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THE MYTHOGENESIS OF PSYCHOGENESIS

In the first lecture of *Seminar III* Lacan divulges “the great secret of psychoanalysis,” which is that “there is no psychogenesis.”¹ At first blush, this is a strange claim for several reasons. First of all, it seems incongruous with much of the Freudian doctrine. Freud’s text on “The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman,” for example, seems to fly in the face of such a claim. One could also puzzle over how this claim squares with Lacan’s earlier “Presentation on Psychological Causality,” in which he defended a notion of psychogenesis against Henry Ey’s organo-dynamism.² Above all, though, the repudiation of psychogenesis raises a series of fundamental questions about Lacanian psychoanalysis. What exactly is the account of genesis that we find in psychoanalysis if it is not psychogenesis?

The claim that there is no psychogenesis in psychoanalysis is a nodal point around which the question of cause emerges. ‘Psychogenesis,’ is a term with a varied and controversial history in both philosophical and medical contexts, usually referring to investigations of the cause, development, and origin of psychological phenomena. The context of Lacan’s claim in *Seminar III* is one of distinguishing psychoanalysis from phenomenological psychology as developed by Karl Jaspers. His claim is more pointedly that there is no psychogenesis if in fact psychogenesis means what Jaspers thinks it means, which has to do with the relation of the understanding, with the assumption that the job of the psychopathologist is to *understand* patients. For Jaspers, the work of the psychopathologist is characterized by a “unique form of understanding which only applies to psychic events; it grasps as self-evident how one psychic event emerges from another; how a man attacked should be angry, a betrayed lover jealous...”³ For Jaspers, if we can identify the origin or the cause of a particular psychic state, we will be able to understand why the patient is suffering and how the patient’s symptom emerged. The details of Lacan’s critique of Jaspers and of his polemic against understanding are not of central importance here.⁴ Rather, if we take Lacan at his word, the claim that the great secret of psychoanalysis is that there is no psychogenesis offers a starting point for an examination of the Lacanian account of genesis, both of the genesis of symptoms and of the genesis of psychological phenomena as such. The claim that there is no psychogenesis in psychoanalysis exposes a peculiarity about Lacanian psychoanalysis; it exposes a fundamental ambivalence about the origin of psychological phenomena. There are

no doubt accounts within psychoanalysis of the kinds of conditions that contribute to a neurosis and of the events that might trigger a psychosis but these are never marked as true points of genesis or origin, or as causes in any efficient, formal, material or final sense.⁵

From its inception, psychoanalysis has been fascinated with moments of genesis and points of origin. The theses of Freud and his followers have relied heavily on studies in early childhood development to establish accounts of the first formations of basic concepts like those of self and other or of presence and absence. We find an example of this in the well known and oft-repeated treatment of Freud's observation of the *Fort-Da* phenomenon, a game he observed a small child (his grandson) playing by himself upon his mother's departure. The child would repeatedly throw a small object over the side of the bed, saying "*Fort*" (away), only to retrieve it a moment later exclaiming "*Da*" (there), a kind of object-oriented peek-a-boo. The repetition of this game led Freud and many others following him including Winnicott and Klein to speculate about the concept formation that occurred alongside this game.⁶ Although Lacan also treats such concepts and moments of origin, he is sceptical about the fixation on these moments and about the psychoanalyst's tendency to be mesmerized by such moments of genesis. Lacan does make use of the "*Fort-Da*" example to describe primordial symbolization,⁷ the original split between sign and object, and he grants that this game marks the subject's entrance into the Symbolic dimension. However, Lacan is critical of the obsessive attention that this moment attracts and he warns:

do not allow yourselves to be fascinated by this genetic moment. The young child whom you see playing at making an object disappear and reappear, who is thereby working at apprehending the symbol, will, if you let yourselves be fascinated by him, mask the fact that the symbol is already there, that it is enormous and englobes him from all sides—that language exists, fills libraries to the point of overflowing, and surrounds, guides, and rouses all your actions ... all this you forget before the child being introduced into the symbolic dimension. So let us place ourselves at the level of the existence of the symbol as such, insofar as we are immersed in it.⁸

To place ourselves at this level, at the level in which we are immersed, it seems we must forego, or at least curb, our fascination with the genetic moment. Psychoanalysis does not give a clear answer to the question of origin. It does not promise to fulfil the fantasy of understanding things from the beginning. Instead, psychoanalysis treats the very structures that already condition that beginning. The child does not invent the symbol, it pre-exists her, it surrounds her and us, it "fills libraries to the point of overflowing," and the danger of the doctrine of psychogenesis is that we become blind to this matter of fact by imagining that we can determinatively identify the point of origin. In attempting to capture with utmost clarity the moment of beginning, the genesis of the symbol, we focus our attention on that moment on what the child entering into language shows us instead of attending to what it is that shows itself through her. The latter is of much greater interest,

although the former seems to be much clearer to see. And Lacan's point in this passage is that such clarity can only ever be an illusion.

One way to read Lacan's claim that there is no psychogenesis in psychoanalysis would be to argue that in analysis the question of origin is somewhat beside the point. Assuming that the aim of psychoanalysis is to help cure patients who are suffering from psychic disturbances, any fixation on finding the original cause of any particular symptom will prove to be nothing but a distraction. In fact, it might help the analysand to rationalize her symptom and cling to it all the more. But even assuming that the aim of psychoanalysis is not so clearly defined in terms of cure, Lacan seems to say that the emphasis on identifying a point of origin is fundamentally misguided. Lacan's warning against the fascination with the "genetic moment" suggests that explanation of this kind distracts from the task of psychoanalysis. The task is not to name the cause in any one particular event or worse to attribute it to some general predisposition. Rather, Lacan suggests that we direct our attention to the circumstances of the present instead of developing narratives about the past that retroactively explain and justify these very circumstances.

Lacanian psychoanalysis is not, for all this, entirely without an explanation of origin if what we understand by "origin" is the genesis of symbolicity. In what follows, I will show that Lacanian psychoanalysis poses the problem of origin in a radically different way. Not only does it establish its account of what happens at the level of the first symbolic articulations as the moment of origin, its own kind of psycho-genesis, but also establishes this account as a myth. For Lacanian psychoanalysis, any psychogenesis is also a mythogenesis. As Lacan puts it, "This creation of the symbol must be conceptualized as a mythical moment rather than as a genetic moment. One cannot even relate it to the constitution of the object, since it concerns the relation between the subject and being and not between the subject and the world."⁹ There are two radical claims here: first there is an explicit acknowledgment that the account of psychogenesis, understood as an account of the origin of symbolic thought, is an imaginary reproduction of the earliest perceptual experiences and symbolic articulations; it is a "mythical moment." Second, such a moment concerns "the relation between the subject and being"; it is also an ontological moment. To address the relation between the subject and being would entail not only the recognition of the mythical status of the story of origin, the account that begins, "in the beginning, there was..." but also the necessity of seeing this account as a myth. Because Lacan's own account of the origin of symbolization addresses directly, as he puts it, "the relation between the subject and being," the mythogenesis of psychogenesis will help to establish the ontological implications of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

I will structure this analysis of Lacanian psychoanalysis through two separate but related accounts of origin that we find in Lacan's return to Freud. The first comes out of the encounter with Jean Hyppolite around a reading of Freud's text on *Verneinung* [Negation]. Hyppolite develops the notion of mythogenesis as a counterpart to Freud's account of psychogenesis given in the essay "On Negation." The second

comes from *Seminar III* and focuses on Lacan's development of the concepts of *Verwerfung* [foreclosure] and *Bejahung* [affirmation]. Lacan elaborates these concepts as an extension of his discourse with Hyppolite around Freud's enigmatic essay on *Verneinung*. Together, these concepts offer an alternative to the discourse of psychogenesis that fixates on the genetic moment. Instead of positing a psychogenetic cause at the origin, the concepts of *Verwerfung* and *Bejahung* identify a lack of cause at the origin. And as such they affirm instead the Mythogenesis of Psychogenesis.

I. Verneinung and the Freudian myths of origin

To begin with a few words on Freud's "On Negation": in this text Freud treats negation as a seemingly simple technique for revealing unconscious ideas. He explains "Negation is a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed," because "the content of a repressed image or idea can make its way into consciousness on the condition that it is negated."¹⁰ For example, when a patient says, "You ask who this person in the dream can be. It's *not* my mother," Freud emends this to "So it *is* his mother."¹¹ Or, an example applicable more broadly: when someone prefaces a remark by saying "I don't mean to offend you," you can be sure that the person with whom you are speaking, whether in analysis, at a party, or over dinner, intends nothing less than to offend you. "No offense but..." a caveat delivered in earnest, reveals itself as "a rejection by projection of an idea that has just come up."¹² Thus negation is for Freud the "Hallmark of repression, a certificate of origin, as it were, like "Made in Germany."¹³ When we hear a negation, Freud says, "we take the liberty of disregarding the negation and of picking out the subject matter alone of the association."¹⁴ This association is key to identifying the repression and it exposes the underlying truth of the negation.

At first glance, Freud's doctrine of negation might seem to provoke a kind of topsy turvy logical scandal in which "No" means "Yes," and "it's *not* my mother," means "indeed, it *is* her." But this is not exactly right. By using the mechanism of negation to identify repressed thoughts, the repressed idea is not simply delivered over into its opposite, the negation doesn't become a straightforward affirmation. Freud says that a negation exposes a repressed idea but this exposure does not resolve the repression and lead to an affirmation, "oh yes, the figure in my dream is my mother." The mere act of disclosure, of identifying the repression, as we know from the earliest days of Freud's studies with Breuer, will not change the repression itself. Identifying the repressed idea and revealing it *as* a repressed idea to the patient will do little to undo the knot of the repression. Rather, as Alenka Zupančič has observed, negation can offer a third way between affirmation and negation; it can lead to what Hegel called a double negation that is neither "it is" nor "it isn't."¹⁵ That is, through the work of negation the analysand can come to the conclusion "it's not *not* my mother," which is not a full acceptance of the repressed idea but is what Freud calls an "intellectual acceptance of the repressed." He writes:

Negation is already a lifting of the repression, though not, of course an acceptance of what is repressed. We can see how in this the intellectual function is separated from the affective process. With the help of negation only one consequence of the process of repression is undone—the fact, namely, of the ideational content of what is repressed not reaching consciousness. The outcome of this is a kind of intellectual acceptance of the repressed, while at the same time what is essential to the repression persists.¹⁶

That is, what is “unconscious” can become “conscious” and still be repressed. Acknowledging a negation can lead to a *lifting* of a repressed thought or idea but this lifting does not resolve the repression, it does not lead to an acceptance of the repressed.

In his 1954 seminar on Freudian Technique, Lacan invited Jean Hyppolite to deliver a commentary on this short essay on “Negation.” In his commentary, Hyppolite, too, emphasized the Hegelian concept of a “negation of a negation.”¹⁷ He says, “I conclude that one must give what happens here a philosophical name, a name Freud did not pronounce: negation of the negation. Literally, what transpires here is intellectual but only intellectual, affirmation qua negation of the negation.”¹⁸ Because the acceptance brought about through the negation is “only intellectual,” the work of negation marks a splitting, a moment of rupture between the affective and the intellectual. As Freud says, “the intellectual function is separated from the affective process.”¹⁹ I can accept a repressed idea intellectually, Freud seems to be saying, but affectively somehow I remain attached to it. And what is essential to the repression, if we take Freud at his word, would be what is “affective.” But precisely what does Freud mean by this term “affective” in this context? This question is the key to unlocking the core of the problem in this essay for both Hyppolite and Lacan.

Hyppolite is skeptical of Freud’s clean demarcation between affect and intellect. And with good reason! One of Freud’s most often repeated claims is that it is *representations* that are repressed, not *affects*.²⁰ Hyppolite suggests that Freud does not really mean to establish such a distinction. On Hyppolite’s hypothesis, “in order to carry out an analysis of the intellectual function, [Freud] does not show how the intellectual separates from the affective, but how the intellectual is that sort of suspension of content for which the somewhat barbaric term “sublimation” would not be inappropriate.”²¹ This reading is consistent with Lacan’s position on the place for affects in psychoanalysis, which is namely that they are first and foremost always articulated within a symbolic relation. Affects are not outside of, beyond, or behind language, for Lacan; they are always symbolically articulated in the sense of being pronounced and delimited in language. Further, this symbolic articulation determines the affect itself. Lacan gives a funny example of this point in *Seminar III* when he tells the following story:

When you give a child a smack, well! it’s understandable that he cries-without anybody’s reflecting that it’s not at all obligatory that he should cry. I

remember a small boy who whenever he got a smack used to ask—Was that a pat or a slap? If he was told it was a slap he cried, that belonged to the conventions, to the rules of the moment, and if it was a pat he was delighted.²³

In his response to Hyppolite's commentary, Lacan agrees with Hyppolite and heavily qualifies Freud's use of the term "affect" in this essay. He says that we should not mistake this usage as a claim about the purity of affects, as if they were "a psychological *qualitas occulta*" sought out by positivist psychology. Lacan says, "In this text by Freud, the affective is conceived of as what preserves its effects right down to the discursive structuration on the basis of a primordial symbolization, this structuration (... is also called "intellectual")."²² Affects are not beyond thought, in other words, and the amorphousness of the language of affect against intellect offers too quick of a way out of the problem with which Freud concerns himself in this text: the problem of primordial symbolization and the role negation plays in it.

One possibility is that Freud effectuates the split between affect and intellect as a mere heuristic gesture. One could see Freud's appeal to the old schema of "affect v. intellect" as a helpful, readymade binary that allows Freud to efficiently explain the "intellectual acceptance" of repressed ideas that is made possible through the mechanism of negation. In doing so, one could excuse Freud's use of "affect" and see it for nothing more than a momentary and uncharacteristic lapse in conceptual rigor. But as Freud's essay unfolds, what emerges from the account of the split between affect and intellect is a full blown doctrine of the genesis of thought as such, of thought born out of a distinction from affect. Freud writes, "Since to affirm or negate the content of thoughts is the task of the function of intellectual judgment, what we have just been saying has led us to the psychological origin of that function."²³ Freud posits his own theory of genesis precisely here in the account of negation as a mechanism in which we see a split between affect and intellect. He thus makes "a very bold generalization, in which he raises the problem of negation insofar as it might be at the very origin of intelligence."²⁴ Hyppolite's suggestion is that we read this account of the genesis of thought in the affective/intellectual split as an account that is based not in a real split but instead in a mythical one.

One might take this genesis for positive psychology, but its import seems more profound to me, being historical and mythical in nature. And given the role that Freud has this primordial affectivity play, insofar as it gives rise to intelligence, I think it should be understood in the way Dr. Lacan teaches, which is that the primal form of relation known psychologically as the affective is itself situated within the distinctive field of the human situation, and that, while it gives rise to intelligence, it is because, from the outset, it already brings with it a fundamental historicity. There is no pure affect on the one hand, entirely engaged in the real, and pure intellect on the other, which detaches itself from it in order to grasp it anew. In the genesis described here, I see a sort of grand myth. And behind the appearance of positivity in Freud's text, there is a grand myth sustaining it.²⁵

The myth that sustains Freud's claim that negation marks the split between affect and intellect is a version of the psychogenetic myth, *par excellence*; it is the myth of the origin of thought as such, understood as the intellect's emergence out of some primordial, amorphous affectivity. And the argument that Hyppolite makes here is very similar to Lacan's insistence that the Symbolic precedes the subject's entrance into it. The fact that language "fills libraries to the point of overflowing" is essential to what Hyppolite here calls the "fundamental historicity" of the human situation which gives rise to intelligence. For Hyppolite, what is mythical about this is precisely that there is anything prior to thought as such, some prior affect against which the intellect emerges. The notion of affect itself becomes the myth insofar as it is a retroactive designation of what must have come before an entrance into language. Just as Lacan warned against a fascination with the "genetic moment" of the *Fort-Da* phenomenon in the quotation cited above, Hyppolite here emphasizes that this appeal to the claim "from the outset" loses sight of what it is that englobes the subject from the very beginning. The genesis is situated within a fundamental historicity; it is situated within the human situation of immersion in language.

For Freud, the account of the "origin of intellect" is more pointedly an account of the origin of judgment. In the essay, "On Negation," he sketches the broad outlines for a theory of judgment, maintaining a classical philosophical distinction between judgments of attribution on the one hand and judgments of existence on the other. The former "affirms or disaffirms the possession by a thing of a particular attribute"²⁶ and the latter "asserts or disputes that a presentation has an existence in reality."²⁷ In the case of judgments of attribution, "Expressed in the language of the oldest—the oral—instinctual impulses, the judgment is: 'I should like to eat this,' or 'I should like to spit it out'; and, put more generally: 'I should like to take this into myself and to keep that out.' That is to say: 'It shall be inside me' or 'it shall be outside me.'"²⁸ And initially, Freud says, "the original pleasure ego wants to introject into itself everything that is good and to eject from itself everything that is bad. What is bad, what is alien to the ego, and what is external are, to begin with, identical."²⁹ What we have here is an account of the genesis of outside and inside at the center of Freud's account of the origin of judgement. Freud reiterates the narrative about the genesis of inner and outer that is repeated in *Civilization and Its Discontents* and in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: initially, one takes in what is "good" and spits out what is "bad" and this operation comes to establish the boundary between inner and outer but prior to this, there is a unity of inner and outer. As Hyppolite reads this narrative, however, it is cast in terms that are again explicitly mythical. "At the outset, Freud seems to be saying, but "at the outset" means nothing more than in the myth "once upon a time..." In this story, once upon a time there was an ego (by which we should understand here a subject) for whom nothing was as yet foreign."³⁰ This same myth of an original unity between the concepts of inner and outer goes on to sustain itself as the basis for Judgments of Existence. In the case of judgments of Existence, Freud describes the development and continuation of that which occurred in the first judgments of attribution.

It is now no longer a question of whether what has been perceived (a thing) shall be taken into the ego or not, but of whether something which is in the ego as a presentation can be rediscovered in perception (reality) as well. It is, we see, once more a question of external and internal. What is unreal, merely a presentation and subjective, is only internal; what is real is also there outside.³¹

What we have here is an account of the genesis of representation. As Hyppolite observes, “What lies at the origin of the judgment of existence is the relationship between representation and perception.”³² This relation returns to the question of inner and outer. The genesis of attributive judgment is, by extension, the genesis of judgments of existence. Both originate in an original act of distinguishing “outer” from “inner,” a distinction before which is presumed an absolute unity. Together, these accounts of the origin of judgment imply an account of the origin of the psyche, that is, of the subject understood as a differentiated being, a being with an “inner existence” and an “outer existence.”

Finally, let us note one last insight of Hyppolite’s commentary. So far, I have followed Freud in focusing primarily on the notion of negation. But it is not just negation that Freud identifies at the beginning of the function of judgment. Remember, he says, “Since to affirm or negate the content of thoughts is the task of the function of intellectual judgment, what we have just been saying has led us to the psychological origin of that function.”³⁷ Freud also adds here, and Hyppolite draws our attention to this, that affirmation plays a role, too. *Bejahung* (affirmation) is given briefly as an opposing force to negation, *als Ersatz der Vereinigung*, as a replacement or an alternative for negation. As the opposite of negation, it is the force of attraction, identification, unification associated with the pleasure principle, it is the unifying work of Eros. In judgments of attribution, it is responsible for ‘taking something in,’ something that is good, as opposed to ‘spitting something out.’ In judgements of existence, it is responsible for the reassurance that something does indeed exist in reality, ‘out there,’ as opposed to just existing subjectively, ‘in here.’ On Hyppolite’s reading the concept of *Bejahung* rounds out and makes whole the Freudian account of the genesis of judgment as a myth. Hyppolite concludes, “This [text] thus becomes entirely mythical. There are two instincts, which are, as it were, tangled together in this myth which bears the subject: one instinct of unification, the other of destruction. A grand myth, as you see, and one which repeats others.”³⁸ It is the additional element of this opposing force to negation, in affirmation, that we find a classical structure of myth, a story of two opposing forces whose conflict generates the subject .

II. *Bejahung, Verwerfung, and Lacan’s Psychogenesis*

In *Seminar III*, two years after Lacan’s exchange with Hyppolite over Freud’s text on “*Verneinung*,” Lacan returns to the lessons of Hyppolite’s analysis. He says “the text *Die Verneinung* ... has enabled us to articulate with precision that there is a moment

that is, one might say, the point of origin of symbolization. Let it be understood that this point of origin is not a point in development but answers to the requirement that symbolization has to have a beginning.³⁶ This beginning is not a genetic beginning but a mythical one. Lacan's reiteration of this key insight from Hyppolite's analysis helps him to establish his own account of the beginning, of what I will develop here as Lacanian psychogenesis. In this origin story, however, the beginning of thought is articulated as the genesis of symbolization not through the opposition of *Bejahung* and *Verneinung* but through the opposition of *Bejahung* and *Verwerfung* (Foreclosure). This psycho-genesis does not posit its origin in a particular moment in psychological development; it posits instead a logically necessary point of origin, a first step. It offers a way of thinking about the structures of symbolization and their operative mechanisms, aligning these structures according to the structure of a myth from the very beginning.

Seminar III focuses on the question of psychosis and Lacan's account of psychogenesis develops simultaneously with his explication of psychosis. One of the main concerns of the seminar is distinguishing psychosis from neurosis. For Lacan, psychosis is distinguished from neurosis by virtue of the fact that psychosis is not the result of a repression (*Verdrängung*), as is neurosis; psychosis is instead characterized by *Verwerfung*, translated as "Foreclosure." *Verwerfung* carries the sense of the German verb *werfen*, to throw; it thus means to throw out, to reject, or to expel. We might think of this expulsion in the sense of Freud's discussion of the oral instincts; it is a "spitting out," opposed to the *Bejahung*, the "taking in." Conceptually, *Verwerfung* is opposed to *Bejahung* on the one hand, and opposed to *Verdrängung* on the other. Instead of repressing a representation, something that occurs in neurotics, *Verwerfung* entails the expulsion of the very possibility of that representation, this is understood as the foreclosure of the very signifier and it is the key mechanism of psychosis. It results in a blind spot, a gap in the representational reality of the Symbolic order.

The binary opposition between *Verwerfung* and *Bejahung* attest to Lacan's famous thesis that the unconscious is structured like a language. As Russell Grigg has explained, this thesis, "implies the claim that for something to be repressed it has first of all to be registered in the symbolic. Thus repression implies the prior recognition of the repressed in the symbolic system or register. In psychosis, on the other hand, the necessary signifiers are lacking altogether, and so the recognition required for repression is impossible."³⁷

Verwerfung is also regularly thematized alongside *Verneinung* (Negation) because these two are defining mechanisms of psychosis and neurosis, respectively. And while *Verneinung* is similar to *Verwerfung* in a general negativity, the two are not at all on the same plane. They do not happen at the same register. That is, *Verneinung* is a mechanism that is operative at a much later stage in the neurotic dialectic once the representation has already been affirmed and admitted into the symbolic; as established above in the discussion on Freud's essay "On Negation," it operates as an indication that something has been repressed. When something is negated it has

already been admitted (in the sense of *Bejahung*) into the symbolic but repressed and only articulated on the condition that it is denied. *Verwerfung* on the other hand, is a mechanism that is logically prior to the possibility of repression because it prevents the admission into the symbolic in the first place. This foreclosure of an idea entails that it is so unbearable that the subject rejects it altogether, denying it even a place in representation in the unconscious such that it could later be negated or denied.

It is helpful to understand the concept of *Verwerfung* through the lens of what I have called the Lacanian psycho-genesis, by which I mean his account of the origin of symbolization. The concept of *Verwerfung* builds upon the account of the beginning that was initially developed in Lacan's exchange with Hyppolite regarding the primordial *Bejahung*. Lacan says,

what emerged clearly from [Hyppolite's] analysis of this striking text, is that in what is unconscious not only is everything repressed, that is, mis-recognized by the subject after having been verbalized, but that behind the process of verbalization there must be admitted a primordial *Bejahung*, an admission in the sense of the symbolic, which can itself be wanting.³⁸

Verwerfung is precisely what happens when this primordial *Bejahung* is wanting. This point illuminates one of the main claims of Freud's essay on *Verneinung*, that the negation of something implies a representation of that very thing as its precondition. Negation requires an early admission, in the sense of *Bejahung*, a logically prior articulation within the realm of the symbolic. But against the primordial *Bejahung* stands the possibility of an operation that is even more destructive than, and logically prior to, *Verneinung*, since to negate something is at least to acknowledge its existence. Against the primordial *Bejahung* stands the possibility of a *Verwerfung*. Even though Freud did not articulate it in precisely these terms, the originary opposition between *Verwerfung* and *Bejahung* helps to clarify what occurs in Freud's text on *Verneinung*. Lacan explains,

This *Verwerfung* is implicated in the text *Die Verneinung*, which M. Jean Hyppolite presented here two years ago, [...] Freud's text, undeniably brilliant, is far from being satisfactory. It mixes everything up. This has nothing to do with a *Verdrängung* [repression]. What is at issue when I speak of *Verwerfung*? At issue is the rejection of a primordial signifier into the outer shadows, a signifier that will henceforth be missing at this level. Here you have the fundamental mechanism that I posit as being at the basis of paranoia. It's a primordial process of exclusion of an original within, which is not a bodily within but that of an initial body of signifiers.³⁹

Psychosis is the result of the process in which one might encounter what cannot even be symbolized because it has already been foreclosed. Lacan's insistence that what is repressed always entails its return—"what is repressed expresses itself, repression and the return of the repressed being one and the same thing"⁴⁰—applies too in the case of *Verwerfung*. What is foreclosed also returns. When what has been

foreclosed through the mechanism of *Verwerfung* returns, “the nonsymbolized reappears in the real.”⁴¹ This event marks the beginning of a psychosis. But the seed for this so-called “psychotic break” with the real is planted at an ontologically prior level in the original split between *Bejahung* and *Verwerfung*.

Prior to all symbolization—this priority is not temporal but logical—there is, as the psychoses demonstrate, a stage at which it is possible for a portion of symbolization not to take place. This initial stage precedes the entire neurotic dialectic, which is due to the fact that neuroses is articulated speech, insofar as the repressed and the return of the repressed are one and the same thing. It can thus happen that something primordial regarding the subject’s being does not enter into symbolization and is not repressed but rejected.⁴²

While this is not the place to develop a complete account of Lacan’s theory of psychosis, what I want to highlight for my purposes here is that the central mechanism of psychosis, *Verwerfung*, exposes Lacan’s psycho-genesis. Together, *Verwerfung* and *Bejahung* are the operative mechanisms at the origin of symbolization. In his treatment of the psychoses, Lacan relies on an articulation of the point of origin and in doing so he develops his own psychogenesis as one that repeats a Freudian mythogenesis. The development of the concepts of *Verwerfung* and *Bejahung* form their own origin story. “In the beginning there is either *Bejahung*, which is the affirmation of what is, or *Verwerfung*.”⁴³ This beginning that rests in the relation between *Bejahung* and *Verwerfung* is not a temporal beginning, as we have seen, but a logical one, the structure of which is no less mythical than Freud’s account of the primordial forces of unification and destruction.

Lacan’s account of origin is thus articulated in his analysis of the processes of *Bejahung* and *Verwerfung*. There is not a determinate cause that we can posit at the origin in the Lacanian psychogenesis, there is instead something like an essential lack of cause underlying the Lacanian account. *Verwerfung* is never a positive presentation that acts as a cause, but it nevertheless has its effects in the hole that it makes. Neither is *Bejahung* understood as cause, it is instead a condition of possibility. Together these two concepts mark a logical priority in symbolization; they designate the starting point for thinking the structures of the symbolic system. While these aren’t exactly mythical in the sense that Freud’s originary concepts are, Lacan’s account does retain its own mythical ring: in the beginning, there were two opposing forces, *Bejahung* and *Verwerfung*. But the difference between Freud’s mythogenesis of psychogenesis and Lacan’s psycho-genesis, as I have developed it here, is that Freud’s account rested on the originary myth of inner and outer, a bodily reference, while Lacan establishes a point of origin around the problem of representing being and non-being. The creation of the symbol, for Lacan, as I have noted “concerns the relation between the subject and being and not between the subject and the world.”⁴⁴ What is interesting about this shift is that Lacan’s account returns to the two-fold theory of judgment posited in Freud’s *Verneinung* essay. As a quick reminder, we saw Freud building upon the myth of inner and outer to develop first an account of the judgments of attribution and then a continuation of the same

logic supported his account of judgments of existence. “It is now no longer a question of whether what has been perceived (a thing) shall be taken into the ego or not, but of whether something which is in the ego as a presentation can be rediscovered in perception (reality) as well.”⁴⁵ For Lacan, on the other hand, it is judgments of existence that are ontologically prior to judgements of attribution, that is, judgements about what is ‘good’ and what is ‘bad.’ The account of the origin of symbolization concerns the relation between “the subject and being” because, for Lacan, the representation is, in the beginning, either affirmed or foreclosed.

To return to the secret with which we began, on the reading I’ve offered here, “The great secret of psychoanalysis,” might not actually be that “there is no psychogenesis.” Nor would I claim that the great secret is “that there in fact *is* psychogenesis in psychoanalysis.” Perhaps we can borrow from the lessons culled in reading Freud’s “*Verneinung*,” to formulate the great secret in the following way: “In psychoanalysis there is not *no* psychogenesis.” Ultimately, the question is whether this is an account of the origin of judgement, or of the origin of the subject, or of the origin of Being as such. Surprisingly, it is Lacan’s version of psychogenesis that emphasizes the last of these possibilities, which sustains itself only as a myth.

Notes

1. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book III, The Psychoses*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: Norton, 1997) 7.
2. Lacan, *Écrits: the First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2007) 123-160.
3. Karl Jaspers “The Phenomenological Approach in Psychopathology” *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 114 (516) Nov 1968): 1313-1323 (1322).
4. See Bruce Fink, *Against Understanding: Commentary, Cases and Critique in a Lacanian Key*. (London: Routledge, 2014), for a detailed explication of Lacan’s critique of understanding.
5. Lacan has an ongoing dialogue with Aristotelian fourfold causality. In particular throughout *Seminar III*, though, Lacan seems to be taking up the pervasiveness of Aristotle’s notion of “final cause.” He writes, “The idea of final cause is repugnant to science in its present form, but science constantly makes use of it in a camouflaged way, in the notion of a return to a state of equilibrium, for instance. If by *final cause* one simply understands a cause that acts in advance, which tends towards something out ahead, it’s absolutely ineliminable from scientific thought, and there is just as much final cause in Einstein’s equations as in Aristotle,” *Seminar III* (187).
6. For Freud, “The meaning of the game was then not far to seek. It was connected with the child’s remarkable cultural achievement—the foregoing of the satisfaction of an instinct—as the result of which he could let his mother go away without making any fuss. He made it right with himself, so to speak, by dramatising the same disappearance and return with the objects he had at hand.” See Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”

in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol XVIII, ed. Anna Freud et al., trans. James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001).

7. See Lacan, *Écrits*, 575.
8. Lacan, *Sem.* III, 81.
9. Lacan, Jacques. "Response to Hyppolite's Commentary on Freud's "Verneinung"" in *Écrits*, 319.
10. Freud, "Negation," 235.
11. Freud, "Negation," 235.
12. Freud, "Negation," 236.
13. Freud, "Negation," 235.
14. See Alenka Zupančič, "Freud, Negation, and the Constitution of Thinking." Lecture at Summer course at the European Graduate School, Saas-Fee Switzerland (2011) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3fjGStI7BE>.
15. Freud, "Negation," 236.
16. It is important to note, as Hyppolite's commentary does, that the German term Freud uses here is *Aufhebung*. The original German text reads "Die Verneinung ist eine Art, das Verdrängte zur Kenntnis zu nehmen, eigentlich schon eine Aufhebung der Verdrängung, aber freilich keine Annahme des Verdrängten." In the interest of cutting to the chase and developing the notion of mythogenesis in this text, my discussion will forego an elaborate treatment of the importance of the appearance of *Aufhebung* here. For a detailed and thorough reading of this issue, see Alenka Zupančič, "Hegel and Freud: Between *Aufhebung* and *Verneinung*" in *Crisis and Critique* 4:1 (2017): 481-494.
17. Hyppolite, Jean. "Commentary on Freud's *Verneinung*" in Appendix I to Lacan's *Écrits*, 749.
18. Freud, "Negation," 236.
19. See Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, 50.
20. Hyppolite, "Commentary" *Écrits*, 748.
21. Lacan, "Response" *Écrits*, 320.
22. Freud, "Negation," 236.
23. Hyppolite, "Commentary," *Écrits*, 747.
24. Hyppolite, "Commentary," *Écrits*, 749-50.
25. Freud, "Negation," 236.
26. Freud, "Negation," 236.
27. Freud, "Negation," 237.
28. Freud, "Negation," 237.
29. Hyppolite, "Commentary" *Écrits*, 751.

30. Freud, "Negation," 237.
31. Hyppolite, "Commentary," *Écrits*, 751.
32. Hyppolite, "Commentary," *Écrits*, 748.
33. Freud, "Negation," 236.
34. Hyppolite, "Commentary," *Écrits*, 752.
35. Lacan, *Sem.* III, 46.
36. Russell Grigg, *Lacan, Language, and Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008) 4.
37. Lacan, *Sem.* III, 12.
38. Lacan, *Sem.* III, 150.
39. Lacan, *Sem.* III, 86.
40. Lacan, *Sem.* III, 86.
41. Lacan, *Sem.* III, 81.
42. Lacan, *Sem.* III, 82.
43. Lacan, Jacques. "Response to Hyppolite's Commentary on Freud's "Verneinung" in *Écrits*, 319.
44. Freud, "Negation," 237.