

BEN HJORTH

INTRODUCTION

cause:rie :: repetition:s

LEAR: ... *Speak.*
CORDELIA: *Nothing, my lord.*
LEAR: *Nothing!*
CORDELIA: *Nothing.*
LEAR: *Nothing will come of nothing: speak again. [...]*
CORDELIA: *...No cause, no cause. [...]*
LEER¹: *Never, never, never, never, never.*

Shakespeare, King Lear

All this is at the beginning only an empty word [nur leeres Wort] and only being [nur Sein]; this simple [dies Einfache], which has no further meaning besides, this void [dies Leere], is as such, therefore, the beginning of philosophy.

Hegel, The Science of Logic²

Cause toujours. (Devise de la pensée « causaliste ».)

Lacan, Écrits³

Lacan's pun, in the Rome Discourse of 1953, on the word "cause" sums up much of what is at stake in the debates over knowledge, meaning and agency raised by his own theory of the subject as a fundamentally "linguistic" phenomenon. The parodic "Motto of 'causalist' thought" is one of the epigraphs to the first section—"Empty Speech and Full Speech in the Psychoanalytic Realization of the Subject"—of this foundational paper, whose "proper" name outlines these stakes, as well as the arena of their playing-out: "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis." They were stakes which were perhaps highest when the chips seemed the furthest down, in the wake of Lacan's resignation (under duress) earlier that year from the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA). The quip's critical (that is, negative) assessment of the naive

“causalist” metaphysics of scientism—as a theoretical cause that should have been acknowledged as lost since at least Hume—appears directed at Lacan’s former IPA colleagues who, it was increasingly and alarmingly clear, not only held but clung to one version or other of such a “causalism.” But, alongside and beyond this critique, there is a profound speculative (that is, positive) force animating this witticism. It is one which partakes of that mysterious, (side-)splitting quality of the joke or *Witz* to which Shakespeare, Freud and Hegel attended so closely, convinced that there are manifold, *Doppelsinnig*, even contradictory truths to be found in jest. While Lacan’s own flamboyant performances of wordplay are themselves often dismissed—most vehemently, of course, by those same colleagues, so-called “orthodox” Freudians—as the conscious obscurantism of a sophist, or simply the attention-seeking tomfoolery of a narcissistic poser, in retrospect it seems that this jester may well prove a prophet, at least when it comes to the strange, even paradoxical temporality of this weird object of metaphysical inquiry to which we still give the name “cause.”

When read by Lacan, the “Promethean” discovery of Freud’s “Copernican” revolution returns us (again and again) to this foundational metaphysical category, which seems to lie in flaming ruins in the wake of psychoanalytic insight. The unconscious, and the compulsive repetitions of *langue* and *lalangue* by which its slippery, chameleonic traces are registered in consciousness, no more recognizes the independence, nor the unidirectional relation, of causes and effects than it obeys the “law” of non-contradiction, the laws of morality or of the land, or the grammatical rules which alone seem to allow for meaning within that very language, and to impart stability, substance and reference to language as such. The ego’s realization of the phantasmatic nature of its own self-mastery means giving up, also, the imaginary belief in its agential capacity for fully free action. To be no longer master in one’s own house means to cease to (act as if one could) be the undetermined, “efficient” cause of consequent effects in that realm, including—perhaps most devastatingly—effects upon that self itself. What the much-fabled “death of the subject” in fact names may, in the end, be no more than the end, or better the loss, of the subject-as-cause.⁴

The real problem is that, in the vacuum of this subject as “lost cause,” you can still hear yourself scream. It is, of course, proper to the definition of a scream that it has no definable semantic or locutionary meaning, no stable constative referent, but also that it is nonetheless manifestly brimming with experiential or performative content, wielding significant (perlocutionary) force, and often to very real, material and/or affective (illocutionary) effect. Hence the scandal, simultaneously aural and moral, of Electra’s repetitive, incessant cries of mourning and outrage: by cleaving to meaning at the edge of meaninglessness, they tear holes in the fabric of common sense, of the commonness and commonality of sense-making. To communicate by scream or lamentation is to throw language-as-communication into turmoil, if not entirely out the window. Anne Carson, in a recent poem introducing her new translation of Sophokles,⁵ addresses herself to Antigone (another infamous screamer):

perhaps you know that Ingeborg Bachmann poem
 from the last years of her life that begins
 ‘I lose my screams’
 dear Antigone,
 I take it as the task of the translator
 to forbid that you should ever lose your screams.

How to understand the meaning of these screams? How to pose—let alone answer—the abyssal question of whether they even have a “meaning”? How to keep listening to them in the face of this undecidability, bordering on the utter negation of the possibility of asking the question itself? How not to *lose*, along with “meaning,” the undeniable “truth” of these screams? These questions, which elude any simple or final answer, animated the Lacanian project from beginning to end.

Not to play by the rules of “proper” communicative action does not mean to forgo the chance to play *with* them. This double-issue of *S: Journal* seeks to take Lacan’s cause-gag quite seriously. The muffled tale, told in and between dictionaries, of its wordplay is suggestive both of the promise, and of a vague sense of threat—the threat of loss—embodied in the unstable causative power of speech: the queer, repetitive performativity of the language by which we, as subjects, come to be subjects; the language that (we) subjects are.

Function and field of “cause” in/as language

Translators Alan Sheridan and Bruce Fink each keep Lacan’s *devise* in French. The fundamental untranslatability of the pun hinges on an intriguing dual function of the French verb *causer*. In a footnote to Lacan’s epigraph, Sheridan simply gives the alternative translations—“Always a cause’ or ‘keep talking’”—two meanings which for the Anglophone may result in a surd of understanding: how are speech and causation to be grasped as related, even punningly? Fink proves that Sheridan was on the right (two) path(s), but adds useful context—simultaneously cultural-linguistic, historical and metaphysical—which allows us to grasp more fully the complexity of Lacan’s parodic-conceptual move:

Cause toujours usually implies that the person who says it couldn’t care less about or doesn’t believe what the other person is saying, and might in fact prefer that the latter shut up. *Causer* means to talk or chat, and *cause toujours* could be literally rendered as “keep talking,” “talk anyway,” or “go on,” even though the context indicates that the speaker means the opposite of what he or she is saying (as when we say “go on” ironically or in exasperation). Agrammatically it might be construed to mean “Always a cause.” *Causalisme* [Lacan’s *pensée* « *causaliste* »] is the doctrine that science seeks causes and not merely regular antecedents.⁷

In contemporary French, *causer* retains these meanings, which seem at first confoundingly incongruous: both to cause, to be the cause of; and to speak, or other-

wise use language or diction. *Wiktionary* lists both a transitive usage, as in speaking a specific language or dialect (the Verlan idiom “Tu causes le céfran, mec?”—a true untranslatable—ridiculously rendered as “You speak frog, dude?”), and an intransitive, as in the overproduction of empty, irrelevant and/or annoying chatter (“De quoi il cause?” / “What’s he banging on about?”).⁸ *Causer* is in turn derived from the Latin *causārī*, to dispute or plead, i.e. one’s cause or case—with the attendant question mark over the reality or authenticity of such a cause: “to give as a reason (a real, and *more frequently a feigned one*) for something, to make a pretext of, to pretend, to plead.”⁹

The *OED* does give this sense of “speak familiarly, converse, talk, chat” as an extremely rare secondary meaning of the English verb “cause,”¹⁰ though it is in fact probably the singular contribution of the 19th-century British poet P.J. Bailey. The citation from his *Festus* (“I have caused face to face with elements”) is reminiscent of nothing so much as Lear’s argument with the storm on the heath, the terrain not only of his divided kingdom, but of his own psychic collapse. And indeed there is something maddening about the hall of mirrors opened up by the confusion of causation and speech. *Wiktionary*’s entry for the written term “causer” here gives an immediate sense of the almost schizoid, translingual polysemy of “cause” more globally: from the English noun (“someone or something that causes or produces an effect”), to the French infinitive verb (with its dual meaning of speaking and causing, a kind of meta-performative demonstrating the content of performativity itself in the slippery form of the verb’s own utterance) to the first-person present active subjunctive conjugation of the Latin verb (as in “were I to plead...”). Simultaneously subjective and objective, both that which causes and that which is caused, the pure or “infinite” metaphysical activity of the prime mover devolves into subjective, subjunctive, indeed self-interested pleading, casuistry or outright pretense in the contingent forms of language.

While Bailey’s “spasmodic” coinage, borrowing from the French, never made it into semantic currency in English, the noun *causerie*, which derives from this sense of *causer*, did manage to cross the Channel sometime in the early 19th century. According to *Le Trésor de la langue française*, *causerie* refers archaically to the act of speech in general, and more specifically to long-winded and familiar banter between conversationalists or debaters, whether amiable or malicious, around a literal or metaphorical campfire: Flaubert, writing to a friend in 1849, wondered: “*Quand reprendrons-nous nos interminables causeries au coin de feu?*”¹¹ It was after this sense that Sainte-Beuve’s weekly column on literary topics in *Le Constitutionnel*, beginning in 1849 in the wake of the workers’ rebellions, was named *Causeries du Lundi* (“Monday chats”). The contemporary usage of the term has continued down this path, referring nowadays to the discursive commodities forged from such chatter: “informal” or “personal” discussion, whether in the form of newspaper column-filler or daytime TV talk shows, which arguably “guide [the] tastes of the populace” no less than Sainte-Beuve’s *causeries* shaped the views of polite society in the Second Empire.¹² It was this sense of *causerie* that entered both the English language,

and English-language literary-commercial production, around the same time. The *OED* defines “causerie” as “informal talk or discussion, esp. on literary topics; also, a chatty article or paragraph.” The first example listed, from an 1827 edition of the *Edinburgh Review*, pinpoints this “lost” (French) connection between chatter and causation, referring presumably to a previous edition of the *Review* as “The volume which has been the innocent cause of all this *causerie*.”¹³

In the North American context “the Lost Cause” traditionally refers to the (“impossible,” but precisely thereby “noble”) position of the Confederate South in the Civil War. This position, frequently referred to as a “religion,” is a near-perfect example of what Lacan refers to elsewhere as the “supreme narcissism of the Lost Cause [*la Cause perdue*],”¹⁴ whose pathway in the “revolutions of culture” winds from the oracular fatalism of Greek tragedy to a “Christianity of despair” in the work of Paul Claudel. The “fate” or “destiny” represented in the tragic dramas of both Ancient Greece and modern Christendom is, as Lacan saw, another name for this “lost cause,” reified in the form of one or another origin myth, whether told in detail or eternally deferred (and thereby upheld) as inarticulable or ineffable, as “transcending” language’s capacity to capture this traumatic experience.

What would it mean, then, for intellectual work to escape such a fate: that of being yet one more *causerie*, one more little, petty object heaped on the exponentially growing pile marked “lost”? Can we really “do things with words,” as the transitive usage of *causer* suggests—that to speak is in some sense to cause something, even language itself, to come into being? Or are we rather doomed to the sense suggested by the intransitive usage: an intransigent irrelevance, crapping on endlessly into the ivory toilet bowl perched perilously atop the academic tower? The same essential dilemma confronts every analytic dyad, when after a relatively short time the experience of repetition in the analysand’s utterances and preoccupations becomes often painfully acute, raising the specter of (bad) infinite, unchanging repetition of the eversame symptom. And, as in tragedy, escape cannot be the goal. Rather, the challenge is to *assume* our fate—the meaningless repetitions of causation to which we seem predestined—*as if* it had been and continued to be (“as if it were,” to use one of the only remaining subjunctive constructions in English, here more necessary than ever) our own choice. This choice or decision *in relation* to our fate—this refusal to accept *la Cause* as *perdue*—is, for Lacan, the proper psychoanalytic “act.” The alternative to acting *out* is an inwardly-directed action, an acting and working upon the self, but only as one of *nachträglich* interpretation and the assumption of previously unconscious responsibilities and potentials. Such an act would amount to the only kind of “freedom” or “cure” to which the work of psychoanalysis could lay claim; could, that is, if it were not always doomed to arrive too late to truly “save” us.

Of course, the chatter and babble both registered in, and in turn generated by, *causerie* is far from innocent; as Rebecca Comay puts it, “[t]he aptly named chain of signifiers is anything but uncoerced.”¹⁵ On the contrary, even the most seemingly harmless speech nonetheless has its effects, and the proliferative polysemy and

instability of causes and effects here proves deeply troubling to received wisdoms metaphysical, psychological and “ethical.” For Lacan, beginning with the mother’s *ronron* or *lalangue*,¹⁶ and echoed in the parapraxes and stubborn repetitions of the analysand’s endless babble, language is the field in which the truth of the subject is “caused,” as an effect of speech: brought into being by and *as* language, the subject incessantly continues to speak itself into being, without knowing how or even *that* it is doing so, and most markedly when it imagines that it is speaking about an other, an object. The threat this “linguistic” approach posed to the contemporary doxa was registered in the rejection of Lacan’s theoretical and clinical innovations by the IPA. This was, of course, the beginning of the infamous “split” which occasioned the Rome Discourse’s project of returning to and “revamp[ing] the foundations our discipline derives from language,” despite (or rather because of) the fear on the part of many analysts that, as Lacan characterizes it, “if we were to challenge the principles in which each of us believes his experience is grounded, our walls would very quickly dissolve into the confusion of Babel” (199). This threat, and the resistances to it, would continue to rip Lacan—or he, the threat, ripped himself¹⁷—from one institution and line of filiation to another, first in the form of his eventual “excommunication” from the IPA, and then his abandonment of the *Société française de la psychanalyse* (SFP), at which point he returned to the cause that must by then have seemed closer than ever to being irrevocably lost—the name of the new and final école, before it was itself disbanded: *la Cause freudienne*.

Already in 1953, “Function and Field” signals Lacan’s signature uptake of the extremely difficult, even paradoxical “task of speaking about speech,” *in the midst of* the seeming negation simultaneously performed by his punning, opaque discourse—a certain cancellation, or ruling-out, of the possibility of a satisfactory completion of such a self-recursive task. In order to carry out this Herculean (if not, precisely, Hegelian) *Aufhebung*—in speech, of speech—he adopts “an ironic style suitable to a radical questioning of the foundations of our discipline” (198). Beyond the “threat” posed by the biblical specter of the confusion of tongues, Lacan sought to demonstrate the constitutive or foundational nature of such a cacophony, working—stylistically—in and through it to show that there is no escaping this *causerie* as simultaneous cause and effect of the subject. Instead of getting around it, the analyst, whether as clinician or theorist, must listen (that is, work) *through* it, closely and with an attention suspended from logical presupposition, temporal prejudgement and moral prejudice. What the analyst listens for is of course what “causes” patients to speak in the way they do, but—and this is crucial—only via what *results* from the one rule of the cure: that the subject “go on,” working against self-censorship to continue speaking, no matter the seeming inanity or perversity of repetition heaped upon repetition; that the analysand *cause toujours*.¹⁸

With Othello we can say, “It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul... it is the cause”—but only in order to perform, in this rehearsal of Othello’s own insistent repetition, the contradiction inherent to cause, in the very act of speaking it: not knowing exactly what the cause is, what the term or concept “cause” even finally means, we

are not only unwilling but *unable*, finally, to “name it.” As Othello acts, and presents himself to us as *driven to* his fateful act by a certain force or necessity,¹⁹ “the cause,” or cause as such, appears as unnamable, the language for it “lost” not only in the face of the “chaste stars” or other form of superegoic power above us, but to our own selves, as the loss of that causative power or agency we imagine is lodged within us. And we can still share with Kant a sense of wonder at this predicament of simultaneously celestial and internal lostness—the objective lack in our grasp of the outer reaches of the universe as the correlative of the gap or abyss constituting our most “inward” subjectivity—even as we inevitably go on causing language to come into being; as we go on chattering, littering the earth with our little, lost syllables, down to the last of recorded and repeated time. Whether wonder-struck or fear-stricken, we can not *know* (the) “cause” any more than we can fully know our own “soul” or psyche: each demanding the scare-quotes of postmodern epistemological suspicion, they seem, for us today, already and irrevocably lost from the start, even before the emergence of any particular “lost cause” of political or cultural history. They seem shrouded in the mists of time and the impenetrable thickets of semantic proliferation, their nominations and theorizations heaping up like the soil from the dogged work—however blind—of a mole digging the tunnel that will become its own grave. Somehow both “first” and “final”—and yet conspicuously failing to explain either origin or *telos*—the term “cause” seems to mean everything and nothing, all at once.

And yet what does the very title (or titles) of this edition of *S: Journal* suggest, except that we seem equally unwilling—or perhaps, again, unable—to simply dispense with cause? To let cause be lost? We keep on talking, causing, causing words (like “cause”) to come into existence, in our mouths and on our pages: repeating the (lost) cause, in repetitions whose force attests, above all and deep down, to some original lostness, an absence that is not only “there” from the beginning, but in some sense *is* the beginning. This is disappearance functioning as efficient cause; an originary lack of a thing whose (prior) loss was, paradoxically and thus traumatically, the moment of its own birth: always missed, and so never fully arriving, it is the cause, it is the cause... whatever “it” might be, we seem to cling stubbornly to the notion that—as Othello intones a third time, perhaps for luck—“it is the cause.”

The *Wikipedia* entry for the English term *Causerie* defines it as “a literary style of short informal essays mostly unknown in the English-speaking world... contain[ing] more verbal acrobatics and humor than a regular opinion or column.” The description that follows sounds a lot like the dismissals of the “ironic style” and droll, lapidary brevity²⁰ with which Lacan addressed his audience in the Rome Discourse, and continued to work with his analysands and followers despite the protestations of the psychoanalytic establishment:

The causerie style is characterized by a personal approach to the reader; the writer “babbles” to the reader, from which the term derives. Language jokes, hyperbole, intentional disregard of linguistic and stylistic norms, and other absurd or humorous elements are permitted... [R]oom is left for the

reader to read between the lines... The content... may be satire, parody, opinion, factual or straight fiction. *Causerie* is not defined by content or format, but style.²¹

“The style is,” Lacan repeats in the first words of his *Écrits*, “the man [*sic*] himself”—by which he (Lacan) also seemed to mean *despite* himself. Indeed this *médecin malgré lui* immediately qualifies his clownish opening move, as a citation of “Buffon’s discourse to the Academy” and, perhaps more significantly, a citation of repetition as such—“*Le style est l’homme même* », répète-t-on...”—a repetition which, as he does not fail to note, leaves us on increasingly shaky ground: “man is no longer so sure a reference point [*l’homme ne soit plus référence si certaine*].”²²

And yet, despite the “fading” certainty of its bearer, style itself continues to occupy a fundamental role in Lacan’s thought, as a crucial hermeneutic and clinical tool. In 1957, in an address to the *Société française de philosophie*, he attempted once again to explain and defend his own version of “Psychoanalysis and its Teaching”:

A return to Freud, which provides the material for a teaching worthy of the name [*un enseignement digne de ce nom*], can only be produced by the pathway by which the most hidden truth manifests itself [*la voie, par où la vérité le plus caché se manifeste*] in the revolutions of culture. This pathway is the only training [*la seule formation*] that I can claim to transmit to those who follow me. It is called: a style [*Elle s’appelle: un style*].²³

Certainly, style—along with the distinctly uncertain “*référence*” (including the gender) of “man,” and their respective repetitions—remained central to Lacan’s formulation of the principle governing the function of language in the field of the psyche; a psychic function in/as the field of language:

Shall we adopt the formulation—the style is the man—if we simply add to it: the man one addresses?

This would be simply to comply with the principle I have proposed: that in language our message comes to us from the Other, and—to state the rest of the principle—in an inverted form.²⁴

The *causeries* assembled here, each in its own way, attempt to heed the double truth—the speculative as well as the critical—in Lacan’s little *causerie* on cause. They seek to understand, and play with, the structures at work in such a *devise*, the stylistic operation of a verbal mechanism which points simultaneously to the “mere” spokenness—the contingent linguistic nature—of “cause,” and to the mysterious fact that, despite this apparent emptiness of the category, the nothing/s we speak or sweetly whisper do/es nonetheless have effects, thus seeming to constitute (*a*) cause.

And here we stop. We stutter over, and so stumble on a point of confusion between singular and plural, subjective and objective, individual and collective. We arrive—again, and as always—at a problem, at a point whose obscurity demands

analysis and which amounts to one of principle. This principle is one of distinct uncertainty or indecision, an *Unentschiedenheit* resulting not from merely passive indifference, but from the “pure”—or simply raw—indeterminacy [*Unbestimmtheit*] and the strangely active indifferenciation, the “lack of all distinction within” [*Ununterschiedenheit in ihm selbst*] by which Hegel characterizes the real (if not yet quite “concrete”) existence of “nothing,” and therefore of being itself.²⁵ And it is at this point of indistinctness (*Nichtunterscheidung*), approaching even a final—and, ironically, *determinative* or constitutive—“cause” of indistinguishability (*Ununterschiedbarkeit*) or undecidability (*Unentscheidbarkeit*), that a single little letter (re) emerges, in parentheses, as a singular theorization of the “original,” and therefore lost, cause; the cause of loss and loss as (a) cause: the small other, Lacan’s “object *a* (to be read: little *a*).”

What Lacan’s style, and theorizations of style (of “man,” of “repetition”...), reflect most strikingly are the paradoxical inversions and chiasmatic interpenetrations of the primal words of the Hegelian logic—those of the “petrified” metaphysics into which he tried to breathe new, and still for many seemingly insane, life. The *Logic*, too, is littered with “strange formulations” [*befremden Reden*], the cunning of puns and wordplays, making this infamously dense and difficult text counterintuitively *funny*, as Brecht’s Ziffel in the *Flüchtlingsgespräche* notes over beer and billiards.²⁶ Already in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel had proposed that consciousness has its meaning or opinion [*Meinung*] corrected when it “learns through experience [*erfährt*] that it means something other than it meant to mean [*daß es anders gemeint ist, als sie meinte*].”²⁷ This punning proposition, this sentence or leap—all meanings of *Satz*, an ambiguity upon which Hegel plays throughout a text which seeks to prove the immanent movement of the properly “speculative” proposition—this proposition-as-leap-of-thought not only demonstrates Hegel’s own considerable powers of literary *Witz*, but in so doing throws the very meaning of meaning into question. This occurs via the unique performativity of such a pun, in which the sentence demonstrates or *performs*, in its form, what its content “constatively” proposes—here, as so often, the difficulty and (self-)contradiction inherent to “meaning” as such, and the “learning experience” [*Erfahrung*] of repeated failure via which one’s own intention [*Meinung*] is revealed and reflected upon retrospectively, even *retroactively*, only *after* one has first taken the risk of speaking, of attempting to express truth despite the inevitability of a certain failure; of attempting to go on causing in the face of so much seemingly empty *causerie*. Such repetition and failure can be the cause either for laughter or despair, like any reversal [*Verkehrung*] at the hands of cruel fate: the subject, having put out its own eyes, proceeds to slip on the banana peel laid by its own meaning or intention, an article, object or other left indefinite; “(a),” a little letter stealing itself away in italics and parentheses, *volée*, stolen or flown gleefully away through the dark.

This “object-cause of desire,” Lacan notes in the Overture to the *Écrits*, is

the object that (cor)responds [*l’objet qui répond*] to the question about style that I am raising right at the outset. In the place [“]man[”] marked for Buf-

fon, I call for the falling-away of this object [*la chute de cet objet*], which is revealing due to the fact that the fall isolates this object, both as the cause of desire in which the subject disappears [*la cause du désir où le sujet s'éclipse*] and as sustaining the subject between truth and knowledge.²⁸

The (*a*) is the One of which we always speak, without ever knowing exactly what either the subject or the object of our language is; we speak (of) nothing, and nothing else. But, in Hegel's words, this nothing of speech, this mere "empty word," this "void," is "neither more *nor less* than nothing." Or, to follow Barbara Cassin's wished-for ventriloquization of Lacan, it is the "less than nothing," the *moins que rien*²⁹ which is not merely or simply nothing, but which rather serves as the constant corollary and inconstant sign of our very being: the meaningless sign that "we" *are*, though not thereby any less affected, or pained, by the loss or lack that we mean when we speak, when we cause language, when language courses through us and causes us, as effects, to "be." In so doing, this (less-than-)nothing also serves as "the beginning"—the word, the first, simplest (stupidest) and most oft-repeated word—"of [*a*] philosophy," as a science striving in every direction after causes, effects and the proper form of their relation, but always haunted by the ironic and uncertain echoes of its constitutive *causeries*.

acknowledgements: loss

The pieces in these two volumes of *S* originated, with a few exceptions, in the conference "Repetition/s: Performance and Philosophy in Ljubljana," hosted by Ljubljana's Aufhebung: International Hegelian Association at the City Museum and the University of Ljubljana, 22-24 September 2016.³⁰ A description of some of the more madcap theatrics of this unique 3-day event can be read in Justin Clemens's 'Re/viewing Repetition/s,' in this volume, while more of the conference proceedings are forthcoming in book format. The focus on Hegel in the first section, and the concern with repetition throughout the volume, are reflections of the essential contribution to contemporary thought of the "Ljubljana School" theorists, Mladen Dolar and Alenka Zupančič (whose timely reflections on Blanchot's "The Apocalypse is Disappointing" we publish here), both keynote speakers at the event but, much more importantly, intellectual leaders and fierce teachers for several generations of scholars, artists and analysts in Slovenia and beyond. In addition to its dark, astringent humour—twin to the stringency of its critique—and their generosity of spirit, their work evinces an abiding interest in, and commitment to, Hegelian dialectical thought as a thinking of repetition, and as therefore essential to the psychoanalytic project in its clinical, aesthetic-cultural and historico-political dimensions.

One of those who joined us in those three magical days in the heartland of the Ljubljana School was Jan Sieber, a brilliant young PhD student and lecturer at the Berlin UDK, whom I had met as a welcoming interlocutor at a symposium on Benjamin's *Aktualität* in Frankfurt in 2015, and with whom I'd consolidated an intellectual comradeship over as many nights with the Kafe Kotti *Stift* as I (that is, my liver)

could manage. After having worked with him to develop and edit his startlingly original paper for this volume, “Beyond the Mimetic Principle: Kant with Lacan,” we received the devastating news earlier this year that Jan had lost his battle with cancer, and that he had left us on May 22nd, 2018.

At one point some months ago Sigi Jöttkandt—the co-editor (with Dominiek Hoens) of *S Journal*, whose idea it had been to collect papers from the “Repetition/s” event, and who was in some justified despair that her suggested title for what was initially to be the 2017 volume (“Lost Cause”) might prove an uncomfortably self-fulfilling performative, and that these volumes might never come to print—suggested forging ahead without an introduction. In the wake of an unthinkably shocking loss, it suddenly seemed impossible to finish thinking and writing, any sense of a just cause for yet more academic *causerie* having dried up or dissipated along with that loss. The causers assembled here—and this mumbling, bumbling editor most of all—want to thank and acknowledge Sigi for her own editorial and intellectual guidance, her masterful typesetting, and her singular, nurturing patience, all of which were indispensable in allowing us to bring these essays to fruition in the face of what amounted, for many of us, to devastation.³¹

It is probably true that this introduction could be rendered superfluous by the succinct, and playfully profound, utterance with which Sigi suggested marking the traditional place of introduction: a true echo of Lacan’s 1953 *Witz*, which brings us back to the beginning and to the question of beginning: “That which repeats has no true beginning, for the One is the original ‘lost cause.’” But one statement more, at least, had to be made here, at the end. It will take some time—perhaps too much—to measure the extent and nature of the loss we have suffered in losing Jan Sieber. Certainly, we can say already, we have lost an intricate mind and a courageous spirit, the twinkle in whose eye could simultaneously flash forth a lightning wit, and bestow a kind, quiet but glimmering attention. His essay here attests to the enormous promise of his genuinely unique work in aesthetic, political and psychoanalytic theory. It is not just suffering, but also this promise, that he bequeaths to us in the midst of our loss. He leaves a spirit—that of this promise and, thereby, his own—that continues to live and breathe in the intellectual and social communities to which he contributed so much, and that continues to make its gentle but insistent demand on us: to think more critically, to work harder, to listen and to love with the depth and strength of which his bodily life was a consistent exemplar. With the approval of his family and friends, with whom our deepest sympathies remain, and with particular thanks to Samo Tomšič, Sami Khatib and Jenny Nachtigall for guidance and editorial assistance, we are humbled to publish Jan’s work here, and to dedicate these volumes to his memory, and to this promise, which continue to speak beyond the incalculable loss of his person: *il cause toujours*.



In Memoriam, Jan Sieber: 1982-2018

Notes

1. “leer (v), 1520s, ‘to look obliquely’ (since 18c. usually implying a lustful, wolfish, malicious intent), probably from... Proto-Germanic **hleuza-* ‘near the ear,’... from PIE root **kleu-* ‘to hear.’” www.etymonline.com/word/leer

“The *ordinary meaning* [Man meint] is that being is the absolutely other of nothing [*das Nichts*], and that there is nothing clearer [*es ist nichts klarer*] than this absolute distinction; indeed, nothing seems easier than being able to state it. But it is just as easy to convince oneself... that the distinction is *unsayable* [unsagbar]... If being and nothing had any determinateness differentiating them [then] they would be determinate being and determinate nothing, not the pure being and the pure nothing which they still are at this point. Their distinction is therefore fully empty [*völlig leer*], each is as indeterminate as the other; the distinction depends, therefore, not on them but on a third element, on *intention* [Meinen].” Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George Di Giovanni (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 68, Hegel’s emphases, translation modified.

2. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 55, translation modified.

3. Jacques Lacan, “Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse,” *Écrits* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966) 247. “Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis,” in Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2006) 206. Future references to Fink’s translation of the Rome Discourse (“Function and Field”) will be given as page numbers in the text.

4. And it is indeed a loss, a kind of death to be mourned, for the late-liberal subject of an ideology cleaving desperately to the ragged edge of the fantasy of individual freedom. On this, see Frank Ruda, *Abolishing Freedom: A Plea for a Contemporary Use of Fatalism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016).

5. Anne Carson, “The task of the translator of Antigone” in Sophokles, *Antigonick*, trans. Anne Carson (New York: New Directions, 2015) 6. I follow Carson’s own transliteration of the playwright’s name, which happens to be closer to the German in being more “faithful” to the Greek...

6. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2001 [1977]) 30; note at 79n5.

7. Bruce Fink, notes to “Function and Field,” in Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, 785–6 n247.4. Fink describes his methodology of translation in terms germane to the efforts in this volume: “Given the degree to which Lacan’s texts have been—and will continue to be, I suspect—subjected to close readings, I have been careful to respect his terminology as much as possible. I have translated here with the notion that the repetition of terms from one sentence to the next, from one paragraph to the next, and from one text to the next, may be springboards for future interpretations and have attempted to either repeat them identically in the translation or at least provide the French in brackets or endnotes *so that the repetition is not lost*” (xi, my emphasis).
8. “causer” (French), *Wiktionary*, en.wiktionary.org/wiki/causer#French.
9. Lewis & Short, *A Latin Dictionary*: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0059:entry=causor>, my emphasis.
10. Oxford categorizes this second sense as “rare⁻¹.” The superscriptual negation here indicates that the citation of Bailey’s *Festus* (2nd ed., 1845) is the sole instance the editors could find of this usage. Given the linguistic breadth and idiosyncrasy (indeed, the “spasmodic” nature) of Bailey’s literary production, it seems likely that this is a neologistic borrowing from the French sense. See “cause, v.2.” OED Online (Oxford: Oxford University Press, July 2018): www.oed.com/view/Entry/29149.
11. “causerie,” in *Le Trésor de la langue française informatisé*, www.cnrtl.fr/definition/causerie.
12. The English-language *Wikipedia* entry for *Le Constitutionnel* notes that “Sainte-Beuve’s reputation as one of the most important French literary critics of the day rested on these columns, in which he guided the literary tastes of the populace.” See www.wikiwand.com/en/Le_Constitutionnel
13. “causerie, n.” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, July 2018), www.oed.com/view/Entry/29164. All but one of the examples listed keep the term in italics, including the most recent (a 1957 edition of *The Times*), attesting to the ongoing recognition of it as a borrowing from the French.
14. “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious” in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, 700; “Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir dans l’inconscient freudien” in *Écrits*, 826–7.
15. Rebecca Comay, “Resistance and Repetition: Freud and Hegel,” *Research in Phenomenology* 45.2 (2015): 237–266; 248.
16. These are Lacan’s terms for the pre-linguistic cooing and gurgling that allows the infant to register for the first time the vibrations of the speaking being, the *parlêtre*, and which indeed induces and inducts them into that being, that subjectivity.
17. Here we can register the lack, in English, of a reflexive verbal form, one of whose crucial conceptual functions in discourse is to allow for an ambiguity of subject and object. There are of course those who maintain that it was Lacan, as subject, who freely chose to tear himself out of the fabric of various institutions, including those he founded. Wanting to dodge the imperative to adjudicate, to “come down” on one side or the other of these often vicious debates, I choose simply to repeat my formulation in an apparently inverted form in order to note the possibility that some “cause” other than Lacan was operative in

the foundation—and the dissolution—of *l'École de la Cause* [note the rare capital letter—this the *école* shared with *la Cause perdu* of “Subversion du sujet...”] *freudienne*.

18. Rebecca Comay has theorized the unfreedom—the resistance—of repetition as central to the supposedly “liberatory” quality of the cure, in terms that highlight both the Hegelian inheritance in this psychoanalytic insight, and the sense of *causerie* as anxious, even compulsive, repetition of speech-as-resistance: “Above all resistance is the breakdown in language when the chain of associations comes to a halt, or never gets off the ground, when nothing comes to mind, when speech fails to spark, when despite or because of your best efforts the whole thing sputters and stalls and goes off the rails; or when, fleeing silence, you *fill the air by telling stories* or by *concocting theories about language’s own inevitable failure*... Like a passenger on a train... you’re to report the changing mental scenery as it passes by, merely looking on, like Hegel’s phenomenological observer... suspending judgment and leaving understanding and explanation to another (day, or person). ‘Free’ association is not a matter of self-expression or catharsis; the point is not to alleviate tension, to discharge pressure, or to tap into an archaic stew of primary process ideation. In fact, the apparent spontaneity of so-called stream-of-consciousness can be yet another stalling tactic—a way of *plugging the void with noise*. The point of the “free” association method is not to achieve freedom in any immediate or obvious way, and certainly not in the sense of autonomy, freewill, or self-expression. It’s about suspending the official rules of language but only so as to allow the real constraints to reveal themselves in their unembellished tyranny. “Resistance and Repetition: Freud and Hegel,” 247–8, my emphases.

19. The necessity, perhaps, which Derrida followed Freud in naming “the drive.” See Jacques Derrida, “Necessity is the Drive,” *Umbr(a): A Journal of the Unconscious*, #1 “On The Drive” (1997), 165.

20. The contentious “short session,” after all, keeps open the potential for scansion and punctuation like rocks thrown mischievously, *nachträglich*, backward through the windows of time and memory...

21. “Causerie,” *Wikipedia*, www.wikiwand.com/en/Causerie

22. “Overture to this Collection” in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, 6; “Overture de ce recueil” in *Écrits*, 9. In articulating this principle, Lacan also notes the performative proof in the causal pudding, reminding us that “this principle applied to its own enunciation”: while it *derives* from him (“the man [Lacan] himself”), as the one who proposed it, via a return to Freud, its “finest formulation” nonetheless *arrived to him* from (or, again, via) another, an other, “*interlocuteur eminent*.”

23. “Psychoanalysis and its Teaching” in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, 383.

24. “Overture to this Collection,” 3–4.

25. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 59.

26. “ZIFFEL: I once read Hegel’s book *The Great Logic*, when I was laid up with rheumatism and couldn’t move. It didn’t do the pain much good, because I kept laughing. The book deals with the lives of ideas, those irresponsible things. It’s about how they fight each other with knives then sit down to dinner together as if nothing’s happened. They go in pairs, ideas: each one is married to its opposite. They sign contracts as a couple, take things to court as a couple, plan muggings and burglaries as a couple, but their marriage is hell! They argue about everything! We’ve talked of ‘order’ and ‘dis-order’—well, in Hegel they

are married. Whatever order says, it's contradicted by disorder. They can't live without each other and they can't live with each other." Bertolt Brecht, "Conversations in Exile," adapted by Howard Brenton, trans. David Dollenmayer, *Theater* 17. 2 (20 March 1986): 13.

27. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), §63. Here I opt for a slightly modified version of Miller's translation, which preserves the triplicate repetition of the cognates *Meinung* / *meinen* within Hegel's *Wendung*.

28. Lacan, "Overture to this Collection," 4-5.

29. Cassin in Alain Badiou and Barbara Cassin, *Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel* (Paris: Fayard, 2010) 82, cited in Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London & New York: Verso, 2012) 59n48.

30. The conference program of "Repetition/s: Performance and Philosophy in Ljubljana" can be viewed here: www.issuu.com/znanstvenazalozbaff/docs/repetitions.

31. For various forms of intellectual, emotional and editorial fortitude over the almost two years of this edition's gestation, I also need to thank Helen Goodman, Geoff Hjorth and the whole much-missed Eleftheriou-Hjorth gang; Dr. Renae Fomiatti (as ever), Shifrah Blustein, Emma Fajgenbaum, Aaron Orzech, Fregmonto Stokes, Justin Clemens, Amanda Holmes, Salvatore Martino, Sarah Freke, and Tom Clerehan; "i fantastici [tre] di Toronto" of Isabell Dahms, Marion Bilodeau and Natasha Hay; the equally inimitable Fan Wu, Daniel Leblanc and Alex Kern; the best conference co-organizers nobody could have hoped for in Bara Kolenc, Gregor Moder and Anna Street; and the various faculty, staff and comrades-at-arms in the graduate communities in the Department of Philosophy at Monash University, and at the Centre for Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto, who know who they are. Most recently but also most profoundly, these volumes may never have seen the light of day had it not been for the presence, as well as some of the absences—all of them patient and hilarious and piercing and kind—of the singular Francesco Gagliardi, PhDiva.