

# Hysterical Academies: Lacan's Theory of the Four Discourses

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## **Preamble:**

Hijacking Lacan's theory of the four discourses can help re-engage such questions as:

- Is an uncompromising approach to student centredness actually possible in the context of our present day academies?
- Where do various educational arguments come from, and whom do they serve?
- What is the difference between "empowering" students and the idea of allowing for the activation of students' power?

These are the sort of questions that concern this paper. This paper is not about harnessing psychoanalytic techniques in order to "maximize learning". In fact, one of Lacan's contributions was to help place a question mark over such "disciplinary" concerns. Lacan, who was inspired by the thought of Freud, Saussure, Heidegger, Levi-Strauss, and Kojève on Hegel was not a cognitive psychologist. But Lacan's thinking is essentially about "learning". The issue of hysteria, for example, presented itself to Lacan as an existential problem revolving around the axiom of self-knowledge and the repressive forces that prevented it. But if Lacan saw psychoanalysis as an "educational" practice, it was to be a practice driven and made effective by the speech of the student rather than by the interpretations that the teacher (or doctor) offers by way of a reply. A "Lacanian" or "hysterical" academy might be dynamic, but it would probably be dynamically "antiproduktive" rather than "produktive" in the ordinary sense. Antiproduction is production which is not recognised as productive. It works by pulling things apart and connecting things in perverse ways. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983) A Lacanian academy would certainly be "student centered", however, which is not to say that Lacan's theory of the academy ignores the requirements of institutions and their associated academic fields. Instead, a reading of Lacan's Four Discourses suggests the profound societal and intrapsychic complexity - which need be no less socialised - of the situation where

"student centredness" and disciplinary requirements are negotiated. For Lacan, an uncompromising "student centered" academy would be impossible to administer or regulate, in that it would involve the liberation of antiproduction and, consequently, fundamental changes for the practices of institutionalised knowledge.

The first half of this paper, therefore, offers a reading of Lacan's theory of the four discourses. Secondly, I seek to "hystericise" Lacan's theory and explore some of the ramifications that such a re-writing might pose for educational practices. As an English teacher, I have used my own field as point of reference, but I hope teachers in other fields will be able to extrapolate in ways that are directly relevant to their own experiences.

## **Context of student protest**

In the wake of the 1968 upheavals, Lacan gave what may have been his most politically engaged seminar - "*L'envers de la psychoanalyse*" (1969-70) - in which he introduced a schema for the dissection of discourse in general. Literally, the title could be translated as "The reverse of psychoanalysis". In many ways, the hysterical academy alluded to by Lacan was the academy in the grips of student revolt. It might just as easily have been the rule of the Red Guards. The schema proposed by Lacan is concerned with the way the content of speech is typically allied to structurally describable positions that are themselves associated with various styles of speech. These positions differ from each other, therefore, in that they are not simply positions within a social field, but have their own internal economy or semiotic form. They are socially competitive and occupy different power niches and also infrapsychologically different in structure. In other words, the schema looks at the "external" structure of power relations, as well as the "internal" structure of each position within that set of "external" power relations. By analysing the deployment of the elements that constitute these different discourses, it becomes possible to understand how a particular discourse (or set of arguments or utterances) serves a particular set of social interests by reinforcing a particular type of infrapsychic structure. Lacan's Four Discourses seminar was designed so as to be generally applicable to any social situation, but it was primarily an investigation into the *power relations, situations of desire, and subjective orientations* at work within the academy. (cf. Lacan, 1982, p.161; Jameson, 1977, pp.111ff & Sarup, 1992, pp.41-43)

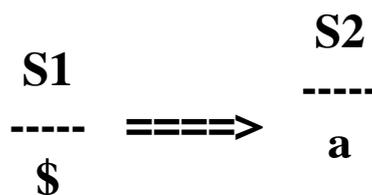
## Four algebraic marks

According to Lacan, the multiplicity of discourses can be categorised in terms of a table where four markers stand in for subindividual and suprasubjective "agencies" (i.e. active principles or "powers").

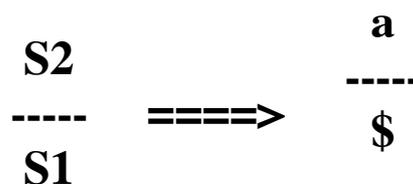
Lacan's four markers are: the Transcendental Signifier[S1]; the chain of signifiers[S2]; the divided subject[\$]; and the object(s) of subjective desire(s)[a]. Each discourse is constituted by a particular arrangement of these agencies. Each marker bears a direct relation to two other markers, but influences all the markers in the system. The situation of each term is overdetermined in so far as it is gripped by the hands of the adjacent terms. In this way the term opposite, though removed, might be said to assert a double influence.

The four discourses "look" like this in Lacan's symbolic system:

### Discourse of the Master



### Discourse of the University



## The Transcendental Signifier

The Signifier[S1] could be thought of as the supersignifier, or principle that controls signification and significance. It bounds and limits affect, and comprises the limits and centre(s) information and affects. Its essential "ties", consequently are to the signifying chain[S2] and the divided subject[\$]. In a sense, the Signifier[S1] is the "Truth" that qualifies discourses and utterances[S2] as "true" (or productive) or "false" (or unproductive). Like the logos - or the phallus - the Signifier[S1] is presented

by power structures as the "origin" of "meaning" both in discourse and *for the subject*; which is to say that the Signifier[S1] violently constructs a line, of inheritance. Learning under the regime of the Signifier[S1] certainly "empowers" students within academic fields, particularly the successful students, but the Signifier[S1] can also be used to keep students in their places. The Signifier[S1] is thereby conventionally used to sacrifice the hysteric (and her difficult questions) in order to guarantee meaning on behalf of the "normal" system of generation associated with a particular discipline, or "genre". The Signifier[S1] thus serves those with substantial investments in the reproduction of that line.

## The Chain of Signifiers

Signifying chains[S2] refers to the Lacanian/Structuralist idea of syntagmatic (e.g. collocative) and paradigmatic (i.e. denotative and connotative) links between signs that are more or less regulated by the Signifier[S1]. These are conventionally thought of as *parole(s)*: acts and speech acts related to practices, codes, conventions, protocols, habitual collocations, discourses, and "unwritten laws". The signifying chain[S2] links back to the Signifier[S1] and to the object of desire[a]. This allows the Signifier[S1] to influence the choice of "proper" objects of desire by way of its repressive force, which, in turn, promotes productive actualisations of *paroles* which select proper objects of desire. Accordingly, repression says "no" in such a way as to promote a certain kind of productivity. But because the chain of signifiers[S2] orbits a dead centre - the Transcendental Signifier[S1] - the chain of signifiers never reaches its "proper" destination. As Lacan found himself continually repeating, nobody has the Truth that could be spoken so as to finalise discourse, or give it a final meaning. For Lacan, then, the dialectic of desire operates between a divided subject[\$], and the Signifier[S1] by way of "deferral". Deferral - which means "putting off till later" as well as "putting ahead" - here suggests a style of suspenseful or "partial" gratification that tends toward the "masochistic" in that it involves the renunciation of instant gratification in favor of long term projects. Deferral, consequently, is intimately tied up with submission to power. As the flipside of repression, in a world where all desires cannot be satisfied, "wishes" come to occupy the spaces of desires those that cannot be actualised. But this also means that "basic" forms of gratification (such as eating) can be transformed into more "complicated" and "educated" techniques of pleasure (e.g. the pleasures of Literary Criticism). These "educated pleasures", even when directing our love towards its "proper" destination (the Signifier[S1]), do not satiate. Instead of reaching the Signifier[S1], the chain of linked signifiers[S2] shuttles through various positions in language, including the positions of despot, teacher, hysteric

and listener. Each position, as such, is a particular *style* of deferral. The Lacanian subject, accordingly, is always "divided", full of wishes, never satisfied, and typically wanders through life with a sense of having been missing out, of having lost something along the way, a long time ago, or of wanting something that cannot be had.

## The divided subject

A "subject" is a whole person. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, this subject is "divided", created by a lack of power. It is linked both to the Signifier[S1] and its objects of desire[a], and is torn between propriety and perversity. It loves and yet plots against the Signifier[S1] that stands opposite. The Subject[\$]'s desire is thus the product of a fundamental sense of loss or incompleteness. The violence of this splitting thus begins the hysterical question: *Who am I and what do I want?* This hysterical subject[\$], then, is one who rebels antiproduktively as a response to the weight of conscience (and its demand on behalf of reproduction). She knows that she should love the Signifier[S1] as the thing that could relieve her pain, and also, therefore, that the Signifier[S1] is the origin of her pain. She suspects its fraudulence, but cannot dispose of its influence over her life.

The subject is thus in a double-bind. On one hand, the fulfilment of desire would be the apocalypse of the Subject[\$] - but on the other hand, as the Lacanian Subject[\$] has come to rely on the deferral of desire for her pleasure- the cessation of desire would result in an apocalypse no less horrifying. To maintain the dialectic of desire the Subject[\$] therefore interposes "objects of desire"[a] between itself and the Signifier[S1].

## The object of desire

The *objet petit 'a'*[a] is thus a fraudulent object of desire that is called upon to sustain desire. As such, there is always a sense of deflation involved in the final possession of the object[a]. This deflation is associated with processes of demystification. The maintenance of the object[a] thus involves a partial possession. The relation between the subject[\$] and the object[a] is like that of a lover who wishes both to control her beloved and yet fears the demystifying results of such control. As noted already, objects of desire[a] can be "appropriate" or "perverse" according to their relationship to the Signifier[S1], which, among other things, is concerned with instigation of basic gender divisions and the enforcement of sex roles (which extend to the situation of men and women in knowledge practices) and "normal" genital sexuality.

## **An economy of counter-clockwise rotation**

These four markers are rotated around an arrow and two sublatory bars. The arrow stands for the principle of production in the widest sense (including reproduction and antiproduction). The bars represent the Hegelian form of dialectical logic: a "rising up" (*aufhebung*) that forces one term "down" and the another term "up" while incorporating both terms into a new entity. This sublation or "rising up" is a form of conquest that retains or reserves the lower term in the service of a totality ruled by the higher term (sometimes translated "synthesis"). Yet Lacan only develops the four discourses that are produced through strict rotation and uses only four markers. For example, the *discourse of the hysteric* is the only configuration offered by way of a system of rotation that begins with desire and subjectivity. We could nevertheless make an item [a/\$] which would could be termed "schizophrenic" rather than "hysterical" in its positioning of the subjective construct under the dominion of the object construct, but only by violating the economy of rotation.

## **The four discourses summarised**

The four discourses, described by Lacan, Rose, and Mitchell et al, are those of the Master, the University, the Hysteric and the Analyst. Summarising: the *discourse of the master* is basically despotic; the *discourse of the university* is "disciplinary" and regulative; the *discourse of the hysteric* is that of the obsessive questioner; and the *discourse of the analyst* is that of the ethical listener. These discourses, however, rarely appear in their "pur" forms. (Sarup, 1992, p.41) The fact that these positions within discourse are both "smaller<sup>2</sup> and "bigger" than the "individual" means that we are not talking about specific persons - as though one is automatically boxed and stuck in the role of a Master or a Hysteric. Though, in practice, because we tend to teach the way we were taught, individual teachers are often predisposed to a particular approach, usually a switching back and forth between "masterly" and "disciplinary" practices and arguments. But actually, these four modes of voice are more like roles or *personae* which specific individuals might adopt from time to time. This does not mean that the discourses merge so as to lose their characteristics. We can usually tell the precise moment when somebody stops talking like a Master and starts talking on behalf of the University, or when the discourse of Hysteria stops and is replaced by the voice of "reason". The "discourse analysis" techniques of Applied Linguistics, for example, are particularly good at noting such shifts in genre, direction and register.

In our academies, however, it is the "hegemonic" discourses of the Master and the University that are most commonly heard, and which struggle over the authority to organise courses, assessments, teaching regimes, research grants and so forth. (cf. Gramsci, 1971)

## The Discourse of the Master

From Mitchell and Rose:

$S1/\$ > S2/a$ : *discourse of the master*: tyranny of the all knowing and exclusion of fantasy: primacy to the signifier (S1), retreat of subjectivity beneath its bar (\$), producing its knowledge as object (S2), which stands over and against the lost object of desire (a); (Mitchell & Rose (eds) Lacan, 1982, pp.160-161)

Here the teacher is situated as the master and producer of knowledge as power, demanding the recognition of his autonomy at the expense of the perversity of students' desire. (Foucault, 1970 & 1980) The students are expected to "reproduce" the discourse of the Master. As such, there is complete disregard for students who fail to adulate the Master or his approach to the text. Commonly, the Master will be found in the staffroom complaining about the way students seem to be getting more and more stupid, the general fall in standards and the unsuitability of some students in particular (who should have become waged labour at age fifteen). The educational process, according to a Master, involves an initiation through pain that thereby "civilises" the desire of students who would otherwise remain feral. The Master takes it upon himself to rescue "educated pleasures" from "brute gratifications". The mark of a civilised student is that she appreciates the Master and the body of knowledge which belongs to him and offers elevated pleasure at the expense of dedication. The inscribing process is thus legitimised. Under a "Society of Discourse" or "commentary" based regime (where Masters are particularly at home), education is seen as the necessary effect of students' painful or happy interaction with the text as "in itself it really is". (cf. Foucault, 1970) Masters, especially when operating in Societies of Discourse, typically place great emphasis on their own expertise and argue from their own experience as students to general principles for education. Even the requirements of the academy - particularly "modern" academies that are now attempting to prescribe "progressive" practices - are likely to be seen by a Master as thorns in the flesh. A real Master is even quite likely to be contemptuous of the state of affairs that dominates his own field (or where it is heading) and will cling instead to his "own" reactive (or radical) understanding of how the discipline *should be*. The Master is always "out of step" with the *status quo*, and can see himself as the champion of tradition or of progressive thinking.

But he will rarely see himself as simply the agent of the academy or the state.

Here it should be noted that while the text is often positioned "phallogcentrically", "centrally" (and is used regulatively) by a Master's discourse, it is actually very common to find the text positioned as the "feminine" partner in the seminal production of the Master's commentary. Positioning the student's as feminine "receptacles" and feminising the text means that we are here to learn how to be "sensitive" to the text - "women" in a sense, but *not* hysterical women. Indeed Terry Lovell goes as far as to suggest that the process of "humanisation" by means of student-textual interaction is primarily a process of the "feminisation" of students, no less phallogcentric than masculinisation of women or the commodification of students as "womanly" receptacles. (cf. Lovell, 1987) So we have the situation, described by Lovell, of the rank and file English students, mostly women, who sit at the feet of the male professor, ready to take his civilising message out into the schools where the really feral students are supposedly working at becoming even more illiterate.

Essentially, the discourse of the Master is the "Tyranny of the all-knowing and exclusion of fantasy [before which we experience the] *retreat of subjectivity*...." (Rose & Mitchell, 1985) This best describes the ultimate in despotic classrooms where teacher says and students are not allowed to disagree. It is certainly grounded on a "delusion of Truth and mastery", but it is a delusion that is often endorsed by knowledge practices that prove themselves performatively (the discourse of the Master is not automatically the discourse of an idiot).

## **The Discourse of the University**

The discourse of the University, on the other hand, is more subtle, more pervasive, and conceals egotism and personal "empire building" far more effectively. From Mitchell and Rose:

S2/S1 > a/\$: *discourse of the university*: knowledge in the place of the master; primacy to discourse itself constituted as knowledge (S2) [sound familiar?- ed], over the signifier as such (S1), producing knowledge as the ultimate object of desire (a), over and against any question of the subject (\$); (Mitchell & Rose (eds) Lacan, 1982, pp.160-161)

Here, knowledge or disciplinary competence takes the place of the Master.

What is at stake is the ability of a student to operate in the field in a "competent" manner. A body of knowledge and technique is constituted as the "core" with the subsequent demand that students "empower" themselves by learning certain techniques of knowledge production. Presently, in English Studies, such techniques might include a command of Critical Theory, a particular sophisticated style of "close reading", or a knowledge of historical and biographical contexts and intertextualities. (Foucault, 1970 & 1980; Derrida, 1981) Competence with regard to such practices separates the educated from the uneducated response. For the discourse of the University essentially attempts to regulate students *and* Masters on behalf of "sound educational practices", responsibility, accountability, the productivity of the field and, ultimately, the state.

For the Master, his signature is a mark of authority, for the University all signatures must be acquired as marks of assent. Paradoxically, the well-meaning teacher who feels the weight of the academy often feels a responsibility to regulate the discourse of the classroom so as to guarantee sound education. The University demands that time must not be *wasted*. The easiest way to do this is to monopolise the space(s) of speech. When the academy demands "student-centred" practices, and does so without revising its assessment protocols so as to allow for deviant forms of activity, the teacher finds herself in a double-bind which only "faith" in the ultimate "effectiveness" of well researched teaching practices can easily resolve. Thus the academy typically promulgates the requirement of such faith by advancing a utilitarian discourse grounded on the research findings endorsed by those currently in control. These research findings invariably rely on the value of performativity that accomodates the discourse of the University, rather than on Truth as such. When egalitarian, they are premised on the idea of the superior productivity of equal distribution, not on the idea of a categorical imperative which would demand an ethical response even at the cost of production. Because of this double-bind, the teacher might be encouraged to feel guilty if she is not constantly "improving". This is typical of what Foucault calls a "disciplinary" regime where surveillance is at maximum, as opposed to a "legislative" regime where once you have your papers you are on your own (the latter being an excellent recipe for producing Masters). Under such a disciplinary regime, the academy is quite ready to get inside your soul. During the compilation of staff "development" or "appraisal" profiles, for example, teachers can be considered egotistical and dishonest if they refuse to confess their frailties. When this happens, teachers quickly learn the ropes: confess to minor "problems", make the right noises about "improving in problem areas", but never let on that there you are having any serious difficulties. Filling in staff development questionnaires often leads to "mentoring", which, when compulsory, can be a rather degrading process, and is probably supposed to be. The first

question a hysteric asks is "who mentors the mentors"? A teacher who refuses to take all this "prying" seriously - and most of them are acting like Masters - could, particularly in the current climate of renewable contracts and voluntary redundancies, even feel too threatened to really become "recalcitrant".

Nothing is too "small" or too "big" for the discourse of the University to concern itself. The discourse of the University reaches from the minutiae of how to record student marks to the "vision" of the academy as competitive in the "global market", and "pro-active" in its response to "government initiatives". The University even announces creativity its "top priority". But it's a kind of efficient and *productive* creativity. Everybody must speak, and speak in a way appropriate to the field. Thus in the classroom, tutorial or seminar, it is not infrequently observed that the teacher often forms what could be described as an "incestuous" alliance with one or two *higs*. Higs (high input generators) talk a lot. And they usually talk in acceptable ways. While this seems to be activating the discussion, an objective survey or discourse analysis would quickly reveal the price paid by ligs (low input generators). For those teachers who are themselves erstwhile *higs*, it is even more essential that pro-hysterical practices be engaged. In short, teacher-*hig* alliances maximise desire within the alliance, but minimised desire outside the alliance. Under such regimes, hysterics are hardly to be blamed for their internalisations, underproduction(s), or antiproduative outbursts.

This regime basically corresponds with Foucault's description of a "Discipline". (Foucault, 1970) In English Studies, this "disciplinary" element becomes tied to the performance of commentary, which is why it is strange in some sense to talk about the "discipline" of Literary Criticism (which has traditionally been highly idiosyncratic). But as Literary Criticism becomes less of a "Society of Discourse" and more of a "Discipline", it is becoming less idiosyncratic - and besides, personal style was never a matter of "individual taste" (it was always associated with a Society of Discourse). Let us hope it never freezes enough to be called a "Dogma". (Foucault, 1970) Presently then, our English institutions operate as mixed and unstable regimes, but almost always with an eye to regulating revolutionary commentary in so far as it remains productive.

## **The Discourse of the Hysteric**

Once again, the discourse of hysteria is completely different. It is crazy and utopian - even when suicidal:

$\$ / a > S1/S2$ : *discourse of the hysteric*: the question of subjectivity; primacy to the division of the subject ( $\$$ ), over his or her fantasy ( $a$ ), producing the symptom in the place of knowledge ( $S1$ ), related to but divided from the signifying chain which supports it ( $S2$ ); (Mitchell & Rose (eds) Lacan, 1982, pp.160-161)

The hysterical question is "unrealistic", paranoid, delusional, hypochondriac, unstable and fluxatious, troublesome. Hysteria violates textual and disciplinary codes, rules, conventions, modes of production, technologies of knowledge, discursive bounds or limits. Hysteria is self-contradictory and "uninformed": the "symptom" of the question takes the place of the real business: the text, the ego of the master, or the need to make a worthwhile contribution to the field. Hysteria disinvests the academic socius through the "fantastic" production of a disseminative surplus (eg: a "waste" of time, resources etc). (Derrida, 1981 & Spivak, 1987, esp. p.82) Hysteria makes spurious economies where counterfeit circulates. Hysteria turns the question/reply transaction into a ruse. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, 1987; Derrida, 1981; Cixous & Clement, 1986; Irigaray, 1985a, 1985b, 1991a, 1991b, 1993b) The hysteric raises the "question of subjectivity" (Mitchell & Rose, 1985), but not necessarily in a direct manner. The hysteric need not say: "Who am I?" or "What is Being?", but might ask another question, or pose a silence that nevertheless has the effect of alienating us from the certainties of knowledge and identity that we tend to buy into as we go about our daily business. Desire, for a hysteric is in the form of question that threatens the construct of subjectivity from below. It is the "old mole" of subjective revolution. As such, the discourse of the Hysteric might be seen as corresponding to the position granted (or more usually forced upon) the "subject" who has "failed" under a commentary regime, a Discipline, or even a Dogma (hysterics make excellent heretics). (cf. Foucault, 1970) *Habituses* (i.e. learned predispositions) and the rules that govern fields are not completely irrelevant to the hysteric, but are part of the problem. They are used to judge the hysteric. (Bourdieu, 1990) You could say that the hysteric has a dysfunctional or badly adapted *habitus* (or "feel for the game"), but you would be talking the discourse of the University. The hysteric, because she is dysfunctional, has no knowledge, but she is still supposed to love the Master or Analyst precisely because of her ignorance. (Lacan, 1977b & 1985). But, in fact, hysterics don't just have badly adapted *habitudes*, they are actively and antiproduktively engaged in destructuring both *habitus* and field. Hysterics are like sorceresses, positioned on the fringes. They are intermediaries between the "civilised" and the "wild", between the structured and the unstructured, between the formal and the heterogeneous, which is why listening to a hysteric can be so thought provoking.

The typical "University" solution, however, is to "nurture" the hysteric back to quiet "ligdom", or if possible, even *higgish* productivity. Otherwise, just fail her. Repression and inscription are the enemies of the hysteric, they are what she is tired of. The hysteric is the scapegoat (Cixous & Clement, 1986) accused of pretending, of hypochondria, of manipulation, of masochism, of selfishness, sadism, inconstancy, irrationality, and bad social skills. A hysteric is "*producing the symptom in the place of knowledge*". (Rise & Mitchell, 1982) But the preamble to such a symptomography is that, somewhere "inside her", the hysteric already *knows too much*. Contestation arises when, from the hysterical "knowing place", the hysteric feels free to raise the question of *whose knowledge of whom*.

## The Discourse of the Analyst

This is where the role of the Analyst begins:

*a/S2 > \$/S1: discourse of the analyst: the question of desire; primacy to the object of desire (a), over and against knowledge as such (S2), producing the subject in its division (\$) (a > \$ as the very form of fantasy), over the signifier through which it is constituted and from which it is divided. .... Hence Lacan's description of psychoanalysis as the "hysterisation of discourse" .... Lacan therefore poses analysis against mastery, hysteria against knowing..... (Mitchell & Rose (eds) Lacan, 1982, pp.160-161)*

It is important to remember that the Lacanian analyst does not reply until the hysteric has given utterance to her splitting - but the corollary of this therapeutic reserve is that the analyst already knows that the hysteric's problem is that she loves and loathes the Signifier[S1]. (Lacan, 1977, pp.31ff) Her problem stems from an unwillingness - or inability - to make the "normal" compromises. On the bright side, the discourse of the analyst is the regime of the teacher who listens to the students without pre-empting their desires or immediately moving to negate or recuperate their voices. On the dark side, the Analyst is commonly just the Master or the University in disguise. It is, for example, commonplace didactic strategy to rephrase a student's utterance in "acceptable" terminology. This is obviously a recuperative practice, and when applied to the discourse of the hysteric, it can only further her sense of alienation. Operating the discourse of the Analyst does not mean listening only to offer this sort of comprehensive reply. The discourse of the Analyst is a small discourse. It is a belated discourse. It is a discourse that stops itself from *knowing too soon*. It waits, but while it waits it modifies itself so as to hear better, so as to produce situations where heterogeneous voices can feel comfortable. It is the regime

of the "ethical" teacher who is prepared to make sacrifices and alter her mode of teaching and subject matter; who replies to the courage of those hysterics willing to risk disagreeing with the teacher, text, or field. Briefly, "ethics" is an intersubjective and pragmatic concern for subjective alterity and politico-relational equality. Like a Master, then, the Analyst is also "out of step". The University, itself, makes certain demands which effectively curtail the potentially ethical dynamic of hysteric and her ethical teacher. An Analyst is always in danger of becoming an agent of the University, just as she is always liable to lapse into mastery.

## **Revolutionary hysteria**

Hysterics are usually seen as trouble, but they are actually good for many reasons. Not only are they inventive, but they also ask the so called "dumb questions" that so often get at the roots of what is going on (though often in such a way that the question looks like a "red herring" or "sidetrack"). Hysteria is a threat to knowledge, but not necessarily bad for the field. However antiproductive, the pleasures of hysteria are not just "brute" pleasures, they are more often pleasures of a particularly refined and rigorous kind. The hystericisation of English Studies, for example, would not necessitate the "impoverishment" of English Studies that Edward Said objects to when he attests to the "superiority" of students trained in "traditional" English discipline(s). (cf. Said, 1993, esp. pp.367ff). Such impoverishments arise from despotic and/or disciplinary regimes that work to *reduce* in order to regulate students' desires the state's vision of its labour requirements. The buzz word "relevance" typically refers to the needs of the capitalist mode of production rather than to the emancipation of antiproductive activity. Similarly, the Hysteric does not make the text vanish, she re-energises it. Techniques such as close reading and deconstruction do not automatically lose their "fecundity" in the hands of a Hysteric, rather, they become invested as technologies for desiring production (including writing). Sadly though, Irigaray is quite right when she observes that she has "never heard the word 'hysteria' being used in a valorising way....." (Irigaray, 1991, p.47) Irigaray continues: "Yet there is a revolutionary potential in hysteria.... It is because they want neither to see nor hear that movement that they so despise the hysteric." (Irigaray, 1991, p.47) Replying to the question of students' desires, therefore, does not mean addressing the issue of students' "needs", or "failings", the "gaps in their knowledge" or the deficits in their "skill resources". All that belongs to the discourse of the University. For the Analyst, the desires of the students take precedence over the demands of either "Master" or "knowledge" - even if that desire is antiproductive.

## Connections and flows rather than needs and lacks

If we re-read desire as bodies making connections (cf. Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), then the normal tree-curricula or set of "spheres" needs to be reorganised in a non-binary, non-repeatable way. The text book or core subject gives way to environments designed to allow maximum perversity of connection and flow. There have to be multiple entry-ways and many ways to go through the landscape of discourse. This is not, however, a regime of "chaos" where teachers forget about course design. Devotion to students' desires actually places greater demands on course design so as to maximise possible sites of perverse connection and energisation. The teacher as Analyst knows that the field must be at least as potentially hostile or "alienating" to students. But she also knows that the demands of the field must nevertheless be perverted and open to chaos if we are to *be listening*. (cf: Irigaray, 1993 & Levinas, 1991). Listening does not mean *having listened*. A "student-centredness" that translates into a repeatable course or set of practices for "meeting the student's needs" is really a "University-centeredness".

## Hysterical excess

As suggested already, Lacan's construction of desire is prevalently "negative". Elsewhere, and most notably, Lacan introduces the idea of a "second", feminine, excessive, non-symbolic *jouissance* or "pleasure" - a pleasure that does not wait (cf: Lacan, 1982, pp.137ff) - which I read as a Lacan's rather belated affirmation of hysteria. But, even without taking into account Lacan's view of "women's *jouissance*" as excessive from the point of view of patriarchal knowledge practices, the sense of submission and waiting upon which Lacan founds his dialectics of desire is hardly as universal as most of Lacan's writings suggests. If I pose a question, it does not automatically follow that I want the answer to arrest the flow of inquiry, just as it does not automatically follow that I wish to eternalise my own sense of subservience. I do not, essentially, lack an answer, rather I might be seeking paths of affirmative flow through symbolic and interpersonal contacts.

## Affirming desire

I am not suggesting that desire is apolitical. (cf. Nancy, 1993, p.203) But students from the "margin(s)", as far as I can tell, do not want the teacher, text, or discipline to make them "complete", rather they want the teacher, the text, or the discipline only insofar as those things offer connections that enable them to express their own actualisations of desire. Knowledge is only

rewarding if its "getting" involves connections and flows. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1993 & 1987) If, as a by product, these flows enable us to build careers and garner symbolic capital or cash, then surely, for us at least, this is a happy outcome of our connective passions and subservient strategies. But I doubt that there are many of us who entered the field of teaching as the cold-blooded strategists that Bourdieu's critique often seems to intimate. (cf: Bourdieu, 1977 & 1988) We play in the field, certainly, but could we continue to play, or play well, if we did not take some sort of pleasure in what we are doing? Along the way we have certainly learned to defer "instant gratification" in order to learn how to partake of "higher" pleasures. Each step, however, involved the pleasure of connection and flow as well as the work of self-denial and submission. Analogously, our students rarely see learning simply as a way of coming into positions of power within our socius and its institutions. Our students are not always operating as split subjects - we take great pains to help put the split in them.

## **Hysterical algebra: a modest proposal**

Hysterically, I want to rewrite the object of desire[a] as desire[cf] which stands for look elsewhere, or, if you like, "connections and flows". (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983) Consequently the Subject[\$] will also have to go. Let us replace "him" with a body[ps] because she has always something to add, to supply: a power source for desiring production. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983 & 1987; Irigaray, 1985, 1991a & 1991b; Cixous & Clement, 1986, Spivak, 1987, pp.77ff & 1993; Derrida, 1976 & 1981). In fact, our student's need not even be subjects. Desire does not need subjects, just connections with which to flow. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983 & 1987) As hinted, becoming hysterical will also mean that the signifying chain[S2] will have to be deregulated. I suggest, as far as the academy is concerned, that we call it discourse in the institutionalised field[(d)if] where the "d" stands for the "otherness" (*itara*) of iteration (Derrida, 1990, p.7) and the "if" stands for a question - or for the condition of possibility. As mentioned already, this would involve giving the Socratic economies of the classroom over to disseminative wastages. (Derrida, 1981) If we do this, we will also have to have a belly-laugh at the expense of the Signifier[S1]. Let us rename the Signifier[S1] the Logos[log]. because we will need to get it out of our *scopoi* before we can begin to imagine a hysterical academy as a site of production. It will mean making the assertion that there is more to writing than signification, and it will make the positioning systems deployed by significatory chain-systems appear as socio-historically contingent semiotic constructs. In short, the *log* - preferably stripped of any dangerous roots and branches - has been used to beat down the "woodenheads" and make sure that the student knows that she is already shamefully castrated. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Irigaray, 1985a, 1985b, & Lacan, 1977, 1982)

## Punch & Judy

It might look like a Punch and Judy show, but only to somebody who has never been the victim of the sort of public humiliation. In my own experience as a teacher, making the humiliation of students structurally difficult has proved more complicated than it sounds. Even in small group work, with the weight of the *log* combined with the regulative imperatives of the academy[(d)if] lodged firmly on my back, I have "instinctively" felt compelled to monitor all exchanges for "merit" and "correctness". In fact, in the institution where I presently work, I am even expected to assess verbal exchanges and give each student a mark out of ten for her or his performance. I expect other teachers will both identify with what I am confessing here, and realise the gravity of what is at stake for the academy if such monitoring is relinquished on behalf of "waste".

But a new game is already being played. Mastery, nowadays, rarely functions as a legitimate means of garnering symbolic capital, but I wonder if, from a hysterical point of view, the new systems of disciplinary regulation are really that much of an improvement. "Corruption" has been replaced by a statist meritocracy, more subtle, but still quite biased. But what would happen if the hysterical agenda were not recuperated by the University? The question of the academy's need for democratic and ethical forms of regulation is central to the discourse of the University. Under the hysterical regime this would become apparent as an almost comical contingency. The prospect of other social forms might become inviting again as imagination gets back to work. Along the way, a state of intense negotiation might already be seen as having opened up between a powerful and heterogeneous student body and an academy in a state of flux and symbolic redistribution. Widespread re-organisation of assessment criteria, course design, spatio-temporal regimes, and positionalities have already surfaced as utopian designs. Already, to a certain degree, symbolic capital is now garnered through the agonization of academic practices. This game has already begun.

## The hysterical academy: a comedy of errors

With the suggested revisions, the discourse of the hysteric becomes [*ps/cf* > *log/(d)if*], by which we could observe that hysterical discourse places a multiplicity of possible connections at the command of the student bodies who would be doing most of the connecting and flowing - but in perverse, non-repeatable ways. The students would then be more able to produce

writings which raise questions over and against the logos and/or the conventions of the discipline. Such writing might be very different from the sort of "subversive writing" that is already acceptable in many disciplines. If we took hysteria seriously, the lecture system would be dead and tutorial design would need to be "task based". The hysterical academy would replace the question of *what students should learn?* with the question of *how many different things the students can do?* Discussions are fine, but what else is there? Resources for cut-ups would be accessed and supplied by students and teachers with an eye to multifarious collages, assemblages, compilations, small group work, and open projects. Open questions and tasks where there are any number of productive possibilities would always be in order rather than closed questions and tasks where the range of acceptable productions is limited. (cf: Deleuze & Guattari, 1983 pp.42ff & Cixous & Clement, 1986, pp.34ff) The metaphor of the analyst and her couch would be replaced with mutually therapeutic communities. Talking would give way to plasticity. Hysterics might enter into symbiosis with Teacher/Listeners who work hard to negotiate with the hysterics in such a way as to allow desire to remain affirmative. In the new game, points could be scored by playing a different game. This would, of course, be a complete disaster for the academy as it now stands.

But what happens if we rewrite the discourse of the University in our new notation: [(d)if/log > cf/ps]? Here there is little space for dogmatisation. And what of the teacher as listener, as "analyst"? If the discourse of the analyst is rewritten [cf/(d)if > ps/log] then there is certainly a place for the teacher who listens in the hystericised academy. She is the compromiser, the new sacrificial body in the contest between academy and hysteria. For the teacher-analyst the students' connections and flows would take precedence, the ethical teacher would still *belistening* to the hysterics, the misfits, the freaks and cranks. She would still be trying to subordinate discourse to excessiveness. The classroom would become a "public space" of the kind Habermas suggests. (Habermas, 1987) This means that students would be coming to class having already engaged in individual or group projects. The classroom would function, not as a place of semination, but as an *agora* with exchanges going on all the time, in various corners of the room and with various collages and assemblages and disseminations. The teacher might ask herself not so much: "*will this enable the student to fulfil course requirements?*" but rather "*is there any way in which the enthusiasm of the student for this task and course requirements can be brought together?*"

## Negotiating between the Hysteric and the University

As suggested already, if the hysterical academy were to retain its situation of power in the capitalist state, we would probably need to employ specific "democratic" strategies for minimising the monopolisation of discourse by the *higs* and imagine new ways of assessing students' production(s). Group work would almost always take place in self-selected groups, and the teacher would probably, at least in plenary sessions, still have to police the handovers of power (a "democratic", counter-hysterical intervention). Teacher-talk is not always "bad"; some teacher talk - particularly from good listeners - is usually desirable. And the *higs* too should have their say. The teacher, particularly, is yet another site where connections and flows are available. Even so, negotiation is always a compromise. Negotiations are never free of power, and the teacher, as assessor, is already positioned with the prerogative of closing down learner desire(s) - but negotiated curricula, tasks, and assessments are still possible paths towards more ethical teacher practices.

So, instead of resisting feedback, we would actively create possible channels for its overflow. The present feedback systems are based on the discourse of the University, but even so, they are moving towards the discourse of the Analyst, and by extension, giving some voice to the hysteric - but this movement would have to be pushed further, rather than resisted. If hystericisation means the apocalypse of the academy, this is because the discourse of the University demands that students equip themselves with certain chains of signification which are field-based contextualisations of terms and phrases. (cf: Lyotard, 1988 & Bourdieu 1977 & 1988). Let us not mislead ourselves on this point, the academy demands that we fulfil the pre-inscribed role of inscribers and assessors adequately.

The teacher as Analyst can also negotiate with the discourse of the University through the compilation of ethnologies of the field such as those undertaken by Bourdieu, Althusser, Lovell, Spivak and others. (cf: Bourdieu, 1977 & 1988, Althusser, 1971, Lovell, 1987 & Spivak, 1993) Changing the ways capital is distributed and garnered by bringing to our attention the biases inherent in the academy has already served to liberate certain hysterical voices. She can engage in lines of flight, making new interdisciplinary connections. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) Hysterics are always making such interdisciplinary moves. It falls to the Analyst to work with the hysteric and continue such subversive operations.

## **Conclusion: the ethical struggle**

So far I have, I hope, been hystericising, but perhaps I have not been hysterical enough? Perhaps I have had to leave too much space for compromise? Negotiation involves compromise, certainly, but compromises also tend to undermine negotiations. Besides, there are difficult pragmatics and opposing interests to be confronted. Personally, I am torn between hysteria and academia to the degree that I feel I can actually witness the historical process of normativisation at work whenever I teach, and especially, whenever I *mark*. Rethinking the pragmatics of the classroom, then, does not mean a blindness towards institutional power, or even the mechanical adoption of certain classroom practices. What I think it means is to make real and thoroughgoing changes to classroom practices while constantly returning to the fact that learning can be a rewarding eventfulness where the teacher is not so much "empowering" students - as though power were something *in the student's future* - but where students' "learning" is already dependent on their power. (cf: Deleuze and Guattari, 1987)