

The Underside of the Digital Field

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Abstract

This essay takes as axiomatic that the subject of new media – which in other contexts we call the user, the reader, the writer (or in institutional contexts, the researcher, the teacher, the student...) – is a subject of language. This subject's engagements with media and, by way of media, with other subjects, are determined by relations founded on language which French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan terms the *social bond* of discourse.

I propose that modes of critical engagement and teaching in the contemporary digital field, particularly as the field shifts towards a more unified disciplinarity and a more secure institutional footing, can be described in relation to the graphs of Lacan's "four discourses" – of the University, Master, Hysteric, and Analyst. I conclude that deliberate reflection on structures of our research and pedagogy, mapped by the graphs, may lead us beyond the confidence games of the master and the University – on and by which our inquiries are founded and oriented, but also narrowed – to the side of the hysteric and the analyst, whose collaborations are more productive of new forms of knowledge.

Returning to the Subject at Hand

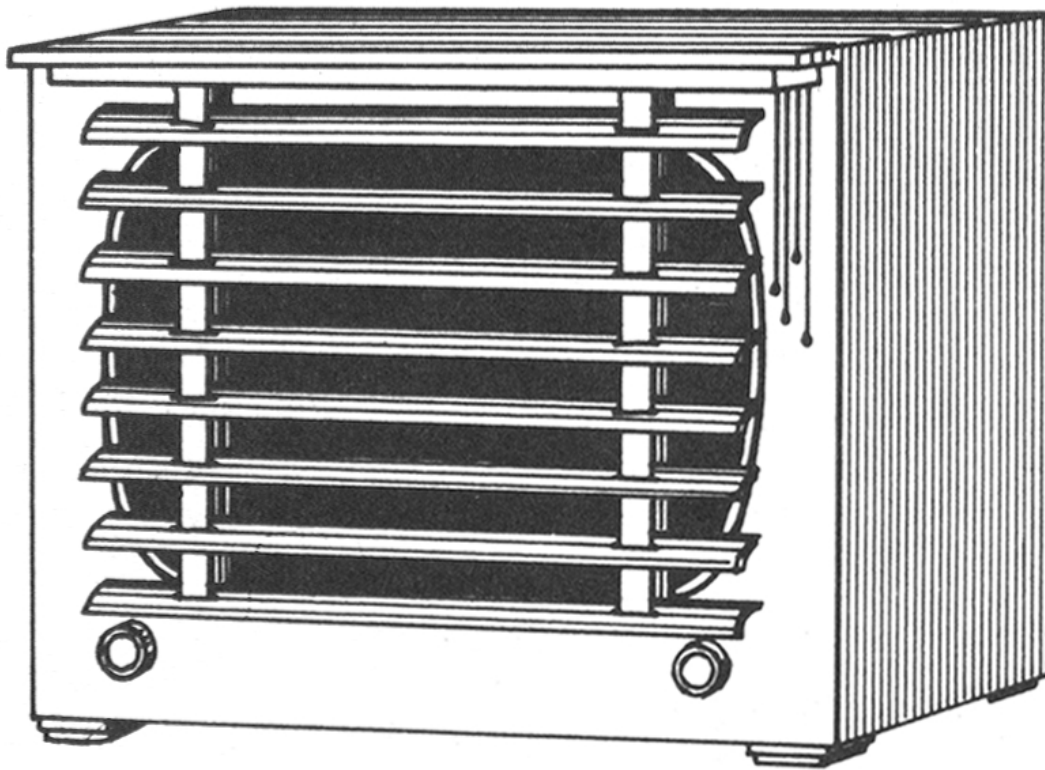


Figure 1. "Venetian blinds for television. When the image is too dazzling, these blinds reduce the brightness." [Carelman 1969]

We may remember that, while language is essentially *blah blah blah*, it is nevertheless from language that the subject's having and being derive. (Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* [Lacan 2006, 756])

"New media studies," Brian Lennon announced a couple of years ago, "has discovered temporality."

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After fifteen years in which its cultural dominant was presentist prognostication, even a kind of bullying, the field has folded on itself with such new guiding concepts as the "residuality," the "deep time" or "prehistory," and the "forensic imagination" of a new media now understood as after all always already new. [Lennon 2009] ^[1]

The digital field's preoccupation with presentism and futurism – and the periodizing that balancing between them requires (marking off "first" from "second" waves, "golden" from "silver" ages, and so on) – lends itself to fantasies of change that are familiar to anyone who has thought much about how we have got to where we are. But the temporalities of media, and in their own way – different from but dependent on the qualities of their objects – the temporalities of media disciplines, are more irregular than talk of ages and waves can encompass. As Lennon observes, the *always already new* figures "a more absorbent fold, perhaps" than *remediation*. Bolter and Grusin's influential formulation of that concept entails a modern, progressive medial evolution, repeatable and accessible to measurement – and on that basis, accessible also to a progressive media theorization [Bolter 1999]. In contrast, the always-already aims at experiences of change that are tangled in their way of marking time: looking ahead, but also visited by atavisms and negativities that make imagining what lies ahead a messier undertaking, subject to uncanny feedback systems.

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A case in point is represented by the two episodes that frame Lennon's reflection on new media's turn to historical reflexivity. The first of these is the publication during the 1990s of Michael Joyce's critical writings on digital media and culture, "untimely" in Lennon's estimation and overshadowed by the attention given to Joyce's hypertext fictions of the same period. The second is Joyce's subsequent withdrawal from literary-critical circles whose other members imagined themselves to be following his lead – the significance of which, Lennon notes, may be discerned in the shocked silence with which that withdrawal has been met.^[2] Here, Lennon ingeniously traverses this disappearing act which continues to leave its mark. Joyce's secession in or around 2004, he proposes, should be read not as a retreat from literary-critical dialogue, but an act of provocation directed at a culture of scholarship that had been too hastily constituted from Joyce's precedent, and was unselfconsciously (and is still) spinning away from the complexities of that precedent. Lennon contrasts the *essayism* of Joyce's criticism of this period – the errant, unfinished, and dissatisfied voice of his writing, more radical in its way of acting out than was his hyperfiction – with a more controlled and compact critical attitude that seems increasingly characteristic of American new media studies.

The reduction of Joyce to hyperfiction author, in the new media studies scholarship that more or less brackets Joyce's critical project, is in fact nothing new as a disciplinary gesture; rather, it is a repetition of the founding ruse of literary-critical modernity, in what Clifford Siskin has called "novelism": the generation, from a heterogenous and yet unified (or combined and uneven) field of writing, of the separate positions of the self-identified critic and her critical object, produced by the writer. In the subordination of writing, a discourse and an institution, to the (fabricated) research object "the novel," modern disciplinary in the literary sphere naturalizes writing as mimesis – that is, *gives it a job to do*, in determined opposition to the radical self-reflexivity of writing as mass professionalization itself, in its capacity simultaneously to expand and to contract the division of intellectual labor. [Lennon 2009]

Joyce's stopping out, Lennon surmises, was at least in part in response to his reduction to the role of its most important critical test case [Harpold 2008, 6.01]. It was also (and I think this among the most important implications of Lennon's reading of his framing episodes) an expression of dissatisfaction derived from Joyce's earlier way of writing out his relation as critic to the objects of his criticism. Sacrificed in the field's coalescing around the novelist mode of research is some of the raw productivity of writing and reading in the essayist mode. There, media are met in a more relational way, and without much assurance concerning what they make happen – in, as Joyce had observed, the "momentary awkwardness" of an encounter with something that may be unprecedented [Joyce 1995, 219–26]. If, as Lennon proposes, new media's discovery of an always-already-new temporality is a sign of its arriving at a position of more unified disciplinary, this has involved setting aside the excesses of first wave theorists such as Joyce. That is a way of effectively focusing on the job at hand, but only at the cost of repressing some of its complexity, or the complexity of our imagining that there is a job or jobs, and not instead some aggregates of unfinished and uncompletable – *unendliche* [Freud 1937] – encounters. Repressing, that is, styles of critical engagement that are less confident of their security and more anxious (or euphoric) about media's inmixing of subjects and objects, which anxiety (and euphoria) Joyce's essayist precedents brilliantly exemplified.

Four Turns

I want to give shape to this line of reasoning along four turns of language, which I draw from the graphs French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan named the "four discourses," introduced in his XVIIth seminar, *L'Envers de la psychanalyse* ("The Other Side of Psychoanalysis," 1969–70; [Lacan 1991a]; [Lacan 2007]).^[3] The graphs figure (in the order in which I will discuss them) the discourses of the *University*, the *Master*, the *Hysteric*, and the *Analyst* (Figures 5–8). Each describes relations of the linguistic foundations, subjects, and objects of knowledge in a different way, according to different structural relations of those elements. By extension, each of the graphs figures distinctive, but related, disciplinary practices, the efficiencies of which are characterized by these different structural relations. At the risk of disclosing the punch line before most of the work of setting it up, my claim is the four discourses describe the dominant effects of modes of critical engagement and teaching in the contemporary digital field. The graphs' descriptions of these modes demonstrate how it is that we got to where we are, and point toward other, I think more

productive, paths of disciplinary practice.

The graphs of the four discourses are highly formalized, and the typographic and terminological units they circulate have specific meanings in Lacan's thought. Once these units are defined, the graphs operate on them with a notable directness and concreteness; they perform the relations they describe. (*Dēscribō: they write out these relations.*) In this regard, the graphs are uniquely productive, in that they generate from determinate conditions of knowledge, new forms of knowledge. What I am after in this essay is a way, with the graphs of the four discourses also in hand, of taking hold of recent critical and teaching practices of the digital field, with the dual aim of illustrating logics of those practices and of *making something new out of them*. Before putting the graphs to work in this way, it is necessary to move programmatically through their terms and shapes, so as to engage their effects.

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Units of Discourse

Prior to 1969, Lacan's uses of the term "discourse" [*discours*] are largely consistent with Émile Benveniste's influential definition: "discourse is language put into action, and necessarily between partners" [Benveniste 1971, 223]; "[it is] every utterance assuming a speaker and a hearer, and in the speaker, the intention of influencing the other in some way" [Benveniste 1971, 209].^[4] That definition fits with the specific social-linguistic relation of the psychoanalytic clinic (see for example, Benveniste 1971, 223–30); for Lacan, it applies more generally to the encounters of the speaking subject with the entire field of language (the symbolic order, the "big-O" Other), which disturbances of speech in the clinic bring to the foreground. Thus, "every bungled action is a successful, even 'well-phrased' discourse" [Lacan 2006, 222]; "the first resistance analysis faces is that of discourse itself" [Lacan 2006, 348]; and the many variations in Lacan's teaching on "the unconscious is the Other's discourse" (for example, [Lacan 2006, 316]).^[5]

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Beginning with the introduction of the four discourses in Seminar XVII, Lacan amplifies discourse's knotting of its interlocutors: discourse is now characterized as "a social bond [*lien social*], founded on language [*langage*]" (1972–73, [Lacan 1998b, 16–17]). This formula echoes Saussure's definition of language [*langue*] as a "social product of the faculty of speech" [Saussure 1966, 13] but, crucially, shifts the locus of sociality from the abstract code of langue (the system of signs deployed in speech [*parole*]) to the material circulation of signifiers between speaker and addressee.^[6] In this reading, the social bond is realized in a concrete, dynamic exchange in which subjects recognize each other and themselves according to (conscious and unconscious, present and past) relations of signifiers. Those relations are determinate; the sociality of the bond obtains, so far as Lacan is concerned, wholly in signifying operations, not in the conventions of langue or as a consequence of the positive content of speech.^[7]

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Figure 2. The master signifier (S_1) and the field of knowledge (S_2).

Lacan builds the graphs of the four discourses within this material-relational schema of speech by mapping it onto circulations of four terms which are of particular significance in his teaching: S_1 , the master signifier; S_2 , the field of knowledge; $\$$, the divided subject; and a , the *objet petit a*.

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The master signifier (S_1 , Figure 2) orients the expression and reception of discourse [Lacan 2007, 13]. In this role it is comparable to the famous "quilting point" [*point de capiton*], the site of convergence in a signifying chain in relation to which the rest of the chain is situated, retrospectively and prospectively [Lacan 1993, 268], [Lacan 2006, 681]. We are familiar with the master signifiers of the digital field; as scholars and teachers we traffic in them and appropriate them to new ends: terms like *avatar*, *home*, *interface*, *screen*, *trail*, and proper names like Bush, Engelbart, Nelson, and so on. Our fluency in them is a sign of disciplinary competence, and the invention of new master signifiers a key to our

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professional success. Our speech is bound to contours introduced by S_1 ; we can't imagine what we achieve in discourse without it [Lacan 2007, 129–30, 188]. Consequently, Lacan accords this signifier a special importance: there is no anchor of a discourse's reference, or the subject's position in the field of speech, except by way of S_1 's cleaving off from other signifiers as their support and alibi [Lacan 2007, 189]. As Lacan envisages it, this is a strictly formal operation; whatever positive content S_1 may be imagined to convey in other contexts is irrelevant to its function in this regard.

S_2 (Figure 2) figures the battery of signifiers whose network constitutes the knowledge (*savoir*) transmitted by a discourse, in which S_1 intervenes as a point of reference, as the term that anchors the expression of knowledge. The temporality of the intervention is ambiguous. Strictly speaking, S_2 may precede S_1 as a mere aggregate of signifiers, gathered incidentally to the situation in which speech (an ordered chain of signifiers) comes to function as discourse (a social bond founded on language). S_1 's intervention in S_2 makes it appear – that is, effectively makes it come to pass – that S_2 specific to this discourse articulates an “already structured field of knowledge” [Lacan 2007, 13], for which S_1 stands, retrospectively, as its support. In this way, S_1 impresses order on the expression of S_2 , in relation to which the speaking subject recognizes itself and others by way of their adherence to S_2 , as a style or idiom of a shared vocabulary. When we identify ourselves as “new media scholars and teachers” or “digital humanists,” and more so, as scholars and teachers operating within more narrowly-defined subfields (“game studies,” “platform studies,” “software studies”), we situate our speech within fields of knowledge (S_2) that are contoured by specific master signifiers; we acknowledge the subjection of our speech to the relations of S_1 and S_2 .

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Figure 3. The split subject (\$) and the object petit a.

$\$$ (Figure 3) figures the split or divided subject. In Lacan's thought, the speaking subject is said to be *split* by effects of language in two respects, in that what is possible for the subject to say is always at a remove from that to which speech can refer, and in that the aim of the speech act is always ahead of or behind what it signifies.

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The first dimension of this split follows from Saussure's division of the sign into signifier and signified [Saussure 1966]. From the breakthrough of the 1953 Rome Discourse forward,^[8] Lacan insisted that this division be rigorously respected in psychoanalysis: anything that the subject communicates of its desires must be recognized as always-already destabilized by the non-coincidence of the signified with the signifier [Lacan 2006, 227, 595–6, 712], [Lacan 2007, 33]. And more so: Lacan's revision of Saussure's doublet – as indicated in the “algorithm” S/s [Lacan 2006, 428] – upends semiology's privileging of signified (s) over signifier (s), and accords the signifier and relations between signifiers priority in the scene of speech. His famous opening parry in the “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter,’ ” that the symbolic order is “constitutive for the subject,” which is determined by the “itinerary of a signifier” [Lacan 2006, 7] might be rewritten as: what is concretely said in the clinic (especially unaware wordplay and slips of the tongue) matters more – it is more directly productive – than what is meant (to be said).^[9] In the graphs of the four discourses, the expression of $\$$ – that is, the expression of the subject *qua* speaking subject – is oriented by S_1 's interventions in S_2 specifically along the fissure of this primordial non-coincidence [Bracher 1994, 113], [Lacan 2007, 170].

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The second dimension of the subject's split in language is signaled in grammatical and temporal ambiguities of speech, as described by two related concepts which Lacan draws from the work of Roman Jakobson – the “shifter” – and Émile Benveniste – the distinction between the subject of the statement and the subject of the enunciation. A shifter [*embrayeur*] is a linguistic element whose meaning cannot be determined without taking into account that a sender and a receiver are engaged in an act of communication [Jakobson 1990, 398].^[10] There are many species of shifters [Ducrot

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1979, 252, 324ff], but first and second person pronouns represent the plainest examples: the terms “I” and “you” designate a particular person – the one who speaks, or the one to or about whom is spoken – only in the context of a speech act. There, the shifter is associated with that person by convention (“you” = the woman to whom I speak; in Peircian terms, the shifter “symbolizes” her), while at the same time it points to her by virtue of an immediate, existential relation to the speech act; it concerns specific conditions of the speech act as well as she. (“You” = the woman to whom I speak here and now, in the scene of speech; the shifter “indexes” her. Jakobson calls shifters “indexical symbols” [Jakobson 1990, 388]).^[11] For Lacan, the duplex aspect of the shifter is evidence of the relationality of discourse, particularly with regard to the speaker. When I speak of myself (“I speak”), the agent for and of whom I speak, and the signifier that figures that agent in speech are not ontologically coincident; the first person pronoun designates only a point of contact between this supposed agent and a signifier. Furthermore, the signifier and this supposed agent can only seem to coincide in that my speech is directed to an other (my addressee – “you” – but more concretely, another signifier, *ju*), in relation to which the signifier I (*a*) has meaning. (According to Lacan’s famous dictum, “The definition of a signifier is that it represents the subject not for another subject but for another signifier” [Lacan 1972b, 194] [Lacan 2007, 47–48].) Moreover, because Lacan treats the shifter as an indexical *signifier* [Evans 1996, 182], its notional reference, contingent on the structure of the speech act, is subordinated to patterns of the signifying chain. Whereas linguists treat the shifter as a special case in problems of linguistic reference, for Lacan the shifter (and especially the I of the first person) exemplifies the speaking subject’s fundamental destabilization (\$) in the field of speech [Lacan 1958, 19 Nov. 1958], [Lacan 2006, 556].

Correlatively, Lacan radicalizes the implications of Benveniste’s distinction between the subjects of enunciation and statement [Lacan 1971, 223–30]. The statement [*énoncé*] is the chain of signifiers that appears to stand apart from the speech act in place of things and events to which the speech act refers. The subject of the statement is the agent designated (or implied to have been designated) thereby. The enunciation [*énonciation*] is the speech act as it takes place in the here and now of an utterance. Its agent exists only in the moment of the utterance, and is immediately thereafter eclipsed by the subject of the statement. It is the illusion of a continuous present in speech, Benveniste says, which sutures the temporal split between these subjects [Benveniste 1971, 227]. For Lacan, this split (*refente*) is another consequence of the determinate effect of the signifying chain as evidenced in the shifter [Lacan 2006, 650], which designates the subject of the enunciation (viz., associates that vanishing entity retrospectively with the subject of the statement) but does not signify that subject, in the way that Lacan understands “signifierness” [*significance*] to mean a dynamic interplay of elements of the chain in the here-and-now [Lacan 2006, 677, 764–65]. The subject *qua* speaking subject is therefore suspended between (\$) the registers of the enunciation and statement [Lacan 1998a, 139], [Lacan 2006, 758].

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The fourth term of the graphs, the *a*, is the glyph of Lacan’s *objet petit a* – “the little a object,” considered by devotees of Lacan to be the most original and nuanced theoretical element of his teaching [Evans 1996, 124–26], [Miller 1990]. For my purposes, *objet petit a* can be characterized as a thing excluded from discourse while also determining its structure. Partly real, partly imaginary, the *a* persists outside of the symbolic, a remnant of language’s parceling of the undifferentiated real into series of manipulable elements (signifiers), which the speaking subject combines and recombines in an (always unsuccessful) effort to bring the *a* into representation.^[12] Thus Lacan describes the *a* as the object-cause of desire, urging on desire’s expressions, which find their motive force in being unable to resolve *a*’s status within the field of language [Lacan 2001, 207].^[13] This is the impasse of desire disclosed by the psychoanalytic clinic: desire’s primordially extrinsic cause (*a*) can’t be brought into speech (S_2), as an unmediated experience of the object-cause is forbidden to the speaking subject as such (\$); it can only be named in absentia by retroactively pinning speech to a particular signifier (S_1); language can convey no positive object that satisfies desire.^[14]

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The radical eccentricity of *objet petit a* compels the neurotic to grasp her relation to the object-cause by way of fantasy, “an image set to work in the signifying structure” [Lacan 2006, 532]; there, the imaginary aspect of the *a*, its correlatively real impossibility, and the chain of signifiers contoured by S_1 are brought into contact.^[15] This, Lacan represents with the matheme of the neurotic’s “fundamental fantasy,” $\$ \diamond a$, in which the lozenge between the \$ and the *objet petit a* designates a circuit of “envelopment-development-conjunction-disjunction” [Lacan 2006, 542], such that

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imagined satisfaction and its actual impossibility are inscribed within the same scenario. Satisfaction would have arrived in a real and lasting way, the neurotic imagines, if things had been “just-so,” if everything had lined up “as it should have,” “if only” this or that had happened, etc. – if, that is, a could have been made to come forward by way of S_1 and S_2 , which is categorically prohibited.^[16]

In the graphs of the four discourses, these terms – S_1 , S_2 , $\$$ and a – are slotted into four positions (Figure 4).^[17]

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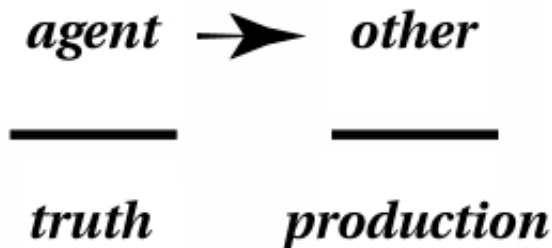


Figure 4. The positions of the terms of the four discourses.

The positions are:

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- in the lower left: the *truth* of the discourse: the term that sets the discourse in motion;
- in the upper left: the *agent* of the discourse: the term that puts the discourse's effects into action through speech;
- in the upper right: the *other*: the addressee toward whom the agent's speech is directed;
- in the lower right: the *production* of the discourse: the term generated by or left over from the discourse.^[18]

Between the upper terms, the arrow figures the agent's interrogation of the other. This may be a demand for recognition or satisfaction; in the most general sense, it is a pure event of discourse: a spoken provocation aimed at making something happen. As in other Lacanian mathemes that include this typographic element [Lacan 2006, 428], the horizontal bars on each side of the graph figure a breach between the upper and lower registers, in this case a refusal or ignorance on the part of the term above bar with regard to the term below the bar. Thus, the agent takes itself to be the instigator of the interrogation, but this is only apparently the case; the actual instigator of the interrogation (as the expression of a social relation) is the truth on which discourse is based [Lacan 2007, 62]. Similarly, the other takes itself to be the definite target of the interrogation, but discourse actually aims at bringing the production forward into a social relation.

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With these definitions out of the way, let's allow the graphs to operate.^[19]

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Discourse of the University

$$\frac{S_2}{S_1} \rightarrow \frac{a}{\cancel{\$}}$$

Figure 5. The Discourse of the University (1969–70, [Lacan 2007, 39])

The graph of the Discourse of the University (DU, Figure 5) is characteristic of research and pedagogy in their institutional settings, such as the university or the laboratory, in which practices of investigation, description, and indoctrination are dominant [Lacan 2007, 31]. Because the disciplinary formation of knowledge in the digital field is among my primary concerns in this essay, I will begin with this discourse. 22

In the DU, a field of knowledge (S_2) is the discourse's agent, propped upon a master signifier (S_1), the choice of which guarantees S_2 's apparent consistency. Knowledge interrogates something outside of itself ($S_2 \rightarrow a$), the incitements of which it wishes to appropriate to itself and to bring into closer association with S_1 . Produced by this is the subject specific to the DU ($\$$), divided along the fissure of its affiliation with institutional thought and its repression of other modes of relation to the object-cause (a). In this way, the DU expresses, by its single-minded devotion to investigation and truth-finding [Lacan 2007, 105], also a desire-to-not-know some aspects of the objects that trouble it, namely those which designate a relational framework of knowledge ($\$$).^[20] Interrogation under the DU may amount to little more than obstinate fiddling with terms of a defined lexicon (S_2/S_1), in willful ignorance of the irreducibility of desire ($\$$). In its more supple forms, the DU acknowledges the master's caprice and the subject's split, but goes on about its business anyway, in hope of eventually arriving at another (a more authentic) form of mastery [Lacan 2007, 63].^[21] 23

The relevance of the DU to the present state of teaching and research in the digital field is marked in our labors to rigorously establish the field's disciplinarity: to, in Lennon's formulation, naturalize the writing out of critical desire as mimesis (S_2), in place of something more unsettled ($\$$ – which, ironically, is precisely that which the DU produces). Taxonomic and descriptive schemes of the finest granularity are the epitome of the DU's aim to bury its troublesome object under a heap of positives. Consensus building and canon formation have this quality of beginning from definite *a priori* (S_1) by which to interrogate the eccentric term (a) so as to arrive at a scenario that seems to accrete out of the interrogation ($S_2 \rightarrow a$). Anthologies and archaeologies depend on such frameworks (Boluk 2009); crowdsourcing and folksonomies foreground the process of accretion and shuffle truth (S_1) and product ($\$$) a little behind. We haven't yet our own brand of the DSM (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* – each revision of which represents the purest expression of the DU yet produced), but we have proliferating encyclopedias, anthologies, and textbooks. No accrediting professional organizations to determine best practices, but emerging cohorts of more voluntary, yet still disorderly, nature, which are sustained (S_2/S_1) by master signifiers of exemplary resonance – *Digital Hum... Electronic... Literature... O...* – and on which are founded collegial but also doctrinally distinct debates within the field (e.g., [Gold 2012]), which from another vantage we might read as the productive circulation of master signifiers within the DU's quadrature. 24

It's not that consensus and canons, anthologies, archaeologies and folksonomies, and the like don't have to be built, or that debates among practitioners about what is it, exactly, they do, don't have to take place. These activities are 25

essential to the development of a field, the consolidation of its research, and the training of its adherents, in short, to its formation as a discipline. In this regard, the DU operates with notable, even laudable, effect. It's just that the DU isn't efficacious only in the way that we might wish as we go about revising our research reports, forming working groups, lobbying our administrators for funding and hires, preparing our syllabi, and training our students. We recognize this on some level, and so we condition the products of our labors with forecasts of refinements and convictions that old problems will be resolved or set aside as no longer applicable under new conditions. Or, conversely, with convictions that the old problems may be better addressed under more expansive rubrics (*hypertext studies* and *game studies* are thus drawn into the penumbras of *comparative media studies* or digital humanities), and if we house their practitioners in already-established divisions of the university. (Matthew Kirschenbaum's widely-cited 2010 essay "What is Digital Humanities and What's It Doing in English Departments?" appears to have invited nearly as much normalization as the destabilization of its key terms [Kirschenbaum 2012].^[22] In the present intellectual and educational funding climates in the United States, a strategic alignment of the digital field with the humanities is increasingly promoted as a method of reinvigorating the humanities, when it may be also a method of sequestering disruptive potentials of both the humanistic and the digital. One consequence of a Lacanian-discursive reading of the strategic alignment, via the DU, is that sequestration and disruption are unavoidable.)

Missing from most scenarios of refinement or containment is an acknowledgement of persistent, even irreducible, impasses of language which may be expressed in a particular way in the digital field, may require their own, idiomatic, master signifiers and their own, idiomatic, strategies of interrogation ($S_2/S_1 \rightarrow a$). Similarly, periodizing – i.e. temporalizing the field in a progressive mode that relegates first waves and golden ages to a historical past, or contrasts modest beginnings with new-found largesses of administrators looking for the Next Thing – may function to contain the presentness of these impasses. Losing sight of the perdurability of our dissatisfaction means giving up also the continuing advantage of our awkwardness.

Discourse of the Master

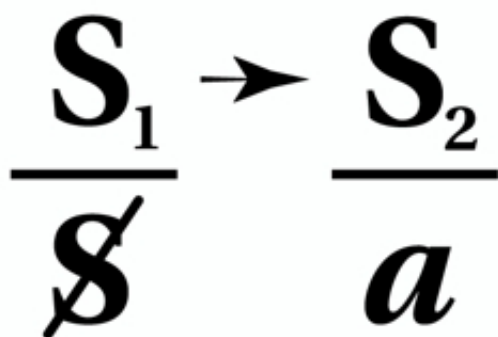


Figure 6. The Discourse of the Master (1969–70; [Lacan 2007, 39])

In the graph of the Discourse of the Master (DM, Figure 6) pure prestige and efficiency are paramount. Here, the master signifier (S_1) directs the interrogation of knowledge (S_2). Confident of the unassailability of his agency ($S_1 \rightarrow S_2$), the master loses sight of the truth of his division ($\$$) and the eccentricity of the object-cause that his efforts reveal (a).^[23] That his mastery is in the final analysis an imposture is irrelevant to him; he doesn't care to know otherwise because his aim is to get something done in an authoritative mode [Lacan 2007, 24]. In the master's mind, the DM is unrelentingly pragmatic, but its pragmatism is touched with a millenarian or apocalyptic style, barely holding off a crisis of faith which could be catastrophic to it. That's why there's something of the obsessional in the DM's way of thinking that is comparable to the DU's more classic obsessional everything-and-the-kitchen-sinking of reason, except that the DM's

compulsion is more aggressive because there is more at stake in this undertaking for the master than for the bureaucrat.^[24] Whereas the DU's passion for detail is directed toward refinement and exhaustion, the DM is associated with predictions of radical transformation, bold ends and beginnings. When it is retrospective, the DM summons deep genealogies and traditions so as to prop up a brave or catastrophic future.

Expressions of the DM in the digital field are traced in signifiers of the theoretical-critical propositions which have had the greatest consequence, the field's "greatest hits," as it were. These include signifiers of the field's primal scenes: Vannevar Bush's "intimate supplement" [Bush 1991], Douglas Engelbart's "augmentation" [Engelbart 1963], and Ted Nelson's "twingle" [Nelson 1990] – the resonances of which, I have argued elsewhere, are undiminished [Harpold 2008].^[25] And, further along the chain: Jay David Bolter's declaration of the new "writing space" of electronic textuality (e.g., [Bolter 1991], [Bolter 2001]); Robert Coover's proclamation of the imminent "end of books" ([Coover 1992] – a millenarian thought experiment that many of us were pleased to entertain – hadn't Victor Hugo given us our script 160 years earlier?); George Landow's prediction of "convergence" between literary theory and digital practice [Landow 1997], [Landow 1992], [Landow 2006]; Espen Aarseth's shifting of the discussion away from differences of electronic and printed texts to the more varied registers of *cybertexts* [Aarseth 1997]; Bolter and Grusin's *remediation* [Bolter 1999], which came to stand for general feedback systems of mediality; Friedrich Kittler's analyses of the "symbolic world" of code (e.g., [Kittler 1997], [Kittler 2008]); Gregory Ulmer's celebrations of the new logic of *electracy* [Ulmer 2003]; N. Katherine Hayles's descriptions of the *intermediation* of print, code, and bodies [Hayles 2005] [Hayles 2008]; Lev Manovich's assertion that software has taken command of cultural production [Manovich 2001], [Manovich 2010]; and Ian Bogost's advocacy of *unit analysis* as a technic of medial interpretation [Bogost 2006].

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Measuring the effects of these master signifiers is difficult.^[26] Some have lost their ability to hold our attention, which may be the most reliable indication of the master's general authority. Others persist in attenuated or negated forms, and this also may be a sign of their effectiveness, by a kind of inversion. Among Lennon's targets in his 2009 essay are versions of bright new beginnings that have taken hold by way of rejections of the first wave's recursive negativities in favor of more empirical and measured (e.g., less "theoretical," less "bellettristic," which is to say less essayist) practices of writing out the digital field.^[27] The turn away from the master's delight in transformation toward the rewards of the DU's finer granularities doesn't surprise – that is the classic trajectory of disciplinary formation – but it's a little too easy to mistake the turn for progress or a refinement of one's assumptions and methods. The DM's penchant for bold ruptures and the DU's devotion to evidence are not incompatible; both have the alibi of S_1 to guarantee that we will figure out what we're about once we get down to real work. What undercuts that guarantee is that a fundamental maladaptation of the subject to the cause of this work: ($\$ \diamond a$); clever obscurantism and pellucid empiricism function as two faces of a single coin.

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But more generally, the mutuality of the DM and the DU is evidence of a principle that is clear in Lacan's treatment of the discourses and which has to be kept in mind in any squaring off of the four: none operates in complete isolation from the others. If one can be said to dominate in a given situation, it is because the others travel under its sponsorship, and deliver their effects according to its structure [Lacan 2007, 43].^[28] With respect to the DM's determination of the DU (DM \rightarrow DU), it is clear that its efficacy may have more than one dimension: the more inflexibly S_1 prevails, the more it limits what is knowable in relation to S_2 , and the more difficult it will be to grasp the object-cause (a), as it will be more operationally estranged from the subject ($\$$). This estrangement is more evident in the DM than in the other discourses because the fundamental fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$) is expressed in its underside, beneath the interpellation of knowledge by the master signifier [Lacan 2007, 108].^[29]

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Discourse of the Hysteric

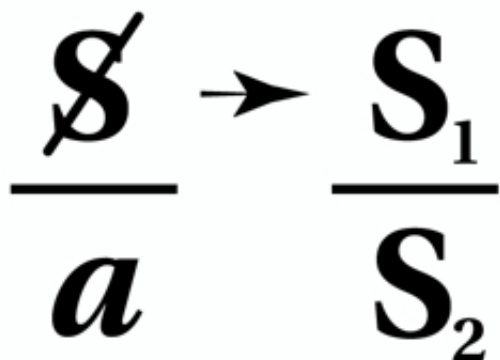


Figure 7. The Discourse of the Hysteric (1969–70; [Lacan 2007, 39]).

The graph of the Discourse of the Hysteric (DH, Figure 7) expresses a relation of dissatisfied and uncompleted inquiry. Here, the divided subject (\cancel{S}) is in the position of agent, supported by the truth of her object-cause (a).^[30] Her interpellation of the master produces knowledge in the form of new signifiers (S_1/S_2), which take on the significance of symptoms of her relations to the master and the object-cause; fantasy ($\cancel{S} \diamond a$) operates by way of by S_1 's determination of S_2 .

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It is easy to see why Lacan associates this structure of discourse with the hysteric's characteristic styles of speech. Freud's pathbreaking insight at the birth of the psychoanalytic clinic was that hysterical suffering, whatever its dysfunctions, communicates a truth (\cancel{S} / a) of the hysteric's situation [Lacan 2007, 73]. It would be incorrect to say that the hysteric cannot take hold of the conditions of her suffering, as she is perfectly capable of demonstrating these to one who cares to listen [Lacan 2006, 34, 83].^[31] Her knowledge is, however, distinctly productive in a way in that it cannot on its own be brought to closure or stable reflection; hers is, says Lacan, a knowledge that doesn't know that it knows itself (*un savoir qui ne se sait pas*, [Lacan 2007, 33], trans. modified.), but which finds its expression in the presence of an other, the analyst who knows how to listen.

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A substantial body of work in the digital field is characterized by one of two styles of the DH. The first style resembles the subject Verhaeghe (ironically) terms the "good" hysteric [Verhaeghe 1995]. She is devoted to the master, and acts as if expressions of her faith in him (S_1/S_2) are something in which he is deeply invested. She obscures her frustrations and measures her provisional satisfactions in the conviction that these labors will one day bring about the master's enjoyment, and vicariously her own. The paradox lies in that the hysteric wants the master's dissatisfaction – she seeks it, she lacks for it – in order that she may (also) desire [Lacan 2006, 518]; [Lacan 2007, 129].^[32] In the digital field, such devotion to the master's enjoyment is expressed in visions of seamless immersion and the erasure of divisions between language and the real – which divisions, if we take Lacan seriously, must be understood to be uneraseable because they determine the subject *qua* speaking subject (\cancel{S} / a ; [Lacan 2006, 712]). Early 1990s fantasies in this vein, of totalizing virtualities and "post-symbolic" communication now have been set aside, even by ardent proponents (e.g., [Lanier 2011]), but related fantasies of transcendence are still vigorous in some strands of posthumanist thought. In actuality, they are only more exacting forms of subjection, the hysteric's version of the master's millennial breakout. In pop-cultural accounts of the technological singularity in particular (e.g., [Kurzweil 2005]), the master's imprint on desire is evident in the conviction that human self-interest, or the interest of an Other that recognizes humanity as its friend or enemy, must span the divide of the transformative event.

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In contrast, the second style of the DH resembles Verhaeghe's "bad" hysteric [Verhaeghe 1995]. She is uncooperative and openly frustrated with the master's responses to her elaborate demonstrations. In this uncooperative mode, her style more nearly grasps her discourse's dependence on S_1 , in that she presses the master to show his hand ($\cancel{S} \rightarrow S_1$)

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by way of innovating signifiers (S_2) expressing her dissatisfaction. This style of the DH more openly acknowledges the efficacy of its structure, as it puts the master's caprice to productive work, not as the DU would (conjecturing that eventually the effects of structure may be transcended), but by insisting on the irresolution of the hysteric's desire.

In the digital field, examples of this style of the DH include in particular those interrogations that openly confront the subject's inmixing with her objects of analysis. Joyce's criticism (1995, 2000, 2001), written in a voice I would characterize as unambiguously hysterical, is the type of this form of writing out that acts out the incompleteness of the critic's desire – in Lennon's terminology, writing out desire in the essayist mode, in contrast to the DU's effort to situate critic and object on distinct registers, in the novelist mode. Other landmark examples include: Shelley Jackson's dexterous stitchings of her fictional and critical personae (e.g., 1995, 1998); John Cayley's (e.g., 2004, 2010), Loss Pequeño Glazier's (e.g., 2002, 2006) and Talan Memmot's (e.g., 2001) contributions to a digital poetics in which coding and coded voices are robustly inmixed; Stuart Moulthrop's excursions in the garden and the library (e.g., 1991, 1999), which were more concerned with the relationality of hypertext writing and reading than their efficiencies; Mark Hansen's intimate reflections on new media affectivity (2004, 2006); Hayles's method of "autocritography" (2002); and Ulmer's invention methodologies of the "mystory" and "MEMorial" (1989, 1994, 2005). This is the style of interrogation I aimed to activate in *Ex-foliations* (2008) by first, insisting that critics should hew closely to Roland Barthes's original definition of the lexia in order to seize the term's generative potential in hypertext criticism, as a name (S_1) for field effects (S_2) of reading [Harpold 2008, 1.44]; and second, by associating these effects with what I termed the reader's *historiation*, her conscious and unconscious recollection of her reading history. Or, to write this out in the style of the bad hysteric: a retrospective gathering signifiers in a dissatisfied present ($\$ / a \rightarrow S_1$) – leading to further, unresolved dissatisfactions and further gatherings – is a way forward to new forms of knowledge, when this activity is directed at the one who cares to listen [Harpold 2008, 1.55–1.56]. Such a generative writing out in the style of the DH need not dominate all aspects of the critical encounter. It may be expressed as a punctual interruption of a writing out in another discourse or style. The pattern of discourse is invariable (Figure 4), but the positions of the terms in play will be determined by specific provocations of the social bond. The key is to remain open to these provocations and their unsettling effects, even as disciplinary formations tend to dampen those effects.^[33]

Discourse of the Analyst

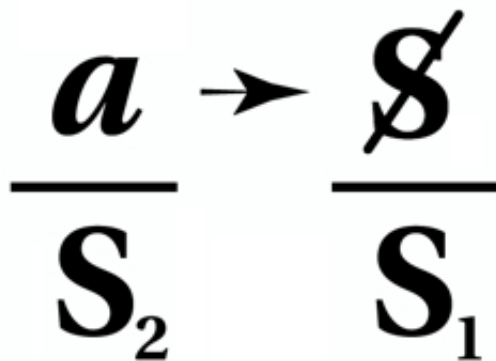


Figure 8. The Discourse of the Analyst (1969–70; [Lacan 2007, 39]).

The graph of the Discourse of the Analyst (DA, Figure 8) figures the social bond in the scene of the psychoanalytic clinic. Here, the analyst takes up the agency of the object-cause (a) [Lacan 2007, 42], supported by the truth of the signifiers (S_2) that the analysand presents to him. The analyst interrogates the analysand ($\$$), prompting her to produce the master signifiers (S_1) that orient her speech and her suffering [Lacan 2007, 172–73].

In the strictest sense, the analyst cannot occupy the place of the *objet petit a*, as it is eccentric to the field of speech by which the analyst and analysand are united. But he may be supposed to occupy its place for the analysand, and this supposition is determinate of her coming to recognize, beyond the analyst, the master toward whom her speech is directed.^[34] (Here, the analyst plays for the analysand the role of the “subject-supposed-to-know” or “subject-supposed-to-knowledge” [*sujet supposé savoir*], which ruse is essential to establishing the transference [Lacan 1998a, 233]; [Lacan 2006, 254].) But the analyst must not confuse supposed knowledge with actual knowledge, as that would mean falling prey to effects of the counter-transference. The knowledge that founds their social relation is not in him but pertains only to the signifiers they exchange [Lacan 2001, 249], and he must remain skeptical of the authority invested in him, and even willing to surrender it when this is called for.^[35] In contrast to the hysteric’s classic partner, the obsessional, who matches her misdirections by stretching out the misrecognition of his own desire, the analyst presents the hysteric with an encounter wherein she can grasp the degree to which her knowledge (S_2) is oriented by S_1 . Of priority here is the social relation of this encounter, founded on language, which is determinate of its effects. What the analysand says in this scene is, in an important sense, immaterial – her speech can be so much *blah blah blah* and the analyst will encourage her to keep at it [Lacan 2006, 275]; [Lacan 2007, 52].^[36] What matters is the pinning of S_2 to S_1 in relation to the object-cause [Lacan 2007, 33].^[37]

If we accept that the DH, and more especially, discourse in the style of the “bad” hysteric, points forward to new forms of knowledge (S_2) in our encounter with media, then it would appear that the most generative variants of this encounter will take place under the hysteric’s mandate to keep desire productive, specifically within a scene of interrogation in which the object-cause is understood to urge on her dissatisfaction ($a \rightarrow \$$), and her relations to master signifiers ($\$ \rightarrow S_1$) are recognized to found her speech. In other words, in the social relation of the analyst and the hysteric ($DA \rightarrow DH$).

In a nutshell, that is the diagnosis and the prescription that I propose here. But such a formula has important consequences for the future of our field, if that is to be as productive as it has been during the last two decades, and if a shift to a more unified disciplinarity and a more secure institutional footing is not to come at the cost of a former uncompleteness that made very interesting things come to pass. This is nowhere more true than in the social bond of our teaching. The graphs of the four discourses show us that the more productive pedagogy is not in the style of the master, which occludes the subject’s division and spits out as its remainder the object-cause of desire ($S_1 \rightarrow S_2 / a$). Nor is it in the style of the University, which reifies the subject’s division by promising eventual mastery over desire ($S_2 / S_1 \rightarrow a$). Much like the neurotic’s just-so stories, that is just a form of temporizing. The more productive pedagogy is one that sustains desire by way of the *hysterization* of the subject in response to something enigmatic, the operation of which is signaled in the field of speech *qua* social bond [Lacan 2007, 33]. There, the place of the agent is not occupied by the digital object, its technical frameworks, or a conjectural entity supposed to “interact” with these things (a *user*) – but, more generally, by those aspects of the interrogation which take on the role of an enigmatic, generative element (*a*), to which we and our students respond, a little unnerved and uncertain. In the model of the DH we can grasp that the eccentricity of the *objet petit a* is foundational to the subject’s interrogation of the conditions of her knowledge. In the model of the DA, by way of its engagement with the DH, we can grasp a positive effect of this always-outsideness of the *a*: it can serve as the agent of the production of new and destabilized forms of knowledge – the DA as a disappearing act that leaves (behind) its mark [Lacan 2007, 23].^[38]

Such an engagement of the DH and DA would be consistent with Joyce’s observation that our awkwardness may (still) be to our advantage. Dissatisfaction, befuddlement, and persistent misprision (the hysteric’s modes of relation) and a hesitation to be, or appear to be, confident of one’s reading of things (the analyst’s reflective response) need not be taken as evidence of lapsed knowledge; they may be acknowledgements of how the scene of knowledge is structured and carried through to its aims. If we profess from the position of supposed knowledge that our charges imagine for us, this will be most effective if we don’t take the supposition seriously, or not for long. We may foster supposition in situations in which this tends toward the building of foundations and the applications of lexicons ($DM \rightarrow DU$): for example, instructing our students in the combinatorial play of the field’s master signifiers, which is a prerequisite for disciplinary competence. Such a tactic is in the short run disingenuous. But in the long run it may be productive of new

signifiers if we, after a time, also renounce some of the authority invested in us, so as to desuppose the knowledge imagined to be attached to that authority (DA → DH). We might call into question – even peremptorily, as is our due – master signifiers and the scaffolding built from them; perhaps even the notion of disciplinary competence itself. Shifting the scene of discourse from supposition to desupposition does not preclude speaking with conviction or making profitable use of the tools at our disposal (“consensus and canons, anthologies, archaeologies and folksonomies, and the like”). *But desupposing, not supposing, is the impulse of a more innovative knowledge production* [Lacan 1998b, 67]. It entails attending to, even signaling to our charges, our and their irreducibly relational engagements with the elements of the social bond. A lesson of the four discourses is that such an attending and a signaling must be initiated by more radical breaks with the master than readjusting our (or their) *a priori*s. And that these breaks have to be perpetually renewed so that they don't lapse into merely new variants of supposed knowledge.^[39]

We are committed, by institutional and professional conditions, to practices that tend toward the imperiousness of the DM and the recursive fiddling of the DU. But another of the lessons of the four discourses is that any one, two, or three discourses must operate in some relation to the others. Within a general economy of knowledge transmission, the primary stated goals of which are to “advance” the discipline and maximize the understanding of the scholar and the student, we could take such a lesson to heart and press the misdirections of imperiousness and fiddling to other, more relational ends. This means, along with the analyst, siding with the hysteric instead of the master, with the deliberate aim of getting her to grasp that what she wants (lacks) is the expression of the master's desire (that which he lacks, but cannot have). And of making something come to pass thereby: new turns of the circuit of discourses and new master signifiers, in relation to which the hysteric and her master will be newly subjectified. (Doesn't my description of the exemplary hysteria of Joyce's early criticism, and Lennon's accounting of Joyce's withdrawal into spectrality as an act of provocation, imply that Joyce has, by his own admission [Joyce 1995]; [Joyce 2001a], played exactly this game of double-mindedness?)^[40]

Playing at the tangle of those relations is neither a heroic nor a cynical response to the laws of desire; the hysteric and the analyst don't aim to nullify the laws, only to recalibrate their effects, shaking loose the master's confidence that he knows what he is talking about, and the bureaucrat's determination that he will do even better – to, in other words, make something new come out of the laws of desire that confidence and determination might hide away ($\$ \rightarrow S_1 / S_2$: $a \rightarrow \$ / S_1$). In a mode of rigorous relationality in which the irreducibility of the laws of desire is acknowledged, one can look ahead, along a path from the impostures of the DM and DU toward (and beyond) the impasses of the DH and DA. Such a change in our point of view would be endlessly unsettled and unsettling, and for that reason, of authentic consequence for our discipline.

Postscript on Method: Metaphor of Discourse

“The cat goes bow-wow, the dog goes meow, meow.” This is how the child spells out the powers of discourse and inaugurates thought. (Jacques Lacan *Écrits* [Lacan 2006, 757])

The graphs of the four discourses strip the social bond founded on language to its barest formalization. This enables us to grasp discourse as merely, but consequentially, an operation in which something new is made to happen within signification. That for Lacan this innovation takes place determinately, if not exclusively, in the concrete register of speech becomes clear if we associate the graphs of the four discourses with another famous Lacanian graph.

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$$\frac{S}{S'_1} \cdot \frac{S'_2}{x} \rightarrow S \left(\frac{I}{s''} \right)$$

Figure 9. Lacan's "expanded formula" of metaphor (Figure 9) figures the signifying substitution [*substitution signifiante*] that Lacan equates with metaphor.^[41]

The elements on the left ("theme") and right ("phoros") of the (•) symbol figure two composite terms that are related in the substitution. The upper case letters (S, S'₁, S'₂) represent signifiers involved in this operation, with S'₁ and S'₂ figuring the signifiers that fall out of the signifying chain, and S the (general instance of the) signifier that is carried over into the product. The lower case x is the "unknown signification" [Lacan 2006, 494] that completes the metaphor. I/s'' figures the new signified that is induced by this operation (or something like a new signified; I will return to this in a moment).^[42]

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The full import of this diagram is evident only if we understand that Lacan conceives of the operation of metaphor in strictly formal terms; the relations between the signifiers involved (S – S'₁ – S'₂) are differential and unmotivated with regard to their reference. Metaphor is merely, sufficiently "one word for another" [Lacan 2006, 422]; an implied analogy between theme and phoros, or the new meaning intended by their association in this way – what, it seems safe to say, is usually meant when we speak of "metaphor" – is not of especial relevance to the efficacy of metaphor's structure. Indeed, one might characterize as obdurate Lacan's insistence that the substitution is in other respects without significance for the subject.^[43]

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The reason for his unwavering formalism is this coda for the subject – that is, the subject *qua* speaking subject, for whom the machinations of the signifying chain are of importance in and of themselves. (This subject is, we may remember, represented in the chain by a signifier for another signifier.) As shown in the expanded formula, metaphor is the substitution of a signifier (S) for one or more other signifiers (S'₁, S'₂), such that their presence in the chain is elided and they are functionally driven below the bar of the signifier/signified doublet (S / s; [Lacan 2006, 594]). This produces a "new species of signification" [Lacan 2006, 757] that preserves a phantom imprint of S'₁ and S'₂ (perhaps this is figured in the double priming of s, which carries some residue of the elided signifiers?), and which is something new in the field of speech that did not exist before: a surplus (→ S'/s'') derived from the mere associations of signifiers on the left side of the formula. Lacan refers to the element below the bar on the right side as a "signified," but we may interpret it as something more evocative and uncompleted that accounts for metaphor's role in Lacan's thought during this period. First, I/s'' is not, as Ed Pluth has observed, a "signified" in the strictly Saussurean sense – a concept associated with the acoustic image of the signifier – but something more like a "signified effect" [*effet de signifié*] or "resonance" of signification generated by interactions of signifiers, which functions as if it were a signified [Pluth 2007].^[44] This is how Lacan understands the production of meaning in the signifying chain, and primordially in the "paternal metaphor" that founds Oedipus.^[45] Second, because Lacan correlates this driving of a signifier below the bar with secondary repression (*Verdrängung, refoulement*: [Freud 1915]), metaphor's production of a "new species of signification" is homologous with repression's production of new signified effects from the exclusion of signifiers from consciousness [Lacan 1998a, 218]. At issue in both metaphor and repression as Lacan understands these operations is the brute

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productivity of signifying substitution, which is realized without regard to the positive content of the elements involved.
[46]

Grasping metaphor thus as a purely formal operation of substitution and production, concretely realized in a specific scene of speech, we can see metaphor's relevance to Lacanian discourse theory in two respects. 47

First, metaphor constitutes a primary axis of the productivity of signification within the social bond of language. There, relations between signifiers are determinate; the sociality of the bond obtains wholly in signifying operations. In the expanded formula of metaphor, the production of new signification emerges from the impertinence of the substitution, insofar as it leaves something behind.^[47] In the graphs of the four discourses, this impertinent product is returned to the circuit of the graph as a term of their subsequent turns: the truth, the agent, the other. This is the trace within the social bond of discourse's perpetually-renewing innovation. 48

Second, the graphs of the four discourses are not a metaphor of the social bond in the usual sense of the term "metaphor." For Lacan, the graphs express structures of the bond directly and concretely; they perform social relations of language. (They write out the social bond.) Putting the graphs to work – putting them through the turns I have described in this essay – demonstrates the instability and uncompleteness of the bond, expressly in that putting them to work will generate new signifying effects. (Which will lead to further turns of the graphs, and so on.) 49

Correlatively, mapping specific scenes of discourse to the graphs, if performed scrupulously, is not to make a metaphor of the graphs (i.e., a metaphor for the scenes of discourse), but to take them in hand (the scenes and the graphs) and to make something new come out of them that was not in evidence before.^[48] To write this more precisely: the signifying substitution of each of the graphs for specific turnings of practice in and of itself ($S / S'_1 \cdot S'_2 / x$) should make something new ($\rightarrow S (/s')$). The character of the product of each substitution ($\$, a, S_1$ or S_2) alone determines the efficacy of such a tactic. 50

A further lesson of the discourses: to aim, merely but consequentially, at producing a response from the other is both the narrowest and most rigorous (DA: $a \rightarrow \$ / S_1$), and the most extravagant and indecent (DH: $\$ \rightarrow S_1 / S_2$), of methodological ambitions. 51

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Notes

[1] Lennon's announcement was roughly contemporary with the first versions of this text. That his intervention – which I had had the privilege of reading as a submitted journal manuscript – is now more than three years out, without having produced the bracing effect I imagined then it must have, is evidence of (I think) not only the vexing belatedness of publishing (editing and revising cycles being what they are), but also of the (more vexing) belatedness of critique of our rush toward the always already new.

[2] "That the undisputed leader of an emerging field might so decisively step back, on what might have been considered the verge of something like victory, is apparently something of a scandal for new media studies. The wrench that Joyce thus threw into the perpetual motion machine of bureaucratic culture – his implicit demand that we simply stop for a while – is not discussed at any length or in any depth in any peer-reviewed published scholarship on Joyce's work currently on record. That is understandable, of course, given that when I say Joyce implicitly demanded we 'stop,' I mean, of course, that he demanded we stop speaking (and writing) with such consensually unadulterable zeal on our topic of choice: an endeavor which, as most every reader of this essay will know – for reasons I will therefore not bother to detail – is structurally impossible" [Lennon 2009]. The structural impossibility to which Lennon refers here is the imperative within contemporary humanities (and no more than in the digital humanities) to keep writing about, i.e., to keep on writing out, its navel-gazing habitus. To keep on writing out, in other words, the

university discourse that is its characteristic form of self-understanding (see below).

[3] In French *l'envers* signifies several related but distinct meanings: "other side," "reverse," "lining" (as in the lining of a garment), or – with a hint of scandal – "underside" or "seamy side." As Nobus observes, *L'Envers de la psychanalyse* is the title given by seminar editor Jacques-Alain Miller [Nobus 2005, 219n9]. Lacan's original title was *La Psychanalyse à l'envers*, "Psychoanalysis Upside-Down" [Lacan 2007, 12].

[4] "It is primarily every variety of oral discourse of every nature and every level, from trivial conversations to the most elaborate oration. But it is also the mass of writing that reproduces oral discourse or that borrows its manner of expression and its purposes: correspondences, memoirs, plays, didactic works, in short, all the genres in which someone addresses himself to someone, proclaims himself as the speaker, and organizes what he says in the category of person." [Benveniste 1971, 209].

[5] In this essay I take as axiomatic, not only for Lacanian discourse theory but also for any rigorous reflection on the subject of new media – which in other contexts we call the user, the reader, the writer (or in institutional contexts, the researcher, the teacher, the student), that this subject is a subject of language – in Lacan's terminology, a speaking subject. Whatever other aspects of the subject also may be marked – gender, ethnicity, or biology, for example: all important considerations in their own right – language is fundamental. This means something precise in Lacan's thought: not that the subject is inclined or capable of making use of language in the everyday sense, but that it is only inclined to and capable of expressing itself, indeed of being a subject at all, within relations imposed by language. (See, for example, [Lacan 2006, 712], [Lacan 2007, 41], and my discussion of Lacan's revisions of the Saussurean doublet and the distinction between enunciation and statement, below).

[6] On the distinction in Saussure between *langue* and *parole*, see [Ducrot 1979, 118–23]. On Lacan's departures from this distinction (notably in his substitution of *langage* for *langue*), see [Evans 1996, 96–98].

[7] That the social bond can be strictly formalized in this way accounts for why Lacanian discourse theory has been productively applied to a range of institutional, political, and pedagogical situations in which problems of knowledge and agency are foregrounded. See for example [Alcorn 2002], [Arfi 2010], [Boucher 2006], [Grigg 1993], [Newman 2004], [Parker 2001], [Schroeder 2008], [Wegner 2011], [Žižek 1998], and the essays collected in [Bracher 1994] and [Clemens 2006].

[8] "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis." In [Lacan 2006, 197–268, 785–92].

[9] [Lacan 2006, 414ff, 712–13]. On Lacan's inversion of the Saussurean doublet, see [Harpold 2008, 2.10–2.22]. Liu proposes that the inversion was motivated by Lacan's responses to contemporary developments in cybernetics, game theory, and information theory [Liu 2010, 153–99].

[10] The term *shifter* was coined by Otto Jespersen in 1922.

[11] See also [Benveniste 1971, 217–22], e.g., "These 'pronominal' forms do not refer to 'reality' or to 'objective' positions in space or time but to the utterance, unique each time, that contains them, and thus they reflect their proper use" [Benveniste 1971, 219].

[12] The imaginary portion of the *a* distinguishes it from the brute real object Lacan calls "The Thing" (*la Chose, das Ding*), which would be radically inaccessible to the subject in any form. This distinction is less marked in the later Lacan, where the real dimension of the *objet petit a* is more emphasized [Evans 1996, 205].

[13] [Lacan 2006, 696], [Lacan 2006, 108]. Lacan characterizes the *a* in the graphs of the four discourses as a *plus-de-jouir* [Lacan 2007, 107]: a pun in French (and a nod to Marx's concept of surplus-value) meaning both a surplus *jouissance* (some quotient of the enjoyment of part-real, part-imaginary *a* that goads desire on with its persistence), and no *jouissance* at all.

[14] Thus the characteristic (neurotic) objection, "No, that's not it!" that shadows every object presented to desire, memorialized in Charles Swann's bitter riposte near the end of Proust's *Swann's Way*: "To think that I've wasted years of my life, that I wanted to die, that I had my greatest love, for a woman I didn't care for, who wasn't really my type!"

[15] See [Nusselder 2009] for a fuller analysis of the role of fantasy in research and teaching in the digital field.

[16] This dependency of desire on the extra-linguistic object-cause (*a*) is why criticisms of Lacan's supposed structuralist orthodoxy, that he reduces human subjectivity to mere operations of signifiers (S_1, S_2), are mistaken. His oft-repeated dictum "there is no metalanguage" (for example, [Lacan 1998c, 74], [Lacan 2006, 691]) does not mean that human experience is defined by and limited to the field of speech, but in a way the opposite of this. The impossibility of a metalanguage means that there is no position outside of language from which to fully represent the experience of the subject, because the outside (*a* as real and imaginary) is constitutive of the (speaking) subject as such ($\$$).

[17] The horizontal bars and arrow shown in Figures 4–8 follow the original presentation of the graphs in Seminar XVII (1969–70). In “Radiophonie” (the redacted transcript of a 1970 interview on Belgian radio, [Lacan 2001, 403–47]), Lacan introduces modifications to the graphs to which he had alluded in Seminar XVII [Lacan 1971, 203], adding a curved arrow beneath the bars pointing in the direction opposite to the arrow above the bars – that is, pointing back from production to the truth – and labels on the arrow on the top, “impossibility,” and the arrow on the bottom, “powerlessness” or “inability” [*l’impuissance*]. (See [Nobus 2005] and [Verhaeghe 1995] for well-developed readings of these additions. I will address their relevance to my applications of the discourses below.) Seminar XVIII (1971) reproduces the graphs in nearly the same forms, with one notable change: the Discourse of the Master (DM) is shown with arrows crossing from the lower left and right terms up to the opposing terms on above the bars, and a dotted line drawn between the terms below the bars (March 17, 1971). The new glyphs were added, we may presume, to emphasize the indirection of relations between S_1 and a , $\$$ and S_2 , that the DM installs, also characteristic of relations of the terms in the other discourses. Seminar XX (1972–73) reproduces the “Radiophonie” versions of the graphs. The DM and Discourse of the Analyst (DA) are repeated in new variants in Seminars XIX (1971–71 [Lacan 2011]) and XXI (1973–74 [Lacan 1973–74]). In Seminar XIX, the DA is shown with a left-pointing arrow under the bars [Lacan 2011, 139], to emphasize the determination of S_2 by S_1 . Later in the seminar [Lacan 2011, 193], Lacan substitutes for the positions *agent*, *other* and *production*, the terms *semblant*, *jouissance* and *plus-de-jouir* (see above, note 14), presumably to note the patient’s supposition of the analyst’s agency, and the productive effect of the patient’s *jouissance*. In Seminar XXI, the DA is shown with arrows traversing the bars, pointing up from the lower left, and down from the upper right, perhaps to emphasize the rotation between terms that generates the production, S_1 (Nov. 20, 1973), as such a rotation was implied in earlier variants. In this seminar, the DM is shown with the crossed arrows and dotted line of the Seminar XVIII DM variant. It is hard to decide upon the specific significances of these variations of the graphs. Lacan’s continued manipulation of them is evidence of his putting them to work in different conditions of his teaching.

[18] Though it is a mainstay of critic’s descriptions of the four discourses, Lacan seems not to have written out the labels shown in Figure 4 for the attendees of his seminars. The apparent exception is [Lacan 1998b], but it is likely that this key was added by the seminar’s editor. Neither the graphs nor the diagram of the positions appear in an unofficial transcription of the seminar [Lacan 1972a], and that text, substantially different from the official version, indicates that Lacan expected his audience simply to be familiar with the graphs.

[19] Prefatory to that which follows, I should say that I take seriously Dany Nobus and Malcolm Quinn’s injunction that “the introduction of Lacanian discourse theory [in extra-clinical applications] ought to have a limiting or circumscribing effect on knowledge itself. It should produce a better account of the irreducibly obscure and not be used as means for producing a kind of hyper-academic knowledge out of a ‘real-world’ situation” [Nobus 2005, 129]. The allure of the University discourse is particularly strong in a setting such as this; that discourse in particular is adept at covertly shuttling the master back to a controlling position, with all the impostures of understanding that this entails, and which the simplicity (and extensibility) of the graphs may seem to authorize. What I have tried to do is to allow the graphs to work in their own way — like levers or pliers [Lacan 2007, 169] — in relation to the recent history of an emerging discipline: unsettled and unsettling, and in the relational mood I characterize below as “double-mindedness.” This does not reduce the social bond of speech in the digital field to the mere quadratures of four diagrams. Rather than circumscribing conditions of knowledge in the field, it should, if I have been successful, demonstrate the instability and incompleteness of those conditions, and show the way forward to more productive expressions of them.

[20] Thus, S_2 is related to a by the disjunction of the impossibility [Verhaeghe 1995] of the former to capture the latter, and $\$$ is related to S_1 by the disjunction of the powerlessness of the master to escape effects of his insertion in the field of speech. See note 18, above.

[21] Such forms of the DU view the master’s impostures (see below) with cynicism or outrage, as they presume that all that goes on beneath the bar (Figure 5) could be rendered inconsequential, were the interrogation to be stripped of historical accident and expressed in “objective” terms. This is the DU’s typical mode of criticizing the exercise of institutional and political power, for corrupting the honest, “scientific” inquiry to which it imagines itself to be devoted.

[22] Kirschenbaum’s reprinted essay opens [Gold 2012] and resurfaces (in its initial *ADE Bulletin* version) in most of the bibliographies of subsequent chapters of the collection.

[23] Here and below I follow convention in referring to the master in the masculine.

[24] Verhaeghe observes that truth is the term that pushes the four discourses beyond a conventional communications model of discourse, which would confine the graph to those elements above the bar: for the DM, $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$ [Verhaeghe 1995]. For Freud and Lacan a quotient of the truth of discourse is inaccessible to consciousness: the agent whose interrogation of the other is propped up on truth doesn’t know all that it is saying, and doesn’t want to know what it is (not) saying. Because the DM promotes mastery in place of reflection on the social relation that is the actual basis of knowledge, this discourse demonstrates more directly than the others the ironic sense of Freud’s observation, “The ego is not master in its own house” [Freud 1917]. In the DM, S_1 and S_2 are related by the disjunction of the impossibility of the former to circumscribe the latter. $\$$ and a are related by the disjunction of the powerlessness of $\$$ to gain access to a directly. See note 18, above.

[25] Nelson has not stopped writing out the signified effect (see note 44, below) of his “fight for civilization”: [Nelson 2010].

[26] That they have persisted as master signifiers is evident in that the preceding paragraph can be rewritten as a series of individual terms or short phrases, without attribution, and still will be understood by students of the field: writing space, “end of books,” “convergence,” cybertexts, remediation, and so on.

[27] Among the half dozen causes of digital humanities having taken root in university English Departments, Kirschenbaum lists “a modest but much-promoted belletristic project around hypertext and other forms of electronic literature that continues to this day and is increasingly vibrant and diverse” [Kirschenbaum 2012]. Which seems – I write here in part in the spirit of Lennon’s pointed criticisms [Lennon 2009] of Kirschenbaum’s earlier responses to first-wave theory – to be damning by faint praise.

[28] Twenty-four possible “discourses” would be described if all possible orders of the terms, mapped onto four positions, were taken into account. “The fact that Lacan only mentions four discourses suggests that he finds something particularly important about the order of the elements. As is true of many of his quadripartite structures, it is this particular configuration, and not just any old combination of its constitutive elements, that Lacan considers of value and interest to psychoanalysis” [Fink 1995, 198n5]. See [Bryant 2008] for an elaboration of the twenty-four possible discourses within six “universes of discourse,” with particular emphasis on the “Discourse of the Capitalist,” a mutation of the DM that Lacan introduced in 1972, but the full implications of which he did not develop.

[29] In contrast, the elements of the fundamental fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$) are distributed differently in the other discourses. In the DU, for example (Figure 5), the characteristic ratio of fantasy is inverted and the dynamic of the lozenge is crossed out by a bar ($a / \$$), signaling that the two terms are more effectively divided from one another.

[30] Here and below I follow convention in referring to the hysteric in the feminine and her interlocutor in the masculine. The hysteric’s essentially feminine relation to the (masculine) figures who have authority over her desire does not preclude that either or neither of them may be anatomically or culturally male or female [Lacan 2007, 33].

[31] In her discourse, $\$$ and S_1 are related by the disjunction of the impossibility of $\$$ to represent her (divided) desire to the (ostensibly indivisible) S_1 . S_2 and a are related by the disjunction of the powerlessness of S_2 to give voice to the a . See note 18, above.

[32] The hysteric’s characteristic question, “Am I a man or a woman?” amounts to an inquiry into her relation to the object-cause of another’s desire. In Lacanian terms, she sets herself up as the Other’s phallus, and calls on the Other to show evidence of its castration ($\$$), so that she may be the object that repairs that lack [Fink 1997, 122].

[33] [Lennon 2009] marks a moment in Kirschenbaum’s account of Joyce’s *afternoon: a story* [Kirschenbaum 2008] which was, uncannily for me, also directive of my reading of *Mechanisms*. (Moreover, it was this marking that directed my response to Lennon’s excellent essay along the path of this writing out.) Kirschenbaum complains of technical challenges of working with the Michael Joyce Papers housed at the University of Texas – “I use what means and know-how I can to make cranky old binaries execute on the up-to-date operating system. Sometimes I am unsuccessful” [Kirschenbaum 2008, 207] – and reports his daily haste to transfer his notes to a stable repository: “At the end of every work day I leave the Ransom Center and cross busy Guadalupe Street to a coffeehouse that offers public WiFi service. I log on and immediately copy and paste my notes into an e-mail message that I send to myself, the bits beamed into the late Austin afternoon to be sprayed across the surface of a hard disk spinning in the silo of a server farm I will never see” [Kirschenbaum 2008, 208]. Spectral presences are not, or not only, virtual; they leave a mark; their return visits instabilities on the subject in the very scene of her retreat from them. *Mechanisms* is an admirable, important book, which I find to be – very productively – more on the side of the University than the hysteric. I think it significant, then, that in a moment in which Kirschenbaum slips, melancholic, from the assurance of the DU into the scene I have termed (after Lacan) an inmixing of critic and object, and which I have associated with the DH’s expression of endless dissatisfaction, he sends a message to (another instance of) himself: $\$ \rightarrow S_1 / S_2$.

[34] We may say that in the DA, the a and $\$$ are related by the disjunction of impossibility because the analyst can only be supposed to occupy its place for a time. S_1 and S_2 are related by the disjunction of the powerlessness of S_1 to anchor S_2 once and for all: no matter how forcefully S_1 indexes the battery of signifiers (S_2), other signifiers may always be produced. See note 18, above.

[35] Operationally, this skepticism with regard to the agent’s authority is the plainest distinction between the DA and the DM, and is accounted for in the graph of the DA by its inversion, as in a mirror, of the graph of the DM (see Figures 6 and 8). Analogously, the DH’s demand for dissatisfaction inverts the DU’s pursuit of closure (see Figures 5 and 7).

[36] In keeping with Freud’s “fundamental rule” of psychoanalysis, that patients should be encouraged to say “whatever comes into their heads,

even if they think it unimportant or irrelevant or nonsensical... or embarrassing or distressing" [Freud 1904, 251]. The graph of the DA gives a formal description of this basic principle of analytic technique.

[37] In the graph of the DA, the fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$) operates above the bar, but in a reversed form – in fact, in the form Lacan identifies with the pervert's distinctive fantasy ($a \diamond \$$, [Lacan 2006, 653]; [Žižek 1998]; [Žižek 2006]; [Žižek 2006a]). This suggests that the DA engages the analysand to reconstruct her relation to S_1 and S_2 as it were, in reverse. Here the analyst acts as the agent of the Other, recalling to the analysand her subjection to the law of the Other's desire.

[38] As I was completing revisions on this text I learned of Wegner's essay applying the four discourses to the humanities classroom [Wegner 2011]. His focus is on increasingly forceful appeals for a "return" in that scene to stable, well-measured disciplinarity, and consequently a turn away from the messy uncompletable of "theory" and "cultural studies" – in which appeals those terms are master signifiers used in a pejorative mood. "The champions of disciplined thought," Wegner writes, "see themselves as occupying the position of masters. The truth is that they are fully ensconced in the order of the university, eschewing the risk of encounter involved in the actual production of knowledge... for a repetitious structure of institutional reproduction." [Wegner 2011] Standing in opposition to such a pattern of mere repetition, Wegner argues, is the dialectical productivity – and in that the scandalously theoretical intervention – of Lacan's formalizations of the discourses. I don't think it a stretch to propose that a retreat in the digital field, away from (imagined) excesses of the first wave, might be gathered under a general trend in the academy, marked by Wegner, of a turning from/repression of unsettled and rigorously counterdisciplinary ways of thinking (and thinking about and performing writing), in pursuit of regularized practices that insure greater disciplinary unity.

[39] In the audience during the first reading of this essay (see Acknowledgements) were a half-dozen or so students in an undergraduate hypermedia course I was teaching at the time. Their dismay in response to the parade of glyphs and graphs – operations of which were implicit in the course's method but which had not been shown as such until then – and at being accounted as admirably bad hysterics, was evident. The first question of the next class meeting was, "What do you mean when you say that you want to turn us all into hysterics?" Which wasn't, of course, what I had said. I attempted to seize the edge of a teaching moment, replying that what I meant should have been clear enough from what I had said, even though I hadn't said it in that way before. I proposed that a more productive way in which to frame the question might be, "What do you want from us when you say, in our presence, that we should be hysterized?" – which indicates that my desire should take the hindmost role in the operation at hand, or that the interplay of their and my desires should remain always unsettled. With all the benefits of hindsight, I see now that this question, this *what do you want from us?*, is a version of the demand I identified, what now seems ages ago, as the key problem of a certain foundational moment of the digital field [Harpold 1994].

[40] Cf. [Lennon 2009]: "If we still want to consider Joyce's work a founding moment in new media literary studies in the U.S., we will have to recognize the radical untimeliness of, and at, that foundation: the extent to which the negativity of Joyce's secession from this emergent field must be understood not as the end of his influence in it, but in antinomian fashion, as its beginning again." Doesn't a shift in discursive structure from that of the DH to that of the DA articulate this change of Joyce's position within the mythology of the field? If secession were understood to invite desupposition, then the family romance built up around Joyce's early hyperfiction, which has, for good or ill, contoured the field from its inception [Harpold 2008, 6.01], might be (re)written (out) in a new and more productive form.

[41] The formula as shown here appears in Lacan's essay "Metaphor of the Subject" (1961) [Lacan 2006, 755–58]. It reprises, with a few modifications, diagrams from "On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis" (1959) [Lacan 2006, 464], a summary of Lacan's third Seminar, on the psychoses (1955–56) [Lacan 1993], and [Lacan 1998c, 176], the fifth Seminar, on formations of the unconscious (1957–58). These instances of the formula are recognizably reworkings of the classic Lacanian "algorithm" of metaphoric structure as given in "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious" (1957) [Lacan 2006, 429, 756].

Of note in the 1959 formula, the positions of S'_1 and S'_2 are occupied by two instances of the same symbol, $\$'$. But the use of a barred S in this formula is somewhat confusing, as Lacan does not appear to refer thus to the divided subject (Figure 3, above), but to "the elision of S' , represented in the formula by the fact that it is crossed out, [which] is the condition of the metaphor's success" [Lacan 2006, 465]. (Thus only one signifier [S'] is elided, rather than two potentially different signifiers [S_1 and S_2], which makes the substitution at work here somewhat clearer.) It is possible to read an echo of the divided subject in this version of the formula for metaphor – given that "the definition of a signifier is that it represents the subject not for another subject but for another signifier," etc. – and Lacan uses $\$$ to figure the divided subject elsewhere in the same essay [Lacan 2006, 487n14]. But that does not seem to be the primary function of the symbol here. As in the case of the variants of the graphs of the four discourses (see note 19, above), Lacan during this period revises the formulae to fit conditions of his teaching.

[42] Figure 9 shows a majuscule "I" in the position of the numerator in $1/s''$, as in [Lacan 1966, 890]. In Fink's translation, this character is shown as an Arabic numeral "1". Treating "I" as a Roman numeral would be in keeping with uses of the character in other mathemes

reproduced in [Lacan 1966] (2006) – see for example, 55(42), 515 (428) and 819 (694); “l” = “1” in these cases appears to be a typographic convention of Éditions du Seuil, the French publisher of Lacan’s canonical works. (See however [Lacan 1998c, 176], where an Arabic “1” is used as the numerator in a variant of the extended formula.) In that reading, the signified’s fractional form ($1/s$) indicates its subordination to relations of the signifiers (S, S₁, S₂; [Lacan 2006, 459]). But one commentator [Dor 1998] has interpreted the numerator (l) as a symbol for “l’Inconscient,” the unconscious. This is a forced reading, but it is permissible in that the subordination of the signified to the signifier is associated by Lacan with the structure of primal repression: viz., the signified – which is no more than the product of relations between signifiers – is driven below the bar of the unconscious [Lacan 2006, 595].

[43] Cf. Lacan 2006, 422–23; 756. “Metaphor of the Subject” was written in response to a lecture by legal and rhetorical theorist Chaïm Perelman, whose *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* Lacan claims to admire, but which he faults for reducing metaphor to a relation of analogy [Lacan 2006, 755]; [Perelman 1969, §87–88].

[44] Fink describes this passage of the signifier into the place of the signifier as a “titillating” release of some of the jouissance stored in the matter of language [Fink 1991, 20].

[45] See note 8, above; [Lacan 2006, 464ff]; and [Dor 1998, ch. 13].

[46] For general treatments of Lacan’s concepts of metaphor and metonymy – which, after Jakobson, Lacan takes to be the second major axis of meaning production in the signifying chain – see [Dor 1998], [Fink 1991], [Pluth 2007], and [Van Haute 2003].

[47] In “Metaphor of the Subject,” Lacan cites as an example of the “radical nature of metaphor” the Rat-Man’s famous temper tantrum in which he reduces his father to a series of signifiers for inanimate objects – “You lamp! You towel! You plate!” [Freud 1909]; [Lacan 2006, 757]. The terms of the series qualify as metaphor, Lacan observes, in that their semantic impertinences in and of themselves effect a communication different from the nonsense they express directly. This dimension of insult [*injure*], he suggests, is the generative kernel of linguistic innovation: “‘The cat goes bow-wow, the dog goes meow, meow.’ This is how the child spells out the powers of discourse and inaugurates thought” [Lacan 2006, 757].

[48] See note 38, above.

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