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READING WITH KNOTS

*On Jane Gallop's Anecdotal Theory*¹

1. Anecdotalizing Theory

*I always try to get us to that place where learning begins to dance.*²

The anecdote is a slippery knowledge maker, its politics suspect. On the one hand, it claims the authority of the first person, of presence. But this “I was there” aspect of anecdotal knowledge brings with it the force of an authority and the undoing of that authority in equal measure. While anecdote traffics in the authority of the personal witness, its undoing emerges in its lack of verification — the *singularity* of that witness. Indeed, it is through this very lack that anecdote as such comes to be. Anecdote is *fundamentally* unverifiable; if it were verified, vetted, it would cease to be anecdotal.³ It is, then, in thinking *with*

1. Early versions of this essay were delivered at the University of California, Santa Cruz, conference on “The Analytic Scene: Translations and Transferences,” May 19, 2007, and the Katholieke Universiteit of Leuven’s conference, “Sign of the Times: The Future of Psychoanalytic Literary and Cultural Criticism in Changing Paradigms,” February 20, 2008.

2. Jane Gallop, *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997). Henceforth cited in the text as *Feminist Accused*.

3. Joel Fineman, “The History of Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction,” H. Aram Veesser, ed. *The New Historicism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989) 49-76. At its etymologically simplest, anecdote (from the Greek *anekdota*) refers to unpublished items: *an* (not) *ekdota* (published). The OED tells us that an anecdote is the “narrative of a detached incident, or of a single event, told as being in itself interesting and striking.” Widely used throughout the 19th century, the term came to designate a kind of historical writing that deliberately eschewed totalizing and large-scale narrative views in favor of the situated personal narrative. The term, however, is a slippery one. According to Lionel Grossman, in his article “Anecdote and History,” “Scholars cannot even agree whether there is anything definable there, whether the anecdote can properly be considered a particular form or genre [...]

the particular organization around knowledge modeled by the anecdote that I want to begin the following reading. Or, rather, it is in thinking with someone who is herself thinking with this particular organization that I want to begin: Jane Gallop and her 2002 volume of collected essays, *Anecdotal Theory*.⁴

The volume was, in many ways, born out of an earlier text — a controversial one, written five years earlier, called *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*. A working-through of a case brought against Gallop in which she was accused by two of her female graduate students of sexual harassment, the book is an attempt to distinguish expressions of sexuality within the realm of the professional from a practice of discrimination based on the demand for sexual favor. Accordingly, the text asks: “What kind of feminist would be accused of sexual harassment?” (*Feminist Accused*, 1).

The answer comes in the form of an anecdotal history: it is 1971, and Gallop is becoming a feminist. Her college years are heady with intellectual, political and social action. “There,” we are told, “on the fringes of my college education, I experienced an exhilarating mix of private reading and social community, which *I would call learning in the strongest sense of the word*” (*Feminist Accused*, 3, emphasis added). Through statements such as this, throughout the text, Gallop’s narrative of intellectual growth and social commitment conjoins learning with pleasure. This embodied, intellectual passion is described by Gallop in its seventies inception not solely to wax nostalgic for a time past (though this it does), but primarily in order to elucidate something about the mid-nineties state of sexual harassment laws in which she finds herself embroiled.⁵ When Gallop states that “it is because of the sort of feminist I am that I do not respect the line between the intellectual and the sexual” (*Feminist Accused*, 12), she speaks against a conception of intellectual engagement that necessitates the intellect being divorced from the body and affect in order to be deemed legitimate, as well as against conflation of sexuality and harassment.

While the university found no evidence of compromised professional judgment, discrimination, or harassment, the final report claimed that simply by encouraging a personal relationship with her students Gallop was violating the university’s

Scholarly literature on the topic, moreover, is scattered and fairly thin, as though anecdote were thought to be too trivial a form to deserve serious consideration.” Lionel Grossman, “Anecdote and History,” *History and Theory*, 42 (May 2003): 168. This slippery and marginal quality links anecdote to the uncanny in ways that matter to the kind of pedagogy this essay is concerned with addressing. On this link see Natalie Loveless, *Acts of Pedagogy: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Art and Ethics* (Diss. University of California, Santa Cruz, 2010).

4. Jane Gallop, *Anecdotal Theory* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002).

5. On this, see Catherine MacKinnon’s *Only Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). That the harassment case emerged at the same time as this text is something that I do not read as a coincidence. For an incisive working-through of the MacKinnon text see Parveen Adams and Mark Cousins, “The Truth on Assault,” Parveen Adams, *The Emptiness of the Image: Psychoanalysis and Sexual Differences* (New York: Routledge, 1996) 57-69.

policy against “consensual amorous relations.” In the wake of this judgment, Gallop was advised by the university to refrain from working with any students with whom she recognized any transference. Her official response to this was as follows:

[...] transference is undoubtedly an amorous relation. But transference is also an inevitable part of any relationship we have to a teacher who really makes a difference [...] At its most intense — and, I would argue, its most productive — the pedagogical relation between a teacher and a student is, in fact, a ‘consensual amorous relation’. (*Feminist Accused*, 56-57).

A consensual amorous relation. This is, indeed, how Gallop understands learning at its best. Asserting an indelible connection between argument and form, *Feminist Accused* articulates a genre that challenges “the divide between feeling and thought, between the passions of the thinking subject and her thoughts.” (*Feminist Accused*, 19)⁶ Entangling the personal and the political with the pedagogical, *Feminist Accused* argues for an inhabited responsiveness, where the stuff of theory and the stuff of life uncannily oscillate between scenes of legitimation: scenes of the proper and improper, the theoretical and the “merely anecdotal.” Implicitly the text asks: can an anecdote *ever* be “*merely anecdotal*”? The anecdote is, it asserts, tied to the scene of transmission — that is, it is always articulated in service of a narrative inextricably bound within a theoretical (sense-making) perspective. An anecdote has a point: to entertain, to exemplify. It is, yes, a personal history, but a personal history that is, nonetheless, *told* — whether or not one thinks one should have told it, or whether or not one admits to any theoretical framing of the logics of the transmission itself. Gallop, of course, does admit this, and the entirety of *Feminist Accused* gracefully articulates both an anecdotal relationship to theory

6. As Gallop tells it, “often faulted for failing to make a coherent, unified argument, the book was as disappointing to those who read it for memoir as to those who read it for theory [...] the content [was] so sensational [...] that the question of its *genre*, its experiment in theoretical writing was seldom noticed” (*Feminist Accused*, 19). *Anecdotal Theory* responds to this (seemingly) disturbing enmeshment of *Feminist Accused* by attempting to make the “epistemological stakes of the genre clearer by treating the practice (anecdotal theory) separately from the topic (erotics of pedagogy).” (*Anecdotal Theory*, 19) The theoretical clarity aimed at in *Anecdotal Theory*, on my reading, however, precisely undoes the power of the earlier genre experiment. In saying this I do not mean to imply the failure of *Anecdotal Theory*. Rather, I want to highlight the textual form of *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*, its scene, as one in which the line between anecdote and theory, erotics and pedagogy, are crucially intertwined. *Anecdotal Theory*, on the other hand, in service of laying out anecdotal theory as a *program*, chooses the form of a set of collected essays showing the trajectory of Gallop’s theoretical experiments. This formal choice works against the theoretical experiment that Gallop champions while, at the same time, offering it as a model to be explicitly engaged. It successfully addresses the “failure” of *Feminist Accused* while offering up that failure as success.

and a theoretical relationship to anecdote – one that relies on a theory of the erotic as cathexis.⁷

Writing, then, in *Anecdotal Theory*, of the conditions of production surrounding *Feminist Accused*, Gallop tells us that “I felt compelled to theorize about what I had been forced to learn [...] I can see that it is precisely this ability to interrupt and divert a project conceived in theory which makes incident a force with which theory must reckon. I can see that anecdotal theory must be [...] this juncture where theory finds itself compelled – against its will, against its projects – to think *where it has been forced to think*” (*Anecdotal Theory*, 15, emphasis added). Here, the cathected *incident*, singular and eruptive, is marked by a certain and compelling *force* (one that forces Gallop to address the lines between the language and framing of anti-harassment laws and the policing of activities that constitute the personal and the professional), and force is theorized as a responsive relation to incident (one in which rigour emerges as a willingness to account for one’s responsiveness, regardless of whether or not it seems to be leading where one thought one might be, theoretically, heading).

Emerging at the intersections of deconstruction, psychoanalytic theory and feminism, anecdotal theory, as a practice, is not a simple call for overtly personal over impersonally abstract theory. Rather, it calls for a complex of (what Gallop calls) “theory in the flesh of practice” – an embedded and responsive movement between the seemingly particular and the seductively generalizeable, a *working-through* of a series of life events that are intimately entwined with a theory-making practice in which neither has priority or can be disentangled from the other. In this way, making claims for the *scene* of transmission, Gallop insists on a reflexive engagement with not only the *incident* but the *occasion* of theorizing.⁸ As a specific, lived

7. It is this engagement with the psychoanalytic concept of cathexis, and, indeed, psychoanalysis more generally, that distinguishes anecdotal theory from autobiography. Unlike the truth-claim of the autobiographical gesture, anecdotal theory calls into question – and *holds open the question* – of who or what counts as a self that might speak with authority within any situated encounter. Rather than claiming the authority of experience, anecdotal theory insists on an irreducible and fundamentally *material* multiplicity at the heart of any theory-making gesture (in that sense of materiality that we try to get at when we speak of the Lacanian Real).

8. Note the different valences between the terms *incident*, *occasion*, *act*, and *event* (all of which circulate through Gallop’s text). I read *incident* as invoking an unexpected and disruptive encounter, *occasion* as describing that which responsively situates knowledge production, *act* as that which locates attention on the “actor” as generative, and *event* as that incident, occasion or act which is historicized as having had impact. My thinking on “event,” here, is influenced by Foucault when he says that “the event is not of the order of bodies. And yet it is not something immaterial either; it is always at the level of materiality that it takes effect, that it is effect; it has its locus and it consists in the relation, the coexistence, the dispersion, the overlapping, the accumulation, and the selection of material elements. It is not the act or the property of the body; it is produced as an effect of, and within, a dispersion of matter. Let us say that the philosophy of the event should *move in the at first sight paradoxical direction of a materialism of the incorporeal*” (Michel Foucault,

moment of theorizing (whether on the page, in the classroom or on the street) the conjunction of incident and occasion is, throughout the Gallopin text, in its sited, embedded and uncontrollable contextuality – its positional thickness – precisely where fertile thought, rich *thinking*, as invested process rather than strategic product, occurs.

This positional quality emerges in a tension between *theorizing anecdote* and *anecdotalizing theory*, as well as between the *anecdote* and *the occasional*. In the first case, Gallop suggests that *theorizing anecdote* emerges on the side of the ‘conscious’ and ‘straightforward’, with *anecdotalizing theory* on the side of the ‘unconscious’ and ‘retrospective.’ *Anecdote*, on the other hand, is isolated as that which is retrospective and historiographic (both following and reflecting on the event), while the *occasional* is the proactive, ‘properly’ historic (that which both precedes and participates in the event). These dual movements speak to a temporality that knots together questions of history, narrative, and data transmission within a cathected scene – a scene within which one’s ethical relationship to *reading* (a situation, a classroom, a text, a self) is highlighted, not simply as a willingness to be responsible for the frame of connections that emerge in one’s reading, but, for a willingness, within that, to stand for a responsibility to a cathected drive that articulates the particularity of one’s *reading being*.⁹

Articulating a responsive relation between anecdote and theory, anecdotalizing theory and theorizing anecdote, *together*, become a localized reading practice, embedded in the marking of situation and time. And, in this, transference, that conjurer, evoker, provoker and re-definer of the past, articulates the temporality of Gallop’s project – one that testifies to the proximity of unconscious conflict, “the area where the subject finds himself face to face with the existence, force and permanence of his unconscious wishes and fantasies.”¹⁰ “It is a circuit frequented by those of us avidly involved in both formal and intimate knowledge produc-

“The Order of Discourse,” Robert Young (Ed.), *Untying the text: a post-structural anthology* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 48- 78 (69, emphasis added).

9. In this, the neat temporal progression in which, if it is to be of use, anecdote submits itself to theory, no longer stands—if it ever did. Between the scene of engagement and that engaged, “we find ourselves at a juncture where theory is so entangled with story that rather than attaining theoretical *perspective*, I find myself only able to tell stories about theory” (*Anecdotal Theory*, 83). The story of enmeshment here folds itself in two important ways. First, it is here that the metalyptic temporality of transference emerges. But also, in this notion of theoretical perspective we are asked to pay close attention to the pull of narrative closure and mastery, a pull in which analysis is predicated on the presupposition of a distance allowing one the separation through which to see.

10. Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1973) 458. While the permanence of unconscious wishes might seem in opposition to the temporal specificity of a situated anecdotal theory, it is precisely the encounter between the specificity and permanence of the subject’s knot form and the *situated negotiation and acknowledgment* of this reading (of one’s *sinthome* and the attendant accountability that this demands within a Lacanian ethical framework) that is the work, to my eyes, of a

tion — academics who become friends after reading each other’s published scholarship, theorists who talk endlessly with intimates trying to make sense of our lives, whose conversations pass seamlessly back and forth between life stories and references to theoretical texts and concepts” (*Anecdotal Theory*, 21).

2. Theorizing Anecdote

[T]he anecdote produces the effect of the real, the occurrence of contingency, by establishing an event as an event within and yet without the framing context of historical successivity. (*History*, 61)

Joel Fineman’s “The History of the Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction,” proves a pivotal interlocutor for Gallop’s use of the anecdotal. Arguing that the anecdotal form is essentially disruptive and disorienting, and, that, in psychoanalytic parlance, it benefits from being read as psychoanalytic *symptom* rather than *sign*, this essay leads us on what might seem a wanton detour — though it is precisely this wantonness to which, for a moment, I want to attend. In his essay, Fineman addresses the following statement by Stephen Greenblatt: “at moments the plays [of Shakespeare] seem to imply that erotic friction originates in the wantonness of language, and thus, that the body itself is a tissue of metaphors or, conversely, that language is perfectly embodied” (*History*, 74). Fineman’s objection to Greenblatt emerges on two interrelated fronts: on the one hand, the very reciprocity suggested between the body as a tissue of metaphors and language as perfectly embodied causes alarm. On the other, the possibility of the second fold of this reciprocity is designated an absolute misreading. That is: while wanton words (and here Fineman is referring to the erotic friction that arises from linguistic pluripotency) give rise to desire (in Fineman) or erotic friction (in Greenblatt), this complex of bodily affect cannot, for Fineman, be designated an *origin point* of words. Affect, as bodily-formation, must be conceived of as extra-linguistic.

I focus on this promise which never fully makes its way into the body of Fineman’s talk (it appears as a four-page footnote), because of the particularity of the dual inflection that Fineman is concerned to counter: he objects to the *second* movement, that in which language has the possibility of being perfectly embodied. It is a rejection that begs for our attention if we are to take seriously Gallop’s claims for a *theory in the flesh of practice*. “Theory in the flesh of practice” seems to ground a body, but it is crucial that this grounding, while always already understood as one that is negotiated through language, articulates a situated *mobility* within a negotiated *scene*. Where my body, words, Imaginary, affect and responsiveness to the Other begin, end, or are differentiated, is, in this framework, precisely what I am interested in, and, I contend, is what constitutes the labour of an anecdotal theory.

truly anecdotal theory. We will return to this notion of the “knot” and its importance for Gallop’s project shortly.

Fineman's invocation of the structure of anecdote is riddled with holes and wholes, with openings and closures, with lips and rims — metaphorical invocations describing the Lacanian Real as implicitly eroticized. This, in turn, is linked, as we have seen, to anecdote's etymological grounding as that which is unpublished or secret. The etymological play is a productive one. For something to exist as unpublished it must have the possibility of being published — made public. Accordingly, the Lacanian Real, aligned with the register of the unconscious, 'exists,' as such, only retroactively from the position of its effects, read within the register of an Imaginary-Symbolic matrix. The Real, here, marks the uncontainable erotics of that which cannot, *in itself*, be represented, published; it marks that which, in this unpublishability can only be asserted from *within* the frameworks of representation. That is, while the Real, within the Lacanian paradigm, can be said to name the play of the unconscious, and thus something like a constitutive primal repressed, it is, as well, that which only exists as retroactively posited from a position within 'reality' — the remembered dream, the experienced symptom, the play of signification that suddenly emerges as uncanny.

The Real unsettles, inflects and constitutes reality in a cathected play between the Symbolic structure of our meaning-making and the Imaginary lures that suture coherence together. As Gallop would have it, this "contradiction between capturing the singular moment and a drive to insert that moment within a familiar plot [...] may be a tension intrinsic to anecdote" (*Anecdotal Theory*, 85). That is, for Gallop, anecdote articulates a relation to the psychoanalytic Real that encapsulates these contradictory, pluri-vocal and poly-morphic, temporal tensions. Never purely one or the other, the *positionality* of these tensions converge in a movement between what is seen but should have remained hidden, or hidden when it should have remained seen.

At stake in the contested Greenblatt quotation is that it is precisely this relation to the Real that undoes the possibility of *pre-ordained* directionality — uni or reciprocal — in *both* Fineman and Greenblatt's assertions of the relation of language to the body. In other words, neither Fineman's disagreement with Greenblatt, nor our engagement with Gallop, psychoanalysis, and pedagogy, is served if left as a debate between the possibility of "perfect" embodiment and the totipotency of words — a conception that Fineman's intellectual bases are likely to leave him allergic to. This is because Fineman's discussion, and through him Gallop's, relies upon a movement in which he weaves the Lacanian function of the Real into a formal discussion of anecdote. The anecdote, linked to the Real as singular and excessive, is also linked to the literary as frame — the anecdote encompasses the Real, for Fineman, but from within the specificity of a literary genre that, while pointing to the Real, is nonetheless firmly a *genre*, a kind, a genus: firmly entrenched in hierarchies of legibility. But, legible how and where?

The answer that Gallop's text leads us to is the late Lacanian engagement with mathematical topology — in particular, the topology of knots.¹¹ In Lacan, the turn to mathematical topology (both in manifold and knot form) is an attempt to conceptualize and *write* the Real. Knot theory (a branch of mathematical topology) studies the constitutive limit of a structure's ability to *be* what it is — the limit before which it can be considered to be a different "species." For Lacan, the mathematical topology of knots does not *describe* the subjective condition, but, rather, *enacts* its structural conditions of possibility. The topology of knots permits a conceptualization of individual subjectivity as both radically *individual* (an irreducible fold figured by the *sinthome*) and, yet, not *personal* (in the sense of an autobiographically endowed ownership of particularity that is used to mobilize truth claims as fact).

Here, the narrativity of the Imaginary (anecdote as autobiographical truth claim) and the structural framework of the Symbolic (anecdote as linguistic effect of the Real) meet the logic of irreducible foldings (the particularity of each subject's drive). In this logic of irreducible folding, linear temporal logic is replaced by what in Gallop's text emerges as the pun *knot-logic*. Tied between the occasional (that which responsively situates knowledge production) and the Real (the assertion of something extrinsic to symbolization giving rise to it without being reducible to it), the knot of anecdote is one that Gallop wants to work *with* and *through* rather than untie, fully loosen or analyze — in fact, as Gallop would have it, the knot "may be anecdote itself" (*Anecdotal Theory*, 85). This move focuses us in, *pace* Fineman, on the *anecdote* as *sinthome* rooted in the Real, and on *anecdotal theorizing* as a particular form of theory-making that is not only entwined with the inescapability of our situated knot forms, but that insists on a reflexive relation to that inescapability. Given this, and to return us to the pedagogical stakes of anecdotal theory, I would now like to consider the ways that anecdotal theory, as a practice, emerges within a cathected narrative that is always in relation (misrecognized or not) to what Lacan calls the *sujet-supposé-savoir*:

The *sujet-supposé-savoir* or the "subject presumed to know" is the figure that Lacan uses to describe the positing and circulation of knowledge in the analytic scene. This position is articulated, according to Lacan, intersubjectively through the transferential attribution of knowledge to a subject. "As soon as the subject who is supposed to know exists somewhere [...] there is transference."¹² The analyst, within this scene, must know what the (analytic/pedagogical) trust turns around:

11. Lacan's key texts in this regard include: *Le séminaire, Livre XX. Encore*, Jacques-Alain Miller, ed. (Paris, Seuil, 1999); *Le séminaire, Livre XXII. R.S.I.* (<http://gaogoa.free.fr/SeminaireS.htm#22>); *Le séminaire, Livre XXIII. Le sinthome*, Jacques-Alain Miller, ed. (Paris, Seuil, 2005); *Joyce: Le symptôme,» Autres écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 2001). See also Ellie Ragland-Sullivan and Dragan Milovanovic, *Lacan: Topologically Speaking* (New York: Other Press, 2004).

12. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis (Seminar XI)*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1998) 232. Henceforth cited in the text as *Four Fundamental Concepts*.

the desire of the analyst bound with the analysand in a transferential inter-relation. For the analysand, this transferential *attribution* initiates analysis, while its *desupposition* ends it. It is, therefore, doubly crucial that, throughout the analysis, the analyst, held in the position of the *sujet-supposé-savoir*, be attentive to the lure of counter-transference. That is, the analyst must inhabit the position of the *sujet-supposé-savoir* without *méconnaissance*.¹³ Here, the position of the analyst or the teacher as *sujet-supposé-savoir* is an organization around authority in which “one can effectively undo authority only from the position of authority in a way that exposes the illusions of that position without renouncing it, so as to permeate the position itself with the connotations of its illusoriness, so as to show that everyone, including the *sujet-supposé-savoir*, is castrated.”¹⁴

Attention to transference and counter-transference in both analysis and pedagogy works to distinguish the *sujet-supposé-savoir* misrecognized as *substance* from the *sujet-supposé-savoir* as a structurally endowed position that, when approached as such, provides an ethical fulcrum to the pedagogical scene. A lack of engagement with the structure of transference can easily devolve a feminist pedagogy, or, indeed, any pedagogy, into a battle of misplaced desires and wills — misplaced because their archaic charges are given a truth value that results in a *working* that is not a *working-through*.¹⁵ The position, then, of inhabiting and relating to the *sujet-supposé-savoir* is one in which the source and plenitude of knowledge — its origin — is not seen, from the perspective of the *sujet* nor the one who relates to the *sujet*, as

13. Doctors and teachers, as well as analysts, in this schema, are said to function as subjects presumed to know — that is, subjects who are invested with that form of knowing and authority that is originally organized around the well-known Lacanian figures of the Father and the Phallus. For a succinct working through of Lacan’s Four Discourses on knowledge, see: Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 29-137.

14. Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 34. Henceforth cited in the text as *Reading*. That is, “one must assume one’s castration” as opposed to a phallogocentrism in which “one must constantly cover one’s inevitable inadequacy in order to have the right to speak” (*Reading*, 20).

15. Accordingly, and here we can recall Gallop’s sexual harassment charge, we must ask care-filled questions about how to navigate the risks of transference in the classroom — a very different scene, in its practice if not its organization around knowledge, from the analytic — and investigate the conditions surrounding what we might call the “safe-enough” classroom. In reading with Gallop I want to underscore that, while not the focus of this essay, I take the pedagogical effects of eroticizing the classroom seriously. Effects must be cared for. Sex and pedagogy, while figuratively intertwined, are different practices — both eroticized, both cathected, both capable of “getting someone off,” they require different parameters and modes of expression. This is not to suggest some version of sublimation in which sex figures the Truth of an urge that is then “elevated”; it is to respect the particular configurations and modes of communication constitutive of each scene. The classroom is not the bedroom. The pedagogical act and the sexual act work to produce different interpersonal indebtednesses. Distinguishing these scenes is not about ejecting the personal or the taint of the erotic from the classroom. It is to respect the richness and specificity of each mode of engagement and to be attentive to what each labour seems to be building.

located in the *sujet*, but rather as *produced* through an acknowledged asymmetrical relation within the scene, as well as a willingness to invest in these asymmetries.

In this context, transference, echoing Lacan's preference in "The Agency of the Letter," demands "a way out from within" (*Anecdotal Theory*, 30), and therefore a reading of symptomatic effects produced in relation to the *sujet-supposé-savoir* — a reading of our situated knot forms. When Gallop states that "if the past had only been behind me, then I could have attained theoretical perspective" (*Anecdotal Theory*, 84), she brings our attention to the desire for a linear temporality equated with mastery — the mastery of a misrecognized relation to a *sujet-supposé-savoir* within the Lacanian analytic scene. This longing for mastery becomes one in which a rejection of *contradictory plurivocality* and ambiguity emerge as the repression necessary to produce the illusion of a coherent self, which, within the Gallopian schema, has implications for the theorizing of the pedagogical relation.

3. From Mastery to Ignorance

Teaching is something rather problematic [...] One always knows enough in order to occupy the minutes during which one exposes oneself in the position of the one who knows [...] This makes me think that there is no true teaching other than the teaching which succeeds in provoking in those who listen an [...] ignorance inasmuch as it is, as such, fertile —in the one who teaches as well.¹⁶

The pedagogical question crucial to Lacan's own teaching will [...] be: Where does it resist? Where does a text precisely make no sense, [...] And what can I thus learn from the locus of that ignorance? How can I interpret out of the dynamic ignorance I analytically encounter, both in others and in myself?¹⁷

I have always loved the second epigraph, above, from Shoshana Felman's 1982 essay "Psychoanalysis and Education: Teaching Terminable and Interminable." I encountered it as the opening salvo of the first of Jane Gallop's texts that I ever read: her 1985 *Reading Lacan*. The quotation is used by Gallop to address, at the beginning of a book designed to take Lacan *à la lettre*, Lacan's famed opacity of language — an opacity that links resistance to mastery to the scene of the aesthetic as a site of productive discomfort within the pedagogical. Championing this charge of aesthetic (literary/stylistic) opacity, Gallop, in *Reading Lacan*, collaborates with Felman in "trying to write in a different relation with the material, from a more

16. Lacan, Jacques, *My Teaching* (London and New York, Verso, 2009).

17. Shoshana Felman, "Psychoanalysis and Education: Teaching Terminable and Interminable" in Shoshana Felman ed., "The Pedagogical Imperative: Teaching as a Literary Genre" *Yale French Studies*, 63 (1982): 21-44. The references that follow refer to the reprinted version of the essay in Shoshana Felman, *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1987) 80, henceforth cited in the text as *Adventure*.

unsettling confrontation with its contradictory plurivocality” (*Reading*, 18). *Reading Lacan*, thus, in many ways prefigures the work that Gallop will do in *Anecdotal Theory*: playing with the place of the proper and improper in figurative language, championing a feminist project of producing and cherishing ambiguity, and working-with and through the Lacanian figure of the *sujet-supposé-savoir*. In Gallop’s words: “[Aesthetic] interpretation is always the exercise of power, while transference is the structuring of that authority. To analyze transference is to unmask that structuring, interrupt its efficient operation [...T]he discovery of transference is the discovery that the power in analysis is not the analyst’s power, but something very powerful that happens *between subjects*” (*Anecdotal Theory*, 27, emphasis added).

Importantly, transference, here, is not just affect displaced anywhere, anyhow, but affect displaced onto and negotiated through relations with a perceived location of authority — an authority bound up with the production of knowledge, with the ability to say I know. Transference functions as a conduit for the past to entangle itself into the present through projection onto the *sujet-supposé-savoir* — the teacher, the doctor, the analyst. In this, and to return, in some sense, to the consensual amorous relation with which we started, a particular formulation arises: the knotting together of transference, the *sujet-supposé-savoir* and love: “The person in whom I presume knowledge to exist thereby acquires my love.”¹⁸ Articulating the mobility of “circulating structures that determine us as subjects” (*Four Fundamental Concepts*, 242), and instigated by (and with) what Lacan will call the *objet petit a*, transference-love, both in its Symbolic function (a repetition revealing signifiers in the subject’s history) and in its Imaginary function (affect acting as resistance), is the axis upon which pedagogical desire turns and from which one takes one’s bearings. Whether in the analytic or pedagogical scene, there is no vantage point outside the transference — one can interpret it, work-through, -with, and -against it, but not escape it.

This affective knowledge economy becomes the locus of an articulation of pedagogical value committed to the attention of *scene* as much as *data*, *process* as much as *product* — a distinction ever more crucial in, at the very least, Anglo-American educational institutions focused increasingly on various forms of standardized testing and research assessment exercises.¹⁹ It grounds an approach to pedagogy that, “proceeding not through linear progression but through breakthroughs, leaps, discontinuities, regressions, and deferred action [...] puts in question the traditional

18. Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge* (Seminar 20), trans. Bruce Fink (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1999), 16. “If transference often manifests itself under the appearance of love, it is first and foremost the love of knowledge that is concerned” (*Four Fundamental Concepts*, 51).

19. This is a particularly virulent problem in North America. For detailed information on the problem of standardization in the North American school system, see: *A Nation at Risk* report (1983), available here < <http://www2.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/index.html> >, and the full text of the federal *No Child Left Behind* legislation available here < <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html> >.

pedagogical belief in intellectual perfectibility, the progressive view of learning as a simple one-way road from ignorance to knowledge” (*Adventure*, 76).

Anecdotal theory is a story of a woman who finds herself constantly where she isn't expected to be: “I was expected to do psychoanalytic theory but instead found myself telling stories” (*Anecdotal Theory*, 90). Through these stories, Gallop brings our attention to the *scene* of pedagogical transmission, to “the juncture of theorizing and pedagogical passion” (88).²⁰ As a specific, lived moment (whether on the page, in the classroom or on the street), this scene is, in its si(gh)ted, embedded and uncontrollable contextuality, that (dis)location where fertile thought, rich *thinking* – as invested process rather than strategic product – occurs. Challenging normative relationships between *theory* and *example* and attuning her readers to the daily practices of *making* theory, Gallop thus grounds us in a psychoanalytic methodology. “At its least normative, at its best,” she asserts, “psychoanalysis is an anecdotal theory: by grounding theory in case history psychoanalysis demands that theory test itself against the uncanny details of story” (*Anecdotal Theory*, 11). These “uncanny details of story” emerge *dialogically*, unexpectedly, in conversation.²¹ It is this psychoanalytic dialogism of anecdotal theory, as Gallop conceives it (that is, as a fundamentally material category), which allows “intimate and inter-subjective knowledge production [to emerge] into the academic realm of formal thinking and legitimized knowledge” (*Anecdotal Theory*, 26).

Anecdotal theory calls us to read through the lens of a dialogic imperative writ-large, one that escapes the confines of legitimizing knowledge productions and begs questions of the mutable embedded practices of critical thinking in situated social contexts; it offers a displacement from a practice of reading for the *known* (answers) to a reading that takes as its charge the mark of the *unknown* (that is, one that is drawn towards the interesting question). That said, it is not just any kind of unknown that is privileged here, but that unknown by which we are *compelled*. In this, the pedagogy of anecdotal theory insists that, instead of addressing itself towards the identification and application of content, we ask: Where do we not want to think? To what are we inescapably, repetitively drawn? It is this that, in effect, become the telos, but a revolutionary one, of a pedagogy that takes seriously

20. “[...A]t conferences, scholars who usually make contact by reading each other’s publications get together in person: we share meals and have drinks together, stay up late talking, or meet early for breakfast [...] When the possibility of intellectual communion arises in contacts with real flesh-and-blood people, the excitement and connection can turn explicitly sexual. A good conference is likely to be an eroticized workplace” (*Feminist Accused*, 82-3).

21. Jean-Michel Rabaté reminds us that, in his spoken seminars, Lacan (in what Rabaté calls a neo-Dadaist move) systematically refused to maintain the habit/remain in the habit/inhabit, the role of the master. Rather, he favoured the roles of the jester, madman, and, most importantly, that of participant in debate (Rabaté in “Psychoanalysis Applicable and Inapplicable?”, paper given at *Sign of the Times? The Future of Psychoanalytic Literary and Cultural Criticism in Changing Paradigms*, January 30, 2008, Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, Belgium).

the psychoanalytic charge — a charge that, in the context of anecdotal theory, emerges as the insistence that we *read with our knots*. In this, anecdotal theorizing, as a knotted reading practice, demands a “reading with” that, more than doubled, is doubly displaced — a “reading with” that can never be straightforward or truly know itself; a “reading with” through which activities called artistic and intellectual, personal and professional, interested and disinterested, quotidian, mundane and exalted are *conjoined*.