

In(tro)ducing F/Phantasy

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The usual difficulty with knowing how to begin is sharpened in this case by a hesitation and nervous stuttering before the word, f-f-f-phantasy. Is there any meeting point for the different lives that this word lives, as erotic scenario, ideological narrative, daytime reverie, constitutive site of sexuality and subjectivity, literary genre, regulatory or enabling fiction? A better question to ask, perhaps, is what kind of performative effects are instituted by the act of calling something a fantasy? At stake in this naming is often an issue of credibility, the governing rules of which distinguish, for example, between a real fear and a paranoid fantasy. The act of calling something a fantasy can operate as a way of excluding from the realm of the plausible and distinguishing between reliable and unreliable speakers. But it can also designate what is longed for, or dangerous – or both. How, then, does one begin to speak of fantasy in a general sense? Judith Butler has remarked that “the effort to describe *theoretically* the origins of fantasy is always also a *fantasy* of origin” (267). We’re trying to get around the problem of origins in this issue of *Tessera* by publishing a collection of texts that registers the non-identity of our starting point – at the very least, the interface between two understandings of this word, marked in the orthographic difference between an *f* and a *ph*.

This difference can indicate a distinction between daydream and unconscious wish; it can also maintain the specificity of a psychoanalytic usage of the word in opposition to the general sense of fantasy as something that has been ‘made up.’ In Butler’s recent work on subjectivity, *f*- and *ph*- designate two forms of fantasy. The slippage between these two forms is understood as the machinery that produces the normalized subject of a heterosexual regime. The fantasy of embodying one of the two symbolic sites of heterosexuality, according to Butler, is induced by the reductive work of regulatory structures on the wide possibilities of a phantasmatic state. The normalized subject, in other words, is an effect of its own highly circumscribed fantasizing activity.

Fantasizing is usually understood as the imaginary rehearsal of a forbidden scene, a stage-setting for desire. Laplanche and Pontalis elabo-

rate on this concept of fantasizing activity by describing the peculiar psychic configuration that this set-up affords the subject. "The subject does not pursue the object or its sign: [s]he appears caught up h[er]self in the sequence of images. [S]he forms no representation of the desired object, but is [her]self represented as participating in the scene although ... [s]he cannot be assigned any fixed place in it" (26). Butler reserves the ph- for this *phantasmatic* organization which permits the subject a strange sort of participation in her own fantasy. She is both the subject of her fantasy and – because present in a diffuse way in its "syntax" – her own object of desire. What is at stake in the difference, *ph / f*, then, is the slippage between a desubjectivized state of multiple and contradictory identifications fused with desire and the relative fixity of the social subject doing the fantasizing. It is in the slide from the phantasmatic state to the normalized one – where desire and identification are held apart – that the sexed subject is produced. The product of an ideological constraint operating on the phantasmatic, the subject is put in the position of "fantasizing the possibility of approximating [one of two] symbolic site[s]": male or female (Butler 97). In this process, identification is channelled along the paths from which heterosexual subject positions emerge. The either/or logic of the machinery maintains the mutual exclusivity of identification and desire: identification with one side of the sexual divide is supposed to entail desire for the other side. The lesbian and gay possibilities of phantasmatic identification are made inarticulate but a "spectral figure of abject homosexuality" remains nevertheless, to haunt the system (Butler 97). (For the return of one of those spectral figures, see Catherine Bennett's vampire tale in this issue.) But the situation is not as static as it may seem. If all identifications have a phantasmatic basis, this means that they can be neither single nor complete, and not only that, but that identifications are operations which necessarily involve desire. Furthermore, if the basis for the normative categories of heterosexual identity is phantasmatic, it is no simple task to align oneself with one symbolic site and it is far from evident that identification with one side of the divide will abolish the possibility of desiring the same side.

What does all of this have to do with the production of texts? How would the conventional quest structure of narrative be reshaped by the idea that all identities are the effects of slippery identifications which also involve desire? Gail Scott's novel, *Main Brides* is one example of such a reorganization of narrative along the lines of *f/phantasmatic* identification. Scott's first-person narrator is a relational construct, an 'I' which is the effect of "cross-corporeal cohabitation[s]" with other women in her

immediate surroundings (Butler 105). The narrator's activity is presented as a liberating and creative alternative to the politically-regulated narrations of self that subjectivize women by attaching them to an identity defined by wounds of the past. In this issue of *Tessera*, Julia Creet's account of her production of a lesbian identity in the space of her mother's disavowed Jewish identity is the record of a self-elaboration which begins by refusing to lay claim to a fantasy of inherited trauma. The incorporation and displacement of her mother's negating fantasy into her own fantasy of belonging to a "sexual tribe" is performed through a reversal of the trope of sexuality in her mother's texts where sexual secrets stand in for the real secret of Jewish identity. A feminist and lesbian appropriation of f/phantasy has also been central in the work of the Vancouver-based lesbian art collective, Kiss & Tell. In *Her Tongue on My Theory*, Kiss & Tell juxtapose erotic photographs with sexual fantasies and conversations about the politics of transgressive representation. *Her Tongue* creates a context for reading that invites identification(s) and desire, as well as participation in the exploration of those sexual contradictions which tend to get brushed aside in debates about sex that reduce all possible positions to those of 'for it' and 'against it.'

The work of Kiss & Tell addresses the kind of tongue-tied hesitation before the question of fantasy with which this introduction began. Sexual fantasy especially can be a site of ambivalence for feminists because of its eminent impurity, because it is one of those realms in which we often find ourselves caught up in the very regimes of power that we consciously, angrily oppose. "Sometimes a woman will be turned on by the exact thing that, in real life, was her most painful and traumatic experience. *Where do these fantasies come from?*" (Kiss & Tell 82; emphasis added). Feminist artists can explore such contradictions, or they can attempt to disinvest sexuality of power relations in their representations. The latter was often the route taken by radical feminists of the 1970's, in whose texts the nude body operated as the magical sign of an unsullied sexuality. Contextualized in nature and "stripped to its 'essential femaleness'," this body was also stripped of historical and socio-political materiality (Dolan 158-59). The problem with this kind of representation is that in side-stepping sexual contradictions, it also opts out of examining differences between women, differences based on race, class, ability and desire. As Kiss & Tell point out, nudity does not solve the problem of sexist conditioning, as if that conditioning were a piece of clothing that could be removed at will. "[I]f it's a T-shirt, it was put on long ago, over open wounds. Our flesh has healed around it, only to be

wounded again and again. It is part of us, grown into our scars. And yet we have joy. It all comes at us at once, not neatly separated out" (11).

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Since the kind of safety that is offered to women comes with a set of rules for conduct ('Don't go out after dark and if you do, watch what you say/wear/do'), the *peril* associated with rule-breaking can have a certain allure. Danger, risk, *Thelma and Louise's* thrilling disobedience, access to the other side of a boundary – the mystique of transgression is often integral to our fantasies, as the texts of Catherine Bennett, Sylvie Bérard, Mary Nyquist and Diane Régimbald in this issue will attest. But this mystique is so compelling that simulated transgressions can be sold back to us by the same, hypocritical culture that reproduces those gendered rules for 'safe' conduct. (For a critical analysis of the fashion industry's simulation of politicality, see Julia Emberley's reading of the Diesel jeans ad in the third section of her essay.) When a particular sign of transgression develops this kind of currency it of course becomes less potent and loses its charge. Transgression is thus overdetermined: its significance depends on the complex articulation, involving socio-political and historical threads, of the boundary which it crosses and without which it cannot exist. Transgression owes a debt to the boundary that it crosses and that boundary is not transhistorical, but an effect of power relations. If rule-breaking and risk-taking are indispensable elements in fantasy but overdetermined by material contingencies, this suggests that fantasy – its content, at least – is deeply rooted in the social world.

Where indeed do fantasies come from? According to Freud, the raw material of fantasy is a stimulus in the body which is only known to the subject once it has been given a representation. Fantasy originates in a moment (constantly renewed) when a drive – detached from any particular object – comes to sustain itself through an imagined scene. It is not clear in Freud just how a representation comes to be assigned to the bodily stimulus. Freud is silent, too, on the question of how a particular fantasy scene might be related to the ways in which a subject happens to be inserted in material relations. This silence leads to dangerous conclusions, such as the infamous one that a girl's fantasy of seduction could be entirely 'made up.' The evacuation of relationships of power from this story of the origin of fantasy also leads to a universalizing tendency in celebrations of the transgressive element of fantasy. There is a rather carefree tendency towards grandiose totalization, for instance, in Julia Kristeva's discussion of transgressive signifying practices which, for

her, have their basis in the raw material of drives but which break the socio-political/discursive rule of monologism.

Writing that forces the drives to erupt in social signification, according to Kristeva, transgresses monologism by introducing another rule, the contradiction and doubling of dialogism. The introduction of this other rule makes such signifying practices a “categorical tearing from the norm” instead of simply a “‘libertine’ and ‘relativizing’” flouting of the rules (40-42). While the signifying practices that Kristeva discusses supposedly draw their transgressive potential from pre-social drives, it is, significantly, a *social* event – the carnival – which serves as a figure for the psychic configuration of the individual practitioner of transgressive signification: “[a] carnival participant is both actor and spectator; [s]he loses h[er] sense of individuality and splits into a subject of the spectacle and an object of the game” (49). This description is reminiscent of one cited earlier in this introduction, the description by Laplanche and Pontalis of the phantasmatic set-up. Kristeva’s figure of the carnival, perhaps despite the theorist’s focus on the psychic renewal of the individual artist, begins to draw the material contingencies of the social world into the discussion of transgression. But we may still want to ask what there is to prevent such transgressive signifying from being merely “‘libertine’ and ‘relativizing’” if it is to consist simply of a re-introduction of the phantasmatic/carnavalesque/dialogistic into an undifferentiated world apparently ruled by an immutable law? There is something missing in a story which gives either transgression or fantasy a basis in pure drives. What if history intervenes early on, as soon as the drive is given a representation, in other words, right at the point where it becomes *meaningful* to the subject?

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In her reading of Laplanche and Pontalis, Teresa de Lauretis discovers a way of getting beyond the impasse of a totalized concept of transgression, in order to begin to think of the complex point of interplay between psychic and social worlds that is fantasy. Honing in on the Freudian idea that a drive must be given a representation before being known to the subject, Laplanche and Pontalis suggest that this representational aspect lies “beyond the history of a subject but nevertheless *in history*” (18; emphasis added). These representations not only structure the subject’s sexuality, they are themselves historically structured. The original fantasies which, according to Freud, set the stage for the subject’s desire – the primal scene, seduction, castration – should be seen as existing beyond the individual history of the subject. They are culturally-

hegemonic fantasies which are transmitted through the earliest intersubjective relations and subsequent institutional practices, for these are invested with discourse. "As the subject is the place in which, the body in whom, significant effects of signs take hold and are realized," de Lauretis concludes from all of this, "there is always something real in psychic fantasy: real for the subject's internal world and real for the external world, from which the fantasy is mediated and to which it returns, again mediated and to a greater or lesser extent resignified" (309).

Since fantasy is the place where the psychic is joined to the social, these original fantasies can be modified by other representations encountered in the life of the subject. If fantasy is, more specifically, the site where sexuality is produced and reproduced and if it works with whatever representations are available, it becomes necessary to scrutinize the representations, the kinds of fantasy, which have public visibility, especially those which have gained the positive status of social norms. Part of this project, as the work of Janieta Eyre and Julia Emberley in this issue suggests, is also to make visible those invisible yet pervasive fantasies which subtend the ideological relations of one's culture. Eyre's staging of the commerce between fantasies 'public' and 'personal' – the necrophilic fantasy of a lifeless female body and the fantasy, motivated by the fear of male violence, of pre-emptive self-annihilation – demonstrates the way that fantasy is structured by and structuring of material relations. Emberley is concerned with locating and disassembling the real effects of fantasies (of originary contact, of disavowed contact) on material relations; hers, too, is an effort to make visible the invisibilities that sustain oppression. But as Emberley points out, the price of attempts to make fully 'present' one vector of domination can be the reinscription of other invisibilities. Pinelopi Gramatikopoulos asks what invisibilities are operative in European fairy tales of innocent golden-locked girls confronting strangeness in the forest, in an allegory that confuses several fairy tales and recodifies their central terms. Her speechless heroine, other-ed by her "colourless" schoolmates, steals language – instead of candy or porridge.

de Lauretis argues for the recasting of original fantasies through a subversive resignification that inscribes the differences (in desire, of race, of class) that can sustain other ways of representing one's drives to oneself. The launching into public space of these set-ups for desire can open up the field of experience for others, too. Recastings of the fantasy of seduction there are a-plenty in this issue: from Nancy Johnston's alien abduction story to Sylvie Bérard's *dépanneur* 'quickie.' Margaret

Webb's "Matisse in Lesbian Pastiche" foregrounds some of the difficulties which attend this work of returning fantasies that are "real for the subject's internal world" to the "external world" – specifically, those which attend an attempt to reclaim the vibrant colours of Matisse for a public display of lesbian affection (de Lauretis 309). Allyson Clay's diptychs – which place the open-endedness of elliptical phrases (set against paintings of sky) in tension with the more precise referentiality of photographs – work through possibilities of suggestion and (mis)reading. The poems of Erin Mouré evoke a fleeting sense of the outer edges of plausibility: "A bird we raise An internal action/ Uncoupled now in the head/ & abolished." The mechanisms at work in the discursive production of credibility and a 'truth' which finally 'outs' are ironically signalled in Johnston's text. The virtual intimacy with (the figure of) another which is respectively staged and recalled in the texts of Lise Harou and Nadine Ltaif involves questions of address which are absent from the phantasmatic configuration described early on in this introduction. When a fantasy is sublimated into a verbal text it is, of course, qualitatively different from that essentially self-reflexive configuration. We hope, however, that this issue will provide you, reader, with at least one opportunity to get "caught up" in a sequence of images, to find yourself represented in a scene without necessarily being assigned a fixed place in it.

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