does suggest an association between race, gender, and sexuality since it is on the condition of any of these that one could be discriminated against or imagined as a fantasmatic site of the Other *jouissance*. But these are race, gender, and sexuality as *judicial categories*. The particularity of sex as a psychic structure makes parallelism impossible. To further support that claim, Seshadri-Crooks and Viego use Lacan to theorize race as strikingly distinct from sex/gender. One basic point that subtends this claim is that the places on the body inscribed with the meaning of gender and race are different. Seshadri-Crooks poses the question, ‘how and why do we read certain marks of the body as privileged sites of racial meaning?’ (*DW*, 2) Those certain marks are different than the ones that are sites of gendered meaning. Seshadri-Crooks goes on, ‘race is fundamentally a regime of looking, although race cannot be reduced to the look.’ (*DW*, 2) If both race and gender are dictated by hegemonic powers through a ‘regime of looking’, that says far less about *what* race and gender are than *how* they become present in the world. If Lacanian sexuation suggests that sex is a psychic formation with a primary point of differentiation based on one’s relationship to the *objet a* and how one obtains *jouissance*, race does not have a fundamental point of differentiation related to the *objet a* or how one enjoys.

Instead, according to Seshadri-Crooks, racial theory ‘does not fully cover’ (*DW*, 16) racial practice. Seshadri-Crooks notes:

Even though it has now become commonplace to utter rote phrases such as ‘race is a construct’ or ‘race does not exist,’ etc., race itself shows no evidence of disappearing or evaporating in relevance. It is common sense to believe in the existence of race. (*DW*, 4)

She goes on:

I suggest that it is the symbolic order of racial difference itself that governs seeing, rather than the reverse. We *believe* in the factuality of difference in order to *see* it, because the order of racial difference is an order that promises access to an absolute wholeness to its subjects – white, black, yellow or brown. (*DW*, 5)

Race, then, is like Lacan’s sexuation only insofar as it relates to desire and enjoyment (but, then, so does *everything*). Though Seshadri-Crooks points out this incompleteness of racial theory, it is not the same incompleteness that Copjec claims is fundamental to sex itself (‘sex is the stumbling block of sex’) and explains why gender and sexuality will endlessly multiply. Seshadri-Crooks positions the Lacanian mirror stage in relation to Althusser’s ‘Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses’ (1972) but argues that ‘racial anxiety, the unconscious anxiety that is entailed by the sight of racial difference, has its cause not in ideology, but in the structure of race itself’. (*DW*, 22) For Seshadri-Crooks, what is key here is that racism, racial oppression, racial violence, and white supremacy are not products of imagining an Other *jouissance* in the other, but rather that there is an inherent anxiety in the encounter with racial difference that threatens a subject’s imagined wholeness. That imagined wholeness, as Seshadri-Crooks argues, is a fantasy supported by the existence of race. For my part, I would like to have it both ways. An imagined Other *jouissance* and an imagined whole subject are both crucial to understanding the structure of race and racism.

Seshadri-Crooks also makes a crucial intervention when she writes that ‘[t]here is no doubt that one can be constituted as a subject with a “unified” bodily ego without

necessarily identifying with a racial signifier, or seeing oneself as racially marked.’ (DW, 35) In terms of developmental stages, this positions the subject’s becoming raced as after the construction of the ego during the mirror stage with the identification of the specular image. Seshadri-Crooks uses literary examples:

This process of introjecting the signifier is repeated by other characters such as Janie in Zora Neal [sic] Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, James Weldon Johnson’s protagonist in *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, and by Oulaudah [sic] Equiano in his autobiographical narrative. (DW, 35)

This claim serves, in part, to distinguish race and sex/gender. Even a contemporary understanding of gender might argue that some form of gender identification is imposed on the subject from the moment of birth. Crucially, Hortense Spillers disputes Seshadri-Crooks’s point and argues the same about race. The equivalent to imagining oneself as somehow without race (buying into the de-racializing fantasy of whiteness itself) is impossible for gender if one takes the position that those who identify as non-gender conforming or agender are still identifying as *a gender*.³³ But following Spillers, Viego offers a different account of Lacanian race in *Dead Subjects* (2007). Most important for Viego is, in ‘All the Things You Could Be by Now if Sigmund Freud’s Wife Was Your Mother’ (1996), Spillers’s claim that ‘The individual in the collective traversed by ‘race’ – and there are no known exceptions, as far as I can tell – is covered by it before language and its differential laws take hold.’³⁴ Viego goes on to give an account of the quotation: ‘This would seem to be a point that could not be supported in Lacan since, as I have explained, it implies that there is a signifierness³⁵ to race before language, that race means something before the acquisition of language – before, that is, language lends it meaning.’³⁶ This characterization of race is at odds with Seshadri-Crooks’s. Viego goes on:

If the human organism is in some essential way always born prematurely [...] then how does race’s presence work on that prematurity – if it does – before the assumption of the specular image, before the infant stuffs herself with the contents in the mirror reflection, before the consolidation of the ego? (DS, 96)

Despite the importance of Spillers and Viego’s claim, I am inclined to agree with Seshadri-Crooks’s positioning of race along the trajectory of psychoanalytic child development. If race is contingent and socially constructed, it is Seshadri-Crooks’s account that captures the essence of that construction. The possibility of the construction of the ego and the appropriation of the specular image possibly ‘before’

³³ If the identification of agender or non-gender conforming are among identifications categorically and ontologically different from gender, this claim requires some adjustment. However, Lacanian sexuation does not allow for the possibility of abdicating a position.

³⁴ Hortense Spillers, ‘All the Things You Could Be by Now if Sigmund Freud’s Wife Was Your Mother’, *boundary 2* 23.2 (1996): 76.

³⁵ Raul Moncayo, *Lalangue, Sinthome, Jouissance, and Nomination: A Reading Companion and Commentary on Lacan’s Seminar XXIII on the Sinthome* (London: Karnac, 2017), 22. Moncayo gives an account of signifierness, ‘Throughout the length of Lacan’s work, there are three implicit linguistic categories: meaning, signification, and significance [signifierness] (ISR). [...] Fink translates significance as ‘signifierness’. Meaning is full and imaginary. Signification is symbolic and refers to the signifier, while significance is empty speech or signification in the sense of meaning without double meaning or too much meaning.’ Signifierness, then, would be associated with the notion of *lalangue*.

³⁶ Antonio Viego, *Dead Subjects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 95. Hereafter cited as *DS*, with page references.

race indicates a stark difference with sex and gender. It is not that sex or gender are essential, gender in particular is equally contingent. But there is a *difference* in the contingency of race and sex, a different timing for when they appear on the psychic scene. There is also the possibility that Viego and Seshadri-Crooks’s differing accounts are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Depending on the cultural context and subject positioning, individuals are raced differently. And simply because, as an example, infants may not conceptualize their own race does not mean that race is not operative on their mode of social relations in an inexplicable, symptomatic fashion. Viego and Seshadri-Crooks may approach this problematic from two different perspectives: one from the position of the fabric of the symbolic order itself, and the other from the position of the subject coming into being within that same order. Viego and Spillers open a possibility for the operation of race before the subject, but Seshadri-Crooks points out the contingency of the self-conception of race after the construction of the ego. These accounts differ from Lacanian sexuation which is contingent not on sociality but on a given subject’s relation to the *objet a* and *jouissance*. Sex, for Lacan, is the always-incomplete account of how one might enjoy. Race, instead, represents the imposition of fantasies of enjoyment. Race, too, means that material conditions will be constructed based on those fantasies.

Viego differentiates race from sex in ways not as closely related to enjoyment, too. Viego observes, ‘The Lacanian argument as to why sexual difference is a different kind of difference from racial or class difference is very complicated.’ (*DS*, 199) An understatement, to be sure. After paraphrasing Copjec’s and Seshadri-Crooks’s positions, he goes on to articulate his position citing Spillers once again as a starting point. Spillers contests Copjec’s point by, as Viego writes, ‘transform[ing] Copjec’s claim into a question: “Is it always a sexed subject who assumes each racial, class, or ethnic identity? Really?”’ (*DS*, 201) This follows from Spillers’s argument in ‘Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe’ (1987) regarding the experience of the ungendering³⁷ administered by, in my reading, a hostile symbolic frame that attempts to efface (in Lacanian terms) access to the Symbolic order for marginalized people. In the case of ‘Mama’s Baby’, Spillers is referring specifically to enslaved African people undergoing the *Maafa*³⁸ or so-called ‘transatlantic slave trade’. For Viego’s purposes, he connects Lacanian thought with Spillers’s formulations when he argues:

Lacan’s notion of disarray is internal to what Spillers calls ‘decentralization’ and ‘dispersal.’ It is this disarray – Spillers’s attempt to decentralize the ego and thus undermine its pretension to mastery at the center of consciousness as well as her attempt to

³⁷ Hortense Spillers, ‘Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book’, *Diacritics* 17.2 (1987): 72: ‘These scaled inequalities complement the commanding terms of the dehumanizing, ungendering [...] I would suggest that ‘gendering’ takes place within the confines of the domestic, an essential metaphor that then spreads its tentacles for male and female subject over a wider ground of human and social purposes [...] Those African persons in “Middle Passage” were literally suspended in the “oceanic,” if we think of the latter in its Freudian orientation as an analogy for undifferentiated identity: removed from the indigenous land and culture, and not-yet “American” either [...] we might imagine, the captive personality did not know where s/he was, we could say that they were the culturally “unmade”’.

³⁸ *Maafa*’s use as an English language neologism dates to Marimba Ani, *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1994). For other engagements with the term, see Maulana Karenga, ‘The Ethics of Reparations: Engaging the Holocaust of Enslavement’, *N’COBRA Online* (2001); available at <http://www.ncobraonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Karenga-THE-ETHICS-OF-REPARATIONS.pdf> [accessed 6 November 2017].

promote the subject's dispersal into spaces of possibility outside its incarceration in solitary Imaginary confinement – that the ethnic-racialized subject must experience in order to understand that she is a subject of the signifier who is incalculable, indeterminate, and always in the process of becoming. (*DS*, 203)

This fundamentally distinguishes race from sex in Lacanian terms because of the relation to the Symbolic order. If sex is the stumbling block of sex and 'coincides with the very failure in language to provide determinate meaning' (*DS*, 199), it is the Spillersian resignification of racial meaning in the Symbolic order that distinguishes race and sex.

But this resignification is far too complicated for society's normal, oppressive operation. Sex, judicially, excludes many expressions of sex and gender in exchange for ease of use. The law must claim that sex is a determinate category. Subjects are who they are because of their sex. The same can be said of race, but the field of that compulsory determination exists largely outside of the written law and is relegated to the space of the unwritten codes of sociality. And yet the Lacanian position used to distinguish race and sex is not to say that one is more real, more important, or more confining than another. Following Lacan and his interpreters, race and sex are constructed differently. It is a difference not simply contingent on the functioning of desire but also on one's place in the Symbolic order. Sex can only signify the impossibility of its own signifiability. Representations of sex are metonymic and can never account for desire. Race is not just resignified internally, as Seshadri-Crooks might argue, but also externally, as Spillers and Viego claim. Hegemonic forces attempt to exert dominance over certain possibilities of racial signification and becoming, an issue which is at the core of Spillers's engagement with psychoanalysis. It is this hegemonic force that Tuvel seeks to exculpate through parallelism between race and gender, ignoring the problem of sex that Lacan takes up. Though Lacanian psychoanalysis may not be the only tool to counteract the harmful hegemonic forces Tuvel smuggles into her thinking, Lacan and his interlocutors offer analysis that serves to distinguish race and sex and open the possibility for plurality.

With the Lacanian objection in mind, it should be abundantly clear that drawing sweeping parallels between race and gender is an inductive leap that is as yet unjustified. There are enough complexities to each formation, even as a 'social construct', that they must each be thought of with the requisite complexity – that is to say, separately. Still, beyond the mistake of an unsubstantiated claim of parity between the two in Tuvel's paper, the entire underlying ideological premise is flawed. Tuvel claims to be an antiracist thinker calling into question the constitution of race, but in reality, she affirms definite racial categorization in a way the lived experience of raced subjects does not support. Her notions of racial categorization and the criterion for what it means to be raced play into the notion of 'coercive mimeticism', a theory originating with Rey Chow. Viego explicates Chow's idea, calling it 'a twenty-first-century mode of inhabiting ethnic-racialized identity where one's social and cultural intelligibility is predicated on one's coming to successfully resemble what is recognizably "ethnic-racialized"' (*DS*, 26). Menon picks up on these themes as well, positing that 'the most widespread truth about our lived reality is that it is too multiple to abide by a code of identitarian difference'.³⁹ Tuvel is interested in rethinking the rules of the code rather than opposing it. She authorizes and affirms the normal operation of the social category

³⁹ Menon, 3.

of race, suggesting one can identify as a given racial category through voluntarism. The issue here comes from Tuvel’s reformist, rather than revolutionary, perspective on transgender identity. Rather than seeing transgender identity as a serious challenge to the category of gender and normative, finite gender categories, Tuvel conceptualizes transgender identity as a voluntary adoption of a given social structure. For her, the transgender individual simply transitions from one discrete category to another, rather than transgressing the very principle that established a gender binary. The ‘trans’ in ‘transgender’ may well signify ‘transgression’ as well as or rather than ‘transition’, as an abdication of the category of gender altogether. Tuvel, however, does not conceptualize transgender identity as a challenge to the social structure of gender that is underwritten by law and legal recognition. Again, Menon’s thinking is instructive when she writes:

If speaking the language of the law is the only way of being recognized by the law, then inclusion in state-sanctioned modes of cultural and sexual specificity also indicates immediate co-optation by the state’s categories of identity. A liberal politics would advocate for just such inclusion to fight the system from within itself. But a radical politics would ask us to be suspicious of these categories altogether because they both assume and create a chain of expectations that are violent, to say the least.⁴⁰

Following Menon’s claim that identity itself necessarily produces this radical political orientation, Tuvel’s lack of radical positioning weakens her argument significantly. One must address the possibility for radical alterity when addressing identity precisely because of identity’s multiplicity that defies state-sanctioned identity politics. Tuvel’s conception of identity is completely within the ‘language of the law’ and positioning lawful recognition as the most important progressive aim. Menon’s argument evinces how foundational aspects of Lacan repudiate Tuvel’s identitarian logic.

I must be precise in the ways I am claiming Lacan refutes Tuvel. The parallelism I identify in Tuvel’s thinking is a charge she attempts to avoid. In the outset of her piece she writes, ‘I argue that considerations that support transgenderism extend to transracialism.’⁴¹ She includes a footnote to this thesis, however, claiming:

I am not suggesting that race and sex are equivalent. [...] My thesis relies in no way upon the claim that race and sex are equivalent, or historically constructed in exactly the same way. (*DS*, 275)

I will grant that Tuvel’s thesis does not rely on claiming the construction of gender and race are ‘exactly the same’. However, her argument falls apart unless race and sex are sufficiently similar. The similarity of race and sex/gender is crucial to her argument, even if Tuvel acknowledges they are not identical. Furthermore, it is a precise similarity which is my concern: the similarity of traversal.⁴² For Tuvel, the logic that dictates transition between gender and traversal between races must be identical.

Serving to support this distinction that Tuvel ignores, there already exists a rich philosophical discourse on notions of racial passing and mixed-race identity. But these

⁴⁰ Menon, 41.

⁴¹ Rebecca Tuvel, ‘In Defense of Transracialism’, *Hypatia* 32.2 (2017): 264. Hereafter cited as *IDT*, with page references.

⁴² I use the word ‘traversal’, rather than ‘transition’, to describe possibilities for racial fluidity including mixed race identity and the phenomenon of ‘passing’, and to avoid conflation with the distinct mechanics of change in expressions of transgender identity. This term is also borrowed from Seshadri-Crooks’s *Desiring Whiteness*, who in turn borrows it from Lacan’s *Seminar XI*.

modes of racial traversal and hybridity are distinct from gender transition. Tuvel is, instead, fixated on a contemporary exemplar of so-called 'transracialism', Rachel Dolezal, that effaces these particular histories of racial identification. Seshadri-Crooks explicates the logic of racial passing in Lacanian terms, writing about the film *Suture* (1993): 'The "traversal" that Clay accomplishes is one that is uniquely available to the subject of race and is intelligible only in the domain of race [...] No longer will language dupe him; he will fully manipulate his position within language and therefore his desire, by passing.' (*DW*, 130-1) Seshadri-Crooks goes on to distinguish Clay's passing as of the order of the symbolic rather than of the order of the imaginary:

To confront the shallow totality of race is not to espouse 'color blindness,' for that is to foreclose the law of racial difference. Rather it is to traverse the fantasy engendered by Whiteness through symbolic passing. The significant difference between imaginary passing and symbolic passing lies in the relation one bears to the Other. (*DW*, 131)

Beyond the history of racial traversal that Tuvel fails to acknowledge, she also suggests the logic of 'transition' for both race and gender must be the same.

Tuvel attempts to repudiate four objections 'that maintain that an individual should not be able to change races'. (*IDT*, 268) Tuvel claims the objections that she opposes have corollaries in arguing against the legitimacy of transgender identity. Beyond that, Tuvel's argument falters because these arguments oppose themselves particularly to Dolezal rather than the notion of changing race more generally. These arguments would not apply to things like passing or mixed-race identity. One of the objections Tuvel argues against is that 'it is a wrongful exercise of white privilege for a white person to cross into the black racial category'. (*IDT*, 268) This is Tuvel's most absurd misreading of the nature of transgender identity and possibilities of racial traversal. Tuvel attempts to suggest that the argument against Dolezal can be applied to 'male-to-female (mtf) trans individual[s]'. (*IDT*, 270) She goes on to suggest that readers should '[a]ssume for the sake of argument that it is easier for a female-to-male (ftm) transgender individual to be read and accepted as male than vice versa.' (*IDT*, 271) Tuvel's claim here is that, again, there is a corollary argument about privilege that one could use to oppose transgender identity. And yet, is it really the case that male privilege or some imagined privilege of a version of transgender identity can serve the same function in gender transition as white privilege when it comes to so-called 'transracialism'? It is true that notions of privilege are conceived of as functioning similarly between race and gender. Seshadri-Crooks maintains, 'the dominant method of ordering human beings is founded on a law that privileges so-called "white" people as possessors of "Whiteness."' (*DW*, 96) Similarly, those gendered as men must live up to certain ideals of masculinity to be the full beneficiary of male privilege. And yet it is the difference in structure between sex, gender, and race that can be discerned, among other ways, through Lacan that demonstrates just how wrongheaded Tuvel's parallelism is. Just because structures of oppression apply across identity categories similarly does not make the categories themselves similar in their construction. This line of thinking would reduce identity to a judicial category. The precision of the claim that white privilege aids in 'transitioning' from white to Black cannot be made in the case of transgender individuals. Tuvel's argument becomes less persuasive by imagining 'ftm privilege'.

Tuvel also elides how connected this argument about white privilege is with the third objection she 'entertains', 'that identifying as a member of another race insults or

otherwise harms members of that race’. (*IDT*, 268) It is precisely that Tuvel ‘entertains’ this objection while refusing to acknowledge the relationship of so-called entertainment to Dolezal’s racial embodiment. Tuvel writes, ‘several comparisons have been made between Dolezal and the nineteenth-century practice of blackface’. (*IDT*, 269) She goes on to dismiss those comparisons by arguing that ‘it is crucial to distinguish problematic from unproblematic forms of identification.’ (*IDT*, 270) How does one distinguish the two? Tuvel suggests the abhorrent practice of blackface is ‘appropriately deemed a pretense because it relies on the fact that this person’s *core identity* is not who she publicly and permanently purports to be.’ (*IDT*, 270, emphasis mine) Core identity? Is one’s ‘core identity’ ‘who she publicly and permanently purports to be’? This position on the part of Tuvel evinces how she has no problem upholding the coercive, harmful structures of identity that transgender identity and other forms of gender embodiment refuse. Tuvel claims to be opposed to essentialism, but argues that identity has some transcendental quality that makes it legitimate, permanent, and determinant. Furthermore, Tuvel misses the fact that the insult and harm parodic identification produces is precisely because of the ease of that identification, an ease that is produced by how white privilege functions and changes the possibilities for racial embodiment. Even racial passing is only possible for those individuals who might appear white according to the color of their skin. Quite distinctly, though, blackface is an aesthetic tradition that exemplifies and perpetuates anti-Black racism and oppression. Such a practice maintains relative social acceptability today through Halloween costumes and cultural appropriation in certain music genres. Dolezal, then, does not ‘recall a horrid history of white people pretending to be black’ (*IDT*, 270), she is another entry into the encyclopedia of appropriative, hostile, anti-Black embodiment.

Still, Tuvel’s point that certain positions in opposition to so-called ‘transracialism’ traffic in anti-transgender, or transphobic, logic is worth considering. However, arguments about white privilege and the hostility of anti-Black embodiment through racist caricature do not relate to prejudice against transgender individuals in the way Tuvel claims. But, in the most abstract sense, if one were to say that one’s opposition to the ideal of ‘transracialism’ is that ‘one is what one is born’, then Tuvel would be right to say that such an argument mobilizes transphobia. Still, it is not necessary that one defend Dolezal, the contemporary iteration of ‘transracialism’. It is clear to me that the opposition to Dolezal’s racial embodiment, raised by authors like Ijeoma Oluo and Tamara Winfrey Harris, are largely divorced from ideas hostile to transgender identity. It seems unfair to accuse them of somehow unwittingly perpetuating anti-transgender ideology without addressing their arguments explicitly. Tuvel would have been better served trying to articulate, perhaps using the rich history of critical race theory and Black feminist thought, a re-envisioning of identity itself. But it is Tuvel’s acceptance of the legitimacy of identity in its juridical, state-enforced, socially normative form that makes this impossible. This is Tuvel upholding the logic of society’s status quo.

Tuvel’s notion of ‘core identity’ and the identitarian logic of her argument make Lacanian theory uniquely relevant. Lacan and his later adherents address her fundamental and unstated positioning of race, gender, and sex by calling into question the possibility of identitarian wholeness. Tuvel’s argument about the importance of one’s ‘core identity’ demonstrates that she upholds a kind of restrictive identitarianism. But she also perpetuates identitarian logic when addressing the objection she characterizes as ‘the idea that society’s current understanding of race places limits on an individual’s (perhaps otherwise) legitimate claim to change race’. (*IDT*, 268) Tuvel

refers to the danger in limiting ‘the possibilities for changing one’s membership in an identity category’ (*IDT*, 269) and argues that ‘social progress’ occurs through changing the criteria for identity, rather than challenging the nature of identity itself. When Tuvel cites Charles Mills and points to the relationship of ancestry to race in Brazil, saying ‘ancestry is a less emphasized feature’ (*IDT*, 267), she conflates societal recognition and lawful recognition. Earlier on, Tuvel cites Michael Root’s comprehensive what-if scenarios about how ‘our practice of racial sorting could change’. (*IDT*, 267) Root and Tuvel both make the mistake of affirming the nature of identity as construed by law and inexplicably equate race and nationality. For Tuvel, progress is consistently indexed by broad social recognition and lawful progress.

Tuvel’s ambition to extend the possibility of representation and civil participation is laudable, precisely because there are so many individuals denied important legal protections. But what about upending the principles of identity that result in certain kinds of oppression and underwrite Chow’s idea of ‘coercive mimeticism’? Tuvel, as stated, goes through the motions of explaining the possibilities of different quantifiable factors that would produce identity categories. She never questions the logic of identity itself, or acknowledges the unquantifiable features of identity that something like psychoanalysis is concerned with. Lee Edelman poses precisely this question. He suggests that queerness, as an ontological negation rather than an identity, ‘refers to what never accedes to representation in itself’.⁴³ In some cases, identity claims to represent this queerness that Edelman argues eludes representation. Copjec might argue the same thing about Lacanian sexuation and gender: how can the stumbling block of sense be rendered in a way that is sensible? Edelman critiques identity categories that serve as totalizing, just like Chow and Viego. He argues that a given social order ‘strives to efface its internal rupture or structural impossibility [...] by making ontological exclusions articulated as queerness or blackness, for example, assume the substantial status of the "queer" or the "black" as identity.’⁴⁴ It is precisely this disposition that should serve as a foundation for a political project in service of one’s non-normative experience: identity needs to be reformulated and rethought. Identity needs to be divorced from the strictures of law and hegemonic social structures. Radical theorizations of trans, such as those of Preciado, attempt just that. However, Tuvel is content to reinscribe identity, merely changing the rules for compulsory, juridical identity. Tuvel ignores the possibility of abdicating identity altogether, or expressing a sort of self that defies any conventional identitarian thinking. Lacan and his theories about sexuation incite one to imagine a world where gender and race are figured radically outside of the law’s strictures.

Lacanian sexuation is not something easily indexed by the census. It is not legible on the body nor immediately discernible from behaviour. It is part of one’s psychic structure and speaks to a subject’s relationship with the *objet a* and desire itself. It speaks to *how* one enjoys, *how* one experiences *jouissance*. But even in that relationship to *jouissance*, the subject can never be consistent. *Jouissance* annihilates the subject and calls into question who exactly is the beneficiary of that erupting, transgressive enjoyment? Certainly not a gendered or raced subject, nor even the subject that could be categorized as only experiencing masculine *jouissance* or able to experience feminine *jouissance*. Perhaps not a subject at all. The language of Lacanian sexuation which expresses this idea is difficult to align with the sex/gender system in gender studies. But

⁴³ Lee Edelman, ‘Learning Nothing: *Bad Education*’, *Differences* 28.1 (2017): 157.

⁴⁴ Edelman, ‘Learning Nothing’, 133.

because Lacan at least attempts to diagnose the masculinist, patriarchal nature of Western society, such an encounter might be worth continuing. That task seems even more pressing in the face of imprecise constructivism that makes gender and race identical, or at least similar in ways they are not. Tuvel is symptomatic of this thinking. She evinces a lack of sophistication in the understanding of how gender and race are constructed and embodied differently. Just as one can deploy Lacan to combat this parallelism, re-envisioning gender through the lens of Lacanian sexuation and some of his anti-identitarian inheritors is crucial. One of Lacan’s successors, Luce Irigaray, makes clear the imperative to posit psychoanalysis against reformist political projects. Irigaray writes:

When women’s movements challenge the forms and nature of political life, the contemporary play of powers and power relations, they are in fact working toward a modification of women’s status. On the other hand, when these same movements aim simply for a change in the distribution of power, leaving intact the power structure itself, then they are resubjecting themselves, deliberately or not, to a phallographic order.⁴⁵

Irigaray, like Mitchell, recognizes the insurgent power of psychoanalytic theory. She also gives a frame in which Preciado seems to be operating when describing the radical alterity of trans identity. Above all, Irigaray’s claim calls into question Tuvel’s preoccupations in shifting the definition of race. Tuvel’s vision of progress perpetuates a harmful version of identity that traffics in coercive mimeticism and authorizes the law to make the final decisions about who one is. The law, however, can never regulate desire. Identity as law will always be undone by the *objet a*.

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⁴⁵ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 81.

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„[D]iferit chiar și de diferențele noastre proprii”. Semnificații rasiale și moștenirea sexuării lacaniene

Rezumat

Jacques Lacan și-a încheiat cel de-al douăzecilea seminar din 1973 la șapte ani după publicarea volumelor *Écrits* și după conferința de notorietate organizată de Johns Hopkins University ale cărei lucrări au fost publicate în volumul *Controversa structuralistă*. Însă, la acest moment, universitarii americani încă discută în contradictoriu implicațiile psihanalizei lacaniene adusă în Statele Unite ale Americii în 1966 și a discursurilor lui în fața studenților parizieni în 1973. Anumite curente filosofice universitare, precum cele ale Rebeccai Tuvel, prezintă o paritate crudă între rasă și gen, pe care teoria lacaniană o contrazice. Teoreticieni precum Jane Gallop, Joan Copjec, Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks și Antonio Viego au avut o importanță majoră în abordarea lacaniană a problemelor de rasă și de gen. Lacan argumentează că sexul este determinat mai degrabă de relația individului cu *jouissance* și cu ordinea simbolică decât de biologie sau de construcție socială. Mai mult, articolul meu continuă în tradiția lui F Seshadri-Crooks și Viego să facă distincția dintre structurile psihice de sex și rasă. Acesta dezbată viziunile lui Tuvel din 'In Defense of Transracialism' (2017) dintr-o perspectivă lacaniană și, prin acestea, demonstrează utilitatea studiilor lui Lacan în discipline precum teoriile de gen și rasă.