Music in Youth Culture
Music in Youth Culture
A Lacanian Approach

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palgrave macmillan
This book is dedicated to my son Jeremy
When he reads it he will know why.
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**Introduction: Aural/Oral Connections**

*Music in Youth Culture: A Lacanian Approach* is a companion book to *Youth Fantasies: The Perverse Landscape of the Media* (2004), which examined postmodern youth from a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective by concentrating on the medias of video games, Internet, and television. This second volume continues to examine youth fantasies specific to music that emerged in the past decade, from approximately the early nineties to the present contemporary musical scene. It can be read as a portmanteau book (mot-valise) within *Youth Fantasies* in the sense that it exits as an enfolded space within that first volume—bracketed by it, so to speak. In *Youth Fantasies*, the thesis concerning the post-Oedipalization of postmodernist society was developed where it was argued that there has been a fundamental “enfoldment” of space between postadolescence and adulthood blurring any distinct boundaries between them as a symptom of the subsequent loss of trust in authority of the Symbolic Order. This thesis is dramatically illustrated by the music industry.

Odd spelling throughout this book is used to indicate the newly created space of postmodern youth. Bois, Boyz, and Boys are the differential signifiers for the psychic conflicts over the limited modernist hegemonic image of Man used to demarcate the skater crowd from punk-metal-Goth-rap Boyz, which are yet again differentiated from pop culture’s Boy Groups. Similarly, Girlie/Gurlz, girls and Grrrls indicate similar differentiations among females in various postfeminist contexts. These distinctions are developed in an exploration of fantasies associated with virginity and being called a “slut.” This differential array of signifiers is predicated on the cauldron of psychic struggles that are taking place precisely within the enfolded space opened up by the postmodernity of designer capitalism. Purposely (at times), these signifiers have been capitalized to indicate their particular psychic relationship toward libidinal bodily energy referred to as jouissance, which demarcates the experience of intensity through bodily drives.

Lacan took a dim view concerning developmental stages that were based on biological growth when it came to youth. Rather, the “bio” of life took a backseat to the way the rhythms of past “psychosocial” events impacted future growth. Talk of stages referred to the libidinal body of the drives; to our oral, anal, sexual, gazing, and vocalizing bodies, which constantly interrupt the regularities of living, making us undergo processes of repression, frustration, and regression. For example, “tweens” may be identified as a
biological cohort aged nine to twelve, but their struggles are shaped by socioeconomic structures bringing such issues as body weight, bullying, styles of dress, parental desires, and drug abuse to fore at the level of their virtual affective “driven” bodies. These become revealing “nodal points” around which symptoms are structured, and are thus far more revealing of their psychic struggles than the cognitive literature of psychological development based on well-known stage theories such as those of Jean Piaget and his followers, which dominated the modernist theorizing of early childhood development. At the very least, a psychoanalytic account both supplements and decenters such cognitive accounts as we have already argued in the early chapters of *Youth Fantasies*.

To what extent can this array of music youth cultures be theorized as examples of “becoming-woman” in Deleuzian terms? Are they the rhizomatic and productive mutually transformative results of the impossible gap between the masculine and feminine heterogeneous binary *appositions*, like Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987, 293) famous example of the orchid (a plant) in exchange with the wasp (an insect) where a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp take place? Is the emerging psyche of youth cultures in the past decade dispersed into hybridic becomings? But, isn’t this all simply another instance of Lacan’s outspoken claim that “desire is the desire of the Other” which also recognizes difference? This last series of questions raise a pressing concern: just how are these psychic struggles to be characterized? Given the claim of post-Oedipalization, does the neurosis of the Freudian familial drama still apply? Many scholars have turned to the schizophrenic account of the capitalist *socius* (conduct of relations) offered by Deleuze and Guattari with their strong rejection of Lacanian psychoanalysis exemplified in their two-volume work *Anti-Oedipus* (1977) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) to theorize another possibility. Becoming-woman, a Deleuzian term, seems to sit uncomfortably within a book that utilizes Lacanian psychoanalysis, who is often accused of *transcendental* phallocentrism against the author(s) of *empirical* *transcendent* immanence.

To what extent, then, do I find myself “Oedipally” still loyal to Lacan, or to his most eminent practitioner in the English-speaking context such as Žižek? Gratefully perhaps, an exploration of pop music can result in a productive misreading so, at the very least, some form of “betrayal” can take place that furthers an understanding of youth today? Such questions address my own anxiety when venturing into the space “in-between” two such powerful systems of thought. The first chapter, Stuttering In-Between Deleuze and Lacan—Acts of Transposition, attempts to define my own position.

The homonym aural/oral in the subtitle characterizes the intimacy of the two drives in youth cultures. It refers to two registers of meaning. First, it brings together hearing and voraciously consuming music together as a way to capture the musical entertainment industry of advanced capitalist countries, which is a haptic event that is performed on a dynamic field that is both unifying as well as disruptive. Second, as developed in the second and
third chapters, the oral and aural form a hybrid “dialectic” relation (Lyotard, 1971, 39) between the drive-demand of oral consumption (pure desire) and the desire of the aural voice through the intervention of the death drive as bodily jouissance. This identifies a transgressive stance toward the accepted performed musical codes. The performative side of music since the Beatlemania phenomenon of the 1960s has now advanced into the concert and television spectacle making marketing based on serialization as simulacra the central concept for commodity production. The political economy of repetition, which is how musical industries supplement commodity serialization, demands that a mold be manufactured from which the mass reproduction of an original can then take place (Attali, 1999, 128). It is the labor that goes into the production of the mold by its producers and design engineers (“molders”) where the greatest costs are incurred followed by the costs for its media spectacularization to maintain its currency and demand for its repetition. The costs of reproduction of the commodity are significantly lower as profit is recovered through sales of the music CDs, musical videos, guest appearances, performances, and paraphernalia. It should be apparent that Attali’s conceptual language draws on a Deleuzian paradigm with its stress on repetition and moulds. His conceptualization of “noise,” as developed in chapter 2, however, is appropriated under Freud/Lacan’s death drive when theorizing musical youth cultures.

Designer capitalism signifies a repetition and a serialization of all forms of consumption, from fast foods to ready-to-wear clothes. Repetition in music requires an attempt to maintain diversity and meaning for demands. The artist as performer acts in the capacity of a replicant, a form of upgraded social Darwinism when the spectacle of performance becomes repeated so as to act at a point of idealized unity rather than difference. An American, British, Canadian, or Australian “idol” emerges in the currency of the pop music industry where such repetition enables a leveling of power to superficially appear by making the music “popular.” Yet, on the one hand, each Idol is “translated” into its respective culture to make it appear unique. The universal/singular tension seems to be solved through such a repetition of difference. But, on the other hand, power becomes concentrated in the record companies and producers who front the spectacle and invest time and money in it. I attempt to describe this paradoxical process in chapter 10, “The New Castrati: Men II Boys.” Ironically, one might call this a “becoming-child,” after Deleuze.

Repetition and serialization contain within it a difference, a conceptual articulation generally bestowed in contemporary philosophy to Giles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida’s notion of différences as the non-presence of the other, which is already inscribed within the sense of presence. However, Lacan’s complex notion of the psychic Real had already explored this same territory in the early 1970s, which Deleuze and Derrida were to claim as their own through their own unique explorations of it. Their debt to Lacan remains, by and large, an uneasy one, dividing scholars in various camps rather than
acknowledging the many similarities between them when it comes to the realm of the “impossible.” This divisive aspect is articulated, explored, and questioned in the first chapter.

The question remains as to whether such repetition by the music industry simply produces “silence” by eliminating “noise” (or non-sense) through the conformity of popular repetition—as Attali maintains. Just when does the repression of noise erupt? The thesis forwarded here is that the eruption of “noise” has taken place through the perversion and hysterization of the performer/audience relationship throughout the last decade and into the new millennium in ways, I hope, that will be surprising to the reader. In the second chapter, “The Figurality of Noise and the Silence of the Death Drive,” I attempt to establish my own position regarding the transgression of difference in music, while in the third chapter, “The Uncanny Figural Voice,” I explore the conceptualization of jouissance in such transgression “against and beyond the Law.”

The following seven chapters consist of part II, entitled, “Perversions of the Music Scene: The Boyz/Bois/Boys.” Here, I explore the masculine postadolescent “stretch” as captured by the signifier(s) bois/boyz and boys of Gangsta rap and hip-hop, metal, punk, and Goth, ending with the pop culture of Boy Bands and the making of American Idol. I claim that these masculine musical developments pervert the music scene. In chapter 7 I attempt to make connections to the much publicized school shootings and suicides. This is then followed by Part III, “The Hysterization of the Music Scene: The Gurlz/Girls/Grrrls,” which consists of four more chapters that explore the developments by cultural music forms of postfeminism. I try to discuss the fantasies around the virgin/slut dichotomization and the responses to this. I end the music section with Part IV, an “Interlude” of two further essays, one on the Fan(addict), which maps out our understanding of a new kind of fan that has arisen in postmodernity, and the other develops Techno music as a utopian fantasy of global harmony. Techno music lends itself to a Deleuzean analysis, thereby providing another opportunity for a comparison with Lacanian psychoanalysis. The concluding essay is a meditation on “the ethics of the Real,” hints of which the reader will encounter throughout most of the chapters.
I

Theoretical Considerations
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In *Youth Fantasies*, an attempt was made to steer a course that incorporated Deleuze and Guattari where it was felt that a certain *transposition* between their conceptual systems was possible; namely the concept of nomadology could be transposed as the discourse of the analyst as no-madic research. The no-madic researcher occupies the impossible position of Lacan’s *objet a* to theorize the drive/desire dialectic, both individually and socially, always in a state of “becoming” to act in the capacity of a “vanishing mediator” so that a fantasy might be traversed. His or her position becomes useless or redundant after such an occurrence. Post-Oedipalization was the term used to transpose their anti-Oedipal stance. But, just how “anti-Oedipal” were Deleuze and Guattari anyway? Guattari, a gay Left activist trained by Lacan, was still a practicing analyst and member of Lacan’s *École Freudienne de Paris* when *Anti-Oedipus* was written. If one reads Flieger’s (1999, 2000, 2005) many attempts to sort through their critique of Freud and Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari often begin to sound more Freudian than they would ever admit; their “lines of flight” being less successful than the written bravado of their neologisms would at first suggest. Their critique certainly applies, but only if Freud and Lacan are read as caricatures in the most orthodox way possible. Flieger forcefully shows that *Anti-Oedipus* brings out the most radical elements in both Freud and Lacan at a historical moment in the late 1960s and early 1970s when Freud’s ideas had become psychologized by neo-Freudians, while Lacan’s concepts had been cast into a structuralist straightjacket. The time was ripe to further radicalize psychoanalysis through their form of schizoanalysis. Atoms now not only “swerved,” as the young Marx had maintained in his doctoral thesis (following the Epicurean–Lucretian doctrine of the clinamen as the “free” declination of atoms) in reply to the atomism of Democritus, but now “molecules” became a flux of “schizzes and flows.” But, by this time Lacan had also moved on. His rethinking of sexuality freed of both gender and identity had already begun to be worked out in Seminar XIX, … *On pire/… Or Worse* (1971–1972), and fully developed the following year S XX, *Encore* (1972) with his *formulae of sexuation,* the
very same year when *Anti-Oedipus* was publicly released. This development, as argued later, contests any easy accusations of binary logic, and offers an alternative to the endless differentiation of sexes claimed by Deleuze and Guattari.

**Lacan Bashing/Bashing Lacan**

When one reads Braidotti (1991, 1994, 2002), Deleuzean theory is proudly proclaimed as anti-Oedipal, and used as a wedge against Lacanian psychoanalysis of the 1950s and 1960s. Alice (in Wonderland), as Deleuze developed this figure in *The Logic of Sense* (1990), now becomes the non-Oedipal poster child (Braidotti, 2002, 69), as if it were possible to remain forever in Wonderland. Avril Lavigne and Michael Jackson, as I argue in chapter 11, however, are doing a good job at trying to stay down the rabbit hole for as long as possible. Apparently, becoming-woman/animal is not about signification, but about the transcendence of the linguistic signifier. “Expression is about the nonlinguistically coded affirmation of an affectivity whose degree, speed, extension and intensity can only be measured materially, pragmatically, case by case” (Braidotti, 2002, 119). Alice is a special case. In Wonderland Alice’s antics illustrate her “becoming.” Wonderland is a world where present time never “actually occurs” but remains “always forthcoming and already past” (Deleuze, 1990, 80). In the book’s opening pages, Deleuze argues Alice is simultaneously getting larger (than she was before) and smaller (than she will become), caught in the interval of “pure” time (*aion*). However, should one take the trouble to read Feldstein’s (1995) Lacanian rendering of Alice, the differences between the two approaches seem, once more, transpositional. Feldstein also reads Alice as “an emblematic study of the representation of the representational process itself as it relates to the reconfiguration of Alice’s identity” (152). The difference is that Feldstein offers a sociopolitical questioning of Carroll’s fantasy concerning women. In Wonderland, Alice is deprived of the right to grow up; she remains a child.

Philosophers in the Academy are continually engaged in territorializing their tuff by calling on names, while at the same time claiming to be irreverent and disrespectful of them. Disciple-hood is often an anathema, but theft of fragments stolen from here and there is common fare. In the heated intellectual circles of Paris parallel concepts amongst Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, Deleuze, Blachot, Barthes, and lesser well-known figures, were developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but their sources disavowed and never acknowledged. In an exchange between Braidotti and Žižek during the final panel discussion of IAPL’s (International Association for Philosophy and Literature) 2002 meeting in Rotterdam, it became very clear that each hardened their own stance to maintain a distance from one another. Braidotti had published *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* that year, while Žižek was busy writing his own “encounter” with Deleuze, *Organs Without Bodies*, which came out two years later. Rumors have it that they will
be now writing a book together to “encounter” their differences! As might be suspected the theoretical claim of this book is to transpose their similarities, which may help in grasping the post-Oedipal musical cultures of modernity rather than insist on differences. But, of course, some differences between their ontological systems can never be reconciled.

How is becoming-woman to be understood in the context of the proliferation of signifiers for youth employed here (girls, girlz, grrrls, boys, bois, boyz), since Deleuze and Guattari’s term is not itself a gender theory; it is not necessarily a condition of possibility for feminality or feminine concepts, nor is it biologically, hormonally, or chromosomally defined? Deleuze and Guattari made no claims concerning the experiences of “real women,” nor did they provide any direction to becoming-woman, although they were critical of neoliberalist feminist positions. Rather, their term refers to a nomadic or itinerant machinic vector or force, a “middle-line” in-between a system (logos) and its dissipation—in-between, in their terms, molar and molecular lines of flight—in-between order and chaos, the proviso being that such a “quanta” of energy can “cause” a collapse back into order (molar state of closure) or offer new potentialities. Becoming-woman is thought of as “the first quantum, or molecular segment” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 279, emphasis added) because woman’s identification is absent: she is Other, unrecognizable under masculine Law that is defined in terms of a “striated” space; that is a homogeneous space of quantitative multiplicity. A form of becoming is inseparable from three specific forms of becoming: “becoming-woman, a becoming-child, a becoming-animal” (Deleuze an Guattari, 1987, 299) because of the asymmetrical binaries of social coding in Western societies: namely male over female, adult over child and rational over animal. For Deleuze and Guattari, sexuality is, therefore, a distributive category rather than a bilateral one. This is contrasted to “smooth space” of becoming-woman, which conjures up an image that is completely opposite to what they mean. Such a space is heterogeneous and rhizomatic like an urban sprawl, characterized by quantitative multiplicity and continuous variation where there is no overarching principle or directionality. Such “lines of flight” of deterritorialization are characterized as open intervals (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 477–481). In short, Deleuze proposed a state of “pure” becoming (without being) that is extracted from corporeality. Such becoming takes place in the “transcendental empiricism” of time itself, which is the key to understanding the Deleuzean worldview. Transcendental empiricism refers to the actuality of preontological virtual possibilities (potentia), a level of vitalism (life) of presubjective consciousness that takes place prior to conscious experience itself. Like Lyotard’s (1971) figural that coexists with discourse, such sensate life coexists as a “stratigraphic” superimposition with conscious experience. Such a transcendental plane of experience refers to time itself, but not the time of movement (as chronos which he explored in his first book on cinema, Deleuze, 1986), but time as the infinite virtuality of the transcendental field of Becoming, the time of aion as the Stoics developed it. Aion was “the pure empty form of time” (Deleuze, 1990, 194).
Feminists such as Braidotti (1991, 122–123; 1994, 118) have criticized Deleuze for his failure to directly engage with this question of feminism. Braidotti throughout her writings always takes a stance of disavowal in this respect to his work, which goes something like: I know that I am disagreeing with Deleuze’s claim that there are an infinite number of proximate and singular sexes (n-sexes, or polysexes), which emerge from his insistence that difference is an immanently differential process, nevertheless for a “feminist Deleuzean” like myself (2002, 68), sexual difference is still the primary or defining difference. Such statement of disavowal can be found in each of her books (1991; 1994, 123; 2002, 68). She forwards feminism as the first difference, which certainly politicizes “becoming-woman” and throws it, once again, into the metaphysics of representation—as exemplified by Griggers (1997) whose book bears the very title Becoming-Woman—a position Deleuze tried to avoid. It is precisely this avoidance that has Braidotti (2002, 82) ironically claiming that it is Deleuze (and by implication, not her) who disavows the consequences of his conceptualization of becoming-woman!

Where are youth to be placed? Are they not “automatically” becoming-minoritarian by virtue of their place in the social order? Oddly, I would agree with Braidotti’s summative claim that comes at the end of a long chapter defending her appropriation of Deleuze within and against Deleuzean followers. “The only way to resist this death-bound machinery [referring to military violence and lethal technologies of death] is to elaborate hybrid, transformative identities working inside and outside, on the majority and the minoritarian front simultaneously” (Braidotti, 2002, 110, emphasis added). The various sex-gendered signifiers throughout this book are not all politicized as “minoritarian” positions, in Deleuze and Guattarian terms. Some forms of music cultures are caught by the molar powers that define their identity, yet there is a desperate attempt to redefine and reterritorialize themselves. In this sense I tend to also concur with Braidotti (2002) when she says: “I think Deleuze [and Lacan] can help and even do a lot, but I would never advocate total reliance on his, or for that matter any other, theoretical framework. This seems to be the age of hybridity, transversal and transdisciplinary connections and non-Oedipal creativity also and maybe especially in media and cultural studies where the intersection of feminist with Deleuze theories can be most enriching for both” (89).

In this book the transposition of Deleuzean concepts of “force” and “affectivity,” which are of such central importance to his stance on radical immanence, play a major conceptual role in music. In Deleuze “force” is conceptualized as a degree of affectivity or intensity of an embodied subject, but the contradiction is that the immaterialism of such a “sense-event,” the flow of pure becoming cannot be reconciled so easily with the “embodied subject” who must then actualize this virtual space-time into Being. In this book, the death drive (more below) does the same conceptual work as the immanence of life, in that it has the same intensity (potentia) as well as resistance and constraint (potestas) for transformation. The pulse of the drives is the force of affectivity—“positive desire.” But, why should the “desire of the
Other”—claimed as “negative desire” or lack, be dismissed so forcefully by Deleuzeans? An overemphasis on positive desire as part of the virtual space of multiple and impersonal singular elements that are not as yet synthesized into “reality”—in my mind a simple transposition of the Freudian/Lacanian drives—does not allow any symbolic intervention between these affective drives and the social Other, outside of repression (see Dean, 2000, 244).

Most Deleuzeans who are critical of Lacanian psychoanalysis reduce desire naively to lack, as essentially being negative. Desire becomes images of what we lack; or we desire to be “whole” again, to achieve some sort of nirvana of a lost plentitude at the mother’s breast; desire becomes “other” than life. Then there are criticisms based on representation—conscious imaginary desire, which Lacan never adhered to. Lacan never posited an imaged object of desire, quite the contrary—objet a, the cause of desire is in the Real, not visible and not signifiable. The image of desire is only a lure. Speech and language theorized representationally is what Lacan struggled against. Desire is precisely what alludes language, what is only half said, or slipped up. Unconscious desire is aimed at the impossibility of representation itself—that we can “never” be whole, never complete, a way to “live” with our “flaw.” Where there is lack in Lacan, there is also excess—the bodily drives present the paradox of life and death, of Law and its transgression.

Every time one reads “desire” in Deleuze and Guattari’s Anti-Oedipus, it is just as easily replaced by the jouissance of bodily drives, with the death drive remaining unmentioned but desire (drives) as the flows of productive difference equally “detrimentalizing” and destructive of any closed order, as is jouissance. Deleuze and Guattari argue that desire is only successful when it “breaks down,” when it is no longer repressed, destroying and dissolving structures. Geminal influx of intensity (Deleuze and Guattari, 1977, 164) or “geminal impex” (162), sometimes also referred to as “chaosmos” or “intense geminal influx,” is characterized as a “machinic assemblage” moving in one direction toward organization and in the other toward free flow. For Freud the most primary drive was the oral drive. How different is that from Deleuze and Guattari’s first synthesis of a life producing “distionic” intensity—by one flow of desire intersecting with another as mouth/breast? Is not the drive “mechanism”—its circular loop—machinie? The importance of Deleuze and Guattari would be their attempt to update a theory of the drives—what they refer to as positive and productive desire—through an updated biologism of complexity theory. In this sense I would argue they fail to capitalize on the more radical aspects of Freud that surpassed biology and recognize anthropology as a distinct philosophical “science” that pertains to homo sapiens. Despite anthropology’s modernist racist roots, its quest is to think through what is distinctly human.

Deleuze and Guattari claimed the virtual field of molecularity as being productive while representation was confined to the molar. The result was the failure to recognize production as the very passage from the virtual to the actual (Badiou, 2000). Representation, for Deleuze and Guattari “is always a social and psychic repression of desiring-production” (1977, 184). This is
Why desire as lack (its negativity) is also required. Without such a conceptualization, Deleuze and Guattari, like Foucault, eschew a theory of fantasy, in favor of a materialism. There is no mediation to complicate the relation between unconscious desire (in the Real) and the social, which Lacan's Symbolic and Imaginary registers take into account. But, as argued below, Anzieu's (1989) concept of the skin-ego is a materialistic bridge to Lacan without sacrificing the notion of fantasy. In Youth Fantasies, Lacan's matheme for fantasy ($S \leftrightarrow a$) was, of course, a key consideration, as it is in this book. The book's subtitle: The Perverse Landscape of the Media refers to Lacan's inversion of his formula of fantasy into the matheme of perversion ($a \leftrightarrow S$). Fantasies are always potentially perverse and in flux. The lozenge sign $\leftrightarrow$ (poinçon) placed between the elements allows for the multiplicity of possible heterogeneous readings. The $\leftrightarrow$ sign indicates the multitude of possible relations between the subject of the unconscious ($je$) and its object cause of desire ($a$), which are engaged through the readings of popular music cultures.

One site of the Real is interpreted here as the embodied unconscious self ($je$), the place of affect—what is “feelable” as opposed to what is “seeable” (Imaginary register) and what is “sayable” (Symbolic register). Affect and jouissance, especially when it comes to music, while not completely equivalent, nevertheless, point to similar level of occurrence (more below). They overlap in the affective disruption that jouissance provides. Jouissance is not an experience of pleasure, but is connected to a momentary break from the symbolic fictions that constitute identity. In a skewed sort of way, it can be read as “positive” in the Deleuzean sense. This is where Deleuze and Guattari’s axiomatic statement “[t]here is only desire and the social, and nothing else” (1977, 184) appears to hold, but not entirely for jouissance is connected to the Symbolic Order precisely in the moment when it throws the Symbolic Order into question. As an eruption of “non-sense” it indicates either a hole (or lack) in the Symbolic Order of the signifier or an excess of over-presence in it. In this particular sense jouissance can be interpreted as being “productive” given its transformative potentiality, while desire, caught up in fantasy as a lack, is theorized in terms of reproduction, consumption, and exchange where the narrative structure of the signifier covers up jouissance as sense making. Jouissance can, therefore, be excessive and abundant, or lacking; at the same time it is painful, addictive, and dangerous, outside the Law where the death drive comes to fore. Jouissance can produce an interruption when the subject is completely unconcerned with the Other’s desire. The subject loses symbolically situated identity as opposed to narcissism where the subject’s identity is invested in the Symbolic Order. I fail to see how the theory of the drives cannot be read as “positive” desire, which is the “market” cornered by Deleuzean supporters. As I argue below and in chapter 2, the death drive can be read as a “positive” site of transformation as an “ethics of the Real.”

How different is Lacan’s understanding of the unconscious from Deleuze’s stance that unconscious subjectivity is a passion-driven network of
“impersonal” machinic-like connections? Lacan always took the unconscious as a system in-and-of itself, interconnected with the Imaginary and Symbolic. While Deleuze can be read as updating the biological paradigm along the vitalist lines of chaos theory, Lacan’s concept of the unconscious as the site of a “mathematical” acephalous Real, developed further in the late stages of his life, can be marshaled to do much the same work as Deleuze’s appropriation of chaos theory (e.g., Milovanovic’s many writings in criminology and law, 1997, 2002), as can the theory of the drives (Trieb). The death drive, in particular, as immanent to experience, becomes the “zero” that is added to the body. It is inevitably present but unregistered. The drives are transposed as the affective embodiment, and are a transposition of Deleuze’s claim of “positive” desire, which Braidotti always pits against Lacan’s notion of lack, as if lack has been simply theorized one-sidedly as a negative conceptualization rather than the paradoxical “full and empty” at once, which Lacan always put subtly into play. Although Braidotti attempts to maintain a hard line against psychoanalysis by forwarding Deleuze, she slips up once in a while. For instance: “The subject is a process, made of constant shifts and negotiations between different levels of power and desire, constantly shifting between willful choice and unconscious drives. . . . [the subject] is the fictional choreography of many levels into one socially operational self. It implies that what sustains the entire process of becoming-subject is the will-to-know, the desire to speak, as a founding, primary, vital, necessary and therefore original desire to become” (Braidotti, 2002, 75–76, emphasis added). Statements such as these show the transpositional possibilities between the two, often claimed, disparate systems. The issue of sexuality, in particular, is identified as a dividing line between them. Lacan is accused of binarism, while Deleuze and Guattari, for the most part, receive “warnings” and “possibilities” for their potential for feminist and queer theory as exemplified, for instance, by Grosz’s (1994) questionable and hesitant support of becoming-woman “as going beyond identity and subjectivity, fragmenting and freeing up lines of flight, ‘liberating’ a thousand tiny sexes that identity subsumes under the One” (207). How far are Lacan and Deleuze apart on the question of sexuality?

**Sexuation: Beyond Sex/Gender**

Sexuality, as theorized within Lacan’s “formulae of sexuation” (S XX, *Encore*), belongs to the category of the Real. It is neither a constructed category (unlike gender), nor can sex somehow be articulated once and for all. Potentially, sex is perpetually differentiated by a gap that separates two logically heterogeneous systems: masculine and feminine. Sex is also not “manipulable” and “pliable” as transgendered and transsexual theorists often claim.¹ *Every* culture has an origin myth regarding the sexes (Moore, 1997). I would argue that this unconscious abyss concerning sex—that is, there is no signifier for sex in the unconscious—emerged as a result of the sex/gender confusion that developed during the evolutionary “rhizome” from the Australopithecines to Homo Sapiens (Jagodzinski, 1986–2004). An impossible gap emerges
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