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# 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. […]*
LEER[1]: *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 Logic*[2]

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

*Lacan, Écrits*[3]

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 naïve

"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'"[6]—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). Agramatically 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 perdu*],"[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 *perdu*—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 himself[17]—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 *Societé 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 origin*ary* 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 brevity[20] 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 *Un*ent*schiedenheit* resulting not from merely passive indiffer*ence*, but from the "pure"—or simply raw—indeterminacy [*Unbestimmtheit*] and the strangely active indifferent*iation,* the "lack of all distinction within" [*Un*-unter*schiedenheit 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 (*Unentsheidbarkeit*), 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 per*forms*, 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 retro*actively*, 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 idiosyncracy (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 françcaise 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 bar 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; "Ouverture 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 *de*rives from him ("the man [Lacan] himself"), as the one who proposed it, via a return to Freud, its "finest formulation" nonetheless *ar*rived *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 Elefteriou-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.

Alenka Zupančič

# THE APOCALYPSE IS (STILL) DISAPPOINTING

*The bigger a man is the fuller he is.*
*(Pause. Gloomily.)*
*And the emptier.*

*Beckett, Endgame*

In 1964, Maurice Blanchot wrote a remarkable text, with a most ingenious title—"The Apocalypse is Disappointing."[1] This title is what one would rightfully call a "perspective shifter": amidst all the talk about a possibly imminent apocalypse and doom (mostly, but not exclusively, related to "the Bomb"), to suggest that apocalypse may be "disappointing" effectually opens a whole new way of thinking about it. It has a quality of an excellent, spirited joke. Apocalypse evokes something so final and colossal that describing it as disappointing sounds utterly nonsensical. And yet, as with all good jokes, this nonsense somehow makes perfect sense.

Blanchot is not discussing the notion of the lost cause, at least not in these terms. But it is plausible to argue that he is very much discussing it in other, different terms. Indeed, if one were to sum up the most compelling elements of Blanchot's argument, it would be hard to find a formulation more fitting and concise than the following, used by Žižek in his take on "lost causes":

> The goal is to leave behind, with all the violence necessary, what Lacan mockingly referred to as the "narcissism of the lost Cause," and to courageously accept the full actualization of a cause, including the inevitable risk of a catastrophic disaster. (Žižek 2008, 7)

Indeed, and as it will hopefully become palpable in what follows, this formulation could be seen as the blueprint of Blanchot's argument, which he develops in his own—often unexpected—terms, and in a specific philosophical and geopolitical context. We will stick to this argument, its terms and its context, and also take it as as a starting point for a reflection on what looks like a repetition of the apocalypse, or at least of the "apocalyptic mood," in recent times.

But let us turn back, first, and begin in times which—somewhat paradoxically—now tend to appear to us as the good old times….

*The Bomb*

"The Bomb" was a genuine master signifier, capturing in one word a whole speculative universe surrounding the historical sequence of the cold war. The war was "cold," yet this "coldness" relied upon the threat of an absolute heat that could melt down the entire world. The Bomb functioned not only as a master signifier, but also as a perfect figuration of the *functioning* of the master signifier as such. That is, it functioned as a figuration of the correlation, or rather the *non-correlation*, between a simple, stupid button that "any imbecile" can press, and the all-encompassing chain of consequences, possibly leading to the disappearance of an entire world. A stupid, minimal gesture (sign) on the one side, and a *whole* (of the world) on the other side—this is indeed a perfect emblem of a master signifier.[2]

And as every master signifier (or "phallic" emblem) worthy of the name, the Bomb also received the appropriate comic treatment, with Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove or: How I learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964). One of the interesting things about this film is that, while remaining a perfect comedy, it ends with the button actually *getting pressed*, and atomic weapons exploding all over the place, in a kind of sublime spectacle of total destruction, filmed from above… The suspense ends in a full realization of the threat that the movie's plot aimed at preventing, and this results in a kind of final comic relief. Despite the spectacle of destruction (the popping up of a field of atomic "mushrooms") there is an impression of *impotence* efficiently conveyed: Ok, so, that's it? This is very similar to the case of authority which, as Mladen Dolar has argued, relies on its constitutive threat never being realized or carried out.[3] The moment this threat constitutive of power is acted out, it necessarily results—in spite of its possible violence—in a display of impotence. And impotence—the loss of (or the display of *lost*) power—can indeed cause a lot of violence.

So we could say that here, too, we have a case of the apocalypse being "disappointing," in the sense that its actually taking place can never match up to the power it wields in being withheld—that is, with its remaining a *threat*. Paradoxically, even if the realization of this threat would kill us, we would not be exactly overwhelmed by its power, but rather swept away by its raging impotence. We could of course say that this doesn't really matter, if it kills us, and that this is rather a poor consolation. Provoking the "coming out" of a power is a very dangerous and dubious game. But we can nevertheless grasp in what sense this coming out may be "disappointing"…

Blanchot's point, however, about the apocalypse being disappointing goes in a somewhat different direction. In its minimal form his argument runs like this: the threat of the Bomb and its destructive potential made appear, for the first time, the idea of a whole (of the world)—a whole, precisely, that can be lost, or disap-

pear forever. We can lose it all; but the idea of the whole (of an all that can be lost) only appears through a negation; it only constitutes a whole in the perspective of being potentially lost. In other words, there is no (existing) totality, no "whole of the world," which could be eventually (actually) lost in an atomic apocalypse; it is, paradoxically, only the perspective of this very (potential) loss which constitutes it, or makes it *appear*, as such a totality or whole.

Blanchot adopts a very Hegelian stance: not at all receding from the idea of a totality or whole as many contemporary philosophers would, he argues that although the appearance of this idea is very important, it remains abstract, that is to say related to the abstract power of negation (as the power of the Understanding). In other words, the Bomb (or imminent apocalypse) gives rise to the idea of the whole, but remains "disappointing" in the sense that this whole is in fact empty of any concrete content and form. People are bound together, united, only by their common disappearance, and not by any real form of global community. The totality that is about to disappear (if the Bomb does go off) doesn't really exist yet as a meaningful totality or whole. Indeed, Blanchot cites Hegel in making this very point:

> What does the problematic event teach us? That: insofar as it puts into question the human species in its totality, it is also because of this event that the idea of totality arises visibly and for the first time on our horizon—a sun, though we know not whether it is rising or setting; also this totality is in our possession, but as a negative power. This singularity confirms the preface to the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*: the power of understanding is an absolute power of negation. (…) Thus man is held to the whole first by the force of understanding, and understanding is held to the whole by negation. Whence the insecurity of all knowledge [*toute connaissance*]—of a knowledge that bears on the whole [*la connaissance qui porte sur le tout*].
>
> But let's reflect a little further. The problematic event about which we should rejoice because it confirms us in our relations to totality—it is true, only in a negative way—and also in our power over the whole—a power, it is true, only of destruction—why does it disappoint us? It is indeed a power, but one in relation to which we remain at a loss [*en défaut*]. A power that is not in our power, that only points to a possibility without mastery, a probability (…). But for the moment we are just as incapable of mastering it as we are of wanting it, and for an obvious reason: we are not in control of ourselves because this humanity, capable of being totally destroyed, does not yet exist as a whole. On the one hand, a power that cannot be, and on the other, an existence—the human community—that can be wiped out but not affirmed, or that could be affirmed, in some sense, only after its disappearance and by the void, impossible to grasp, of this disappearance; consequently something that cannot even be destroyed, because it does not exist. (Blanchot, 105-6)

To avoid any misunderstanding, we should perhaps first stress the following: Blanchot isn't saying that the destruction of the world would be insignificant because there is no real (communal) world yet; he is not, that is, cynically saying, "Let it all go to hell, the world such as it is is not worth the trouble anyway!" On the contrary, Blanchot is suggesting that, now that we have at least an abstract idea of the world (humanity) as a whole, it is worth the trouble more than ever. It is here that the political edge of Blanchot's text is situated, for he turns this into no less than a surprising and powerful argument for communism (that which remains to be invented), which is also extremely pertinent for our present times and circumstances.

But let's take this step by step.

Blanchot wrote his text as a polemical response to Karl Jaspers. In 1956, Jaspers gave a talk on the atomic peril, which was then broadcast over the radio, creating a considerable stir. So Jaspers thought it necessary to take up the question again, and even to reexamine all of the problems that arose in relation to this reaction. The result was a book published in German in 1958, and translated into French roughly at the time of Blanchot's "response" of 1964. Jaspers' book was called *The Atomic Bomb And The Future Of Man: Political Conscience Of Our Time*. Blanchot points to the incredibly ambitious scope of Jaspers' project, as is clear from the following quote from Jaspers' book: "The matter of this book is, properly speaking, the political conscience of our time. That the threat of the atomic bomb should necessarily give another structure to political conscience for all time: this act is what brought about the main title." (Jaspers 1958, 3)

The core of Jaspers' argument as outlined by Blanchot is the following: science has made us masters of annihilation. There is the atomic bomb; humanity can destroy itself; this destruction would be radical; the possibility of a radical destruction of humanity by humanity inaugurates a beginning in history; and whatever happens, whatever precautionary measures there may be, we cannot go backward. The result is: either man will disappear or he will transform himself. This transformation will not only be of an institutional or social order; rather, what is required is a change in the totality of existence, a profound—and entirely individual—conversion.

The first *coup de force* of Blanchot's response is to point out a striking discrepancy between what Jaspers's text declares, and the text itself. The theme is that we must change, writes Blanchot. But right away we are surprised by something: in regard to Jaspers, nothing has changed—neither in the language, nor in the thinking, nor in political formulations that are maintained. How could he have the authority to alert us to a threat so great that, as he says, it must shatter our existence utterly and, what is more, our thinking, while persisting, without contestation or modification, in the same speculative conception to which he was led well before becoming conscious of this unique event, this immanent possibility of universal catastrophe?

> Why does a question so serious, a question such that to answer it would suppose a radically new thinking, why does it not renew the language that conveys it, and why does it only give rise to remarks that are either biased

> … when they are of political order, or moving and urgent, when they are of spiritual order, but identical to those that we have heard in vain for two thousand years? (Blanchot, 103)

Blanchot asks where this difficulty comes from. Is the question too grave, so that thinking immediately turns away from it to call for help? Or else is it because, as significant as it is, it *nonetheless contributes nothing new*? Or else because it is far from being as important as it seems to be? Or, finally, is it because the question only serves as an alibi or a means of pressure for bringing us to spiritual or political conclusions that have already been formulated long ago and independently of it?

Blanchot starts with the affirmative answer to the last question: what preoccupies Jaspers is the end of humanity, but more particularly the advent of communism. Thus he comes to this practical question: Should we say "no" to the Bomb if this "no" runs the risk of weakening the defense of the "free world"? For Jaspers, the dilemma ultimately comes down to this: either to save oneself from total extermination, or to save oneself from total domination; either the Bomb and its threat of total destruction, or an "explosive totalitarianism" (communism). And Blanchot is right to point out how the logic of choice suggested by Jaspers is actually the oldest of thoughts: life should not be preferred to the reasons for leaving ("I'd rather die than have my freedom taken away…"): we should prefer death to oppression…

Blanchot is also right to insist that something is obviously lost here, if all the talk of a most radical change and conversion comes down to this oldest of thoughts. The radical novelty allegedly introduced by the perspective of the Bomb is nowhere to be seen, nor seriously taken into account in Jaspers' argument. Jaspers simply takes one side in the cold war conflict:

> However, where the liberal philosopher—and with him a good number of men—speaks of totalitarianism without examination or critique, others—and with them a large number of men—speak of liberation and the achievement of the community as a whole. (Blanchot, 104)

Yet Blanchot does not simply take the other side in this conflict—his point is much more insightful. He continues:

> Once again the dialogue has stopped. The event, the pivot of history, does not change the options or the fundamental oppositions in the least. Reflection on the atomic terror is but a pretense; what one is looking for is not a new way of thinking but a way to consolidate old predicaments. And with this "choice" it becomes clear that humanity will continue to turn around old values, be it for all eternity. (104)

Instead of novelty we have repetition, even the enthronement of a possibly eternal repetition. The problem is not that Jaspers chooses the "wrong" political side; the problem is that he immediately disavows the novelty of the perspective introduced by the Bomb, and uses its threat simply to consolidate the old parameters and oppositions. What is fundamentally problematic in Jaspers' argument is not the political

choice he makes, the side he picks, but rather the very terms, and the manner, in which he *formulates the choice itself.*

> If thinking falls back into its traditional affirmations, it is because it wants to risk nothing of itself in the presence of an ambiguous event about which it is not able to decide what it means, with its horrible face, with its appearance as absolute—an event of enormous size but enormously empty, about which it can say nothing save this banality: that it would be better to prevent it. (Blanchot, 107)

Blanchot argues that in the face of this ambiguous event we could perhaps actually take the risk of thinking differently, that is, to properly *think*, instead of immediately falling back into the old formulas and oppositions. It is here that Blanchot, inspired by Hegel, makes his ingenious turn, which eventually leads to a very different kind of choice and opposition. Here is the crucial passage, which relies strongly on the Hegelian distinction between the notions of understanding and reason:

> Understanding lets us choose. Either to accept, henceforth this end for what it will be when it will have taken place: a simple fact about which there is nothing to say, except that it is insignificance itself—something that deserves neither exaltation nor despair nor even attention. Or else to work to elevate the fact to concept and empty negation to negativity. It is in this sense that understanding addresses—it is true, in an indirect manner, for the choice does not belong to it and understanding is in fact indifferent to it—"a call to reason." Reason is totality itself at work, but because it is achieved not through the effect of some quiet goodwill but through antagonism, struggle, and violence, it risks provoking, as it realizes itself, the unreasonable event against which and also, in some ways with the help of which it raises itself [*s'édifie*]. Hence the turmoil that this perspective introduces into old ways of thinking: one still does not know what to say about it. If, for example, Jaspers gives himself the task of reflecting on the atomic peril and at the same time never stops reflecting on the communist "peril," it is because he senses that, with the approach of this destructive totality, humanity risks being awakened to the idea of the whole and pressed, as it were, to become conscious of it by giving the whole form, that is by organizing and uniting itself. (107)

Blanchot thus skillfully shifts the parameters of the choice and invites us to (re-) discover *another* choice. The true choice is not between tolerating the Bomb (and hence running the risk of losing everything) on the one hand, and preventing the looming destruction of the world (but thereby running the risk of losing our liberal freedoms) on the other hand; the true choice is between "losing it all" and *creating what we are about to lose* (even if we lose it all in the process): only this could eventually save us, in a profound sense. The problem with the choice as formulated by Jaspers is that it presents the given situation as utterly homogenous, unambiguous, fully accomplished. Blanchot, on the other hand, points to a *crack* in this situation,

a time-loop inscribed in it. When caught in the threat and fear of "losing it all" we are in fact held hostages of something that does not exist—yet. And is this kind of blackmail not in fact the very means of making sure that it *never will* exist? It makes us focus on preserving what is there, and what we have, but excludes any real alternative, any means of really thinking differently.

The crack in this looming fate does not mean that there is a chance, a possibility or hope that it won't happen; it means that what is *bound* to happen (and will *necessarily* happen) is not fully there yet: this, and nothing else. To use a suggestive image from another, Hollywood universe, this is somewhat like in that deservedly famous scene from the movie *Back to the Future*, in which the hero is desperately trying to connect his parents, induce them to fall in love, and hence conceive him. In the past, where he has been sent by mistake, he has with him a photograph from which he is slowly disappearing, because he is failing to connect his parents… The past of the future we inhabit is being decided in a somewhat similar way.

The call to awakening that can be potentially heard with the appearance of the Bomb is not simply "let's do everything in our power to prevent it before it's too late," but rather "let's first built this totality (unity, community, freedom) that we are about to lose through the Bomb."[4] If through the Bomb "the idea of totality arises visibly and for the first time on our horizon" (as the idea that we could "lose it all"), than perhaps we have to take it from here, and build on this.

Blanchot is not advocating that we take the side of the "existing communism" (or of the Eastern bloc) against the West, but is rather arguing for a much more uncertain form of uniting and organizing as a first true form of the world. The choice is to fight not simply to preserve the world such as it is, but to unite in *creating*, in forming a world, for the first time…. This is not so much about "changing the world," but about *making it*. The totality or whole that Blanchot defends and argues for here is clearly not some kind of organic, harmonious totality, but simply a totality which does not disavow its own antagonism(s). The crucial passage in the quote above is this: "Reason is totality itself at work, but because it is achieved not through the effect of some quiet goodwill but through antagonism, struggle, and violence, it risks provoking, as it realizes itself, the unreasonable event against which and also, in some ways with the help of which it rises itself." The Bomb is part of this totality, as are the struggle and violence. But such is the nature of a true totality.

Yet things are far from moving in this direction, so what is the problem? The configuration of "the Bomb" also tells us something about what is usually perceived as an encouraging (liberating) dimension of some fatal threat. The acute consciousness that we may actually die at any moment is supposed to liberate us from our everyday petty little fears, and give us courage to pursue things that we would otherwise fear pursuing….

What happens in reality is something very different: the possibility of universal catastrophe does not produce an opening to the new dimensions of the possible, but usually incites either apathy and depression, or an anxiety-ridden inclination

to "realize" the existing possibilities (and as many of them as possible, so as not to miss out on anything). Yet these are clearly possibilities that are determined by the parameters of the already existing configuration (take a mistress, yell at your boss, steal something from the store….). In other words, and to link this back to Blanchot's argument, when confronted with an impending doom, we usually don't say to ourselves: "We will all die very soon anyway, so we may as well engage in the struggle for communism!"

The fact that this kind of suggestion is most likely to incite laughter tells us a lot about the ideological consolidation of the "possible" as based on the existent. We hear a lot about the necessity of creative thinking, and "thinking outside the box" has become a fashionable *bon mot* of entrepreneurship. But why does nobody even remotely consider taking the above example as an illustrious example of a *true* "thinking outside the box"? If everything is going to hell anyway, why not introduce communism first? Why is it that an impending doom usually encourages only a commonplace nihilism: all is meaningless, nothing is worth fighting for; or a pathetic, that is, pathos-ridden "courage" of claiming a few last indulgences for oneself in the face of the inevitable…?

This, I think, has a lot to do with the ideology of death, and of the end. The problem is not that—at least from our secular perspective—death looks so final and irreversible; the problem is that it looks so *full* (of itself), so dense and substantial. Ours is a society of death, yet one that does not accept death for what it is: an enormous event (for us), but also enormously empty, "insignificance itself." Yes, like the apocalypse, death is disappointing: nothing really happens there.

*And now for something completely different?*

After some decades of optimistic belief in growing prosperity and general well-being, the apocalyptic mood has returned to haunt us. Looming ecological disaster, economical crashes, wars, "terror," millions of refugees, and now even the reemergence of the Bomb. Not that atomic bombs have not been there during all this time, quite the opposite. But their presence did not function like "the Bomb" of the cold war, until we have recently received a properly farcical (in the Marxian/Hegelian sense) repetition of the configuration of the Bomb in the form of two spoiled grown up babies, threatening to use their bombs because, *Hey, nobody will f*** with us!* Yet the farce should not blind us to the seriousness of the matter, nor to the fact that the threat is quite real.

These similarities notwithstanding, there are also important differences with respect to the configuration of the '60s, and particularly with respect to the figure of the Bomb. These differences are largely obfuscated by the very predominant apocalyptic thinking, namely by *expectation* of the apocalypse.

The configuration of the Bomb suggested a more or less instantaneous destruction of the world and extinction of humanity, which could have occurred if somebody

pressed the wrong button. Today, the most lucid analysts do not warn against what will happen if we press the wrong buttons; they rather insist that the wrong button *has already been pressed*. The apocalypse has already started and is becoming an active part of our life and our world, such as it is. It is not waiting for us somewhere in the future, but is dictating our social, economic, environmental conditions as we speak. The lesson of negative utopias (with the TV series *The Handmaid's Tale* as a prominent recent example) is also not simply that we are approaching the apocalypse; moreover they direct our attention to its duration: apocalypse can take time, even a lot of time; it is not necessarily an instantaneous event, but can last and last… long enough for another world and history to take place before "it all ends." We could also say: the final result of the apocalypse (total extinction) is insignificance itself. The problem is that apocalypse is not so much the end of the world as it is itself first and foremost the revelation of *a new world*.

What does this mean? At different levels of analysis we can encounter a convincing argument according to which perhaps the biggest problem today is the rapid normalization and hence admission of things that were only a moment ago still considered inadmissible, totally unacceptable, "impossible" (normalization of "torture"—in certain circumstances—of racism, discrimination, of the precariat, of the "crisis," of the state of emergency…). And this is not about a progressive moving forward toward new horizons; these things are not "unheard-of" because of their novelty, but precisely because they constitute a step *backwards* to a point we had considered "beyond the pale," a *reversion* of "progress" we had considered "irreversible." It is "unheard-of," for example, that somebody in an exposed public office indirectly gives his support to a white supremacist rally that features openly Nazi symbols and slogans, as well as open violence—but there is nothing new in this. Indeed, this is a possible definition of the apocalypse: a suspension or reversal of the irreversible itself.

†††

In brief, all this suggests that we are not facing an approaching apocalypse, but rather already standing *within* it. Apocalypse is already here, we cannot "prevent" it. Or, put in a slightly different way:

> Giorgio Agamben said in an interview that "thought is the courage of hopelessness"—an insight which is especially pertinent for our historical moment, when even the most pessimistic diagnosis as a rule finishes with an uplifting hint at some version of the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel. The true courage is not to imagine an alternative, but to accept the consequences of the fact that there is no clearly discernible alternative: the dream of an alternative is a sign of theoretical cowardice, functioning as a fetish that prevents us from thinking through to the end of the deadlock of our predicament. In short, the true courage is to admit that the light at the end

> of the tunnel is probably the headlight of another train approaching us from the opposite direction. (Žižek 2017, xi-xii)

In other words, before we fully grasp that there is no way out, nothing can really change. To say that today we are situated *within* the apocalypse introduces a different perspective from the one that constitutes Blanchot's point of departure. The perspective of totality, of a "whole" that we can lose, presupposes an external point from which this whole appears as a whole. In the case of the configuration analyzed by Blanchot, this external point is temporal: we *will* lose everything in the apocalypse. The perspective of totality depends on the time gap separating us from the catastrophe: the point where we stand anticipating it is external to the apocalypse. Hence the mode in which Blanchot formulates his call to awakening: instead of waiting to lose it all, we can unite and organize as a whole, build the world/humanity as a whole—and then decide whether or not we want it to disappear. For Blanchot is far from stating that the making of humanity (as a whole) excludes its destruction.[5]

The perspective opened by *our* apocalypse is no longer the perspective according to which we can lose it "all" in a single unfathomable event. The fantasy of this possibility is still alive, of course: the predictions and expectations of, for example, this or that planet crashing to the earth and totally destroying it continue to excite the imagination. But in spite of their catastrophic character there is something perhaps too optimistic about them. Because we know all too well that we won't get off so lightly, and that dying will most likely be gradual, long and painful…

Our immanence to the apocalypse is at the same time precisely that which enables the functioning of this normalization. What does this mean? Just think about that advice we usually get when something terrible happens to us, say that we lose a loved person. If we start thinking about *all* that we lost with this person, this perspective can break us totally (we will never again do this, and that, and…—the whole picture is unbearable). This is why we are advised not to think in this way, but rather to try to survive through one day first, and then take it one day at a time, focus on the tasks at hand… What else is this but an invitation to start with the work of mourning, to step inside our mourning, to inhabit it, precisely *without* trying to comprehend its totality? Every day something happens that just a day ago we would have considered impossible or unbearable, but slowly we adjust to the new situation. But if, in our example, we first lose the beloved person and this (concrete) loss opens the perspective of *all* that we have lost with her, the perspective of a whole into which we then step and start our work of mourning, the contemporary apocalypse functions differently. We start with the survival strategies, we take the losses one at a time, and only at "the end" will we find out what exactly it was that we lost, in total. Today we get used to this, tomorrow to something else; we'll manage somehow, as long as we don't see the whole picture, which is actually being created in this way.

The fact that normalization works so smoothly is precisely the *proof* that we are already *inside the apocalypse*. This is to say that the automatism of normalization is not the way to, or the means of, structural change, but is already a sign, an indicator, a symptom of a serious structural change—that is, of the fact that the button has already been pressed. Were it not for this change having *already* occurred, the normalization would not work as smoothly as it does. "With time, one gets used even to the worst of things," we say. This is not simply and necessarily bad, if we knew what exactly we had lost and were mourning. But this is precisely what, for structural reasons, we cannot know, because this "something" is being created as we go along, with our daily adjustments. Our apocalypse is a loss without the lost, a mourning that precedes the loss and actually creates it with its work (that of mourning). It is a mourning without object.

Does this structural change mean that Blanchot's "solution," his call to first create the whole that we are about to lose, loses its pertinence here? On the contrary. The standpoint of reason (Hegelian *Vernunft*) to which Blanchot calls us is in fact precisely a standpoint which is *interior*, and not exterior, to the whole. The fact that apocalypse is already here, that it has already started, does not mean that everything is over. The problem is that, for the most part, we haven't yet accepted that this change is already operative—we still think of the world as pre-apocalyptic, we are expecting the catastrophe, are afraid of it, and hope that perhaps it won't happen.... Or, to return to Blanchot's own terms:

> Reason, in anticipation of itself and immobilized by this anticipation, seems only to want to win time, and, in order to win time, passes off to the understanding the ask that it is not yet able to master. (In such a way that the caption that would best illustrate the blackboard of our time might be this one: The anticipation of reason humbling itself before understanding.) (108)

Understanding, Blanchot continues, is cold and without fear. It analyses the danger, subjects it to its measures, looks for the solutions, strategies, adjustments. This work is useful: it demystifies the apocalypse, and shows that it is possible to live with it (and the normalization we talked about is precisely this: we have learned how to make do with the apocalypse.) "It shows that the alternative of all or nothing, which turns the atomic weapon in a quasi-mystical force, is far from being the only truth of our situation. (...) Yes, this lesson of understanding is sound. Only, it is almost too sound, because it exposes us to a loss of fear." (108)

The loss of fear that Blanchot talks about does not mean that we have become so brave that we are no longer afraid of anything; it does not speak about our courage, but rather about our perspective on the world in which, with necessary adjustments, everything can be solved... It does not speak about the presence of courage, but rather of its absence, in the sense given to it by Agamben and Žižek: "the courage of the hopeless," the courage to admit that we don't have a solution and that there is none visible on the horizon. Instead, we would quite literally "rather die" than admit this.

Where does this paralyzing effect of reason anticipating itself come from? Reason does not feel up to its task, to the work which is already its own. The question is perhaps whether reason could, at any point, *feel* that it is up to this task; or whether it is rather that taking the risk and making the first step would be the only possible proof of its being up to its task? This risk is properly speaking "existential," because it is not covered by any guarantee, by any symbolic mandate. And this risk, this step into the unknown, is not necessarily a matter of (premeditated) decision—we can also be pushed to make it.

Many years ago, I saw on TV a beginning of a horror movie[6] in which a depressed woman decides to commit suicide. She is about to swallow a whole bottle of sleeping pills when a werewolf climbs up the wall of the house, entering through the bathroom window. And the woman who was about to die anyway starts screaming for help and does everything in her power to escape the werewolf. At the time I thought this was ridiculously funny, she obviously shouldn't have cared one way or another, she should have looked the beast straight in the eye and said: come on, be my guest! But on second thought, my reaction was perhaps wrong. The scene is funny, of course, but that is because the truth is funny. It's not that upon seeing the werewolf, the woman suddenly realized that her meaningless life had a meaning after all. And it is also not simply that the sheer instinct of survival prevailed over depression and metaphysical considerations of the meaninglessness of it all. No, at that moment she was simply *frightened to death*, as we say. And it woke her up.

In all its brutal immediacy the encounter with the negative can have a deeply symbolic effect. The "logic of sheer survival" has gained a pretty bad reputation in contemporary emancipatory philosophy (for example in the work of Alain Badiou): it basically means that we merely cling on to our lives, in the absence of any idea or truth, and hence sustain the *status quo*. But perhaps we should return to Hegel on this point, and stress the difference between the moment of the life and death struggle that *inaugurates* the master/slave dialectic, and this dialectic itself.[7] In mortal fear the slave chooses life, yet this does not mean that he thereby forever condemns himself to vegetating (survival), without any idea or truth. The master is prepared to go all the way and die, yet this also doesn't entail that he is henceforth immune to the logic—and the straitjacket—of survival. Hegel's point is rather that actual freedom (in respect to the demands of survival, for example) cannot be chosen directly, and in this sense the master's choice is no more "correct" than the slave's. They are both forced choices. And of course this is also not simply about the fact that we first have to choose life, if we want to make something with it; it is about the fact that we need first to experience the trembling of pure negativity, the mortal fear. If the choice of life is not a forced choice (forced because of mortal fear), but appears natural and immediate, then we have no means of accessing it and repeating the choice; since there is nothing to repeat here, we can only cling on to our lives. The problem is not a slave who, in mortal terror, has bent before a master—for him there is still a possible escape, a future, even freedom. The problem is with the idea of a "neutral man," who is neither a master nor a slave, but "freely" creates his life,

changes roles etc. Paradoxically, what condemns us to the logic of survival without any idea or truth is not the experience of mortal fear, but rather the absence of this experience, of the (also symbolic) cut it represents, and of the *subjectivation*—in one way or another—of this cut. I emphasize subjectivation, because as psychoanalysis teaches us, this kind of cut can also result in its foreclosure, that is to say in psychosis, which is precisely a way to avoid its subjectivation. Differently from *both* "master" and "slave," the psychotic "chooses" freedom directly; but the price of this direct choice is that he lives as the helpless prisoner of his freedom, enslaved to it, so to speak. Both Hegel and Lacan emphasize that the choice of *actual* freedom can only be a second, *repeated* choice.

Returning for a moment to our example of the suicide interrupted by a werewolf, we can relate this situation to the logical and temporal dialectics emphasized by Blanchot. The woman who decided to commit suicide made this decision following an understanding-based insight according to which *everything* was meaningless. The surprise in the form of the "invasion of the negative" (the werewolf) makes her start fighting for her life—the life that she never really had, and was hence ready to give up. But perhaps she will now get it, precisely through this fight. Perhaps—for there are no guarantees here. In our apocalyptic world, in the smooth running of normalization and adaptation to one problematic thing after another, when our attitude toward the world is so "sound" that it is actually *all too sound*, there are of course also werewolves that appear from time to time. After all, Donald Trump is such a werewolf. But can they scare us to death? Can they scare us so much that we start fighting for our lives and switch from the survival mode of coping with things one day at a time (and as comfortably as possible), to a passionate struggle for our lives? For the struggle for life is not the same as clinging on to life and to the *status quo*; it is much more than this, and it derives its force from the encounter with the negative, from the utmost distress which can also be a birthplace of ideas, and even truths.

What does all this imply in relation to the difference pointed out earlier—the difference between the perspective of the whole, appearing as such from an external point of view, and our being situated within this whole, which for this reason we cannot see as a whole? Moreover: since we have related this difference to the difference between the perspective of understanding and that of reason (in the Hegelian senses of these terms), does this mean that in the perspective of reason the Idea of totality is simply lost? This would certainly contrast with Hegel's position. In truth, we are dealing with two different types of totality or "whole," the difference conceptualized by Lacan as that between the "all" and the "not-all." Crucial in understanding this difference is precisely to avoid the idea that "not-all" is the *opposite* of all, and thus of totality. Rather, the "not-all" is "all" to which something more gets added, it is "all" *plus* the point of view from which this all *appears* as "all." This point is now situated within the "whole"/"all," which for this very reason becomes not-whole/not-all; that is to say, it includes its own negativity. The Lacanian not-all is a different kind of totality, and not simply its opposite. This also implies that

there are certain points *within* this totality, from which, and only from which, this totality can appear as totality.

So if, on the one hand, we can be awakened to the idea of a whole by the possibility of losing it, that is, by the possibility of losing this *whole* (even if it doesn't yet exist), we can, on the other hand, also be woken up to it by the appearance of the *loss as such*, that is, by the cut that redoubles—and functions as a symbolic marker of—the insecurity and incompleteness of the whole (of life).

The recently renewed threat of nuclear war could be an example of such a cut. The apocalypse has already started, and to "press the button" would now be inherent to the apocalypse: it functions as a cut that could open the perspective of a "whole" from within, and make us fight for our lives—and perhaps build a world in the process. Or would we still rather die than let this thing "scare the shit out of us," as the saying goes? If so, then we are clearly still in the process of the work of *mourning* without object (the smooth running of normalization, of gradually accepting what we even yesterday deemed unimaginable), instead of "jumping over" and starting the work on the object (of mourning), in the process of which we wouldn't be building the loss, but the lost. In order to make this jump, we need *courage*. Yet this courage is not the courage in the usual sense, the courage of the understanding, which is not that scarce today (as we already pointed out: we would "rather die," or—worse?—simply keep suffering, than acknowledge some rather obvious things). No, what is lacking is precisely the "courage of the hopeless"—the courage to see the hopelessness of our predicament. What is lacking is—in one word, and to follow Agamben on this—*thought*.

This thought is not the opposite of action, but rather the inherent condition of a properly *courageous* action that eventually makes a difference.

This would also imply rediscovering the "lost cause" in a new way: there are no lost causes, in the sense of causes that were originally lost. There are only *refound* causes, causes *found again*, causes that emerge at the site of something that never was—that never existed—but which we are nevertheless able to recognize.

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## Notes

1. Blanchot, Maurice. "Apocalypse is disappointing." *Friendship*. Translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg, Stanford University Press, 1997, 101-108.

2. "In the master's discourse, for instance, it is effectively impossible that there be a master who makes the entire world function. Getting people to work is even more tiring, if one really has to do it, than working oneself. The master never does it. He gives a sign, the master signifier, and everybody jumps." (Lacan 2007, 174)

3. See Dolar 2004.

4. An additional footnote as regards the (political) efforts of the preservation: There is of course nothing wrong in itself with trying to *preserve* certain values and accomplishments, say the welfare state. The problem with the leftist politics being reduced to fighting to conserve the fast-disappearing remains of the welfare state is that with the ongoing devastating economic politics this is a lost fight.—Lost not simply because of the financial elite who profits from its loss, but because this same financial elite can rely on the growing army of those who *never even had* access to any of these "benefits" and instead denounce them as privileges (young, precarious workers). The present dynamic is disastrous because far from endangering it, the growing poverty and insecurity play right into the hands of the infamous "1%." The extremely poor do the fighting for the extremely rich, as was made all too clear in the election of Donald Trump as president.

5. "It is very probable that humanity would have no fear of this power of the end if it could recognize in it a decision that belonged exclusively to it, on condition thus too of being truly the subject and not simply the object of it, and without having to trust to the hazardous initiative of some head of State who is just as foreign to humanity today as formerly the turtle that fell from the sky and crushed him dead was to the unfortunate Aeschylus. One is constantly speaking to us about suicide; we are told, You have finally become the masters and rulers of yourself, you possess not only your own death but, in you, the death of everyone. A strange discourse that childishly represents thousands of human beings divided according to the model of single individual, the supreme hero of the negative, deliberating, as the final Hamlet, on the reasons for giving himself death, and dying at his own hand in order to preserve the power of dying until the end. Supposing this image of common suicide made any sense whatsoever, it would do so only if men could be shown all that they are lacking in order to reach the decision of a death said to be voluntary, whose subject would be the world.« (Blanchot, 106)

6. I don't remember the title, but I've been told that the description fits the movie *Silver Bullet*.

7. See Hegel 1977, 111-119.

Dieter Henrich

# BEGINNING AND METHOD OF (THE) LOGIC[1]

Translated by Ben Hjorth and Alexander Kern

A commentary on Hegel's *Logic*[2] that could be compared with the works of Cornford, Ross, Vaihinger, or Paton remains as yet unwritten. Even Hegel's own followers [*Hegels eigene Schule*] undertook no attempt to analyze, in their specificity, the derivations of the work's speculative thought-determinations [*spekulativen Gedankenbestimmungen*]. In a manner that still prevails today, the Hegelian school limited itself to the path of grasping a view of the whole [*den Gang des Ganzen ins Auge zu fassen*], seeking to execute variations on Hegel's theses and to make them easier to understand, by referring backwards and forwards in the text [*durch Rückverweise und Vorblicke*]. Alternative interpretations of difficult passages, between which one could make a reasoned decision, were nowhere developed. Two observations follow from this: on the one hand, that the scope of such an *interpretative* endeavor is extremely broad, based as it is solely upon the impressions of the individual reader [*einem solche Verfahren der Impression des Verstehenden*]; on the other hand, that the arguments of its *critics* cannot find a sufficiently definite point of departure, and are therefore forced, like its interpreters, to address only the system as a whole [*sich… allein dem Ganzen des Systems zuzuwenden*]. The interpretation and the critique of Hegel can hardly be brought into a fruitful relationship in this manner.

The only exception on this uneven balance sheet is the debate over the beginning of the *Science of Logic* and the development of its first three categories. Within Hegel's own lifetime, his followers [*Schüler*] came into a dispute with his opponents [*Gegnern*] over the question of the meaning of the strange formulation [*Sinn der befremdlichen Rede*] that being [*Sein*], as indeterminate immediacy [*unbestimmte Unmittelbarkeit*], must equally be thought of as nothing [*Nichts*], and that both, insofar as each vanishes into its opposite [*jeweils in ihrem Gegenteil verschwinden*], have their truth in the thought of becoming [*Werden*].

It appears, at first, that the difficulties of understanding this beginning are minor when compared to those arising from later deductions, especially those of the logic of the determinations of reflection [*Logik der Reflexionsbestimmungen*]. These latter seem to be in much greater need of commentary, because they place much higher

demands on the faculty of abstraction. Anyone who has understood the determinations of reflection may well be inclined to the opinion [*Meinung*] that the logic of the beginning is elementary, and barely problematic in the formal sense. To such a reader, the fixation of interest on this beginning will seem the sign of a lack of familiarity with Hegel's logic, and of an archaic, merely developmental stage of its interpretation.

This appearance is not unjustified. However, it does not correspond to the problematic of logic in its entire scope. It is true that the logic of reflection, because of the peculiar and intricate interconnection [*eigentümlichen Verschränkung*] of all of its determinations, poses great difficulty to interpretation—Hegel himself called it the most difficult part of the logic.[3] But its beginning contains difficulties of a quite different and in a certain sense opposite kind. These difficulties result precisely from this unmediated transition [*unvermittelten Übergang*] from being to nothing, and from the lapidary brevity with which this transition is enacted [*vollzogen*]. It is not easy to properly grasp the nature of this transition, nor to understand the means [*Mittel*] by which Hegel grounded [*begründet*] his reasoning. Only because of the beginning's difficulty was it possible for such a remarkable number of apparently plausible objections to be presented, by which Hegel's conservative followers were placed in no slight degree of embarrassment [*Verlegenheit*].

Whatever their own reasons may have been, the singular interest shown by the Hegelian school for this first chapter of the *Logic* is justified not only on the basis of its particular structure, but moreover its exceptional methodological significance [*ausgezeichnete methodische Bedeutung*]. That is, whereas the logic of reflection [*Reflexionslogik*] is susceptible to immanent interpretation [*immanente Deutung*], the logic of pure being can only be understood if one considers several lessons [*Lehrstücke*] from an entirely different context. The interpretation of this beginning can only be achieved by looking at the overall context [*Gesamtzusammenhang*], and the method of development of pure thought-determinations, and not by restricting itself to the well-known thesis of the retroactive explanation [*rückläufigen Begründung*] of the logic's beginning from the perspective of its conclusion. The following paper demonstrates in which sense this is the case.

This must be done in two ways. The first of them deals with the different forms of critique that have been made of Hegel's doctrine [*Lehre*] of the unity of being and nothing [*Einheit von Sein und Nichts*]. In so doing, we prepare the way for the second, which tries to precisely determine the meaning [*Sinn*] of that doctrine, and the arguments upon which Hegel established it [*Begründung gegeben*].[4]

### *1. Critique of the beginning*

One has to distinguish between two basic forms of critique of the beginning of the logic. The first purports to adopt Hegel's own standpoint [*Standpunkt*] and to show that no progression [*Fortschritt*] of thought is possible from this point, particularly not to the unity of being and nothing. The goal of this line of critique, finally, is to

prove that the speculative dialectic is not a tenable method. The second thinks that, for the sake of the logical consistency of the system [*um der Konsequenz des Systems*], the precise shape [*Gestalt*] that Hegel gave to the dialectic of the beginning must be given up [*preisgeben*].[5] This latter view is shared by almost all the students and successors of Hegel, albeit for different and often opposing reasons. We will call it the positive critique (B), distinguishing it from the negative critique of the speculative method's opponents (A).

A. The negative critique was elaborated by [Adolf] Trendelenburg and Eduard von Hartmann in particular.[6] The former's *Logical Investigations*, published as early as 1840, proved very effective despite its few convincing arguments.[7] Openly or discreetly, they were taken into account by most of the disciples of Hegel and, as regards the critique of the logic of being, they were universally recognized, with the sole exception of Michelet. But Trendelenburg developed only one of the three objections that can be brought forward against Hegel's doctrine of being and nothing from this point of view. The subsequent objections proceed in the following manner:

If we assume, with Hegel, that the notion of indeterminate immediacy must be the beginning of the logic, it can not be understood how this must be thought of as the passing over of being and nothing into one another. For if we assume that being and nothing are really distinguishable from one another, then they are either (1) *two aspects*, in one and the same thought-determination, of "indeterminate immediacy," *in* which they can be distinguished, and *from* which they must at the same time be distinguished, or (2) *two different thoughts* which share by the characteristic of being indeterminate and immediate, but which must remain distinguished from each other. If, on the other hand, we assume that being and nothing can *not* be distinguished from one another, then (3) both are merely different names for a single thing, which is to be understood as an indeterminate immediacy.—In none of the three cases can a transition from being to nothing or from nothing into being be asserted.

In Hegel's sense, these objections can only be countered with the concession which they themselves make: namely, that in the context of a speculative logic, thought must begin with the first and simplest [*erste und einfachste*], and that this thought must be that of indeterminate immediacy.

1. The first objection states that being and nothing are actually mutually opposed [*einander entgegengesetzte*] aspects of a single indeterminate immediacy, which is [*ist*] insofar as it is posited as such [*überhaupt gesetzt ist*], and which is nothing [*ist Nichts*] insofar as it is posited without any further determination [*ohne jede weiterer Bestimmung*]. But if that were the case, this indeterminate immediacy would not be able to be what Hegel says it must: the beginning [*Anfang*]. It would not be immediate, but rather posited, namely as form (even without any content) or as a thing (even without any property). Indeterminate immediacy would then be a reflected [*reflektierte*] determination, and consequently could not be properly defined as an

originary [*anfängliche*] determination.[8] But being and nothing are *not* to be thought of as moments of a determined reflection. If we intend to think nothing [*meinen wir Nichts*], we do not mean emptiness of content [*Leersein von Gehalt*] such that form could still be, for in this case it would precisely not be nothing [*somit gerade nicht Nichts*]. If we intend to think being, we do not mean something indispensable for thought [*Nichtwegdenkbares*] before any content, which can be sublated, for in this case being would only be there [*Sein nur dort wäre*] to the extent that the nothing of its contentless emptiness [*Nichts seiner Leere*] was *also* thought.

This is why Hegel believes that being and nothing do not have the opposite of themselves as moments of reflection. Instead, they must transition into one another [*ineinander übergehen*], without any substance. The thought of being is supposed to contain the *whole* indeterminate immediacy. And so long as it is thought of as nothing, it is equally thought of as *whole*. Therefore, one cannot say that being is closer determined as nothing, or that being crosses over into its *opposite*, which is nothing; because being and nothing are not opposed to each other. They are the same [*dasselbe*], and they are just as much different, but absolutely different, meaning that they are without any relation [*Beziehung*] to one another. If such a relation were to be demonstrated [*aufzuweisen*], then not only would they not be determinations of indeterminate immediacy [*keine Bestimmungen der unbestimmten Unmittelbarkeit*], they would not even themselves be immediate determinations at all: on the contrary, each would be mediated by its other. Therefore, either being and nothing are something other than aspects of indeterminate immediacy, or this immediacy cannot serve as the beginning of the logic, and can no more be thought of as indeterminate as being and nothing can be thought of as immediate.

2. The second objection asserts that "indeterminate immediacy" is the generic concept [*Oberbegriff*] of both being and nothing, which remain distinguishable from one another. But here, too, one is compelled to take away the immediate character both from this generic concept, as well as from being and nothing, to determine them as opposed to one another, and thus to mediate them. This objection can therefore be countered by the same response that Hegel offers to the first; it is therefore not necessary to go into it in any more detail.

3. The third objection already by which the first two objections are to be countered. According to this thought, at the beginning of the logic an affirmation and a negation—both without any relation [*beziehungslose*]—are differentiated from one another. The objection states that this is only difference between mere *words* [*bloßen* Worten], the meaning of which is one and the same, namely indeterminate immediacy. Being and nothing differ as *flatüs vocis*,[9] but in their meaning [*was sie meinen*] the two are identical [*miteinander zu identifizieren*]. According to this objection, the beginning of the logic achieves nothing more than this identification, and therefore does not give rise to any progression in thought.

Hegel would have been able to turn this critique against the critics themselves. For it is a form of begging the question [*petitio principii*] to argue that this "indeter-

minate immediacy" can itself be thought of in its entirety, without the use of such conceptual determinations as unrelated [*beziehungslose*] being and nothing. The notion of "indeterminate immediacy" already points to the fact that this concept must be defined by an affirmative and by a negative moment. The logic had attempted to show that this can only be done by means of the thoughts of "being" and "nothing." If we do not try to show in what *other* way the rhetoric [*Rede*] of indeterminate immediacy receives a well-defined meaning, we use a mere word [*ein bloßes Wort*] which only gives a vague sense [*Ahnung*] of a thought, without it having in fact been thought in itself [*ohne ihn selbst gedacht zu haben*]. We thereby name only one word with the words "being" and "nothing." In this case it is not surprising if they remain nothing but mere words for us.

It could be demonstrated that these objections, together with their refutation, are the only ones it is possible to make at a fundamental level. Here, however, it is only a question of revising the principle underlying them. The objections all want to distinguish between the thought of indeterminate immediacy and the opposition being/nothing, and therefore, first of all, separate them from one another in order to relate them, as an aspect of the thing and as the thing itself [*Sache selbst*]; as a concept and as a case of its application; as word and as meaning. And they are all disproved, simultaneously, if it is shown that this thought loses the character of immediacy, and thus all well-defined character. The justification of the logic of being can therefore only take place with regard to its place in the *Science of Logic*: whoever changes the structure of its dialectic must, of necessity, take away its position as beginning.

The refutation of these objections can thus be taken as the first step toward the proof of a proposition which will be presupposed as a *thesis* in the following considerations: that the logic of pure being can only be explained, *via negationis*, in terms of its differentiation [*Unterscheidung*] from the logic of reflection.

B. The followers of Hegel had no adequate idea [*Vorstellung*] of such a method of justification [*Begründungsverfahren*]. It is therefore not surprising that they either discovered the objections themselves, or that they considered them irrefutable after they had been brought forward by opponents. All speculative logics—of which the first appeared in 1826 and the last in 1876—have two things in common with respect to their relation to Hegel's logic of being: they are, without exception, convinced that it is with the thought of "being" [*mit dem Gedanken "Sein"*] that the beginning of logic must be made. Similarly without exception, they depart from Hegel in the manner in which they unfold the dialectic of the beginning. In the majority of cases, this is done with great care, bearing in mind the previous critiques. Changes to the logic of being were often justified by the necessity of giving logical science a different meaning from Hegel's, and of denying it the character of being the science of the Absolute itself. This is the case in speculative theism, and subsequent theories of Ulrici and Rosenkranz, who were already preparing the way for Neo-Kantianism. But defenders of Hegel, such as Michelet, also found themselves inclined to reinterpret—or to change the meaning of *[umzudeuten]*—the logic of be-

ing. Given their quiet, tacit [*stillschweigend*] approach, and the fact that they were often cloaked in the apparent intention [*Meinung*] of merely interpreting Hegel's text, these arguments were particularly unpersuasive.

All these attempts—those of the reformers and those of the orthodox—are exposed to the same response to the objections of the opponents: they cause the first category of the logic to lose the character of immediacy. They differ from each other only by the way in which they bring about this mediation. If we ignore their peculiarities and focus only their method, four approaches to the Hegelian reinterpretation of the logic of being arise:

1. The first of them is found in Werder, Ulrici, and Karl Philipp Fischer.[10] They argue, in agreement, that the beginning of the logic cannot be a mere lowly determination [*arme Bestimmung*] but only the principle of the whole. Hegel had this principle in mind when he spoke of the unity of being and nothing. Thus Ulrici says that being as the beginning is that which is "indispensable" [*"Unwegdenkbares"*]; however, this is not an abstract being, but *is* only by means of its unity with nothing. For the thought of nothing shows first of all that in being there is a "determination by itself" ["*Bestimmung durch sich"*], and thus necessity [*Notwendigkeit*]. For the thought of nothing [*Gedanke des Nichts*] is also the negation of itself. If there is nothing [*Wenn Nichts ist*], then that is not the determinateness [*nicht jene Bestimmtheit*] that we think when we intend to think nothing [*wenn wir Nichts meinen*]. Thus, it is not at all nothing [*schlechthin nicht Nichts*], but rather being, which thereby proves itself to be *causa sui.*

Werder, in a similar way, holds being to be the positing of itself; that is, as the negation of all that is not being. And Karl Philipp Fischer is of the opinion that only being as absolute *possibility* of being [*Sein als absolutem Sein*können] makes the transition to becoming, while the transition of abstract being into nothing is said to be irretrievable vanishing [*unwiederbringliches Vergehen sei*].

It is clear that, in this conception, Hegel's own idea of logic, as a theory that reaches its principle only at its end, is inverted into its opposite [*in ihr Gegenteil verkehrt ist*]. This new conception cannot, however, be substantiated in text of the logic; it cannot take the beginning and the first transition as immediate. Rather it must assert that, in being, the opposite of itself is posited. But this is precisely the definition of a determination's being mediated [*Vermitteltsein einer Bestimmung*].

2. The second form of interpretation was developed by Hinrichs and by Kuno Fischer.[11] According to this line of interpretation, the dialectic of being results from the difference in which a thought-determination is to be conceived, such that nothing is thought at the same time. According to Kuno Fischer, being, which is a thought, presupposes the difference between being thought [*Gedachtsein*] and thinking [*Denken*]. But at the same time, it should be absolutely indeterminate, undifferentiated thought. Thus it also includes the sublation of precisely that difference, which is the condition of its thinkability [*Voraussetzung seiner Denkbarkeit*]. Being must therefore be both affirmed and denied.

However, this interpretation cannot be carried through, any more than the first, without changing the meaning [*Bedeutung*] and systematic position [*systematische Stellung*] of the logic from the ground up [*von Grund auf*]. If the logic wants to develop the thought-determinations for itself, and each one out of the other [*für sich und auseinander*], then reflection on their being thought [*Gedachtsein*] cannot be regarded as the driving force of their progression [*Movens ihres Fortschrittes*]. This, on the contrary, is the viewpoint of *phenomenological* dialectic. If this phenomenological viewpoint is introduced into the theory of thought-determinations—that is, into logic—then one is already well on the way toward neo-Kantianism has already been made. It may well be that such a step is inevitable. But it certainly cannot furnish an interpretation of the beginning of a logic which still calls itself speculative.[12]

3., 4. The two remaining interpretations are subject to the same objections as have been put forward against the first and second. The third gives rise to the logical systems of Immanuel Hermann Fichte, Rosenkranz, and Michelet.[13] They grasp the concept of being as an abstraction from all beings [*Seienden*], which they therefore think with the help of ontological difference [*ontologischen Differenz*]. Johann Eduard Erdmann and Christian Hermann Weiße make use of a fourth possibility of interpretation.[14] They take the being of the beginning [*das Sein des Anfangs*] as the copula in judgment [*die Copula im Urteil*].

It is not difficult to show that in these cases too, the concept of supposedly *indeterminate* immediacy is in fact being taken as a reflected determination; namely, as *determined* in opposition to determinate being, or as a concrete unity of subject and predicate. Moreover, the concept of can only be completely defined from the point of a further relationship to the subjective act of thought. Fichte, Weiße, and Rosenkranz prove themselves to be the more important of these successors, in openly confessing this fact, and not shying away from its consequences: a transformation [*Veränderung*], also, of the idea of logic itself. The result of this review of the critique and interpretation of the beginning of the logic can therefore be expressed in the form of an alternative: either one succeeds in interpreting the structure of the beginning of the logic, as distinct from the logic of reflective thought-determinations, and a concept of indeterminate immediacy can be developed; or, reflective moments [*reflektierte Momente*] must be presupposed from the beginning. In the latter case, it is impossible to hold to the idea of logic as a science of pure thought; for in such a science, it was necessary to give a first and absolutely simple determination of ground [*eine erste und schlechthin einfache Grundbestimmung geben*].

Having shown that the successors and critics of Hegel—whether avowedly or merely in practice—took the standpoint of the second of these alternatives, our next task must be to interpret the beginning of the logic, with the help of the guidelines for interpretation established in our theses and in the first of the two alternatives.[15]

*2. Structure of the beginning*

At the beginning of the section on being, in the first chapter of the logic of being, "pure being" is characterized in a series of turns of phrase [*Reihe von Wendungen*] before its unity with nothing is asserted. Some of these phrases have an unmistakably negative character, and evidently serve only to keep away any further determination from the purity of being. If one disregards these, two expressions [*Ausdrücke*] remain through which the concept "being" as such appears to be thought: "indeterminate immediacy" and "identity only with itself" [*Gleichheit nur mit sich*]. These also, in the whole of the logic, designate what is meant by "being." If there is any way to translate [*übersetzen*] "pure being" into other conceptual determinations [*Begriffsbestimmungen*], then it must be sought in these turns of phrase. If we analyze them, however, we see that what they have in common is the structure of the *via negationis*: in them, a category of reflection [*Kategorie der Reflexion*] is qualified by a determination in which that same reflective character [*Reflexionscharakter*] is supposed to be sublated.

Thus *immediacy* is the negation of mediation, and as such is itself mediated and determined by this concept.[16] Indeterminate immediacy is thus an expression that obscures [*verstellt*] the origin of the thought of immediacy in the logic of reflection, and is inverted into its opposite [*in sein Gegenteil verkehrt*]. Hegel can only mean to show, with this expression, that being is to be conceived differently from the immediacy of essence [*Unmittelbarkeit des Wesens*]. And he clarifies this expressly [*ausdrücklich*]: "Simple immediacy is itself an expression of reflection [*Reflexionsausdruck*]; it refers to the distinction from what is mediated. The *true* expression of this simple immediacy is therefore pure being."[17]

The same applies to the expression *equality with itself* [Gleichheit mit sich]. Equality, too, is a determination of reflection, which is developed as one of the modes of difference [*Modi von Verschiedenheit*] in the logic of essence.[18] Here, equality and inequality appear as perspectives on the relation of that which is differentiated [*Gesichtspunkte der Beziehung von Verschiedenem aufeinander*]. Equality can thus only be explained by relation to another, which is itself differentiated. In the second expression at the entrance of the logic of being, however, this essential determination of equality is negated, a negation which Hegel himself implies by speaking of an equality *only* with itself [*Gleichheit* nur *mit sich*].

Thus only these two determinations, by which the thought "being" is to be expressed in some other way, turn out to be negated reflections. They serve only to clarify the thought that is intended [*gemeint*] by "being," thereby referring to the fact that it is entirely free of structures of reflection. This occurs because, in this reference, the meaning of the categories of being are inverted and sublated [*verkehrt und aufhebt*]. No other method of explaining the thought of being is available to Hegel.

If, however, the nature of "pure being" can only be brought into view *via negationis*, the beginning of the logic cannot be adequately understood on its own. If one were restricted only to it, one would, inevitably, demand a more detailed definition. This

can be attempted in many ways, albeit within the limits arising from the system of objections in our first path. Hegel was fully aware of this connection. He immediately declares his hand, warning against false interpretations and objections to the beginning until after the study of the logic of reflection is secured: "The intellectual education required to perceive the nothingness of these refutations, or rather to dispel such arbitrary ideas on one's own, will be attained only through a critical cognition of the forms of the understanding. But those who are the most prolific in such objections straight away set themselves upon reflecting on the first propositions, without helping themselves or having helped themselves through further study of the logic to the awareness of the nature of their crude reflections."[19] "This restriction to the simple allows free play to the arbitrariness of thought which will not itself remain simple but brings in its own reflections on the subject. Having good right to occupy itself at first only with the principle and therefore not to let itself be involved in anything else, this industrious thoroughness in fact does the very opposite, for it does bring in the "else," that is, other categories besides just the principle, extra presuppositions and prejudices."[20]

It is particularly important to protect the beginning from such reflections. For, on the one hand, it must be characterized by reflexive expressions, but on the other hand, according to Hegel's own words, it is "*something unanalyzable* [*ein* Nichtanalysierbares], taken in its simple, unfilled [*unerfüllten*] immediacy."[21]

At the same time, he admits that the transition from being to nothing and from nothing into being is not susceptible to any further analysis, and must itself be taken in pure immediacy. "The mode of the connecting reference cannot be further determined without the connected sides being at the same time also further determined."[22] Hegel describes this state of affairs with images: nothing emerges from being; it does not pass into it, but rather has already passed into it [*es geht nicht in es über, sondern ist schon in es übergegangen*].

This transition would, therefore, not be understood in the sense intended by Hegel, if we were to try to interpret it in the following way: We first think of the indeterminate immediacy of pure being. We then notice that we have thought of a completely empty immediacy, and now we designate it as nothing, with regard to it emptiness. The model of this interpretation is the relation of form and content, and thus a structure of reflection. If one wants to construct such a model from the beginning of the logic at all, this is the least appropriate one. For in the form of pure immediacy, Hegel wants to think the unity of position and negation, of relation to itself and relation to other things—the idea [*Idee*] of absolute negativity. Nothing is not the empty form in immediacy, and being is not the form of emptiness. Moreover, nothing can under no circumstances be considered as the negation of being. It is immediate negation, as being is immediate position [*Gesetztsein*]. Formulated in the language of reflection, the beginning of logic, in which at first something is posited, signifies the simple indeterminacy of what is immediate, and then this proposition proves to be the negation, but the pure undefined negation in the form of nothing. It is only with the help of this thought that we can establish the order

in which being is a first, and nothing the second, way of thinking undefined immediacy. Their transition into one another must take place in the same immediacy which is proper to them; that is, without any reflection on form and content, nor any opposition of being and nothing over against one another.

This realization—that it is only this model that can mediate access to the scientific intention toward proof animating Hegel's logic of being [*Beweisabsicht in Hegels Seinslogik*]—does not, however, replace an actual proof [*Beweis*] that would make intelligible the fact that the immediate transition of two things, which are at first distinct [*zweier zunächst Unterscheidbarer*], into one another actually takes place [*wirklich erfolgt*]. But this proof, too, Hegel can only give *via negationis*. In order to give it, he required two procedures.

The first of them gives rise to new misunderstandings. Whereas, in the chapter on being, no reason is given for its transition into nothing, in the preliminary overview [the "General Division of Being"][23] this transition had been grounded in the categories of reflection: first of all, being is without quality and indeterminate. This character of indeterminateness, however, belongs to it only in contrast to the determinate, so that it nonetheless turns out to have been grasped as determined.

But this procedure has the same meaning [*gleichen Sinn*] that is also associated with the expressions of the concept of pure being: the procedure points to a necessity which anticipates, in an immediate shape [*unmittelbarer Gestalt*], a transition which is itself reflected, and which, therefore, precisely cannot be properly characterized as immediate [*Unmittelbarkeit gerade nicht zukommt*]. In the introductory section to the beginning of the logic, Hegel recognizes a further reason for the consideration given to the conclusion and result [*Ergebnis*] of the *Phenomenology*.[24] The logical dialectic itself, however, can only be understood if its beginning is taken in complete immediacy.

The second procedure consists in an invitation [*Aufforderung*]—to attempt to differentiate between being and nothing in a different way. Hegel refers to the claim that we can grasp the thought of nothing just as well as that of being, as if it was a fact. He seeks to show that every attempt to think otherwise than the way demanded by the beginning of the logic necessarily brings in the interference of reflective determinations, and thus misses the true nature of pure being and pure nothing. This method is best developed in Hegel's review in the Berlin *Jahrbuch* of 1829.[25]

Hegel's method at the beginning of the logic is therefore the opposite of a construction. It has one sole purpose: to make evident the connection [*Zusammenhang*] between thoughts; this connection, despite its speculative nature, eludes all construction. If the logic would indicate this connection without taking into account the difficulties of understanding, this could only be done with the simple utterance of the words "being" and "nothing." Hegel himself once considered whether a procedure [*Verfahren*] could be used, in logic, in which all anticipation of not-yet deduced determinations would be omitted. With respect to the emptiness and simplicity of the beginning, however, he recognized it as too abstract and therefore useless.[26] But

what logic can do as a discipline of science, beyond the simple saying of the beginning, is no more than to refute the objections [*Einwürfe zu entkräften*] to the simple enforcement [*Vollzug*] of this "unanalyzable" thought. Nowhere is the demand for pure thinking, which is observation by nature [*das die Natur des Zusehens hat*], as indispensable as it is here. Hegel always had the clearest sense of the difficulty that lay in wait at this beginning of logic: that the only evidence that can be adduced for it must itself be in the form of pure, simple thought—evidence which, moreover, can only be held in mind by one with an overview of all the connections of the system as a whole. This difficulty makes it impossible to refute objections by direct reason, and is therefore a source of irreversible ambiguity. There is, however, no way to avoid it. For this reason, Hegel never questioned the correctness of his presentation [*Darstellung*] of the logic of being *via negationis.*

It is well known that the new edition of the first volume of the *Logic* [1832] was Hegel's last published work, and that these are therefore the last words written in his hand. Hegel thought that, almost twenty years after their first appearance, it was necessary to rework almost all essential parts of the logic of being. It is interesting to note, however, that the logic of pure being was the *only one* adopted without any change in this new edition. We certainly know that Hegel himself was acquainted with at least some of the objections to his doctrine [*Lehrstück*].[27] Not only did he fail to acknowledge these objections, he did not see any need to improve upon the text of the first edition in response to them.

He did, however, thoroughly rework the Remarks [*Anmerkungen*] appended to the main text. Comparing the two versions, it becomes clear that Hegel was convinced of the impossibility of securing [*abzusichern*] the text itself against the objections to it.[28] In the second edition, in contrast to the first, he refrained from countering these objections one by one. Instead, he emphasized the difference between the logic of being and the determinations of reflection even more clearly than before.

In this context, it is particularly interesting to note one change that does affect the transition from being to nothing. In the first edition[29]

Hegel had remarked that the progress of thought [*Gang des Gedankens*] from Parmenides to Heraklitos[30] had come about through the latter's reflection that the former's concept of pure being is identical with nothing [*dessen reines Sein gleich Nichts ist*]. But Hegel later, in his *History of Philosophy,* brought this progression under a different rule than that of the logic's originary thought-determinations [*anfängliche Gedankenbestimmungen*], and thereby came into contradiction with his own interpretation of Presocratic philosophy.[31] In the second edition of the *Logic*, Hegel retained the Remarks reflecting upon the determinate character of immediacy; he erased, however, his relationship to Parmenides.[32] In his place he put the philosopher of reflection [*Reflexionsphilosoph*], Jacobi, who had sought to establish the validity of pure immediacy against the Kantian synthesis; however, Jacobi's is not that originary immediacy [*anfängliche Unmittelbarkeit*] of Parmenides, but rather one which can only be imagined as a product of abstract reflection. Hegel wants to

prove, contra Jacobi, that the result of his abstractions is not an indeterminate immediacy, but is rather determined through the negation of what is abstracted [*durch die Negation dessen bestimmt ist, von dem abstrahiert wird*]. Its abstract immediacy is thus also a negative [*ein Negatives*].

This proof, which can be reached via the method of the dialectic of reflection [*Mitteln der Reflexionsdialektik*], must be distinguished from the dialectic of pure being itself, by which the path [*Weg*] of Presocratic philosophy was defined. In Hegel's *History of Philosophy,* Heraklitos is said to succeed Parmenides, but not because the former reflected upon the determinateness and emptiness of the Eleatics' concept of pure being. Rather, Hegel argues, Heraklitos saw that this pure being could in no way be distinguished from the unthought of nothing [*Ungedanke des Nichts*], which the Eleatics had wanted simply to banish [*verbannen*] from all thought.[33]

Heraklitos thus thought the first concrete thought, and did so with the immediacy which Hegel also invokes as the beginning of his own logic, in the transition from pure being to nothing: the thought of indeterminate immediacy, first taken as pure being, can only be thought of as reflectionless identity with itself [*reflexionslose Gleichheit mit sich*] if it is also, on the contrary [*statt dessen*], grasped just as much as nothing [*ebenso sehr als Nichts gefaßt*]. Any attempt to further determine the nature of this relationship would of necessity corrupt and dissipate its originary character [*ihr anfänglicher Charakter zerstört*].

The result of this analysis of the beginning in our two paths has a series of consequences for the interpretation of logic in its overall context. These can only be stated in the form of theses:

1. The *science* of logic [*Die* Wissenschaft *der Logik*] must be distinguished from the process of logical thought determinations. This process takes the form of a unidirectional [*einsinnige*] development. The science of it is, however, a mode of the actuality of spirit [*Geist*]. In many cases, it can only be developed in a retroactive manner and with a view to the whole. We need a methodology of these conceptions, which would have the character of a "metalogic." One of their most important achievements would be a comparison of the second with the first edition of the *Logic*, which latter should have been re-issued long ago.

2. The immediacy of the initial determinations is, indeed, worked up into more complex structures which are more transparent to reflection. However, it is never abolished as the beginning of the whole, and can never be adequately interpreted by those subsequent structures. The conclusion of the system must, on the contrary, justify the insight into the necessity of the beginning in inexorable immediacy.

3. Neither is it permissible, therefore, to look for the *Logic*'s "real" center [>*eigentliches*< *Zentrum*] and the motor of its process in any of its later chapters—neither in the doctrine of reflection, nor in that of judgment

[*Urteil*] or of syllogism [*Schluß*].

4. The attempt to formalize logic in these contexts may be especially difficult—if not impossible—to achieve.

5. There is no way of substituting, in logic, for a reference to the evidence that being and nothing are conceivable, and yet indistinguishable, some other argument which would not require the *via negationis* for its justification. In this evidence, the groundless, original unity of the negative with itself is experienced. It is, therefore, one of the foundations of any possible certainty of the absoluteness of spirit.[34]

But whoever is able to think being and nothing in their immediacy—and yet differently from that indistinguishable unity [*jener ununterscheidbaren Einheit*]—will have thereby only responded to a demand [*Aufforderung*] that Hegel himself repeatedly expressed anew [*immer wieder aufs Neue ausgesprochen*]. If we could achieve this, we would prove Hegel successful in having thought back [*zurückzudenken*] to a ground of logic, without having had to go beyond logic itself. Hegel's followers made such an attempt. It must be acknowledged that it was justified, even if it failed in every way. From the reasons for this failure we, too, still have much to learn.

## Notes

1. Original: 'Anfang und Methode der Logik,' in *Hegel im Kontext,* revised edition (Frankfurt: Suhkramp, 1971 [1967]), pp.73-94. The author's bibliographical notice (p.209) explains that the paper was first delivered as a lecture to the Heidelberger Hegeltage in 1962, and first published in 1963 in *Hegelstudien*, Beiheft 1, ed. H.-G. Gadamer (Hamburg: Meiner) pp.19-35. The dates of publication (and republication) are particularly significant given the paper's claim that "nothing truly new has been added" to the commentary on Hegel's logic since the nineteenth century (see n.4, below). Given the extreme interpretative difficulties posed, not only by the nuances of Hegel's own terminology, but furthermore by Henrich's detailed treatment of it, we have included more interpolations of original German terms than would normally be necessary. We hope the infelicities of style thereby produced are outweighed by the clarity added. Translators' footnotes are denoted by [Trans.]; all others are Henrich's, except that where possible we have added references to English translations of the German texts cited. In the case of the nineteenth-century scholarship on the *Logic*, this is tellingly impossible due to the complete lack of translation of these works - evidence of the *Vergessenheit* into which Henrich characterizes these important studies as having passed (see, again, n.4 below). Sincere thanks for assistance in producing this translation are due to Isabell Dahms, Dieter Henrich, Daniel Leblanc and André Möller; to Nick Stang for providing the situation and the impetus for it, in the form of a seminar on Hegel's *Science of Logic* at the University of Toronto Philosophy Department, Fall term 2017; and to the Centre for Comparative Literature at UofT for support both financial and moral. [Trans.]

2. We have followed Henrich's select italicizations of the title of Hegel's book, (*The Science of*) *Logic*; references to "Logik" (without italics) are rendered simply as "(the) logic," as

context demands. Evidently, this includes the title of Henrich's paper itself, some of whose ambiguity of reference we have tried to capture. [Trans.]

3. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*, §114; *Encyclopedia of the philosophical sciences in basic outline. Part 1, Science of logic*, trans. Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) §114, p.176.

4. In the following, initial contribution to a commentary on the logic (which has yet to be written in its entirety), only the literature of the nineteenth century is considered. This restriction is justified not only by the fact that this literature is today largely forgotten. Moreover, it had already developed so completely the elementary forms of the objections to Hegel that, since then, nothing truly new has been added to them.

5. A perhaps telling ambiguity presents itself here: *preisgeben* can mean both to give up, in the sense of surrender or abandonment, and to deliver up (e.g. the secret of something), in the sense of elucidation. In this context, the two meanings seem opposed: either interpretation seeks to elucidate the specific shape of Hegel's opening dialectic, or it accepts that this shape must be abandoned. The latter is the intended meaning here: see (B), below, in which the positive interpreters of the logic's opening are characterized as "depart[ing] from Hegel in the manner [that is, the shape] in which they unfold the dialectic of the beginning." Like other ambiguities, however, this one remains suggestive of the centrality of such interpretative decisions in any reading of (the) logic. [Trans.]

6. A. Trendelenburg, *Logische Untersuchungen* (Berlin: Bethge Verlag, 1840), Book A, p.31 ff. E. V. Hartmann, *Die dialektische Methode* (Berlin: Duncker, 1868; 2nd ed. Bad Sachsa, Südharz: Haacke, 1910) p.78 (in both editions).

7. On Trendelenburg's response to the "identity crisis" in German philosophy after Hegel, including the significance of the *Logische Untersuchungen*, see Chapter 1, Part 2 ('Trendelenburg's *Philosophia Perennis*') in Frederick C. Beiser, *After Hegel: German Philosophy, 1840–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014) p.19 ff. On Eduard von Hartmann's—uniquely, *not* neo-Kantian—response to Hegel, see Part 6 of that same chapter ('Eduard von Hartmann's Metaphysics of the Sciences'), in Beiser, p.45 ff. [Trans.]

8. The German adjective *anfänglich*, denoting initial, something which begins or has the character of (a) beginning, has no precise, single English correlate: both "initial" and "original" fail to capture the active, decisive—even arguably performative—nature of the beginning of (the) logic, and of beginning as such. The distinction is important to bear in mind: the *Anfang* is precisely not the *Ursprung* (a much-beloved concept of the Romantics, from which Hegel largely kept his distance), in the sense that the former involves a decision [*Entschluss*]—an act—whereas the passive, pre- and over-determined objectivity (including, of course, an object located in deep obscurity, even fantasy) of the latter is attested to by the fact that *Ursprung* cannot take an active, verbal form without the help of an auxiliary. This is particularly important in the context of the *Logic*'s preoccupation with the proper beginning of science, which as Henrich notes is methodologically and epistemologically (because logically) foundational to Hegel's whole system; see in particular the last of the *Logic*'s many, near-interminable introductions, "With what must the beginning of science be made?," the verbal form here accentuating even further the *making* [machen] involved in beginning—the construction and performance of an act, the taking and making of a decision. Interestingly, the grammaticalogical situation is asymmetrically inverted in English: while one can be said to originate, to locate or constitute something original or originary, and to act originally or even originarily, the verb "begin" has no cor-

responding adjectival or adverbial forms. Given this lack, we have been forced to slip back from beginning to origin, but have chosen to translate *anfänglich* as "origin*ary*," in order to highlight this decisive, performative aspect of *anfangen* and *Anfang,* beyond the mere, opaque denotation of *Ursprung*. Cf Frank Ruda & Rebecca Comay, *The Dash—the Other Side of Absolute Knowing* (Cambridge / London: MIT University Press, 2018), on the centrality of decision to Hegel's "philosophy of *Entschluss*, of resolve," (p.108), particularly the Epilogue (pp.107-112) which cites a poem written by the young Hegel called "Entschluss" (1801). Ruda, in his chapter "Hegel's First Words" (pp.87-105), makes extensive reference to Henrich's "Anfang und Methode der Logik." [Trans.]

9. Latin, literally "the breath of the voice"—Henrich is referring to the doctrine of medieval nominalists such as Roscellinus, which held that universals are merely words or "voices" (*voces*), and have no other ontological status as "things" (*res*). Wilfrid Sellars has noted of this doctrine—"often regarded as nonsensical"—that it nonetheless has a (so to speak) "sound core" in the proto-Wittgensteinian "conception of predicates as auxiliary symbols." See Wilfrid Sellars, 'Reply to Quine' in *Essays in Philosophy and Its History* (New York: Springer, 2012 [1974]), p.159. In this context, we are inevitably reminded of Hegel's demonstration, in the Sense Certainty chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), that even the flattest, "simplest" and most apparently immediate of utterances – "this," "here" or "now"—always entail reference to a universal *beyond* the supposedly "immediate" (and therefore in fact mediated) "certainty" of sense perception. [Trans.]

10. K. Werder, *Logik. Als* Kommentar und Ergänzung zu Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik (Berlin, 1841) p.41. H. Ulrici, *Ober Prinzip und Methode der Hegelschen Philosophie* (Halle, 1841) p. 83 ff. K. P. Fischer, *Spekulative Charakteristik und Kritik des Hegelschen Systems,* (Erlangen, 1845). K. P. Fischer, *Grundzüge des Systems der Philosophie* (Erlangen, 1848), Book 1, p.59.

11. H. F. W. Hinrichs, *Grundlinien der Philosophie der Logik* (Halle, 1826). K. Fischer, *Logik und Metaphysik oder Wissenschaftslehre* (Stuttgart, 1852; 2nd edn, 1865), p.21 ff.

12. Here we must make reference to the interpretation of Bertrando Spaventa, which emerged from a combination of the ideas of K. Fischer and those of Werder, and to which Italian Actualism, especially that of Gentile, directly returns. Spaventa recognizes with K. Fischer that Trendelenburg's objections can only be overcome if one understands the beginning of the logic from the notion of thinking. ('Le prime categorie della logica di Hegel,' in the *Atti della Academia delle scienze morale di Napoli*, [1864], and others in: *Scritti filosofici*, ed. Gentile [Napoli, 1900]. I am very grateful to J. vd Meulen for alerting me to Spaventa.) Spaventa argues against, K. Fischer, that thinking must not only be understood, in the logic of being, as the act in which being is thought. Thought, moreover, takes itself for its own object. For this reason, nothing emerges as the power of the negative, to duplicate and to intervene (*prevaricare e geminare*), which dwells in potential in all thought. Spaventa justifies this interpretation with reference to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Only with the concepts reached by the former's conclusion, he argues, can the *Logic* be interpreted. Spaventa's attempt at a revision of Hegelian dialectics (see above, p. 215, among others) avoids the path toward Neo-Kantianism, onto which K. Fischer is forced by necessity. Spaventa maintains the absolute character of the logical determinations and understands, with Werder, the beginning of logic as the interpretation of the "*originalità*" of the pure idea. In contrast to Werder, however, Spaventa understands this beginning as at the same time a process of thought. Insofar as it is implicitly asserted that the unity of being and nothing forms the unity of immediacy and mediation in the idea

of absolute negativity, one must agree with Spaventa (see below). Nevertheless, he did not really contribute to an *interpretation* of the beginning of the *Logic*. For he demands that the dialectic of being be interpreted directly from the concept of absolute knowledge. Thus logic is wholly reduced to an explication of the result of the *Phenomenology*, abandoning its independence as the first science of the absolute, and in direct contradiction of Hegel's explanations, according to which the *Phenomenology* is the condition of the possibility of logic as science, but does not enter into the factual path of the development of the object of this science. Spaventa's theses represent the first of a long series of attempts to conceive the *Phenomenology* as the core of the system. Consequently, an interpretation of the *Logic* could not emerge from them.

13. I. H. Fichte, *Grundzüge zum System der Philosophie*, Bd. 2 (Heidelberg, 1836) p.58 ff. K. Rosenkranz, *Die Wissenschaft der logischen Idee* Bd. 1 (Königsberg, 1858) p.121. C. L. Michelet, *Das System der Philosophie,* Book 1 (Berlin, 1876) p.45 ff.

14. J. E. Erdmann, *Grundriß der Logik und Metaphysik* (Halle, 1841). C. H. Weiße, *Grundzüge der Metaphysik* (Hamburg, 1835) p.111.

15. That is, respectively, the strong distinction between the thought-determinations of being and those of reflection; and the immanent development of the concept of indeterminate immediacy. [Trans.

16. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik,* ed. G. Lasson (Leipzig: Meiner, 1951), Part 2, v.1, p.3 ff; *The science of logic*, trans. G. Di Giovanni, (Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p. 7. Future references to *Wissenschaft der Logik* / *The science of logic* are to these editions, with page numbers (and part/volume numbers where relevant) for the German edition, followed by those from the English (the Cambridge is a single-volume edition), separated by a semi-colon. [Trans.]

17. *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Part 1, p. 55; *The Science of Logic*, p. 47 (Henrich's emphasis).

18. *The Science of Logic*, p.34 & ff; p.29 & ff.

19. *The Science of Logic*, p.80; p.70.

20. *The Science of Logic*, p.21; p.21.

21. *The Science of Logic*, p.60; p.52 (Henrich's emphasis).

22. *The Science of Logic*, p.90; p.78.

23. *The Science of Logic*, p.66; p.56; see also p.85; pp.73-4.

24. *The Science of Logic*, p.53; p. 45.

25. Hegel, *Berliner Schriften,*. ed. J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Meiner) 1956, p.330 ff. Unfortunately, no English translation of this important text yet exists. [Trans.]

26. *Wissenschaft der Logik*, v.1, p.19; p. 20.

27. See Hegel's review of 1829 (n.25 above). In the notes to their translation of the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, editors T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting and H.S. Harris note that "[i]n the 1829 *Jahrbuch für Wissenschaftliche Kritik* Hegel promised a comprehensive review of five polemics against his philosophy. Actually he reviewed only the first two of them." *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part 1 of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze* (Indianapolis / Cambridge: Hackett, 1991) p.310n1. [Trans.]

28. For a contemporary perspective on the relationship of the remarks to the main text of the logic, cf Jean-Luc Nancy, "Of a Text to be Marked Again," pp.23-46, and "Remark," pp.47-9, in *The Speculative Remark: One of Hegel's Bon-mots*, trans. Céline Surprenant (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001 [1973]). [Trans.]

29. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik* (Nürnberg, 1812) p.33; *The science of logic*, p.45 ("With what must the beginning of science be made?").

30. We follow Anne Carson's spelling, which incidentally is closer to the German [*Heraklit*], as well as to the Greek, than the traditional English rendering "Heraclitus" [Trans.].

31. Hegel, *Werke,* ed. H. Glockner, Bd. 17 [*Vorlesung über die Geschichte der Philosophie*] (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1965) p.306 ff. & 343 ff. *Lectures on the history of philosophy,* v.1 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1892), p.249 ff. ["2. Parmenides"] & p.278 ff. ["D. Heraclitus"].

32. *Wissenschaft der Logik,* Part 1, v.1, p.81 ff; p.70.

33. Ουδέν μαλλον τό ὄν τοϋ μή ὄντος εϊναι. Hegel, *Werke,* ed. H. Glockner, Bd. 17, p.348; *Lectures on the history of philosophy* (cited in n.31 above), v.1, p.282. See also *Berliner Schriften* (review of 1829, cited in n.25 above), p.359. Here Henrich cites an ambiguous - and for us, untraceable - parenthetical reference in Hegel's lecture on Heraklitos, in the History of Philosophy course: "1. Das allgemeine Princip. Dieser tühne Geist hat zuerst das tiefe Wort gesagt: 'Das Seyn ist nicht mehr als das Nichtsein,' *es ist ebenso wenig*;**" (Hegel's bolding, our italics). The asterisks refer to a footnote giving the references as "*Arist. Metaph. IV, 7...* [and] (Metaph. I, 4: Ουδέν μαλλον τό ὄν τοϋ μή ὄντος εϊναι [the line cited by Henrich]." While we have not be able to locate the latter citation in Aristotle, it is clearly cited by Hegel as the source of "es [Seyn] ist ebenso wenig [als Nichtsein]." The entire phrase from the lecture - "This bold spirit first spoke the profound word: 'Being is no more than non-being,' *it is just as little* [as non-being]"—is reminiscent of Hegel's claim in the opening of the *Logik*, at the end of "A. Seyn"—"Das Seyne... ist in der That Nichts, and *nicht mehr noch weniger* als Nichts" ("Being... is in fact nothing, and *neither more nor less* than nothing"). (*Wissenschaft der Logik,* p.69; *The science of logic*, p.59, Hegel's bolding, our italics). The phrase singled out by Henrich here, albeit left in a nigh-unsearchable Greek, is entirely missing from Haldane's 1892 translation of the *Lectures* (still the only one available in English), which cites Metaphysics IV.7, but not I.4, and nor therefore the punning *Wendung* attributed to this elusive passage of Aristotle. And yet, lest we despair entirely at the wandering-away of of Heraklitean wisdom, we can see it wending its way into our own century, having wound up (albeit perhaps slightly wounded, maimed or transfigured) in the title of Slavoj Žižek's magisterial *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012). [Trans.]

34. From this thesis two consequences arise for any possible interpretation of Hegel, which should be noted: 1. Hegel's thought cannot be interpreted sufficiently by itself—neither from the unsurpassability of the beginning [*Unüberholbarkeit des Anfangs*], nor from the movement that emanates from it, but only by considering both simultaneously. It is a philosophy neither of origin nor of emancipation [*weder Ursprungs- noch Emanzipationsphilosophie*].—2. At every stage of the system's unfolding, the immediacy of the beginning remains present, insofar as both the mediation, and the modes of that mediation, are determinate and distinct from one another. The immediacy of the beginning's transition differs from the concept of the system not only in degree, but also in kind, of mediation.

An interpretation of logic, and above all of *Realphilosophie* must, above all, be an interpretation of its modes of mediation [*Vermittlungsweisen*]. The final and most difficult task is to make intelligible the interrelationships of these modes of mediation.

Rasmus Ugilt

# HEGEL AND THE RHYTHM OF LOGIC

In a few short but crucial passages in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*[1] and *the Science of Logic,*[2] Hegel repeatedly uses a curious term: *rhythm*. He invokes it five times towards the end of the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, where he discusses themes such as the nature of scientific method, speculative philosophy and the destructive force of the speculative proposition. In the Introduction to the *Logic* he again uses the concept in this striking passage:

> How could I possibly pretend that the method that I follow in this system of logic, or rather the method that this system itself follows within, would not be capable of greater perfection, of greater elaboration of detail? Yet I know that it is the one and only true method. This is made obvious by the very fact that this method is not something distinct from its subject matter and content—for it is the content in itself, the dialectic which it possesses within itself, which moves the subject matter forward. It is clear that no expositions can be accepted as scientifically valid that do not follow the progression of this method and are not in tune with its simple rhythm, for it is the course of the subject matter itself.[3]

The idea that rhythm is crucial to philosophical thinking and method is both novel and, to my mind, highly interesting. At the same time, it has received little attention in recent research on Hegel. There are of course exceptions. Jean-Luc Nancy's book from 1973, *The Speculative Remark (One of Hegel's Bons Mots)* presents a reading of Hegel's concept of *Aufhebung* and concludes that rhythm is both a crucial and a largely overlooked concept for our understanding of this key Hegelian term.[4]

More recently, Rebecca Comay has touched upon Hegel's preoccupation with rhythm in her article "Resistance and Repetition: Freud and Hegel." Here she argues that, if he is read through the lens of Freud, "Hegel appears less as a philosopher of inexorable progress (the infamous cunning of reason) than as a thinker of repetition, delay, and stuckness."[5] Repetition, delay, and stuckness are all concepts that have a certain rhythmic quality to them. If we look at the many famous characters of the *Phenomenology* guided by these terms, we can begin to imagine the rhythmic trajectory at work in them. Sense-Certainty, the Lord and the Bondsman, the Unhappy Consciousness, or the various forms of Reason, Spirit and Religion

are all in a sense "stuck" in a pattern of thinking and being. They are stuck in a way that could be described as rhythmic. On the one hand, because they are breaking off or disrupting a certain rhythmic pattern;[6] on the other, because there is a rhythm that in turn emerges through these very disruptions. As Comay notes, "Hegel will identify this deferring, disaggregative, interruptive—strictly death-driven—rhythm of thinking with the work of analysis itself, the unsung hero of the entire undertaking."[7]

The *way* in which rhythm is central to Hegel is still open to debate, however. In particular, it seems difficult to imagine how the concept of rhythm could have a central role to play in the *Logic*.[8] Nancy and Comay both focus primarily on the *Phenomenology* in their discussions of the term,[9] and the reason for this focus should not be difficult to see. One can relatively easily make sense of the idea that there is a rhythm in the life and development of the experience of consciousness presented by Hegel in the *Phenomenology*; after all, the life of consciousness is spatio-temporally determined, and thus subjected to the rhythms of life as we know it. The determinations of thought that are expounded in the *Logic*, on the other hand, are neither spatial nor temporal. And thus it is much more difficult to imagine how they could be rhythmic.

Henry Lefebvre's idea of "rhythmanalysis"[10] can bring us closer to this problem. Lefebvre proposes rhythmanalysis as a way of investigating the specific historical and social situation of late capitalism. He stipulates that "[e]verywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm."[11] He argues that rhythm provides a fruitful point of departure for an analysis that follows the movements of the concrete matter at hand:

> This supplies the framework for analyses of the particular, therefore real and concrete, cases that feature in music, history and the lives of individuals or groups. In each case the analysis should ride with the movements in whichever work or whichever sequence of actions until their end.[12]

Although he does not mention it, Lefebvre is here echoing Hegel's idea, in the quote from the *Logic* above, about rhythm as a methodological principle for philosophical analysis that follows the dialectic inherent in the content. Still, because Lefebvre is precisely stipulating that rhythm takes place where there is *space, time* and *energy*, we are from the start precluded from seeing how rhythm could make sense in *logical* analysis: "No rhythm without repetition in time and in space," as Lefebvre puts it.[13]

Hegel's *Logic* is certainly no ordinary logic, but it does follow mainstream philosophical ideas of logic in that it is a-temporal and non-spatial, even though Hegel's logical categories do undergo certain *movements*: those which (in)famously take place in "the mind of God before creation."[14] My aim in this paper is to make sense of these logical movements in terms of rhythm, precisely in the way that Hegel is proposing in the passage from the *Logic* quoted above.

Lefebvre's take on Hegel is, unfortunately, disappointing. He does discuss him in the book, but focuses on the somewhat tiresome triadic structure of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. Lefebvre argues that Hegel makes progress in moving on from what he calls dialogical analysis (in which two terms are posited against each other) to what he calls dialectical analysis (in which three terms are involved), and places his own triad of space-time-energy alongside triads formulated by Marx and Hegel.[15] Still, he eventually falls into the trap of understanding Hegel in an all-too-familiar way, where synthesis stands for the final "closure" of the dialectical movement.[16] This equation of Hegel's idea of rhythm with that of a final or closing synthesis (in a fusion of the former two terms) is certainly a misconstrual. I believe that we must go into much finer detail regarding Hegel's expositions in the *Logic,* in order to get at the point he is making about rhythm. In the following section I will seek to do so by engaging with Dieter Henrich's interpretations of Hegel.

*System and method*

In the history of Hegel scholarship, Dieter Henrich's work in the 1970's remains special. Henrich's attention to the most minute details in the dense passages of the *Logic* was unsurpassed at the time he wrote his interpretations, and it still is. As will be clear below, I do not agree with Henrich in everything, but his classic readings of Hegel are very useful for my argument, although he does not pay much attention to rhythm itself at all. What he does, instead, is to take seriously the idea Hegel presents about system and method in the passage quoted from the *Logic* above. The method of speculative philosophy must emerge from the subject matter itself, if it is to form a philosophical system worthy of the name. My point is that if we pay attention to how Henrich develops this Hegelian idea, we will be able to make sense of how and why it is precisely in the *Logic* that we find the most striking version of Hegelian rhythm unfolded and worked through.

The idea of a system is the idea that the totality of existence can be explained as a coherent whole: "the true is the whole," as Hegel famously put it.[17] This idea of a systematic philosophy that encompasses everything certainly comes with a few well-known problems. The accusation that his philosophy is in fact a political crime seems forever to cling to Hegel, and thus it tends to be something all Hegelian philosophers must confront in some way. Indeed, both Nancy and Comay (following Derrida, who is a crucial source of inspiration for both) reject the suffocating metaphysical notion of an all-encompassing system so often ascribed to Hegel. Thus, when Comay argues that he is a philosopher of "repetition, delay, and stuckness"[18] she is also trying to save Hegel from the most systematic tendencies of his own thought.

While I do agree with Comay and Nancy that it is crucial to notice the importance of rhythm in Hegel, and while I also agree that there are crucial elements of delay and stuckness in the rhythm of Hegel's philosophical thought, I am still not inclined to let go of the idea of the philosophical system. It is, I believe, in the very

idea of a (supposedly "totalitarian") philosophical system that Hegel provides us with the resources to expose what rhythm—and in turn stuckness—really mean.

By arguing in this way, I am of course going directly against the idea of a system as a smoothly functioning metalanguage. While I am defending the idea of a system, I am not defending the idea of system as an ultimate philosophical checklist, a complete set of final answers to the crucial philosophical questions. In my view, this kind of "absolute knowledge" is not what makes up Hegel's system. The crucial point, however, is that it is not because Hegel is *less* hyperbolic, *less* metaphysical, that he manages to avoid the trap of a philosophical metalanguage; on the contrary, it is precisely because Hegel goes all the way in the direction of metaphysical hyperbole that his philosophy is beyond the reproach of those critics who see his metaphysics as criminal. Paradoxically enough, it is in virtue of his vehement ambition to create a total system that Hegel's philosophy outwits the standard critique of philosophical "totalitarianism."

To put the point briefly at first: This idea of system as a philosophical check-list has a crucial requirement. If the system is to stand as such, then it must be a finished structure; in order to function smoothly, the meta-language has to be set in stone. One thing must therefore be excluded from the finished system, namely the genesis of the system itself, if it is to be understood in the way Hegel's critics tend to do, when they are lamenting his idea of a system. In other words, if the system in fact does integrate its own method of construction, then it ceases to function as a metalanguage, and then it cannot play the role of a philosophical checklist. My point is that this is what Hegel was aiming for, when he said "The Truth is the Whole." With this remark Hegel precisely sought to integrate the genesis of the system in the system itself, not in order to further cement the system as a metalanguage, but rather to reconfigure the very idea of what a system could be—to open up the philosophical field for another understanding of systematic thought.

This idea is also guiding Henrich's readings of Hegel. He sets out to show how the very thinking of the system, i.e. the method of constructing it, is identical to the system itself in Hegel. Henrich himself does not call this auto-genetic movement rhythmic, but as I will show below it does in fact make sense to look at it that way.

*Autonomous negation*

The crucial point of Henrich's reading of Hegel is that there is a fundamental concept at work in Hegel's *Logic* that makes it possible to identify system and method in the described way: autonomous negation.[19] For Henrich, it is the key to understanding how the developments from notion to notion in Hegel's *Logic* truly take place. Every movement in the *Logic* is undertaken as a transformation of the original autonomous negation, where each step simultaneously is constructing the system and inventing the method for this particular step. In this way the method for constructing the system is never external to the system; there is identity between system and method.

Autonomous negation is a form of negation that is very similar to the usual understanding of a negation: autonomous negation is a "not…." It differs from the usual understanding of negation in that it negates without presupposition. This means that it negates without having anything "there" that is negated.[20] This is what is entailed in its "autonomy." Thus, this negation works like a negation in a sentence such as, e.g., "the book is not red," only without the book or the redness or any other positive concept.

Furthermore, Henrich points out that the autonomization of the negation should not be understood as a substantivization. That is, it should not be understood as the "Nothing" which existential philosophy and phenomenology (e.g., Kierkegaard and Heidegger) have addressed in various ways.[21] The autonomous negation is rather a curious form of negation that does not negate anything. The autonomous negation merely says "not…."

According to Henrich, the dialectics that Hegel bases on the autonomous negation consists in taking the steps that are necessary to avoid suffering a logical breakdown once one has made autonomous negation the starting point.[22] Henrich's point is that the only way to defend the idea of the autonomous negation is to let it point towards itself. "Not not" is thus the necessary next step after the autonomous "not …." Or, in Henrich's words, "Autonomous negation is thus necessarily always already a double negation."[23]

The next point is that this double negation should not be understood as an affirmative statement, as is known from the most common forms of general logic. It is not simply a version of "P = not not P." The reason for this is, again, that we cannot legitimately at this point introduce any positive predicate or statement "P." Instead, the idea is that the negation negates itself as negation; it is not simply a negative statement, it is rather a negation that is self-negating. In Henrich's words: "The negation that the negation is negating, negates itself."[24] Thus, what is negated in the double negation (of autonomous negation) is the very process or act of "negating."

Henrich argues that this self-negating negation possesses "generative force."[25] From what has already been said it follows that autonomous negation is active in a productive way. Something is generated by the very self-negating negativity of autonomous negation. Perhaps surprisingly, what is produced by the generative force of autonomous negation is a concept of immediacy. In fact, Henrich introduces three concepts of immediacy that are produced by the autonomous negation.

The first concept of immediacy is found by Henrich with the argument that the self-relation of the autonomous negation is itself a form of immediacy; the doubling of the negation that follows from the idea of the autonomous negation is precisely immediate. Thus, the first concept of immediacy is the autonomous negation itself, understood as the immediacy of autonomously negating. Henrich says: "It (the negation) implies no relation to an other, it is only relating to itself."[26] Because autonomous negation can do nothing other than relate to itself, that is to negate

itself, and thus needs no external intervention in order for it to negate itself, this pure self-relating negativity is immediate.

The second concept of immediacy is the *result* of the self-negating activity of autonomous negation. To see how immediacy arises as a result of the self-negation of autonomous negation, we only have to consider that its own activity towards itself is a destructive one. If autonomous negation is self-negation, that must mean that it effectuates its own disappearance. In Henrich's words "The self-relation of negation is therefore at the same time its own self-cancellation.[27] Importantly, this disappearance is not without result. What emerges after the negation has dissolved itself is a situation where there is no negation. This situation is precisely immediacy, in the sense of that which is completely unmediated, i.e. without negation. In the words of Henrich, "From the logical situation in the beginning, in which only the (autonomous) negation was thought, a new situation has emerged, one in which there is no negation at all."[28] This situation without any negativity is the second concept of immediacy.

The third concept of immediacy is the concept of the transition from the first to the second. The second concept of immediacy is only there because of the self-negation of the first. In this way, there is a minimal umbilical cord between the situation in which there is no negation at all and the original situation in which there is only autonomous negativity. The third concept of immediacy that Henrich finds in Hegel is thus the ultimate success of the *Logic*. Even the notion of immediacy thought of as the purity of the situation in which there is no negation at all, can be thought of as produced by autonomous negativity. The point here is, in other words, that even pure immediacy, the very thing that is devoid of negativity altogether, can be shown to have been produced by pure negativity.

### *The rhythm of Henrich's reading*

To get a sense of the rhythm in Henrich's version of the *Logic*, we should recall Hegel's idea of the identity between system and method. There can be no difference between the method that establishes the system and this system itself, because otherwise the system does not live up to the demand that the truth should be the whole. What Henrich does with autonomous negation is to construe a logical thought that at one and the same time *thinks* the system and *is* the system while keeping this procedure tightly secured by logical necessity. To put the same point in different terms, what Henrich is seeking to accomplish is a certain *simultaneity* between logical conditions and the statements that are supported by those conditions.

Hegel's *Logic* begins in a point where there are no rules to guide the logical steps that follow, because the method cannot be given in advance. Still, according to Henrich, this point, the negative point of autonomous negation, has a generative force that necessitates a series of logical steps. But because it cannot rely on rules of inference given in advance, each step forward must invent the rules that gov-

ern the step as it is taken. Thus for each move Henrich makes in his argument, he is simultaneously doing two things: he makes a statement and by making that statement, he is at the very same time producing the conditions that guarantee that the statement is necessary. For each step from autonomous negation, to double negation, to self-destructive negation to the three forms of immediacy, system and method co-evolve.

This demand for simultaneity between condition and statement gives Henrich's reading of Hegel an unusual extra "problem" to overcome. It is not enough that his arguments are logically sound, because if this soundness can only be shown by stipulating a set of rules *prior* to the argumentative steps are taken, then Henrich has failed. It is this very need for simultaneity, rather than the accuracy and soundness of his reading that interests me here, because here we can see that rhythm plays a crucial role in Hegel's *Logic*. What better description could we give of the requirement of simultaneity between logical conditions and statements, than to say that there must be a very specific rhythm to the movements of Hegel's *Logic*, namely the rhythm of statements and conditions being completely in synch.

This rhythm is neither spatial nor temporal. It thus does not follow the paths of the rhythms, we are generally accustomed to. The rhythm of music for instance is distinctly temporal. The rhythm of a heartbeat pulsating through our veins is both spatial and temporal. The rhythm of dots in the line below is spatial:

. .. ... . .. ... . .. ... . .. ... . .. ...

The rhythm of Hegel's *Logic* on the other hand takes place in a different field altogether: the realm of logical conditions and statements. To get a feeling not only for how rhythm can be at play in the field of logic, but also for how the rhythm of Henrich's reading of Hegel is something out of the ordinary, we should consider how conditions and statements normally relate to each other in logic.

The logical conditions required for claiming the necessity of a certain statement does not temporarily precede the statement. But they are usually thought to be logically prior. Thus, for instance, the conditions that allow me to claim the statement B in a standard syllogism such as *modus ponens,* logically precede that statement. (The rule that I can conclude "B" whenever I have "A⟶B" and "A" must be *given in advance*—logically not temporally—in order for me to make that inference "B"). One could say that logic usually follows a rhythmic pattern that goes: condition then statement, condition then statement etc. Hegel's *Logic*, however, cannot follow this pattern, because it sets out from the identity of system and method. In Henrich's version the pattern would look something like this: condition-and-statement condition-and-statement condition-and-statement etc.

There are two potential points of criticism, we should mention regarding this kind of rhythm. The first consists in the worry that it is impossible to establish a regulated notion of necessity within Hegel's *Logic* as Henrich presents it. If we are making the rules of inference up as we go along (which is what Henrich seems to be

doing), then it could be argued that there are no rules at all. As striking as this point might seem, I do not think it hits the mark regarding Henrich. Henrich does in fact have an explanation of why the single steps in his rendering of Hegel's *Logic* are necessary. Each step that simultaneously establishes a statement and the logical condition necessary for making that statement is necessitated by being what I called "the steps that are necessary to avoid suffering a logical breakdown once one has made autonomous negation the starting point" (see above).

The second potential point of criticism has to do with the cadence Henrich sees in the *Logic*. Ultimately, I do not think that Henrich's reconstruction of Hegel's *Logic* is successful. But that is not because he is wrong in upholding the systematic ambition of Hegel, nor because there is a logical fault in his exposition, but rather because the rhythm of his reading follows cadence that is too strict. At the same time this is the point where Henrich's reading is most interesting, because the very fact that there is a crucial notion of cadence at play in Henrich's reading makes it evident that there is a certain rhythm at work in Hegel's *Logic*.

This is the genuinely interesting question that is opened up by Henrich's reading of Hegel: if the *Logic* is rhythmic, what rhythmic pattern does it follow? I think the cadence of the simultaneity of condition and statement misses the mark. But that merely opens up the field to ask further questions about the rhythm of the *Logic*.

*Henrich, Hegel, Kleist*

The step by step simultaneous development is closely connected to another idea about Hegel's *Logic* that Henrich has defended on numerous occasions: linearity.[29] It is a theory "that starts from just one concept"[30] and shows how all other fundamental concept can be defined in its terms. From autonomous negation Henrich seeks to draw a long line of concepts that follow from it, like knots on a string or pearls on a necklace. The only way he can do that, however, is by making sure that the series of conditions and the series of statements are in absolute lockstep—i.e., by making sure that they follow the cadence of simultaneity.

In a certain, quite illuminating way, Henrich's reading of Hegel brings to mind Heinrich von Kleist's famous text "On the Gradual Construction of Thought During Speech."[31] Kleist begins the text by boldly claiming that the best thing one can do, if one is in doubt about the answer to a tricky question, is to explain the answer to a good friend. One should precisely not explain the question or the troubles one has in understanding it, nor should one wait for the other to ask further questions back. Instead, one should precisely begin to do the very thing one cannot: explain the answer. Kleist's surprising, simple and profound idea is that the mind works best as it is engaged in speech. Often one will find that one learns the answer just as one is saying it out loud.

What Kleist and Henrich have in common here is a recognition of the impossibility of knowing in advance. Kleist's speakers cannot know what they are about to say,

at any prior point in time than when they are saying it. Henrich's Hegelian logic is doing something similar only in the logical realm of conditions and statements. Here the conditions for making the statement can only be known simultaneously with the statement itself. There is a crucial difference, however, that we should investigate. It can be made clear by looking at a famous passage where Kleist discusses Mirabeau's words of thunder to the Master of Ceremonies:

> Take Mirabeau's 'thunderbolt,' with which he silenced that Master of Ceremonies who—after the adjournment of the King's last Royal Session on June 23rd in which he had commanded the Three Orders to vote separately—returned to the assembly hall, where the Three Orders still lingered together, and asked them whether they had heard the King's command. 'Yes,' Mirabeau replied, 'we have heard the King's command.' I am sure that during this humane opening he was not yet thinking of the bayonet with which he concluded: 'yes, sir,' he repeated, 'we have heard it.' One can see that he still does not really know what he wants. 'But what entitles you'—he continued, and now suddenly a well of immense possibilities breaks through to his consciousness—'to draw our attention to commands in this place? We are the representatives of the Nation.' That was what he needed: 'The Nation gives orders and does not take them'—only to hoist himself at once on to the peak of audacity. 'And to ensure that I am making myself perfectly clear to you'—and only now he finds the words to express all the resistance for which his soul is armed: 'go and tell your King that nothing but the bayonet's power will force us to leave our seats'—where-upon, satisfied with himself, he sat down on a chair.[32]

What we are presented with here is a small phenomenological account of the mental process involved in gradually giving form to one's thoughts as one is putting them into speech. Kleist makes it quite clear that he thinks this is a process that develops in fits and starts. Halted at one moment it suddenly flows smoothly the next. The idea behind the simultaneous cadence of Henrich's developments is quite different. Here movements that go in fits and starts are precisely not allowed, because then the idea of linearity would be lost.

The point is, however, that Hegel's *Logic* in fact *does* move in fits and starts. In other words, I think Henrich overstresses the notion of linearity. And in a certain way this point is visible even in the small parts of Henrich's argument I have presented above. In these developments we go from autonomous negation to double negation to self-destructive negation to immediacy. The three concepts of immediacy, however, are more or less explicitly formulated as returns to previous elements. The first concept of immediacy is thus the immediacy of the self-relation of autonomous negation itself; the second concept of immediacy is the immediacy that emerges as a result of self-destruction of double negation; and the third concept of immediacy is the immediacy of the connection between the first and the second concept. Thus, instead of a straight line we have a logical movement that continuously loops back to elements, we in a sense should have left behind. In other words, the movements

of Hegel's *Logic* are precisely stuck in various loops. If Hegel's *Logic* is linear then it certainly has a lot of trouble moving ahead. For each step Hegel would be taking down the line of his allegedly linear logic, he seems to be again and again cast back to a previous point. Much more than being one long triumphant linear progression, Hegel's logic seems stuck (to use Comay's term).

Having said this much, it is crucial to note, however, that we did not reach this result by backing down from the systematic ambition of Hegel's *Logic*. On the contrary, it was a result of a series of considerations that follow from a beginning where we, guided by Henrich, took on the highest systematic ambitions imaginable, namely the ambition to integrate the very genesis of the system into the system itself. In so many words, being the most systematic, the most "totalitarian" can be the best way of resetting the entire philosophical field. The question now is what we are to do with this field that has been opened up. What kinds of rhythm can we find in Hegel's *Logic*, if we begin to look for them?

*Retroactivity*

In recent years, a very popular approach to Hegel has consisted in viewing his work through the lens of psychoanalytic theory in the vein of Freud and Lacan. In particular, Slovenian philosophers such as Slavoj Žižek, Mladen Dolar and Alenka Zupančič have been investigating new ways in which psychoanalysis and Hegelian philosophy intersect.[33] Here, the concept of retroactivity (*Nachträglichkeit*) has been a point of particular emphasis.

Žižek has discussed retroactivity countless times in his work. I will not be able to go into all the details here, but only briefly look at one very basic example from a recent book, *The Most Sublime Hysteric*. Here, Žižek takes on the old riddle of how many grains of sand it takes to make a pile.[34] The answer, Žižek argues, is given retroactively. Imagine gathering grains of sand one by one:

> At a particular moment, we simply recognize that what we have in front of us was, *at least one grain earlier*, a pile. In other words, the validity of our observation is retroactive; it remains true if we remove a grain.[35]

Here the logical step from one quality to the next (from a few grains of sand coincidentally placed on a surface to a pile) is precisely accomplished retroactively; upon the arrival at a latter stage, a previous stage is retroactively changed. The first time we were at the previous stage it simply was what it was (a few grains of sand), but the second time, (after having moved past it), it turns out to have been something different (a pile).

This is in fact quite similar to the process we have seen unfold in Henrich's rendering of Hegel's *Logic*, where autonomous negation becomes double negation the first time we encounter it, but where it retroactively becomes a concept of immediacy the second time. Henrich himself acknowledges that there is some kind of retroactivity in Hegel's *Logic* although he distinctly phrases it in what I would call a

hermeneutic language of understanding: "In this way, the *Logic* can be understood as a development of meaning, which in the end enables us to understand how it is to be understood."[36] While this is certainly a possible way of interpreting the *Logic*, I do not think it lives up to the expectations Henrich himself set for his reading of it . On the contrary, I think the issue of retroactivity remains unsolved in Henrich's reading of Hegel precisely because he emphasizes the theme of linearity to the degree that he does.

The question is what kind of rhythm is at play in retroactivity? It should be clear that it is a pattern where a certain reversal of prior and posterior, where the latter determines the former. It is relatively easy to write a sequence of retroactivity in logic: statement then condition, statement then condition. But how do we make sense of such a pattern? In the present article I can only make suggestions.

In music this pattern is in fact a very common occurrence. Niels Lan Doky, a relatively well-known Danish jazz-musician, recently explained that improvisation in jazz works retroactively in this precise way. Improvisation does not mean that you can just play anything. Even though you have no score, when improvising, you can still make mistakes. But the wonderful thing is, he said, that when you make a mistake you can retroactively undo it. By including the mistake in the tonal and rhythmic patterns as you continue to play, you will retroactively make sure that the mistake will have been no mistake at all.[37]

Likewise, I think an argument can be made that retroactivity is an essential part of various genres of electronic music—such as jungle, break beat and drum and bass. One of the most famous samples of recent popular music in general is the Amen Break (sampled from the B-side entitled "Amen, Brother" from a single by *The Winstons* in 1969). The Amen Break is not only used very frequently in the genres mentioned before, but has become an ubiquitous part of our collective soundscape 30-40 years, from *NWA*'s "Straight Outta Compton," to the theme music of the tv-show *Futurama*, to various commercials—the Amen Break has been featured in all of them.

The Amen Break consists of 4 bars.[38] The first two bars repeat a basic kick-snare pattern, creating a very familiar circular drum rhythm. The third bar begins in the same way as the former two, but ends by breaking the pattern, in a way that sounds almost as if the drummer missed a beat, creating a short syncopation. And then the fourth bar resolves the tension introduced by the third bar. Viewed from the angle of the present paper, the Amen Break is very nice example of rhythmic retroactivity. A beat that breaks down, but which is then retroactively made to work in spite of its breakdown. And, given the broad distribution of the sample, the Amen Break has the added advantage of showing just how attracted the human mind can be to such retroactive ways of making sense.

All of these examples taken from the world of music share a feature that makes them somewhat problematic for my present purpose. They are by their very nature temporal. Even Žižek's example is in his rendering somewhat temporal, as he puts focus on the sequential adding of grains of sand to a pile one by one. But

the point I am making here concerns the retroactivity in the realm of logic. This is not too much of a problem, though. What these examples show is merely that our thoughts are more than capable of dealing with retroactivity in very divergent and still meaningful ways. In the present article, I did not seek to go into details with the way in which retroactivity is at work in Hegel's *Logic*, nor did I want to investigate the various ways in which retroactivity can be understood rhythmically. Here there is a lot more to say. I merely wanted to show, first of all, that there are distinct and profound rhythmic patterns in Hegel's *Logic* and that the concept of rhythm in fact lies at the very heart of Hegel's project in the *Logic*. Furthermore, I think I have shown that different ways of approaching the *Logic* can result in readings that are rhythmically quite distinct, and conversely that different rhythmic approaches to the *Logic* might result in very different, perhaps even new, understandings of the work. I think the study of the rhythm of Hegel's *Logic* is only just about to begin.

## Notes

1. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 34, 35, 36, 38.

2. Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

3. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 33. I have amended the translation, substituting "fact" for "subject matter" in the final sentence.

4. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Speculative Remark (One of Hegel's Bon Mots)* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001) 100.

5. Rebecca Comay, "Resistance and Repetition: Freud and Hegel" *Research in Phenomenology*. 45.2 (2015): 237. Comay makes a similar point vis-à-vis Hegel's continued engagement with the French Revolution in her excellent *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2010).

6. Comay, "Resistance," 245.

7. Comay, "Resistance," 264.

8. Mladen Dolar hinted at the idea in his "Being and MacGuffin," *Crisis and Critique*, 4/1 (2017): 95.

9. Comay briefly mentions the determinations of reflection, which are central to my discussion of Hegel's *Logic* below, but she does not go into detail. Comay, "Resistance," 243.

10. Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992).

11. Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 15.

12. Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 15-16.

13. Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 6.

14. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 29.

15. "Thus: 'thesis—antithesis—synthesis' in Hegel; or in Marx: 'economic-social-political.' Or more recently: 'time-space-energy.'" Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 12.

16. Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 12.

17. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 11.

18. Comay, "Resistance," 237.

19. Dieter Henrich, "Hegels Grundoperation. Eine Einleitung in die 'Wissenschaft der Logik'" in *Der Idealismus und seine Gegenwart. Festschrift für Werner Marx zum 65. Geburtstag, e*d. Ute Guzzoni, Bernhard Rang, and Ludwig Siep (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1976) 216.

20. Dieter Henrich, "Die Formationsbedingungen der Dialektik. Über die Untrennbarkeit der Methode Hegels von Hegels System," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie.* 36 (1982): 154.

21. Henrich, "Hegels Grundoperation," 216.

22. Henrich, "Hegels Grundoperation," 216.

23. Henrich, "Hegels Grundoperation," 217

24. Dieter Henrich, "Hegels Logik der Reflexion. Neue Fassung," *Hegel Studien.* Beiheft 18 (1978): 323.

25. Henrich, "Die Formationsbedingungen der Dialektik," 154.

26. Henrich, "Hegels Grundoperation," 216.

27. Henrich, "Hegels Grundoperation," 216.

28. Henrich, "Hegels Grundoperation," 217.

29. Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel. Lectures on German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) 287.

30. Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel,* 38

31. Heinrich Kleist, "On the Gradual Construction of Thoughts During Speech," trans. Michael Hamburger, *German Life and Letters* 5.1 (1951): 42-46.

32. Kleist "On the Gradual," 43.

33. Comay's article "Resistance" takes a similar path and argues that it is by looking at Hegelian philosophy through the lens of psychoanalysis that we can free it from the entrapment of the cunning of reason.

34. I have discussed what we may call the "problem of the pile" to a greater extent in "Hegel's Excess," *Stasis* 4.2 (2016): 190-209.

35. Slavoj Žižek, *The Most Sublime Hysteric. Hegel with Lacan* (London: Polity, 2014) 21.

36. Henrich, "Hegels Logik der Reflexion. Neue Fassung," 323.

37. Niels Lan Doky, Heidi Vesterberg, and Sigene Roderik, *Improvisation: i musikken, på arbejdet og i livet* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2015).

38. In musical notation the break looks like this:

Alfie Bown

# HEGEL THE COMEDIAN

## *Or the Wink of St Vitus*

Writing in *Flüchtlingsgespräche*, Berthold Brecht says that Hegel had what it takes to be one of the greatest comedians.[1] This suggestion works in opposition to a whole history of philosophy that has asserted Hegel's status as the philosopher of complete and secure totality, and of seriousness. Typically, Hegel would be one of the last philosophers to be associated with anxiety, disorder or comedy and yet Brecht sees his philosophy as embodying each of these things, writing:

> He was always winking in the same way that others had an insuppressible St. Vitus' dance. His sense of humor was such that he could not think, for example, of order without disorder. It was clear to him that in the immediate proximity of the greatest order, there was to be found the greatest disorder, and he even went so far as saying: in one and the same place![2]

Brecht refers here to the St. Vitus dance, a cultural name given to bouts of mania involving infectious erratic dancing and laughter, occurrences of which were recorded from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries. The phenomenon is sometimes called choreomania, from the Greek *choros,* meaning dance, and *mania,* meaning madness. This dancing madness involves being taken over by (usually) temporary hysterical laughter, sometimes in large groups. Pieter Breughel the Elder is among those to have famously depicted the phenomenon. When it comes to comedy, it is tempting to relate the St Vitus dance to Bakhtinian carnival, another kind of infectious and "insuppressible" group eruption into comic disorder, or to what has sometimes been called "relief theory" or liberation theory in laughter studies. On the contrary, I argue here for a Hegelian reading of laughter which counters Bakhtinian carnival and ideas of laughter as liberating, assumptions which have dominated discussions of comic theory in the fields of both literary studies and philosophy. This function of laughter is embodied by Hegel's wink: a wink carrying the insuppressible threat of St Vitus.

The paper explores laughter as a process involving a kind of paradoxical relationship between order and disorder. As Brecht's comment suggests, in laughter order and disorder are not only "in closest proximity" but are "in one and the same place." Looking at Hegel's comments on comedy in the last 50 pages of *Aesthetics,* as well as earlier comments in *The Logic,* this paper argues for a Hegelian conception of laughter as a kind of "beginning," or what would later be termed an "event" in the work of Alain Badiou; a moment at which a new "order" emerges and is asserted, retroactively changing the past so that it appears as if the new order was always-already destined to be.[3] Laughter establishes precisely such new realities, I will show here, but it also comes with the wink of St Vitus, indicating the precarity of the new orders that it brings into being. Further, the article explores how Lacan understood this function of humour via his reading of Hegel and put it to work in his lectures to produce new realities in order to force his philosophy into being within the room of his seminars. In this paper, then, Lacan is used less as a commentator on comedy than as an example of a humorist who embodied a particularly and peculiarly Hegelian approach to comedy.

Hegel discusses comedy at length, though this part of his oeuvre is often critically neglected.[4] There is discussion of comedy in several important sections of the *Phenomenology,* and there is a much more sustained discussion at the end of his last work, the posthumously published *Aesthetics*. Here, Hegel dedicates fifty pages to the topic of comedy, yet, due to their critical neglect, these final pages of his life's work seem to recall stories surrounding Aristotle's lost book on Comedy, the second part of the *Poetics*. Umberto Eco speculates about these lost pages in his 1980 novel *The Name of the Rose,* somewhat comically suggesting that discovery of the text would undo the Western traditions of thought that have been set on their course by Aristotelian philosophy. Hegel, likewise considered by many to be an embodiment of established European rationality, finished his final lecture series with a disruptive and subversive discussion of comedy that has been "lost." Hegelian comedy—if it is recovered—would be equally disruptive of a number of assumptions about Hegel's status as the philosopher of secure rationality. It would also counter assumptions about laughter's apolitical and supplementary status, showing laughter to be of vital political power and a key feature of philosophical discourse.

Writing in *Aesthetics,* Hegel discusses the "comic as such," which can be thought of as something like the pure spirit of laughter, often separate from the general things which make us laugh. Hegel writes that such laughter:

> Implies an infinite light-heartedness and confidence felt by someone raised altogether above his own inner contradiction and not bitter or miserable in it at all: this is the bliss and ease of a man who, being sure of himself, can bear the frustration of his aims and achievements.[5]

This idea of comedy can be read as being on the side of the subject, and on the side of a traditional reading of the Hegelian dialectic and of Hegel's work as asserting totality and completeness. In such a way it could be read as asserting that laughter

helps the subject overcome its contradiction and progress in some way: there is first the subject, then the subject threatened by "its own inner contradiction," and finally the subject "raised above" this problem via comedy. Yet this reading is insufficient, and the flicker of St Vitus is visible in Hegel's eye, since he is clear that the process has to do not only with the development of a pre-existing contradiction into a total and secure conclusion (as in the clichéd thesis-antithesis-synthesis reading of Hegel) but with the absolute destruction of what has gone before in the emergence of something new, even if the new also, paradoxically, emerges out of the old in its very destruction or undoing.

Hegel returns to the definition of the comic as such and stresses the radically destructive function of the laughter it involves. For Hegel, such comedy occurs:

> When what has no substance in itself has destroyed its show of existence by its own agency, [and] the individual makes himself master of this dissolution and remains undisturbed in himself and at ease.[6]

For Hegel, a moment of pure comedy destroys something which "has no substance in itself" and only ever had "a show of existence." In its place, something new emerges. This new thing may be thought of as "truth," as if comedy abolishes appearance and reveals "true reality" underneath apparent fictions (something laughter studies and general discussion of laughter have often claimed).[7] Something is destroyed and "dissolved" which is shown never to have had any substance but to have been in the order of appearance only. This is an old tradition and one can think of any comedian revealing the fallacy of an eminent performer and showing the harsh and inadequate material reality underneath the show of appearance: Plautus's Miles Gloriosus, Shakespeare's Falstaff, Mel Brooks's Hitler. This is a precursor to what Freud would call "unmasking," a comic moment when "such and such a person, who is admired as a demigod, is after all only human like you and me."[8] Kant could also be thought of as philosophizing laughter in a comparable way when he comments that "laughter is an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing."[9] Such ideas, also a kind of "relief theory" see laughter as the transformation of an (apparent) something into nothing. The confusing difference is that in Hegel's conception of the comic this is carried out by the individual's own agency and the individual is able to emerge in a new form as the master of the situation, making laughter at least as creative as it is destructive, at least as much the production of something as the dissolution of something.

As such, the key to the complexity of Hegel's argument is found in another implication: that which is produced appears to have always-already existed; rather than appearing new, it seems to "remain" and to be "undisturbed," even though it has been produced anew in the moment of comedy. In other words, this laughter doesn't so much reveal the truth as produce it as preexistent. We might say that this type of laughter finishes something and starts something new, but that which it starts appears to have pre-existed, it "remains undisturbed" and "persists self-assured." Hegel implies that true comedy is not about dismantling appearance and

revealing underlying truths but that comedy functions in the service of producing truth itself. Perhaps we can hypothesize that comedy turns existing truths into mere appearance and creates new truths which appear grounded in more than appearance, as indeed truth always appears to be. I will try to bear out this hypothesis in what follows.

Rather than the *Aesthetics*, where Hegel discussed comedy directly, Brecht singles out *The Science of Logic* as the most comical of Hegel's works. In that text Hegel explores the idea of a "beginning," questioning how order comes into being. For Brecht:

> His book "The Greater Logic" ... is one of the great comic works of world literature. It is about the mode of a life of concepts, those slippery, unstable, unaccountable existences; how they insult each other and fight with knives, and then sit down to dinner together as if nothing had happened. They appear, so to speak, in pairs, each is married to its opposite ... What order declares is immediately denied, in one and the same breath if possible, by disorder, its inseparable partner.[10]

But, how is it exactly that, in the Hegelian schema, order and disorder can be married and sit down to dinner? To approach an answer to this we need an understanding of Hegel's conception of beginning, which is also developed in *The Science of Logic*. Viewing laughter through the idea of beginning can lead to an understanding of his conception of pure comedy in which order and disorder are simultaneously and dialectically present. For Hegel, when something *begins* it is established and presented as inevitable and secure, yet also threatened by a kind of infinite anxiety. As in Brecht's comment, Hegel explores how order is produced through a paradoxical relationship with itself. He writes:

> There is nothing in heaven or nature or spirit or anywhere else that does not contain just as much immediacy as mediation, so that both these determinations prove to be unseparated and inseparable and the opposition between them nothing real.[11]

Everything which appears immediate contains just as much mediation, and vice versa, anticipating a Freudian concept of the unconscious. Hegel considers these two things, mediation on the one hand and immediacy on the other, which have characterized all prior theorizations of the beginning, to be inseparable, although equally importantly, something falsely or apparently separates them. This process which divides the two is close to what we can think of as the beginning in Hegel's work. For Hegel we can say that the beginning does not exist at the beginning, but rather, the beginning is, in Hegel's own words, "*to be* made" by this division.[12] At the beginning there is a divider, something which precedes immediacy and mediation, cause and effect, which separates the two, producing them in relation to each other. The moment of laughter can be seen as such a divider, a rupture that produces both cause and effect, which determines both the object of laughter and

the subject laughing. It is this unsecuring sense of how truth and identity come into being which Brecht found so humorous in Hegel and called "those slippery, unstable, unaccountable existences [that] insult each other and fight with knives, and then sit down to dinner together as if nothing had happened."

A whole history of laughter studies has focused on the *causes* of laughter, seeing it as purely the effect of something else, while more recent work such as that of Anca Parvulescu has begun to discuss its *effects* and what can be caused *by* laughter.[13] In this conception of laughter via Hegel, laughter is conceived of as neither cause nor as effect but as a rupture which constitutes both. In his book *Event,* Slavoj Žižek defines the event as "*the effect that seems to exceed its causes.*"[14] An event is that which exceeds its causes, so that whilst it has political stimuli, it also establishes new causes for itself, its effects retroactively re-structuring the past into a new structure and bringing us within this re-ordered world, whether we like it or not. Laughter, conceived as Hegelian beginning, is exactly such an event. It brings the subjects involved (those telling the jokes, those laughing, and those targeted) into new ideological structures which are produced, entrenched, naturalized and enforced by the process of laughter, with the laugh itself (considered only as *effect*) appearing to serve as evidence of the existence of what *caused* it. Instead, laughter is both cause and effect, as well as a force that falsely divides the two. It is a true Hegelian beginning, which has three constituent parts that cannot exist save in relation to each other. The political effects of seeing laughter in this way are significant. Rather than an effect of or response to existing political discourses, laughter must be seen as a more active participant in the establishment of and resistance to political realities. Since such comic processes produce political reality, establishing order, they also leave that political reality precarious and open to being reproduced again. In other words, such laughter is order and disorder "in one and the same place."

Whilst for Brecht it is Hegel's *Logic* which holds within it the greatest humour, for Lacan it is the *Phenomenology* that is "hysterically funny." As if frustrated with his students' failure to pick upon his suggestive comments about the humour of Hegel, in *Seminar* XVII Lacan notes that "it has no kind of effect […] if I say to you that *The Phenomenology of Spirit* is hysterically funny. And yet, this is what it is."[15] Pointing to a lack of attention to Hegel's humour, Lacan hides his insight in a throwaway comment, himself making a joke by offering his audience the chance to ignore him and misread Hegel. "Hysterically funny" means not just very funny but that Hegel's comedy must be thought of in terms of the "discourse of the hysteric," something he suggested some weeks earlier in the seminar. For Lacan, Hegel's discourse goes against the history of philosophy, which has been nothing but "a fascinating enterprise for the master's benefit." On the contrary, with Hegel's "outrageous absolute knowledge," we confront the fact that "what leads to knowledge […] is the hysteric's discourse" (*S17*, 23). The hysteric's discourse is a constantly questioning and never fixed sense of knowledge. As the servant to many masters, the hysteric suggests knowledge on the precipice, always capable of collapsing and being replaced by another. The St Vitus dance is also "hysterical," both in terms of humour,

and in terms of the hysteric's discourse in a strictly psychoanalytic sense. For Lacan, Hegel counters the idea that knowledge is fixed (and the fixity, or ossification, of this very idea) with the fact that knowledge is always new. Truths are *produced,* rather than being perceptions of what is "already there."

While we talk of "discovering" the truth, particularly in scientific discourse, Lacan re-formulates the idea of discovery in *Seminar* XI to argue that *"the discovery is of a strange temporality."*[16] Recalling Freudian *nachträglichkeit, Lacan shows that the discovery of something also brings it into being in a new form.* This production of truths found in Hegel is, for Lacan, "hysterically funny," with the pun fully intended. It is funny because it shows how humour itself functions like a beginning or discovery, appearing to be a blast of clarifying "unmasking" which renders what previously appeared true to be mere illusion and establishes a new truth in its place, just like the hysteric in its relationship to its masters. Any classic example of unmasking laughter will serve the argument well: laughter issued at the pompous king is often thought to shatter the illusion (his performance of superiority) and reveal the truth (the common humanity of us all). On the contrary, it abolishes one truth (traditional hierarchy) only to replace it with another (equality in the eyes of God). Via laughter, a new master is established, making laughter a truly hysterical affect.

Freud did not consider himself much indebted to Hegel and it is Lacan who brings Hegel into psychoanalytic discourse. In *Seminar* XVII, Lacan criticizes traditional philosophy and makes Hegel the absolute antithesis of this, calling him the "anti-philosopher" (23). Influenced by Kojève's lectures on Hegel that he attended in the 1930s,[17] Lacan criticizes ideas of the ego-as-origin which characterize the psychoanalysis of Anna Freud and other Freudian schools. Distancing himself from these schools, Lacan writes that "one should not imagine that [psychoanalysis] is something that would be the discovery of being or of the soul."[18] Lacan, like Hegel, asks not what the origin of the subject is but rather how we are formed as subjects who see ourselves as originary. Ian Parker and David Pavon-Cuellar explain that "Lacanian discourse analysis" is an attempt to move away from models which "attempt to go back to some reality that was expressed, represented or reflected in discourse" and instead place the emphasis on "the reality of discourse itself," not just linguistics but the way in which real subjects are produced and constructed within those languages.[19] Lacan's comment about Hegel's humour is no throw-away remark but a central point of *Seminar* XVII to which he repeatedly returns.

> All the way through—take as an example what Hegel is able to say about culture—the most pertinent remarks concerning the play of events and exercises of wit abound. I repeat, there is nothing more amusing. (171)

Lacan stresses that reason, the very thing affirmed by traditional readings of Hegel, operates in his work as a cunning trick: "the cunning of reason is, he tells us, what directed the entire game." "However," writes Lacan, "the high point of this cunning is not where one thinks it is. It is the cunning of reason, no doubt, but one has to recognize the cunning of the reasoned and take one's hat off to him." Lacan then re-

fers to the "extraordinarily dirty trick of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*" arguing that Hegel's question "which is truth?" and "what brings him into play?" are humorous ones (171). Such humour—like Lacanian psychoanalysis itself—would operate against the discovery of the soul, working not to unmask what is already there but to reveal the cunning trick by which we emerge as subjects who see themselves as originary or who believe in the existence of a soul-like quality to our subjectivity. Lacan's insistence that this element of Hegel's project should be seen as hysterically funny indicates that the process described by Hegel is close to the heart of humour itself. We can put the hypothesis in the terms discussed above: laughter, while appearing to unmask the truth behind illusion and show what the subject really is, is in fact a process which involves bringing the subject into being while tricking it into thinking it existed to be unmasked.

Lacan's own use of light humour in his seminars is an interesting case study of the function of such humour. Lacan's humour has rarely been mentioned (except perhaps by those such as Noam Chomsky, who mindlessly labelled Lacan an arrogant charlatan). Like most jokes, they are usually seen as a light aside to the serious development of his arguments. On the contrary, his use of jokes supplies illustration of how Lacan understood the function of humour itself. From a certain perspective the jokes may seem arrogance, since he uses them to prove himself right, but in doing so he shows how ideologically powerful jokes can be. In short, Lacan's own use of light humour shows how the joke can establish an argument as a truth. One example is a humorous gambit aimed at his contemporary writer Marie-Claire Boons:

> Marie-Claire Boons would even give us to understand that […] in some way psychoanalysis frees us from the law.
>
> Fat chance. I am well aware that this is the register in which a libertarian hook attaches itself to psychoanalysis. […] The father's death […] does not seem to me to be of a kind to liberate us from it, far from it. (*S17,* 119)

Lacan stresses that psychoanalysis, from Freud's own work to his own, should not be thought of as on the side of liberation. Rather, its interest is in the *always structured* movement from one "discourse" to another, with the production of new subjects and discourses out of and in place of old ones. The joke in the above quotation turns on the phrase "fat chance," takes as its target the idea that "psychoanalysis frees us from the law." As such, by mocking the idea of liberation, it also targets the idea that humour operates as a "liberating release," which is often considered to characterize Freud's own theory of humour in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*. His conception of humour via Hegel reflects this primary interest of his work, stressing a laughter that is not so much on the side of liberation—as Freudian relief theory and Bakhtinian carnival have often been considered—but involved in the process of moving from one structure to another. Lacan uses this small joke to make a certain event-like movement happen in the very text of his seminar. The laughter (albeit brief) that we might assume accompanied this phrase "fat chance" in the lecture theatre full of Lacan fanatics, is itself an evental change; it turns

a reading of psychoanalysis (that of Marie-Claire Boons, who thought that psychoanalysis may liberate us from the law) into a *past* that is now laughed *at* and shown to have only ever had "a show of existence," to borrow Hegel's language from above. In relation to this past, a new present is established in which it is made clear that psychoanalysis is "far from" liberating. The process therefore establishes a *new* present in relation to this *equally new* past, both of which emerge as the joke is made. The joke has the three-part structure of a Hegelian beginning.

Another way of putting this might be to say that Lacanian psychoanalysis (like laughter) is not about truths but about myths or the truth of myth; it does not reveal the "truth" but shows us the truth of discourse itself. Lacan makes more jokes to hammer home this point:

> Bullshitting, as I have always said, is truth. They are identical. [...] Why is this privilege given to myth in psychoanalysis? [...] Claude Levi-Strauss states the complete myth of Oedipus [but] one can see that it concerns something quite different from whether or not one is going to fuck one's mummy. (*S17,* 111)

This observation is not simply grounded in the argument made by many post-Freudians that the Oedipus myth is not to be taken literally but metaphorically. Rather than being a myth which shows us something true, as metaphor can function, it is the mythic status of Oedipus which makes it important. Here, the joke about fucking one's mummy actually enacts what Lacan describes. The joke shows that we are wrong to see psychoanalysis as something which reaches back into childhood to find "truths," indicating instead that it is the myths we tell ourselves (about childhood for example) which are important. These myths, in being shown for the myths that they are (or shown to be a kind of true "bullshit" which governs subjectivity) are revealed to have never had anything but a "show of existence," to borrow Hegel's phrase once more, and a new truth is erected in its place, which then seems to have always been the truth waiting to be revealed ("unmasked") by the abolishment of myth.

Which truth is demoted to the status of myth here? It is the myth that fucking our mothers is at the root of psychoanalysis, a former psychoanalytic truth. Yet the joke doesn't reveal essential truth (what psychoanalysis is *really* about), but it produces new truth in place of the old myth. This new equally mythic truth appears true by virtue of its comparison with the old and now abolished myth. Thus Lacan is able to defend Freud, to get him off the hook, and re-establish his theory as a new truth: from this joke on, psychoanalysis was *never* just about "fucking one's mummy," and Freud *always* meant something quite different. It is the same "dirty trick" played by Hegel's *Phenomenology* and which Lacan found so humorous. Now playing this dirty trick on his seminar audience, Lacan shows that laughter functions to turn established truths into appearance and establish new truths its place. Psychoanalysis itself can be said to function comparably.

As a final example, we can consider one of Lacan's best comic moment from *Seminar* XI, in which he uses a humorous story about an encounter with a sardine can in order to explain the function of the gaze. Joan Copjec noted that the humour deployed by Lacan in this famous instance should be thought of in relation to Hegel.

> Lacan tells his tale of the relation of the subject to its world in the form of a humorously recondite story about a sardine can. The story is told as a kind of mock Hegelian epic, a send up of the broadly expansive Hegelian epic form by a deliberately "little story" that takes place in a "small boat" in a "small port" and includes a single named character, "Petit Jean."[20]

This little story is about the gaze—not my topic here—but it is also about humour. In the tale, the young man, Petit-Jean, points to a sardine can floating in the ocean and comments to Lacan (himself a character in the story) "*You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!*" For Lacan the theorist, the non-reciprocity between the subject and the sardine can illustrates a Lacanian theory of the gaze, but for Lacan the character in the story, what is most disconcerting is that while Petit-Jean finds his own comment "highly amusing," he had not. "Why did I find it less amusing than he?" asks Lacan, "it's an interesting question." The answer he gives is that the moment of exclusion from the humour makes it visible that the middle class Lacan had no place in the picture of working life in which he finds himself, but the further implication is that the laughter establishes a new reality to the scene in which the little story is set. After the laugh, the scene is rendered in a different light, with even its history constructed anew. Again, laughter is conceived as an eventual force that moves the subjects involved into a new structural reality. Recognizing this power of laughter is a prerequisite to being able to use it to create such a shift in the examples discussed above.

One of the most interesting comments Lacan made about laughter is the suggestion in *Television* that laughter may oppose capitalism. Here Lacan says, "the more saints, the more laughter; that's my principle, to wit, the way out of capitalist discourse—which will not constitute progress, if it happens only for some."[21] The possibility of Lacanian laughter working against capitalism has been brilliantly explored by Samo Tomšič:

> The association of laughter with the exit from capitalism is another surrealist moment in the citation from Lacan's *Television*. Laughter as a weapon against capitalism seems to suggest that capitalism might be structured like a joke, and the envisioned universalisation of laughter—"the more saints the more laughter"—would mean the downfall of capitalism. Should psychoanalysis teach us how finally to laugh at capitalism?[22]

For Tomšič, laughter, as something which reveals the structure of capitalism, might cause its very downfall. Such an argument is comparable with the one I've made here, that laughter has the power to change the structure of a discourse and inaugurate new realities. Yet, Tomšič's insight provides another important dimension.

Laughter is not just any event, but a particular kind of event or movement which makes something structural visible to us. We can have many masters, and many beginnings, while still within the capitalist discourse and framework, but what makes laughter different is that it makes such structures visible to us, undermining their claim to inevitability. Speaking of Hegel and of Derrida on Hegel, Jean-Luc Nancy—perhaps an unusual writer to evoke here—puts it nicely when he writes of laughter that "what makes sense about meaning is that it senses itself making sense."[23] If we can say that laughter is a beginning, or an event, that exceeds its causes and produces something which it appears to reflect, then what is specific about laughter is that it senses its role in the production of a cause which seems to have pre-existed, rather than believing in itself as an effect of already-existing objects, identities and subject-positions. Laughter, with all its anxieties, knows that what it brings into being is completely unsecured and always potentially subject to complete change. It could function not only like the hysteric's discourse, but to change the structure of the discourse itself. In such a way, this Hegelian laughter could be the opponent of capitalism. Like Hegel's philosophy, capitalism often presents itself as inevitable and secure totality, but if it is structured like a joke, and if jokes produce rather than reveals truths, then capitalism is shown to be based on the kind of dirty cunning trickery found in the *Phenomenology*.

Describing Hegel as the most anxious of men, his student Heinrich Heine makes the following comment which chimes with that of Brecht many years later:

> I often saw how he anxiously looked around, fearing that people would understand him. He liked me a lot since he was certain I wouldn't betray him; I even thought at the time that he was servile. When I was once uneasy about the saying 'all that is, is rational,' he smiled in a peculiar way and remarked: 'This could also read "all that is rational must be."' He quickly looked around, but soon calmed down.[24]

As Mladen Dolar has written, the passage depicts Hegel as "someone who must constantly attempt to hide his subversive underside."[25] This subversive underside, this article has proposed, is to do with laughter. In Heine's account, Hegel's manner is uneasy and anxious because he fears being understood, seemingly on this particular tricky point. Speaking privately to Heine, Hegel allegedly suggests an alternate reading of the famous proposition "all that is, is rational"; whilst the first phrase implies that being is inherently rational, the alternative suggests that this is because rationality itself demands to *be*. Hegel sees, in the very act of making rationality inevitable, the strange and powerful way in which rationality demands to *be inevitable*, and makes itself so, thus performatively undoing the very chain of causality and inevitability traditionally thought to bind the rational itself. This paradoxical move is the true St Vitus' dance in Hegel's viewpoint, and makes its destabilizing presence felt in what Brecht called his wink, and in what Heine called his "peculiar smile"—embodied, even unconscious gestures which constantly threaten to undo themselves in the very act of doing.

Whilst it was Georges Bataille who wrote "my philosophy is a philosophy of laughter" and Hegel would never have described his own work in this way, it is in fact Hegel—the philosopher of rationality—whose work threatens the very logic of the order it also establishes.[26] Whilst Bataille saw laughter as "non-knowledge" or anti-knowledge, humour in Hegel's philosophy—and here he might be heard to have the last laugh—is both knowledge and non-knowledge, both philosophy and anti-philosophy at once, "in one and the same place!" The peculiar role of comedy in his work is not found in its association with any liberation from the law, but rather in making visible a process by which a new structural reality comes into being. The wink of St Vitus, barely concealed in Hegel's work, is the indicator that such a reality could collapse just as easily as it emerged.

## Notes

1. Special thanks are due to Mladen Dolar for inspiration for the article.

2. Berthold Brecht, *Gessamelte Werke* 14, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967) 1460-1. English translation by Mladen Dolar.

3. This is not something that Badiou would be likely to directly agree with, since laughter is far from one of the four categories of the event. The theory is explored in full in my forthcoming book *In the Event of Laughter: Psychoanalysis, Hegelianism and Comedy.*

4. Agnes Heller makes an interesting connection between Hegel and the comic novel. See *Immortal Comedy: The Comic Phenomenon in Art, Literature and Life* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005) 93. Alenka Zupančič dedicates a chapter to Hegelian comedy in *The Odd One In* (London: MIT Press, 2008) 11-60. Zupančič's text has been crucial in reversing the trend of dissociating Hegel from the comic.

5. G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics,* vol II, trans T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) 1200.

6. Hegel, 1202.

7. See for example Elder Olson, *The Theory of Comedy* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1968) 35-6.

8. Sigmund Freud, "Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* vol. VIII, ed. & trans. James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001) 3-238; 202.

9. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 161.

10. Brecht, *Gessamelte Werke,* vol. 14, 1401-2.

11. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic,* trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 46.

12. Brecht, 1401-2.

13. Anca Parvulescu, *Laughter: Notes on a Passion* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010).

14. Slavoj Žižek, *Event: Philosophy in Transit* (London: Penguin Books, 2014) 3.

15. Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller and Russell Grigg, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, XVII* (New York: Norton, 2007) 169–70. All subsequent references to *Seminar* XVII are to this edition, denoted by *S17* (where necessary) and page number.

16. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques Alain-Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Norton, 1998) 25.

17. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel,* ed. Allan Bloom, trans. James H Nichols, Jr (New York: Basic Books, 1969).

18. Jacques Lacan, "The Tokyo Discourse," *Journal for Lacanian Studies*, 3.1 (2005): 129-144; 3.

19. David Pavon-Cuellar and Ian Parker, *Lacan, Discourse, Event: New Psychoanalytic Approaches to Textual Indeterminacy* (London: Routledge, 2013) 2.

20. Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (London: MIT Press, 1994) 30.

21. Jacques Lacan, *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, ed. Joan Copjec, trans. Denis Hollier et al. (New York: Norton, 1990) 16.

22. Samo Tomšič, "Laughter and Capitalism" in *S: Journal of the Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique* 8 (2015): 22-38; 29.

23. Nancy, Jean-Luc, "Elliptical Sense," *Research in Phenomenology*, 18 (1988): 175-191; 177.

24. Heinrich Heine, "Briefe über Deutschland" in *Sämtliche Schriften*, 6 vols, vol. 5 (Munich: Hanser, 1976) 197. I have used the translation of this passage given by Mladen Dolar in 'The Owl of Minerva from Dusk till Dawn, or, Two Shades of Gray,' in *Filozofija i društvo*, vol. 26, Broj 4 (2015): 875-890; 882-3.

25. Dolar, "The Owl of Minerva from Dusk till Dawn, or, Two Shades of Gray," in *Filozofija i društvo*, vol. 26, Broj 4 (2015): 883.

26. Georges Bataille, "Nonknowledge, Laughter, and Tears" in *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, ed. Stuart Kendall, trans. Michelle Kendall and Stuart Kendall (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2001) 138.

Goran Vranešević

# DREAMS, DOGMA AND SPECULATION

The remembrance of Hume interrupted Kant's dogmatic slumber, and inaugurated the period of reinvigorated speculative philosophy which would come to define the modern era. If we initially omit the scope of implications that followed, it seems that a simple dream of a philosophical figure was enough to form a new mode of thinking. However, Kant didn't propose a grandiose undertaking of renewing the human spirit, as he argued in the context of the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, where he merely questioned the premise of the possibility of pure sciences. He based his reflections on an essentially theological assertion that men of his time are reconciled with belief that the established mode of knowing is undoubtedly true: the dogmatic presumption being that it is possible to make progress in pure knowledge by strictly following the realization of concepts without first putting forth a critique of reason itself. At least in the formal sense, Kant articulated a contrasting framework which rested on the exposition of conditions of possibility of knowledge or appearance. Yet interestingly the path that led him there seemed to be knitted out of material made of dreams. Where do the conditions of knowledge then meet with dreams? Such a premise can lead us to hypothesize that Kant dreamt of certain speculations on Hume, which led him to articulate an unconscious desire. Essentially, desires have to be reread as a tool for representation, a principle which conditions thought. It sounds Kantian enough to simply follow the inner tendency of dreams to a logical conclusion. In other words, it isn't our purpose to justify Kant's philosophy, but to outline if (and how) a dream is capable of instituting a comprehensive change in reason itself.

If the presented topic is in principle centered around dreams, any interpretation which is deprived of the pivotal insight that dreams are a wish fulfilment (*Wunscherfüllung*) can only be seen as a bastardization of Freud's message.[1] Even if a transpired dream is as clear as a recurrence of an ordinary daily experience, there is nevertheless something additional present in it, an unconscious shadow. The latter can be presented through a distortion in the exhibited appearance of the dream. It isn't self-evident that this is the norm as there are undoubtedly instances where the latent and the manifested content overlap, whereby the unconscious desire is fully visible during waking life. However, even such cases don't exclude the existence of an essential characteristic of the unconscious desire according to which we

"must regard dreams as the guardians of sleep."[2] Dreams articulate the incongruity imbedded in (unconscious) thoughts in such a manner that the dreamer can continue slumbering. We only wake up when the dream content touches reality (*Wirklichkeit*). This trait is further linked with a peculiar detail which is often unformulated but presupposed, namely, that a part of the dream persists as unanalyzable, but as such serves as the kernel of our being. These aren't just specific instances according to which it is possible to recognize individual traits of a dreamer's state, as they exist as a structural necessity. With this in mind, let us return to the subject matter.

In the same vein that Lacan reinterpreted Freud's dream of Irma's injection, we should also look at Kant's supposed dream as a response to questions that occupied him throughout his life and accordingly approach dreams as though they were a sacred text, where "the author comes second, only as a pen-pusher."[3] At first, it may seem that for Kant the problematic core of metaphysics rests in its dogmatism, but interestingly enough, he himself remarked, "science is only possible by being developed dogmatically and, in accordance with the strictest demands, systematically."[4] If we are content to use the idea of dogma only as an authoritative principle pertaining to a certain community, then the dream wouldn't need Hume's intervention. However, following Hegel's insight, dogma is immanent to the process of thought, or strictly said, the theoretical part of truth one is obliged to practice: an insistence on discipline and fidelity to the word. By constructing his dream in a way that would prolong his sleep, Kant dogmatically dreamt the same dream over and over again. He continued to repeat the dogma and followed it to an unbearable end, a failure to establish an *a priori* link between cause and effect (Hume). In the last instance, the catalyst for Kant's awakening wasn't a break with dogmatic thought, but a fidelity to dogma itself.

Before interpreting Kant's revelation, let us be faithful to Freud's remark that "no one can practice the interpretation of dreams as an isolated activity, as it remains a part of the work of analysis,"[5] and firstly unfold the theoretical framework behind our endeavour. But in so doing, it would be more productive to firstly take into consideration a more modest dream, a dream that was dreamt by Hegel.[6] He mentioned this dream as a marginal occurrence in a letter to a friend (Niethammer), but it nevertheless made him restless to such an extent that he couldn't help but recount it. By his own admission, verbalization of the dream seemed the only way to free himself of its subtle influence, even if in other instances he stated that "it is not worth the effort to retain or remember dreams."[7] Even though his life is well documented, this dream certainly presents a unique glimpse into his mind.

On the night of the 5th of January, 1814, Hegel dreamt that he "was in a large group attending a disputation in which two physiologists [...] discussed the relative merits of apes and pigs."[8] While the disputants argued about which are more human, apes or pigs,[9]

> a loudmouthed, wide-bodied fellow named Pippel [*People or Pöbel*] [...] continually wanted to bring up still other matters, even juridical matters such as human rights, constitutions, and so forth. But the moderator, who, so to speak, played the role of fate throughout the whole proceeding, treated all matters of this sort as mere irrelevancies, mere packaging. He disallowed them from being seriously discussed, and held firm in his insistence that the issue was merely a preference between the two species. But a super-clever man, murmuring in the corner more to himself, then asked the moderator—this seemed to me unrelated—whether he meant that Pippel, should he someday feel warm in his heart and head, would, as is well known, risk the shirt off his back; that aristocrats would put this to their advantage; and that Pippel would thus play the fool in a game—as in fact occurs quite legally in the name of the Devil, and has always occurred from time immemorial. The historian Zschokke then ran up to jump in, shouting that the people of Bern had already received an answer at least verbally from Zurich, but that there were still many other considerations [...] and so forth.[10]

At that point Hegel woke up and it seemed difficult to him "to have to go to class and lecture on law."[11] Even before describing the dream, Hegel makes an observation to his friend: "I now believe the entire dream stemmed from the fact that a medical student handed me your letter."[12] A premature observation or interpretation suggests a similar inclination as a postmodern analysand confronted with a dream in one of his sessions: I don't know what my dream means, however I'm positive that it has something to do with my mother. Yet, it is paramount to sustain this problem and not rush to solve it.

Hegel usually touches upon the phenomena of dreams only in passing and with an uncommon anxiousness. The most coherent account can be found in a transcript made by one of Hegel's students. It is not a text which was published by Hegel himself, but a sort of a manuscript of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit* (1827-28), which was the basis for the formation of *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. Its focus is principally on subjective spirit or as Hegel explains: "Here we consider only the finite spirit, but in it the essential substance is to be spirit. It has this in common with the infinite spirit, to be spirit."[13] In it there is a clear throwback to Aristotle's *De Anima* in which he similarly expounds that the organizing principle of the spirit is spirit itself, thus having itself for its own object. Furthermore, Hegel identifies "Know yourself" as the basic imperative of spirit, and regards the imperative as a condition of spirit's achieving its vocation. Ultimately, it is self-knowledge that unifies the various faculties, powers, and/or functions of spirit. The spirit should not be considered as having an (pre)established being. It is rather:

> This movement, this process, this activity of going out of nature and of liberating itself from nature [...] The nature of spirit is to be this absolute liveliness, to be this process itself, namely, of proceeding out of its natural origins and natural immediacy, to abandon and suspend these conditions and thus

> to come to itself, to free itself. Spirit is only as it comes to itself, it exists only as it produces itself. Its actuality is only that it has made itself to be what it is.[14]

In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel offers a more accessible illustration: "spirit is the ethical life of a people insofar as it is the immediate truth; it is the individual who is a world. It must advance to a consciousness about what it immediately is, it must sublate (*aufheben*) that beautiful ethical life, and, by passing through a series of shapes, it must attain a knowledge of itself."[15] The narrative tells the story of spirit's triumph over the external world. This triumphal march begins with the simplest organic life, proceeds to the opposition of spirit in the struggle for recognition and culminates in the emergence of free spirit, to wit, spirit for itself (*fursichsein*).

Although spirit is supposed to follow a path of concretization (by cultivating reality it is to become, the spirit establishes its own presuppositions) and thus liberate itself from nature, that does not exclude the possibility of degradation of the spirit. However, overcoming such instances of infirmity are paramount to the existence of spirit, as its structure is always susceptible to disintegration, such as dementia,[16] which Hegel likens to the beautiful soul. In a manner that is similar to the way the beautiful soul substitutes acting for subjective fancies and ideals, the demented grasps at an ideal fantasy world, while simultaneously displacing the objective reality. Both forms of immediacy make the flight from the world into subjectivity their purpose. Hegel includes clairvoyance, hypnotism and magnetism in this category, and thus approximates his reading with the one offered by Freud on the omnipotence of thoughts (*Allmacht der Gedanken*).[17]

Hegel includes this topic of the inhibited spirit under the title dreaming soul. Hegel conceptualizes the dreaming soul as self-feeling, thought as a limited existence, a deficit, being devoid of the knowledge of its own contradiction. More specifically, the spirit at first appears estranged from itself and is thus reduced to a simple spirit, a concept of purpose (*Zweckbegriff*), but as a particular instance of spirit it is also a universal process of overcoming immediacy (individual cases determine the universal). While possessing the elementary form, spirit is a pre-conscious condition and some interpreters even find in it a Hegelian version of the unconsciousness,[18] meanwhile Hegel himself has another motive in mind as he uses Aristotle's passive *nous* to explain it. In essence, such spirit is slumbering. In this state, as an "immediate existence," the spirit is the soul, or, "the soul is the Spirit in nature"[19]: not yet spirit as spirit, for it belongs to spirit to negate and render ideal its immediacy, its being, its immersion in nature, and to make these its own. The soul itself is posited (as immediate) and it is posited by spirit itself. It is a play of spirit whereby it comes to itself. In this sense, the soul is the subject of sentience (*Empfindung*), it is sentient totality, a contingent totality of sentience, and as such "an existent concept, the existence of speculation"[20] within an enclosed particular world.[21] For Hegel, the soul fails to draw a distinction within itself. There is no outer limit. It is even "hostile towards the endurance of the outer world; it negates the world and makes it null."[22] Along these lines, it is possible to reason that the life of a soul mirrors the process

of sleep itself. Sleeping is namely not there to offer a safe haven for dreams, but the other way around, dreams lay the foundation for souls to fall asleep. While the purpose of daydreams is thus to shape sleep in broad daylight, sleep in the midst of waking, insomnia expresses a state bereft of dreams

If the soul is still sleeping, what exactly wakes her? It seems that desire is structured in such a way, that it avoids the state of wakefulness. Underlying this thought is the more fundamental query regarding the factors that differentiate the slumber of the soul at the moment it awakens? More bluntly put, what is hence the difference between the state of sleeping and waking? Even if at the first glance the distinction seems as clear as the summer's sun. Yet Hegel clearly didn't think that determining the two states was a straightforward matter. To substantiate his opinion he mentioned that Napoleon addressed this exact question to a class of ideology while visiting the University of Padua.[23] Both considered it a captious problem that does not seem solvable. Although differences may abound between the states of wakefulness and sleep, the similarities are more relevant to the present discussion. Not because of any personal preference, but because the requirements of the topic. Insight into the realm of the similarity is significant for the comprehension of the structure of knowledge itself. There are precedents of consigning the state of consciousness to another topic. An example can already be found in Aristotle's *Parva Naturalia*, where he argued that the common core of sleep and waking can be found in the perceptive faculty, but it was Descartes who made the deliberate step by explicitly claiming that the experience of a dream could in principle be indistinguishable from waking life: "For even thought I might be dreaming, if there is anything which is evident to my intellect, then it is wholly true."[24] Searching for certainty something that is not subject to doubt, Descartes completely disregarded the thin line between sleeping and waking and based truth on pure knowledge (*cogito ergo sum*) that has nothing outside itself. In a sense, Pliny (the Younger) was right when he said, *quod dubitas, ne feceris*, when in doubt, do nothing. There is thus sufficient similarity present between experiences of sleeping and being awake to ingrain doubt into our ability to distinguish them apart and/or causes us to mistake one for the other. Doubt insists even if firm evidence of dissimilarity between both states of consciousness is presented to the doubter. In not accepting the obvious, doubt persists as a blind spot of reason, a deceiving demon that befuddles our knowledge, the mirage of truth from which only lies can be expected.

How to overcome such an impasse to differentiate wakefulness from sleep that otherwise may not even be considered as a deadlock? At first sight, there couldn't be a more clear answer. Our conscious perception of our surroundings necessitates that we concern ourselves with images of the external world. However, the same can be again postulated of sleep: dreams as images embedded into the state of sleeping are clearly related to the mechanism of representation. Furthermore, dreaming also parallels consciousness, since dreaming concerns itself with images which are constituted by dream-work. In this sense, waking state and sleep seem to share a similar logic: a manner of contemplating, which utilizes reason itself as

the object of reflection. In order to avoid further digressions, let us present Hegel's solution. Although a simple observation would suffice, Hegel, for one, remains apprehensive regarding the function of dreams as it seems to stretch into the state of wakefulness.

While not undermining the features that link sleep and wakefulness, he introduces a general common sense distinction where the existence and confrontation with an external world is the sufficient reason to differentiate the two predicaments. This is furthermore substantiated by the premise that in sleep I am not for myself. Without having a coherent framework to hold together the complex of images in this state, "everything can run through one's mind without connection, without purpose"[25] and thus incapacitates the subject together with the totality of all determinations. We can all testify to the unpleasantness of going to bed intending to sleep and yet lying awake. The common remedy can be taken as a practical rule: one must stoically turn away one's attention as soon as consciousness starts to perceive any thought stirring. In a similar discussion of his own, Kant purposes that a random neutral object, such as the figure of Cicero, can be of great help. The moment that ideas lose their coherency, awareness is suspended. Hegel used an example of Jean Paul, who used nonsensical, silly stories to put children to sleep, to demonstrate that the suppression of the power of consciousness can only lead to sleep. Bearing this in mind, it is easier to understand why Aristophanes and Agathon were put to sleep by Socrates before he could conclude his argument in the *Symposium*.

We can surmise that there is a rational framework holding together the weight of the representational forms of wakeful and dreaming consciousness, however an immanent question remains unanswered: how is consciousness related to its own structure? Hegel offers a simple solution. While in waking I relate myself to myself, in dreams I do not relate to myself as the concrete center. Hegel continuous: an "entire interconnected nexus is concretely present in me in a veiled way [...] and when something entirely unexpected appears to me, which does not fit into that complex, I can ask, am I awake or am I dreaming? When by and by I learn to comprehend this nexus, then I regard it [even the unexpected] as actual."[26] Whenever unsure of my concrete condition I can ask, am I awake or am I dreaming? Dreams simply suspend the inner differentiation of the consciousness to itself, which produces enjoyment. It is precisely because of this, that it is even more interesting to observe Hegel's difficulties to grasp the concept of dreams, as it is precisely dreams where his logical exploration seems to stumble.

Hegel, similar to Descartes, applies a certain sceptical outlook to rationality itself. Descartes methodically examined the possibilities of certainty to such an extent that he excluded consciousness from its link with the world, and thereby inadvertently abolished the means by which one could declare a specific actuality. In contrast, Hegel made a slight readjustment of this endeavour. In a predicament where a plain thought is enough to bring about an existential dilemma of uncertainty, the subject is left with a forced choice, haunted by thinking itself it must incessantly contest its form and prevent it to settle into a shape completely of its own. This

path "can accordingly be regarded as the path of doubt, or, more properly, as the path of despair."[27] The aim of this self-accomplishing scepticisms (*sich vollbringende skeptizismus*) isn't in adjusting the cognitive apparatus to account for the truth, but it is rather "a conscious insight into the untruth of phenomenal knowledge, for which the most real is in truth merely the unrealized concept."[28] This is addressed through a meticulous exploration of the relation of reason itself in the other, which is based on a premise of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that science can be achieved only through self-knowledge of consciousness. Later, in the *Encyclopedia*, Hegel added:

> Science should be preceded by universal doubt, i.e., by total presuppositionlessness. Strictly speaking, this requirement is fulfilled by the freedom that abstracts from everything, and grasps its own pure abstraction, the simplicity of thinking—in the resolve of the will to think purely.[29]

This minimal form of thinking, thinking that is implemented on itself, without any sensual supplement, strictly speaking overlaps with Hegel's elevated concept of speculation, an activity of reason reflecting on itself. The difference being that the first expresses a process, while the latter defines its immateriality. Hegel inserts another subtle twist when he embraces Aristotle[30] and posits that sleep is a passive *nous*, reason or spirit. The passive *nous* is thus a slumbering soul, capable of speculation but not knowing it. It is being speculated on without its own will, activity of reason on itself. As such, it represents the opposition to the active soul, which is constantly at work, but at the price that it needs constant affection not to fall asleep.

Even if Hegel was working from the premise that the subject can inhabit the position of science, he was simultaneously mesmerized by dreams. As already mentioned, after recounting the dreams, Hegel wrote: "I woke up. But it seemed difficult to me to have to go to class."[31] Dreams introduced a sort of uneasiness into the realm of knowledge, whereby the place where knowledge is (re)produced becomes traumatically signified. The reason is that dreams themselves produce a distinctive knowledge, indifferent to what we are left with in the waking state.[32] One could simply add "in consequence of the dreamer's wish," as Freud was fond to do, before the explanation that Hegel puts forth. Freud attempted to bridge the difference that adheres in-between thoughts and dreams by reminding his readers "that a dream is as a rule merely a thought like any other, made possible by a relaxation of the censorship and by unconscious reinforcement, and distorted by the operation of the censorship and by unconscious revision."[33] Even here, there seem to be no certain marks to distinguish waking consciousness from dreaming, only a common denominator—thinking: an impossible coupling of thought and doubt, a premise of the cogito, a suture which nevertheless has to be made, as a speculative task.

The differentiating factor which constitutes the act of awakening from sleep is ultimately the hiatus or discrepancy within the dream narrative. It has everything to do with thinking and consciousness: there is namely a rational kernel embed-

ded in both. If we quickly come back to Hegel's dream, surely it was caused by the Niethammer's letter, however the traumatic part, which led him to doubt his own knowledge, was the moment that knowledge itself was exhausted in his dreams. The latter functioned as *Vorstellungrepräsentanz*, a sort of a repetition or a substitute of the representation. His dream revolved around the expression of knowledge and it was at the moment when the material of his waking life was repeated, when the meaninglessness of knowledge was presented, that doubt came to the surface and ejected Hegel from his dream. This becomes even clearer if we follow Freud in the reasoning that a dream wakes us up at the very moment when we might touch the truth. Such dreams are often associated with anxiety, as Hegel's example clearly shows, which are introduced as a last effort to mask the wish present in the dreams. The dreamer will thus miss the satisfaction in remembering only anxiety. We can offer an interpretation according to which the potential of the aforementioned passive nous comes to the surface and produces a sort of unbalancing (he doubted, but didn't know it). Hegel's dream supports this claim. Just before the point when knowledge collapses on itself, he suddenly wakes up, so he could dream on and thus allow knowledge to remain unscathed.?

With this in mind, let's not forget that our prevailing question still remains unanswered, the point of Kant's dream. There was obviously quite a lot of meat to Hegel's dream, whereas the latter one seems to consist just of skin and bones. Be that as it may, there is nevertheless some fine tissue holding both together. Initially, it appears that there is little evidence available to decipher anything more than what Kant already enunciated regarding his dream. Nothing seems to be hidden behind Hume's presence, but his theory of causation based on the notion of habit. In *The Conflict of Faculties*, we can find a suitable Kantian answer to this mystery: "that one who has given too much of his adult life, specifically more than one-third of it, to sleep cannot expect a long time for sleeping, that is, for living and growing old."[34] Hegel may be able to provide a sufficient answer to the status of the underbelly of dreaming, however it seems that the specifics of the initially presented ontological dream evaded him. It may even be luring to grasp at the elaborate and manifest content, however the proper response would be to emulate Columbo and ask one more question.[35] Specifically, the question pertaining to dogma, the state from which Kant and the modern era awoke. Instead of inserting an obvious explanation, according to which the dogmatic slumber was clearly a reflection of his specific period, a vague question, one which touches upon something unexpected and unpredictable produces a more productive answer.

So, what exactly is in a dogma? Dogma comes from Greek opinion and tenet. It is further connected to *dokein*—to seem—and in Latin—belief. However, it is in general applied to religious doctrines that are accepted irrespective of reason or evidence, and justified by an authority. They usually carry a pejorative denotation, as they presuppose beliefs without the use of reason. But these familiar definitions often omit its universal character as they have to be "communicated uncorrupted to all human beings for all future times [...] entrusted to the care of the learned."[36] Con-

trary to such partial explanations, Hegel sees in the emergence of dogma an immanent process of thought, or strictly said, the theoretical part of truth. Dogmas are meant to be practiced, which also encompasses the insistence on discipline, a fidelity to the word, whereby we blindly follow rules, but it is only in this manner that a speculative form can manifest itself. Therefore, it is the essential part of the modern world not a remainder of the old. Dogma is thus a theoretical proposition which is valid in itself (objectively).[37] Even when used in the general sense that the ancient Sceptics gave to "dogmatism," it constitutes nothing else but a set of definite theses. But we come closer to the truth by looking at its narrower sense, an interpretation attributed to Kant. A dogma is thus a proposition that obliges us to necessarily choose between two contradictory principles: for instance, either the world is infinite or finite, but not both.

On the one side, it is curious that Kant was thrilled to wake up from the dream of theoretical dogmatic coherence into the dreary landscape of transcendental idealism. Even though in principle, the immersion into thought seemed as a foreordained decision, there was a stronger motive opposing it, an aspiration to step behind the back of reason and observe its innards. Such a development is in line with Hegel's reflection that dreams must be overcome, speculated away, if we want to acquire true knowledge. On the other side, we already stressed that dreams are not just the guardians of sleep, but also the fulfilment of the wish. If it is possible to unveil an immanent interpretation of the slumber, this is the kernel where it can be illustrated. In being asserted, a dream isn't expressing a wish or its realization, but exhibits a fulfilled wish: the wish and its realization actually overlap. In this sense, Hegel's other claim that dreams suspend the inner differentiation of consciousness to itself holds up, however the question, how is the same dream able to induce a cognizant state, remains unanswered. Since Kant's initial wager rested on the dream's ability to force a transformation of the structure of thinking, the transition from one state to the other isn't merely a technical detail, but a cornerstone that facilitates the capacity to think.

If we accept that the dream material is embedded into the structure of desire (wish), it seems impossible to rationalize the occurrence of waking up as anything else but a response to an arbitrary somatic affect or psychic impulse. However, before making any hasty conclusions, it is preferable to briefly consult the father of dream theory and examine his *The Interpretation of Dreams*. More precisely, a dream of a father whose recently deceased child walks to his bed in flames and scoldingly asks him: "Father, can't you see that I am burning?" Shortly after, the father wakes up beside his dead child's burning cloth. The classical explanation is well known: smelling the smoke, the father integrated the scenario into his dreams and prolonged his sleep. While such standardized interpretations are based on the premise that dreams are produced to enable the dreamer to remain in the state of dreaming even when disturbed by external stimulus such as noise, this dream seems to undermine such a notion. In this instance, it wasn't the stimulus that woke him up, but the dream itself, which was supposed to prolong his sleep. The sentence in the

dream manifested a traumatic kernel, a message that held more reality than the impetus from his burning child's body. The father's leap from the dream wasn't a rescue mission to save his child, but an escape from the dream. You can give up on your dreams, but never give up on your nightmares. Clearly the question of waking cannot be formulated through the opposition between the external and internal encounters with the real. Rather, in the same manner that for Hegel the organizing principle of the spirit is spirit itself, here, the dream is the conveyer of its own (un) doing. Such instances aren't structured as a declaration of affinity to being or non-being, but are nevertheless expressed as their convergence.

Interestingly enough, Kant mentions a similar description in a letter to Garver, when recounting the manner in which his dogmatic slumber was interrupted by a dream.

> It was not the investigation of the existence of God, immortality, and so on, but rather the antinomy of pure reason—"The world has a beginning; it has no beginning, and so on, right up to the 4th[sic]: There is freedom in man, —versus: there is no freedom, only the necessity of nature"; that is what first aroused me from my dogmatic slumber and drove me to the critique of reason itself, in order to resolve the scandal of ostensible contradiction of reason with itself.[38]

This idea didn't simply interrupt a peaceful metaphysical nap, but inaugurated a distinctive structural break. A completely distinct philosophical position emerged, devoid of traditional metaphysical disputes, which attempted to ensure the truthfulness of their particular claims, as it was based on the failure to provide them at all. By following the premise that reason (striving to establish an unconditioned system) comes into contradiction with itself (failing because the process of understanding is always conditioned), Kant thus affirmed contradiction as its foundation.[39] The question posed to him in his dream was premised on a general result of a discrepancy contained in metaphysical disputes of that time which exceeded the limits of possible knowledge.

With this in mind, let us return to the initial conundrum introduced by Hume's spectral presence in Kant's slumber. The philosophical slumber certainly prevented a clear inquiry into the groundwork of the world on which it was resting. But that changed with the emergence of antinomy out of this calmness that came to prominence through the question of disjointed causality, the forefront of Hume's inquiry into its necessity. For him, there is no universal law governing the world, only simple successiveness based on experience. Nothing more. And yet, Kant detected an additional aspect:

> I thus first tried whether Hume's objection might not be represented generally, and I soon found that the concept of the connection of cause and effect is far from being the only one by which the understanding thinks connections of things *a priori*; rather, metaphysics consists wholly and completely of them. I sought to secure their number, and since this succeeded as de-

> sired, namely, from a single principle, I then proceeded to the deduction of these concepts, on the basis of which I was now assured that they are not derived from experience, as Hume had feared, but had arisen from the pure understanding.[40]

Taking Hume's wager that there is a sort of bond knitted between (empirical) natural and (logical) representational laws, Kant follows his steps and derives the first from the latter while furthermore conditioning their relation with unconditioned (pure) thought. Necessity is thus a feature of the mind or the spirit,[41] but is still inherently tied to the sensual dimension. If there is a contradiction to be found in such reasoning, it is certainly here. By dogmatically claiming that there is causality, while nevertheless asserting that it isn't necessary as it is based on momentary impressions, Hume's premise presents a structural discrepancy. Whereas the concept of causality can't be purely (subjectively) determined it is still based on a pure (objective) notion of comprehensive determination. It was such an antinomy that drove Kant from the dogmatic slumber. The latter didn't emanate from Hume's idea (arbitrary linking cause and effect), but the incalculable part attached to it, the interval between empirical and logical domain. The specific impulse wasn't solely entailed in the exhaustion of knowledge, as was the case in Hegel's dreams, but the folding of the formal twofold logic that evoked an irreducible contradiction.

Even though there is a discrepancy present in dreams, we must not seek a reason to disprove its relevance, as it is here that we must formulate a coherent answer as to how the representational process is formed: it is the repressions, rejections, displacements and condensations that correspond to the contingency of a speaking being. And one can find a similar logic in pure understanding that cannot exclude its own inconsistencies, articulated as antinomies and paralogisms. Lacan, in contrast, specifies this discrepancy as the kernel of the real or more commonly known as *jouissance*, the intersection of pleasure and anxiety. If we place this function into the framework of dreaming, the representation falls through and hence the dream becomes unbearable (resulting in us waking-up). We dismissed outer influence as the predominant factor in shortening the dogmatic slumber, but desire and representation have a pivotal role. Although the spirit may triumph over the external world, there is an immanent impasse with its own conditions. Dreams, be they of a speculative variation or a dogmatic type, are a wish fulfilment: "Thus its content was the fulfilment of a wish and its motive was a wish."[42] The Humean dream namely has to be interpreted as a fulfilment of desires (the Other's desire) to obtain knowledge, regardless of the consequences. Despite the impossible choice, Kant opted to stay faithful to such reasoning. And it seems that he only woke up, so he could dream further of speculative truths. In reality, Kant's slumber wasn't really successful in overcoming dogmatism as it was more in line with a well known story: As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into an enormous vermin (*ungeheuren Ungeziefer*).[43] Hegel

would later add, we shouldn't see weakness in this, but his greatest accomplishment.

## Notes

1. In a small footnote in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, we find a passage in which Freud appears to assert precisely this division between the subject and his desire: "No doubt a wish-fulfillment must bring pleasure; but the question then arises "To whom?" To the person who has the wish, of course. But, as we know, a dreamer's relation to his wishes is a quite peculiar one. He repudiates them and censors them—he has no liking for them, in short. So that their fulfillment will give him no pleasure, but just the opposite; and experience shows that this opposite appears in the form of anxiety, a fact which has still to be explained. Thus a dreamer in his relation to his dream-wishes can only be compared to an amalgamation of two separate people who are linked by some important common element." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume V: The Interpretation of Dreams*, Part 2 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1981) 580, n1. In Lacanian terms, a more modernized version which embraces specifics minutiae of the current era, the wish fulfillment should be translated as "a desire of the Other," a desire of the symbolic order and not just a personal whim. In practice, this reinterpretation enables the analyst to effortlessly inhabit the symbolic position of the Other.

2. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 678.

3. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-55* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991) 153.

4. Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 153.

5. Sigmund Freud, *Gesammelte werke I: Einige Nachträge zum Ganzen der Traumdeutung* (London: Imago Publishing, 1952) 562.

6. This is not the only occasion that Hegel mentions the stimulating nature of dreams in letters. The other example was of a dream that his wife had of her and his friend Niethammer. Hegel was suspiciously not invited to this dream.

7. Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit* (1827-28) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 105.

8. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Letters* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984) 303.

9. 9 The argumentation was the following: "pigs most resemble human beings in their digestive and other intestinal organs [...] while apes, on the contrary, for their drollery, have human-like appearance, mannerisms, imitative ability, and so forth." (*Letters*, 303).

10. Hegel, *Letters*, 303.

11. Hegel, *Letters*, 303.

12. Hegel, *Letters*, 303.

13. Hegel, *Lectures*, 6.

14. Hegel, *Lectures*, 13.

15. Hegel,*The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Terry Pinkard (online draft: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/ph/pinkard-translation-of-phenomenology.pdf) 395.

16. Individuals with dementia aren't worldless. They share a common humanity and rationality. They are able to engage the world and participate with others. A reliable method to achieve this, according to Hegel, is to set the subject to work: "To work means to become interested in a cause, to become interested in a cause outside of subjectivity." (Hegel, *Lectures*, 120)

17. The theme of the omnipotence of thought is especially prevalent in Freud's study *Totem and Taboo* (1913), where it is presented as the absence of a dividing line between imagination and reality. The boundary that usually governs the laws of the world are simply dismissed in favor of universal principle based on subjective postulates. Occurrences which would be categorized as accidental acquire a predominant meaning, or even more pronounced, a fleeting thought coincides with an actual event whereby the belief in its omnipotence becomes almost unavoidable. That is also the reason why we convince ourselves that we shouldn't think about school grades or the victory of the home team before they happen, because the intrusion of thinking may change the outcome. All such examples have an uncanny undertone, because they embody the lost part of reality, thought itself, which becomes visible and assumes its form.

18. More consistently put, the pre-conscious state is a unactualized consciousness.

19. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1830) III, *Die Philosophie des Geistes* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970) 38.

20. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie* III, 123.

21. "Our determination was that the individual existing for itself has excluded natural life from itself (the in-itself, the implicit being of individuality); it is in a state of opposition to slumbering natural life." (Hegel, *Lectures*, 104)

22. Hegel, *Lectures*, 104.

23. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie* III, 87.

24. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 49.

25. Hegel, *Lectures*, 106.

26. Hegel, *Lectures*, 106-7.

27. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 74.

28. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 74.

29. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline. Part I: Science of Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 125.

30. Aristotle, who precisely elaborated on the dispositions and states of the soul, wrote according to Hegel with De Anima "the best or even only work of speculative interest ever written on the philosophy of spirit" (Hegel, *Enzyklopädie* III: 11).

31. Hegel, *Letters*, 303.

32. "There is a knowledge you understand in dreams that has nothing to do with what you are left with when you are supposedly awake. That is why it is important to decipher dreams." (Lacan, *Seminar XXI: Les Non-dupes errent*, trans. Cormac Gallagher (http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Book-21-Les-Non-Dupes-Errent-Part-1.pdf), session of December 18, 1973).

33. Freud, *Gesammelte werke XIII: Bemerkungen zur Theorie und Praxis der Traumdeutung* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1967) 304.

34. Kant, *The Conflict of Faculties* (New York: Abaris Books, 1979) 191.

35. In the long-running detective crime drama series Columbo, the title character appears oddly out of place as he seems to exist outside the coordinates of normal reality. While in a regular series the audience is supposed to get to know the protagonist by also witnessing his intervening personal life and intimate predicaments, Columbo excludes this familiarity and only leaves unreliable hints of it. Instead, it focuses exclusively on the characters explicit traits. Each of his mannerisms, the head scratching while thinking, the inappropriate cigar smoking, the outdated appearance and the awkward conversations are all structured as a slip or parapraxis, symptomatic actions and statements that point to unconscious impulses, intentions, implications and thoughts. Furthermore, his presence in the TV series is devoid of anything else but the drive to solve a perpetuated crime. Standing almost as a caricature of a detective, he only endures as a pure question to being.

36. Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2009) 179.

37. Here it is interesting to refer to G.K. Chesterton, who regards dogma as one of two structural necessities of the human mind, the other being prejudice. If every thought is thus pervaded by a dogma, this theoretical foundation has to be disseminated to others for the dogma to remain coherent. This notion is best exemplified by the educational process: "A teacher who is not dogmatic is simply a teacher who is not teaching." Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *The G.K. Chesterton Collection* (London: Catholic Way Publishing Company, 2014) 295. Can this logic also be revised to fit a dogmatic position? Certainly: a dogmatic who is not teaching is in fact not dogmatic.

38. Kant, *Correspondence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 552.

39. Kant is clear about these circumstances from the very outset of his first critique: "Human reason has the peculiar fate in one type of its cognitions that it is burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, since they transcend every capacity of human reason." Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 99. Of course, assigned with such an impossible task, man does not accept failure. "For human reason, without being moved by the mere vanity of knowing it all, inexorably pushes on, driven by its own need to such questions that cannot be answered by any experiential use of reason and of principles borrowed from such a use." (Kant, *Critique*, 147) The crucial part that shouldn't be overlooked is that the function of overreaching is essential for experience to exist: "If the use of higher abilities of understanding would be limited to what was directly given at the level of sensuality; if there was thus no function of reaching over itself, - then there would be no experience." Zdravko Kobe, "Antinomičnost pri Kantu," *Problemi* 40.3-4 (2002): 145-187.

40. Kant, *Prolegomena*, 10.

41. More specifically, it is the representational mechanisms of understanding (materialized through *a priori* concepts) that structures experience and the causal links within which it operates.

42. Freud, *Standard Edition, Volume IV: The Interpretation of Dreams, Part 1* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1971) 119.

43. An *Ungeziefer* isn't a specific insectoid animal, as usually depicted, but any animal unfit for sacrifice.

Bara Kolenc

# THE PARADOXES OF THE LIMPING CAUSE IN KIERKEGAARD, HEGEL AND LACAN

*At this point, I should define unconscious cause, neither as an existent, nor as a ουχ ον, a non-existent... It is αμη ον of the prohibition that brings to being an existent in spite of its non-advent, it is a function of the impossible on which a certainty is based.*[1]

The constitution of the psychoanalytic subject is essentially determined by a certain leap of causality. This leap does not take place as an effect of the signifying chain, *automaton*, but rather as an effect of the *automaton* always already being barred by *tyche*, the impossible encounter with the real, or the encounter with the real as impossible. It is precisely this inherent impossibility, which does not allow for things to combine in a causal chain, but also does not let them surrender to coincidence, that determines the function of the limping cause operating in the unconscious.

The limping cause is a lost cause, but not a cause that was lost—precisely as lost it is essentially at work. It grounds the subject, but it grounds it by way of undermining the ground itself. It grounds it in the gap that always establishes a certain delay between cause and effect and thereby prevents the subject from arising as an effect of a causal series structuring its history. Repetition in psychoanalysis means exactly this: in the moment the subject emerges in the signifying chain, it retroactively produces its own cause, but is at the same time prevented from establishing itself as the effect of this cause.

The psychoanalytic conception of repetition and the limping cause as articulated by Lacan through his reinterpretation of Aristotle's coincidental causes *automaton* and *tyche* can be read through Kierkegaard's *double paradox of repetition*. By introducing this paradox, Kierkegaard carries out a surprising *tour de force*: it is exactly the structural impossibility of repetition that is the only condition of its possibility. He thereby delineates a subversive ontology that departs from the classical ontology of being: instead of the strict delimitation of the area of being and the area of non-being, he claims that they mutually condition each other and structurally

belong to one another. Through the prism of the limping cause we can read also Hegel's dialectics: negation is the constitutive moment of repetition as a co-determination of determinacy and indeterminacy, being and nothing, indistinction and distinction, finitude and infinity.

*The double paradox of repetition*

In Kierkegaard's famous book on repetition, published in 1843 under the pseudonym Constantin Constantinus,[2] we can trace a certain *double paradox of repetition*, which Kierkegaard himself did not expressly articulate, but whose exceptional structure practically offers itself to thought, as it were. This paradox consists of two premises, with each premise itself being a paradox.

The first premise of Kierkegaard's double paradox of repetition is established when Kierkegaard faces a *fundamental failure of repetition*—the radical impossibility for a given event to be repeated in the same form. This was precisely why he was disappointed with his experimental trip to Berlin, which ended with his finding that repetition is not possible:

> After several days' repetition of this, I became bitter, so tired of repetition that I decided to return home. I made no great discovery, yet it was strange, because I had discovered that there was no such thing as repetition. I became aware of this by having it repeated in every possible way.[3]

Repetition, says Kierkegaard, the pure repetition of the same, is not possible. All that constantly and stubbornly keeps returning is merely the failure of repetition. There is a paradox here: nothing can be repeated, but this is also precisely what keeps repeating.

At this point, Kierkegaard carries out an unexpected and key *tour de force* that determines modernity: it is exactly the failure of repetition, says Kierkegaard, that is the key to its success. The fact that it is merely the impossibility of repetition that keeps repeating is what first even establishes the actual terrain of repetition, whose condition of possibility is nothing but its fundamental impossibility: *this stubborn return of the failure of repetition is already repetition itself.*

Kierkegaard thereby traces a new, modern logic of failure that does not bring resignation and destruction, but is rather constructive insofar as it operates as the condition of possibility of every kind of motion or change. Failure is not a hindrance to the perfect repetition of the same, but is itself the very constitutive moment of repetition. In psychoanalysis, the failure of repetition is the constitutive moment of repetition as the movement of the signifying structure and the logic of alienation through which the subject emerges in this signifying structure: "The function of missing lies at the centre of analytic repetition. The appointment is always missed – this is what constitutes, in comparison with *tyche*, the vanity of repetition, its constitutive occultation."[4]

The second premise of Kierkegaard's double paradox consists of another contradictory situation traversing the logic of repetition: difference, the exception, will not be reached beyond repetition, it will not be discovered in pure transgression, deviation or variation, but will be produced only where it is impossible to look for it—in the pure repetition of the same. The paradox here is that *the deviation from the repetition of the same is possible only through the repetition of the same*:

> Hope is a pretty girl, who slips away from one's grasp. Recollection is a beautiful older woman who never quite suits the moment. Repetition is a beloved wife of whom one never tires because it is only the new of which one tires. One never tires of the old, and when one has it before oneself, one is happy, and only a person who does not delude himself that repetition ought to be something new, for then he tires of it, is genuinely happy.[5]

Here, Kierkegaard again carries out a speculative twist similar to the first premise, turning the impasse of the paradox into the stem cell of thought: the new, says Kierkegaard, is not something we must look for beyond repetition, beyond the structures we are inscribed in. The greatest diversity, claims Kierkegaard, is the greatest boredom—what is more boring than buying a different yoghurt every day, sleeping with a different person every night, and changing our political affiliation every month? Is not this the pure routine of the same? For Kierkegaard, diversity is merely what is externalised, designated as *interesting*, which does not establish difference, but forms the order of the general. The interesting, which Kierkegaard's aesthete indulges in—is nothing but exchangeability, which does not have the subversive power of *exception*: exception, the Kierkegaardian impossible moment of the ultimate realization of existence in repetition, precisely cannot be captured in variations, but takes place through a radical repetition of the same.

The new will not be reached with its—always different—designation, or the variation of meaning, for, the moment we try to name difference, we necessarily lose it. The new is not marked, named *new*, but always emerges behind our backs as an uncodifiable and uncontrollable moment of repetition itself, as its inherent surplus—lack. If we want to reach the movement of true repetition, we have to persist in its paradoxical structure, *the impossible repetition of the same*, which in itself produces difference, the new. *The possibility of repetition lies precisely in its own impossibility*: this is the realization that elevates Kierkegaardian existence from an ethical to a religious level.

The double Kierkegaardian paradox binds together its two premises, two commitments of the impossible as the condition of possibility of repetition, which are themselves paradoxes, that is: the *paradox that repetition as repetition of the same is not possible, and yet this impossibility keeps repeating*, and, on the other hand, the *paradox that the condition of possibility of the emergence of difference is precisely the perfect repetition of the same.* The double paradox, the paradox of two paradoxes, is therefore the following: *although the repetition of the same is impossible, although difference cannot be eliminated in order to achieve a perfect repetition, the condition of*

*possibility of the emergence of difference is, on the other hand, exactly the perfect repetition of the same.*

Behind this exceptional supposition lies Kierkegaard's theory of paradox as developed in *Repetition* and in *Philosophical crumbs*. Kierkegaard does not consider paradox as such to be a hindrance to thought, but rather a revelation of the only legitimate field of thought: a paradox is nothing but the very liveliness of thought—it is only in a paradox that thought actually comes across itself (but precisely in coming apart):

> One should not think ill though of paradoxes, because the paradox is the passion of thought and a thinker without a paradox is like a lover without passion: a poor model. But the highest power of every passion is to will its own annihilation. Thus it is also the highest passion of the understanding to desire an obstacle, despite the fact that the obstacle in one way or another may be its downfall. This is the highest paradox of thought, to want to discover something it cannot think.[6]

With the double paradox of repetition Kierkegaard carries out a twist that determines the modern subject—it is the fundamental, structural impossibility of repetition that is the only condition of its possibility. Consequently, Kierkegaard's ontology differs from the classical ontology of being in that the area of being and the area of non-being are not strictly delimited, but mutually condition each other and structurally belong to one another. Non-being is not beyond being, but is its inner incision. Difference as the absolute other, as non-identity, is not ejected from the field of the identity of one as its external limit, but determines it from within.

Because the ontology of being builds on a strict delimitation of identity and non-identity, it can understand repetition only as *reproduction* of identical elements where non-identity cannot enter. Difference as negation is ejected from the system: non-identity is beyond the series, beyond the field of the thinkable. That is why classical ontology can think difference only in the form of *variation*, as a specific difference that establishes variety within the very identity of being, without thereby curtailing the formal division between the area of being and the area of non-being. However, in order for the ontology of being to think difference that does not introduce negation into the system, that does not desecrate the field of being with the traces of non-being, it has to establish another delimitation: the delimitation between the general and the particular, the universality of form and the particularity of its individual material realisations. The identity of one establishes pure form that, as such, is unchangeable and absolutely reproducible, but insofar as it is realised in material particularities, it generates diversity, an innumerable multiplicity of variations. Thus, difference is inscribed in the ontology of being as variation, as a positive material differentiating moment, which does not influence the form of being itself—it cannot stand against it as negation, as non-being.

Kierkegaard's theory of repetition brings a critique of two mechanisms of the ontology of being: the critique of the mechanism of *reproduction* as the repetition of

identical elements, which, at the level of form, perpetuates the unchangeability of the one, and the critique of *variation* as merely material diversity, which does not have the power of difference as negation, an exception that would cut into the very identity of the one, the very form of being. Repetition is not reproduction insofar as a certain difference is always already inscribed in every turn of the repetition of the same and *a priori* undermines any pretension to identity from within, but, at the same time, difference is not variation insofar as it does not operate merely in the material area of positive diversities, but cuts into the very form of identity as a subversive power of exception, as its internal other, as its constitutive negation.

However, Kierkegaard's ontology, insofar as it turns away from the ontology of being, is not an ontology of non-being, an ontology of an eternally flowing becoming of non-identities, an ontology of substitutivity and groundlessness, as traced in a certain postmodern theory of simulacra. In Kierkegaard's conception of repetition, a certain identity is established—but this identity does not persist in time: in every moment, the subject is born anew through the dialectics of repetition that retroactively posits every identity as an identity of identity and non-identity and, through it, *a priori* generates its history.

Non-being is always already inscribed in being or, as Lacan puts it, the *one* of the unconscious is precisely the *one* of the rift, gap. The unconscious is not the field of one, being. But it is also not the field of non-being. The unconscious, says Lacan, opens the gap, which is pre-ontological; it is neither being nor non-being, but belongs to the register of the *un-realized*. As such, the unconscious is essentially a discontinuity, inconstancy. There is no closed *one* here, no whole that precedes this discontinuity and into which a difference cuts subsequently, making a fissure, a break in the original oneness. But, on the other hand, just as there is no pre-existing identity, there is also no pre-existing non-identity; absence is also not the basis. Lacan stresses this with his famous metaphor of silence and voice: there is no initial silence into which a voice shouts, he says, but it is the shout that yet establishes the silence.[7] Being and non-being as co-determining are produced at once with the original cut: the unconscious is, says Lacan, "in profound, initial, inaugural, relation with the function of the concept of the *Unbegriff*—or *Begriff* of the original *Un*, namely, the cut."[8]

The double critique of reproduction and variation can also be found in Hegel, in the rare passages where he discusses repetition. Even though Hegel does not develop a theory of repetition, his theses on repetition concern the core of his dialectics.

### *The dialectics of repetition*

Hegel very rarely talks about repetition, but we nevertheless have to say that Hegelian dialectics is nothing but repetition *par excellence*. The classical field of reflection on Hegel's theory of repetition is related to his famous idea of historical repetition, which—in line with the retroactive logic of the productive conception of repetition[9]—was first actually inscribed in the history of thought by Marx's (but in

reality Engels') retort on repetition in history.[10] Instead of the classical discussions on repetition that draw on Hegel's perception of history, we will here proceed from his *The Science of Logic*.

There is a passage in which Hegel briefly, but very clearly says something about repetition as a purely structural matter. This passage can be found in Volume One of *The Science of Logic*, in Remark 3 of the section on Becoming. This is how Hegel defines becoming:

> The unity, whose moments, being and nothing, are inseparable, is at the same time different from these moments. It thus stands as a *third* with respect to them—a third which, in its most proper form, is *becoming*.[11]

Hegel's development of the initial hypothesis of *The Science of Logic* that pure being and pure nothing are the same, and as such basically inseparable, which is also the fundamental point of his dialectics, is that it is precisely this inseparability of being and nothing that constitutes their difference. It is exactly this difference, this necessary shift within every statement of identity, that is the inner motor that establishes his dialectics as the dynamism of becoming and transition.

Being and nothing, says Hegel, do not exist for themselves, but are present only through becoming or transition. Wherever there is talk of being and nothing, this third, becoming, which is the truth of pure being and pure nothing, must be present as their condition of possibility.

This third, Hegel continues, has different empirical shapes that abstraction sets aside or neglects for the sake of "holding fast to its two products, being and nothing, each for itself, and showing them as protected against transition."[12] The most eloquent accounts of the impossibility of advancing from an abstraction to something beyond it, and of uniting the two, claims Hegel, are given by Jacobi in support of his polemic against the Kantian *a priori synthesis* of self-consciousness, in his *Treatise Concerning the Undertaking of Critique to Reduce Reason to the Understanding* (Jacobi, *Werke*, Vol. III). Jacobi defines the task as follows:

> [...] demonstrating the originating or the producing of a synthesis in a *pure somewhat*, be it consciousness, space or time. Let space be *a one*; time *a one*; consciousness *a one*. Now, do say how any of these three 'ones' *purely* turns itself internally into a manifold: each is *a one* and *no other*. What brings *finitude* into these three infinitudes? What impregnates space and time *a priori w*ith number and measure, and turns them into a *pure manifold*? What brings *pure spontaneity* ('I') into oscillation? How does its pure vowel sound come to its concomitant sound, the consonant, or better, how does its *soundless*, uninterrupted *sounding* interrupt itself and break off in order to gain at least some kind of self-sound, an *accent*?[13]

Hegel comments on Jacobi's task as follows:

> One sees that Jacobi very distinctly recognized that abstraction is a *nonentity*, whether this *nonentity* is the so-called absolute (only abstract) space, or the equally abstract time or abstract pure consciousness, the "I." He insists on this nonentity for the sake of maintaining the impossibility of any advance to an other, which is the condition of a synthesis, and to a synthesis itself.[14]

Especially graphic is Jacobi's description of the procedure for attaining the abstraction of space:

> For a time I must try clean to forget that I ever saw anything, heard, touched or moved anything, myself expressly not exempted. Clean, clean, clean must I forget all movement, and let precisely this *forgetting* be my most pressing concern, since it is the hardest. Just as I have thought all things away, so must I also get perfectly *rid* of them all, retaining nothing at all except the intuition, which *violently* held its ground, of the infinite *immutable* space. I may not, therefore, *think* even myself *back into it* as something distinguished from it yet equally bound to it; I may not let myself even be merely *surrounded* and *pervaded* by it, but I must rather *give myself over* to it totally, become a one with it, transform myself into it; I must allow no leftover of myself except *this my intuition* itself, in order to behold it as a truly self-subsisting, independent, single and sole representation.[15]

In this void, states Jacobi, he encounters the opposite of what should happen to him according to Kant's assurance. He does not find himself to be a *many* and a *manifold* but to be rather a one without any plurality and manifoldness; even more, he himself is nothing but the impossibility itself, the nihilating of all things manifold and plural. This is how Jacobi concludes: "any manifoldness and plurality … are revealed in this purity as a *pure impossibility*"[16]. Hegel responds that "the meaning of this impossibility is nothing else than the tautology: I hold fast to abstract unity and exclude all plurality and manifoldness; I keep myself in indistinctness and indeterminacy, and look away from anything distinguished and determinate."[17]

Kant's *a priori* synthesis of self-consciousness, says Hegel, is diluted by Jacobi to pure abstraction. He reduced the synthesis in itself to "the copula in itself;—an '*is, is, is*' without beginning and end, without 'what,' 'who,' or 'which.'"[18] This, says Jacobi—and here we finally arrive at repetition—"this repetition of repetition *ad infinitum* is the one single occupation, function, and production of the purest of all pure syntheses; the synthesis is itself this mere, pure, absolute repetition."[19]

The copula 'is, is, is' expresses abstract being, which allows no advance to the other, is completely indeterminate, has no predicate and is not even a substance, but rather a pure void, an empty space, a soundless sounding, a highly general sameness. For Jacobi, repetition is thus precisely a sort of a stubborn persistence in the same, a movement that produces nothing, a reproduction of the identical, whose most perfect form is possible precisely as a reproduction of the void, pure contentless form. However, notes Hegel—and we must be careful here—"since there is no pause in it,

that is, no negation, no distinguishing, the synthesis is not a repetition but rather undifferentiated simple being."[20]

What Jacobi names the purest repetition of repetition itself—the return of the copula '*is, is, is*' as the supposed absolute identity is for Hegel precisely *not* repetition, but is, quite the opposite, an *a priori* structural abolishment of any possibility of repetition.

If mental abstraction that tries to conceive something pure, for example, pure being (or pure consciousness or pure space or pure nothing), gets stuck in absolute indeterminacy and cannot advance to anything determinate, cannot descend from infinity to finitude, and if all that this abstraction manages to repeat is merely its identity with itself, an '*is, is, is*' or '*I, I, I*,' then what we have here, says Hegel, *is precisely not repetition*.

*The correlation of content and form*

Repetition is a process of the identity of identity and non-identity, within which every identity is always the identity of identity and non-identity—in dialectical transition, a difference is always at work.

Because this difference is nothing but negation, the minimal mark of this difference is not substantive, but quite formal—it does not concern any special signifier but the signifying logic itself. Difference is not designated, named, bonded with a signifier (it does not name a void, absence etc.), but appears merely in mediation, through the form of the repetition of dialectical structure. And, yet—and herein lies the fundamental twist of Hegel's concept of repetition—it is precisely difference as contentless and merely structural, as a connective-separative bond between being and non-being, that can produce a meaning on its flip side and enable the descent of the indeterminate to the determinate, the infinite to the finite. That repetition is not reproduction, that repetition as reproduction is not possible, therefore means for Hegel that there *is no pure form*.

It is exactly in this vein that Hegel's criticism of Jacobi continues. First, says Hegel, when Jacobi assumes his position in an absolute, abstract space, time and consciousness, he transposes himself into something which is empirically false:

> *There is* no such thing as a spatially or temporally unlimited space or time, that is, none is empirically at hand which would not be filled with continuous manifold of limited existence and of change, so that these limits and these changes would not belong, unseparated and inseparably, to spatiality. Consciousness is likewise filled with determinate sensation, representation, desire, and so forth; it does not exist *in concreto* apart from some particular content or other. … Consciousness can indeed make empty space, empty time, and even empty consciousness or pure being, its intended object and content, but it does not stay with them. Rather, from this emptiness it passes over—more than that, it forces itself over to a better content, that is, one

> which is somehow more concrete and to this extent, however bad as content, still better and truer. Precisely such a content is the synthetic as such, "synthetic" understood in its more general sense. … The synthesis contains as well as exposes the untruth of those abstractions; in it they are in unity with their other, are not therefore as self-subsistent, not as absolute but strictly as relative.[21]

Hegel goes on to say that

> it is the thought of pure space etc. (that is, pure space etc. taken *in themselves*) which is to be demonstrated to be null, that is, what must be demonstrated is that, as such a thought, its opposite has already forced its way into it, that by itself it is already being that has gone outside itself, a determinateness.[22]

It is precisely through the perversion of the relation between abstraction and determinateness, the classical differentiation between form and content, that the logic of the signifier is unfolded in Hegel. This is something that Žižek also points out:

> What is supposed to be the internal content expressed or externalised in form is actually always already form, an effect of a decentralised process, a surface effect; and, vice versa, what is supposed to be form, the medium of the externalization of content, is actually the only content, i.e., a network of mediations that produces the interior of meaning as its effect.[23]

Form and content always already correlate in the sense that the law of their correlation is always established retroactively, as the product of the signifying chain.

Jacobi, who abstracts one and its other, avoiding their empirical shapes in order to, as Hegel puts it, keep them far apart, cannot advance from one to many, from pure indistinction to diversity. He presupposes pure formal being-in-itself of one and the other, subject and object, and then tries to connect them *from the outside, subsequently*. In this way, he excludes difference from the relation between one and the other, which is why he conceives difference itself, that is, the distinction between one and the other, being and non-being—as something in itself, something external.

However, in Kant's *a priori* synthesis, one and the other, for example, I and the world, concept and the thing in itself, subject and object, do not correlate *a priori* as fixed given entities—which is what Hegel points out when he says that *synthesis must not be taken as a tying together of external determinations already at hand*. On the contrary, one and the other, that is, I and the world, concept and the thing in itself, subject and object, correlate in mutual co-becoming: the synthesis of being-in-itself and being-for-itself, says Hegel, is not external, subsequent, but *immanent:*

> The synthesis which is the point of interest here must not be taken as a tying together of *external* determinations already at hand. Rather, the issue is twofold: one of the genesis of a second next to a first, of a determinate something next to something which is initially indeterminate, but also one of *im-*

> *manent* synthesis, of synthesis *a priori*—a unity of distinct terms that exists in and for itself. *Becoming* is this immanent synthesis of being and nothing.[24]

Difference is not external to being and nothing, it is not established as their distinction in itself that puts them in an impossible relation from the outside, but is inscribed in being itself as its internal gap: being is always already nothing, being is fundamentally subjected to its own negation.[25] Being as one already refers to its other—and precisely herein lies the logic of Hegel's dialectics. Being is its own other and it is exactly this transition of one out of itself into its other, of indeterminacy into determinacy and infinity into finitude (and vice versa) that is for Hegel the *true movement of repetition*. The Hegelian formula of dialectics as the transition of being-in-itself into its otherness and of this otherness back into being-for-itself is therefore nothing other than the fundamental formula of repetition.

Hegel precisely defines the double critique of reproduction and variation in an exceptional sentence, which is also the only sentence in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that explicitly addresses the problem of repetition. We find this sentence in *Paragraph 14* of the *Preface*. The sentence about repetition is placed in the context of the critique of scientific culture, which has not yet realised that pure knowledge is precisely the path to it. Thus, says Hegel, one side "boasts of its wealth of material and intelligibility," that is, loses itself in pure empiricism and collecting examples, while the other side, on the contrary, "scorns this intelligibility, and flaunts its immediate rationality and divinity."[26]

The first side thus deals with variation, the collection of diversity, while the second side is the absolute as pure abstraction separated from any content. The two poles are then externally reconciled and the principle of the masters of scientific culture is that:

> They appropriate a lot of already familiar and well-ordered material; by focusing on rare and exotic instances they give the impression that they have hold of everything else which scientific knowledge had already embraced in its scope, and that they are also in command of such material as is as yet unordered. It thus appears that everything has been subjected to the absolute Idea, which therefore seems to be cognized in everything and to have matured into an expanded science.[27]

It is at this point that we come across the key sentence:

> But a closer inspection shows that this expansion has not come about through one and the same principle having spontaneously assumed different shapes, but rather through the shapeless repetition of one and the same formula, only externally applied to diverse materials, thereby obtaining merely a boring show of diversity.[28]

The real difference, difference as form that introduces negation into being itself and, precisely through change, which pertains to substance as such, also has an effect in the material, will not be found in the boring show of diversity, which is

only an external application of the shapeless repetition of one and the same, it will not be found in the diversity of the interesting, as Kierkegaard would say, rather, difference as pure otherness can happen only as an inherent moment of repetition that twists the same from within, changes it into a new relation between determinacy and indeterminacy. Dialectics does not unfold through the reproduction of the identical, which in the sense of variation imprints its unchangeable form in always diverse materiality, but through the inner negation of the very form of identity, which on its flip side, as a sort of a side effect, produces a *novum*, a difference as an exception that has an effect in the material. It is exactly this material effect that triggers a new change of form, a new turn of the dialectics.

*Repetition beyond reproduction and variation*

Kierkegaard's double paradox of repetition can be discerned in Lacan's conception of repetition as the double movement of *automaton* and *tyche*, which establishes the return of signs, repetition at the level of the *symbolic*, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the elusive circling of the non-representable remainder, gap, repetition that circles the field of the *real*. In Lacanian theory, *automaton* refers to a network of signifiers established in the register of the pleasure principle, while *tyche* operates "beyond the *automaton*, the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle."[29] *Tyche*, says Lacan, *is the encounter with the real*. Repetition traces the return of structure, but only in constantly perverting the structure itself, turning it through its own failure, through the slip of representation that appears as its insufferable remainder, as that whose meeting is essentially failed for the subject. However, this failure is also the condition of possibility of representation and subject as such. *Automaton* and *tyche* are two inclinations of the same process; they condition each other and are inseparable. Or, as Dolar writes in a pithy formula: "*tyche* is the gap of the *automaton*."[30]

Repetition results from the endeavour to abolish difference, to establish indistinction between both objects of repetition, but it is the very endeavour to do away with difference that produces something that *a priori* terminates sameness and that causes there to always be too much or too little repetition. The difference that emerges as something superfluous, something that sticks out and as such prevents the repeated to coincide with its own repetition is at the same time also a lack, a complex of the repeated driven to another repetition. But what from the viewpoint of the repeated is its unhealable wound is from the viewpoint of repetition its condition of possibility.

We must refrain here from, on the one hand, jumping to the conclusion that assigns reproduction to the symbolic repeatability of signs and, on the other, reserving the thesis that repetition is not reproduction for 'real' repetition beyond the symbolic. It is not the case that there is *automaton* as reproduction, on the one hand, and *tyche*, which is beyond reproduction, on the other. On the contrary, *tyche* and *automaton* are two sides of one and the same movement of repetition—repetition

that is not reproduction. The repetition of difference is involved in the movement of the signifying structure, while, on the other hand, the signifying structure can establish the platform for repeatability only through difference. Or, put differently*: it is precisely their intertwinement—tyche as gap is automaton—that separates repetition from reproduction.*

Observing children at play, Freud discovered something unusual—in their games and activities, adults always search for something new, while children tirelessly repeat the same game: "If a joke is heard for a second time it produces almost no effect; a theatrical production never creates so great impression the second time as the first; indeed it is hardly possible to persuade an adult who has very much enjoyed reading a book to re-read it immediately. Novelty is always the condition of enjoyment. But children will never tire of asking an adult to repeat a game that he has shown them or played with them, till he is too exhausted to go on."[31]

Adults always demand something new, different, and in this demand extend the symbolic field in which they are placed by varying meanings. But this demand for the new, says Lacan, precisely "conceals what is the true secret of the ludic, namely, the most radical diversity constituted by repetition in itself."[32] Variation, the designation of the new as *interesting*, precisely does not produce anything new: "Whatever, in repetition, is varied, modulated, is merely alienation of its meaning."[33] The child's "requirement of a distinct consistency in the details of its telling signifies that the realization of the signifier will never be able to be careful enough in its memorization to succeed in designating the primacy of the significance (*signifiance*) as such. To develop it by varying the significations is, therefore, it would seem, to elude it. This variation makes one forget the aim (*visée*) of the significance by transforming its act into a game, and giving it certain outlets that go some way to satisfying the pleasure principle."[34]

Insofar as repetition is not reproduction, variation as a possible way out of the vicious circle of the supposed reproductive repetition turns out to be a pointless task—a sort of a quixotic struggle with windmills. Variation stands against reproduction as a malevolent representative of a repressive instance of repetition, which is nothing but an illusory notion of repetition as a pure repetition of the same (sign, example, event) and is therefore itself illusory in its stand. Even more—insofar as variation operates at the level of the return of signs where it wants to capture the new in the field of *meaning*—it not only creates a phantom representative of difference, but thereby also annuls every possibility of difference. Meaning here is not established as one of the walls of the subject's impossibility, which within the movement of separation and alienation is again and again established only in the form of an empty signifier, but as an ossified signifier, a sort of a signifying buffer that embeds itself in the gap of the signifying structure and precisely prevents for something new in itself and as a necessary remainder to be produced in the movement of the return of signs, in (the necessary and at the same time necessarily impossible) return of the same. Variation as a signifying representative of difference is not only its lookalike, but actually operates as its uncanny double—it takes its place

and drives it out of its field: variation with a supposed departure from reproduction not only stops the uncanny return of the same, but abolishes the very possibility of difference.

## *The* Zufall *and the limping cause*

Aristotle "manipulates two terms that are absolutely resistant to his theory, which is nevertheless the most elaborate that has ever been made on the function of cause,"[35] says Lacan. Those two terms are *tyche* and *automaton.* And their stubbornness, their inherent resistance towards Aristotle's system, functions exactly within the realm of what Lacan calls the *resistance of discourse*: it is the indicator that points to the flip side of discourse itself, where a certain compulsion is always at work. A compulsion of thought, which has to deal with its own surplus, with something standing out, something that cannot be incorporated into the system, but which precisely in this deviation from itself defines the system as such. From one perspective, what has emerged in the system appears as an interposition, but at the same time it also functions as a gain: without the concept of *coincidence* (*as privation*), Aristotle's theory would not be what it is since it is what it is exactly in the difference, the addition, the turns it brings in relation to Plato and the Eleatics. Here, precisely through the most resistant concepts, the theoretical repetition producing a *novum*, a difference, takes place.

The Eleatics believed that non-being cannot come out of being, which is why there is no motion or becoming. Aristotle gets out of this conceptual squeeze, which Plato also followed, by positing different ways of talking about being. He suggests two possibilities (of talking about being in several ways): 1. introducing the aspects of potentiality and actuality—this theoretical crutch helped the history of philosophy get out of many an ontological quandary, and 2. introducing the concept of privation (στέρησις), which in Aristotle is not merely the name for absence, but also for something that is hardly or barely present. It is precisely the idea of privation that the concept of coincidence draws on.

Among coincidental causes (κατα συμβεβηκός), Aristotle points out two that stand out, almost become independent and take the place of causes in themselves. They are *tyche* (τυχη), *fortuna* in Latin, chance, and *automaton* (τό αυτόματον), *casus* in Latin, spontaneity. While *automaton* operates as a coincidental cause for all beings and events in nature, *tyche* is a coincidental cause only for those things that can be chosen and for those being capable of choice: "however, these events are said to be chance events if they are choice-worthy and happen spontaneously to agents who are capable of exercising choice."[36] Chance is actually a type of spontaneity: "The difference between chance and spontaneity is that 'spontaneity' is the more general term, in the sense that every chance event is a spontaneous event, but not every spontaneous event is a chance event."[37]

Chance and spontaneity are something inexplicable and *indeterminate:* "It is also correct to say that chance is inexplicable (*paralogon*), because explanations can

only be given for things that happen either always or usually, but the province of chance is things which do not happen always or usually. Since these kinds of causes are indeterminate, chance is indeterminate as well."[38] Despite their indeterminate status and inexplicability, *automaton* and *tyche* in Aristotle are nevertheless *defined as causes*. Even though it operates beyond a clear end and purpose, coincidence clearly has a certain key.

Coincidence, as that which is neither necessary nor usually, neither determinate nor itself, but something fundamentally different, differentiating, is Aristotle's great (and of course heretic) invention, which resolves Hamlet's dilemma—from the viewpoint of becoming, to be or not to be precisely cannot be the question: "Nothing comes in an unqualified sense from what is not, but we maintain that there still is a sense in which things do come from what is not—that is, coincidentally: they come to be something from the privation, which is in its own right something that is not, and which does not remain."[39]

With the concept of chance, *Zufall*, says Lacan, Freud takes us to "the heart of the question posed by the modern development of the sciences, insofar as they demonstrate what we can ground on chance."[40] Repetition is always something, says Lacan, that happens *as if by chance*. But analysts do not let this deceive them. Why? Lacan's point here is not that nothing is coincidental, in the sense of predetermination that does not allow for deviation. If we must not let ourselves think that something happened as if by accident, then there must be something in the background, something that precisely *makes a coincidence appear as a coincidence*. This is precisely what coincidence wants—to seem as a coincidence, a split, a mistake, a failure.

However, claims Lacan, this must not deceive us—us slipping or misspeaking is not innocent, there is a cause behind this apparent coincidence. There is a cause, but this cause is not a law. On the other hand, this cause is also not the key to the puzzle, it is a key that opens Lynch's blue box in which we will not find Meaning. Coincidence must not deceive us in a triple sense: firstly, it must not deceive us that there is nothing behind it, that it is merely a coincidence—for we know that it is always a coincidence according to something; secondly, it must not deceive us that—because we do not believe in coincidence as such—there is a necessity as determination, a sort of a law, behind it; and thirdly, it must not deceive us into believing that there is meaning behind coincidence revealing the actual truth.

What essentially determines the constitution of the psychoanalytic subject is neither a pre-given cause, which relates the subject and its history to a story about the origin, the original trauma, nor any kind of a purpose that saves the subject from its unpredictable emergence in the structure. On the other hand, however, the emergence of the subject is not left to pure chance. Within the return of signs, there is something that resists the causal logic and wants to seem like a coincidence, but exactly where something wants to seem as a coincidence, says Lacan, a cause is at

work. However, this cause is itself a *limping cause*: the constitution of the psychoanalytic subject is essentially determined by a certain leap of causality.

Freud's theory of *repression* is an attempt at conceptualizing the logic of the lost cause, which essentially determines the human psychic apparatus and is established through a specific temporal and topological mechanism of repetition. *In psychoanalysis, the constitution of the subject does not involve repetition that is a consequence of repression*, repetition as a return to the originally repressed, missing signifier, that is, the failure of representation does not trigger repetition, but it is also not the case that *we repress because we repeat*—as Deleuze would have it—that we are always already in the field of the ever present quasi-causal asubjective becoming into which the process of repression is subsequently included. Rather, as Alenka Zupančič points out, *repetition and repression are part of the same process. Just as in Lacanian alienation the signifying pair emerges in the place of the first signifier*, which means that the signifying logic first starts with the dyad—logic that is, the moment it is established, already bound to repetition—and that the first signifier exists only in its own fall, so too, *in Freudian repression, the Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*[41] *as a minimal signifying mark is established only with the repetition compulsion, while repetition takes place precisely at the moment of the always already occurred repression of the Vorstellungsrepräsentanz.*[42] The function of Freud's hypothesis of primal repression, which proceeds from the structure of substitutivity, is not to reveal the ultimate foundation that the analysis is supposed to reach after peeling off all the layers of "real repressions," but, as Alenka Zupančič points out, to "ground the unconscious in the leap of causality itself, in its gap."[43]

That there is no original event functioning as the first cause in a signifying series, to which clusters of shifted and repressed representations are then attached, means not only that any signifier can assume the role of a supposed origin and that there is no deeper meaning behind this, but also that we are always already in a language, that, at the unconscious level, the subject emerges merely in a signifying field and that there is no pre-signifying thing in itself, that is, that it exists merely as non-existent, as a lack, a loss.

Moreover, what is important here is that we do not look at the fixation itself as an original signifying gesture established in childhood, to which the patient returns throughout their life through repressions and resistances, but that, looking from a slanted perspective, we see that, through shifts, through repeating substitutive forms and their repressions, in short, through the movement of repetition, the original itself is retroactively produced. Fixation is not a past event, it is not a signifying origin and it is not the cause of repression, it is rather the other way round: the repetition of repression itself operates as a fixer that simultaneously produces and solidifies its supposed origin.

However—and this is crucial,—this process does not involve only retroactivity, *nachträglichkeit,* which retroactively establishes every cause as its own effect, as a cause of a cause, it does not involve only the subject constantly producing its his-

tory anew. The point here is rather that it is precisely within retroactivity, where a certain *presence* (the presence of the now) *retroactively* produces its own origin, that a certain causal hole, gap is established, which *a priori* prevents this *presence*—that is, the subject—to establish itself as a real effect of the origin that it produced as its own cause.

As Lacan puts it: "What is realised in my history is neither the past definite as what was, since it is no more, nor even the perfect as what has been in what I am, but the future anterior as what I will have been, given what I am in the process of becoming."[44] Kierkegaard writes something similar in *Repetition*: "Repetition and recollection are the same movement, just in opposite directions, because what is recollected has already been and is thus repeated backwards, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forwards."[45]

Within the logic of *Nachträglichkeit*, a certain intentionality towards the future is established, a *forward recollection*, which does not only (retroactively) fabricate the cause itself (as the cause of the cause), but also shifts, again and again (and in advance), the return to it. The consequence of this is not a retroactive phantasmatic fabrication of a traumatic event that would nevertheless somehow ground it in its function of the origin, but an avant-garde forward movement of shifting within which the phantasmatic fabrication of the origin does not operate only as a (retroactively produced) trigger of a causal chain, but also as its unpredictable side effect. And it is exactly within this side effect that a certain aspect, a certain real is established, which, as Lacan emphasises, keeps psychoanalysis from turning into an empty idealism of 'life is a dream.'[46]

*Envoi*

With the *double paradox of repetition* which can be traced in his book *Repetition*, Kierkegaard, on the one hand, delineates a new theory of the subject and its temporality and, on the other hand, legitimises a certain logic of failure, which Lacan posits as the constitutive moment of repetition in terms of the movement of the signifying structure, in which the subject emerges through the mechanism of alienation. Kierkegaard's double paradox of repetition carries out a *tour de force* that determines the modern subject: the structural impossibility of repetition is the only condition of its possibility. Kierkegaard thereby delineates a subversive ontology that departs from the classical ontology of being: the area of being and the area of non-being are not separated, but they mutually condition each other. Because the ontology of being builds on a strict delimitation of identity and non-identity, it can understand repetition only as a *reproduction* of identical elements and difference only in the form of *variation*, as a specific difference that establishes variety within the very identity of being. What is essential both for the constitution of the modern subject and the modern understanding of the historical moment is that repetition is structured in the conceptual departure both from the idea of *reproduction* as pure

formal repetition of the same, on the one hand, and the idea of *variation* as a substantive articulation of difference, on the other.

The critique of repetition as reproduction and difference as variation, which can be found in Kierkegaard, Hegel and Lacan, delineates the theory of the subject that, on the one hand, turns away from every teleology or the theory of pre-given origin established by the classical ontology of being, while, on the other hand, it also moves away from the postmodern theory of non-being, pure substitutivity, simulacra, the absence of origin. By turning away from the idea of *telos* and the origin, Kierkegaard's double paradox of repetition doesn't abolish causality as such but rather establishes a new causality, which, so to say, accounts with a certain slip, with a leap that is inscribed in its very structure. It is precisely this leap of causality what Lacan calls an unconscious cause, a *limping cause*. Within the function of the limping cause, something is *at work*. And what is at work is nothing but the gap—the gap, inscribed in the very movement of repetition as its impossible condition of possibility.

## Notes

1. Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998) 128.

2. *Repetition*, subtitled as *An Essay in Experimental Psychology* and organized around the experimental trip to Berlin and the correspondence between Constantin Constantinus and the Young Man (who are, as Constantinus admits by the very end of the book, the two faces of the same person) reveals an exceptional structure: through the carefully planned formal composition of the book, which realizes the complex concept of repetition that it presents, and through the hidden progress of the main character (who is itself split) through the three levels of existence (the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious), Kierkegaard's theory of repetition overturns the traditional ontology of being as well as the realistic, Newtonian conception of time.

3. Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 38.

4. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 128

5. Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 3-4.

6. Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 111.

7. "Where is the background? Is it absent? No. Rupture, split, the stroke of the opening makes absence emerge - just as the cry does not stand out against a background of silence, but on the contrary makes the silence emerge as silence." Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 40.

8. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 43. Here, Lacan captures the one of the rifts in the following play on words: un- in French signifies one, while in German it means a negative prefix non- or un-.

9. In relation to the thesis on the productive conception of repetition as one of the four fundamental matrices of repetition, cf. Bara Kolenc, *Ponavljanje in uprizoritev: Kierkegaard, psihoanaliza, gledališče [Repetition and Enactment: Kierkegaard, Psychoanalysis, Theatre]* (Ljubljana: Analecta, DTP, 2014) 21–28.

10. This is Marx's famous reference to Hegel's statement on repetition, which has become established as an indestructible aphorism, as an eternally returning sentence on the Hegelian problem of repetition: "Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce." Marx, Karl, *The Eighteenth Brumaire Of Louis Bonaparte*, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/

11. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 69.

12. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 69-70. Hegel's examples of such a conceptual—and necessarily abstract—"protection against transition" are Parmenides' doctrine of being and Spinoza's and Fichte's philosophy.

13. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 71.

14. *The Science of Logic*, 71-72.

15. *The Science of Logic*, 72.

16. *The Science of Logic*, 73.

17. *The Science of Logic*, 73.

18. *The Science of Logic*, 73.

19. *The Science of Logic*, 73.

20. *The Science of Logic*, 73.

21. *The Science of Logic*, 74.

22. *The Science of Logic*, 74.

23. Slavoj Žižek, *Hegel in označevalec [Hegel and Signifier]*, (Ljubljana: Analecta, DDU Univerzum, 1980) 170.

24. *The Science of Logic*, 72.

25. In the notes to the sections on being, nothing and becoming, Hegel explained his conception of the relation between being and nothing also by referring to Parmenides' identity philosophy. As Gregor Moder wrote: "Hegel declares that pure being, without any further determination, is a Parmenidian concept. But at the same time, he argues, Parmenides failed to see that pure being has already become pure nothingness." (Gregor Moder, "Held Out into the Nothingness of Being: Heidegger and the Grim Reaper," in *Filozofski vestnik*, Ljubljana, 2 (2013): 97-114, 105.

26. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford University Press, 1977) 8.

27. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 8.

28. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 8.

29. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 53.

30. Mladen Dolar, "Comedy and its Double" in *Stop that Comedy!: On the Subtle Hegemony of the Tragic in Our Culture*, ed. Rober Pfaller (Wien: Sonderzahl Press, 2005) 184.

31. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, (New York: Norton, 1961) 29.

32. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 61.

33. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 61.

34. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 61-62.

35. Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts,* 52.

36. Aristotle, *Physics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 47.

37. Aristotle, *Physics*, 46.

38. Aristotle, *Physics*, 45-46.

39. Aristotle, *Physics*, 29.

40. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts,* 39.

41. There is a series of misunderstandings regarding Freud's term *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, originally named *die psychische (Vorstellungs)Repräsentanz des Triebes,* and its preinterpretation by Lacan. An extensive elaboration on this problem can be found in: Michael Tort, "V zvezi s freudovskim konceptom 'zastopnika" (Repräsentanz), in *Problemi*, 157/158 (Ljubljana): 105-108.

42. Repression is a complex process: on the border between *consciousness and the unconscious*, the mechanisms of the *return of the repressed*, which demands constant creativity from the psychic in forming substitutes, and *repression*, performed by the ego, demanding a constant use of force to be able to produce new and new resistances, since the primary struggle against the repressed continues in the secondary struggle against the substitute—the symptom, are involved in a double movement. On another border, on the edge of the *signifying and the pre-signifying*, in the impossible contact between the drive and representation, a movement whirling around the undetermined point of *Vostellungsräpresentanz* takes place, driving the movement of repression and the return of repressed at a level fundamental for the constitution of the psychic apparatus—this is *a compulsion to repeat the very act of the repression. This repetition compulsion* is basic and we cannot get rid of it, for it is a constitutive function of the psychic apparatus itself.

43. Alenka Zupančič, "Ponavljanje [Repetition]," *Filozofski vestnik* 1( 2007): 57-79, 69.

44. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 300.

45. Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 3.

46. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts,* 53.

Jan Sieber

# BEYOND THE MIMETIC PRINCIPLE

## *Kant With Lacan*

In light of a new interest in the mimetic in contemporary art and philosophy of art, it is useful to remind oneself that this interest is not so new at all; that in fact it is a problem that has been haunting modern aesthetics since its very beginnings. Think of Roger Caillois' writings on mimesis, Walter Benjamin's and Theodor W. Adorno's concepts of mimesis, Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*, Jacques Derrida's "Economimesis"—to name but a few. Likewise, an engagement with the mimetic can be found in many artistic practices, of which Pop Art, Appropriation Art, the artistic strategies of fake, camouflage and re-enactment are only the most obvious of recent date.

In arguing that the mimetic has been haunting modern aesthetics, 'haunting' should be understood literally. In modernity's relation to the mimetic there is something unresolved. Since its beginnings it has imposed itself on modern thought, as either something to overcome or something to achieve, as something dangerous or something useful, as an obstacle or a means. As such, the mimetic in modernity presents a truly dialectical problem. Hence, modern art's attempt to do away with the mimetic and the emphasis on the mimetic of its postmodern counterpart appear as two sides of the same coin. These two sides are connected through their relation to something at the core of the mimetic that resists, something that resists its negation as much as it resists its full realization. One could never get entirely rid of the mimetic, as much as one could never fully accomplish it.

This seemingly paradoxical structure of the mimetic in modern art and aesthetics is linked to the problem of modern subjectivity. Historically, attempts to do away with the mimetic went hand in hand with an affirmation of the subject as the source of objectivity—e.g. the Kantian project to ground knowledge, morals and judgments of taste in the subject. And vice versa, reaffirmations of the mimetic accompanied efforts of the disempowerment of the subject as a firm ground of objectivity (one example in the field of aesthetics is Roland Barthes' famous *The Death of the Author*). But structurally, as psychoanalysis has shown, the subject does not constitute itself in relation to a non-mimetic, allegedly substantial, authentic ker-

nel, and neither is it just the mere effect of a mimesis to the existent. Rather the subject escapes the mimetic, while at the same time forever failing to arrive at some non-mimetic core. It continues to be marked by the dialectical tension between a mimetic and a non-mimetic side. It is this tension that I want to explore in the following.

For this purpose, I want to propose going back to the beginnings of the modern aesthetics of mimesis, namely, to Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. I will first outline the late 18th century discourses on imitation and genius that influenced Kant's aesthetics, secondly elaborate on Kant's concept of exemplary originality and thirdly subject his discourse on art to a Lacanian critique.

In Kant's third critique, more precisely in the second half of the *Deduction of Pure Aesthetic Judgments*, which is dedicated to art, we can find a contradictory tension between the mimetic on the one side and a non-mimetic moment on the other side. Derrida, in his essay "Economimesis" recognizes this tension for the first time and develops from it a deconstructionist critique of Kant's discourse on art. All of Kant's non-mimetic differentiations—between art and the arts, art and nature, art and science, art and crafts—which lead up to the concept of genius, are finally and again, Derrida argues, being undermined. Kant ascribes to the dictate of nature that which, in the production of art, is its freest moment. The place of this dictate, according to Derrida, is the figure of genius, as the medium through which art receives its rules from nature. The genius doesn't mimetically imitate nature, rather nature, by giving art its rules through the genius, folds back onto itself, returns to itself, reflects itself through art.[1] For Derrida, the Kantian *as if*, which differentiates between nature and art, introduces an analogical mimesis at precisely that point at which art seems to be at the greatest distance to nature. Beautiful works of art must have the appearance of products of nature insofar as they are products of freedom. They have to appear to be effects of natural processes, yet in precisely that moment in which they are purely works of human artistic production. Mimesis here, for Derrida, does not designate a representation of a thing by another, not a relation of resemblance or identification of two things, not a reproduction of a product of nature through a product of art, in fact it does not define a relation between two products at all. Instead mimesis for him is the relation between two productions—and between two freedoms to produce, namely divine freedom and human freedom.[2] This, for Derrida, is the kernel of the anthropo-theological mimesis implied in Kant's conception of artistic production, the identification of one freedom with another, of a human act with a divine act.

Following Derrida's deconstructionist critique of Kant's discourse on art, I want to suggest conceiving of the tension between the mimetic and the non-mimetic as a central aspect of the modern (aesthetic) subject, which, with Lacan, should be understood in recourse to the relation between the symbolic and the real. Such a Lacanian reading will not, like in Derrida, lead us to uncover a hidden and unacknowledged mimesis in Kant's seemingly non-mimetic aesthetics. Rather, it allows

us to think the tension between the mimetic and the non-mimetic in Kant as at the same time irreconcilable and constitutive for the aesthetic subject.

To start with, I will outline the historical philosophical sources of Kant's concepts of imitation and of genius. Strikingly, the contradiction between the mimetic and the non-mimetic already structured the historical constellation out of which Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and more precisely out of which his discourse on art emerged. The empirical psychology of the late 18th century heavily relied on imitation as a natural behavioral disposition. If the mimetic has always been situated between nature and culture it might not be by coincidence that imitation was then widely referred to as a drive, the notorious *Nachahmungstrieb*—a concept that Freud later in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* discards in favor of *Wiederholungszwang*. Despite many disagreements concerning its location in the human mind, the mimetic drive was at that time seen as an anthropological constant through which one learns to model one's own behavior after that of the other's. The most common philosophical source for this was Aristotle's *Poetics* where he famously argues: "For it is an instinct of human beings, from childhood, to engage in mimesis (indeed, this distinguishes them from other animals: man is the most mimetic of all, and it is through mimesis that he develops his earliest understanding); and equally natural that everyone enjoys mimetic objects."[3] A number of poetic works from the Weimar classicism express this belief vividly. Consider, for instance, Goethe in his poem *Playing at Priests*: "As children, monkeys, and mankind/ To ape each other are inclin'd"[4]; or Schiller in his mourning play *The Death of Wallenstein*: "For man was made an imitating creature,/ And who goes first will always lead the flock."[5] The psychology of the late 18th century, however, understood mimesis not only as one of the most natural human drives, but also as one of the most fruitful *and* most dangerous at the same time. On the one side the mimetic drive could create genuine sympathy and empathy, but on the other side it could lead to a mere aping (*Nachäffen*) of the other's behavior because one is jealous, wants to be liked or tries to gain advantages for him- or herself.

The dialectical counterpart of the empirical psychology of the late 18th century with its concept of mimesis or *Nachahmung* is the artistic movement of *Sturm und Drang* with its concept of genius. With their aesthetics of original creation its adepts believed to finally have freed themselves from the paradigm of the mimetic imitation of nature through art, which had been, more or less, valid from the Renaissance until the mid-18th century.[6] Here we find one of the first instances of this grand narrative, which Mladen Dolar in another context describes as the "foundational myth of modernity that there once was a mimetic art and then modernity finally did away with it, liberating humanity from the mimetic fetters, this is what defines modernity at its core."[7] The young artists and philosophers of *Sturm und Drang* worshipped the genius as the creative gift of an artist but also as a divine spark residing in these exceptional individuals. Genius was seen as the natural and un-learnable disposition of feeling in the subject as ground for artistic creation. Allegedly, artistic creation resided in the most inner part of the soul of the subject. The *Sturm und*

*Drang* elevated the genius in a radical emancipation from philosophy, science and the system of the arts to the image of an original, unconditioned, undetermined subjectivity. Its original creativity was celebrated in analogy to the godly creation of the world, making the genius a godlike creator of an original aesthetic world, a *Schöpfer* who out of himself creates a totality. Especially inspired by the works of Shakespeare, Herder and Goethe praised the genius as a Prometheus-like creator, as free from all laws of time and space, a divine messenger, translator of nature, interpreter of all languages of all ages, voice of god, and so on[8]—interestingly they frequently employed metaphors for a harmony between being and language, for a kind of meta-language. Again, and perhaps not by chance, the concept of drive here reappears. In his aesthetics *Calligone*, which was published in 1800 and directed against Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Herder calls the enthusiasm of the genius, which was given to him by a higher power, the "holy drive" (*heiliger Trieb*[9]) that drives the genius to create inimitable, original works. Thanks to his exceptional abilities and his immediate relation to god the genius was believed to have the power to undo social and political alienation and aesthetically unite what was separated in one harmonious totality.

As one might expect, Kant was more than skeptical towards the mystic ideology of *Sturm and Drang*, to say the least—and not only because Herder, while having been his student, turned out to be his philosophical archenemy. Nonetheless, Kant's aesthetics is deeply rooted in both of these discourses. He had great interest in the empirical psychology of the 1770s and used its concept of the human mimetic faculty (which he mainly took from J. N. Tetens und J. Feder). In his *Lectures on Logic*, for example, Kant argues for the great significance of imitation for learning and in the sciences.[10] At the same time, however, already in the early 1770s and in opposition to his contemporaries Gottsched, Batteaux, Lessing and others as well as to the aesthetic theory of the 18th century in general, Kant rejected the principle of *imitatio naturae* as the fundamental principle of art. Instead, inspired by J. G. Hamann and E. Young, he turned towards the concept of genius as a spontaneous invention of the spirit, free from given laws. After that Kant at least twice changed his notion of the relation between imitation and genius again, first under the influence of the empirical psychology of J. J. Winckelmann and J. N. Tetens[11] and again in the context of his own *Lectures on Ethics* and the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is, as Cassirer rightly states, located "at the crossroads of all aesthetic discussions in the eighteenth century."[12] Two of the most important roads of these were, as mentioned, the neo-classical doctrine of mimetic imitation and the romantic emphasis on free, non-mimetic creativity. But Kant does not play off one against the other nor does he discard one in favor of the other. Instead he tries to combine them or put them into relation with each other.

In the third critique, this culminates in Kant's seemingly paradoxical concept of exemplary originality as the definition of ingenious works of art. Contrary to other interpretations[13] I want to argue that exemplarity and originality have to be understood as two dimensions of the aesthetic subject that relate to each other in a con-

tradictory tension. To delegate them to two separate agents, or to conciliate them with each other, would be to lose the most interesting and vital tension within Kant's conception of the aesthetic subject.

Exemplarity first of all is introduced as a normative, regulative function in relation to originality. Kant argues that "since there can also be original nonsense, its products must at the same time be models, i.e., *exemplary*."[14] The products of genius are not themselves imitations, but they have to be able to be imitated by others; they themselves don't follow a model, but they have to be able to serve others as a model; they don't adhere to any given rule, but others have to be able to extract a rule from them. In order to lay out in which ways the products of genius can be exemplary for others Kant develops a complex typology of forms of imitation. Imitation as *Nachäffung* can be understood as a mere reproduction or a superficial mannerism, which even corrects the original in certain moments but without relating these corrections to the idea of the original. Kant differentiates *Nachäffung* from imitation as *Nachahmung*: a notion of imitation by other artists or artistic schools that develop a dogmatism out of a set of rules that they extracted from exemplary works of art, i.e., "a methodical instruction in accordance with rules, insofar as it has been possible to extract them from those products of spirit and their individuality."[15] From this perspective, the history of art would appear as a homogenous continuity of aesthetic reactions, a great accumulation of academic and mannerist imitations[16], an endless repetition of the same—were it not for the products of genius as a break in this continuity. But the genius too is subject to a form of imitation, namely imitation as *Nachfolge*, as an "emulation by another genius, who is thereby awakened to the feeling of his own originality, to exercise freedom from coercion in his art in such a way that the latter thereby itself acquires a new rule, by which the talent shows itself as exemplary."[17] *Nachfolge* is not a form of imitation in the strict sense, not the imitation of a work of art, not the repetition of a set of rules extracted from another work of art, but the paradoxical figure of an imitation of freedom in production which is itself an act of freedom. Here, in comparison to the other two forms of imitation, there is a very different relation at stake. *Nachäffung* and *Nachahmung* on the one hand are concerned with the relation between the products of genius and its imitators. The concept of imitation as *Nachfolge* on the other hand tries to conceive of the relation between two geniuses, or a product of genius and another genius. As a truly free act in the Kantian sense can't be mimetically determined by the act of another, one would have to understand *Nachfolge* as a relation in which both actions solely relate to each other by the fact that they are both free—not in the sense that the freedom of one has its condition in the other. Furthermore, this relation of *Nachfolge* can't be intended or known by the acting subject itself. One could even argue that *Nachfolge*—and the literal meaning of the German term would support this—is a retroactive effect more than anything else: There only ever will have been ingenious works of art. Understood in this way, imitation as *Nachfolge* does not, like the other forms of imitation, fall under the concept of the exemplarity of genius in the strict sense.

But contrary to the genius' freedom from rules, scholastic instruction is a necessary condition for its exemplarity, as Kant underlines. Kant here follows up on his distinctions between work and art, and between mechanical and aesthetic art from his definition of beautiful art in §43.

> Although mechanical and beautiful art, the first as a mere art of diligence and learning, the second as that of genius, are very different from each other, still there is no beautiful art in which something mechanical, which can be grasped and followed according to rules, and thus something *academically correct*, does not constitute the essential condition of the art."[18]

Artistic production presupposes thought, more precisely a thought end, in order to be able to count as art. Otherwise, according to Kant, it would merely be a product of chance. But in order to realize an end in a work determinate rules are necessary. The artist must learn and submit himself to the rules of art. Even though, as Kant continuously points out, "genius is entirely opposed to the *spirit of imitation,*"[19] the production of art has a whole series of forms of imitation as its condition. Contrary to the mystic concept of original creativity of *Sturm und Drang*, the production of a work of art for Kant is very much dependent on the symbolic order of artistic traditions, schools, styles, rules, technics and a community of taste.

Opposed to these forms of mimetic relations, originality is the "primary characteristic"[20] of genius. Kant initially defines it as "a *talent* for producing that for which no determinate rule can be given."[21] But as no product can be called art without a given rule, it is, Kant argues, the "nature in the subject"[22] that gives art its rule. And here lies Kant's difficulty in defining the moment of originality: it can firstly only be defined in negation to that which it is not, and secondly only in relation to its products. Kant states of genius "that it cannot itself describe or indicate scientifically how it brings its product into being, but rather that it gives the rule as *nature*."[23] Genius is, in relation to its originality, characterized by a non-knowledge. The aesthetic subject does not know how it arrived at the ideas that are expressed in its product; it is not in its power to consciously intend such a production according to a plan; and it can't teach others how to bring about such a product. If genius is that "predisposition of the mind (*ingenium*) *through which* nature gives the rule to art"[24] then originality can be understood as that moment in which genius exceeds the existing rules of art and at the same time gives art a new rule. But the latter, as Kant emphasizes, "must be abstracted from the deed, i.e. from the product."[25] That means, one can't predict a production of originality but grasps something as being original retrospectively through judging again and again, particular works of art.

If one reads the corresponding passages in §46 to §49 of the third critique attentively, it becomes obvious that Kant indeed seems to have problems in determining the relations between exemplarity and originality. On the one hand, art presupposes determinate rules in order to be called art. On the other hand however, art, in its judgment as well as its production, can't be determined by concepts or rules. Beautiful art requires artistic rules. But at the same time the products of genius

don't succumb to these rules but exceed them. Genius is opposed to imitation, but nonetheless there is no genius without imitation. The production of original works of art is not determined by any positively given rule and still it must create a new, previously not existing rule.

The whole question of artistic production revolves around this impossible moment: creating something according to a rule that is not given. Art, it seems, is a lost cause—in the double meaning that it seems impossible to produce a work of art under these conditions, but that this impossibility is at the same time *the* condition of the production of art. Adorno calls this the paradox of the *tour de force* in Beethoven's work and moreover of the aesthetic as such: "that out of nothing something develops, the aesthetically incarnate test of the first steps of Hegel's logic."[26] Kant's whole discourse on art writes itself in relation to this paradox. And it's remarkable with how much theoretical rigor and inventiveness Kant tries to conceptualize this by definition un-conceptualizable moment, in how many different disguises this impossible place of foundation returns in Kant's discourse: in his dictum that art has to appear *as if* it was nature (§45); in the free harmony between the faculties of imagination and reason (§49/50); in his attempts to find a solution to the antinomy of taste by introducing the indeterminate concept of the supersensible (*Dialectics of aesthetic judgment*, §57) and even by recurring to the thing in itself (*Remark II*). And yet, this place beyond the mimetic, beyond the symbolic order of taste can, from the standpoint of the conceptual framework of reason, only be addressed negatively. Beyond that, there is no firm ground from where to grasp it, it always again slips away. No concept of reason is sufficient, no transcendental argumentation abundant.

Furthermore, Kant struggles to keep those uncanny figures at bay that lurk around this impossible place. Artistic production is always in threat of producing nonsense and madness—not as a threat from the outside but as a threat immanent to itself. The productive imagination is always in danger of subverting the laws of taste and producing non-sense or indulging itself in a flight of enthusiasm. Nonsense and madness are figures of a too-much, of an excess of imagination. Kant therefore—in opposition to the concept of genius in *Sturm und Drang*—insists that originality alone is not enough. The production of an ingenious work of art requires technique, skill, discipline and rules. But in the end, there's no guarantee. Nonsense seems an inevitable surplus of artistic production.

As argued, before the antinomy between exemplarity and originality should not be dissolved by delegating them to separate agents or by reconciling them in a superficial way. Instead, the tension between imitation and genius, between exemplarity and originality should be understood as constitutive for the aesthetic subject. And this tension can be connected to the Lacanian relation between the symbolic and the real. One could argue that what has been called a moment of the non-mimetic is not something merely opposed to imitation, but rather something that stands in relation to—paraphrasing Freud here—a beyond the mimetic principle.

If Kant's discourse in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is indeed situated *inside* the aesthetic subject, then one of the conditions of artistic production is that the aesthetic subject submits itself to the existing rules of art, to what one could call the symbolic order of taste. The latter consists of a community of taste, artistic traditions and schools, techniques that have to be learned, styles, conventions and motifs. The aesthetic subject, internalizing these rules of art, imposes the symbolic law of taste upon itself from the inside. This law rejects non-sense, reverie and mad enthusiasm as pathological products of the productive imagination. It governs aesthetic production on a field marked by the distinction between sense and non-sense.

But as much as the subject imposes the symbolic law of taste upon itself from the inside, it remains heteronomous. Just like art, for Kant, has to be differentiated from nature, from science, from craft, from mere liking, from moral feeling, from knowledge, likewise it has to be differentiated from mere imitation and from the mere application of certain, given rules. But this separation from everything, in the Kantian sense, pathological to aesthetic production produces an un-assimilable rest, and it is this rest that is at the same time its true driving force. It is this point beyond the mimetic principle, beyond the distinction between sense and non-sense that aesthetic production is oriented towards.

Unlike the first and second critiques, Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and his discourse on art theoretically invests in this impossible place. Ultimately, it is not the symbolic law of taste that drives aesthetic production but its orientation towards that which is situated beyond it. If Kant's reflections futilely evolve around this point which itself can't be known, then the figure of genius is located exactly at this place. It inhabits a stand-in function for that which can't be integrated as a positive condition of aesthetic production, but still determines it from the inside. For Kant, in other words, the genius is the locus of art as a lost cause: of the impossibility of producing a work of art derived from predetermined conditions, and of precisely this impossibility as condition of art's production.

In his *Seminar* VII Lacan calls that which is situated beyond the pleasure principle—beyond the symbolic order—the Thing (*das Ding*) and later the real. The Thing must be posited as excluded from the symbolic law, as something external, which the subject experiences as foreign. And yet it constitutes the most intimate interior of the subject, that whereof the fate of the subject, the way of its desire is oriented. It functions as the vanishing point of desire and is at the same time inaccessible, originally lost. It's here, one could argue, in the irreconcilable tension between the symbolic order of taste and the real of genius beyond the mimetic principle that the impossibility of an autonomous, self-transparent subject becomes apparent. Subjectivation always depends on something excluded, a kernel of the real that remains, insists and disturbs the self-construction from the inside. There remains a rest that can't be assimilated.

Kant's figure of genius is a stand-in for this excluded something in the innermost of the subject, for the real in the symbolic. And for Kant the striving towards this beyond the symbolic is the true driving force of aesthetic production—but opposed to the cult of Sturm and Drang for which the genius functions as the phantasm of a godlike creator, aiming at the aesthetic undoing of alienation, the creation of a harmonious totality, a unified whole. The products of Kant's genius do not unify or make whole, they don't have any totalizing function. They emerge from this gap in the symbolic and interrupt established conventions and the continuity of the rules of art. They mark a break in the symbolic conditions of art—a break with meaning and with the continuity of things.

But if Kant argues that the products of genius are attempts of aesthetically presenting the unrepresentable, then we have to remind ourselves with Lacan, that in the end the real resists representation. What one gets with the attempt of representing the real is never the real as such. There always remains a rest. Likewise the products of genius must remain inadequate. Kant—in his theoretical rigor and in opposition to *Sturm und Drang*—acknowledges this inadequacy and impossibility of any representation of the real by emphasizing that a product of genius is a "representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., *concept*, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible."[27] Works of art are necessarily inadequate attempts of sensually presenting what lies beyond the limits of experience. They occasion much thinking, as Kant puts it, because they lack determinate concepts.

The strength of Kant's discourse on art ultimately lies in his refusal to resolve the tension between the symbolic and the real, allowing the concept of genius to function as a placeholder for the real in the symbolic. We should not understand Kant's concept of genius as some kind of mystic entity of higher, godlike powers to reconcile body and soul, nature and freedom, being and sense—but instead as a placeholder for that from where such a reconciliation is impossible, a placeholder for a gap in the structure that resists signification. Genius marks the inner border of the allegedly self-transparent subject. It is the figure of an origin that itself can't be grounded, can't be conceptualized or known—it is a figure of a lost cause. As such a figure of paradox, of something excluded in the interior of the subject, it introduces a break in the symbolic conditions of the production of art. Without final synthesis, without final harmony, the Kantian genius realizes a break with meaning and the order of taste.

To conclude, I would like to briefly return to the problem of the mimetic. What do we find in Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, more precisely in his discourse on art? Arguably, Kant offers us a way to acknowledge the mimetic and the non-mimetic as two dimensions of the modern aesthetic subject, related to each other in a dialectical tension. On the one side, he rejects the neo-classical dogma of mimetic imitation as primary condition of artistic production. But on the other side, he also rejects the modern myth of a non-mimetic, unconditioned subject of creation as

sole condition of art. Instead, he tries to think them together as constitutive of the aesthetic subject. Kant's concept of genius does not describe an exceptional, artistic personality, not a divine gift, not the ability to aesthetically reconcile what has been shattered. It marks the place of a break in the symbolic, where something does not add up, does not function smoothly according to plan. With Kant the genius marks the locus of a radical non-knowledge, which is to say, the site of an encounter with the real. It is this dialectic between the mimetic and the non-mimetic, the "specter of mimesis"[28] that has been haunting the modern aesthetic discourse since its beginnings. That would apply, very schematically, to modern art as an attempt to do away with mimesis and represent the real, as well as to postmodern art as an affirmation of the mimetic, celebrating the death of the original in an endless series of copies for which there is no original. A Lacanian reading of Kant's aesthetics offers us a way to address the mimetic and the non-mimetic as two related dimensions of the aesthetic subject. One can't just do away with either of them. It's only through mimesis that one can encounter what lies beyond the mimetic. But there's no guarantee for success, no necessity. One can only ever try again and fail better "to make things of which we do not know what they are."[29]

## Notes

1. See Jacques Derrida, "Economimesis," *Diacritics* 11.1 (1981): 3-25, 4.

2. Derrida, 9.

3. Aristotle, *Poetics*, ed. and trans. St. Halliwell (Loeb Classical Library, 1995) 37.

4. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Playing at Priests," *Poems of Goethe*, trans. Edgar Alfred Bowring (Hurst & Co., 1881) 251.

5. Friedrich Schiller, *Wallenstein. A Dramatic Poem*, trans. Flora Kimmich (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2017) Act III, Scene 4, 198.

6. Already with the intellectual movement following the publication of Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* (1750) art seemed to have finally, after 2000 years, emancipated itself from the domination of reason, its limitation to the imitation of nature and the application of technical rules. And it began to challenge philosophy and the rational sciences with its new claim to an aesthetic truth which is founded on sensual feeling.

7. Mladen Dolar, "Plato avec Althusser. Mimesis and Ideology," unpublished manuscript of a lecture given in Berlin, 2014.

8. See "Genie," *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter (Berlin: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974) 294.

9. See Johann Gottfried Herder, "Kalligone," *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 15 (Bureau der deutschen Classiker, 1820) 245.

10. See Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Logic*, ed. and trans. J. Michael Young (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 5.

11. The complicated system of conceptual differentiations between different forms of mimetic behavior (between *Nachmachen*, *Nachahmen*, *Imitation*, *Nachtun* and *Nachäffen*) shows the great theoretical effort that Kant put into this at that time.

12. Ernst Cassirer, *Kant's Life and Thought* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981) 320.

13. Gammon, for example, emphasizes the contradiction between exemplarity and originality and tries to solve it by delegating each of the opposing terms to different agents, originality to the genius and exemplarity to the imitating other. See Martin Gammon, "Exemplary Originality. Kant on Genius and Imitation," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 35.4 (1997):563-592. Guyer on the other side argues that there is no fundamental contradiction between originality and exemplarity and that it is the genius' task to conciliate both demands with each other. See Paul Guyer, "Exemplary Originality. Genius, Universality, and Individuality," *The Creation of Art. New Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics*, ed. Berys Gaut and Paisley Livingston, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 116-137.

14. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Mathews (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) §46, 186.

15. Kant §49, 196.

16. See Guyer, *Exemplary Originality*, 132.

17. Kant, §49, 196/7.

18. Kant, §47, 188.

19. Kant, 187.

20. Kant, §46, 186.

21. Kant, 186.

22. Kant, 186.

23. Kant, 187.

24. Kant, 186.

25. Kant §47, 188.

26.Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2002) 107.

27. Kant, §49, 192.

28. Dolar, *Plato avec Althusser*. n.p.

29. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 114.

Sandrine Rose Schiller Hansen

# A GLITCH IN TRANSCENDENTAL REPETITION

## *On the Freudian Uncanny and the Ambiguity of Repeating*[1]

In *Analysis Terminable and Interminable*, Freud envisages the unconscious material looping with compulsive rigidity in transference neurosis as "small fragments of necrotic bone."[2] Although Freud here addresses the particular problem of residual portions of the analytical transference continually disrupting the subject after ended analysis, the image he uses evokes something beyond post-therapeutic complications. A necrotic bone rigidly recurring on the horizon of the unfolding future. It is as if the image was taken out of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In the first act, "the Dawn of Man," the birth of Homo Faber coincides with the first act of killing—one ape killing another with a bone. The simultaneity of destruction and creation lingers throughout the film as this bone is tossed into intergalactic circulation. The metaphor of a necrotic bone arrested in a compulsive loop touches on the very core of Freudian metaphysics. A necrotic bone is a dead bone. In medical terms it can refer to osteonecrosis and avascular necrosis characterized as bone death due to deficient blood supply.[3] In Stanley Kubrick's film this bone *is* Death put into production. It is the inorganic remains of another life and it is a tool to kill. Thrown from the timeless origin of man to an unseen future it is replaced and substituted by the pinnacle of sublimation, a spaceship.[4] We hear the Hegelian echo "the *being of Spirit is a bone*."[5]

In the clinic Freud made himself the witness to the exceptional ingenuity with which people repeat themselves juggling the necrotic bone.[6] This compulsive repetition is according to Freud the dumb machinery underlying the mythologized compulsion of human destiny.[7]

It is well known that in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud examines different forms of compulsive repetition that appear to challenge the presumed dominance of the pleasure principle which posits that psychic life should be ruled by a tendency to evacuate excitation or, at least, to keep excitation at a constant level.[8] But Freud is not only interested in the exceptional and pathological compulsive repetitions disrupting the smooth operation of the coherent ego, he is interested in the

mysterious nature of the repetition at work behind the uniformity and conservatism of our character. Freud writes:

> This 'perpetual recurrence of the same thing' causes us no astonishment when it relates to *active* behavior on the part of the person concerned and when we discern in him an essential character-trait which always remains the same and which is compelled to find expression in a repetition of the same experiences.[9]

Freud's observation is accompanied with a silent bewilderment. How come, Freud implicitly asks, are we only astonished by the passive or involuntary repetitions, whereas the repetitions that are experienced as integral to our person are determined as character-traits and seen as healthy markers of continuity and individuation. This throws us directly into the ontological intricacy of repetition, and to the problem of the conceptual rift between voluntary and involuntary repetition. What is the difference between a tic and character-trait? Beneath or *beyond* this question is a problem that emerges with Deleuze's paradigmatic reading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in *Coldness and Cruelty*, namely, how to distinguish between the constitutive and productive repetition of Eros and the repetition which in the name of the death instinct erases? Another way to formulate this question is to ask: *where*, or maybe better, *what* is the threshold between individuating repetition and the enclosing claustrophobia of compulsive repetition? One could investigate instances of pathological compulsive repetition and from that point delimit a threshold between healthy individuating repetition and inhibiting compulsion. Trailing along already accepted categories for adaptive and social behavior such an approach however risks jeopardizing the critical potential of the question.[10] My point of departure is the glitch itself—the moment where an overdetermined recurrence shakes our habitual expectation. Within the non-pathologized everydayness this instance is in the Freudian oeuvre best known as the uncanny. Exploring the link Freud establishes between the experience of the uncanny and compulsive repetition, I will show how certain experiences of the uncanny can be seen as the paralyzing concurrence between the temporality of consciousness and the timeless instantaneousness of the unconscious, as such marking a glitch in what Deleuze defines as the transcendental work of repetition.[11]

### *Uncanny recurrences and the caged animal*

In his exposé of the uncanny, Freud writes about a visit to Italy. During a hot afternoon stroll in a provincial town, Freud is surprised to find himself in a red-light district. Eager to leave he turns down the first street, only to find himself shortly after in the same place. When this situation is repeated a third time, Freud reportedly was overcome by an uncanny feeling.[12]

Giving rise to a claustrophobic or inescapable sense of fate he describes this feeling of the uncanny as something similar to "the sense of helplessness experienced in some dream-states."[13] In his rejection of the idea that the uncanny has its roots in

an intellectual uncertainty Freud draws attention to different cases that provoke an uncanny feeling—the idea of the *Doppelgänger*, the living doll, the dread of damaging one's eyes—all of which serve as evidence for his conclusion that "an uncanny experience occurs either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed."[14]

Reflecting on his personal experience, Freud notes that the uncanny feeling of this episode, like others related to repetition or recurrence, is rooted in the experience of "an unintended recurrence of the same situation."[15] Having noted already that people are not disturbed by repetitions pertaining to character-traits, which hardly can be defined as strictly voluntary or intentional phenomena, we need a more precise characterization of the kinds of repetition that evokes the uncanny. Whereas some forms of anxiety can be understood as a phenomenon where the indifference of the material universe encroaches on our meaningful existence, it is a sense of over-determination that snap in the case of the uncanny. In the instances where repetition gives rise to an uncanny feeling, elements that are usually experienced as causally unconnected suddenly appear to be connected. Although Freud does not elaborate on this, he observes that events which otherwise would not have stood out, become uncanny if they occur with a temporal proximity at odds with our expectations or rhythm. Freud uses the example of one specific number recurring over and over again within a short time frame. Imagine that you are on a train with the number 5757, your allocated seat is 57 and you notice that you have 57 unread emails, later you are celebrating your friends 57th birthday. These instances are unrelated and in themselves unremarkable, yet the obstinate recurrence of the same number will according to Freud in most people stir an uncanny feeling.[16]

Instead of explaining how the uncanny effect of these kinds of repetition are grounded in infantile psychology, Freud refers his readers to another text, stating:

> It is possible to recognize the dominance in the unconscious mind of a 'compulsion to repeat' proceeding from the instinctual impulses and probably inherent in the very nature of the instincts—a compulsion powerful enough to overrule the pleasure principle, lending to certain aspects of the mind their daemonic character [...] All these considerations prepare us for the discovery that whatever reminds us of this inner 'compulsion to repeat' is perceived as uncanny. [17]

The text Freud refers to in this passage is *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.* Here Freud writes, a bit more tentatively, that "manifestations of a compulsion to repeat [...] exhibit to a high degree an instinctual [*triebhaft*] character and, when they act in opposition to the pleasure principle, give the appearance of some 'daemonic' force at work."[18] Although the concept of fate or destiny,[19] usually serves to bracket the involvement of the individual, Freud nonetheless ties the impression of "being pursued by malignant fate" to the defiant daemonic force opposing the pleasure principle, rooting both in the compulsion to repeat. [20] Whether or not it is service-

able to conflate what appears to be on the one side an active force, and on the other a passive experience as Freud does in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, it is for our purposes crucial to note the link he establishes between the work of the compulsion to repeat and that of fate. Exemplifying this one could turn to an array of fictive tragic characters, repeatedly falling prey to the same misfortunes, but Freud points out that we find similar instances in "the lives of normal people."[21] Love relations terminating in the same predicament, another wrecked friendship, the long overdue promotion postponed yet again, another missed deadline. This compulsive repetition is according to Freud not simply the unfortunate "fate" of neurotics, nor the mysterious work of a divine faculty, but in fact what we rationally must understand as the "intelligible" mechanism operating beneath the culturally edified concept of destiny.[22]

The painful circuitousness of life evidently challenges the presumed rule of the pleasure principle, but it also complicates and obscures the idea of a proper (with this I mean smooth) functioning of the psyche, hence, Freud finds that enough is left unexplained to break the question: "how is the predicate 'instinctual' related to the compulsion to repeat"?[23] On the basis of his observations Freud reply with a radical hypothesis:

> *It seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things* which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, it is a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life.[24]

Traditionally, instincts are understood as inherent impulses pushing the organism towards change and development. Seeing instincts[25] rather as conservative in nature, Freud reverses that view. Repetition is by definition the re-occurrence of something, from this perspective it is not difficult to see why Freud conceptualizes the instincts behind this tendency to fall back upon oneself repeating earlier reactions as rearward rather than progressive. Yet, it is not all together clear what Freud writes—the question is how the concept of inertia can be understood as a drive or an urge. Is it possible to understand "elasticity," the tendency to retract back into an original form when external pressure is relived, as an urge or an impetus? One way of postponing the question ( steering clear seems impossible) concerning this inherent tension in the driveness of drives, or instincts, is to first look at this tension through the dualistic split between two classes of instinct: the instincts of life and the death instincts, respectively named Eros and Thanatos.[26] Mirroring the bi-polar division life unfurls in the tension between the urge of Eros and the elasticity of the death instinct—on the one side rushing ahead into ever larger libidinal networks and on the other harking back or short-circuiting the system of libidinal engagement. [27]

In this idealized form the split between Eros and Thanatos has been subject to much critique. The critique central to our question concerns the ambiguity of repetition—

is compulsive repetition a manifestation of the death instinct? Catherine Malabou formulates the problem in the following way:

> The profound ambiguity of repetition [...] inheres in its binding power. Certainly, in an essential respect, this power is mortiferous: it immobilizes, freezes, or leads to inertia and to the inorganic state. Compulsion—as has been said and resaid—has the spectral character of a death machine. At the same time—something said less often—this 'mechanicity' is a *binding agent*: it disciplines, flattens, and tames as it immobilizes.[28]

To understand Malabou's critique we must turn to Freud's idea of binding. As one instantiation of compulsive repetition, Freud attempts to come to terms with the repetition of unpleasurable experiences in child's play? With the infamous *Fort-Da* game at the center of this question Freud asks, why children make repeated games out of frightening and unpleasurable experiences, for instance a doctors visit?[29] Freud uncovers two motivations that can be aligned with the pleasure principle: through repetition the child makes herself the active master of the events to which she was initially the passive victim, secondly the repetition offers the possibility of taking revenge on another subject.[30] From an economic viewpoint both of these repetitions are forms of abreaction that can be linked to the idea of binding excessive amounts of stimuli. Relying on the distinction between bound or quiescent energy and unbound energy which Freud attributes to Josef Breuer, Freud suggests that binding is the process through which unbound energy, which in its nature is aimless and undirected, is woven into a libidinal network and thus transformed into quiescent energy.[31] The key example often used to explain the relation between binding and the pleasure principle is the case of trauma. When an external force pierces the protective shield safeguarding the equilibrium of the psyche, Freud writes that the pleasure principle is momentarily put out of action.[32] The primary task of the organism is in this case "mastering the amounts of stimulus which have broken in and of binding them, in the psychical sense, so that they can be disposed of."[33] Contrary to what one should expect, unbound energy has no way out—it is stuck as the silent scream framed in Edvard Munch's painting.[34] This is where the functional understanding of repetition as binding comes in. One way of understanding what Freud meant with psychic binding is thus to see it as the laying down of libidinal circuits conducting excitation or energy, thus allowing the energy to find an outlet through motor actions or associative activity.[35] Prior to binding there is an overvoltage captivating the organism in a tormenting tension like a caged animal immobilized by bars. Focusing only on the traumatic effect of external forces is however misleading. In *Studies on Hysteria* written together with Freud, Breuer at one point writes that "[l]ack of sensory stimuli, darkness and complete silence become a torture; mental repose, lack of perceptions, ideas and associative activity produce the torment of boredom."[36] The torment of boredom Breuer writes about is the result of an unchecked charge stirring from within the organism.[37]

In her analysis of the Freudian oeuvre Malabou concludes that compulsive repetition understood in perspective of its binding capacity remains nothing but a preface to pleasure.[38] Hereby she rejects Freud's proposition that different forms of compulsive repetition, in Freud's words, "afford us a view of a function of the mental apparatus which, though it does not contradict the pleasure principle, is nevertheless independent of it and seems to be more primitive than the purpose of gaining pleasure or avoiding unpleasure."[39] Deleuze agrees with Malabou, that exceptions to the pleasure principle do not exist in Freud's writings, nevertheless he accepts with Freud that binding is more "primary" than the operation of the pleasure principle. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud arrives at this formulation in the last chapter:

> One of the earliest and most important functions of the mental apparatus is to bind the instinctual impulses which impinge on it, to replace the primary process prevailing in them by a secondary process and convert their freely mobile energy into mainly quiescent (tonic) cathexis.[40]

Deleuze grasps the radical potential of this statement when he pushes the mechanism of binding beyond both Freud's relative positioning and an etiological temporality determining binding as the transcendental principle constituting pleasure as an empirical principle ruling over the psyche. [41]

*The bipolarity of repetition*

If there is a beyond the pleasure principle—something that cannot be accounted for by the principle—it is, according to Deleuze, the imperative principle governing life. Pleasure and pain in themselves have no systematic value. It is the systematic binding achieved through repetition that makes excitation resolvable as pleasure and it is repetition that bestows the experience with a systematic value that will direct our behavior, binding is therefore by Deleuze positioned as a transcendental principle.[42] Deleuze writes:

> The 'binding' action of Eros, which is constitutive of the pleasure principle may, and indeed must, be characterized as 'repetition'—repetition in respect of excitation, and repetition of the *moment* of life, and the necessary union.[43]

In the constructive work of binding, or Eros, Deleuze sees a double movement, the energetic binding of excitation and "the biological which binds cells."[44] One could find the key to this passage in *Difference and Repetition* where Deleuze's theory on the passive synthesis culminates with the words: "all is contemplation!" That is: *all* is made "of contemplated and contracted water, nitrogen, carbon, chlorides and sulphates."[45] All organic beings are composed of a multitude of passive syntheses which is the origin of everything from organs to the association of ideas, thus, the *moment* of life is the primary organic contraction of excitation upon which the perceptual synthesis of excitation must be based.[46]

It appears to be a very similar point Deleuze wishes to make about the psychoanalytic concept of binding in his earlier analysis of Freud in *Coldness and Cruelty* where he characterizes the process of binding as "repetition of the very moment of the emergence of life."[47] This moment, the emergence of life, marks a speculative threshold for Freud, how and why life was roused in inorganic material is a cosmological problem. Nonetheless, Freud insists, that life cannot be understood as the manifestation of an inherent vital force nor can change and apparent progress be understood as an original tendency of living organisms. If anything, evolution and change is the result of contingent external disturbances introjected and repeated by the conservative instincts. Freud writes:

> The elementary living entity would from its very beginning have had no wish to change; if conditions remained the same, it would do no more than constantly repeat the same course of life. In the last resort, what has left its mark on the development of organisms must be the history of the earth we live in and of its relation to the sun. Every modification which is thus imposed upon the course of the organism's life is accepted by the conservative organic instincts and stored up for further repetition.[48]

Life and its development on this planet is not the expression of an inner vital force, nor does it harbor a teleological meaning in itself, it is merely the effect of the constructive work of the conservative instincts that bind obtrusive and undirected excitations into libidinal circuits that are more or less coherent and stable.

But the repetitive contraction at the heart of living matter beats in counterpoint—Deleuze writes: "inseparable from this form of repetition we must conceive of another which in its turn repeats *what was before the instant*—before excitation disturbed the indifference of the inexcitable and life stirred the inanimate from its sleep."[49] We are back at Freud's ambiguous definition of the drives and the ambivalent effect of repetition, it binds excitation into a system, but it also eliminates excitation. Thus, Deleuze continues, "[b]eyond Eros we encounter Thanatos; beyond the ground, the abyss of the groundless; beyond repetition that links, the repetition that erases and destroys."[50] Although Deleuze refers to binding as the work of Eros, it is clear that in binding, Eros and Thanatos are fused, inconspicuously balancing somewhere between the primary gasp for air and the terminal exhalation. Framing the complex relationship between the death drive and Eros in view of the bipolar mechanism of repetition Deleuze introduces the concept of time, stating that "repetition as conceived by Freud's genius is in and of itself a synthesis of time—a 'transcendental' synthesis."[51]

In *The Economic Principle of Masochism* Freud suggests that rather than a strict causal relation between an increase of tension and unpleasure there might also be a qualitative factor at play which perhaps has something to do with the rhythm of the changes in the quantity of stimuli.[52] This idea is tentatively repeated in *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*,[53] but also in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is it present. Here Freud asks if perhaps "pleasure and unpleasure series indicates a change in

the magnitude of the cathexis *within a given time unit*?"[54] Introducing time as a unit we move from a one-dimensional plane to a two-dimensional chart on which the intensity of change emerge from the unconceivable flatness of sheer quantity. If we compare the experience of a loud monotone noise produced by an engine, and equally loud rhythmic music where the noise is cut in breaks and flows, the qualitative factor of rhythm is evident. In one case, the noise unbearable in the other it is pleasurable. Nonetheless we must be attentive to Freud's understanding of the role of time in relation to conscious and unconscious processes:

> As a result of certain psycho-analytic discoveries, we are today in a position to embark on a discussion of the Kantian theorem that time and space are 'necessary forms of thought.' We have learnt that unconscious mental processes are in themselves 'timeless.' This means in the first place that they are not ordered temporally, that time does not change them in any way and that the idea of time cannot be applied to them.[55]

Freud does not dismiss the Kantian theorem, but he delimits it to a smaller functional region of the mind stating that the "abstract idea of time" is a reflection of the peculiarities of the system of mental processes where consciousness occurs as an effect. Time, consequently is not originally given, but a secondary effect of certain mechanisms of the psyche.

Consciousness is, by Freud's definition, the perception of external excitations and feelings of pleasure and unpleasure arising from within.[56] In contrast to the other systems of mental processes, what is in the system of perceptual-consciousness [*Pcpt.-Cs.*], as Freud names it, expires, it passes away. In all other systems excitatory processes must overcome a resistance, this struggle with the inherent inertia of the organism leaves marks or traces. These permanent traces must be understood negatively as the gradual erasure of resistance, they are wires of excitability in fallow land. But the system of perceptual-consciousness is different, this system has been exposed to currents of excitation so strong that there is no more resistance to be overcome.[57] Consequently, the excitations passes through or expires without any trace.[58] The fact that this system should undergo no further change, makes it according to Freud the most favorable for receiving stimuli.[59] Taken together with the statement that "*protection against* stimuli is an almost more important function for the living organism than *reception of* stimuli,"[60] this tells us something about the metaphysical core of Freudian thinking. Suspended in a universe of inexorable forces the organism would be shred into pieces if it did not have a protective enclosing barrier marking inside and outside. This stands in stark contrast to Deleuze's elated statement: "all is contemplation!"[61]—affirming the vigorous and productive capacity of excitation as the locus where life conjures and persists in an open co-continuance. While Freud envisions the skull as the physical barrier protecting the system of mental processes from external forces, the *modus operandi* of the system of perceptual-consciousness is itself set up only to receive appropriate excitation in small quantities, the system of perceptual-consciousness merely "samples" the external world. Freud illustrates his point by comparing the sense organs to feelers

tentatively stretching out into the world, only to retract when hit upon.[62] In addition to the transient quality of consciousness, the peculiar functioning of this system is by Freud associated with the temporality unique to consciousness. In *A Note Upon the "Mystic Writing Pad"* Freud elaborates what is only hinted at in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*:

> My theory was that cathectic innervations are sent out and withdrawn in rapid periodic impulses from within into the completely pervious system *Pcpt.-Cs.* So long as that system is cathected in this manner, it receives perceptions (which are accompanied by consciousness) and passes excitation on to the unconscious mnemic systems; but as soon as the cathexis is withdrawn, consciousness is extinguished and the functioning of the system comes to a standstill.[63]

According to this theory consciousness works in periodic flashes following the currents of energy shot through the system. Reflecting on this Freud continues, "I further had a suspicion that this discontinuous method of functioning of the system *Pcpt.-Cs.* lies at the bottom of the origin of time."[64]

Freud clearly states that these ideas and hypotheses are the result of speculation, even "far-fetched speculation."[65] Determining this a transcendental inquiry and not an empirical study, Deleuze encourages us to explore the connection between Freud's different metapsychological or transcendental suggestions[66]. As a derivative effect of the intermittent operation of consciousness the unfolding of time discloses itself as another means of protection, unravelling and ordering the sheer force of the external bombardment in a temporal sequence. In a roundabout way we are back at Deleuze's point that repetition as conceived by Freud is a transcendental synthesis of time. Repetition, Deleuze writes, is:

> [A]t once repetition of *before*, *during* and *after*, that is to say it is a constitution in time of the past, the present and even the future. From a transcendental viewpoint, past, present and future are constituted in time *simultaneously*, even though, from the natural standpoint, there is between them a qualitative difference, the past following upon the present and the present upon the future.[67]

From the natural standpoint, which means in our conscious experience, time unfolds with a past weighing in on the present and a present opened up by the expectation of the future. The threefold dimension of time is from a transcendental perspective however just a qualitative difference contracted within simultaneity. Just as repetition constitutes pleasure as the empirical principle governing life, repetition contracts within an unmoving simultaneity, a qualitative difference experienced as the movement of time.

Repetition is two-dimensional—it is in Deleuze's reading of Freud the repetition of *before* and *during*, i.e. the bipolarity of inertia and excitation—but it opens up a three-dimensional time because the future is the inevitable outcome of the two

correlative structures of past and present.[68] Again it might help our understanding to take a look at *Difference and Repetition* where Deleuze characterizes the passive synthesis of repetition as the foundation of time.[69] Defined as a recurrence, the paradox of repetition is that it must disappear before it re-occurs. The key to this paradox, or the condition of possibility for repetition, is the difference between the cases recorded or contracted by the being that contemplates repetition.[70] This difference or change in the mind that contemplates can be conceptualized both as a tendency to renew earlier actions and as a weight of expectation determined according to the number of repeated instances. It is in this sentiment that David Hume grounds the relationship of cause and effect. The difference in sentiment produced by repeated instances is by Hume, and later Deleuze, named habit. Fixing the very possibility of drawing inferences from earlier experiences, habit is understood as the principle which gives the human mind its particular nature to move beyond the given, projecting itself in the expectation of a future that resembles the past.[71] The operations of customary conjunction which grounds both expectation and belief, is in Hume's words "a species of natural instincts, which no reasoning or process of the thought and understanding is able, either to produce, or to prevent."[72] Making the very ability to predict events and to adjust actions accordingly depend on this species of natural instinct, Hume severs the neat distinction between instinct and understanding, consequently also blurring the conceptual division between voluntary and involuntary repetition.

*A glitch in the transcendental clockwork*

What emerges at the end of Jacques Derrida's analysis of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* is not a thesis as much as a theme: *rhythmos.*[73] While this primarily is a commentary on what Derrida considers Freud's speculative limping,[74] shuffling between more or less radical compulsive repetition, this theme of rhythm also occurs in our reading. Habit or custom as Paul Ricœur's proposes fixates the quality and quantity of our needs, but also their rhythm.[75] Manifested in our habits and character-traits, binding makes pleasure attainable on a systemic level, and as such it sets the rhythmic organization of excitation and its release. A time unit is not simply a metrical cut-out of some flat homogenous reality of quantity, it is a varying intensive interplay between excitations and inertia characteristic to the idiosyncratic organization of the individual.[76] Repeated excitation, for instance the alarm clock going off at 7, contracts an expectation according to Deleuze and Hume and with that we catch a rhythm. With such a rhythm, among so many others contracted in our being, the recurrence of excitation is hardly ever recognized—"and there is nothing new under the sun"[77]—unless of course it fails to appear, in which case something will be experienced as being off. In *Analysis Terminable and Interminable* Freud writes:

> The adult's ego, with its increased strength, continues to defend itself against dangers which no longer exist in reality; indeed, it finds itself compelled to seek out those situations in reality which can serve as an approximate sub-

> stitute for the original danger, so as to be able to justify, in relation to them, its maintaining its habitual modes of reaction.[78]

In this passage Freud reverses the dominating idea that in fixing our behavior it is habit that ties us to an environment. What Freud sees is that we cling to situations and places to justify and maintain our habits. This throws light on the puzzling statement with which we began: character-traits that remain the same are "compelled to *find expression* in a repetition of the same experiences."[79] Like habits or habitual modes of reaction, character-traits are not merely reactionary phenomena spurred by recurrent situations or experiences, but inconspicuous accomplices of these events. The adult ego is fortified (in the literal sense) through a contraction of defense mechanisms that serves to make agitation tolerable for the ego, and eventually these become, as Freud says, "regular modes of reaction of his character,"[80] even if redundant or dangerous. "What has come to life" Freud writes "clings tenaciously to its existence."[81] Both inherent excitations and external agitations are through a process of binding woven around objects and people to make up this fabric of reactions that enfold our ego and invest our being in social dynamics and quotidian rituals. Reality, it seems, is woven by repetition and reified by the conservative nature of the instincts.

But suddenly this reality is tinged, there is a fissure, something isn't right and one feels, as Freud says: "pursued by malignant fate."[82] What marks the threshold between coincidence and fate? Is it where enlightened rationality collides with self-appointed myth or the instant where gods manifests their existence? Relying on the traditional conception of fate or destiny, as a predetermined and inescapable trajectory devised by some form of divine faculty, the metaphysical split between the sphere of fate and that of coincidence is clear. For Freud, the threshold between chance coincidences and fate is marked by the experience of the uncanny. Freud writes, as we have seen, that it is what *reminds* of an inherent compulsion to repeat that is experienced as the uncanny. In this paper I have focused on the constructive work, as Deleuze would phrase it, of compulsive repetition. Characterized by Deleuze as a transcendental principle, binding is by its nature not only hidden from our experience, but constitutional for our experience. This means that the threshold between chance and fate has its locus in the moment where the work of compulsive repetition is exposed, when, for some reason, there is a deficiency in the transcendental clock-work of repetition.

According to Henri Bergson, consciousness reflects the leeway of indetermination where the individual can cut through the perfect determination of matter in an open moment of spontaneous activity. Whereas any unconscious material point or atom is, in its instantaneousness,[83] always already affected by the overwhelming force of all other atoms in the material universe, consciousness is the negative flicker of the actuality of these forces.[84] Rather than registering every excitation, consciousness functions as shield reducing the overwhelming influx to that which the organism can act upon. Although Bergson and Freud differ on crucial points, we can see an overlap in their conceptualization of consciousness as a kind of re-

duced reception of stimuli or temporal apperception protecting the being from the actual and overwhelming forces of the material universe. For Freud, however, it can also be seen, I will argue, as a protection from instantaneousness of the unconscious mental processes. "In the deepest strata of our minds, made up of instinctual impulses," Freud writes, "contradictions coincide,"[85] here succession involves co-existence.[86] This might give us an idea of the peculiar psychic materiality which in Freud's psychoanalytical practice present itself as indifferent to progress, but it also gives us an indication of what Freud means when he says that time is only an effect peculiar to conscious mental processes. It is this unconceivable simultaneity of before and after—the co-existence of being and non-being—the process of binding unravels and weaves into a temporal sequence. Before this, or rather beyond, cause and effect coincide in an over-determined tension too forceful for the organism to endure.

In *Dostoevsky and Parricide*, Freud characterizes epilepsy as an "uncanny disease."[87] The character is pierced by convulsions, cut in fractions or bracketed for a space of time that disappears. [88] From the violent and sudden convulsive attacks to brief periods of absence, it looks as though the patient is controlled by her unconscious.[89] The moment of the epileptic attack never existed, as Paul Virilio points out,[90] it is cut out of the temporal extension the individual circumscribes. But rather than a void this absence is the mark of an excess. Freud suggests that we should understand the epileptic attack functionally as an instinctual discharge of abnormal proportion put in place to relieve the organism in situations of imbalance or when there is a critical overload or "crisis-pitch" in the energy operating the mind.[91] Reflecting on this Freud wonders if the epileptic attack can be seen as a product and indication of instinctual de-fusion.[92] Could it be that the violent convulsions pulling the subject out of time marks the appearance of the otherwise silent death instinct? If the death instinct were about to appear, it would be in an instantaneous leap, Deleuze claims. Although Deleuze conceptualizes Thanatos as absolute groundlessness of repetition, this absolute cannot emerge alone—destruction is always the opposite of construction.[93] From the perspective of binding the epileptic attack appears as a systemic failure imprisoning the organism in a frenzy simultaneity of the unconscious without a future or a past (pleasure). It is along similar lines that Deleuze explains sadism and masochism. These perverse phenomena are cases in which the transcendental work of repetition and its constitutive relationship to pleasure as the empirical principle governing life is obscured or even reversed. Cut loose from the empirical ground of pleasure, repetition would spin around its own empty core dragging pleasure around as secondary gain subsumed by the gravitational force of repetition. In this light the difference between a tic and the character-trait emerge as a question concerning the transcendental capacity of repetition. As the nemesis of the character-trait, the tic occurs as a compulsive repetition that has failed its transcendental promise.[94] A metronome interrupting the rhythm of the song.

*Fated—in conclusion*

The uncanny does not mark a perversion, nor is it directly pathologized. It is a quotidian glitch in the transcendental work of repetition. The rhythm of reality is upset, events do not follow our habitual expectations, chance coincidences follow too closely upon one another, causal relations are unstable. For a split second the absolute instantaneousness of the unconscious pierces the conscious ego and time collapses together with the leeway of action. Confronted with the groundless delirium of our psyche, the quintessential capacity to constrain the overdetermination, our nature, is unveiled as the effect of a dumb machinery of repetition which fails us—suddenly, the spaceship is a necrotic bone, tossed into orbit, without purpose or direction.

There is a hiatus in Penelope's work of fidelity; neither weaving nor undoing it, neither binding nor unbinding, in this instant she doubts her love of Odysseus.[95]

## Notes

1. This research is made possible by The Research Foundation—Flanders (FWO).

2. Freud, Sigmund, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XXIII, trans. J. Strachey (London: Vintage Press, 2001) 218. Henceforth *Standard Edition*.

3. Cristina Fondi and Alessandro Franchi, "Definition of Bone Necrosis by the Pathologist," *Clinical Cases in Mineral and Bone Metabolism* 4.1 (2007): 21–26. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2781178/> [accessed April 11, 2018].

4. Although the future, year 2001, which Kubrick portrays is now passed, it remains at once futuristic and indicative of our human (all too human) way of relating to this planet. Sloterdijk's comment that the space station (which is what we see in Kubrick's film after the spaceship) "represents a model for being in a world condemned to artificiality" underscores this as both the past and the future in an age that have been deemed the Anthropocene. Peter Sloterdijk, "Forward to the Theory of Spheres," *Cosmograms*, ed. M. Ohanian and J. C. Royaux (Berlin & New York: Lukas and Sternberg, 2005) 236.

5. Hegel, G. W. F., *The Phenomenology of Spirit,* trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 208.

6. Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," *Standard Edition,* vol. XVIII, 21.

7. Freud, "Beyond," 23.

8. Freud, "Beyond," 7.

9. Freud, "Beyond," 22.

10. In accordance with current tendencies, one could assess this question from the perspective of the concept of plasticity, answering that the individuating repetition (or habit), must neither be too rigid, nor too loose. In the infamous words of William James, organic plasticity is defined as having a structure weak enough to "yield to an influence, but strong enough not to yield all at once" (William James, *The Principles of Psychology,* vol.1. Macmillan and Co, 1891, 105). One could argue that the concept of plasticity has today become the ontological reply to problems of evolutionary adaptation. Inbuilt in this idea is

consequently not only the idea of adaptation, but also the idea of progress. Even if the idea of plasticity can be said to replace the essentialist notion of teleology it is still founded on a particular notion of time in which Freud could not fit the workings of the psyche. Defined as the capacity to receive, maintain and give form, organic plasticity, is devised within an unfolding temporality, where it is not, as Catherine Malabou stresses, possible to return to an earlier form. The temporality of plasticity is irreversible, if a material has been shaped in a particular way, it cannot return to the earlier form. Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* trans. S. Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008) 1-14; *Ontology of the Accident*. trans. C. Shread (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012) 36; "Plasticity and Elasticity in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,*" *Diacritics* 37.4 (2007): 78-86; 82, 84.

11. A paper on the nature of repetition in Freud's work is of course also indirectly a paper about resistances. Repetition is a way of stalling analysis, both in its rigidity and its great ingenuity. Writing about resistances and repetition together would however require an analysis focused also on the threefold division between the Id, the ego and the super-ego which I have not included in this paper. I have chosen to focus more narrowly on what Deleuze terms the transcendental work of repetition. As such this paper does not consider the hermeneutic unveiling aspect of psychoanalysis, but focusses on the pragmatic 'energetic' aspect of working-through.

12. Freud, Sigmund, "The 'Uncanny,'" *Standard Edition,* vol. XVII, 237.

13. Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" 237.

14. Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" 249.

15. Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" 237.

16. Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" 237-238.

17. Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" 238.

18. Freud, "Beyond," 35.

19. I use them interchangeably.

20. Freud, "Beyond," 21.

21. Freud, "Beyond," 21.

22. Freud, "Beyond," 22-23.

23. Freud, "Beyond," 36.

24. Freud, "Beyond," 36. Original italics.

25. Or drives, which would be the more appropriate translation of Freud's *triebe*. In this text, however, I will use the term instinct, in accordance with the *Standard Edition* terminology.

26. Freud, "Beyond," 39, 44, 60-61 n1; See also Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Id," *Standard Edition*, vol. XIX, 40-41.

27. Freud, "Beyond," 38-39, 43, 53; "The Ego," 40.

28. Malabou, Catherine, *The New Wounded.* trans. Steven Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012) 197.

29. Freud, "Beyond," 15-17.

30. Freud, "Beyond," 16-17.

31. Freud, "Beyond," 26-27, 31.

32. Freud, "Beyond," 29. Later in the text Freud nuances this conclusion stating: "While this transformation [of freely mobile cathectic energy into bound energy] is taking place no attention can be paid to the development of unpleasure; but this does not imply the suspension of the pleasure principle. On the contrary, the transformation occurs on *behalf* of the pleasure principle; binding is the preparatory act which introduces and assures the dominance of the pleasure principle" (Freud, "Beyond," 62).

33. Freud, "Beyond," 30.

34. Edvard Munch, The Scream, 1893.

35. Freud, "Beyond," 62. In this context it could be interesting to discuss the idea that the organism is in need of some form of conjunctive relation to liberate excitation, either to an object x or to some eidetic content that can be manipulated in thought.

36. Breuer, Josef and Sigmund Freud, "Studies on Hysteria," *Standard Edition,* vol. II, 197.

37. Breuer & Freud, "Studies on Hysteria," 196. It is remarkable to note that Freud, in "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through" describes the transference neurosis instituted through analysis as a playground where the compulsion to repeat can play itself out and "display [...] everything in the way of pathogenic instincts that is hidden in the patient's mind." From "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through" *Standard Edition,* vol. XII, 154. Whereas one would normally associate a playground with the jolly jubilance of excited children, the playground Freud refers to is not directly associated with pleasure, but rather understood as a delimited space where the force of compulsive repetition is unleashed (Freud, "Remembering," 154; "Beyond," 20). But as such it is also the playground where the work of binding must be played out, working quotas of anarchic energy into the established and accepted libidinal circuit constituting the preferences of the coherent ego. In this respect psychoanalysis is not only, as Rebecca Comay writes, analysis in the sense of untying or unbinding the psychic knots of punishment and desire but also the designated space for binding anarchistic energies into the libidinal network. See Rebecca Comay, "Resistance and Repetition: Freud and Hegel," *Research in Phenomenology* 45 (2015): 237-266; 254.

38. Malabou, *The New Wounded*, 195-198.

39. Freud, "Beyond," 32.

40. Freud, "Beyond," 62.

41. Gilles Deleuze, "Coldness and Cruelty," in *Masochism* (New York & Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books, 1989) 111-112. At this point we are at crossroads, how should we understand the originality binding? In one way it can be seen as a mere preparation, a preface to the rule of pleasure, and thus functionally subsumed by what follows i.e. the pleasure principle, or it can be understood as conditional and independent of the pleasure principle, in which sense it is not understood as functionally subsumed pleasure, but independent

of it. Where Malabou represents the first stance, I follow the second route via the help of Deleuze. In *The Postcard,* Jacques Derrida opens up this discussion in consideration of the concept of mastering, which he finally brings back to the singularity of the drive, a drive to dominate, also to assure its own mastery, as such power is posited as the transcendental predicate of the drive. See Derrida, Jacques, *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) 387-405.

42. Deleuze, "Coldness," 112-113.

43. Deleuze, "Coldness," 113.

44. Deleuze, "Coldness," 113.

45. Deleuze, Gilles, *Difference and Repetition,* trans. P. Patton (London & New York: Continuum) 1994, 96.

46. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 93-95. For more on Deleuze and the three syntheses I recommend Henry Somers-Hall, "Deleuze, Freud and the Three Syntheses," *Deleuze Studies* 11, no. 3 (2017), 297-327.

interpretation of compulsive repetition in the form of paper I follow the fisure feel iences paper I reflect on this understa

47. Deleuze, "Coldness," 114.

48. Freud, "Beyond," 38.

49. Deleuze, "Coldness," 114.

50. Deleuze, "Coldness," 114.

51. Deleuze, "Coldness," 115.

52. Freud, Sigmund, "The Economic Principle of Masochism," *Standard Edition,* vol. XIX, 160.

53. Freud, Sigmund, "An Outline of Psycho-Analysis," *Standard Edition*, vol. XXIII, 146.

54. Freud, "Beyond," 63. This is a repetition of a point presented already in the first chapter of this work (8). While Freud had already developed some of these points in the "Project for a Scientific Psychology," I will not go into the development of this idea here.

55. Freud, "Beyond," 28.

56. Freud, "Beyond," 24.

57. Freud, "Beyond," 26.

58. It is interesting to note that Freud here draws the opposite conclusion of William James and Felix Ravaisson who also engage directly with ideas concerning repetition, facilitation and consciousness. While James and Ravaisson propose that facilitation due to repeated excitation is connected to a lessening of conscious awareness, Freud here seem to understand it as a condition for consciousness. See Felix Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, trans. C. Carlisle and M. Sinclair (London & New York: Continuum, 2008) 43, 47.

59. Freud, "Beyond," 26.

60. Freud, "Beyond," 27.

61. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 96.

62. Freud, "Beyond," 27-28.

63. Freud, Sigmund, "*A Note Upon the 'Mystic Writing Pad.'*" *Standard Edition* vol. XIX, 231.

64. Freud, "Mystic," 231.

65. Freud, "Beyond," 24.

66. Deleuze, "Coldness," 111.

67. Deleuze, "Coldness," 115.

68. Deleuze, "Coldness," 115.

69. For an account of the first synthesis as the foundation of time see for instance: Jay Lampert, "Living the Contracted Present—the First Synthesis of Time," *Deleuze and Guattari's Philosophy of History* (London & New York: Continuum, 2006) 12-30. See also: Somers-Hall, "Deleuze, Freud and the Three Syntheses," 297-327.

70. Deleuze, *Differenceand Repetition*, 94.

71. Hume, David, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beaucham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 120-123; Deleuze, Gilles, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, trans. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) 23-25.

72. Hume, *Enquiry*, 124.

73. Derrida, *Postcard*, 405-406.

74. Derrida takes the image of limping from the quote with which Freud brings *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to its end: "What we cannot reach flying we must reach limping. The book tells us it is no sin to limp" (Freud, "Beyond," 64).

75. Ricœur, Paul, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, trans. Erazim V. Kohák (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966) 298. It has been stressed innumerable times that there is a difference between "need" and the Freudian concept "pleasure." While "need" by definition marks a lack, "pleasure" is by Freud understood as a lowering or release of tension. That I allow myself to take a cue from Ricœur is due both to his own clause "custom fixates our needs (in the broadest sense)" and more importantly that the release of tension through binding is bound up, and is thus in need of certain triggers and excitations.

76. Derrida hints toward this idea, opening up the problem for further exploration (*Postcard*, 407-408).

77. Ecclesiastes 1:4-11.

78. Freud, "Analysis," 238.

79. Freud, "Beyond," 22, my emphasis.

80. Freud, "Analysis," 237.

81. Freud, "Analysis," 229.

82. Freud, "Beyond," 21.

83. In material and unconscious points or atoms the future is perfectly contained in the present. See Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory,* trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004) 1.

84. Bergson, *Matter & Memory*, 30-31.

85. Freud, Sigmund, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death." *Standard Edition,* vol. XIV, 296.

86. Freud, "Thoughts," 285.

87. Freud, Sigmund, "Dostoevsky and Parricide." *Standard Edition*, vol. XXI, 179. In "The 'Uncanny'" Freud also refers to the uncanny effect of epilepsy (242).

88. Here the flickering existence of K's holographic girlfriend Joi, in *Blade Runner 2049* comes to mind.

89. Freud, "Dostoevsky," 179-180.

90. Virilio, Paul, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance,* trans. P. Beitchman (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009) 19.

91. Freud, "Dostoevsky," 180. This, according to Freud, gives us a glimpse of the underlying mechanism of instinctual discharge. To support this hypothesis Freud draws attention to the early medical description of coitus as a kind of minor epileptic discharge (180-181).

92. Freud, "The Ego," 41.

93. Deleuze, "Coldness," 116, 120.

94. Here it is instructive to remember how the neurotic patient appears to be haunted by material that refuse to assume a position in time (Freud, "Beyond," 13, 18).

95. In Homer's *Odyssey* Penelope, the wife of Odysseus, weaves all day only to undo the work at night. Always unfinished, she defers courtship and guards her fidelity. It was Rebecca Comay's beautiful article, "Resistance and Repetition: Freud and Hegel" that allowed me to see the Penelopean character of the process of Binding (254, 256).

Alexi Kukuljevic

# WHY A HITCHCOCK DRINKS ITS COFFEE BLACK

In an interview with *bon appétit* magazine, Mel Brooks recalls an evening dining with Alfred Hitchcock before the release of *High Anxiety* (1977) at one of the latter's favorite restaurants, Chasen's on Beverly Boulevard:[1]

> He ordered a shrimp cocktail to begin, with cocktail sauce. And a sirloin steak, which was at least two inches thick. And a baked potato crammed full of chives and sour cream. And then he ordered a separate plate of asparagus with hollandaise sauce. And some sliced tomato on lettuce and there was some kind of blue cheese dressing on that … And for dessert he had, I don't know two bowls of vanilla ice cream with chocolate sauce, with strawberry or something on top. What a meal. And this is all true. You won't believe this … So he finished and he took out a kind of ostrich-covered wallet, and in it there were three cigars or four cigars, and I'm sure it was a Cuban cigar. He took it out and he took out a little guillotine from his pocket, which he always kept, and he clipped the tip of the cigar. And he put it in his mouth and he paused. He paused. I figured he'd take out a lighter. He paused, he paused, he paused. He took the cigar out of his mouth, put it back in the case, and put it back in his pocket. "Oh George." Headwaiter ran over, and he said, "George, I'm really peckish tonight. Do it again. … He had a big belly, and he ate it all. And he didn't have the dessert. He just finished the main course. He got the tomato and the Roquefort cheese dressing and everything, and then he lit the cigar. And I said, "Don't you want some cream on the side, or some milk on the side?" And he said, "No, no, no, I gotta watch the calories."…[R]eally a great joke. [Laughing] You know, he had black coffee. Watch the calories; watch him tower up like a goyishe, like nobody else in the world.[2]

Mel Brooks's narration—its richness of detail, attentiveness to Hitchcock's timing and fine use of that signifier of suspense, the cigar—lends to their encounter a cinematic quality, as if the scene had been directed with a refined sense for the impression the 'goodness' of his appetite would make, not only on his companion, but posterity as such. The gorging, the flabbergast, and the punchline. The joke here turns on understating the all too visible excess, situating "Hitchcock" within

the hole marked by the performative negation, "No, No, No…" and embodied in the blackness of his coffee.

"Wit is only wit," Lacan mentions in passing, "because it is close enough to our existence to cancel it with laughter."[3] And laughter here cancels any semblance of congruity to the creature before our eyes. The signifier's incision renders any consistent sense that image might have null. "Logic is dull," Hitchcock frequently reiterated, taking aim at his critics that he dismissed as the "plausabilists." It proceeds too consistently, intolerant of the incongruities Hitchcock worked so hard to plan.[4]

No stranger to making a spectacle of himself, Hitchcock carefully managed his public persona, the production more than authentication of his signature, treating his projected image as an extension of his cinematic art, always mucking about with the idea of his corpus and the relation its swelling mass would bear to his person. There was more than a bit of a Dandy in Hitchcock, to allude to Thomas Elsaesser's fine essay, and his films are littered with *dandyesque* rogues and elegant villains. One of the chief aims of the dandy is to render the *humanity* in the human unrecognizable. To this purpose, Hitchcock put his corpulence to good work.[5] "[L]ike the exorbitant ingestion of meanings by the image," Tom Cohen suggests, it is "always a signifier to be exploited—whether rendering the figure unthreatening and neutered, perhaps infantile, or signalling formality in excess."[6] In this case, it is a void to be stuffed.

Hitchcock once told Robert Boyle, a close friend and set designer of such films as *Shadow of a Doubt* and *The Birds*: "I have all the feelings of everyone encased in an armour of fat."[7] As armour, his suit of flesh deflects blows, but as fat it absorbs them. Feelings for Hitchcock are the effect of perturbations of a surface that does not just reflect, but is stained by its contact, as a mirror by the oil that leaks from the human pore. Feelings are as dirty as they are artificial: the result of a certain amplification of a stain. Just as melodrama, for Hitchcock, is in service of understatement, feeling is in service of registering the "cut" that is the vehicle of the cinematic idea. The image that does not react to the cut, that understates it, is most faithful to the null presence of the idea. The cut operates less perhaps like a blade than a tooth, akin to a biting remark that the image like the flesh must ingest.

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The principle of Hitchcock's eating follows closely the cinematic principle that he lays out in the essay, "Why I Make Melodramas."[8] "I use melodrama," Hitchcock writes, "because I have a tremendous desire for understatement in film-making."[9] Defining the "melodramatic film" as "one based on a series of sensational incidents," he claims that it is "the backbone and lifeblood of cinema."[10] However, the melodramatic is not any less real for being sensational, just as the understated is not more real for being less theatrical. As Hitchcock puts it: "A woman may receive the news of her husband's death by throwing up her arms and screaming, or she may sit quite still and say nothing. The first is melodramatic. But it may well hap-

pen in real life."[11] Striving for what he terms an "ultra-realism," his cinema assumes the contradictory form of the sensationalization of the understated, arriving at a form of melodrama that is *less* fictional than reality. Rather than assuming the opposition between reality and fiction, he displaces the distinction itself. Since audience's perception of reality has been shaped irreparably by a "habit of drama," as he puts it, "[r]ealism, faithfully represented," does not appear as such, seems "unreal," because "[t]his habit causes the audience to prefer on the screen things that are outside their own, real-life experience."[12] By sensationalizing "the strange anomalies of real life"—often dismissed as "wildly improbable" and "grotesquely unreal" though filched directly from the newspaper—he maintains at once "the entertainment demands of the screen" for "colorful action" without simply feeding their "habit of drama." He entertains contrawise: not by making time pass, but, let us say, by filling the void. Ultra-realism is thus more real than reality's lack of reality, since it includes the void that reality excludes. This is Hitchcock's formula for his break with a representational conception of cognition and thus cinema. Understatement internalizes the thing it excludes: sensation. It does so by sensationalizing lack, making the void scintillatingly present.

To fill a void is not simply to add something, like cream to coffee, but to mark out its emptiness, making a place for absence, and this is what allows Hitchcock to liken the construction of the cinematic phantasm, as he does in *Psycho*, to the taxidermist's macabre art. The taxidermist fills the void for the sole purpose of displaying a kill, mounting its vacancy, maintaining its look while vacating its gaze. Such a practitioner must first gut the beast before treating its hide and filling it with cheap materials. As Norman says, "It's cheap, really. You know, needles, thread, sawdust. [Today it would be Styrofoam.] The chemicals are the only thing that cost anything."[13] Taxidermy like cinema, Hitchcock suggests, preserves the look of the void.

The vacancy of the eye is what Hitchcock captures through the metonymic slide from shower head, to the eye, to the drain that follows the murder of Marion (Janet Leigh) in the infamous shower sequence in *Psycho*. Any crass attempt to reinstate metaphor—life going down the drain, etc.—results in mere cliché, which cannot sustain the formal relentlessness of the metonymic chain that associates these things by their voided shape. Reduced to their capacity to stand in the null place of a vacant subject—vacated by a virtuoso series of "cuts"—they do not become metaphors for Marion's loss of life, but emblems of insignificance, separated from their own meanings through their circumstantial association. He does not make something from nothing, but *some thing* of not.

Absence makes an impression, like the imprint left by Mrs. Bates on her bed, the poison illuminating the glass of milk carried by Johnnie Aysgarth (Cary Grant) in *Suspicion*, the smoke ring blown by Uncle Charlie (Joseph Cotton) in *A Shadow of a Doubt*, the stain on the glass that Brandon wants to keep for the museum in *Rope*, the crop duster that is dusting a cropless field in *North by Northwest*, or Hitchcock's black coffee. Absence *takes* place, hollowing out the signification of that which appears like the empty vessel of the "O" that stands for nothing of Roger O. Thorn-

hill's name and whose matchbook bares the initials ROT: the "O" being mighty coffin like.

Treating an absent presence as an all too present absence is perhaps Hitchcock's most central operation: one which Mel Brooks parodies in *High Anxiety* by making it shatteringly literal. Shooting a dinner scene at "The Psycho-Neurotic Institute for the Very, Very Nervous" from outside a large window, the camera slowly zooms in crashing, rather than passing, through the window, drawing the shocked attention of the dining analysts, Brooks included. The process of filmic enunciation here crudely intrudes on the enunciated like a fumbling voyeur. Far from positioning the director as a figure who holds all the spades, or a master manipulator who plays the audience "like a giant organ," Brooks allegorizes his own relation to the viewer as a goofball always ready to lay the banana peel. If the joke hits the mark, it is because Hitchcock, of course, would never resort to such clumsy measures. His approach being decidedly understated.

If he understates his relation to the viewer, this is not, however, because he takes himself and the cinema so much more seriously. Although he would take the joke in stride, Hitchcock's problem is neither concerned with calling the fictional, diegetic space of the film into question, by including in the space of the picture that which is purportedly excluded: the beyond of the frame or the physical "reality" of the camera, the set, etc.. Nor does Hitchcock, despite opinion, simply *personify* the camera's presence.[14] It may indeed be a certain decoy of authorial presence, like the cameo, but the question remains: what kind of presence? Hitchcock's notorious (and doubtless overstated) claim that "actors are cattle" provides a clue. Rather than humanizing the camera, by assigning an authorial role or making it a character, it is a question of dehumanizing the actor with its mobile presence, stripping him or her of "character," some reputed interiority that they could appeal to. When Ingrid Bergman had trouble 'motivating' a scene, he would simply tell her to "fake it," doing the trick.[15] If the camera's passivity acts in their place, it is because their roles are only animated by a series of "cuts." All images await the cutting that hollows them out: making them at once self-contained and yet insufficient unto themselves.[16] The inhuman, artificial cinematic gaze snatches away the interiority of 'character' by way of its irreducible exteriority and it is the cut implied by its animation that positions the subject in the very place of its absence: always between the image like a gap tooth. Inside by being irreducibly outside: on its masticated plane.

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Hitchcock conceives of cinema as vast network of the relations that determine the course of ingestion. As he tells Truffaut:

> I'd like to try to do an anthology on food, showing its arrival in the city, its distribution, the selling, buying by the people, the cooking, the various ways in which its consumed. What happens to it in various hotels; how it's fixed

> up and absorbed. And, gradually, the end of the film would show the sewers, and the garbage being dumped out into the ocean. So there's a cycle, beginning with the gleaming fresh vegetables and ending with the mess that's poured into the sewers. Thematically, the cycle would show what people do to good things. Your theme might almost be the rottenness of humanity.[17]

It is neither the beginning nor the end, nor the vast system of exchange that focusses Hitchcock's attention, but the chewing, the incessant chewing, that moment that already implies corruption, but is not yet wholly identified with the mess that flows into the sewer. This is the moment in which the teeth bite down on the image, positioning it in relation to those that are absent, broken down and tasted, prepared for ingestion. The average public, Hitchcock stresses, have little clue as to this process of "cutting," as little clue as awareness of the piping that carries the human mess through the walls and under the streets. A film must ingest the cuts that position its many seams, creating that phantom of interiority—a meaning or a message—that Hitchcock treats corrosively, insisting rather on the absolute exteriority of that which unfolds upon the screen.[18] Hitchcock liked to quote Sam Goldwyn: "Messages are for Western Union."[19] The message that Hitchcock sends cannot be telegraphed, since it would be composed of the stops between words: like Uncle Charlie's (played by Joseph Cotton) strange message from *A Shadow of a Doubt* in which he articulates the "stops" between the message: "Lonesome for you all. Stop. I'm coming out to stay with you a while. Stop. Will arrive Thursday and try and stop me. Will wire exact time later. Love to all and a kiss to little Charlie from her Uncle Charlie." It is this "between" that Hitchcock aims to show: the arrested image, so to speak, with all its bite marks.

The cinematic moving picture is cut up, or better chewed, masticated, only then swallowed in a gulp. Herbert Coleman recalled that Hitchcock "always said he hated the idea of swallowing food or drink, and in fact everything seemed to be taken in one huge gulp."[20] But he certainly chewed it, so to be more precise, the image is chewed in order to be tasted, absorbed by the tongue and palette and only subsequently swallowed, sent on its unmerry way. Only Cohen, to my knowledge, grasps the full extent to which in Hitchcock the eye is "metonymically transcoded as site of mastication, ingestion, the lips as eyelids, teeth as shredders, where the white skeleton protrudes."[21]

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Did I mention that Hitchcock loved his food? He once said that he would be happy to die eating. A gourmand, he even had meals on occasion flown in from Paris and his wine cellar was worth a small fortune. However, he was not fond of the toilet, even lifting his legs if he sensed a presence while in a public stall. Not surprising for one for whom eating was more conceptual than nutritional. Hitchcock liked to astonish, even shock, but only rarely disgust. His efforts were never aimed at simply tearing the fronts off houses to reveal the sty within. His feats of eating

were not the performance of a pig at the trough. Their ambition was to destroy the organic, or at least transform it into that empty vessel we call art, converting fat into chainmail.

In the episode that Mel Brooks recounts, Hitchcock's hunger per se is not at issue, but the manner in which it is put on display, cued by the repetition—"Oh George … Do it again"—as if it was not a meal but a scene to be replayed. The repetition of the meal situates him in relation to his appetite and it is this relation that becomes the kernel of this joke. Rather than simply sharing a meal with the master, Mel Brooks is treated to the spectacle of watching him eat. The meal's wanton excess, which serves no purpose, certainly no caloric function, other than Hitchcock's drive to transform the "health" of his appetite into something as fiendishly funny as it is *ugly*—to allude to the voice of Norman Bates's mother.[22]

This transformation is indubitably the source of the hilarity of Hitchcock's understatement: "No, no, no, I gotta watch the calories," as if health was a concern. An excess of calories is certainly at stake, contributing as they no doubt do to the girth of his physical presence, but their consumption here serves to lay stress to a certain *formality in excess*. Like the birds that Norman Bates stuffs—his hobby that is "more than a hobby," since "a hobby is supposed to pass the time," as he puts it, "not fill it"—Hitchcock's stuffing of his belly establishes the true enormity of his *peckishness*. He certainly does not eat like Marion Crane, which is to say, like a bird, unless we are to admit Norman's correction: "the expression 'eats like a bird,'" he stutters, "is really a fal-fal-falsity. Because birds really eat a tremendous lot." The *mise en scène* of Hitchcock's joke, his own stuffing, serves the function, like the chemicals of the taxidermist trade, of the fixation of his form.

This form, always stuffed into the same blue suit, is fixed by means of the understatement that announces a sudden concern with how all those calories will make him appear. But appearance was the concern all along: not a concern with the size of his belly, but with making the stomach appear as a bottomless pit, a hollow to be stuffed. By not just eating a hell of a lot, but repeating the meal, Hitchcock causes the quality of his appetite to change sign (from health to ugliness). A transformation that happens through his exhaustive capacity to put it away: "He had a big belly, and he ate it all." *Gorging* himself he assumes the artifice of his hunger through its hyperbole. The natural becomes unnatural, the real surreal, the stomach a void, not through an assumed opposition between the artificial and the natural, fiction and reality, but through a process of exhaustive ingestion, oversaturation, or exaggeration. The moment of restraint, the punctuations of wit, assigns the limit to the indulgence, making a recognizable form unrecognizable, marking the transformation, not by highlighting the excess but by positioning it in the place of its absence.

What was a stomach becomes a void to be stuffed. Not one meal or two meals, but a meal repeated, making the person who must absorb all those calories into a Hitchcock. No small achievement, it is a matter of applying the right stress, a matter of timing. Hitchcock goes to great lengths here, interestingly, to not place the accent

on excess. When Brooks attempts to get in on the joke, he does the opposite, emphasizing Hitchcock's overindulgence: "you've been so excessive, why stop there, why not add some milk or cream to your coffee." Hitchcock's joking rejoinder is a corrective that returns to the logic of understatement (No, no, no…), insisting on the necessity of restraint (I gotta watch the calories). Does the image that Hitchcock here forms depend on exceeding expectation or laconically disappointing it? It does both: it exceeds in order to disappoint. But the moment of disappoint is first, since the excess is staged for the display of this lack. Hitchcock has his cake, so to speak, and eats it to, but the stress clearly falls to the thing less given. Dessert, the second time round, is left out. It is as if Hitchcock is subtly saying, do not be distracted by the quantity, the matter of addition, not the amount that is put away; it is not the stretching of the belly, but the hollowing out of the gut. Repetition is repetition only if it adds nothing, the stress falling to the less given. And this is the power of understatement; it adds nothing and thereby positions the singularity of its act incongruously. It is repetition that here shifts the frame from one more to the less that is more.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, Hitchcock had repeated this performance, this half-gag, before. But as his biographer, Donald Spoto, remarks, he did not make a habit of it, preferring not to make a public display of his affections. Donald Spoto recounts:

> America was famous for steak and ice cream, Hitchcock told Smith, and so he had enjoyed plenty of both since his arrival. He admitted ordering vanilla ice cream for breakfast with a dash of brandy poured over it, and he said his luncheon and dinner so far had not varied: a double-thick steak at each meal. Smith thought Hitchcock was exaggerating, but when everyone ordered coffee at the end of the meal, Hitchcock showed the newsman by ordering a second steak to follow his dessert of an ice-cream parfait. The second steak he followed with still another serving of ice cream, and when Hitchcock summoned the waiter, the diners thought at last he would be leaving. But moments later the 21 Club hummed with the gossip: Alfred Hitchcock had ordered a third steak, and with it, so as not delay his companions, his third helping of ice cream.
>
> At last he seemed to finish, with a gulp of strong tea. "Lord!" Hitchcock said with a great sigh as he fingered the teacup. Smith thought he was commenting on the gargantuan meal. Instead, Hitchcock reflected aloud on the china cup, his mind perhaps bending back to his perverse habit of throwing teacups over his shoulder in the London studios. "How I'd love to shatter this cup. Fling it on the floor. Smash it in a million pieces. I can't explain it, but breaking things makes me feel fine."
>
> But the director restrained himself, and Smith turned the conversation to Hitchcock's appetite. With a final swallow of brandy, Hitchcock remarked with uncharacteristic honesty: "I find contentment from food. It's a mental process rather than a physical. There is as much anticipation in confronting

> good food as there is in going on a holiday, or seeing a good show. There are two kinds of eating—eating to sustain and eating for pleasure. I eat for pleasure."[23]

Gilles Deleuze credits Hitchcock with introducing the "mental image" into cinema.[24] Yet, one should also credit him with introducing it into the act of eating. This is not simply to suggest that Hitchcock here eats with an eye to the newsman and the discourse he will produce. Whether his aims are to astonish or frustrate, making his dining companions into prisoners of his appetite, they are repeated with an eye to the tooth of inscription. It is not simply his image, but its signification that is at stake. If the jaw drops when these episodes are repeated, it is to transform this linguistic instrument into a sagging hole. Such an impression cannot be made without the repetition of the act, of taking one bite after another. It is not what is eaten, or its metabolizing, but the act of eating, that sanctioned destruction, that turns the body into a screen of chainmail.

When Hitchcock utters "Lord!," setting up an expected reference, and then fingers his teacup, shattering the expectation that he would comment on the meal, this shattering stands in the place of the desire to destroy the object in his hands, figuring the teacups devastation: the evidence hanging, as if suspended, before the anxious gaze of Lydia Brenner in *The Birds*. And he does in fact destroy something; he destroys the form that one had of a Hitchcock. He hollows out the gaze as if pecking out the form that the eye could seize upon.

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Hitchcock jokes wittily that the style of his films results from a form of "self-plagiarism," each film cannibalizing the last. His style emerges from this process of incorporation. This becomes most evident perhaps in *Rope*: the film that put the form of a Hitchcock film most in question by eliminating montage in the strict sense altogether. But in doing so, he also pushes the relation between the eye and the mouth to its furthest extreme: identifying the camera, not with the eye, but the mouth, a mobile jaw that eats whatever is put before it. "[U]ntil *Rope* came along," he writes, "I had been unable to give full rein to my notion that a camera could photograph one complete reel at a time, gobbling up 11 pages of dialogue on each shot, devouring action like a giant steam shovel."[25] Perhaps his most experimental film, it also wears its allegorical dimension on its sleeve, but it makes of the sleeve a mere hollow where arms are kept.

An elaborate pun on real and reel, the film consists of nine cuts, each determined by the length of a single canister of film. The end of each reel, rather than being left to dangle, dare I say, is ingeniously concealed by a "featureless frame," to borrow Peter Wollen's apt description, that allows for the camera's reloading.[26] A truly colossal feat of technique and planning, involving, "a kind of intricate ballet for moving camera, furniture and performers," the film's artifice lies in the seamlessness of the camera's and the story's movement enabling for the time of the film's

"real" projection to coincide with the time that elapses within the fictional space of the film. "I wanted to do a picture with no time lapses—a picture in which the camera never stops."[27] As the camera eats up dialogue and ploughs through space, it causes an incessant upheaval which only the most rigorous imposition of order can disguise. The floor was covered with "tiny numbers" indicating spots that the camera man had to hit at a given point of dialogue, a choreography that required that everything be "wild" as Hitchcock termed it, movable in principle. This literal displacement concealed from view makes possible the mapping in turn of the figurative displacement prompted by the absent place of David Kentley whose dead body is the film's MacGuffin.

The film "centers" around David, a schoolmate of Brandon and Phillip, who strangle him at the start of the second reel. Hitchcock cues his murder with his scream, which is heard but concealed from view by the curtains of the apartment window. Abruptly "cut out," the scream's absence is timed to coincide with the only visible cut in the film in which the camera jumps from the exterior to the interior of Brandon's Manhattan apartment, focusing on the rope's silencing of Kentley's scream. Separating the seen and the heard, we are left to linger on the gasping mouth of David that no longer emits a sound. Without a voice, the mouth becomes a mere hole that is promptly stuffed into a chest. Appearing only to be promptly dispatched, David is a kind of any corpse whatever, "as good or as bad as any other," as Brandon says: "The David's of this world merely occupy space which is why he was the perfect victim for the perfect murder." And this is precisely what David will do for the remainder of the film: occupy space. Hidden in what Brandon will refer to as a "cassone," his absent presence will be the motor for the dark and macabre humor that drives the film.

A kind of practical joke taken to an absolute limit, David's murder is a purely gratuitous act staged for the pleasure of observing how their company, David's father in particular, will react to his absence. An experiment to test their capacity for detachment, their ability to register the queries of their guests as to David's absence without flinching, or showing any emotion at all. It is a test in understatement, of not reacting even though one's suit of fat is being bombarded with sensations. Brandon especially does everything within his power to intensify the pressure of the situation by actively presenting David's absence. As good a film as any about the withdrawal of being,[28] the film is less concerned with the concealment of a crime, than playing with the manner of its revelation. The film's drama is created not through the crime's revelation, nor by any need to confess, but by the strange manner in which David's absent place (the cassone) is incessantly presented. David's absent place is constantly put on display: not literally, of course, but figuratively, allowing him even, for instance, to become identified with the chicken served up and subsequently swallowed by all the guests. All the guests except Phillip, that is, who refuses to eat chicken, because, as he blurts out, he is not a "chicken strangler." It is his truly bizarre insistence that he does not strangle chickens, even though it was well known that he had rung the necks of more than a few, that leads to the

association of David, *strangled* by Phillip, with the chicken being eaten. And all the while this playful dialogue is being "gobbled" up by the camera.

The film abounds in such figurative play on David's literal absence, just as the film itself is a literal play on the figurative absence of the cut. Form and content seamlessly stitched, the film's efforts to hide Brandon's and Phillip's efforts to commit a perfect crime, figures the cinematic means of staging it. Hitchcock's "desire," as William Rothman suggests, to have his own technical mastery recognized, mirrors the character's paradoxical aim of having their own criminal audacity acknowledged: "the crux of *Rope*'s secret is that it allows the film to be a perfect counterpart to the murder at the heart of its narrative."[29] Absence figured and absence made literal is the real subject of the film.

And true to form, Hitchcock uses his cameo to complicate this relation between the figurative and the literal. He does not appear in person so to speak, but only as a sign of himself. Yet, this reflexivity which tempts one to align Brandon's facile Nietzscheanism with Hitchcock is in fact undermined with his cameo. Positioning 'himself,' as a sign to be read in the background, we glimpse his trademarked profile as a neon outline blinking in the Manhattan skyline, just as the party is breaking up. Its appearance coincides with the statement off screen, "I'm sure the old boy will turn up somehow," referring of course to David, but signalling Hitchcock and the spectator's long overdue search for a "sign" of his presence. He meets this search head on and all too literally: by making the sign of his presence the presence of a sign. If signs are only signs insofar as they refer, this sign refers not only to his absent presence, but the absence of his person. Referring then to his present absence, a sign of a sign, the status of his cameo aligns him with that other signifying absence, David Kentley. And the first literal clue, that is not a suspicion figured, is David's hat that Rupert tries to put on as he leaves only to find that it does not fit. Looking at the hollow of its form he sees the printed initials DK. Far from a signifier of mastery—Hitchcock is no Brandonian—he aligns himself with the hollow that DK occupies, that signifier of absence, that is presented to us as if the camera had "cut" to a close-up of its presence. As Hitchcock tells Truffaut, he overcomes the deficit of a lack of montage through the camera's ability to move in to a scene: a requirement that demanded the invention of a new lens that would allow for such range.[30] Hitchcock's sign that blinks on and off, literalizing its figurative play with presence and absence, does not refer us to his person, but the chubby profile of an "adrenal type."

†††

"A New York doctor once told me that I'm an adrenal type. That apparently means that I am all body and only vestigial legs. But since I'm neither a mile runner nor a dancer and my present interest in my body is almost altogether from the waist up, that didn't bother me much."[31]

†††

The things that made Hitchcock the happiest, according to his own ledger, were eating, drinking, and sleeping:

> I sleep like a newborn babe. I drink like a fish, have you seen what a red face I have? And I eat like a pig. Even if it does make me look more and more like a porker myself. Some days ago, walking along in New York, I saw myself reflected in the window, and before I recognized myself, I let out a yell of fright. Then I called to my wife, "Who's that porker on two legs?" I didn't want to believe it when she replied, "It's you dear."[32]

After likening himself to an infant and a fish, he misrecognizes himself as a pig with two trotters, leaving the punctuation of dry wit to Alma. If Hitchcock appears to himself at times to be a porker, it is wit that assures him otherwise, positioning him as a queer old bird, an odd duck, more chicken than cock, but certainly no ham, as he insists responding to a critic who described his cameo performance as such in *Stage Fright* where he can be spied as a passerby ogling the behind of his lead, Eve Gill, played by Jane Wyman.

> In *Stage Fright* I have been told that my performance is quite juicy. I have been told this with a certain air of tolerance, implying that I have now achieved the maximum limits of directorial ham in the movie sandwich.
>
> It just isn't true. There may have been a "MacGuffin" in my film appearance, but not a ham. My motives have always been more devious, or, if you prefer a more devious word, sinister. I have wormed my way into my own pictures as a spy. A director should see how the other half lives. I manage that by shifting to the front side of the camera and letting my company shoot me, so I can see what it is like to be shot by my own company.[33]

If the MacGuffin is that infamous apparatus for trapping that which is not, that which does not exist, like the mythical Scottish lion of the highlands; its presence marks an absence filled by the narrative, but this "filling" is a filling out of its void that serves to displace the film's raison d'être into those atomized particles that comprise the dissipated substance of cinema as such.[34] By referring his cameos to this utterly ridiculous creature, a MacGuffin, Hitchcock defines himself as:

> **Hitchcock** \'hich,käk\: a rotund bird which only appears human. Occasionally it lets itself be spotted obsessively preening the irreparable falsity of this image by pecking on the pounds.

Such a definition reminds us that Hitchcock may stuff himself to his heart's content, but his coffee must remain black. All the better to understate the void's presence, filling it with the deformity of his presence. The cock of his double-chin that refers us to the letters of his name reminds us that he is less pig than bird. And as Lydia Brenner worries in *The Birds*, it is a problem when the chickens won't eat.

The bird has pride of place in Hitchcock's bestiary: from the shot in *Young and Innocent* from a seagull's point of view, *Sabotage's* use of the bird store as a front for the bomb-maker, the artificial wing flaps whose disturbing resonance is fabricated by the trautonium in *The Birds*, to the crow perched on the branch of Hitchcock's lit cigar. The bird in Hitchcock is a friend of the void and just as he imagined a film entitled "Bartholomew the Strangler," he likely could have conceived of a "Francis the Hangman." A signifier of suspense, the bird is a creature of the void.

It is not the void that scares a Hitchcock, but its absence. Hitchcock had a singular horror of eggs:

> I'm frightened of eggs, worse than frightened; they revolt me. That white round thing without any holes, and when you break it, inside there's that yellow thing, round, without any holes... Brr! Have you ever seen anything more revolting than an egg yolk breaking and spilling its yellow liquid? Blood is jolly, red. But egg yolk is yellow, revolting. I've never tasted it.[35]

Yolk is too runny, too shapeless, for a Hitchcock, and unable to register the beak of an incisor. And it is the bite of wit, to return to Lacan's remark, that situates the subject that enunciates it in the place of its absence.

## Notes

1. Hitchcock was one of a handful of figures who had their own booth at the restaurant. Hitchcock dined there, religiously, on Thursdays. Chasen's played a key role in Hitchcock's "ritual of manners" as Thomas Elsaesser puts it: "Affecting a superstitious nature, a fear of crossing the street or driving a car was part of the same public gesture [of always staying at the same hotel or always dining at Chasen's]: to make out of the contingencies of existence an absolute and demanding ritual, and thereby to exercise perfect and total control, almost as if to make life his own creation." Elsaesser, "The Dandy in Hitchcock," *Alfred Hitchcock: Centenary Essays*, ed. Richard Allen and S. Ishii-Gonzalès (London: BFI Publishing, 1999) 3-14, 5.

2. "Mel Brooks on Omelettes, Coffee, and the Inimitable Appetite of Alfred Hitchcock," Interview with Mel Brooks, *Bon Appetite Magazine On-line*, May 17th 2013. https://www.bonappetit.com/people/celebrities/article/mel-brooks-on-omelettes-coffee-and-the-inimitable-appetite-of-alfred-hitchcock

3. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: Norton, 1988) 234.

4. François Truffaut speaks of the "planned incongruity" of the famous scene with the crop duster in *North by Northwest*, in Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), 256.

5. Recall his clever cameo in *Lifeboat*. Placing himself into the boat as model for a newspaper advertisement for "Reduco," "The Sensational New OBESITY SLAYER," Hitchcock sinisterly establishes with tongue in cheek the relation between his own struggle with weight loss and the all too serious diegetic reality facing his boat of castaways. Lifeboat—a film

about weight loss?—yes, indeed, for one who approaches life as such a joke. "40,000 dollars is a joke to me, the whole world is a joke to me," Uncle Charlie hurls at the priggishness of the bank manager in *A Shadow of a Doubt*. And 40,000 dollars is the sum that Marion Crane steals from her employer, in *Psycho*, ending up ultimately in the trunk of her car at the bottom of the bog. As a side note, Thomas Leitch, commenting on the role of Hitchcock as 'celebrity auteur,' mentions how Hitchcock did not merely lend his name, but his "unmistakable image to the projects of others in order to fatten their market." Leitch, "The Outer Circle: Hitchcock on Television" in *Alfred Hitchcock: Centenary Essays*, 59.

6. Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies: Vol. II War Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005) 18.

7. As quoted by Peter Ackroyd, *Alfred Hitchcock: A Brief Life* (New York: Doubleday, 2016).

8. In *The Dark Side of Genius*, Donald Spoto describes the episode in the chapter addressing the years 1937-39. Hitchcock's essay appears in 1939.

9. Alfred Hitchcock, "Why I Make Melodramas" in *Hitchcock on Hitchcock, Vol. 2*, ed. Sidney Gottlieb (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015) 77.

10. "Why I Make Melodramas" in *Hitchcock on Hitchcock, Vol. 2*, 77.

11. "Why I Make Melodramas" in *Hitchcock on Hitchcock, Vol. 2*, 76.

12. "Why I Make Melodramas" in *Hitchcock on Hitchcock, Vol. 2*, 77.

13. As William Rothman notes, "This is a joking comment about the link between Norman's stuffing things and Hitchcock's acts of filming" *Hitchcock—The Murderous Gaze* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982) 280.

14. William Rothman writes, for example, "In Hitchcock's films, the figure of the author is an important—perhaps the most important—character. One cannot even accurately relate the story of a Hitchcock film without taking into account the author, or his instrument, the camera." "Some Thoughts on Hitchcock's Authorship," in *Alfred Hitchcock: Centenary Essays*, 30.

15. Donald Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Ca Capo Press, 1983) 275-276.

16. Gilles Deleuze formulates this well when he writes, "Each image in its frame, by its frame, must exhibit a mental relation" *Cinema I: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press) 201.

17. Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, 320.

18. George Toles formulates this nicely: "Hitchcock's style is predicated on the belief that the surface of a screened image is absolute. It never yields to anything 'within.' The only interior it has is supplied by the mind of the spectator." "'If Thine Eye Offend Thee…': Psycho and the Art of Infection" in *Alfred Hitchcock: Centenary Essays*, 164.

19. "Surviving: An Interview with John Russell Taylor" in *Hitchcock on Hitchcock: Selected Writings and Interviews, Vol. I,* Ed. Sidney Gottlieb (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 60.

20. As quoted by Donald Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Ca Capo Press, 1983) 382.

21. Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock's Cryptonomies, Volume I. Secret Agents* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005) 62.

22. I am alluding to Norman's first 'conversation' with his mother, in *Psycho*, in which she says, "Go on, go tell her that she'll not be appeasing her ugly appetite with *my* food or my son. Or do *I* have to tell her because you don't have the guts."

23. As quoted by Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius*, 170-171.

24. See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement Image*, 200-205. Deleuze's analysis of Hitchcock is correct to link the problem of relation to a "process of weaving," but errs in attributing Hitchcock's destitution of the "whole" to a tragic orientation. As this essay hopes to establish, it is rather a ruthlessly comic dimension that motivates him. In response to a question of why he only made thrillers, Hitchcock once remarked to the contrary that all of his films were in fact comedies. The truth of this claim cannot be assessed without grasping the relation it bears to the operation of putting one's tongue in one's cheek.

25. Alfred Hitchcock, "My Most Exciting Picture" in *Hitchcock on Hitchcock, Vol. I*, 275.

26. Peter Wollen, "Rope: Three Hypotheses" in *Hitchcock: Centenary Essays*, 78.

27. Alfred Hitchcock, "My Most Exciting Picture," in *Hitchcock on Hitchcock, Vol. I*, 275.

28. For the relevance of Hitchcock to the question of being, see Mladen Dolar, "Being and MacGuffin," *Crisis & Critique* 4.1 (2017): 83-101.

29. *Hitchcock—The Murderous Gaze*, 247.

30. "When I look back, I realize that it was quite nonsensical because I was breaking with my own theories on the importance of cutting and montage for the visual narration of the story. On the other hand, this film was, in a sense, precut. The mobility of the camera and the movement of the players closely followed my usual cutting practice. In other words, I maintained the rule of varying the size of the image in relation to its emotional weight within a given episode" (Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, 180).

31. Donald Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius*, 385.

32. Oriana Fallaci, "Hitchcock: Mr. Chastity" in *The Egotists: Sixteen Surprising Interviews*, trans. Pamela Swinglehurst (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1963) 239-56.

33. Alfred Hitchcock, "Master of Suspense: Being a Self-Analysis by Alfred Hitchcock" in *Hitchcock on Hitchcock*, vol. 1, 122.

34. In Hitchcock's first film, *The Lodger: A Story about the London Fog*, the colon itself hints at the operation his cinema will repeatedly negotiate. Nominally a melodrama concerning the enigmatic identity of the lodger, the film in fact tells the story of the London fog. The figure is displaced by that which places it: the fog that marks the "Avenger's" present absence. The fog presents the void's presence that avenges itself on all attempts to assign it a determinate place and meaning within the narrative, which would make it the mere functionary of an attempt to pass the time. But the fog does not pass, it remains, it fills the void by marking the place of a vacant figure.

35. Fallaci, "Hitchcock: Mr. Chastity."

Amanda Holmes

# 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 Psychical 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 means 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, misrecognized 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 promordial 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 Aristolelian 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.

Nadia Bou Ali

# THE FATE OF EVERYTHING THAT IS WRITTEN

*Writing, from its origins, up to its last protean techniques, is only something that is articulated as the bone of which language is the flesh.*

*Jacques Lacan, Seminar XVIII*[1]

The question of writing occupied Lacan's work from the very beginning to the very end. In his later formulations he maintained that the letter, or the written word, is not reducible to the work of the signifier—which is located in the symbolic—but belongs to the real: "the written word is the limit or shoreline against which the real breaks into the symbolic,"[2] i.e. the letter for Lacan is considered more explicitly material than the sound. This statement must be understood in relation to his claim that the subject is the answer of the real (*la réponse du reel*) in the symbolic.[3] In his later obsession with Joyce as a "literary saint," we can find a condensed version of Lacan's theory of the subject: one that is split between truth and knowledge, or between jouissance and the symptom. Joyce is seen to have introduced a new *symptome,*—or the *sinthome*—that is a compulsive repetition in as far as writing provides, a "linguistic discharge for the structural and inadmissible jouissance of the Other."[4]

In Lacan's elaborations on the *sinthome* literature (as a form of writing) is to be seen as a model of linguistic equivocation in which psychoanalysis finds a new youth. Psychoanalysis forces literary criticism to measure up to it with "the enigma remaining on the latter's side."[5] The enigma is the real question though: what is the enigma that is on the side of psychoanalysis? As an artist, Joyce's *savoir-faire* reveals that "there is something we cannot enjoy," that there is "no other of the other to pass the final judgement." [6] That is, the enigma that Joyce reveals is that with writing, bit by bit, we cease to imagine, and we begin to enter the real. Ultimately, Joyce the *sinthome* calls into question the status of the real, the possibility of non-ideological identification in the subject's assumption of the Name-of-the-Father, and the function of repetition in re-symbolizing the lack in the symbolic. Does Joyce, the *saint-homme*, then represent what is ejected from ideological jouissance or the enjoyment of the Other. thereby posing the question of a possibility of a new

symbolic and the subversion of a hegemonic master signifier? It is unclear whether the *sinthome* is a repetition of the symptom, or some new form of traversal of the fundamental fantasy that not only generates a new symptom, but moreover an individualized symbolic[7] that defies the hegemony of a master-signifier.[8]

It cannot be ignored that the saintly posture ascribed to Joyce is that of a modernist egoist, a "radical individualism defined by a refusal to 'serve' any other cause than that of the subject's own [which] entails a rethinking of 'ownership' and a desire of owning… the entire world of discourse at least."[9] Joyce seems to be at once a "singular individual" or a "littoral fact," on the one hand, and on the other an incarnation of the ego as symptom. Is Joyce—*the sinthome*—then an answer to the real in as far as he straddles the border between *lituraterre* as an erasure of the symbolic, and a *literalization* of the imaginary? Is Joyce, the omniscient God, really a limit, and a breaking point?[10] Or does Joyce bear witness to the limits of the Lacanian subject, not as a lost cause, but as what only emerges from the narrow passageways between the real and the symbolic?

It is well established by now that Lacan wished to maintain a notion of the subject that was in line with Descartes and Hegel. The split subject of the unconscious cannot but be the correlate to the subject of science; that is, a subject that is not the result of ideological interpellation but a "defile"[11] of the "rejection of all knowledge"—Cartesian doubt. This defile, this narrow passageway of definition, simultaneously establishes that subject as one which science cannot suture, while at the same time it "is nevertheless claimed to establish for the subject a certain anchoring in being":

> I sustain that this anchoring constitutes the subject of science in its definition, "definition" to be understood in the sense of a narrow doorway [or defile]. This lead [*fil*] did not guide me in vain, for it led me… to formulate our experienced division as subjects as a division between knowledge and truth.[12]

The analytic discourse is not concerned with saving the truth (*salva veritate*)[13] for it addresses the jouissance of the subject by acting like its *déchet,* the *trashitas* of the subject of the unconscious (here, the analysand's desire). Most importantly, the analytic discourse is determined in writing: in the *objet (petit) a*—an object which is nevertheless a letter, one whose typographical case is specified—for example, or in the phallus, signified by the letter Φ.[14] All that is produced in discourse, understood as the fantasy structure of the social link, is considered by Lacan to be an effect of the written.[15] The written, here, is not simply equivalent to the "autonomy of the signifier" as it is posited by Saussurean linguistics; rather the dimension of the written has nothing to do with the voice but with the gaze: "What you hear is the signifier. The signified is the effect of the signifier, *la lecture de ce qu'on entend de significant.*"[16] The analytic discourse then gives "a different reading to the signifiers that are enunciated (*ce qui s'enonce de significant*) than what they signify."[17] It has to assume that the "subject of the unconscious knows how to read" or that it can be taught how to read; however, what the unconscious is taught to read in the

analytic setting is on a different plane from what psychoanalysis as a discourse can write of it.[18]

*A tale of two deaths: the subject and ideology*

Lacan's conception of subjectivity stands in contrast to the structuralist dismissal of the subject at the time in which he was teaching. Althusser for instance, broke with humanism and construed the subject as an effect of structure. The Althusserian interpellated subject is one that is captured in imaginary identification and remains a subject of consciousness at the site(s) where both recognition and misrecognition occur. Žižek and Dolar have both argued that what is eluded in Althusser's account of interpellation is the symbolic itself,[19] while for Lacan, it is the symptom and fantasy (the barred subject and *objet a*) that are beyond interpellation, and connected through the notion of the *sinthome*.[20] Lacan's account of the subject, as what emerges at the point of failure of interpellation and the recognition of loss that has to be incurred for entry into the symbolic, challenges Althusser's clear-cut distinction between materiality and subjectivity, in which the subject is only a result of the process of interpellation, and materiality what is asserted as the exterior of ideology.

In contradistinction to this, Lacan's account of the subject posits it as the remainder of interpellation: "the psychoanalytic point of departure is the remainder produced by the operation… the clean cut is always unclean; it cannot produce the flawless interiority of an autonomous subject. The psychoanalytic subject is coextensive with that very flaw in the interior." The Lacanian subject is then one that "emerges at the point of non-recognition: this is not me. I was not there"[21]—that is, there is an alien kernel to subjectivity, one of which the symptom (and the *sinthome*) is the most striking manifestation.

If we consider Lacan's delineation of the emergence of the subject it is possible to map out Althusser's notion of interpellation as what occurs in the register of alienation and not separation.[22] In Lacan's dialectic of identification or the confrontation between the subject and the other, the subject drops out of the picture and the subject's own disappearance, *aphanisis*, is the first step towards subjectivity. In the mirror stage, the ego as imaginary identification is what comes to replace a non-existing subject, or the subject only retroactively emerges as an imaginary identification when faced with the other (the mirror image, other child, the Other). Alienation is a process through which the subject appears precisely as a non-being or in the place of a lack in being, there is no subject prior to the Other and the encounter with the Other affirms the subject as an "empty set" or as what is out of place.[23] If the subject is without being and only appears in the field of the Other then what comes back to the subject in imaginary identification is not really his image, i.e. the imago is fundamentally (de)formative.[24] Rather, what comes back to the subject is a sign: the sign comes back to "petrify the subject in the same movement by which it calls the subject to speak and function."[25] The sign or the signifier

here comes to represent the subject for another and the chain of signification is put into place: the subject is completely submerged by language or by "empty speech" as Lacan calls everyday language—versus the full speech of analysis. The lost object that is to be re-found is a signifier of a missing signifier, and the desire of the Other acts as a stand-in for a structurally missing representation, for representation in the unconscious is not whole, not-all.

The subject is thus inscribed in the field of representation, it features as something represented, and not for whom something is represented. This step was also crucial for Freud in the seminal text negation, *Die Verneinung*, whereby we can detect the two-fold process of alienation in what Freud calls the form of intellectual judgment or "reality testing" where the subject comes to be represented for something else.[26] Freud posits reality testing as the process by which "whether something which is in the ego as a representation can now be rediscovered in perception, reality, as well."[27] It is the process through which a foreign body the ego is formed as internal to the subject, as a foreign intruder through which external objective reality is then experienced.

What is inaugurated in this process, or the first signifier as such, is the inaugural point of the Ego-Ideal [S1] what Lacan will call "the unary trait," the trait of one-ness, but this One-ness is only possible in relation to another S2, through which the chain of signification is put into place. Separation is *to be put in the world* in the field of the Other whereby the other is revealed as also lacking. The example Lacan gives is of the child's question: *why are you telling me this?*

> The desire of the other is apprehended by the subject in that which does not work, in the lacks of the discourse of the Other, the child's questioning, the why's of children, are about securing a place for themselves in the desire of the Other whereby the question posed is: can you lose me?[28]

The subject now devotes himself to the lack of the Other: desire is the desire of the Other, i,e. man's desire is for the Other to desire him. This is the (lost) "cause" of his desire: the *objet a* emerges here precisely because the Other's desire is elusive, it is (always already) lost and cannot be squared with the subject's desire: "desire crawls, slips, escapes, like a ferret."[29] For instance, the child cannot decipher the desire of the mother—there is something about her desire which escapes him. We can think of Hamlet here and his mother's desire, for which Ophelia acts as a stand in, as *objet a* or O-phelia.[30] Where the rift is introduced between the child (subject) and the mother's (other) desire, *objet a* emerges, and this is no longer the realm of the demand to be desired by the Other—instead, the subject is now in desire proper: "it is a repetition based on a lack engendered from the previous time that seems to reply to the lack raised by the following time."[31] The subject's symptom or the "silent point in the speaking subject" is a site of conflict in which *objet a* is kept alive, and the *objet a* in turn reveals that the object of the drive is independent of any other (real) object.

> It is difficult to designate that subject anywhere as subject of a statement—and therefore as articulating it—when he does not even know he is speaking. Hence the concept of the drive, in which the subject is designated on the basis of a pinpointing that is organic, oral, anal, and so on, which satisfies the requirement that the more he speaks, the further he is from speaking.[32]

The symptom is then what ideological interpellation cannot account for and to which analysis is directed for the purpose of locating the subject's position in fantasy. The symptom escapes the chain of signification and brings forth a lack in the signifying chain, a (-1), that is due to the fact that jouissance has no signifier and abuts the real. It is in listening to the "sym that bols and the sym that toms," that the analytic discourse tunes in to the subject as a response to the real. Mladen Dolar's formulations on the voice as *objet a*, as what disrupts the division between the internal and external and exposes them as irreconcilable domains, are important here: "only insofar as there is a real as an impossibility of presence is there a subject. The voice may well be the key to the presence of the present and to an unalloyed interiority, but it conceals in its bosom that inaudible object voice which disrupts both."[33]

Is this object voice then the written or the function of the letter that underlies any reality? Is it the bone (sym that bols) for which language is the flesh (sym that toms)? Further, is the object voice, the bone, the same as that which resists *aufhebung* or sublation, the death drive that cannot die?[34] In Dolar's reading, Beckett's—and not Joyce's—voice is deemed as *increvable,* as un-killable, or as what cannot die even as it keeps trying.

> [The death drive] is not a drive towards death but quite the opposite—despite some confusion in Freud—a drive which itself cannot die. It is a pure thrust of persistence which cannot be annihilated, but it can merely be destroyed from without as a pure life in the loop of death that emerges on the verge of nothing, as an "unnullable least" which inextricably brings together the stone, that epitome of death and exteriority, and the voice, the epitome of life and interiority.[35]

Dolar renames the death drive as *beckettable*, in a parallel move to Lacan's renaming of the symptom as *Sinthome* via Joyce. For with Joyce, the Saint, we have a "refuse of jouissance" or a "man devoured by letters," [36] only to emerge as saintly individual, a scribe of a stream of consciousness or a Saint-homme while with Beckett, "the voice maintains itself as unplaceable, as something at the very edge of the mind and the world or of speech and the body; it therefore cuts into both and is cut by both."[37]

In contrast, Joyce stands in for the pretense of jouissance and exposes the *objet a* as a lack in the real, for is this not the ultimate task of psychoanalysis? If Joyce reveals the automatism of jouissance then with Beckett we seem to be already on the side of repetition, of reaching the end at the very beginning only to repeat it again: with Becket we have a "a pure thrust of persistence"[38] of the voice as a crack in a pure nothing, as a repetition of a death that can never be terminal. The distance between

Joyce and Beckett is then one that can be read as a tale between two deaths or between *objet a* and the compulsion to repeat.

*Littoral as pure erasure*

> Erasure of no trace whatsoever that is prior: this is what constitutes the land [terre] of the littoral. Pure litura that is the literal. To produce this erasure is the reproduction of this half without complement of which the subject subsists.[39]

If we read Lacan closely, Joyce reveals the "virus of the signifier" or the ceaseless work of jouissance against which psychoanalysis must put together the pieces of the real, here and there, and provide it with its lucubrations. The *sinthome* writes what it cannot read. That is why Joyce is more of an artist than a poet, he does not realize he is making a *sinthome* but is "a pure artificer [..] a man of know-how."[40] Joyce is an artist because the master signifier has not managed to steal his know-how, his enjoyment, which gradually erodes the master and gnaws away at it.[41] The terms that Lacan uses, Lituratterre and gullying, for describing the function of writing carry the meanings of passageways in a landscape: a shoreline, stream, and shimmering course describe the cut into a landscape or stone instilled by the slow yet persistent work of water. The "gullying of the signifier" is meant to be an interruption of the signifying chain or the repetition automatism of the symbolic passageway through which the *sinthome* emerges, in other words, the *sinthome* is not caught up in intersubjectivity. The written work is to be treated as the testimony given by an obsessional subject on the structure that determines her, by which sexual rapport appears impossible to formulate in discourse.

The littoral or the written is a shoreline, a border between center and absence or between knowledge and jouissance. Further, the void that is carved out by writing is distinct from objet a because it is not always ready to welcome jouissance. Joyce cannot simply be the object of a psychoanalysis that seeks knowledge in the symptom and psychoanalysis cannot be conceived as a science of a nagging object since "objet a is not peaceful [...] it doesn't leave you in peace?"[42] The *sinthome* then is a pure know-how that does not know itself, and is the site in which writing makes a name for itself, a site whereby literature approaches the status of science or the status of a "littoral fact." Language is only possible because of the impossibility of symbolizing the sexual relation and the "littoral fact," as Lacan argues in *Seminar* XXIII, is a fact because it does not feign the sexual relation but exposes it as a non-relation. The *sinthome* then is distinct because it approaches the truth of non-relation by being a "defile" of knowledge.

We can now understand how it is that literature ultimately exposes the "illiteracy of the symbolic," as Dany Nobus has put it.[43] The relationship then between psychoanalysis and literature is complicated: it is one of a measuring against each other. Lacan's replacement of *Litura* for *litterra* replaces writing with the notion of erasure, deletion, and correction. Joyce's writing does something different to *Litera-*

*ture* for it makes a litter out of the letter: if the letter is a litter then culture and "civilization is a sewer."[44] It is only by admitting this that Lacan says a position can be made from which "to save the honor of literature." Literature uses up the leftovers of society and in fact becomes a piece of trash: Joyce "slips from *a letter* to *a litter,* from *a lettre* to a piece of trash,"[45] and psychoanalysis in its understanding of waste as surplus jouissance carries the key to discern in literature what is more than the endless repetition of symptomatic compensations for the lack of knowledge. The endless cycle of repetition is halted only to be replaced by an acknowledgement of ignorance, of the ignorance of *savoir-faire*. This ignorance is nothing but the ignorance of knowledge itself.

The task of psychoanalysis, then, is not to simply interpret the literary text but to insist on the "weapon of equivocation" against the *sinthome*. As Lacan puts it in *Seminar* XXIII: "it is uniquely by equivocation that interpretation works. There must be something in the signifier that resonates."[46] Words have an effect, and drives are the echo in the body of the fact that there is speech. The letter always arrives at its destination without recourse to any content, it outlines a hole in the edge of knowledge, it isn't simply a frontier between the Umwelt and Innenwelt, but a limit, a point that exposes the two as non-reciprocal frontiers. In other words, writing is not an impression on the mystic writing pad, but functions in an economy of language as that which is Littoral: that by which langue, language, is affected. The Littoral functions as an erasure on the "shimmering course" of "the bouquet of the first trait [unary trait] and of what effaces it,"[47] and it is from this conjunction that the subject is made.

However, erasure does not simply conjoin with a presence: it is "as erasure of no trace whatsoever that constitutes the land, *terre*, of the *littoral*."[48] The literal is pure *litura*: *pure erasure, pure deletion*. The littoral can only turn into literal if in the rupture between knowledge and truth, between presence and absence, an expulsion of what may constitute jouissance is possible. Lacan insists that it is a turn that is possible at every moment for the subject. From the littoral to the literal and finally to litter-al. From knowledge in failure to a failure in knowledge, this is what psychoanalysis can make of literature.

> "It is insofar as the unconscious knots itself into a , which is what there is singularly in each individual, that one can say that Joyce, as it is written somewhere, identifies with the individual. He has made himself privileged enough to have, at the extreme point, incarnated in himself the symptom, that by which he escapes any possible death, by reducing himself to a structure that is precisely that of LOM [*l'homme*, man], if you will permit me to write it quite simply as l.o.m."[49]

If the *sinthome* exposes the illiteracy of the symbolic order then the interpretation of literature is premised on decimating it to the rubble, to the remainders of gullying, that it really is. Literature then can act as a violent intruder that takes away something from culture, it is "a ruthless excavator,"[50] that introduces a rup-

ture in knowledge, a hole in knowledge. This invasive function of literature does not puncture a hole in what was full before, but introduces a rupture in knowledge that has the ability to continuously repeat only if allowed to retrospectively create the illusion of an absolute jouissance that has been lost. This is what we could call idiotic enjoyment—Joyce's enjoyment?—the jouissance of *objet a* in the fundamental fantasy that has to be traversed: it is ultimately an ideological function when considered from the standpoint of structure rather than from the standpoint of the subject failing to be interpellated by it.

In the *Seminar* on "The Purloined Letter," Lacan argues that the signifier's *caput mortuum* or worthless remains takes effect through a repetition compulsion that departs from the Freudian understanding of the notion of existence as reminiscence. With regards to the question of repetition, Dolar has placed Lacan on the side of Kierkegaard in this debate, and repetition is pitted against memory and reminiscence Lacan indeed moves beyond Freud and reinterprets Freud's discussion of the child's *Fort-Da* game: the modulation of the alternation of presence and absence through syllables in the game is the direct manifestation of the determination that the subject receives from the symbolic order. It is not however a question of genesis for Lacan but of structure: "it is at the moment of their essential conjunction [presence and absence] and, so to speak, at the zero point of desire that the human *object* comes under the sway of the grip which, cancelling out its natural property, submits it henceforth to the symbol's conditions."[52] The autonomy of the symbolic is evidenced in repetition, in the indestructible persistence of unconscious desire and not in some scholastic understanding of an imaginary inertia of free associations. Lacan argues that his own understanding of *insistence* as the essential characteristic of repetition is beholden to Freud's suggestion in *beyond the pleasure principle,* of it as "prevital and transbiological" and is not in any sense spiritualistic. Thus, if man comes to think about the symbolic order, it is because it is a forced choice that curtails his being. The illusion that he has formed this by his consciousness itself stems from a gap in his imaginary relationship which allowed his entrance into the symbolic only via the "radical defile of speech" that is not a moment of genesis (although is a genetic moment in the child's entry into speech) but a structural determination: one that is "reproduced each time the subject addresses the Other as absolute, as the Other who can annul him himself, just as he can act accordingly with the Other, that is by making himself into an object in order to deceive the Other."[53]

If, as Dolar argues with regards to this point, "repetition is pitted against the law, regularity and causality, and it poses the problem of the impossibility of spelling out the identity of what is repeated. It appears in a discontinuity, a break in the causal chain,"[54] then how does this structural determination link back to the *caput mortuum* of the signifier? Here it is important to consider Lacan's argument that literature is what makes a claim about the meaninglessness of the written and its destiny to function despite its meaninglessness:

> The essence of the latter [Purloined Letter] is that the letter was able to have its effects on the inside—on the tale's actors, including the narrator—just as much as on the outside—on us, its readers and also its author—without anyone having had to worry about what it meant. That is the usual fate of everything that is written.[55]

Everything that is written functions according to a limitation embedded within it: this limitation is what Lacan calls "the role of the possibility of representation" that governs the relation between metaphor and metonymy, the former being in the field of condensation or *Verdichtung* (poetic) and the latter in the field of displacement or *Verschiebung* (the unconscious's method of foiling censorship). Again here it is not genesis that is the question: the limitation inherent in writing is not to be understood as a limitation of 'natural expression' or figurative semiology, rather it is a limitation that is constitutive of writing itself.

Further to this, the symptom is determined by the mechanism of metaphor—between the signifier of sexual trauma, sexual non-relation and the term that comes to replace it in the signifying chain—while desire is "caught in the rails of metonymy eternally extending toward the *desire for something else*." To recall Lacan's known formulation: "it is the truth of what this desire has been in his history that the subject cries out through his symptom."[56] But it is not about giving the truth its rightful place, but about taking up our place in the truth: the conflictual truth of social relations. And this is where Marx becomes Lacan's main reference as the inventor of the social symptom. The symptom is what manifests the incompatibility between truth and knowledge and the *sinthome* is what produces a discourse that is not one of semblance, not one of *objet a*. Could Marx perhaps be considered a *sinthome* as well?[57]

The traversal of the fundamental fantasy is about re-signifierizing the symbolic by assuming temporarily the real of the symbolic: its constitutive lack or jouissance, i.e. it is an assumption of a new fantasy and not a remembrance. It is a repetition that cuts into continuity and installs a break that is irreducible to the continuity of memory, one that cannot be captured by symbols and signs. It is in this sense that the unconscious is fundamentally an arche-writing (and not meta-language), what predates both speech and writing or what ante-dates *lalangue* but also poses the very question of the relationship between language and world. Contra Freud, Lacan argues that the symptom does not simply emerge where there is a lacking signifier, a lacking representation, which upon repression becomes the grounds for repetition. Further to this he posits the *sinthome* as a marker for a possibility of repetition that does not simply re-instill the symptom. And this is why *lituraterre* is a smearing of a surface, or perhaps torsion in the surface, a negativity that is constitutive of the real. Lacan resorts to Joyce to enlighten the engimas of psychoanalysis: the letter in the case of Joyce no longer insists but becomes a breaking point, i.e. Joyce introduces a limit of the real. The *sinthome* in this sense is not a tragic repetition, but names the real. Joyce the writer, the *sinthome*, is already separated from the symptom: writing allows the subject to be relocated in the meaning that he lacked.

The question is if the symptom is a non-linguistic symbol, then is the *sinthome* a new social concept? Or is it the virus of identification, from an interpreted symptom, to a traversed fantasy back to an insistence on identification only to fail and reproduce a symbolic again?

The *sinthome* shows that there is nothing opposite the symbolic or that the real is the support of the symbolic:

> what is at stake in jouissance, the jouissance not of the Other [because there is no other of the other] is that there is nothing opposite the symbolic [which is the locus of the Other as such]. And that there exists a hole within the symbolic itself based on the division of the symptom: into symptom and symbol—the sym that toms and the sym that bols. But this division of the symptom which puts the chain of signifiers into work, the shift from S1 to S2 is a false hole.[58]

The consistency of the real, symbolic, and imaginary is like the consistency of a circle and a circle presupposes a hole. But the logic of the hole, or one could venture to say the void of the symptom, is that it is not simply a matter of turning around continuing, a return to a point of origin, to a repressed origin, rather the hole of the symptom generates a new origin, a form of ex nihilo creation. The *sinthome* is introduced into the Borromean knot as its forth element: the written—or writing as a symptom—allows an entry into the real only because the letter does not in any way represent sensible nature, but literally replaces it. [59]

It is not simply that the written is pitted against the presence of a subject of enunciation, but the written emerges as a remainder of the gap between nature and culture, between the rock and the voice as Dolar has argued:

> that dead letter which disrupts the living voice, the supplement which usurps its subsidiary place to tarnish presence. And ultimately, it is not writing in its positive and empirical appearance that is at stake, but more fundamentally the trace, the trace of alterity which has "always-already" dislocated the origin.[60]

Writing as the stainearth, the border, and *terre* instils a temporal thrust: the written text has a futurity to it, in as much as nothing *really* happens in it. This dislocation of an origin that was not there to begin with is the function of writing as "the stuffing of the signified by the signifier." Its no coincidence that Lacan resorts to the example of stuffing to describe the function of the written in Joyce: for why would Joyce believe "that there is a book of himself? What an idea to make oneself be a book! This could only come to a stunted poet, a pig of a poet!"[61] It may as well be that only with Pozzo's injunction to Lucky in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*—"Think Pig!"—that we can illuminate the statement that Joyce is a pig of poet. But then, what is the distance between thinking like an animal and being a *Saint-homme*, a *trashitas* of jouissance? Could Lucky's beastly existence be read as the repetition of

God's jouissance in Joyce the saint? In other words, could it be that God's jouissance is nothing more—nor any less—than thinking like a pig?

## Notes

1. Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XVIII, On a Discourse that Might Not Be a Semblance*, trans. Cormac Gallagher, session of Wednesday 9 June 1971, http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/THE-SEMINAR-OF-JACQUES-LACAN-XVIII.pdf.

2. Jacques Lacan, "Lituraterre," *Continental Philosophy Review* 46 (2013): 327–334.

3. Jacques Lacan, "L'etourdit," *Scilicet* 4 (1972): 15.

4. Lorenzo Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness, A Philosophical Reading of Lacan*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2007) 190 n287.

5. Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XXIII*: *Le Sinthome*, trans. Cormac Gallagher, session of Wednesday 18 November 1975. http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/THE-SEMINAR-OF-JACQUES-LACAN-XXIII.pdf. References to this text will be to "*Seminar XXIII*" followed by session date.

6. Lacan, *Le Sinthome,* Wednesday, 13 January 1976.

7. Lorenzo Chiesa, "*Lacan Le-sinthome," Journal of Lacanian Studies* 2 (2005): 157-170. Review of *Re-inventing the Symptom—Essays on the Final Lacan* ed. Luke Thurston (New York: Other Press, 2002). Chiesa argues: "Joyce is 'the individual' for Lacan, that is, Joyce succeeds in subjectivizing himself by (partially) individualizing *objet a*: the individual is not the ideological One, it stands for another modality of One, another (non-psychotic) way of inhabiting the symbolic 'starting' from its real lack" (168).

8. Chiesa's discussion of Miller's reading of the *sinthome* is important here. See *Subjectivity and Otherness,* 189-192.

9. Jean Michel Rabaté, *James Joyce and the Politics of Egoism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Rabate's discussion is important because it brings forth the centrality of egoism in the modernist movement in which he places Joyce, cf 40.

10. Mladen Dolar makes a distinction between Joyce's omniscient additions and Beckett's subtractive impotence in "The Voice and the Stone: From Hegel to Beckett," *Theory@Buffalo: Revisions of Excess* 12 (2008): 140-168, Also available at http://www.ibrarian.net/navon/paper/The_Voice_and_the_Stone_from_Hegel_to _Beckett.pdf?paperid=12013052 – page numbers will be from the latter document.

11. This unusual term, deriving from and here translating the French *défilé,* is a noun in English (and not the more common verb) which has an archaic, military definition, meaning a narrow way or passage through which an army has to pass in single file. Translator Bruce Fink notes that "[*d*]*éfilé* (defile) should perhaps be understood in the sense of a narrow, difficult path; since the French also means procession [such as that of an army] or succession, however, it could perhaps imply consequence or aftermath. See Freud's "defile of consciousness" in the *Standard Edition vol.2: Studies on Hysteria*, 291, and Kant's notion of science as a "narrow gate" in *Critique of Practical Reason*." Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink, in collaboration with Héloïse Fink and Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006) 844 (Notes to "Science and Truth").

12. Lacan, "Science and Truth," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition*, 727. For Lacan the subject of science, the Cartesian *cogito*, is constituted in a "rejection of all knowledge": this does not simply anchor the subject in being, but crucially does so by introducing the subject as the split or crack in being itself.

13. Even the modern scientific or Copernican revolution, for Lacan, maintained this position of saving the truth, since revolution is about a constant return to an origin, while psychoanalysis is concerned with a constant work of decentering, through which a worldview can never be formulated.

14. Lacan, *Encore, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX*, ed. Jacques Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: WW. Norton & Co., 1995) 28.

15. This is not simply a matter of mechanical causality but has a temporal structure of retroaction. Lorenzo Chiesa in *The Not-Two*: *Logic and God in Lacan*, in his discussion of the question of what comes first, writing or discourse, poses that "discourse, without exception, gives itself as a semblance" while also being "an effect of truth, the truth of incompleteness that is not pregiven in opposition to what is false, but becomes true through discourse's repression of it" (83). This is essential for understanding the link between writing and speech in psychoanalysis, by which writing does not simply represent speech but is a "*literal* element that resists signification, and puts into play the real not as an after-all meaningful deficit of meaning… but as the *meaninglessness* from which meaning qua deficit of meaning originates" (85). Lorenzo Chiesa, *The Not-Two: Logic and God in Lacan* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).

16. Lacan, *Encore*, 33. A better translation that is suggested in the footnote by Bruce Fink is "the reading of what one hears qua signifier."

17. Lacan, *Encore*, 37.

18. Lacan, *Encore*, 37.

19. Another dangerously close approach which misconstrues imaginary identification at the expense of a total lack of understanding of ideology is Jungian psychology and its notion of the archetype, which does not go beyond the narcissistic enrapture in imaginary identification and ends up effectively substantializing the imaginary and mis-apprehending the subject as one that is construed through an authentic intuition or an immanent essence: a subject full of being rather than one that is a subjectivized lack in Lacan's account. With Jung we see the elevation of the symbolic's void of meaning into a sublime object (this is, of ideology).

20. Mladen Dolar, "Beyond Interpellation," *Qui Parle* 6.2 (Spring/Summer 1993): 92.

21. Dolar, "Beyond Interpellation," 80.

22.Jacques Lacan, "The Subject and the Other," *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: WW. Norton and Co., 1998) 203-216.

23. Lacan, *Écrits,* 207.

24. Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness*, 14-19.

25. Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness*, 14-19.

26. Sigmund Freud, "Negation" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1925), vol.19, 235-239.

27. Freud, "Negation," 235-239.

28. Lacan, *Écrits*, 214.

29. Lacan, *Écrits*, 214.

30. Jacques Lacan, Jacques-Alain Miller; James Hulbert, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet," *Yale French Studies*, Literature and Psychoanalysis. The Question of Reading: Otherwise, 55/56, (1977): 11-52.

31. Lacan, *Écrits*, 225.

32. Lacan, *Écrits*, 691-2.

33. Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006) 41.

34. Dolar, "The Voice and the Stone," 11. Dolar's reading of the relationship between the voice and the stone, Beckett and Hegel, elucidates the indistinction of life and death in Beckett, his subtractive effort versus the omniscience of Joyce: "Both are placed alongside each other—the stone only in one iconic scene, the voice constantly—in a region which is precisely neither outside nor inside. They are placed on the dividing line, at the intersection of incorporation and expulsion. This region of the extimate that modernity has come to explore could serve as its definition: the stone speaks, but only if you put it in your mouth, the voice speaks, but only if you deprive it of interiority and its expression, if you chew it as a stone. This is the voice which does not come from within, i.e., it does not express interiority nor does it point to it. What is cracked is neither the stone nor the voice, but the very division inside/outside, and both the stone and the voice come to inhabit this crack" (11).

35. Dolar, "The Voice and the Stone," 11.

36. Jean Michel Rabaté, "A Space of Dumbillsilly: When Joyce Translates Lacan," *Critical Quarterly* 48.1 (2006): 26-42, 36.

37. Dolar, "The Voice and the Stone," 11.

38. Dolar, "The Voice and the Stone," 11.

39. Dolar, "The Voice and the Stone," 11.

40. Jacques Lacan, *The Sinthome: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII*, trans. Adrian Price, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Cambridge, UK & Walden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2016) 99.

41. Dolar reads the Master slave dialectic through Lacan as one which involves a theft of enjoyment, what the master takes from the slave is surplus enjoyment and what the slave works to recuperate is a pure enjoyment which fetishizes the master as a subject supposed to enjoy. Mladen Dolar, "Hegel as the Other Side of Psychoanalysis," in *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis: Reflections on Seminar XVII*, ed. Justin Clemens and Russell Grigg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) 129-155.

42. Lacan, *Écrits*, 733

43. Dany Nobus, "Illiterature," in *Re-Inventing the Symptom*, ed. Luke Thurston (New York: Other Press, 2002) 30.

44. Lacan, *Lituraterre,* 328.

45. Lacan, *Lituraterre,* 331.

46. Lacan, *Seminar* XXIII, Wednesday 18, November 1975.

47. Lacan, *Seminar* XXIII, Wednesday 18, November 1975.

48. Lacan, *Lituraterre,* 331.

49. Lacan, *The Sinthome*, 141-148.

50. Dany Nobus, "Illiterature," 30.

51. Mladen Dolar, "Which Repetition?" (Unpublished) 14.

52. Lacan, *Écrits*, 35.

53. Lacan, *Écrits*, 54.

54. Dolar, "Which Repetition?," 14.

55. Lacan, *Écrits*, 53.

56. Lacan, *Écrits*, 431.

57. Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness*, 191-192.

58. Lacan, *Seminar* XXIII, Wednesday 18 November 1975.

59. Lacan *Seminar* XXIII, Wednesday 18 November 1975.

60. Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 37.

61. Lacan, *Seminar* XXIII, Wednesday 13 January 1976.

Esther faye

# IL N'Y A PAS DE RAPPORT SEXUEL ...

## *Ou pire: the discourse of capitalism*

*Ou pire*, ... or worse? What is it that could possibly be worse ... and worse than what? And why not write *the* worst? ... *ou pire* is the title of Jacques Lacan's nineteenth seminar of 1971-1972. Anticipating these same questions from his audience, Lacan begins with a comment on his choice of the adverbial form of '*pire*' for his title. As an adverb, Lacan explains, "worse" calls for a verb, a verb from which it has been separated, its absence represented by the three dots of the ellipsis that precede the words "or worse." These three dots, Lacan explains, is something you see used in printed texts to mark or create an empty place—something, a word, and in this instance a verb, that should be there has been deliberately omitted. And so Lacan goes on to say: "My title underlines the importance of this empty place." Why? Because it is the only way of catching something *with* language that is not *of* language; in other words, something of the real.

In this middle period of Lacan's teaching—the late 60's to early 70's—when he began to elaborate a theory of discourse as a logical writing of the structure of relations between speaking beings—that is, as a social bond that takes the real of jouissance into account—for this is what is really at stake in discourse, he concluded that the only way language can say something about the real is by allowing this empty place to be preserved ... with the use of language. This empty place is what a saying ["*un dire*"] preserves as act: "That one might say remains forgotten behind what is said in what is heard" ["*Qu'on dise reste oublié derrière ce qui se dit dans ce qui s'entend*" ("L'Étourdit" 5). Lacan arrives at the term "*un dire*"—the saying that he will bring into play in ... *ou pire*—by tipping over the first letter of the word "*pire*" and then, to make it function as argument in logic, converting "*dire*"—to say—into "*un dire*"—*a saying*. With a particular saying—*il n' y a pas de rapport sexuel*, there is no sexual relation—one of a related series of sayings Lacan was formulating around this time, the real that is proper to psychoanalysis and which the ellipsis indexes, the real as the impossible to say, the real as unsayable, is thus marked with language.

Lacan warns that in trying to dodge this saying you can only say *worse* (... *Ou Pire* 11-12). Using propositional and modal logic Lacan undertook in ... *ou pire* to elabo-

rate this saying—there is no sexual relation—and that of another, one that would be a response to it, that would moreover not try to get out of it and thus say worse. This saying is "*Y a d' l' Un*" or rather *Yad'lun* (turning it into a *one* saying)—there is something of One, the One all alone not the One of union. There is something of One that can function as a placeholder for the hole of the real. A singular One, a master signifier that as letter names the singularity of the subject's jouissance identity.

But the worse has already been forgotten in what has been said in what is heard. I am referring to the saying of the capitalist discourse, the *matheme* of which Lacan wrote only once in a lecture he gave in Italy in 1972 ("Du discours psychanalytique"). And this saying worse is precisely the effect of the capitalist discourse's foreclosure of the impossible real of the sexual non-rapport, that is, the foreclosure of the saying that sustains the emptiness brought into real ex-sistence through the operation of language on the living being—castration. My argument here is that the reality this foreclosure generates is far worse—*ou pire*—than the impossible real of the lack of the sexual relation.

*Castration is not fantasy, it is real (Lacan, The sinthome 107)*

We know that there is a general and deeply held belief in the existence of the sexual relation. It is a universal dream, we could say, the dream of Eros, the principle of union, of two making One that Lacan calls in *…ou pire* a gross mythology he was determined to exorcise. An archaic version of such a belief can be seen in the comic fable recounted by the poet Aristophanes, one that has taken on mythological status, when he takes his turn at the table in Plato's *Symposium* to speak on the topic of love. In it, he derives the ancient and powerful desire of one human being to join up with another in what he calls human nature—a powerful drive to reunite what was once original nature, expressing itself as a "seeking to make one out of two, to heal the state of man." To heal, in other words, the cut perpetrated by Zeus as punishment for mankind's hubris in attacking the gods that divided the original unity or oneness of human beings. The significance of this little story that makes a myth of subjective division, is that each half of the severed being is destined to always look for their original other half. In other words, the desire of two to become one again is the very expression of an ancient need which Aristophanes called desire and the pursuit of the One love.

Myth, as Russell Grigg explains, "is a kind of logical instrument for resolving contradictions." There is a logical contradiction at the heart of the myth that insists as "a point of impossibility." In other words, at the heart of any myth we find an unsayable real—the impossible real for which Lacan gave the modal formulation "that which never ceases not being written in the unconscious." As such this real cannot be reduced or resolved but, as Lacan says, it can be marked as such—it can be circumscribed. Which is precisely what a myth does—it is a circumscription. Or as Grigg puts it: "The myth is a fictional story woven around a point of impossibility, or the real," and its function is to provide "a fictional papering over for

the impossible, real kernel around which the myth is constructed and for which it was originally formulated" (Grigg 55). Now we might take Aristophanes' mythical story of a primal unity and the desire it leaves behind, of seeking to make one out of two as comedic fiction, as a comical treatment of a point of real that cannot be resolved, the point of real in this case being the impossibility of making one from two, in other words, of establishing the sexual relation. When people say, I say what I mean, or I always speak the truth, we should not forget the saying that underpins such statements—it is that *there is* a sexual relation, that is, that it exists. There is however a non-comedic outcome of such a saying, one that stems precisely from the foreclosure by the capitalist discourse of the impossible real of the sexual non-rapport, a saying that takes us to something worse. I will return to this.

Castration is however not a fable, it is not a fiction, it is not a myth—it is real. It is the real effect of language on the living being, an effect that precludes any possibility of there being a sexual relation. What does this mean? As Lacan says in "*…ou pire*, Compte Rendu du Séminaire 1971-1972," there is no measurable relation [*rapport*], that is, there is no calculable ratio of sexual jouissance that can be universalized between speaking beings (Lacan 549). The non-rapport of the sexes is integral to the very fact that a human being is a speaking being, an être parlant. "I have also defined the sexual relation as that which 'doesn't stop not being written.' There is an impossibility therein. It is also that nothing can speak it—there is no existence of the sexual relation in the act of speaking" (Lacan, *Encore* 144-45). And it is sexual jouissance itself, that is, the jouissance that is our lot because of castration, which is simply the cut of the signifier, which bars access to the sexual relation (Lacan, *… ou pire* 31). The subject, as supposed to the signifier which represents it for another signifier, the support of itself as *parlêtre*, can appear *qua* subject only on the basis of loss, the loss of an absolute form of jouissance that does not exist (there is no Other of the Other). And yet, although irrecoverable, the subject will seek to recover what does not exist through the very means, that is through the symbolic and imaginary semblances of language that effected this primordial loss in the first place. Exiled from the sexual relation, that is, from the possibility of establishing a sexual relation with the Other, of making One from two, the subject will attempt to seek compensation via the surplus jouissance objects around which their drive will turn endlessly in fantasy. Imagining the possibility of overcoming castration, yet memorializing its very impossibility in this attempt to make up for it—in fantasy—the subject does not know they are already enjoying, in their symptom and in their affects, "everything that marks in each of us the trace of his exile." As speaking beings we are *exiled* from the One of the sexual relation, condemned to the semblance of a sexual relation in and through discourse, to the contingency of an encounter "that momentarily gives the illusion that the sexual relation stops not being written […]—an illusion that something is not only articulated but inscribed […] by which, for a while—a time during which things are suspended—what would constitute the sexual relation finds its trace and its mirage-like path in the being who speaks" (Lacan, *Encore* 145).

To grasp this notion of exile, and of the sought for illusion that the sexual relation can be written in the unconscious, it is necessary to say something more about the Lacanian concept of the unconscious. What follows here is I believe pertinent to my later discussion of the capitalist discourse. The German word that has been translated as *The Unconscious* gives a clearer idea of its true sense in Freud: *das Unbewusste*. Although the adjectival form from which this noun has been formed, '*bewusste*,' can be translated as conscious, and *unbewusste* therefore as unconscious, its first listed meaning derives from the verb "*wissen*," 'to know,' to have knowledge of, and correlatively *unbewusste* 'to not know.' I am making something of this etymology because I want to emphasize the fundamental characteristic of the unconscious—of a knowledge that is unknown, that is, unknown to the subject. Unknown, not only in the sense that, as Freud explained, one can only assume the existence, or rather *ex-sistence*, of the unconscious—it is a postulate, a necessary one however; it can only be supposed on the basis of the traces left behind from the first encounters with the Other, traces that appear in a camouflaged way in the formations of the unconscious—dreams, bungled acts, slips, that is, lapses of the tongue and pen, forgetting and, of course, symptoms and affects as I referenced earlier—but unknown also in a much more fundamental way. As Lacan was able to show, Freud's conceptualization of the primary repressed, *das Urverdrängung*, constitutes the unconscious as a hole, a kernel of emptiness. This kernel is not merely repressed knowledge; it is knowledge as radically irrecoverable. It took someone like Lacan to draw out the radical nature of this primary repressed as the primordial object foreclosed to the human subject, topologically both outside and inside the subject at the same time—as *ex-timate*. This truly radical concept of the unconscious as a knowledge in the real is fundamental to (but as beyond) the very constitution of the unconscious as the discourse of the Other, the unconscious structured like a language, the more usual understanding of the Lacanian unconscious. The unconscious as a place of unconscious knowledge without the subject is what Lacan's concept of *lalangue* references, a kind of un-known knowledge in which signifiers as *un*chained symbolic elements carry something real, namely the real of jouissance.

An early sense of this real dimension of the unconscious can be seen in Lacan's eleventh seminar *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. There he speaks of the unconscious as an opening and closing: as a split, a gap, an interval in time, an unborn, a non-*real*ized, and yet through this a-temporal gap some-*thing* speaks—*ça parle*. It speaks, not I speak (*The Four Fundamental Concepts* 22-23).[1] Although not formulated expressly by Lacan at this time, in 1964, the notion of the unconscious speaking without a subject will eventuate in the recognition that it is jouissance that is spoken, and most saliently in the symptom as an event of the body: "What speaks, whatever it is, is that which enjoys itself as body, that which enjoys a body that is lived" (*… ou pire* 151). And yet what is also born in the gap of this unknown knowledge is the very possibility of desire: from that which presents itself as a *lack in being* comes a *want to be*—(*manque à être*)—to be that which was foreclosed to the subject *qua* subject on entry into the game of language. Lacan uses Pascal's

wager about the existence or non-existence of God to make the point that we have no choice but to enter the game of language, of heads or tails, money or your life, death or life, a game in which we have always-already lost (*D'un Autre à l'autre*). And it is this loss that has the status as the real of a jouissance presumed lost to the subject, that is the cause of both the subject's unconscious desire and their compulsion to repeat—to repeat what Lacan in *Seminar* XVII refers to as the ruinous search for the lost jouissance of themselves as living beings, even to the point of going against life itself! What is to be noted here is that the unconscious comes at this time to be theorized by Lacan as an apparatus fitted out by language for the repetition of jouissance. For what necessitates repetition, the engine of desire, the search for a sexual jouissance that would be restored to the subject, is precisely a *point of impossibility* in the very structure of discourse, the very thing that the capitalist discourse forecloses.

Although Lacan never discarded the concept of the subject as a being spoken by language, but also essentially as a being who speaks, an être parlant—"the human being, called thus undoubtedly because he is only the *humus* of language" (*The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* 51)—in his later teachings he invented a new term for this being in whom speech and jouissance are inseparable—*parlêtre*. Written as one word *parlêtre* glues together two words—*'parler'* to speak, and 'être,' being. But together these also evoke the phrase, *par lettre*, by the letter, alluding thus to the real element carried in the signifier by the speaking being. This real element is the foundation of the saying that Lacan elaborates in his seminar *... Ou pire—Yad'lun*, there is a One-all-alone. There is something of One, a master signifier that represents the subject at the level of its singular mode of jouissance. With *parlêtre* ,Lacan introduced a subtle but significant shift in the concept of the unconscious and simultaneously in the concept of the subject of the unconscious. For the *parlêtre* now becomes the very name of this subject of the unconscious in its *real* dimension. An unconscious no longer to be understood simply as the unconscious structured as a language, as the discourse of the Other, but the unconscious as real.[2] The *parlêtre*-unconscious is the real subject with a body that enjoys itself, for the most real of the subject is as enjoying substance; this is an unconscious that enjoys [*jouit*], and in enjoying [*jouissant*] speaks: "*I speak with my body and I do so unbeknownst to myself*" (*Encore* 119).

*Apparolé to the capitalist discourse*

"The subject, who is called human, no doubt because he is only the humus of language, has only to *apparoler* himself to this apparatus," to the structure immanent in speech (Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* 51, modified trans.).[3] Discourse, if we are to follow Lacan, is a logical writing of little letters that inscribe a particular social bond that represents the relations of speech and jouissance between subjects as speaking beings. And it does so—each discourse doing so differently—as a way of making up for the fact that there is no possibility of a sexual relation, for there is no natural social/sexual relation between subjects, and none such especially be-

tween what is fundamentally at stake for all subjects, the jouissance specific to the discourse in which they are *apparolés*. Lacan's neologism *apparolé* is fundamentally equivocal. The French word *parole* refers to the function of speech and language in the constitution of the subject and evokes the sense of the subject as fitted out in and by language, thus putting the emphasis on the status of language as semblance. But the prefix 'a,' this little letter that alludes to Lacan's *objet petit a*, announces something beyond semblance—the real that as remainder of the operation of language functions *nachträglich* as cause, the cause of the speaking being, the *parlêtre*. To be *apparolé* is thus the condition of being fitted out in the terms of the specific discourse(s) one inhabits but also essentially characterises the position of the subject in discourse in relation to their real. As the 'a' indicates, to be *apparolé* is not merely the condition of being apparelled, as with an item of clothing that one can adorn oneself in and take off at will; language has effects that go beyond the semblances that construct our reality: "The subject is not only represented by language … he is in addition produced as an effect, a real effect of language which transforms the organism" (Soler, *Vers l'identité* 32). Language, in other words, touches the real.

Turning now to the capitalist discourse (if it is a discourse) to which subjects are *apparolés*, I now ask: what exactly are the effects of this discourse on subjects and what might qualify it as producing *a worse saying*? The capitalist discourse has recently received increasing attention from a number of Lacanian psychoanalysts and my discussion of it here is indebted to their insights. Lacan had commented on capitalism sporadically from early in his teaching but it was only in 1968, understandable given what was happening in the world at the time, that he began to examine it more concertedly.[4] A few years later, in a lecture he gave at the University of Milan, "*Du discours psychanalytique*," he mathematized capitalism as a discourse for the first time and in so doing indicated in what ways it challenged not only the very status of discourse but in particular the psychoanalytic discourse, or as he had formulated it a little earlier, the discourse of the psychoanalyst. In this lecture Lacan laid out what he considered to be the foundation stone of psychoanalytic discourse—that it is founded on the play of signifiers, namely that the signifier slips in relation to meaning—*Le jeu des signifiants*, ça glisse au sens. With the verb "slip" we hear the possibility of making a *blunder*, a lapsus which, as Lacan states in "Preface to the English-Language Edition" of *Seminar* XI, indicates the presence of the unconscious, the unconscious as real (Lacan, "Preface" vii). The practice and effectiveness of psychoanalytic discourse depends on this very possibility, on the possibility of the *parlêtre* analysand slipping up in speaking, a slipping made possible by the fact that there is no signifier whose meaning is assured. Hence the possibility of the analysand saying something more or less than intended, and saying something that unbeknownst to them touches a real. A psychoanalytic session relies on this possibility in speech, of a slip falling from the lips of the analysand and thereby revealing an unintended sense—in meaning and direction. Speech takes the analysand towards something real, the real of their jouissance.

It is this very principle of language's equivocity that is not only the fundamental condition of psychoanalytic discourse, it is also, said Lacan, what characterizes what we, that is psychoanalysts, refer to as man.

> *But it is a fact that psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic practice has shown us the radical character of the effect of the signifier in this constitution of the world. I do not say for the being who speaks, because what I called this skidding [ce dérapage,* slip-up*] a moment ago, this sliding which is done with the signifying apparatus … this is what determines being in the one who speaks. The word being has no other meaning outside of language* [emphasis and ellipsis in original].

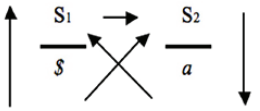
But the radical effects of language go even further than constituting the world and the being that speaks. The play of signifying slippage disrupts any possible natural or harmonious relation between man and his objects and this is evident in the fact that not only is the signified not primary, before it is produced in the wake of the signifier—and Lacan quickly added that we would be rushing too quickly if we think that the purpose of language is to produce the signified and signification—"there is something more primary than the effects of signification." What could be more primary? We are assured, said Lacan, of the presence of a subject *in the real* if we have before us a subject who is capable of using the signifier as such, which means, to make use of the play of the signifier not to signify something but precisely to *deceive* us as to what there is to be signified. So in Lacan's view, the primary purpose of the signifier is not to produce sense or signification, and it is not even to *re*-present the subject that is supposed to the signifier, that is as a barred subject represented by a signifier for another signifier and as therefore lacking-in-being, but to produce *a real subject*, a subject in which there is a jouissance proper to it—in other words, a *parlêtre*. To produce in other words, the *parlêtre*-unconscious.

That is, I hasten to add, if the particular discourse to which the subject is *apparolé* will allow it. I say this because of what Lacan then goes on to say in relation to the capitalist discourse. We are in the time of crisis because something no longer goes around, something has stopped turning. This is not the crisis of the discourse of the master, as many are still banging on about, that is, a crisis in the failure of the position of the father in current social arrangements, for the discourse of the old *pater-master* has already given way to that of the university. The crisis we face is due to the fact that the capitalist discourse turns only on itself; there is no movement possible from it to any of the other discourses and, moreover, the movement internal to the capitalist discourse is fundamentally different from that in the other discourses. What the four discourses Lacan named have in common—the discourse of the master, the hysteric, the university and the analyst—is that they each turn on a common point of impossibility, the impossibility of the sexual relation. I stress this condition of impossibility for it is this that allows these discourses to rotate and thus turn from one to the other, and it is precisely this condition that is foreclosed in the capitalist discourse. In each of the four discourses some*thing* remains impossible; something is barred from being brought into the field of semblance.

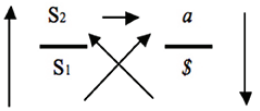
This is the effect of castration as real. In this sense alone the capitalist discourse cannot be considered a true discourse that constitutes a social bond.

Each discourse consists of the same four little letters—S1, S2, *a*, and $—that rotate via a quarter turn to the left and, starting from the bottom left, occupy in turn the four fixed places in the structure—those of truth; agent/semblance/desire/symptom; the worker/other/jouissance; and product/surplus jouissance—whichever letter that occupies the place of agent (in the top left position), giving the discourse its name. The barrier of jouissance determines that the product or surplus jouissance of the discourse, (surplus jouissance, *Mehrlust* in German, which Lacan exposed as being what is really at stake in Marx's concept of surplus value, *Mehrwert*) can never meet up with the place of truth underlying the place of agent/semblance/desire (*D'un Autre à l'autre* 172-173). The circle cannot be closed; there is an unbridgeable barrier. And precisely because of this, castration is brought into play each time a discourse shifts from one discourse to the next, the turning revealing the unconscious truth that underlay the agent of the previous discourse and that now through the turning occupies the place of agent.[5]

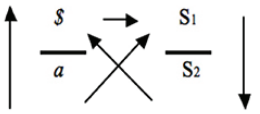
*Discourse of the master*



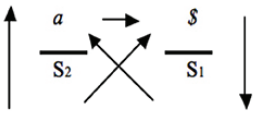

*Discourse of the university*



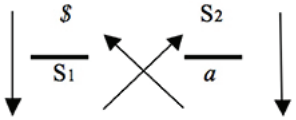

*Discourse of the hysteric*




*Discourse of the analyst*




*Capitalist discourse*



To repeat: it is precisely this barrier of impossibility that the capitalist discourse disables. In the discourse of the capitalist, the truth incarnated in the master signifier is now not only directly accessible to the subject—note the downward vector from the divided subject in the place of agent to the master signifier in the place of truth—but also that this master *must* be passed through in order to reach the scientific/technological knowledge—note the vector from truth to knowledge—through which surplus jouissance embedded in the products of capitalism flow to the subject—note the vector from product to agent. In none of the other discourses does the product of surplus jouissance, in whatever letter it is embedded, be that S1, S2, $ or object *a*, come directly to the subject. That happens only in the capitalist discourse and this is precisely the effect of the foreclosure of castration. In the capitalist discourse, it is the masked master, the brand names of the capitalist market, as Stiijn Vanheule nominates this master to be, that occupies the place of truth—an inversion of the discourse of the master, the very discourse that is also equated with the structure of the unconscious.

This has far-reaching consequences—to the status of the subject as well as to the endurance of social bonds. Within the logic of the other four discourses we can see that loss is incurred from the very outset because the one in the position of agent has to go via the other, the place where their desire hopes to meet up with some knowledge about the jouissance of their lost being, for this is the question being raises for the subject. But the product resulting from this operation is never *all* the jouissance that was aimed for, only a more and/or less of jouissance—surplus jouissance. Even more disturbing to the subject is the fact that desire can never make this *not-all* jouissance product reach the place of the agent's unconscious truth; there is, as I have already noted, a barrier constituted by the only jouissance permitted to subjects as speaking beings. So in the social bonds constituted within the terms of this logic, the subject remains necessarily divided from the truth of their singular mode of jouissance, divided from, in other words, the proper name of the singular jouissance of their symptom; the singular way in which they have, in these four discourses, made up for the fact that there is no sexual relation.

However, within the logic of the capitalist discourse the subject does not have to go via the other in the hope of meeting up with a knowledge of their jouissance and of thereby creating some form of social bond. Seeking an answer to the question of their subjective division and to the dissatisfaction it may generate, the subject in the capitalist discourse is directed to seek it directly via the master signifiers of capitalism. Any possibility of a bond with the other is necessarily via this master. But what is arrested through the rupturing of the social bond between agent and other is the very possibility of the equivocity, that is, the play of signifiers, Lacan regarded as so fundamental to the definition of man as a speaking being. The capitalist discourse goes around and around continuously like a roulette table, apparently unstoppable, and the effect of this is that the necessary impasse of the non-rapport is no longer an obstacle. At the same time then that capitalism necessarily cultivates ersatz forms of dissatisfaction and discontent, it offers a fantasy of

completeness. The capitalist discourse is in fact predicated on making the sexual relation exist. Its fundamental yet deceptive promise is that we can have all we desire, that satisfaction via the objects of surplus jouissance is attainable.

The subject, as Irène Foyentin has remarked, is thus reduced to *what* she/he desires—the objects of surplus jouissance that pull the subject into consumption—not *that* he/she desires (Foyentin 59). Desire does not have to pass via the signifiers of the Other to be there confronted with the enigma of the Other's desire and the question in turn of the subject's desire. Instead the promise of the realization of the sexual relation now comes to the subject as homogenised and collectivised objects of consumption, these ready-made gadgets of capitalist production that we as subjects reduced to our status as consumers are commanded to enjoy. Desire is in effect reduced to demand. As Colette Soler has argued, capitalism has no interest in the truth of the subject's desire and the singular jouissance that desire aims at. Rather its sole interest is in managing the jouissance of the capitalist subject by feeding the pseudo-desire it creates with "*lathouse*" objects that render the subject anonymous to itself. In line with the psychoanalytic understanding of perversion, the only universal right capitalism is interested in is the right to enjoy—*jouis—encore, encore*! And the *encore* is guaranteed through the cunning of the capitalist discourse. The jouissance of consumption can never be satisfied, frustration is built into the very principle of its logic: the more I consume, the more I need to/have to consume. As *apparolé* to the capitalist discourse, the subject is thus reduced to the status of *proletarian* (Soler, "Sujets apparolés"). It was Marx, as Lacan pointed out, who must be credited with having revealed the truth of capitalist discourse as the proletariat: "The proletariat means what? It means that work is radicalized at the level purely and simply of merchandise, which means that it reduces the worker himself to the same rate" (*D'un Autre à l'autre* 172-173).

A proletarian is thus a subject reduced to the same unit value of the merchandise they produce, for the effect of the absolutization of the market is to reduce all *life* "to an element of value." As Renata Salecl has noted:

> The prediction is that in the future almost everything will be a paid-for experience in which traditional reciprocal obligations and expectations—mediated by feelings of faith, empathy and solidarity—will be replaced by contractual relations in the form of paid memberships, subscriptions, admission charges, retainers and fees. (Salecl 29)

In other words, as proletarian, the subject becomes a mere *body* whose primary purpose is to consume the gadgets—whether these are objects or so-called life experiences—produced by the capitalist machine, and to be consumed by them. Reduced thus to the equivalence and value of objects, the modern subject as proletarian is left with very little with which to form a social bond, for the body on its own is not enough with which to create a social bond (Soler 2011, 35, citing Lacan 1975 [1974], 177-203).[6] So it is not surprising that the bonds of love as well as ties to place have become precarious, for as Lacan said:

> What distinguishes the discourse of Capitalism is that the *Verwerfung*, the rejection—the rejection outside of any symbolic exchange, with what I already said it has as consequences. The rejection of what? Of castration. All order, all discourse that akin to capitalism leaves aside what we simply call the things of love, my good friends." (*The Knowledge of the Psychoanalyst* 103)

*Conclusion*

Colette Soler has written about the precarity of what she calls the generalized proletariat, those who having lost their relations of solidarity with each other are thereby more exposed to insecurity and loneliness. This is surely a worse. But what is perhaps even worse is what this precarity (and not just dissatisfaction and frustration) can lead to—to the appeal of a *One of union*—"By which I designate the identification of the Other with the One" (Lacan, *Television* 23)—a fundamentalist One that has shown itself to be murderous towards others. Lacan may have questioned whether the discourse of psychoanalysis would survive,[7] but he had the certainty of presentiment that something worse would be born from the capitalist discourse—to which he gave the name *PST*. Spelled out, these letters form the word "*peste*," the French word for plague or pestilence, an ironic reference to what Freud believed he had brought to the United States with psychoanalysis.[8] The *PST* would truly be a pestilential discourse, a scourge in the service of the capitalist discourse. It would be the worse of a jouissance taken to the extreme already manifest in rising levels of hatred, religious intolerance and racism. With capitalism's foreclosure of castration and its co-optation of scientific universalism, the singularity of subjects as embodied in their fundamental symptom is at stake. The homogenization of subjects as equally free to consume, the only freedom capitalism is interested in, and the extreme individualism to which we are pushed, can only result in more and more segregation. The building of walls is the logical attempt to make up for the social bond that is in default in today's world, described by Colette Soler as the logic of segregation.[9] Slavoj Žižek has also noted this:

> … age-old fixations, and particular, substantial ethnic, religious and cultural identities, have returned with a vengeance. Our predicament today is defined by this tension: the global free circulation of commodities is accompanied by growing separations in the social sphere. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the rise of the global market, new walls have begun emerging everywhere, separating peoples and their cultures. (Žižek 7)

The fascination with populist nationalisms gaining momentum in the world today is premised on this logic. A single quote from a speech by Donald Trump alerts us to the resurfacing of an old danger: that of the murderous exclusionism of extreme nationalism and its potential to end in fascism through its elevation of the *Volk,* constituted as such in identification with a mad master—"the only important thing is the unification of the people, because the other people don't mean anything" (Cited in Müller).[10] This would truly be the return of the real as *peste*. I wrote at

another time of the drama of Nazism as the fascination of sacrifice on behalf of a *Fuehrer* and of the ego ideal the Leader incarnated.[11] Although Trump is not Hitler, perhaps we can see something of the latter's discourse resurfacing in the Trumpism of MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN. This is the danger of a discourse about which Lacan had already in 1964 thought necessary to warn us. At that time, he spoke of the "drama of Nazism" as a re-enactment of "the most monstrous and supposedly superseded forms of the holocaust," the resurgence of which the predominant forms of historical critique (Hegelian-Marxist) could not account for. I believe we are witnessing such a resurgence again—think of the privileged world's responses to the forced mass movements of peoples; the terror and terrifying conditions in which those who cannot flee live; and the formation of One Nation politics around the world: Brexit; Donald Trump; Pauline Hanson; Australia's Detention Camps; etc. In my view, what Lacan said at the very end of the last session of *Seminar* XI to account for the resurgence of "the holocaust" still holds good today:

> … the offering to obscure gods of an object of sacrifice is something to which few subjects can resist succumbing, as if under some monstrous spell.
>
> Ignorance, indifference, an averting of the eyes may explain beneath what veil this mystery still remains hidden. But for whoever is capable of turning a courageous gaze towards this phenomenon—and, once again, there are certainly few who do not succumb to the fascination of the sacrifice in itself—the sacrifice signifies that, in the object of our desires, we try to find evidence for the presence of the desire of this Other that I call here *the dark God*. (*The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 275, emphasis in original)

As we know, the ideal of purity and non-division at that time required the enslavement and extermination of all those others who were seen to threaten the unity of the One People, *das Vo*lk. Those who threaten this fantasy of the imaginary unity of "the Other and the One," the mystical One crudely brought to life by Aristophanes as "the beast-with-two-backs" (Lacan, *Television* 23), have to be expelled, for their very existence disrupts the fantasy of the *One body*. Dissent, not merely dissatisfaction, we could say, is built into the very structure of discourse, but only if the barrier of impossibility created by the castrating effect of language is sustained. The capitalist discourse removes this barrier; foreclosing castration, foreclosing the impossibility of the sexual relation—as happens in psychosis—it is difficult to see how, despite the clear evidence of protests around the world in response to the excesses of capitalism, the discourse of capitalism itself could be made to shift to another that would expose its truth. The only chance for the proletariat cast adrift without ballast and driven to distraction by their quest for *lathouse* objects is, I argue, via the wager of the unconscious—the unconscious that psychoanalysts take responsibility for making ex-sist[12]—and of its symptom that incarnates the singular real of the subject's response to the non-rapport of the sexual relation.

We have this chance because, as Colette Soler has argued, the *parlêtre* is *not all apparolé* to discourse. As living beings effected and affected by language, not all of

the subject's being is ensnared by language. And this not all is essential if a subject is to emerge in the real, not just one *apparolé* to the discourse they inhabit. This not all ex-sists in the real of the symptom, in the opaque jouissance conveyed by the letter of the symptom. The symptom is not the real, for the real is impossible and the symptom is necessary, but it is the closest thing there is in the *parlêtre*, who is *pas tout apparolé* to the capitalist discourse, that preserves something of the empty space that is foreclosed in the capitalist discourse. Only such a subject with a symptom that stands against the dominant discourse has a chance of resisting the push to join up with the empty *plus de jouir* objects of capitalism. For joining up is tantamount to the suicide of the subject—a subject who in search of the social bonds which capitalism cannot provide is thus easy prey to the increasingly loud calls of populist nationalisms to sacrifice him or herself to the dark God of the One Leader, the One Nation. In contrast to the push to the *One* of the *One-Volk*, the psychoanalytic premise of the *not all*—another way of saying that there is no sexual relation—and of the singular One as condition for the symptom—*Yad'lun*—is, I believe, the ethical and political antidote to the … *or worse* ushered in by the capitalist discourse.

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## Notes

1. This could also be translated as "That there is a saying …."

2. For an excellent introduction to this shift in the conceptualization of the unconscious, see Soler, *Lacan—The Unconscious Re-invented*.

3. As Bruce Fink, the translator of *Seminar* XVII notes, the punning of Lacan here is untranslatable. I have decided however not to use Fink's translation of "s'apparoler" as "speechify," preferring to keep the French because of the way it condenses both "speech" and "apparel," nor his translation of "appareil" as "fittings," seeing more value in using a word that is closer to the French "*cet appareil-là*" at the same time as its sound is closer to "*s'apparoler*."

4. The year 1968 is famous for being a time of generalized revolt and social disturbance in many parts of the world and especially in France. The possibility of a real revolution marked a crisis for capitalism and the socio-political regimes that sustained it and were sustained by it. Lacan engaged seriously with the question of capitalism as a discourse from his sixteenth *seminar*, *D'un Autre à l'autre* until his nineteenth … *Ou Pire*, as well as in the series of talks at St Anne that coincided with this latter seminar, known as *Le savoir du psychanalyste* [The Knowledge of the Psychoanalyst], some of which have been included in the published edition of … *Ou Pire*.

5. The truth from which the agent is barred from knowing is represented by each one of the letters that in turn occupy the place of truth and that thereby function as the particular cause of the agent's unconscious desire.

6. In 1974, Lacan would say that even though we are so captured/captivated by gadgets these could still function as symptoms, for example, the car as like a false woman—"*une fausse femme*"—that is, it has phallic value.

7. This was discussed by Lacan in *La troisième* in 1974, but was also raised in his talk in Milan in 1972, as well as in other texts.

8. Lacan may have also intended with PST to evoke the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, harbingers of the Last Judgment, the name for one of these being Pestilence. See Braunstein's remarks on PST as the pestilential discourse in the service of capitalism.

9. See Soler, *Vers l'identité*, see esp. session 6 May 1975, as well as in other of her writings.

10. On the power of fascination in the relationship between subjects identified with each other via identification with a leader, see S. Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921c), SE XVIII, Ch. 8 Being in Love and Hypnosis.

11. The paper to which I refer is "A Solid Hatred Addressed to Being."

12. On the responsibility of the discourse of the analyst in making the unconscious ex-sist, see esp. Lacan, *Television*, 14.

Justin Clemens

# RE/VIEWING REPETITION/S

## *The Collected Works of Victor Bergman*

Having just finished my own conference presentation—as it happened, on the theme of 'The End'—it was about the last thing that I wanted to do. Still, as an old Australian ad for car oil once nearly had it, ends ain't ends. The conference itself—entitled, in tune with *le dernier cri* of academic fashion, *Repetition/s*, deploying that natty front-loaded slash like a beachhead from the general unique to the multiple particulars—had hit the sands running three days before in Ljubljana with a demented neo-suprematist post-Soviet cosmonautical performance (no, an 'informance'!) tagged as *Zupančič::Turšič::Živadinov-AKTUATOR: 2016*, and directed by the notorious Slovenian impresario Dragan Živadinov—perhaps most famous world-wide for his part in founding the avant-garde music group Laibach or, at least, its umbrella corporation the Neue Slovenische Kunst (NSK), but allegedly close to being a household name within Slovenian territorial borders, not least for his ongoing world-historical semi-centennial project *Noordung 1995-2045* by which terminal date, if he is still alive, the geriatric Živadinov will for his final act be shot into space in a capsule with the residual symbols of his own 'anti-mimetic, post-corporal' performances gathered about him—in which two shaven-headed goons clad in emended versions of so-called Active-Wear acted-out a sequence of extraordinary load-bearing geometrico-gymnoyogic partner exercises accompanied by an enigmatic robotic collaborator that was rocking out to a melancholic techno *son-et-lumière*. In any case, I felt that I'd been morally blackmailed or strongarmed into attending the final Saturday night performance of *The Collected Works of Victor Bergman* on the basis of elective affinities in which I ultimately do not believe—the matey syntagm 'my Australian friends' hardly being the crispest of aesthetic carrots in the refrigerator's vegetable section—given there is, as Jacques Lacan puts it, 'no friendship in the unconscious,' let alone among the partisans of nationalism—a feeling only queasily exacerbated, as it turns out, when, having been solicited by Aaron Orzech and the rest of The (extended) Family into penning the review that you are currently reading on the basis that 'nobody ever writes about our work,' I discovered through the merest, most cursory of online enquiries, that earlier iterations of the piece in ques-

tion had been relatively well-received by a variety of our glorious homeland's theatrical sub-luminariat, who had poured out—or, at least, had committed to print and pixels—their own upsized elucubrations concerning the matter at hand. In *The Age*, Cameron Woodhead had thoughtfully hand-tooled a series of *schwärmerisch* ejaculations to provide a tender *berceau* for his sensitivities: 'breathlessly eccentric,' 'whirlwind intimacy,' 'barrelling absurdity,' and 'crazed experimentation' were only a few of the adjective-noun combinations jetting upstream like spawning Canadian salmon from the avant-garde cursor of his word-processor. The self-proclaimed 'baby boomer' Elizabeth Quinn seemed to have been significantly less impressed, modulating heavily into the third person to convey her 'uncharacteristically lukewarm response while all around her were admiring the Emperor's new clothes.' For his part, Martin Shlansky announced that '*The Collected Works of Victor Bergman* is one of the most unique performances I've seen,' 'an experience, and possibly an exorcism.' Need I go on? All the evidence is there to suggest that I'd been unduly duped by a hoary hard-luck tale of young, plucky local actors struggling manfully—or, since this is allegedly THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, personfully—against the sheer fortress walls of White Australian Philistinism and its Pitiless Indifference to Experimentation, to Talent and, yes, to Thinking. The so-called 'Tall Poppy Syndrome' is indeed an historically-attested Australian cultural disorder, itself denominated in a neo-classicizing way after several of the key events leading up to the destruction of the ancient Roman monarchy under the Tarquins, discussed in several savage lines by Søren Kierkegaard following an indication by Hamann, himself presumably indebted to Livy and Plutarch… but where? Where else but in…. oh, disappointingly, not in *Repetition*, but in *Fear and Trembling*. Still, it seems now that it was too late for me, given that I had already begun to write, given that I and my friend Sigi, another Antipodean attendee, had barely had time to wash down some subtle Slovenian sushi with the Human Fish Beer (actually this is a lie, as they did not stock this particular brand—though it does exist—or, if not a lie, at base a kind of retrospective wish-fulfilment founded on a kind of wistful longing I will continue to entertain for such mildly surrealistic signifiers of odd life-forms), before we were whisked away from the table of Slovenian intellectuals at which we had been only-too-briefly seated, and into the winding cobbled streets of Ljubljana-By-Night, guided by none other than Ben Hjorth, one of the conference organizers and another Australian performance-maker, prompting in me ('prompting,' a term I believe to be of theatrical provenance) a very dim recollection of reading Paul Theroux's *Riding the Iron Rooster* as a teenager, in which the following lines, or, perhaps, something recognisably close to the following lines (given that I have never referred and intend never to refer to 'the original' again as long as I live and breathe) appear: 'I had reached my lowest point yet. All around me were Australian voices in the dark. I was soon to learn that, whenever I hit a low point, Australians would be there.' In any case, I had no idea where we were going, and could do nothing but try to maintain in my state of relative beerlessness some kind of equanimity by staving off the fear that I, with Živadanov's informance still relentlessly dominating all my performance-receptive

neurons, of which there are I must confess relatively few, would have to lie to 'my Australian friends' that I had actually liked their *The Collected Works of Victor Bergman*, using a few choice dissimulating phrases, before shooting off to the impending conference afterparty where, with any luck, I would be able to drink enough Mitteleuropean alcools with Hegelian-trained scholars of 'Being, pure Being —' to suppress my irritatingly insistent jetlag and finally get some sleep back at the hotel, before being taken on a scheduled sight-seeing Sunday survey of the famously picturesque environs of Slovenia, 'the sunny side of the Alps.' Addled as I was, I couldn't quite place the name Victor Bergman, which I was nonetheless convinced I recognized, if in an annoyingly attenuated form, and which—indeed, given that my professional life as an academic demands a certain mnemonic reliability, even, to repurpose one of Martin Heidegger's terms from the 1930's concerning the ontology of equipment, a serviceability regarding the sense and reference of proper names—I was shamefully (or rather shamelessly) semi-consciously flirting with confusing with the well-known left-wing photographer-writer Victor Burgin, as if, knowing that I knew less than I knew I should know, I could nonetheless pretend that I was a better piece of equipment than I was (or am). As it turns out, another quick googling of today's technically-externalized-expropriating global memory that is THE INTERNET set me straight: Professor Victor Bergman was a character in the first season of the UK sci-fi series *Space: 1999* which I had watched sporadically as a child, and whose mystifying disappearance from the show—'in reality' due, of course, to invidious contractual wrangling between the actor Barry Morse and the producer Fred Freiberger—had inspired a veritable effusion of speculative explanatory counter-narratives from fans. Yet was this even relevant to *The Collected Works of Victor Bergman*? Being inveterately or constitutionally Cartesian, I sort of doubted it. By the time we arrived at the theatre, the place was crawling with punters, many of whom had somehow found somewhere to buy enormous quantities of beer. Gregor Moder, another of the conference organizers, and apparently himself once a working actor before completing his PhD—not on *The Collected Works of G.W.F. Hegel*, but rather a brilliant intervention titled *Hegel and Spinoza: Substance and Negativity*, which I have since been attempting to *work through*, as they say—reassured me that there was still time before the performance began to acquire the necessary instruments for ensuring drunkenness beyond even the truth of the Hegelian dictum that truth is that 'Bacchanalian revel in which no member is not drunk….' ('Preface' to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §47). In his own conference presentation, on philosophy as performance, Gregor, following Barbara Cassin, the great historian and theorist of sophistry, had quoted the ancient rhetorician Quintilian's fabulous, famous *Diktat* to the effect that, while philosophy can be faked, performance cannot. In any case, Gregor had spoken in his own name here—or, at least, in the name of The Organisation: "there is time." So Sigi and I, along with two other young Aussies, Kiri and Eleanor, scuttled around the corner to an excellent establishment at which the proprietor was celebrating his birthday with his chain-smoking, hard-drinking family and friends. The triangular bar was so smoky I could hardly see my hand in front of my face. As a birthday gift, the

owner offered us several sharp shots of a shockingly strong liquor to go with our big brown bag of long-necked beers, which we gratefully if foolishly sculled before stumbling back to the theatre, which, to my surprise, was veritably seething with enthusiastic attendees. As I never usually drink shots, their effects proved disarmingly unpleasant. Alas, I was also lamentably without a bottle opener. One talented and sensitive usher skilfully popped the cap off my beer with a cigarette lighter as we jostled in. The salle was oblong, with the bench stairs at one end. The walls and floor had been painted black. Sigi and I squashed ourselves onto one of the benches, front and centre. Near us, I saw Freddie Rokem, a well-known German-Israeli dramaturge and theorist of theatre, who had been a keynote speaker at the conference. His paper, a meditation on Walter Benjamin's *Critique of Violence* and Berthold Brecht's *Mother Courage*, had elaborated upon the thesis that *habits are the petrified residues of our first happinesses and our first horrors*, invoking the *Verfremdungseffekt* of a family drama: a stranger appears at the door just as a mother is about to throw a bronze figurine at the daughter, while the father has opened a window to call for the cops. You get the picture: the enigmatic, elemental drama of domesticity is exposed by a primitive interruption, the stranger at the threshold, the contingency of an encounter, the *Deus ex machina*. The stage props before us were already suggesting the menace of a homely—that is, an *Unheimlich*—encounter. A great square of tape, perhaps 5 or 6 metres across, delimited the stage. At the rear, in the centre, a little table you might find at a nondescript trattoria draped with a red cloth and white lace was topped by a video screen, several photographs which looked to be portraits of various persons, and an array of fat white candles. To the left of the central table, a non-descript white chair, accompanied by a bundle of leafy branches; to the right, a red bucket, a much lower white coffee-table upon which sat another white chair, upon which, in turn, sat an old-school yellow telephone with the circular dial. There was also a six-pack of beer in its green plastic sheath, and a small red bucket. In front of the furniture lay a fringed Persian carpet. I leaned over and stage-whispered at Sigi, still thinking of Živadinov's show as the gold standard: 'I hope it's not too terrible.' Then Aaron came on. He was wearing a loose white singlet and black jeans. And he began to dance. The first time I had ever clapped eyes on the fellow, he was playing the devil in a University of Melbourne student production of an Austrian classic whose name I have completely forgotten. The play itself wasn't that good, but I knew at once he was a real actor because he changed shape and size several times during the performance. I also recall being surprised when I met him afterwards: he didn't look anything like any of his characters. Now, however, Aaron looked exactly like he looked himself. His dancing resembled the way an average Australian might imagine a traditional Eastern European dance to be done, all thigh- and foot-slapping, blank-faced and over-formal, rhythmical yet clumsy. Having started, moreover, he did not stop. Brian Lipson, the other actor in this two-hander—older, sinister, and certain—moved purposefully about, yelling exhortations and uttering insinuating fragments of advice. Aaron kept dancing. The dancing went beyond the point at which the point would have already been made that the point had expressly gone beyond the point of making a

point. The dance went on and on. Nor did this indecent extension of exhaustive and exhausting performance serve either to clarify or decide the logic of the scene. On the one hand—and since I knew Aaron and his ex-partner Emma, another acquaintance of mine, had in fact gone on a long trip together through Eastern Europe, events upon which this performance was clearly in some way based—it seemed to speak of certain real, traumatic events that had actually occurred, and their consequences: linguistic confusion, sexual tension, financial hardship, disturbing encounters, etc. On the other hand, as the performance progressed, the situation simply became more and more diegetically unreal. Was Brian a personal trainer of some kind? A secret service handler? A therapist? A family member? A director? Was this a rehearsal for a future play? The play itself? Or some kind of murderous, non-fictional reality? A scam? A response to a scam? A revenge tragedy? A rewriting of *Doctor Faustus*? A *Hamlet* or even a *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* set in Romania? The plays within plays started to multiply beyond even the famed death-traps of *The Mousetrap*. The incompatible narratives and their generic models circulated around a central character—or, perhaps, to speak the current language of topos theory, a subobject classifier—whom Aaron and Emma had met on their journey. An avuncular man with innocent motives? An ex-KGB operative now working for Mossad? Hard-working, straight-talking fellow? Madman? Killer? Harmless eccentric? A phantasm of the play itself? Or of the relationship between Aaron and Emma? Or of the relationship between Aaron and Brian? Or that between actors and performance? Play and spectators? Performance and reality? Even after Aaron had finally stopped dancing and cracked himself a can of VB onstage, the complexities continued to compound. The conversations between Aaron and Brian shifted between the quotidian and surreal. Who was who? Was the first part just training for the second? Or was the point to push Aaron to the point of real exhaustion, so that there could in fact be no real training for the (never-achieved) finale? Something had to keep on not finishing in order to finish itself off. Both actors wore black armbands which may or may not have contained technical recording and/or transmitting devices.1 Necessity or virtue? The great abstract relation between modality and morality was evidently one of the play's themes (so to speak), and not just concerning the apparition and application of technical devices. J.L. Borges famously remarks that the most boring European version of the Arab classic *1001 Nights* was a masterpiece of German scholarship: whereas all other translations had excised, censored, and repressed various scenes and stories from the original, the Germans left nothing out. But it was the excisions and insertions that gave the text its preternatural vigour. The personages involved in the production of *The Collected Works of Victor Bergman* had clearly learned their Borgesian lesson well; in fact, they had evidently had to begin with excision and simulation. Knowing Aaron and Emma without being close friends, I knew something decisive and terrible had happened on their trip overseas, but the mystery of it was probably unplumbable without an appallingly supernumerary rudeness on my part. This ritual performance neither cleared nor cleansed the air. Rather, as in Kenneth Slessor's great poem about Sydney, "*Five Bells*," the play conjured and condensed the fog of per-

sonal and political histories into a snarling mnemotechnical beast that scratched and tapped against the pane of the present, without ever resolving into a final, defining, or definitive shape. What emerged from the appalling fantasias, the disjunctions, the confusions, the systematic distortions and the downright fabrications, was a moving image of trauma and repetition, of ends and endlessness/es. In my own talk at *Repetition/s*, I had briefly spoken of 'death-lag,' on the model of jet-lag: that paradoxical interval between your death and the realization you are dead. If, as is sometimes said, one's whole life flashes before one's eyes at the moment of dying, then one never dies, even though one is already dead. The image of your whole life repeats itself, all the way up to the moment in which… the image of your whole life repeats itself. At some point during the performance, I heard Freddie Rokem exclaiming 'These Australians are crazy!,' an ejaculation which he almost immediately corrected: 'Their idea of Europe is crazy.' I couldn't agree more. Something horrifically personal was being *worked through* (to repeat this indispensable Freudian concept) in the consciously displaced form of a consciously displaced performance, but that personal experience hooked into all sorts of vaster, darker colonial horrors. Much, much later, when I had returned to Melbourne and was drinking again with an old friend who had once been an actor, he remarked that it couldn't have been done without co-creator Romanie Harper's intervention. Romanie, my friend asserted, is 'a kind of genius.' 'I saw that thing before she'd gotten to it,' he said, 'and it just wasn't that good.' As I've been trying to convey, however, I'm pretty much a Buridan's Ass functionary as an audience member, so I'd rather starve to death than decide on the truth of this. But it's clear that Romanie had functioned as something like a fixer, or rather as an un-fixer, a *dé-brouillardeuse*, an ingenious agent who kept the actors and their actions unsettled with a divisive power of negation. So the undecidability of sense, reference and value in this piece was potentially due not just to my own psychic weaknesses, but to a 'conscious' and objective aspect of the work itself. It was as if the performance—like this re/view of it—ended not with the bang of a single full-stop, nor with the whimperingly traditional triplicity of an ellipsis, but rather with two, between the two: a little, literal, litteral stutter or minimal repetition of points, improperly finished yet not entirely certain whether it should have been continued or whether it had already said too much..

## Notes

1. It is worth mentioning here the actual, theatrical-technical function of these devices: replaying recordings of artists Harper and Orzech, and others, discussing and trying to retrospectively piece together this 'event.' The performance itself was therefore a staging or framing of literal *repetition*: "It's French for rehearsal!," to bastardize another Australian advertising jingle. Such a(n attempted) repetition is not only—or even primarily—that of the 'original' event itself, but repetition precisely of attempts to reconstruct and recount it that were themselves already never more than repetitions—inevitably failed, second-rate or second-order, poor images flickering on the cave wall of memory—of that absent,

'lost' original, the efficient cause of those memories. *The Collected Works,* then, would be positioned in that simulacral third-order to which Plato seems to relegate artistic representation, and most urgently theatre, but with the Deleuzian—or, depending on how you look at it, Badiousian; in either case, fundamentally psychoanalytic—twist that this copy of copies, circling interminably around the absent centre of the true original and its ('lost') meaning, would embody the fragile, dynamic truth of this inversion: the simulacrum as the locus of (the traces of) the Platonic 'form' itself: the traces of a necessarily 'lost'—and only in this purely formal—object that does not exist, but paradoxically insists in the imperfect form of its own repetition/s [*Ed.*].

S Berlin Brahnam

# PRIMORDIA OF APRÈS-COUP, FRACTAL MEMORY, AND HIDDEN LETTERS

## *Working the Exercises in Lacan's Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"*

Appended to Lacan's "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" are three propaedeutics, "Presentation of the Suite," "Introduction," and "Parenthesis of Parentheses," collectively referred to as the *suite*, that elaborate a series of exercises intended to train the psychoanalyst somewhat in the manner of a cryptanalyst. The goal of these exercises, Lacan tells us, is for the student "to figure out how a formal language determines the subject"[1] in a symbolic chain that constitutes a form of remembering first discovered by Freud. Although Lacan assures us that his program is not intended to be difficult neither is it meant to be simple "since it assumes that a subject will not fulfill it except by contributing something of his own to it [*mettre du sien*],"[2] a requirement that is not always met by those addressing the suite. According to Bruce Fink, many readers find the suite distasteful because its diagrams and mathematical symbols hold little literary appeal;[3] and, in the "Presentation of the Suite" (designed for those "who were leaving, having gotten a feel for my seminar"[4]), Lacan decries those who would dismiss his program out of hand with unfair accusations of intellectualization. This is not to mention the hackneyed legerdemain that Lydia H. Liu laments when writers fetishize Lacan's textual excursions into Poe's story "as a virtuoso performance in psychoanalytic criticism" that turns "that criticism into all kinds of navel gazing exercises," exercises that deflect attention away from those in the suite that explicate "his important discoveries concerning the Freudian unconscious."[5] As Lacan indicates in the "Presentation of the Suite," the exercises are the seminar's centerpiece: the analysis of the "The Purloined Letter," "merely refines on the grace of one of those exercises."[6]

Although not intended to be difficult, Lacan's program is, nonetheless, risky business: to learn from it, a subject must wrestle with it, and the name one wins, in the end, may not prove flattering. Be that as it may, I have tried in this essay to take up Lacan's challenge and in struggling with the exercises to add something of my own to them. Bringing to bear in this endeavor a formal training in computer science, I have uncovered in Lacan's codes primordia of *après-coup*, fractal structures, and hidden letters buried in time, the excavation of which has deepened my understanding not only of how it is that a formal language determines the subject but also of what it means to engage Lacan's mathemes—*the letters* "from whence come the teaching of which I am the effect."[7]

## The Exercises

The kernel of the suite is the "Introduction," which, as already noted, Lacan presents "to give my audience practice in the notion of remembering implied by Freud's work;" he goes on to reveal that "I did this due to the all-too-well-founded consideration that by leaving it implicit, the very basics of analysis remain fuzzy."[8] Prefacing the "Introduction" is the "Presentation of the Suite," a polemic that was written to fend off detractors, those who "in explaining to themselves their everyday subject, their patient, as they say, or even explaining themselves to him . . . employ magical thinking."[9] This piece aims at knocking "the psychologist's assurance down a notch"[10] so that the patient can be heard "in the proper manner at the moment at which he speaks."[11] Finally, the section entitled "Parenthesis of Parentheses" is a postscript that expounds a transcoding of symbols defined in the "Introduction" into binary digits and a set of parentheses that elucidate the L schema. This section also concludes the suite with an elaboration of Dupin's exposition of the Even or Odd game—a game that becomes itself something like a closing parenthesis mirroring an opening parenthesis in the "Introduction" with Freud's *Fort-Da* game.

In the game of Even or Odd, a player is asked to guess whether the number of marbles held in his competitor's hands is even or odd. The supposed wizardry of the youth in Poe's story (whose wins clean out the schoolyard) is revealed by Dupin to rely on an imaginary identification with the opponent, whom the child *becomes* by mirroring his mannerisms and facial expressions so as to listen within his own mind to his rival's reasoning about the next guess—a process that Lacan points out leads to an indefinite oscillation.

The solitary *Fort-Da* game, played out by Freud's eighteen-month-old grandson with a cotton reel, which he would repeatedly toss out of sight with the exclamation *Fort* and then reel back into view with a welcoming *Da*, marks for Lacan, in its enunciation of the phonemes of presence and absence, the "zero point of desire," when the "human object comes under the sway of the grip which, canceling out its natural property, submits it henceforth to the symbol's conditions."[12] This is the point that sets in motion *repetition automatism* and the chaining of symbolic alternatives of presence and absence that aim at "*refinding an object that has been fundamentally lost* [italics in the original]."[13]

It is between these two children's games, one that encodes and one that pretends to decode, that the exercises in the "Introduction"—their elaborations, loops, and cross-conjunctions—are worked out.

### *Exercise 1: Recording a Pattern of Presence and Absence*

Mothers disappear. In his discussion of the *Fort-Da* game, Freud notes that his nephew was a normal boy who enjoyed a good rapport with his family, especially with his mother who tended him herself. Yet she would leave him, often for hours on end. This could not have been a pleasant experience for the boy, Freud tells us,

and her return must have been accompanied by the greatest of joy. The life of the infant is punctuated by experiences of mother's disappearance and reappearance and the consequences of unpleasure and pleasure. Hence, we begin our exercises, much like the infant, by recording a series of coin tosses with a plus and a minus sign connoting the "alternative of presence and absence."[14]

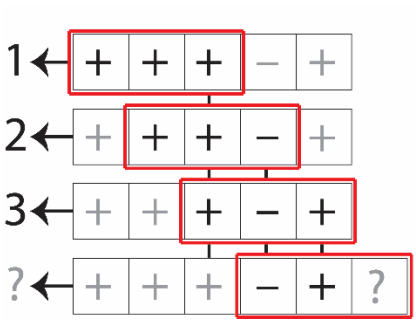
Though it might be presumed that heads connotes presence (and with its positive valence maps to plus) and that tails connotes absence (and with its negative valence maps to minus), no explicit key is provided. The significance of each sign lies solely in its relation to the other: what the one *is*, the other *is not*.[15] Consequently, no definitive reconstruction of what took place is possible from such a record. Thus, from the start, there is no true or false; there is only the inscription of a pattern.

*Exercise 2: Retracing the Record: Memory and the Emergence of Law*

When it comes to a coin repeatedly flipped by human hand, the ensuing pattern of heads and tails is biased towards repeating the initial state of each flip. The result depends on a single parameter: the angle between the normal to the coin and the angular momentum vector. A magician knows how to keep this angle under forty-five degrees so the coin never flips though in its spinning it appears to do so. As Persi Diaconis, Susan Holmes, and Richard Montgomery put it, "coin-tossing is 'physics' not 'random.'"[16] Following the lead of Freud, who argued that numbers picked at "random" are determined by unconscious thought,[17] Lacan, both in the "Parenthesis of Parentheses" and in *Seminar II*, contends, in effect, that coin-tossing is "language" not "random." "No pure game of chance exists," he writes, for as soon as a person engages in guessing the result of a coin flip, "there is already the articulation of one word with another."[18] Moreover, without the "sign" there is no outcome. Even when playing alone, "there is already the articulation of three signs, comprising a win or a loss, and this articulation prefigures the very meaning of the result;"[19] thus, it is the symbol, not the subject, that organizes the result. The subject plays but a part in the game: "the role of the little *pluses* and *minuses* in it," thereby becoming "an element in this chain, which, *as soon as it is unwound* [emphasis added], organizes itself in accordance with laws."[20]

In exercise 2, the record of presence and absence is retraced and encoded, with a loss of granularity, by viewing the series through a window the size of three signs that incrementally slides across the record one sign at a time, as illustrated in Figure 1. Grouping signs by three paves the way for ideas of symmetry (or evenness) and dissymmetry (or oddness) to emerge. The codes extracted from this window represent three categories of triples labeled 1, 2, and 3 and are so arranged that labels 1 and 3 contain symmetrical patterns, but of two different kinds, what Lacan calls the *symmetry of constancy*, represented by the triples [+++] and [−−−] and labeled 1, and the *symmetry of alternation*, represented by the triples [+−+] and [−+−] and labeled 3. In both cases, the two elements delimiting the triples match. In other words, codes 1 and 3 are made up of line

symmetric triples, with the line of symmetry drawn through the middle term. Category 2 is based on dissymmetry, revealed by the presence of an *odd* or dissimilar +/– member framing the triple, as exhibited in the remaining four possible permutations of three coin flips: [++–], [––+], [+––], and [–++]. With this definition of the three categories in mind, a record of tosses can be transcribed, as in Figure 1, as a series of numeric codes.




**Encoding Scheme**

| 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|
| +++ | ++– | +–+ |
| ––– | ––+ | –+– |
| | –++ | |
| | +–– | |

*Figure 1. Example Numeric Encoding of a Record of Coin Tosses.*

The sliding window analogy, provided for its simplicity and clarity, obscures a retrogressive step, however, in what is essentially a reductive process, that is, a form of *condensation*, where five signs in Figure 1, for instance, are rewritten as three. After isolating and encoding the first three +/– signs, another way of representing the encoding process would be to advance sign by sign, and, *looking backward*, to examine each sign in relation to the previous two, rewriting the group accordingly.[21] This way of conceptualizing the transcoding process ties the formation of the numeric code to the mechanism of condensation as described by Freud in *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*. In this text, Freud explores many forms of condensation in witticisms, one being the overlapping of letters between words. He illustrates this idea with such mixed word formations as *alcoholiday*, which compresses the last three letters of the word *alcohol* with the first three letters of the word *holiday*, noting that the effect of the witticism relies on a retrogression: the flickering double take of the syllable *hol*.

In addition to ideas of symmetry and dissymmetry, Lacan goes on to note that the numeric encoding scheme causes "possibilities and impossibilities of succession to appear,"[22] that is, an unfolding of new layers of presence and absence and the laws governing this unfolding. Whereas any given plus or minus in a record of tosses is (ideally) independent, a specific numeric code in a sequence of such codes is always restricted by those that precede it. Examining the last item in Figure 1, for instance, it can be seen that only two of the three possible numeric codes can replace the question mark, either 2 (if the next sign is + ) or 3 (if the next sign is

− ); this is so because only these two numeric codes contain a triple that matches the initial pattern −+.

A law of succession is thus observed to emerge and that is that each plus/minus triple can link up with only two others, in this way producing either a numeric code that is the *same* as the one preceding it or one that is *different*. Another law of succession regulates the sequencing of symmetric codes: 3 cannot follow 1 (since no 1 ends with two dissimilar plus/minus signs), and 1 cannot follow 3 (since no 3 ends with two identical signs). In other words, any sequence connecting the two types of symmetries must be mediated by a dissymmetry.

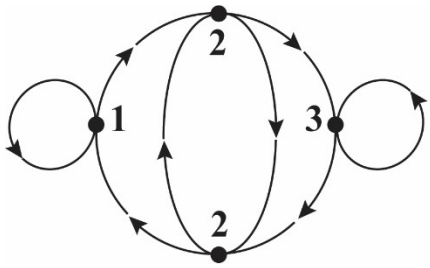



*Figure 2. Lacan's 1-3 Network.*

These laws of succession are described in Lacan's 1-3 Network,[23] reproduced in Figure 2, which traces all possible sequences of the numeric code. Readily observable in this graph are the cycles and loops that represent repetitions of the same code: $11^+$, $22^+$, and $33^+$ (the superscript + is *Kleene plus* and means that there are one or more occurrences of the symbol preceding the operator[24]). Careful examination of the numeric encoding scheme reveals that each of these cycles is uniquely generated by the plus/minus triples defining the repeating code. Whereas in a record of absence and presence, repetitions of the same sign (plus or minus) are always of the *same kind* (that is, ever indicating, regardless of sign, the successive appearance of the self-same side of a coin), $11^+$, $22^+$, and $33^+$ differ, as we shall see, not only in the manner in which they govern the chain of signification but also in the manner in which they determine the reconstruction of possible toss records that informed the repetition of codes in the first place.

Bounding the 1-3 Network are the symmetric self-loops $11^+$ and $33^+$, each behaving in accordance with its symmetric type. The constancy of $11^+$ precludes any exchange in the loop between the two plus/minus triples ( [+++] and [−−−] ) defining the 1 code. In other words, the pattern providing entry to the loop is the revolving door furnishing exit. The alternation inherent in $33^+$, however, claims the participation of both triples defining the 3 code ( [+−+] and [−+−] ), with the two patterns serving equally as points of entrance and exit. Unlike $11^+$ and $33^+$, the cycle described by $22^+$ has the distinction of circulating between two separate

points (conjoining four triples), each marking the intersection of two divergent paths, the one bridging 1 to 3 (top) and branching directionally in and out of the $22^+$ cycle and the other bridging 3 to 1 (bottom) and likewise offering access in and out of the $22^+$ cycle.[25]

Inspection of the $22^+$ cycle reveals that the switching taking place at these two points is directed by triples partitioned into two sets: those that begin with identical signs and those that end with identical signs (see Table 1). These sets are mirror images of each other and express divergent (and directionally opposite) pathways of flow in the network. For ease in following the chain of signification that develops in exercise 3, these two sets will be distinguished, when necessary, by a circumflex ($\hat{2}$) and a caron ($\check{2}$), selected to correspond visually with the top and bottom vertices of the $22^+$ cycle represented in the 1-3 Network. As already noted, without this split in the 2 code, no transit between 1 and 3 or between 3 and 1—that is, no walk through the outer circuit of the network interposed between the two symmetric self-loops—would be possible.

| 1 (even) | $\hat{2}$ (odd) | $\check{2}$ (odd) | 3 (even) |
|---|---|---|---|
| [+++] | [++−] | [−++] | [+−+] |
| [−−−] | [−−+] | [+−−] | [−+−] |

*Table 1. Numeric Encoding with Division of Number 2.*

On the face of it, the four plus/minus encodings of 2 express four different pathways through the 1-3 Network and represent four possible reconstructions. Indeed, no matter the length of the numeric series, as long as it is defined as $22^+$ there are always four possible reconstructions of the plus/minus record (the series [22], for example, encodes [++−−], [−−++], [−++−], and [+−−+] ). In contrast, 1 and 3 both express two different pathways through the network, and any numeric series of any length containing either 1 or 3, including $11^+$ and $33^+$, encodes only two possible +/− records. What this means is that the introduction at any time of 1 or 3 in a series starting out as $22^+$ *retroactively* redefines the decoding, or unwinding, of the memory trace by eliminating two possibilities. For instance, the addition of 1 in the series above to produce [221] immediately eliminates the last two plus/minus encodings of [22] since 1 must start with two identical signs. Thus, it can be said that the symmetric patterns determine the dissymmetric patterns. Although Lacan does not examine this aspect of determinism, we find already inherent in the numeric encoding of a pattern of presence and absence a rudimentary structure offering the possibility of retroaction.

The determinism of the symmetric over the dissymmetric takes yet another form, also related to memory, which Lacan does mention. Provided that a succession of 2s in a series is framed by either 1 or 3, these symmetric delimiters *remember*, as it were, whether the number of 2s contained therein is even or odd. If such a frame

is itself same/even,[26] that is [1-1] or [3-3], then the number of 2s inside is even, but if the frame is different/odd, that is [1-3] or [3-1], then the number inside is odd.[27] In this way, and "right from the primordial symbol's first composition with itself . . . a structure, as transparent as it may still remain to its givens, brings out the essential link between memory and law."[28]

*Exercise 3: The Exchange of Letters*

The determinism uncovered in the numeric encoding scheme worked through in Lacan's last lesson increases in complexity as more codes are generated by the iterative application of the same organizing principle. The next evolution in this iterative process encodes the legal succession of three numeric codes according to their +/– symmetric/dissymmetric (even/odd) designations. This produces four new codes, which Lacan labels α, when symmetry is joined to symmetry ([1.1], [3.3], [1.3], and [3.1]),[29] β when symmetry is joined to dissymmetry ([1.2] and [3.2]), γ when dissymmetry is joined to dissymmetry ([2.2]), and δ when dissymmetry is joined to symmetry ([2.1] and [2.3]).

Of the sixty-four possible combinations of numeric triples (considering the two different 2s),[30] only sixteen are legal, four of which fall into each of the four symmetrical/dissymmetrical categories of letters. Take, for example, the case of symmetry joined to symmetry or the letter α. Since 1 cannot directly connect to 3 or 3 to 1, the only numeric code that can replace the dot in [1.3] and [3.1] is 2. Likewise, the only code that can replace the dot in the other two possibilities for α, [1.1] and [3.3], is the repetition of the same number defining the frame, either 1 or 3, since a trail starting out from 1 or 3 and returning to itself again via 2 requires the intervention of at least one other 2 (an even number of 2s as noted in the last exercise) for a minimum sequence of four numeric codes, not three. Thus, the letter α is defined by these four triples: [123], [321], [111], and [333].

In Figure 3 the four numeric triples defining the letter codes are mapped out on the 1-3 Network. As can be observed, the first two triples include a cycle, and the last two triples define paths connecting three separate points, that is, three different numeric codes (if the top and bottom 2s in Lacan's 1-3 Network are distinguished).[31]

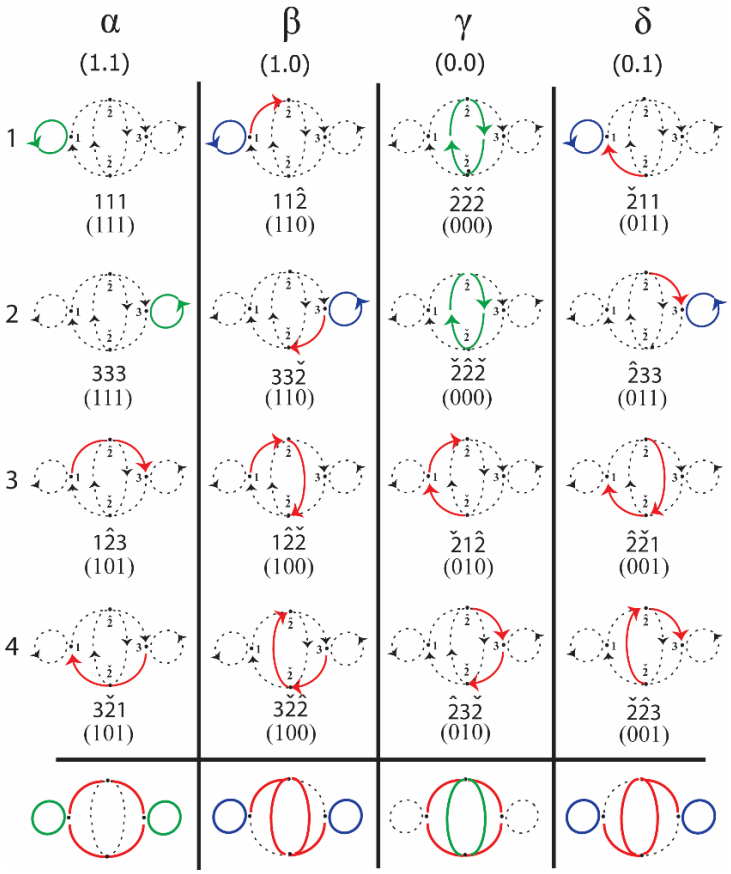



*Figure 3. The Greek Letter Codes Mapped on the 1-3 Network. Note: in this figure the letters encoding legal numeric triples (as well as Lacan's later binary codes,[32] which are placed in parentheses) are superimposed on the 1-3 Network. The two points representing code 2 are distinguished with a circumflex* $(\hat{2})$ *and a caron* $(\check{2})$*, as defined in Table 1. The four permissible triples for each letter are numbered 1-4 on the left-hand side. Green trails are cycles that are traversed twice; blue trails are self-loops that are traversed once, and a red path connects two separate points.*

The composites on the bottom row of Figure 3, which superimpose all trails produced by the four numeric triples defining each letter, visually highlight some marked similarities between the patterns composing, on the one hand, the pair α and γ and, on the other hand, the pair β and δ. Each of the α and γ composites circumscribes the larger circuit (in red) connecting the points $[1-\hat{2}]$, $[\hat{2}-3]$, $[3-\check{2}]$, and $[\check{2}-1]$ though they differ in the way the two semi-circles defined by triples three and four of each letter complete the circuit (horizontally for α and

vertically for ɣ). Another point of similarity between α and ɣ is the way in which the first two triples of the pair circumnavigate cycles (in green) twice, producing a superimposition that either traces out the symmetric self-loops ([111] and [333]) in the case of α or variations of the dissymmetric numeric cycle ([222]) in the case of ɣ. In contrast, the composites of β and δ trace out all three numeric cycles; but, unlike α and ɣ, the first two triples defining β and δ are limited in circumscribing the symmetric self-loops (in blue), making only one round after entering the loop in the case of δ and only one before exiting the loop in the case of β, a variation that produces superimpositions that are mirror images of each other. Later, Lacan transcodes this mirroring pair into a set of parentheses.

The laws of consecutive letter succession that emerge from this encoding scheme are entirely determined by the trails these sixteen numeric triples map on the 1-3 Network. The α and ɣ pair, for instance, whose first two triples are observed to loop twice, are able, as Lacan notes, to "overrun the entire chain"[33] if caught in a self-loop generating endless strings of $\alpha\alpha^+$ and $\gamma\gamma^+$. Closer inspection shows that these two self-loops behave on one level in a manner identical to the numeric self-loops, with the α self-loop following the law of constancy and the ɣ self-loop following the law of alternation. As was the case with the plus/minus sequences propagating $11^+$, a given sequence of $\alpha\alpha^+$ is always generated by the same underlying code, in this case either α1 or α2 (representing, as detailed in Figure 3, the numeric triples [111] and [333], respectively). In other words, the triple providing entry into the α self-loop is the same one furnishing exit. Likewise, in following the law of alternation, the $\gamma\gamma^+$ sequence requires the participation of both the ɣ1 and ɣ2 ( [2̂2̌2̂] and [2̌2̂2̌] ) cycles. That the laws of constancy and alternation govern the production of $\alpha\alpha^+$ and $\gamma\gamma^+$ can be verified visually by consulting Figure 4, which traces in detail all possible sequences of the letter encoding scheme.

As dictated by the first two triples defining β and δ, which loop only once, the β and δ self-loops permit just one revolution through the loop (see Figure 4), prohibiting, as a consequence, the sequences $\beta\beta\beta^+$ and $\delta\delta\delta^+$. However, since both β and δ are interconnected in the manner indicated by their mirroring composites, each letter can exit its own self-loop to transition into the self-loop of the other, possibly cycling this way forever. Potential infinite cycles also exist between the letters α and ɣ (though not between their respective self-loops as is the case with β and δ), making possible an infinite series of $(\alpha\gamma)^+$and $(\gamma\alpha)^+$. Repeated cycles do not exist between α and β; α and δ; β and ɣ; ɣ and δ.[34]

Lacan has much to say about these cycles and loops. He notes, for example, that whereas α and ɣ could potentially overrun a chain of letters in infinite self-looping, the only cycling possible between the self-loops of β and δ—defined as either $(\beta\beta\delta\delta)^+$ or $(\delta\delta\beta\beta)^+$—"limits to 50% the maximum possible frequency of each of them."[35] Given that the probability of a "fair" coin toss is 0.5, Lacan sees these differences in the mechanisms governing the cycling of letters as separating "out from the real a symbolic determination which, as faithful as it may be in recording

any partiality of the real, merely produces all the more clearly the disparities that it brings with it."[36]

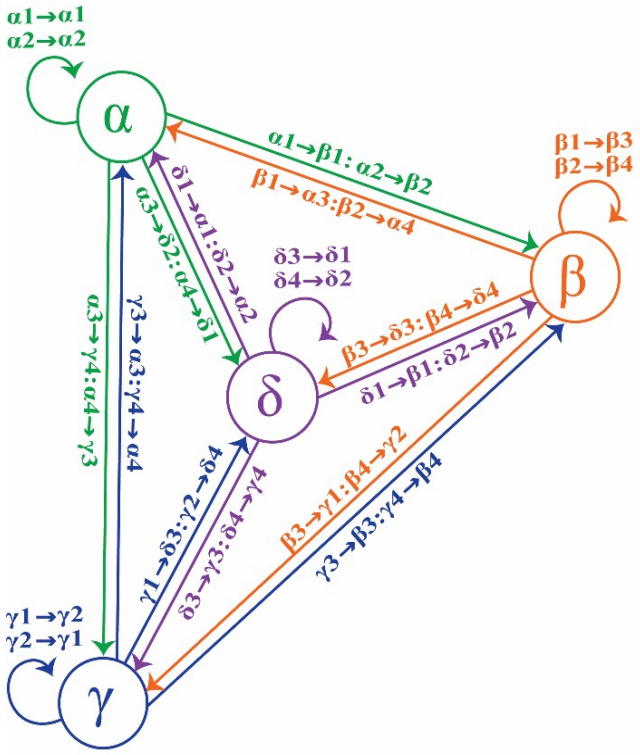



*Figure 4. Transition Diagram of Letter Codes. Note: the paths emerging from the letters are color-coded for ease of identification. The symbol → placed between two letter codes means that the code before the symbol "transitions to" the code following the symbol. The numbers that follow each letter represent the four numeric triples defined in the far left-hand side of Figure 3.*[37] *Thus, for example, β2 → α4, means (consulting Figure 3) that* [33̌2] *transitions to* [3̌21] *producing the permissible sequence βα (permissible because the last two numbers of β2, that is,* [3̌2]*, match the first two numbers of α4).*

Even more interesting is the meaning Lacan attributes to these cycles, particularly when discussing the L Chain in "Parenthesis of Parentheses," which he relates to the L schema presented at the end of the "Introduction." Briefly, the double-looped ββδδ cycle is said to "cover" the structure of the subject,[38] that is, S, "the subject of the psychoanalytic session."[39] Inside this structure, repetitions of ɣ stand for the "silence of the drives,"[40] with ɣ itself, when combined with α in any of their potential cycling, representing a punctuation of scansion. Cycles of $(\gamma\alpha)^+$ and $(\alpha\gamma)^+$

reflect the axis of the imaginary relation in the L schema, which is "the couple involved in reciprocal imaginary objectification."[41] Surrounding the ββδδ structure, in the field of the Other (A in the L schema), are repetitions of α (especially the α1 loop of unary symmetry), which Lacan says are "the times marked by the symbolic as such."[42] Also situated in this field, but encased within β-δ integuments, is the potentially endless cycle of $(\alpha\gamma)^{+}$, which Lacan identifies with the "ego of the psychological *cogito*—the false *cogito*—which can just as well prop up perversion pure and simple."[43] We shall return to the L schema and its connection to the letter code later in our investigation.

For now, there is more that the cycling behaviors of the letters can teach us about the mechanism of letter code succession (and, by extension, memory and *repetition automatism*). As already mentioned, α and ɣ (unlike β and δ) never directly transition into each other's self-loops. The two numeric triples defining the α self-loop (α1 and α2) either return to α or branch off to β. Similarly, the triples defining the ɣ self-loop (ɣ1 and ɣ2) either remain with ɣ or join up with δ. In other words, the triples defining the α and ɣ self-loops are *cut off* from each other. As a consequence, sequences such as ɣαα and αɣɣ that directly connect ɣ and α to the other's self-loop are simply not possible.

What is happening here provides a clue to the connective functioning of each letter code. Inspection of Figures 3 and 4 shows that every letter is partitioned into two parts (henceforth referred to as *moieties*), based on a division that has already been discussed between the first two numeric triples defining a letter that inscribe a cycle and the last two that bridge three points. Lacan also recognizes these moieties, which he labels with binary codes in his α, β, ɣ, δ Network.[44] Except for the special nature of the α and ɣ loops, triples 1 and 2 of each letter can be observed to flow together as a pair through the transition diagram in Figure 4, as do triples 3 and 4. Moreover, each pair is isolated from the other pair, *making every letter the site of two separate and opposite exchanges*. Thus, the succession of letters is determined by the connections their moieties make, a single moiety behaving something like a switch linking two that precede to two that follow, the two that precede functioning as parameters or inputs that regulate the outputs. What results is an elaborate reformulation of the pattern of presence and absence, where every moiety both activates or permits four sequences of three-letter codes and suppresses or prohibits four others.

All sixty-four combinations of three-letter codes, whether permitted or not, are listed in Figure 5 beneath an illustration of the eight moieties and their inputs and outputs. With the exception of ɣ, the cycling 1 and 2 (abbreviated 12 and read as "one two") numeric triples defining the letters (see Figure 3) constitute one group (category 1), and the bridging 3 and 4 (abbreviated 34 and read as "three four") triples comprise another (category 0). The four moieties in category 1 permit all three-letter sequences beginning with α and δ and ending with α and β but filter out those ending in ɣ and δ. Similarly, category 0 moieties permit all three-letter sequences beginning with β and ɣ and ending in ɣ and δ but filter out those ending in α and β.

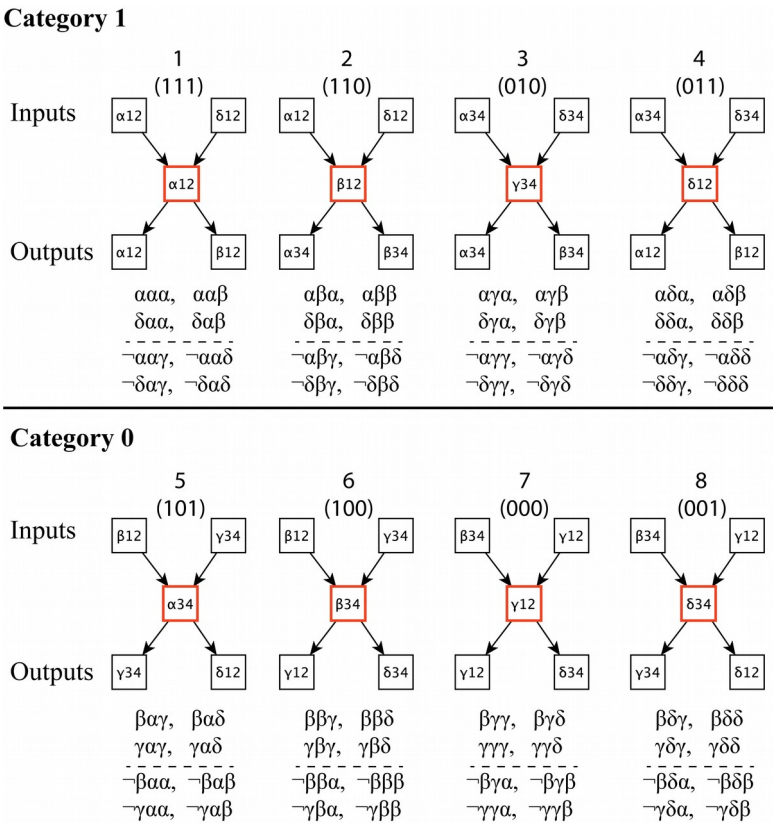



*Figure 5. Inputs and Outputs of the Eight Moieties. Note: each of the eight moieties (located in the center of each network and outlined in red) permits and prohibits four three-letter sequences. These sequences are listed below the networks (the '¬' sign means 'not' and is applied to those sequences that are excluded by the moiety and impossible within the language of the letter code). Lacan's binary designations for the eight moieties are in parentheses,*[45] *and the two categories are labeled based on the middle binary term that differentiates the two groups (binary 1 representing the symmetric/cycling moieties and binary 0 the dissymmetric/branching group, with γ moieties the interlocking exception).*

Lacan summarizes the permissible three-letter sequences in his Δ Distribution[46] diagram, which lists all possible letter successions at times one, two, and three. Reflecting on the links forged between exclusive pairs of letters at times one and three (which comprise the inputs and outputs of the two categories of moieties), he concludes that time three is "the constitutive time of the binary,"[47] which indeed it is. As our analysis has demonstrated, every letter is divided into two, its moieties belonging to two different categories that share two possible inputs and two possible outputs. Lacan comments later on that "The fact that the link has

appeared here is nothing less than the simplest formalization of exchange and is what confirms for us its anthropological interest."[48] Certainly, we have discovered within this simple language the emergence at time three of a system of rules that, determined by binary oppositions and mediated by groups of three, govern not only what can be exchanged but also what is prohibited.[49]

Lacan's interest in what is prohibited, however, is focused more on what happens when a fourth term is added to the permitted sequences of three letters. In this case, we find all sixty-four *permissible* four-letter sequences organizing themselves into quadrants of sixteen each that are determined by a letter that is excluded at both times two and three, as well as by a shared additional missing letter at time two and yet another at time three, for a total of three missing letters. Lacan organizes all permissible four-letter sequences into their respective quadrants (defined by the missing letters) in his Tables Ω and O,[50] reproduced as Figure 6 with quadrants marked.

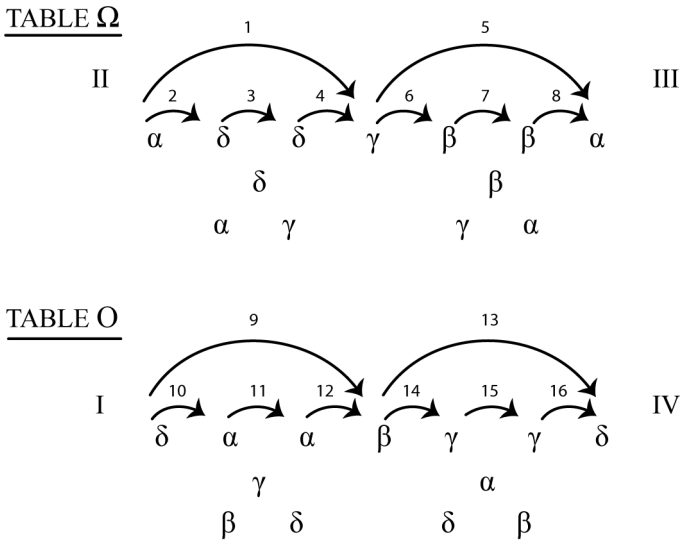



*Figure 6. Tables Ω and O Labeled with Quadrants (Roman Numerals) and Figure A1.1 Tree Numbers.*[51] *Note: an arc represents a skip from letter one to letter four and thus four sequences of length four. The letters arranged in a pyramid beneath the quadrants represent the shared missing letter at times two and three (top) and the additional missing letter at time two (bottom left) and at time three (bottom right).*[52]

Lacan suggests that what we have here at time four is a possible "rudimentary subjective trajectory, by showing that it is grounded in the actuality which has the future anterior in its present."[53] We do indeed discover at time four a trajectory that convolves past, present, and future—this convolution the effect of the

impossibilities Tables Ω and O are meant to illuminate, where each of the quadrants are defined by three missing letters: those at time two plus those at time three, the missing letters at times two and three having been removed retroactively, as we shall demonstrate, at time four. Lacan goes on to say that "in the interval of this past that is already insofar as it projects, a hole opens up that is constituted by a certain *caput mortuum* of the signifier (which is set here at three-quarters of the possible combinations in which it must situate itself), suffices to make it depend on absence, obliging it to repeat its contour."[54]

Setting aside the total number of missing letters at times two and three and the contours of absence these inscribe within four-letter sequences, Lacan may also be referring here to the fact that the sequences situated in each quadrant are quarantined from the remaining three, the missing letters appearing at this juncture to limit any further intermingling between quadrants. This speculation, though unlikely, would nonetheless explain why Lacan discontinued his analysis of the letter code at time four.[55] That he stopped short where he did is perplexing[56] (however much this serves to illuminate his theory of scansion) considering that future sequences, as we shall see, are not bound by the contours of absence established at time four; rather, four-letter sequences, with their retroactive pruning of letters at times two and three, foreshadow yet another *caput mortuum* of the signifier, one giving rise to yet another pattern of absence, inaugurated at time five by a breach between quadrants that erects within each one (and *ex post factum* at time three) a single signifier.

An appreciation of these (de)materializations within the letter code, however, requires a more in-depth analysis, which is provided in Appendix 1. The results of this analysis are summarized in Table 2, which reveals the general pattern of letter succession for each of the quadrants, the patterns differing from one another in detail only and not in form. It will be observed that the first and last letters of a sequence of four or more letters serve as a set of coordinates that situates each sequence within one of the quadrants (which are not defined until time four when the first "*caput mortuum* of the signifier" and retroactive pruning of letters are encountered). A stable pattern of letter succession only becomes evident, however, much later at time six. The basic pattern established from this point forward is clearly defined by two moieties: one situated at the start of the sequence (time two) and one located at the end (in the penultimate position). These bounding moieties belong to specific categories defined by the quadrant coordinates (that is, by the inputs and outputs of the bounding moieties). Referring to Table 2, for example, we find that Quadrant I is bounded by category 1 moieties, whereas Quadrant II starts off with those in category 1 and terminates with those in category 0, and so on, with none of the bounding pairs duplicated in another quadrant.[57] Careful inspection of the two odd patterns produced by four-letter and five-letter sequences reveals that they too follow the same general pattern but become *deformed* as a result of a collision between the inputs and outputs of the moieties framing the sequence, a collision that retroactively eliminates more letters—most strikingly in the case of five-letter sequences, where at time three a total of three letters fall out with the imposition of the terminating moiety.

| | Quadrant I (α) | | | | | Quadrant II (β) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Time (*t*) | 1-4 | 1-5 | 1-6 | 1-7 | 1-*n* | 1-4 | 1-5 | 1-6 | 1-7 | 1-*n* |
| 1 | α,δ | α,δ | α,δ | α,δ | α,δ | α,δ | α,δ | α,δ | α,δ | α,δ |
| 2 | α,δ | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | γ,β | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 3 | α,β | α | α,β | α,β | α,β | α,β | β | α,β | α,β | α,β |
| 4 (. . .) | α,β | 1 | α,δ | all | all | δ,γ | 0 | γ,β | all | all |
| 5 (*t*-3) | | α,β | 1 | α,δ | (. . .) | | δ,γ | 0 | γ,β | (. . .) |
| 6 (*t*-2) | | | α,β | 1 | α,δ | | | δ,γ | 0 | γ,β |
| 7 (*t*-1) | | | | α,β | 1 | | | | δ,γ | 0 |
| *t*=*n* | | | | | α,β | | | | | δ,γ |

| | Quadrant III (δ) | | | | | Quadrant IV (γ) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Time (t) | 1-4 | 1-5 | 1-6 | 1-7 | 1-n | 1-4 | 1-5 | 1-6 | 1-7 | 1-n |
| 1 | β,γ | β,γ | β,γ | β,γ | β,γ | β,γ | β,γ | β,γ | β,γ | β,γ |
| 2 | α,δ | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | γ,β | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 3 | γ,δ | δ | γ,δ | γ,δ | γ,δ | γ,δ | γ | γ,δ | γ,δ | γ,δ |
| 4 (. . .) | α,β | 1 | α,δ | all | all | δ,γ | 0 | γ,β | all | all |
| 5 (*t*-3) | | α,β | 1 | α,δ | (. . .) | | δ,γ | 0 | γ,β | (. . .) |
| 6 (*t*-2) | | | α,β | 1 | α,δ | | | δ,γ | 0 | γ,β |
| 7 (*t*-1) | | | | α,β | 1 | | | | δ,γ | 0 |
| *t*=*n* | | | | | α,β | | | | | δ,γ |

*Table 2. Pattern of Letter Succession. Note: rows represent a time step (t), and columns represent sequences of different lengths, starting with four-letter sequences, the length at which quadrants are defined. The numbers 0 and 1 are moiety category numbers meaning that all four moieties in that category are possible at that particular time step for that given length.*

The exclusion of all letters save one at time three holds for all five-letter sequences, the letter prevailing determined by the coordinates of the first and last letters of the string (its quadrant position) and *revealed only from the standpoint of five-letter sequences*. Though it is the case that the missing letters at times two and three in four-letter sequences (for Quadrant III, that would be α, β, and γ)[58] seem to converge in dropping out at time three in five-letter sequences, of the two letters that would otherwise occupy the third position (see Table 2), only one is

eclipsed, forgotten, repressed—retroactively by the addition of the fifth letter—while the other lays claim to the quadrant. Whereas four-letter sequences are directed at every time step by dyadic relations, time five marks the juncture where chains are determined by the ascendency of one signifier, a sovereignty that ruptures the quadrant, setting into motion the construction of a vast expanse of chains that intertwine the quadrant of the letter that prevailed with the quadrant incarnating the letter that was dislodged.

How is it that the emergence of the single letters marks the time when quadrants are ruptured and patterns of displacement are instituted? If we write out all five-letter sequences that begin, for example, with the letter α, restricting our consideration for the moment to α12 (see Figure 7), we discover that half the sequences start out in Quadrant I and half in Quadrant II and that they remain in their starting quadrants until time five, when fifty percent of the sequences at this time step are displaced into the opposite quadrant. The reason for this displacement has to do with a shift in moiety categories that is instigated by the letter that will be eclipsed. For example, focusing on time three in Quadrant I, we find that fifty percent of the moieties are β12, which only outputs α34 and β34. If these sequences were to terminate at time four, they would be located in Quadrant I, but as soon as a fifth letter is added, the category 0 representations of α and β output only γ and δ letters, thereby displacing these sequences from Quadrant I to Quadrant II. A similar investigation of the other seven moieties reveals a pattern similar to the one displayed in Figure 7, the main difference being the letter inaugurating the displacement (which is the missing letter at time three) and the column locations of the transitions at time five.[59]

| | Quadrant I (α) | | | | | | | | Quadrant II (β) | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Time 1 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 |
| Time 2 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | β12 | β12 | β12 | β12 | β12 | β12 | β12 | β12 |
| Time 3 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | β12 | β12 | β12 | β12 | α34 | α34 | α34 | α34 | β34 | β34 | β34 | β34 |
| Time 4 | α12 | α12 | β12 | β12 | α34 | α34 | β34 | β34 | γ34 | γ34 | δ12 | δ12 | γ12 | γ12 | δ34 | δ34 |
| Time 5 | α12 | β12 | α34 | β34 | γ34 | δ12 | γ12 | δ34 | α34 | β34 | α12 | α12 | γ12 | δ34 | γ34 | δ12 |

*Figure 7. All Five-Letter Sequences Starting with the α12 Moiety and Illustration of Quadrant Displacement at Time Five. Note: the displacement is initiated at time three by the letter naming the associated quadrant (outlined in red).*

As more letters are added, half the outputs of the moieties in the penultimate position in the previous time step become inputs to moieties in the opposite category, which displaces sequences two time steps later into the other quadrant (this explains why there are always only two possible letters in the antepenult position for strings greater than size five: when a sequence halts, the imposition of

the final moiety *always* retroactively removes two letters in the antepenult position). Once in this second quadrant and for as long as the sequence continues, half the moieties in the penultimate position of these displaced codes flip the sequence back two time steps later to its quadrant of origin, repeating (remembering) in this way the earliest inscriptions of presence and absence.

Not all sequences in a quadrant suffer (and thus record within themselves) moments of displacement. Tallying up the four sequences that remain in Quadrant I for all moieties initially positioned in this quadrant (α12, α34, δ12, and δ34),[60] brings the total number of these "pure" sequences at time five to sixteen (four moieties x four sequences), and this is the number that remains within every quadrant, no matter the number of letters appended.[61]

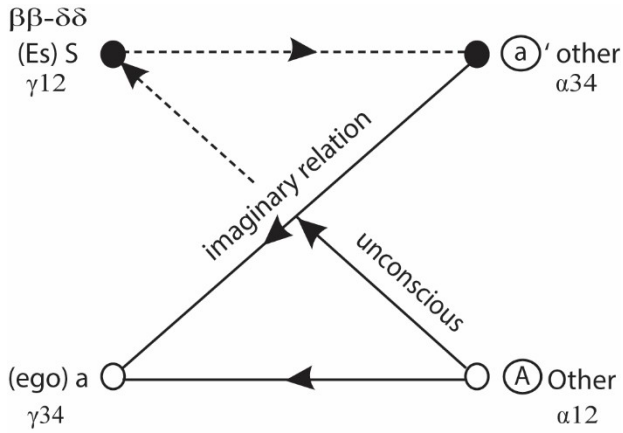



*Figure 8. L Schema with Associated Moieties*

The example of α12 in Figure 7 was chosen because of Lacan's association in "Parenthesis of Parentheses" of the α self-loop with A in the L schema (see Figure 8). In the L Chain language, this loop stands outside the "quotes," the sobriquet Lacan gives the basic ββδδ structure of the subject, so called because of the double quotes' resemblance to nested parentheses, the opening and closing of which replace all instances of β and δ in the L Chain language (see Appendix 2 for a formal definition of the L Chain language and its five rules). It goes without saying that the α12 loop generates a pure sequence that remains within its quadrant, the γ12 loop being yet another, and one that Lacan places inside the double quotes that cover the structure of S (as well as inside any number of β and δ integuments within the quotes). The remaining fourteen pure codes are essentially α12 and γ12 loops with the addition of one to three letter prefixes (see Appendix 3) that serve to situate the loops within their quadrants and one to two

letter suffixes that set sequences up to be displaced later as they duplicate and grow in length into their complementary quadrants (thereby generating a series of new mixed sequences).[62]

It is by means of these suffixes that A ($\alpha^+$) and S ($\gamma^+$) on the symbolic axis cross over to the imaginary axis, much as is illustrated by the two directed arcs between S and a' and A and a in the L schema. The cycles $(\alpha\gamma)^+$ and $(\gamma\alpha)^+$ that represent for Lacan "the couple involved in reciprocal imaginary objectification"[63] are embedded in strings that, in effect, disrupt the pure codes and assume the iterative functioning of the α12 and γ12 loops. These disruptions are expressed in the L Chain language in the alternations of α34 and γ34 (and visa versa) that are played out between the linings of the double quotes (β-β and δ-δ)[64] or, in the exclusive case of the $(\alpha\gamma)^+$ cycle, outside the quotes in the "field of the Other (A in the L schema),"[65] where they lodge within β-δ shells, representing the "ego of the psychological *cogito*."[66] According to Lacan, these codes formulate "a certain remembering [*mémoration*] related to the symbolic chain," whose law "is essentially defined by the relay constituted," in the $(\alpha\gamma)^+$ and $(\gamma\alpha)^+$ cycles, "by the surmounting [*franchissement*] of one or several parenthetical signs [β or δ] and of which signs."[67]

Not until the final sentence of the "Introduction" does Lacan connect the L schema to the letter code: "The similarity between the relationship among the terms of the L schema and the relationship that unites the four times distinguished above (in the oriented series in which we see the first finished form of the symbolic chain) cannot fail to strike one as soon as one considers the connection between them."[68] In Lacan's clarification of this connection in the section that follows in the seminar, it is interesting to note that "the relationship that unites the four times distinguished above" (if I may interpret this clause as referring to more than the quaternary structure exhibited in the combined Ω and O tables so as to encompass the specific terms contained therein as well), spells out in reverse in Table Ω the basic L Chain codes belonging to the symbolic axis: αδδγββα; moreover, the jumps over the βs and δs (the surmounting of parenthetical signs), from the first to the middle term and from the middle term to the last, spell out the imaginary relation: αγ and its inverse γα.[69]

The correspondence between the letter code and the L schema is carefully worked out by Lacan with his later addition of "Parenthesis of Parentheses," where the description of the L Chain language (as illustrated by the L Chain sequence) is centered on securing to its foundational four letter ββδδ structure not only the pure phrases positioned at the poles of the symbolic axis but also the interruptive displacement patterns (the wall of language) generated by the "imaginary grill," as well as by the outlying "false *cogito*." Because the ββδδ structure harbors within itself both the γ12 loop on the symbolic axis and the imaginary α34 and γ34 cycle, the graph as a whole could well be viewed as "double" quoted. In Appendix 2, I make explicit some additional connections between the L schema and the L Chain language, tying both, in Appendix 5, to Lacan's α, β, γ, δ Network (which, like Figure 4, completely expresses the letter code).

By way of concluding the third exercise, it is worthwhile taking a moment to examine the composition of these displacement patterns since they shed light on the "entire appearance of remembering" in the "ordered chains of a formal language," which is the kind of remembering that accounts "for Freud's notion of the indestructibility of what his unconscious preserves."[70] We can visualize this "appearance of remembering" in the letter code by mapping out the quadrant locations of sequences at each time step for larger numbers of terms, as in Figure 9, which illustrates these patterns for α and β moieties for ten time steps. Since the ɣ and δ patterns are identical in appearance to those for α and β, they are not shown.[71]

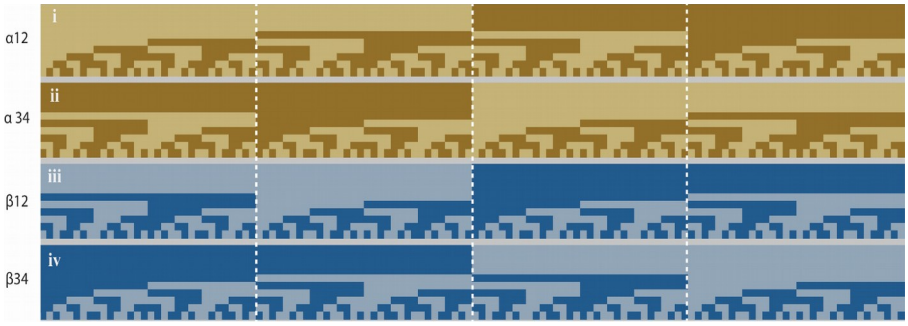



*Figure 9. All α and β Moieties Color-Coded Based on Quadrant Locations for Strings of Length Ten.*[72] *Note: each of the four images (α12, α34, β12, β34) shows a total of 512 sequences by ten time steps (time one at top and time ten at bottom). Every term (moiety/letter) in a sequence is represented by a small rectangle that is colored based on the quadrant it belongs to at each time step. As quadrants are not defined until time four, the first four terms are colored according to the quadrant defined at time four. Light brown represents Quadrant I, dark brown Quadrant II, light blue Quadrant III, and dark blue Quadrant IV. Roman numerals label the four basic patterns discernable within the images.*

Examining Figure 9 we discover that the displacement images are composed of at least four distinct patterns (identified in the first column with Roman numerals) that are shuffled in each image.[73] The sequence of patterns in the α12 image, for example, is one, three, two, and four, whereas in the β34 image, the sequence, starting off with pattern four, is reversed. Closer inspection reveals that the four patterns can be grouped into pairs that are inverses of each other: pattern one is the inverse of four, and pattern two is the inverse of three. These patterns are, in fact, inverses of each other in terms of the moieties that make up the patterns, as explained further in Appendix 4. For instance, if a particular pattern has α12 (Lacan's binary label 111) in a certain position, the inverse of that same pattern will have ɣ12 (binary label 000) in the corresponding position. Consequently, given the differential already discussed in letter probabilities, an inversion reveals a shift in α and ɣ dominance, with lighter patterns dominated by α and darker patterns by ɣ.[74]

It will be observed that the patterns in Figure 9 are fractals, with smaller versions of the four patterns embedded within larger patterns, as illustrated more clearly in Figures 10 and 11. In other words, Lacan's letter code generates patterns of connectivity that are self-similar and typical of those formed by substitution systems that replace elements according to a set of rules, arranged, as in this case, such that larger sequences are subdivided into smaller sequences.[75]

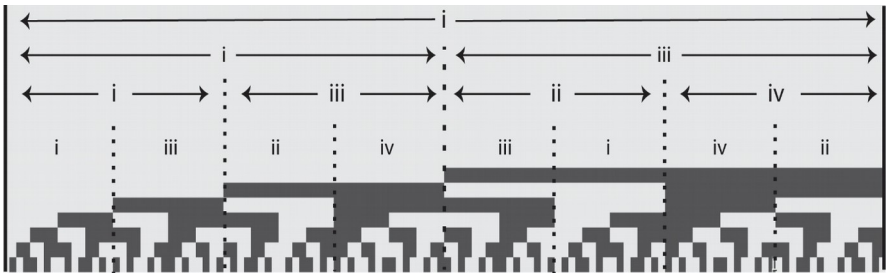



*Figure 10. Fractal Fragment of the Image for α12 of Length Eighteen. Note: this pattern is formed by the first 512 (out of 131,072) combinations of eighteen letter sequences. In other words, this is 1/256 of the entire image. Not all the fractal patterns visible in the image are labeled. Time one is at the top.*

*Figure 11. Another Tiny Fragment of the Image for α12 of Length Eighteen. Note: this fragment shows traces (top half) of much larger (elongated) displacement patterns.*

With the analysis of the letter code completed as far as it will be taken in this essay, let us revisit the L schema once again, this time considering its connection to the letter code in light of the displacement patterns that have now been uncovered. The two poles of the symbolic axis, as already established, are linked to the two self-loops: γ12 or the drives, which we are told by Freud have no aim, no goal other than to loop,[76] and α12, especially α1, the unary trait "by which repetition is marked as such," a mark to which one can return, "which precisely is the unary trait."[77] These two iterative engines do more, however, than self-loop: each is also capable of spinning off into the imaginary axis (in this sense, generating it)[78] via suffixes (parenthetical signs) that transport, on the one hand, γ12 to α34—a point in the chain that marks a displacement between quadrants, a

displacement that is reflected in the L schema in a crossing over (*franchissement*) from the left-hand side of the subject/ego to the right-hand side of the other/Other—and, on the other hand, α12 to γ34—marking yet another displacement between quadrants that is reflected in a crossing over from the side of the other/Other to that of the Subject/ego. As mentioned above, the displacement patterns in Quadrants II and IV are driven by the γ12 iterative engine and those in Quadrants I and III by the α12 engine, each the inverse of the other (see Appendices 3 and 4). Quarantined as they are within their separate domains, it is impossible for pure codes composed of only α12 or γ12 strings to cross paths—for them to reside in the same quadrants, except insofar as they are *projected* in expressions forged (via their prefixes and suffixes) within the vast wall of language, patterning it with their inversions.

*Exercise 4: The Symbolic Circuit*

Although it is the case that Lacan's suite contains difficult material, elliptical and cryptic in presentation, it is nonetheless perplexing that so few have attempted a full explication of it, especially of the three exercises. Much has been written about the L schema and its various incarnations, as well as Lacan's later algebraic expressions and topological figures, all of which exhibit difficulties of their own—so saying the exercises are neglected because the material is too dry or too mathematical or too complex is probably not the whole story. Despite being a project that was taken up and revised by Lacan on several occasions and granted a certain pride of place in his *Écrits*, this program was eventually dropped in favor of his more extensive modeling excursions into graphs, mathemes, and topology. Thus, the exercises represent an oddity, and it is Lacan's more characteristic modeling endeavors that his students have found more attractive.

The exercises are odd in yet another sense having to do with computing and cybernetics. According to John Johnston,[79] Lacan's discourse, at least in the 1954-5 seminar, which first presented the exercises, participates in a new discourse network, one that emerged after the Second World War and that incorporated into psychoanalysis, which was originally based on the discourse network of psychophysics, many cutting-edge ideas taken from the fields of cybernetics and computer science (in Seminar II, for instance, we find mention of Turing machines, Markovian machines, electronic computing machines, such as SEER[80] that was hardwired to play the game of Even and Odd, automata theory, formal languages, computer algorithms, halting, symbolic processing, recursivity, communications theory, codes, messages, closed circuits, cycles, loops, feedback structures, Boolean logic, logic gates, etc.)—ideas that are known to have surprised those who attended his 1954-5 seminar. It should be added that the novelty and level of difficulty of this material (perhaps, the equivalent today of theoretical quantum computing) required extensive study, which Lacan had undertaken with Claude Levy-Strauss, Émile Benveniste, and the mathematician Georges-Théodule Guilbaud.[81] Unlike certain other ideas inspired by cybernetic concepts, such as those of textual machines and *mise en abyme*, that later became the fashion in the

new literary criticism, Lacan's handling of cybernetic concepts, as Jean-Pierre Dupuy[82] has pointed out, was far from superficial.

Nonetheless, as Johnston has remarked, "Lacanian theory has pretty much ignored Lacan's interest in cybernetics, with no apparent loss of completeness or intelligibility. So, even if we agree that 'cybernetics clearly highlights . . . the radical difference between the symbolic and the imaginary orders,'[83] as Lacan asserts, we may wonder to what extent his introduction of machines is a handy illustration of his theory that doesn't add anything essential."[84] Drawing upon the work of Friedrich Kittler, Johnston stresses, quite to the contrary, the absolute "*necessity* of cybernetics to Lacan's theory,"[85] underscoring that when Lacan says "the symbolic world is the world of the machine,"[86] he is referring to computers (Markovian machines, finite state machines, and Turing machines). These machines form the basis of Lacan's "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,'" especially the postscript, as noted by Johnston, who unravels, like Fink before him, the emergence of law in the numeric encoding system and points out that both the 1-3 Network and α, β, γ, δ Network are transition diagrams of finite state machines that are "intended to show how the operation of a 'primordial symbol' can constitute a structure linking 'memory to law.'"[87]

Yet what has not been recognized is that the three exercises taken together are themselves a machine, a computational model (one that Lacan carefully worked out by hand) of the *formation* of subjectivity (the latter term defined as "an organized system of symbols, aiming to cover the whole of an experience, to animate it, to give it its meaning,"[88] what Freud calls "*the core of our being*"[89]). This model develops through the recursive application of two elementary functions that combine pre-established patterns (originating with a series of binary inscriptions) into groups of three[90] that are then labeled (rewritten) according to whether the patterns in a given group express symmetry or dissymmetry,[91] evenness or oddness.[92] What emerges after only two iterations clearly informs Lacan's understanding of the symbolic world as the world of the machine:[93] its autonomy and repetition (the insistence of the chain), its organization of structures and laws (possibilities and impossibilities), its transformations of probabilities (that subvert randomness), its consequence of lack (the *caput mortuum* of the signifier), and its mechanisms of retroaction. Lacan's intention in the suite is for the student to work out the computations for himself, so that his understanding of the symbolic world via this machine can be so informed. But for this to happen "he must pay the price with elbow grease [*mettre du sien*]."[94]

Following Lacan's program by encoding alternations of absence and presence (the outcome of a flipped coin), we worked out how these alternations are transformed by sequentially grouping them by three, first to form the numeric code and then the Greek letter code, uncovering in the process the emergence of cycling behaviors in the case of codes that express evenness (symmetry) and bridging behaviors in the case of those expressing oddness (dissymmetry)—behaviors that in the letter code divide every letter in two (like the two sides of the original coin), the separate halves functioning as switches that both prohibit and permit certain

connections, linking together those letters that are so permitted into vast chains of codes, which, when halted or interrupted, retroactively delete antepenultimate codes, thereby situating each sequence into one of two interconnected quadrants. We discovered in this way that retroaction is always a possibility. Moreover, we encountered in the early stages of the letter code, two special moments, one at time four and one at time five, that produce deformations of the basic sequencing pattern—the consequence of a collision of moieties (a trauma, as it were) that rewrites the past, kicking into motion the gears of displacement. At this moment a structure and a mechanism for the subject's entry into the symbolic are forged, autonomously, "independently of the peculiarities of its human support."[95] What is generated thereafter are streams of self-similar patterns that are inversions of each other.

It is within the perspective of the Greek letter code that Lacan deciphers "The Purloined Letter," which, inverted in position in the seminar, becomes for us a final exercise, one explicating the "intermixing of subjects."[96] As Lacan tells us in the overture of the *Écrits*, "It will be up to the reader to give the letter in question . . . the very thing he will find as its concluding word: its destination."[97] For what Poe's tale illuminates for us is the *character* of the letter in the circuit of the symbolic, as it is "displaced in its pure state, which one cannot come into contact without being immediately caught in its play."[98] Here the letter is "synonymous with the original, radical, subject."[99] For each of us, it is our unconscious,[100] and it is:

> Here we rediscover what I've already pointed out to you, namely that the unconscious is the discourse of the other. This discourse of the other is not the discourse of the abstract other, of the other in the dyad, of my correspondent, nor even of my slave, it is the discourse of the circuit in which I am integrated. I am one of its links. It is the discourse of my father for instance, in so far as . . . I am condemned to reproduce . . . the discourse he bequeathed to me, not simply because I am his son, but because one can't stop the chain of discourse, and it is precisely my duty to transmit it in its aberrant form to someone else . . . in such a way that this discourse produces a small circuit in which an entire family, an entire coterie, an entire camp, an entire nation or half of the world will be caught.[101]

## Appendix 1: Analysis of the (De)Materialization of Letters within the Letter Code at Times Four and Five

Understanding the (de)materialization of letters within the letter code at times four and five requires that we wade through a brief, albeit somewhat more arduous, analysis of the letter code, one that starts with an examination of the moieties implicated in the addition of the fourth letter. To assist us in this endeavor, Figure A1.1 provides tree diagrams grouped into their respective quadrants that map out the progressive transitions between moieties in all sixty-four combinations of four-letter sequences.

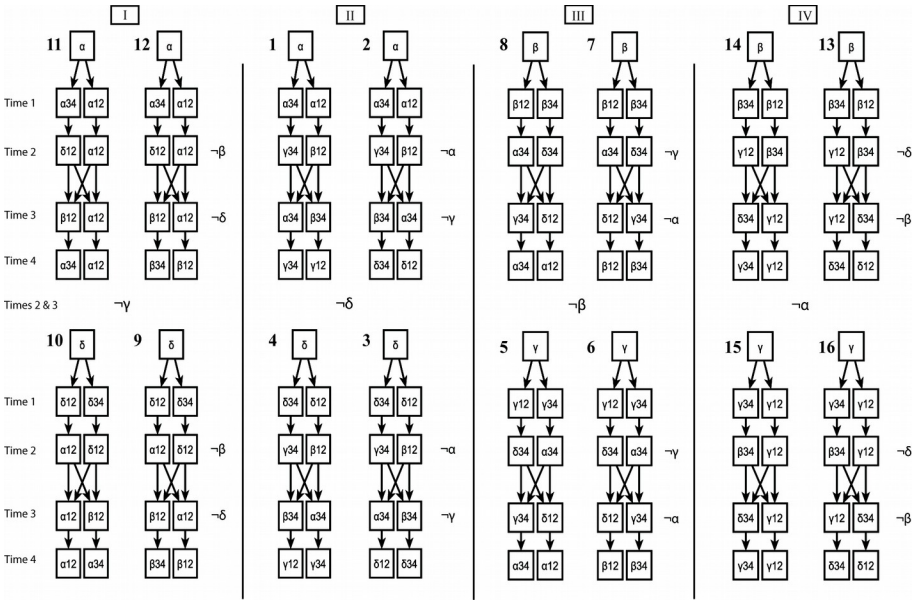



*Figure A1.1. Tree Diagrams Representing All Legal Four-Letter Codes. Note: trees are numbered 1-16 to correspond with the arcs in Lacan's Tables Ω and O (see Figure 6) and are grouped into quadrants (labeled with Roman numerals) based on the missing letters at both times two and three.*

Examining commonalities among the trees within a given quadrant, we notice that every tree shares two sets of moieties, one at time two and another at time three, with the two elements of each set belonging to only one category. For example, all trees in Quadrant III transition at time two to either α34 or δ34, both of which belong to category 0, and at time three to either γ34 or δ12, both of which belong to category 1. Moreover, none of the other quadrants have trees that transition to these same moieties at these particular times. In other words, at times two and three, a letter is never fully expressed by both its moieties within a single quadrant nor is the moiety combination at each of these time steps ever duplicated in another quadrant.

A further observation concerns the starting and ending letters of trees within a quadrant. As is the case with times two and three, letters at time one are not distributed evenly throughout the quadrants but rather are confined to two, with α and δ restricted to Quadrants I and II, and β and γ to Quadrants III and IV. The case is similar for terminating letters: the trees in Quadrants I and III all end in α and β, whereas those in Quadrants II and IV all end in γ and δ. Thus, we discover that the first and last letters of a sequence function much like a set of coordinates that positions a sequence within a specific quadrant.[102] These quadrants are

defined as (*start letters*; *terminating letters*): Quadrant I: (α,δ; α,β), Quadrant II: (α,δ; γ,δ), Quadrant III: (β,γ; α,β), and Quadrant IV: (β,γ; γ;δ).

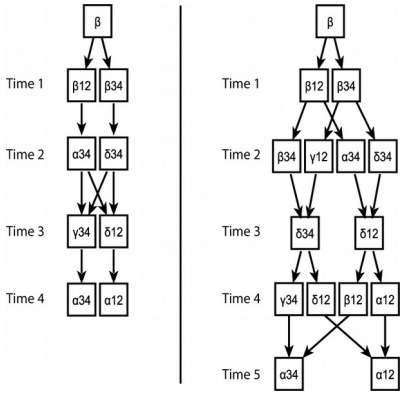



*Figure A1.2. Trees at Times One through Four and One through Five for β to α.*

With these observations in mind, it is time to explore what happens when more letters are added. As Lacan notes when speaking about the Δ Distribution for time three and as the trees in Figure A1.1 confirm, at time four it is possible for any starting letter to terminate at any other letter, unlike time three, which is restricted, as we have already discussed, to two letters that directly depend on the starting letter. The trees in Figure A1.1 also confirm the obvious that every letter at the terminating point of a tree is represented by both its moieties. While all letters remain a possibility in position four when a fifth letter is added (with the difference being that every letter is now represented in every tree at position four), the moieties of one category drop out. The category that remains in position four is determined by its quadrant location and is the same category that was in the penultimate position of the four-letter trees before the fifth letter was added. Consider, for example, the five-letter strings beginning with β and ending in α. The penultimate moieties for these five-letter sequences, as illustrated in Figure A1.2, are restricted to category 1, just as they are in the penultimate position of the four-letter sequences. That this must be so can be demonstrated quite simply by examining the outputs of the moieties in Figure 5: only category 1 moieties output α letters. Similar restrictions apply at time two, where the moieties in our example are limited to category 0, a limitation that in this case can be explained by the fact that only category 0 moieties have β inputs.

The patterns we have just uncovered in these two examples persist as more letters are added and can be generalized, as reflected in Table 2, as follows. Given some sequence of any length greater than three, the penultimate letters (where time $t=n-1$, with $n$ being the length of the string) and all second letters (where $t=2$) are represented by moieties belonging to one category, a category that is determined by its quadrant position (that is, by its first and last letters). Two

letters appear at time three ( $t=3$ ) and in the antepenult position ( $t=n-2$ ), as illustrated in Figure A1.3, which shows sample trees for sequences of length six and seven. This follows naturally from the categories of moieties in the second and penultimate positions, the two letters in position three due to the fact that a single category only outputs two letters, and the two letters in the antepenult position caused, as described in the main text, by quadrant displacements.

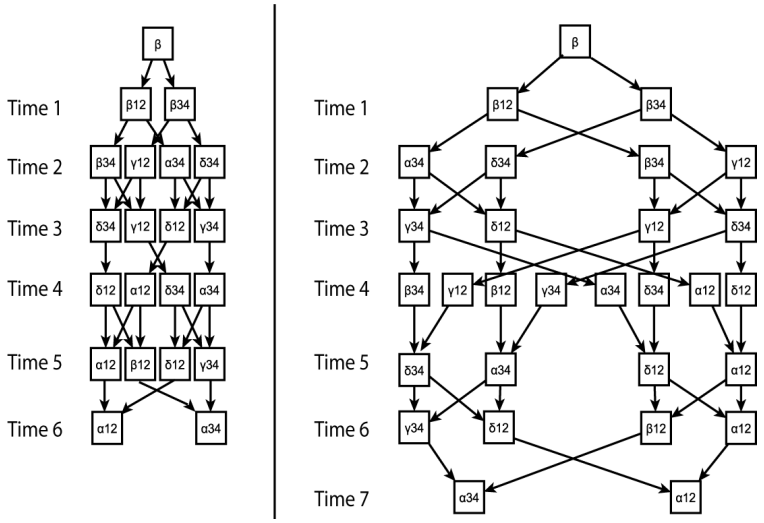



*Figure A1.3. Trees at Times One through Six and One through Seven for β to α.*

The question now arises whether it is the case that this general pattern holds for four-letter and five-letter sequences since some moieties that should be there are missing in the second, third, and penultimate positions (compare Table 2 with Figure A1.2). The missing moieties in these key positions can be explained by observing that the inputs and outputs of the moieties in the second and penultimate positions coincide in shorter sequences. For example, the four-letter tree in Figure A1.2 has moieties belonging to category 0 in the second position, as expected for the pattern of letter succession in Quadrant III, but only α34 and δ34 are present in position two, missing are the category 0 moieties β34 and γ12. This can be explained by the fact that time two is also the input position ( $t=n-2$ ) for the moieties of category 1 in the penultimate position. This leaves only α34 and δ34 (the only category 0 moieties that are also category 1 inputs) for position two (removing β34 and γ12 since they cannot function as inputs to category 1 moieties), and only γ34 and δ12 in the penultimate position as they are the only category 0 outputs for the remaining moieties in position two. With the five-letter example in Figure A1.2, the situation is slightly different. Following the general rule, all category 0 moieties are represented at time two and all category 1 at time four (the penultimate position), but time three is both the output of the first set of

moieties in position two and the input to the second set of moieties in the penultimate position, a collision that eliminates at time three all but the δ moieties (note that category 0 moieties output the set s1 = {γ12, γ34, δ12, δ34} and category 1 inputs belong to the set s2 = {α12, α34, δ12, δ34}; the intersection of s1 and s2 is δ, that is, s1 ∩ s2 = {δ12, δ34}).

As a final note, let me counter a possible objection to the partitioning of sequences into quadrants. It might be argued, for instance, that merging Quadrants I with II and Quadrants III with IV (see Table 2) would produce a much simpler albeit less interesting pattern of letter succession, where, for any sequence larger than three, any letter/moiety (*All*) would follow thereafter. One might even hypothesize that this is the general pattern Lacan discerned for larger sequences (until halted, *All* is the pattern) and the reason he stopped his analysis of the letter code at time four. Yet the fact remains that not only does Lacan partition four-letter sequences in Tables Ω and O into quadrants based on the letters that disappear at times two and three, but he also foregrounds this "hole that opens up," that makes the signifier "depend on absence, obliging it to *repeat its contour* [emphasis added]."[103] This repetition reflects the very form of memory (*repetition automatism*) that Freud was the first to discover. Objections that these fissures extend indefinitely can be countered by examining the patterns produced by trees of letter codes of varying lengths, such as those provided in this appendix, where it can be observed that specific pairs of letter delimiters do indeed produce the patterns of missing letters as described in Table 2, confirming that the contours of absence that Lacan observed for four-letter sequences persist over time (although in a slightly different form due to the deformations at times four and five of a more general pattern as noted above). The reason quadrants materialize at time four with the four-letter codes is because each letter is divided into two, and the moieties segregate letters at time three into two input and two output pairs, which in turn produce at time four a $2 \times 2$ *combination of delimiting pairs*.[104] It wasn't until the 1966 edition of the *Écrits* that Lacan introduced the α, β, γ, δ Network, the graph that recognizes the binary nature of the letters. One can only speculate what Lacan would have worked out had he elevated this graph's status as lowly footnote to a position warranting a more thorough analysis of the binary letters.

## Appendix 2: Some Remarks on the L Chain Language and Its Formalization

My reading of the rules informing the L Chain is provided below along with a regular expression defining each rule. A regular expression is a set of symbols that formally define a legal expression within a given language. Because parentheses are a metacharacter in regular expressions (and must be *escaped* with a backslash to indicate a literal parenthesis which in the case of the L Chain language would add clutter to the expression), I use the roman letters b and d to designate β and δ in the list of rules rather than parentheses but retain Lacan's final transcoding of α and γ to 1 and 0 for those two letters. After describing each rule, I provide a full description of the L Chain language as one regular expression, transcribing b and

d back into parentheses as Lacan preferred. This regular expression along with variations to the L Chain can then be plugged into any online regular expression tester to validate the string. This should prove useful to scholars wanting to explore legal variations of the L Chain or other expressions within this language, as I demonstrate below when analyzing what Lacan says about the reverse of the L Chain and what it teaches us about the effects of the letter in the "The Purloined Letter."

Unfortunately, there are ambiguities in Lacan's description of the L Chain language in "Parenthesis of Parentheses." He begins clearly enough by transcribing β into a right parenthesis and δ into a left parenthesis, calling the double cycle ββδδ, transcoded as (( )), "quotes."[105] What is misleading is his expansion of the "quotes" to include (( ) ( ) . . . ( )), which on its own is not a legal statement in the letter encoding scheme: the sequence βδβ, or ( ) (, is illegal. I believe that what Lacan is specifying here is that between the first and last parentheses making up the quotes there can be any number of sets of parentheses, however that might be formulated *legally*.[106] It should be noted that my interpretation of the five rules appears to be in agreement with Fink's commentary on the rules informing the L Chain;[107] that this interpretation is correct is lent weight when these rules are compared to features evident in Lacan's α, β, γ, δ Network (see Appendix 5).

**The Five Rules of the L Chain Language**

Given the basic string bbdd:

1) Zero or more bd can occur between the first and last b . . . d in the basic string as long as at least one 0 is inserted[108] between any db in the series bdb (for example, bbd0bdd).

   *Regular expression for rule 1*: ^b((bd)|((bd)*(bd0bd)+(bd|0bd)*))d$

2) Zero or more 10 strings (pairs) can be inserted between bb in the basic string (for example, b10bdd), and zero or more 01 strings can be inserted between dd in the basic string, as long as the number of signs added is even (for example, bbd01d);

   *Regular expression for rule 2*: ^b(10)*(bd)+(01)*d$

3) Zero or more 0101 strings can be placed between any bd ... bd combination placed inside the basic string but add a 0 at the end if one or more 0101 strings are inserted there (for example, bbd01010bdd);

   *Regular expression for rule 3*: ^b(10)*((bd)|(bd)*(bd((0101)*01010)?bd)+(bd|((0101)*01010)?bd)*)(01)*d$

4) Zero or more 0 signs can be inserted between any bd located inside the basic string (for example, bb000db000dd);

   *Regular expression for rule 4*: ^b(b0*d)+d$

5) Zero (based on the L Chain example) or more 1 signs (as well as zero or more bd frames stuffed with one or more 1010 sequences, but add a final 1 before the d) can be placed *outside* the basic bbdd string;[109] In other words, this rule applies to what goes before and after the basic string (for example, 111bbdd111b10101d111). Any bd here must be stuffed with at least one 1 to be a legal letter code, so I am reading the last line of this rule, namely, "the number of signs being zero or odd,"[110] as referring to the total number of signs involving the bd frame (and that number would be zero if no bd and odd if any), and not as referring to the number of signs inside and excluding the bd frame.

*Regular expression for rule 5*: ^(1*|(b(1010)+1d)*)*(bbdd)(1*|(b(1010)+1d)*)*$

Transcoding β and δ back into parentheses, Lacan provides the following application of these rules in the L Chain: "(10…(00…0)0101…0(00…0)…01)11111…(1010…1)111….etc."[111] Thus, one legal string in the L Chain language is (10(000)01010(000)01)11111(10101)111. This string, as well as others in this language, can be verified online at https://regex101.com/ using the following regular expression, which combines all five rules defining this language:

^(1*|(\((1010)+1\))*)*\((10)*((\(0*\))|(\(0*\))*(\(0*\)((0101)*01010)|0\(0*\))+(\(0*\)|((0101)*01010)|0\(0*\))*)(01)*\)(1*|(\((1010)+1\))*)*$

***

In speaking about the laws of remembering (*mémoration*) as they are reflected in the L Chain, Lacan writes, "the same dissymmetrical structure persists [in the L Chain] if, for example, we reverse all the quotes."[112] The dissymmetrical structure Lacan speaks of is a reference to two segments in the L Chain: one located on the left-hand side representing the subject, which is dominated as we have seen by the γ12 iterative engine (the strings of zeros in the L Chain) but which also includes the displacement patterns generated within various configurations of β-δ as γ12 crosses over to the imaginary axis; and the other segment situated on the right-hand side representing the Other, which is dominated by the α12 iterative engine (the strings of ones) but which likewise includes displacement patterns generated within β-δ shells. These two sides are highlighted here within the L Chain: (10…(00…0)0101…0(00…0)…01)11111…(1010…1)111.

In explaining the dissymmetric structure that remains after reversing the quotes in the L Chain, Fink considers two strings: the L Chain proper with all parentheses reversed: )10)000(01010)000(01(11111)10101(111, which he dismisses for not being a legal letter expression; and )01)111(10101)111(10(00000)01010(000,[113] which, in addition to reversing the quotes, flips all zeros and ones to their opposite values. The resulting string is a permissible letter string and one which he investigates. It is not, however, a legal expression in the L Chain language, as can be confirmed

by plugging this string (along with the regular expression defining the L Chain language worked out above) into a regular expression tester. The L Chain language is but a subset of the letter code: thus, although it is true that all L Chain strings are legal letter strings (when translated), the converse is not true. A perfectly legal string in the L Chain language can be generated, however, if we simply take advantage of the fact that each of the two segments highlighted above is essentially palindromic, that is, if we reverse the elements in the original L Chain (with ellipses removed) to obtain 111)10101(11111)10)000(01010)000(01( and then flip the parentheses to produce 111(10101)11111(10(000)01010(000)01). This string is interesting because it swaps what was originally on the left-hand side of the L Chain (that is, what is allowable inside the "quotes" covering the subject) with what was on the right-hand side (that is, what is allowable outside the "quotes" in the field of the Other)—effectively turning the L Chain inside out.

Lacan uses the reversibility of the L Chain to cast light on how the letter in "The Purloined Letter" "was able to have its effects on the inside—on the tale's actors, including the narrator just as much as on the outside—on us, its readers, and also on its author."[114]

## Appendix 3: Pure Code Prefixes and Suffixes

As mentioned in the text, there are sixteen pure codes that persist in their starting quadrants no matter the length of the sequence. These pure codes are essentially composed of two roots, the α12 and γ12 self-loops or iterative engines, each of which dominates or drives their own separate quadrants, as noted in Table A3.1.[115] Attached to these two roots are seven possible prefixes ranging in size from one to three letters and three possible suffixes of one or two letters. The prefixes and suffixes serve the dual functions of situating the sixteen pure codes within their respective quadrants and of generating the displacement patterns discussed in the text (that is, of forging links that connect two quadrants that are dominated by opposite roots, specifically Quadrant I with II, as illustrated by the displacement patterns in Figure 7, and Quadrant IV with III, as illustrated in Figure 9 by the displacement patterns produced by β12 and β34).[116] It should also be noted that the infinite sequences $\alpha^{+}$(α12) and $\gamma^{+}$(γ12) are located only in Quadrants I and IV, respectively. Obviously, these two sequences can never be interconnected. What this means is that Quadrants I and IV, as well as the two quadrants these two are linked with (II with I and III with IV), can never be interconnected either.[117]

| Quadrants I & III | | | Quadrants II & IV | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Prefix | Root | Suffix | Prefix | Root | Suffix |
| (δ12) | (α12) | (β12) | (β34) | (γ12) | (δ34) |
| (α34)(δ12) | | (β12)(α34) | (γ34)(β34) | | (δ34)(γ34) |
| (δ34)(δ12) | | (β12)(β34) | (β12)(β34) | | (δ34)(δ12) |
| (β34)(δ34)(δ12) | | | (δ12)(β12)(β34) | | |
| (β12)(α34)(δ12) | | | (δ34)(γ34)(β34) | | |
| (γ12)(δ34)(δ12) | | | (α12)(β12)(β34) | | |
| (γ34)(α34)(δ12) | | | (α34)(γ34)(β34) | | |

*Table A3.1. Prefixes and Suffixes Attached to the Self-Loops α12 and γ12. Note: roots are missing in some pure strings at time five (see footnote 115).*

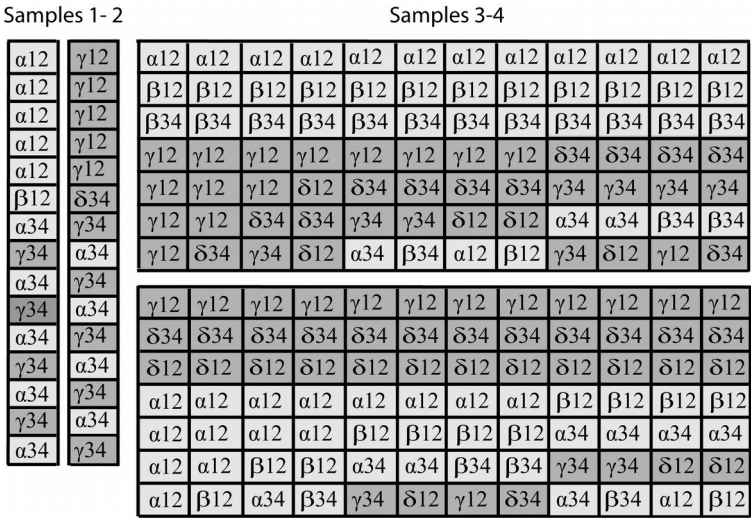
Rather striking in Table A3.1 is the dominance of β and δ in the composition of the prefixes and suffixes, with β forming all the α12 suffixes and δ all the γ12 suffixes (recall from Figure 5 that α12 and γ12 output either themselves or β34 or δ34, respectively). The dominance of β and δ in the composition of the suffixes reflects the fact that these letters are primarily responsible for connecting Quadrants I with II and Quadrants IV with III and thus for generating the displacement patterns, which, as noted in the main text, are the result of surmounting "one or several parenthetical signs."[118]

In functioning as prefixes and suffixes, we discover that β and δ act not only as connectors but also as delimiters—much like a pair of parentheses. Lacan's transcoding of β and δ into a set of parentheses becomes all the more fitting considering how these codes function as containers for different α and γ combinations in the L Chain language. In the α, β, γ, δ Network, as noted in Appendix 5, β and δ moieties even assume the shape of a box.

## Appendix 4: Code Inversions

The basic displacement patterns revealed in Figure 9 can be grouped, as pointed out in the main text, into pairs that are inverses of each other. Moreover, since the displacement patterns are fractals, we observe these basic patterns repeating themselves, with smaller versions embedded within larger ones.

If we inspect the letters making up the inverted patterns (see the four samples in Figure A4.1), we discover that certain codes are the flipside of certain others: α12 and γ12 are inverses of each other as are α34/γ34, β12/δ34, and β34/δ12. These inversions are observable as well in the binary encodings of these moieties in Lacan's α, β, γ, δ Network (see Figure A5.1 in Appendix 5), where the binary digit 1 represents a symmetric numeric code and binary 0 a dissymmetric numeric code (the inverses are evident in Figure 3 as well).




| | |
|---|---|
| α12 | γ12 |
| α12 | γ12 |
| α12 | γ12 |
| α12 | γ12 |
| α12 | γ12 |
| β12 | δ34 |
| α34 | γ34 |
| γ34 | α34 |
| α34 | γ34 |
| γ34 | α34 |
| α34 | γ34 |
| γ34 | α34 |
| α34 | γ34 |
| γ34 | α34 |
| α34 | γ34 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 |
| β12 | β12 | β12 | β12 | β12 | β12 | β12 | β12 | β12 | β12 | β12 | β12 |
| β34 | β34 | β34 | β34 | β34 | β34 | β34 | β34 | β34 | β34 | β34 | β34 |
| γ12 | γ12 | γ12 | γ12 | γ12 | γ12 | γ12 | γ12 | δ34 | δ34 | δ34 | δ34 |
| γ12 | γ12 | γ12 | δ12 | δ34 | δ34 | δ34 | δ34 | γ34 | γ34 | γ34 | γ34 |
| γ12 | γ12 | δ34 | δ34 | γ34 | γ34 | δ12 | δ12 | α34 | α34 | β34 | β34 |
| γ12 | δ34 | γ34 | δ12 | α34 | β34 | α12 | β12 | γ34 | δ12 | γ12 | δ34 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| γ12 | γ12 | γ12 | γ12 | γ12 | γ12 | γ12 | γ12 | γ12 | γ12 | γ12 | γ12 |
| δ34 | δ34 | δ34 | δ34 | δ34 | δ34 | δ34 | δ34 | δ34 | δ34 | δ34 | δ34 |
| δ12 | δ12 | δ12 | δ12 | δ12 | δ12 | δ12 | δ12 | δ12 | δ12 | δ12 | δ12 |
| α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | β12 | β12 | β12 | β12 |
| α12 | α12 | α12 | α12 | β12 | β12 | β12 | β12 | α34 | α34 | α34 | α34 |
| α12 | α12 | β12 | β12 | α34 | α34 | β34 | β34 | γ34 | γ34 | δ12 | δ12 |
| α12 | β12 | α34 | β34 | γ34 | δ12 | γ12 | δ34 | α34 | β34 | α12 | β12 |

*Figure A4.1. Samples of Repeated Patterns (Extracted from within Larger Patterns) and Their Inversions. The inverted pairs seen here are binary complements of each other. The moiety (binary) complements are α12/γ12 (111/000), α34/γ34 (101/010), β12/δ34 (110/001), and β34/δ12 (100/011). Note: the four patterns labeled and shuffled in Figure 9 do not necessarily begin with a binary complement even though the patterns are identical: a single β or δ prefix starts off patterns for strings beginning with β or δ (these two letters form complements with each other but not with α and γ, which also initiate some of the same patterns). After this first letter exception, all inverted pairs of patterns and subpatterns are composed of the same binary complements, as illustrated here.*

A great deal could be written about these inverted pairs, whether in terms of their relation to each other within the various graphs presented in this text and in the suite or whether in terms of their histories—stretching back to the point of their origin: the coin whose two sides are the antecedents of these binary complements.

## Appendix 5: Comparison of the L Schema, the L Chain Language, and Lacan's α, β, γ, δ Network

Arguably the most elegant expression of the letter code is Lacan's α, β, γ, δ Network,[119] which, like the transition diagram in Figure 4, traces out all possible letter codes. Although both graphs completely express the letter code, they are essentially different, the transition diagram offering a diachronic perspective (as well as a synchronic description) of the letter code.[120] Lacan's α, β, γ, δ Network, however, might also be thought of as "diachronic"—that is, insofar as it reveals to us something of the origin of the rules defining the L Chain language and its link to the L schema (which is reprinted below for ease in comparison).

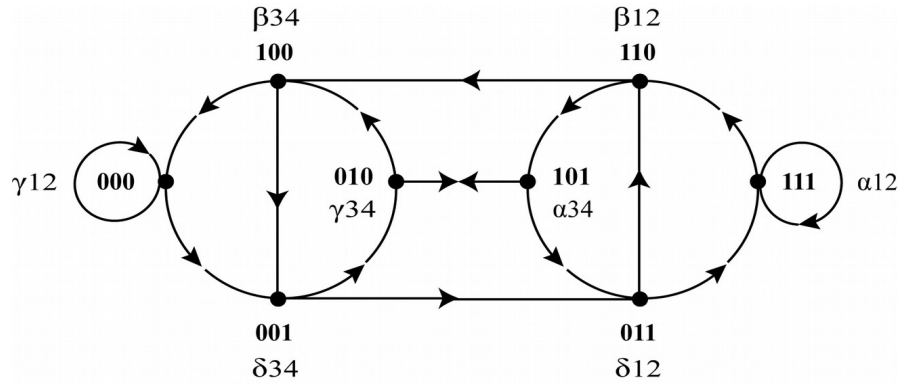



*Figure A5.1. Lacan's α, β, γ, δ Network with Moieties Labeled.*

What is perhaps most striking in the α, β, γ, δ Network is the contrast between the four circles and the central square defined by ββδδ. Also of note is the bridge defined by γ34 and α34 that connects the two (vertical) symmetric halves of the graph. I believe it highly likely that Lacan's L Chain language was directly inspired by these features in the α, β, γ, δ Network. There is, for example, the aforementioned prominence of the ββδδ structure,[121] with γ34 and α34 clearly contained inside this structure in ways prescribed by the L Chain language. One could say, in fact, that the entire L Chain language is defined in terms of the ββδδ structure as it is configured in the α, β, γ, δ Network. In the L Chain language, for instance, cycles of γ34 and α34 iterate between any number of βδ-βδ combinations (rule 3 in Appendix 2), as clearly evident in the network by the left-hand vertical edge (β34, δ34) of the square and the path defined by the right-hand side of the circle it bisects (that allows for any number of crossings back and forth on the bridge). Situated on the left-hand side of that same circle is γ12, where it potentially self-loops any number of times between β34 and δ34 (rule 4). In contrast to the γ12 loop, the α12 loop in the L Chain language is defined as lying outside the ββδδ structure, where it can self-loop indefinitely (rule 5). Given the direction of the arcs (and assuming precedence of the ββδδ structure), one can see in the network why Lacan defines α12 as the exit point of the ββδδ structure[122] (and since α12 is associated with the Other, this placement fits perfectly). Moreover, the L Chain language allows for indefinite iterations of α12 and its walk around the right-hand circle bisected by the β12 and δ12 edge, whose letters in the L Chain language are stuffed as well with any number of potential α34 and γ34 cycles (rule 5).

Rules 1 and 2 are also clearly evident in the α, β, γ, δ Network. Rule 1 walks (in part) through β34, δ34, γ34, and β34, whereas rule 2 takes two main paths inside the ββδδ structure: one path through β12 and any number of α34 and γ34 cycles followed by β34 and a second path, its reflection, through δ34 and any number of γ34 and α34 cycles followed by δ12.

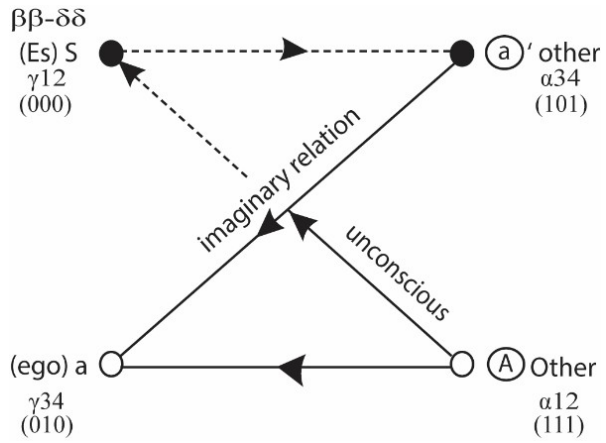



*Figure A5.2. L Schema with Associated Moieties and Binary Codes.*

How does the α, β, γ, δ Network correspond to the L schema? Although the ββδδ structure connects the two larger circles and frames the connecting bridge, it also separates the bridge from the two self-loops located at the two ends of the structure. The bridge, as discussed in the text, is associated with the imaginary relation, whereas the outer loops represent the symbolic axis. However, as noted above, γ12 (which corresponds with Es) lies within the ββδδ structure. It is interesting to point out at this juncture that the letter γ is twisted, not only in appearance but also in its function. Unlike the other letters, γ12 (the interweaving self-loop), is the only loop represented in category 0 moieties, all the others being connections between three points; this in turn leaves γ34 as the only three-point connector in category 1, which otherwise is composed of cycling moieties. The inversion of α (see Appendix 4) and true to its twisted shape, γ is not only the stitch that ties together the two categories of moieties but also for Lacan a *point de caption* ("moments of silence, a value of scansion"[123]). In contrast, α is the other/Other, with α12 Other by virtue of lying entirely outside the structure. Contemplating the α, β, γ, δ Network, α12, especially α1, which Lacan calls "the unary trait,"[124] could also be considered the alpha and omega of both the L schema and Lacan's letter code.[125]

[1]Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1996) 42. Note: the original pagination of the *Écrits* 1966 edition is used throughout.

[2]Lacan, *Écrits,* 42. The antecedents of the pronouns in the original, preserved in the translation, are nuanced and lend themselves to several interpretations of this passage.

[3]Bruce Fink, "The Nature of Unconscious Thought or Why No One Ever Reads Lacan's Postface to the 'Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter," *Reading Seminars I and II: Lacan's Return to Freud*, eds. Feldstein, Richard, Bruce Fink and Maire Jaanus (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996) 173-91.

[4]Lacan, *Écrits,* 41. This passage lends itself to several interpretations.

[5]Lydia H. Liu, "The Cybernetic Unconscious: Lacan, Poe, and French Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 36.2 (2010): 288-320; 289.

[6]Lacan, *Écrits,* 42.

[7]Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love, and Knowledge: Book XX Encore (1972-1973),* trans. Bruce Fink (New York and London: Norton, 1975) 30.

[8]Lacan, *Écrits,* 46.

[9]Lacan, *Écrits,* 43.

[10]Lacan, *Écrits,* 44.

[11]Lacan, *Écrits,* 43.

[12]Lacan, *Écrits,* 46.

[13]Lacan, *Écrits,* 45.

[14]Lacan, *Écrits,* 47.

[15]I am referring here to Lacan's discussion of the pluses and minuses in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis (1954*-1955), trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972) 192-193.

[16]Persi Diaconis, Susan Holmes, and Richard Montgomery, "Dynamical Bias in the Coin Toss," *SIAM review* 49.2 (2007): 211-35; 211.

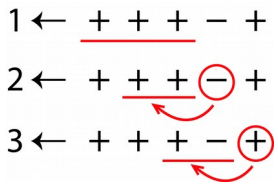
[17]Sigmund Freud, "Determinism, Belief in Chance and Superstition—Some Points of View," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. VI, trans. James Strachey, ed. James Strachey et al. (London: Hogarth, 1900/1953) 239-80. Hereafter *Standard Edition.*

[18]Lacan, *Sem. II,* 192 (see also 182).

[19]Lacan, *Sem. II,* 192.

[20]Lacan, *Sem. II,* 192-193.

[21]The following figure highlights the retrogressive step when encoding a plus/minus sequence into a series of numeric codes:



[22]Lacan, *Écrits,* 47.

[23]Lacan, *Écrits,* 48.

[24]Thus, $11^{+}$ is the set of strings {11, 111, 1111, . . . } and is used here to mean that 1 goes to 1, or makes a loop in the 1-3 Network at least once (11), if not more than once $(11^{+})$. I use a superscript to distinguish the Kleene operator from the plus sign.

[25]The $22^{+}$ cycle, circulating as it does between two points, is different from the $11^{+}$ and $33^{+}$ cycles, which revolve around one point; these single point cycles, as we have seen, will be referred to as either *cycles*, *loops*, or *self-loops*, but multipoint cycles will always be referred to as *cycles*.

[26]Here I am noting the *delimiters of numeric triples* in terms of evenness and oddness (of course, by definition, 1 and 3 each represent *even* +/– triples).

[27]This is a generalization of the rule that Lacan partially specifies. Note that the dash between numbers means that any number of 2s can be inserted between the 1 and 3 numeric delimiters. Walking through the 1-3 Network with the following (legal) sequences will confirm the general rule: [1221], [3223], [12223], and [32221]. Two impossible sequences would be [12221] and [323]. Note as well that although one need not count all 2s inside the delimiters to know whether the number of 2s inside is even or odd, both delimiters are necessary to make this determination (otherwise there is no way of knowing whether a series of $22^{+}$ began with $\hat{2}$ or $\check{2}$ ). Delimiters play a key role not only in defining the numeric and Greek letter codes but also in the properties that emerge from these codes. Moreover, the idea of delimiters is repeated and transformed as one advances through the exercises, as are the ideas of evenness/oddness and the coin's two-sidedness.

[28]Lacan, *Écrits,* 48.

[29]The dot symbol here indicates any legal (given the context) numeric code (1, 2, or 3).

[30]Thus, there are $4^3$ combinations (four numbers, given the two 2s, grouped by three).

[31]In other words, it reflects the two types of succession in the numeric code: *viz*, the addition of a sign that loops (repeats) or one that simply arcs or branches (that is, one that is different, not reflexive).

[32]Lacan, *Écrits,* fn. [28] 61. In the α, β, γ, δ Network, the binary number 1 encodes the symmetric numeric codes 1 and 3, and binary number 0 encodes the dissymmetric numeric code 2. Thus, the binary digits in parentheses beneath the Greek letters at the top of Figure 3 define each of the letters.

[33]Lacan, *Écrits,* 51.

[34]Although it is true that there are connections from α to β to α; α to δ to α; and γ to δ to γ, these sequences are not true cycles since they do not return to the same point, or moiety (defined later in the text) as observable in Figures 3 and 4. Likewise, neither ββ nor δδ connect back to their points of origin, that is, to their originating moieties (as most clearly seen in Figure A5.1 in Appendix 5) though they do make a single letter loop. For this reason, β and δ, as well as the sequences listed above, are unable to loop indefinitely.

[35]Lacan, *Écrits,* 51. It is immaterial whether a record of pluses and minuses is produced completely at random or not. The same general structures of possibility and impossibility in the numeric and Greek letter codes would still emerge, along with variations in the

probabilities of certain letters that Lacan speaks of here (in fact, as noted in fn. 74, the probabilities for α and γ change over time if quadrants are taken into consideration).

[36]Lacan, *Écrits,* 51.

[37]Defining code *Xi* as in Figure 3, with *X* = {α, β, γ, δ}, *i* = {1, 2, 3, 4}, and *Xi* representing one of the four numeric triples defining a letter, it can be observed that in general, *X*1 and *X*2 flow together in the transition diagram, as do *X*3 and *X*4; however, as already mentioned, the *X*1 and *X*2 pairs diverge slightly in the α and γ self-loops, remaining separate in the α self-loop and interchanging in the γ self-loop. For this reason, all four possible combinations for each letter are separated in the graph and not collapsed (as later in the text) into their abbreviated forms *X*12 and *X*34. The intention is for the transition diagram to reveal the underlying numeric compositions of the letters as well as all legal transitions between letters.

[38]Lacan, *Écrits,* 54-55.

[39]Lacan, *Écrits,* 55.

[40]Lacan, *Écrits,* 55. The association of γ with the drives is all the more appropriate if we consider the pounding pulsation produced by the underlying plus/minus patterns informing the 2 cycle that drives the $\gamma^{+}$ iterative engine. Ignoring the initial plus/minus in two of the triples defining $2^{+}$, $\gamma^{+}$ is essentially the redoubled alternation of the pluses and minuses informing code 3: [++−−++−−++−−++−−…] and its reverse.

[41]Lacan, *Écrits,* 53.

[42]Lacan, *Écrits,* 56.

[43]Lacan, *Écrits,* 56.

[44]Lacan, *Écrits,* fn. [28] 61. Reproduced in Figure A5.1 in Appendix 5. Note: when Lacan says a letter cannot be partitioned, he is speaking about the *materiality* of the letter (see *Écrits*, 24). At issue in this paper and Lacan's network are the mechanisms of letter connections. In the Greek letter encoding scheme, letters interconnect with other letters, including themselves, using two switching mechanisms. What follows in this paper is an analysis of the inner workings of these switches and their collective productions. Viewed from this perspective, each of the Greek letters, as Lacan rightly observes, is best represented as two.

[45]Lacan, *Écrits,* fn. [28] 61.

[46]Lacan, *Écrits,* 49.

[47]Lacan, *Écrits,* 49.

[48]Lacan, *Écrits,* 49. Lacan's reference to anthropology at time three is one of the reasons I call the letter divisions *moieties*.

[49]We also saw this filtering mechanism, or gating, at work when grouping both the plus/minus codes and the numeric codes into threes, a process that renders some numeric and letter combinations legal and some illegal.

[50]Lacan, *Écrits,* 50.

[51]See Appendix 1.

[52]These shared missing letters defining the quadrants can be verified by inspecting the

four-letter trees in Figure A1.1 in Appendix 1.

[53]*Lacan, Écrits,* 50.

[54]Lacan, *Écrits,* 50.

[55]Indeed, at the end of the "Introduction," Lacan refers to "the times distinguished above" as the "first *finished* [emphasis added] form of the symbolic chain." Lacan, *Écrits,* 54. See also the end of Appendix 1 for another theory.

[56]To be fair Lacan died before personal computers were commonplace; his analysis of the code, I will assume, was entirely worked out by hand.

[57]It should be noted that the two binary patterns for each quadrant in Table 2 representing the moiety category numbers in position two and in the penultimate position are the same as those defining the Greek letters in Figure 3 (that is, they are the same as the top binary delimiters printed beneath the letters in parentheses, *viz.,* 1.1, 1.0, 0.0, and 0.1). Recall that moieties are defined in terms of patterns of symmetry and dissymmetry. This is a fascinating topic in its own right.

[58]Consulting Figure 6 we find that these three letters are missing either at times two or three or at both times.

[59]Numbering the columns in Figure 7 one through sixteen, α12 and δ12 have displacements spanning column five to column twelve and that cut across both quadrants as illustrated in Figure 7; α34 and δ34 have displacements from column one to four in the second quadrant and from thirteen to sixteen in the first quadrant; β12 and γ34 have displacements from column one to four in the third quadrant and from thirteen to sixteen in the fourth quadrant; and β34 and γ12 have displacements from column five to column twelve that span quadrants IV and III. Quadrants are defined here according to time four. Thereafter in time, they increasingly become interwoven.

[60]Each quadrant has two starting letters and each letter is composed of two moieties spanning two quadrants. Since each moiety produces four pure codes (see Figure 7) per quadrant and four moieties define every quadrant, the total number of pure codes in a given quadrant is sixteen.

[61]Thus, pure codes make up a diminishing fraction of sequences as their length grows. Starting with one of the eight moieties, the total number of combinations of length $n \geq 4$ is $2^{n-1}$, and the total number of transitions between quadrants is $2^{n-2}(n-4)$, though the maximum number of displacements within a single string is $n-4$.

[62]See Appendix 3 for a table of pure code prefixes and suffixes attached to these roots. Note that they are dominated by β and δ, these symbols functioning as transitions between the symbolic and imaginary axes, as discussed in the next paragraph.

[63]Lacan, *Écrits,* 53. In "Parenthesis of Parentheses," Lacan transcribes γ as 0 and α as 1 and associates these two letters (specifically, γ34 and α34) with aa' in the L schema, writing "It is then the alternation of the 01s that represents the imaginary grill (aa') of the L schema." (55). See also fn. 64.

[64]"It remains for me to define the privilege of the alternation characteristics of the between-two of the quotes (01 [γα] pairs)—that is, of the status of a and a' in themselves," Lacan, *Écrits,* 55.

[65]Lacan, *Écrits,* 56.

[66]Lacan, *Écrits,* 56.

[67]Lacan, *Écrits,* 56. See as well my discussion of β and δ in Appendices 2, 3, and 5, where I show how β and δ function as both connectors and containers (prefixes and suffixes).

[68]Lacan, *Écrits,* 54.

[69]Of course, it must not be forgotten that an arc in Table Ω connects the first and last letters in sequences of length four (see Figure 6).

[70]Lacan, *Écrits,* 42.

[71]Because a quadrant begins with two letters, the α and δ as well as the β and γ displacement patterns are arranged in the same order for each of their associated moieties. The sequences in these pairs of letters are essentially the same, varying only in the starting letter.

[72]The algorithm for generating the displacement patterns in Figure 9 can be described as follows. At time one, write out a given moiety for a length $2^{n-1}$ times, with $n$ being the desired length of the sequence (note: sequences are written in time from top to bottom). At time two, write out $n/2$ times the two possible outputs of the single moiety at time one. At time three, write out $n/4$ times the four outputs beneath the appropriate moieties at time two. Repeat this process, subdividing the previous moieties as above by writing out their two outputs, until no further subdivision is possible. At each time step $t$, color the moiety based on its quadrant location, defined, as spelled out in Appendix 1, by the first letter $(t=1)$ and the last letter $(t=n)$ in the sequence at that point. This process is illustrated with moieties written out in Figure 7. NB width of all figures generated using this algorithm are elongated for better visibility, as is the case with other figures coloring quadrant locations at a specific point in time.

[73]As shown in Appendix 4, the patterns are made up of specific codes.

[74]Whereas β and δ each comprise 0.25 of all letters in every quadrant (no matter the length of the sequence), after step four the frequency of α is greater than that of γ in Quadrant I, and γ is greater than that of α in Quadrant IV (see Appendix 3). For strings of length five the frequency of α in Quadrant I and of γ in Quadrant IV is 0.45, and this number slowly decreases over time, eventually converging to 0.25, this convergence due to the fractal properties of the patterns (that is as more and more smaller patterns emerge within the larger patterns over time).

[75]For other examples of substitution systems, see Stephen Wolfram's *A New Kind of Science* (Champaign, IL: Wolfram Media, Inc., 2002). Pages 83 and 84 of that text provide illustrations of substitution systems that produce patterns similar to some of those in Figure 9. The similarities are due to the fact that Lacan's letter code (the moieties) and some of the substitution systems on pages 83 and 84 are essentially binary. For instance, in the Thue-Morse example, which is (b) on page 83, half the patterns switch colors at each time step. The patterns generated by the quadrant displacement patterns in Lacan's letter code are more elaborate, however, than those produced in the Thue-Morse example, involving, as the Lacanian letter code does, changes produced at a later point in time (not just the next time step) via the switching mechanisms of the eight moieties and the required agreement of the first and last letters in a given code with the coordinates defining the quadrants. Although interesting, it is not the intention of this paper to explore the fractal properties of Lacan's code in greater detail.

[76]Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," *Standard Edition*, vol. XVIII, (London: Hogarth,

1926/1959) 1-64. For a brief discussion of the appropriateness of associating ɣ with the drives, see fn. 40.

[77]Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XIX Ou Pire (1971-1972),* trans. Cormac Gallagher, 1972, [10.5.72], http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Book-19-Ou-pire-Or-worse.pdf (accessed 2017). Quoted as well in Adrian Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity,* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008) 224.

[78]Connecting from *within* (in the case of ɣ12) or from *without* (in the case of α12) to the ββδδ structure, or its variant (see Appendix 2), that covers S (including the imaginary axis as shown most clearly in Appendix 5). Samples 3-4 in Appendix 4 illustrate these transitions into the imaginary axis via the suffixes listed in Appendix 3). Note: to cross from the symbolic node ɣ12 to the imaginary node α34 requires at the minimum the suffix δ34 ɣ34; similarly, to cross from α12 to ɣ34 requires at the minimum the suffix β12 and α34, which is the inverse of the ɣ12 suffix. W*orking out the other suffixes for α12 and ɣ12 produces the L Chain*, which connects the *within* of the subject to the *without* of the Other, as discussed at the end of Appendix 2.

[79]John Johnston, *The Allure of Machinic Life: Cybernetics, Artificial Life, and the New AI* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008).

[80]Lacan discusses this machine in Seminar II. Built in the early 1950s, SEER is the SEquence Extraction Robot that was designed to play the game of Even and Odd. This machine was built at Bell Telephone Laboratories by D. W. Hagelbarger (a simpler version was constructed by Claude Shannon). SEER exploited the human tendency to generate nonrandom patterns as a function of emotions and previous experience. Equipped with a tiny memory that kept track of three items of information (the machine's results for the last two moves, recorded simply as a win or a loss, and whether the player played the same or different), SEER was designed to select a correlated output when winning and a random output when losing. For more information about SEER, see, D. W. Hagelbarger, "Seer, a Sequence Extraction Robot." *IRE Transactions on Electronic Computers* 5. March (1956). For an account of Lacan's commentaries on SEER, see Annette Bitsch, "Kybernetik Des Unbewusstens," *Cybernetics - Kybernetik* 2 (2011): 157-58. See also, Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan, "From Information Theory to French Theory: Jakobson, Lévi-Strauss, and the Cybernetic Apparatus," *Critical Inquiry* 38 (2011): 96-126.

[81]Élisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co.: A History of Psychoanalysis in France 1925-1985,* trans. Mehlman, Jeffrey (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014 [2011]).

[82]Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *The Mechanization of the Mind: the Origin of Cognitive Science*, trans. DeBevoise, M. B. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000 [1994]) 108.

[83]Lacan, *Sem. II*, 306.

[84]Johnston, *The Allure of Machinic Life*, 79-80.

[85]Johnston, *The Allure of Machinic Life*, 80.

[86]Lacan, *Sem. II*, 47.

[87]Johnston, *The Allure of Machinic Life*, 86.

[88]Lacan, *Sem. II*, 40-41.

[89]Lacan, *Sem. II*, 43.

[90]Both functions involve grouping and are a primitive form of counting. Oddness is the recognition that when objects are lined up into two rows, something sticks out; there is too much or too little. Evolutionarily, it may be the case that before human beings were able to count, they were able to divide objects into equivalent ratios. Some animals and birds are known to be capable of discerning the relative size of small groups of items, with rhesus monkeys, for instance, being able to match the number of sounds they hear to the number of shapes they see. (see Dustin J. Merritt, Rosa Rugani, and Elizabeth M. Brannon. "Empty Sets as Part of the Numerical Continuum: Conceptual Precursors to the Zero Concept in Rhesus Monkeys," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 138.2 (2009): 258-69). Though probably unable to count, Rhesus monkeys appear to be able to do an estimation of the size of sets of objects (see Caroline B. Drucker, Marley A. Rossa, and Elizabeth M. Brannon. "Comparison of Discrete Ratios by Rhesus Macaques (Macaca Mulatta)," *Animal Cognition* 19 (2016): 75-89). I have not come across studies showing animals able to distribute objects evenly into groups, though some birds and fish appear to divide territories into patches according to a ratio of profitability. See C. R. Gallistel, *Organization of Learning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990). It is possible that ratio discrimination evolved with human beings into the social acts of sharing and gift exchanging.

[91]"I also said that we have, of course, to take the formal side of nature into account, in the sense in which I qualified it as possessing pseudo-significant symmetry, because that is what man embraces in order to produce his fundamental symbols. The important thing is what gives the forms of nature symbolic value and function, what makes them function in relation to one another. It is man who introduces the notion of asymmetry. Asymmetry in nature is neither symmetrical, nor asymmetrical—it is what it is." Lacan, *Sem. II*, 38.

[92]See note 91.

[93]"I am explaining to you that it is in as much as he is committed to a play of symbols, to a symbolic world, that man is a decentred subject. Well, it is with this same play, this same world, that the machine is built. The most complicated machines are made only with words." Lacan, *Sem. II,* 47.

[94]Lacan, *Écrits*, 10.

[95]Lacan, *Sem, II*,192.

[96]Lacan, *Sem. II,* 194. Also, as Lacan informs the analyst, "Last time I told you that symbolism is essential to all the most basic manifestations of the analytic domain, namely to repetition, and that we must think of it as tied to a circular process of the exchange of speech. There is a symbolic circuit external to the subject, tied to a certain group of supports, of human agents, in which the subject, the small circle which is called his destiny, is indeterminately included," (98).

[97]Lacan, *Écrits,* 4.

[98]Lacan, *Sem, II*, 196.

[99]Lacan, *Écrits,* 196.

[100]Lacan, *Écrits,* 197.

[101]Lacan, *Écrits,* 89-90.

[102]This information is evident in a careful inspection of Lacan's Tables Ω and O, as the additional labels in Figure 6 make explicit.

[103]Lacan, *Écrits,* 50. Of course, Lacan may be referring here to the patterns of absence observable only at time four; but, as I have shown, this pattern is an anomaly of a more general pattern of absence caused by the bounding moieties. Interestingly, Lacan notes in footnote 25 that the *caput mortuum* is 7/16 if letter order is not taken into consideration—though he may be calculating this ratio on each table (Ω and O), this number requires the interconnection of *two* quadrants.

[104]Let me stress here that codes of any length greater than three are chains of moieties connected by their inputs and outputs. After time three strings that begin with α and δ, for instance, end not only with the letters α and β but also with γ and δ because category 1 moieties are able to link up with both category 1 and 0 moieties, forming the patterns [*start category*, *end category*]: [1,1] and [1,0]. Likewise, strings beginning with category 0 inputs (β and γ) are able to link up with moieties belonging to both category 0 and 1 moieties, producing the delimiters [0,0] and [0,1]. These are the very combinations of categories in the second and penultimate positions of four-letter strings that originally define the quadrants and that produce the patterns of retroactive dematerializations of letters that Lacan highlights in his Tables Ω and O—dematerializations that manifest again whenever strings of any length are halted (see Table 2 and the trees in Figure A1.3). Moreover, as demonstrated in the text, at time five, pairs of quadrants are breached and become interconnected thereafter. At this moment yet another gap emerges that separates (most importantly, considering the L schema) strings that start with α from those that begin with γ. Thus it is that Lacan's computational model demonstrates for us not only how early primitive symbolic formations persist beneath the surface (as illustrated in Freud's *Wunderblock*) but also how such formations continuously propagate and evolve into ever more complex formulations (see fns. 27, 40, 57, and 117).

[105]Lacan, *Écrits,* 54.

[106]The only connection allowable after βδ that connects back to another β is δ12 to β12 or γ34 to β34. In other words, an expansion of the quotes as specified by Lacan requires the insertion of γ before connecting back to β.

[107]See Appendix 2 in Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[108]As mentioned above in fn. 106, I add this to make the expression legal according to the rules of the Greek letter encoding scheme.

[109]See Appendix 5 for a discussion of α12 as the end node of the L Chain language.

[110]Lacan, *Écrits,* 55.

[111]Lacan, *Écrits,* 55.

[112]Lacan, *Écrits,*56.

[113]Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 171.

[114]Lacan, *Écrits,* 57.

[115]Very few pure strings contain no α12 or γ12 roots. After length five, when displacements occur, α12 and γ12 form the heart of all pure codes. For strings of length five, however, half the pure codes for quadrants II and III contain no α12 or γ12 roots.

[116]For more details on pure codes as they relate to quadrants and specific starting moieties, see fn. 60.

[117]This is an emergent property of the two-sidedness of the letters, which produces at time four with the four-letter sequences the quadrants that continuously perpetuate the binary split that extends as far back as the original plus and minus inscription of presence and absence that was simulated by flipping a coin. I discuss this split and its connection to the Oedipus complex at time five with the five-letter codes in *On Lacan's Neglected Computational Model and the Oedipal Structure: An Expanded Introduction to* "Primordia of Après-Coup, Fractal Memory, and Hidden Letters: Working the Exercises in Lacan's Seminar on The Purloined Letter" located in this issue of *S*; 261-274.

[118]Lacan, *Écrits,* 56 (see also the note in fn. 78).

[119]Lacan, *Écrits,* fn. [28] 61.

[120]The transition diagram is diachronic in that it reveals (in tandem with Figure 3) the number codes informing the letter codes.

[121]As Lacan states, "the redoubled parenthesis [ββδδ] is fundamental," Lacan, *Écrits,* 54.

[122]In contrast to γ12, which is entered into before the ββδδ basic structure can be completed. See as well fn. 125.

[123]Lacan, *Écrits,* 42.

[124]Lacan, *Écrits,* 42.

[125]Consider as well the composites of α and γ on the bottom row of Figure 3: γ inscribes the cycle *inside* the larger circuit and α inscribes the $11^{+}$ and $33^{+}$ self-loops *outside* the larger circuit. It is by virtue of being the alpha and omega that α12 intermixes subjectivities in that it connects one ββ-δδ structure covering a subject to another (see discussion at end of Appendix 2).

Raul Moncayo

# THE SYMBOLIC IN THE EARLY LACAN AS A CYBERNETIC MACHINE, AS AUTOMATON AND *TYCHÉ*, AND THE QUESTION OF THE REAL

*A Review and Response to: Brahnam, S. B. (2017). Primordia of Après-Coup, Fractal Memory, and Hidden Letters: Working the Exercises in Lacan's Seminar on "The Purloined Letter."*

It is well known that the early period of Lacan's ouvre included a detour through cybernetics. Lacan did not continue this train of thought that was picked up most notably by Guattari and Deleuze with their notions of the unconscious as a creative machine (the *machinic* unconscious or "L'inconscient *machinique*"). However, as far as I can tell, their notions of desire and of the mind as a machine did not include a detailed incursion into binary logic and computer programming such as that seen in Lacan's exercises at the end of his text on the purloined letter. The connection between letters and numbers is that letters are meant to be read while numbers are used to perform arithmetical operations and functions. Letters and numbers both have an effect outside meaning or can be senseless units that must be combined to generate meaning within a system.

> Drawing upon the work of Friedrich Kittler, Johnston stresses, quite to the contrary, the absolute "*necessity* of cybernetics to Lacan's theory," underscoring that when Lacan says "the symbolic world is the world of the machine," he is referring to computers (Markovian machines, finite state machines, and Turing machines). (Brahnam, 30)

Lacan's formulation of the Symbolic as a formal language, incorporates formal logic, Boolean logic, and the binary logic invented by Leibniz and prevailing in the field of computer programming, cybernetics, and cognitive psychology. Lacan's interest in binary logic responds to the attempt to understand and develop Freud's idea that the unconscious determines the conscious ego. He wanted to figure out how a formal language determines the subject even if it is the "active" subject that engages such a language. Like in all logic and mathematics, problems and equa-

tions require repeated practice and exercises. This is precisely what Lacan attempts to do in the "Suite" following the text on the Purloined Letter.

Such efforts take Lacan outside the parameters used by Freud to define the unconscious. Even though Freud was well-aware of how the unconscious worked within language (in jokes, dreams, and everyday life), Freud believed that images and not words prevailed in the unconscious. It was Lacan's contribution to give an account of the signifying chain operating within the unconscious. However, in 1955 he had not yet developed the concept of the signifying chain with the aid of the graph of desire or the concept of the Real, in its two periods.

One of the important merits of Lacan's text of 1955 is how he links Freud's clinical and phenomenological observation of the Fort-Da game in a child, with an exposition of the Even or Odd (Head or Tails) game as it appeared in Poe's text. As the former constitutes an empirical/structural moment of psychoanalytic developmental theory, the latter represents a foundation for probability theory. The result amounts to an informal proof of how automaton, as a supposed form of chance, or randomness, represents an actual form of causal determination. This form of chance or randomness is how the Real first appears to Lacan. I will examine first the concepts of automaton and *Tyché* as they appear in Seminar XI before returning to the Fort-Da game and the machine made of signifiers as presented in the Exercises. However, Lacan's final concept of the Real is articulated in Seminar XXIII (see Moncayo 2017).

*Tyché and automaton*

The early Real is ominous, painful, awful, hazardous, accidental, and is often not differentiated from the concept of reality in general or the two are used interchangeably. The second Real is more like *Tyché*, a true hole that generates consonance and concord, is benevolent, and auspicious. This view coincides with *Tyché* as the Greek goddess of Fortune as something surprising and undetermined at the heart of the structure of determination, the point where structure vanishes or does not exist.

Automaton and *Tyché* are the two forms of chance that Aristotle considered. In the Suite or Exercises, the two are not clearly differentiated and both are subsumed under the principle of the repetition compulsion. "What are you, figure of the dice I roll in your chance encounter (*tyché*) with my fortune?" (Lacan, 1956, 28). It is important to 'remember' that in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud (1920) pointed out that repetition in trauma, or the return to the place of trauma is not only a *daemon* of repetition, but also an attempt at catharsis, healing, and repetition with a difference that makes all the difference.

The Lacanian concept of the Real eludes and disconcerts because it is situated in a dimension beyond formal logic/binary language and the senses and yet it is intrinsically 'bound up' with language and the senses. Lacan links the Real to the concept of *Tyché* in Aristotle. Aristotle (350 BCE/2002) distinguished between causality and

chance as an accidental form of causality. In the Physics, Aristotle distinguishes between two modes or types of causality: causality proper (four causes) and two kinds of chance. The two kinds of chance are *automaton* and *tyché*. It is important to distinguish between the two types of causality (causality proper and chance) and the two types of chance because these are often confused. In fact, Lacan also refers to *tyché* as a form of causality instead of as a form of accidental causality.

More recently, after Aristotle, Hume (1748, Of Probability) distinguished between causality and probability. Due to our ignorance or the limitations of our cognitive and perceptual functions we miss many small, numerous, or complex forms of causality. At some point complexity renders prediction, impossible. From this perspective, the most we can know is various degrees of probability that certain events may be causally related to one another. Chance is an everyday word used when speaking about an event taking place while probability is a precise measurement of that chance. In the roll of the dice, each of the six numbers/sides of a dice have a 1/6 chance of manifesting. Probability is a special branch of mathematics that helps people decide the percentage of likelihood of an event taking place (according to large number computer runs or calculations).

For Aristotle (Physics) there were two forms of chance or accidental/spontaneous/random causality: *Tyché* and automaton. Of the two only *Tyché* is truly spontaneous or Real. Automaton appears random because it disrupts predictable social behaviour derived from social norms but is determined by very precise signifying chains of conscious or unconscious causality. Automaton is the disruptive psychical causality associated with the Freudian Unconscious while *Tyché* is the type of causality linked to the Lacanian Real unconscious.

There is what cannot be represented about the drive (*Tyché*) as well as what cannot be measured or predicted due to the complexity of factors and causes at work (automaton). In formal logic certainty is expressed in terms of the probability that preferential states and beliefs will manifest and prevail in the relative frequencies of the facts of existence. Propensities, tendencies, or human habits, "must obey" the usual probability calculus. Objective probability represents the hope that nature functions according to the categories of formal logic. Automaton or accidental causality refers to the unconsciously repressed elements that we do not expect (accidental/random) and are not socially desirable and yet remain an intrinsic aspect of the facts of existence. What appears random and irrational may obey and be determined by logical and mathematical principles of a different order.

*Tyché* for Lacan represents an encounter with the Real and manifests in free association. Encounters are things that one suffers/enjoys in abeyance or pending receiving the necessary attention in the practice of speech or analysis. *Tuche* (as written in Seminar XI) or *tyché* and automaton are accidental causes. *Tyché* is destiny, and automaton is chance associated with instincts and non-rational beings and their fate but that in humans Lacan associates to the signifying chains of language and the Unconscious. Accidental causes produce unintended outcomes or conse-

quences. What appears random and irrational may obey and be determined by logical principles of a different order. Instinct and drive are also organized by logic and numbers of a different order (symmetrical dialectical logic and irrational and imaginary numbers). In addition, in Chaos theory, the Chaos of complex causality in nature, is not without the strange attractors that organize a pattern or regularity amidst and despite the Chaos.

Automaton is more characteristic of nature and "unreasoning agents" as in the example of animal instincts. Here the connection between unconscious psychical causality, nature, and instinct cannot fail to be made. Automaton as unconscious determination is also linked to chance and its derivation from the Latin *cadere*—to fall, and to fall away from the norm and towards decadence. Games of chance are also associated with decadence and with leaning or decline rather than being upright.

For Lacan the Real is beyond and behind automaton and can be linked to accidental events that have an effect on a subject's destiny and this is to be distinguished from fate that represents a fall as in the case of Oedipus who ended up killing his father and marrying his mother despite his otherwise preconscious and socially acceptable intentions.

Lacan distinguishes between lawful regularity in nature and what he calls causality in the form of a gap (of causality). The notion of cause in Lacan turns causal determination on its head and instead refers to something undetermined. *Tyché* as causality in the form of a gap, *a*causality, and the unconditioned/undetermined, is a new and surprising enigmatic knowledge emerging in the Real of here and now experience as a missed encounter. However, there is also a need to differentiate between what could be known under different logical/rational principles and the existence of un-determination per se, the emptiness of inherent nature and what may be inconceivable or unknowable by logical principles of any kind whatsoever.

Some authors confuse automaton with causality proper. This is not accidental (pardon the pun) given that automaton is a type of chance that only appears to be arbitrary or contingent. In fact, automaton is the result of structural and unconscious unintended consequences. For example, a person wanted to say one thing and instead said the opposite. Here chance in the sense of change only appears to be something new or spontaneous. Automaton is the permutation of pre-determined structural factors. Change or chance here does not escape determinism. This is particularly true of unconscious psychical causality and the repetition of trauma and suffering, whether in pain or pleasure, in desiring the desires of others or repeating their painful mistakes.

Lacan instead relocates *automaton* within the network of signifiers in language. It seems the ego has autonomous choice but in fact the subject is determined by the heteronomy of the signifier and the fact that language and the Other speak through the subject. Finally, the heteronomy of the signifier can work equally for desire/

wishing that may conflict with social norms or for the regulation of desire according to the laws of signification, substitution, and censorship.

*Tyché* is the more distinctly human type of chance which, on the one hand, represents the possibility of something truly arbitrary, contingent, as well as new, but can also be linked to what Aristotle called luck or virtue in the sphere of ethical actions. Although the results/effects of moral choice appear undetermined until a choice is made, the only thing undetermined is the emptiness or the yet undefined nature of the choice itself. The structure and arc of possible choices, and what the consequences may be, are pre-determined. However, depending on the choice the results may vary and lead to different permutations of the structure. Human nature is undetermined or unfixed until a choice is made and the outcomes of our choices return in the various forms of causality including automaton.

Lacan says that the encounters with the Real are missed encounters or failed encounters. It is the failed encounter with the Real that links the two forms of accidental causality. The Real lies beyond or behind automaton, and un-determination interacts with determination or begins where determination, symbolization, or interpretations ends or fails. The Real unconscious remains unborn or unrealized in language and is realized as a form of jouissance that is beyond representation.

A missed encounter fails in the sense that the encounter or the jouissance at stake remains unrepresented as something suffered or enjoyed. When the Real is symbolized, something of the Real is lost in translation. There are the gaps in the signifying chain left behind by the work of repression (the false hole of Seminar XXIII) and then there is the gap that appears in the Symbolic due to the Real (a true hole) being the Being of non-being and non-being refers to what does not have being or existence within the chain of signifiers. Whether this is an ontological or pre-ontological state of affairs is a mute question because the larger Real manifests or opens within the chains of being yet closes and retains the quality of non-being or emptiness with respect to the Symbolic.

Using Godel's theory (outside the PM arithmetical system) I can say that the gap in the symbolic chain is the incomplete or the unproven truth that renders symbolic chains consistent. What is undetermined about the Real causes a gap in the chain that sets the chains of causality into motion, but the concept of the lack belongs to the Symbolic while the lack of a concept belongs to the Real. Automaton does not determine the Real (that remains undetermined) but does circumscribe or determine the limits beyond which the Real can be found.

The Symbolic does not cease in its efforts to represent how the Real appears as a gap within the Symbolic and at the same time the Real does not cease from NOT being written because the Real is beyond the signifier. This is how the two forms of accidental causality are interwoven: causality functions as a gap within the Symbolic yet the gap or Real itself beyond/behind the signifier is undetermined. The missed encounter is only on the side of the Symbolic.

With regards to the unconscious, the ego fails or makes allegedly unintended mistakes, and the unconscious represents threats to the ego's imaginary self-image. However, with regards to the subject, the Real is always beyond the ego's reach, and beyond moral determinism and conditioning, whether positive or negative. The unconditioned Real does not fit within the structure of symbolic laws or moral determinism and, therefore, like an unpredictable earthquake, the Real can shake the foundations of lawful regularity. The symbolic unconscious and the pleasure principle are organized around a core of defenses/avoidances and wishes and yet the wishes and defenses themselves represent an irreducible core of emptiness or lack of being. Neither the Imaginary nor the Symbolic can render the Real because the Real remains *a*causal or unconditioned.

There are two levels of chance, corresponding to two levels of the Real: The Real as a true and false hole, as *tyché* and *automaton*. The ambiguity regarding the nature of the binary signifier precisely refers to the division of the subject. Such division is reflected in the division between the primarily repressed signifier, and the representative substitute which then will become the object of a secondary repression. However, the division of the subject is also revealed in an ambiguity or uncertainty between the primarily repressed signifier at the core of being, and the disappeared subject qua-nothing or non-being (as the essence of the core of being or the non-being within being).

The S of the subject can either be the pre-subject (that appears at the top left of the L schema) or the imaginary object the child represents (under primary repression) as an object of the mother's desire. The S then needs to be barred ($) and the S as $ or $S_1/S_2$ becomes the relation of signification between metaphors, and between subjects and signifiers. In the *matheme* for the fantasy or phantasm, the subject appears as a divided subject in relation to the primary part object of fantasy cause of desire ($\◇*a*). But in the signifying chain or narrative of social discourse the subject appears subordinate to the Other: s(A) or s(O). In the upper chain the subject appears as the capital S pure signifier of the subject designating the place of jouissance and the subject of the Real as a hole in the Other S(Ø) since the Other does not have the signifiers to represent what is Real about the subject.

The Real of jouissance can be of the order of the primarily repressed (the jouissance of the Other precipitated by the object), or of what remains of the subject qua-nothing behind a bar that has or acquires a different meaning (the Other or Third jouissance). Rather than a primary and primarily repressed object/thing, the subject now represents the 'no-thing.' For this 'no-thing' that the subject is, the bar now represents not the source of a prohibition, but the impossibility of representing what the subject is in and of the Real. Instead, what appears of the subject is a metaphor that represents the subject and at same time fails to represent or conceals what of the subject is in the Real. It is this failure that is experienced as a missed encounter. The repressed/repressive primary signifier or first representative of the drive or the representation refers to the type of primary repression known to Freud, while the absence of a signifier is due to a different form of primary repres-

sion instantiated by the fact that the Real cannot be grasped within language and the Symbolic.

The primarily repressed signifier represents a false hole since in the gap left in its wake "lies" a repressed signifier that represents *automaton* or a centrifugal first cause mover of the chain of ideational signifiers responsible for a structural form of change that only appears to represent change or something new. In contrast to this, a true hole is a semblance of a causal hole but in fact represents an absence or emptiness of causality that functions as a centripetal force for the generation of new signifiers out of the unmarked Real within the Symbolic. The subject of the Real, the no-thing or emptiness, the no-mind, precedes the differentiation between language and being and between being and non-being. The subject-qua-no-thing remains unrepresented or lacking in the mark, stain, or gap of repressed representations. The Real is both beyond representation and the very crack, stain, and concept of the lack within symbolic representation.

*The signifying machine*

Returning to the Fort-Da example, and to the theory of the Symbolic as a cybernetic machine, a register is established (within the Mind or with a scientific method), using the resources of language, to record the alternation and undulation of the mother's even presence or even attention with her absence and emptiness. Even receives a + sign and absence receives a –sign. The plus and minus signs associated with the object (the *objet a* and the phallus) are conceived in various ways within Lacanian theory. In addition, presence and absence can also be conceived as polyvalent or at least representing a quadrant with each element of presence and absence potentially having both a + and a – sign. There are positive and negative presences and positive and negative absences that refer to each other within a quadratic pattern of differentiations.

> Though it might be assumed that heads connotes presence (and with its positive valence maps to plus) and that tails connotes absence (and with its negative valence maps to minus), no key is provided. The meaning of each sign lies solely in its relation to the other: what the one *is*, the other *is not*. Consequently, no definitive reconstruction of what took place is possible from such a record. Thus, from the start, there is no true or false; there is only the inscription of a pattern. (Brahnam, 4)

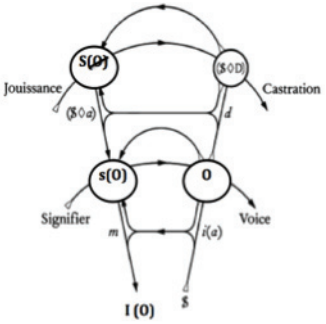
The apparent randomness of the mother's presence and absence, her comings and goings in and out of the child's immediate subjective world is the juncture where phonemes (Oooo-Aaaa), as the phonological or sound dimension of the letter, capture the first object, and the object world, therefore, in a net of configurations and significations provided by language. The sound of the letter or phoneme points to the Real and to an immediacy of the object or *Das ding*, and an original form of experience that is lost in the system and structure of language or what Lacan calls the 'symbol's conditions.'

A phoneme is converted into a script, character, or hieroglyphic, and the latter can be reconverted back into a sound/phoneme that now functions within a system of signifiers and numbers. The script or hieroglyphic represents a unary trace while the signifier represents a unary trait present in all signifiers and numbers. The object now is no longer represented as an icon, or a part-image of the object, but as a sound or an acoustic image that converts the visual image into a signifier. Dream representation reverses this ancient process every night for the brain to get some rest.

However, the immediate link to the object remains as a potential presence within the function of the letter, the sound, and the effectiveness of the structure as a vanishing point instant. A sound in the air, like the insubstantiality of ideas, the impregnations of the Imaginary, and the place where words vanish once they are uttered, are examples of the nullibiety or utopia of the signifier. The latter represents both 'machinic' effectiveness and a failed attempt to recover and suture (through a text) the lost object and the gap produced by the loss of the object. I will have more to say about this further on.

The result of a flip of coin depends "on a single parameter: the angle between the normal to the coin and the angular momentum vector... As Persi Diaconis, Susan Holmes, and Richard Montgomery put it, "coin-tossing is 'physics' not 'random" (Brahnam, 4). The angle and the momentum are the determining physical/material factors. In addition, Lacan states that even or odd, winning or losing, heads or tails, are already a symbolic structure or pattern (the articulation of one word with another). Unconscious thought selects even or odd and, once selected, the symbol organizes the result. Finally, the subject that selects or makes the choice becomes an element in the chain that is organized according to symbolic laws. The participation of the subject in the choice, explains why in the graph of desire, the capital S for the subject is a component of the unconscious signifying chain (see the matheme at the top left of the graph). Further on I will differentiate between thinking, non-thinking, and the signifier as components of thought.

In Lacan's paper, the organization of structures and patterns of symbols explains the functioning of the unconscious signifying chain. However, this formulation does not include what Lacan (1966) later discovered through the graph of desire. There are two signifying chains (Romanowicz and Moncayo, 2015) and the two are organized differently. What he says in his 1955 paper applies to the lower conventional signifying chain but does it apply to the upper chain? The upper chain is not organized by binary logic the way that a binary computer is.




In binary logic, a man is a man (1) and cannot be a woman (0), or a woman is a woman (1) and cannot be a man (0). For a computer 1 or 0 are one or the other but not both and neither. In dreams and in the unconscious signifying the 0 and 1 can be found superimposed and a subject can be man and woman, or a female dreamer can appear as a man in the dream, and a male dreamer can appear as a woman in the dream. But the unconscious signifying chain cannot be entirely or modally transcribed into the narrative line of social discourse.

The ego is involved in the lower social chain of discourse, while the upper signifying chain contains the pure Signifier (S) as a representation of the subject in the place of jouissance. In Lacan's text of 1956 under consideration, he uses the S for the subject that is included in language and in the signifying chain but in both cases what he calls the signifying chain refers to the lower level of the social narrative associated with Preconscious language (unconscious in a descriptive sense).

Four years later (1960) he uses the S as the pure signifier of the lack in the Other (S[Ø]). Here not only does he differentiate two signifying chains but he also differentiates the *Je* from the *moi* (the subject from the ego). The ego goes with the lower chain and the subject with the top chain. The subject now moves further away from the ego and in the direction of a subject in/of the Real. The upper chain transcribed into the lower chain can be handled by a binary system but not the other way around. Conversely, psychoanalysis and the psyche require a different logic that cannot be adequately expressed with the logic of non-contradiction. Perhaps in the future quantum computers will be able to handle something closer to a human system and capacity.

Signs and symbols, which here mean the same thing for Lacan, are organized into various types of patterns: the symmetry of constancy (+++ or - - -) labelled 1, and the symmetry of alternation (+ - + or - + -) labeled 3. Asymmetry instead combines opposites (++ - or - - +) and is labelled 2. The record of tosses can now be organized in the form of a numeric code. So far this type of formal language or system could be descriptive of the descriptive unconscious or the Ucs./Pcs. System but not of the Unconscious proper, whether repressed (Freudian) or Real (Lacanian). Lacan also widens the structure that is based on symmetry and asymmetry by establish-

ing rules of how the two types of symmetry can be combined in such a way that symmetry is mediated by asymmetry. It is the repetition or iteration of the codes (1⟶11; 2⟶22; 3⟶33) that ultimately determines the form of the signifying chain in this model. And as if this were not enough, such rules yield additional codes composed of the various relations among symmetry and asymmetry in various combinations. Lacan uses Greek letters to label such new codes in binary terms (0,1).

Outside Lacanian theory and twenty years later, Matte-Blanco (1975) attempted to construct what he called a bi-logic to formulate the unconscious in terms of symmetrical/asymmetrical relations. I would not be surprised if Matte-Blanco knew about Lacan but ignored his work in obeisance to the IPA's rejection and ignorance of Lacan's gift to psychoanalysis. The IPA ignores Lacan or reads and plagiarizes him in the hopes that this will go unnoticed given the general active ignorance of his work within the organization. Unfortunately, some Lacanians (the World Congress of Psychoanalysis would be an example) also ignore other forms of psychoanalysis and dismiss attempts to engage other forms of knowledge. Both Freud and Lacan engaged the scientific and psychoanalytic knowledge of their times without worrying too much about conceding validity to alternative points of view. Otherwise arguments are not strengthened by open dialogue and instead are upheld by a dogmatic and sectarian self-referential stance.

*Memory and the machine*

Brahnam in her paper also brings out the connection that Lacan makes in his text between memory and law. The structure of the language that we use is what allows for memory and reversibility and for what is legal and acceptable within a system. However, in Freud this would be more representative of the secondary process than the primary process at work in the Unconscious. In addition, Lacan forges an equivalence, perhaps justified, between the rules of thought and the judicial and cultural concept of Law. I cannot presume to give an exhaustive account of the psychoanalytic concept of memory but perhaps a few indications will suffice.

> Which is that the remembering *[melioration]* at stake in the unconscious—and I mean the Freudian unconscious—is not related to the register that is assumed to be that of memory, insofar as memory is taken to be a property of a living being (31)…Whereas it is quite obvious that, in doing without this subjection, we can find in the ordered chains of a formal language the entire appearance of remembering, and quite especially of the kind required by Freud's discovery (31)… Thus, right from the primordial symbol's first composition with itself— and I will indicate that I have not proposed this composition as I have arbitrarily—a structure, as transparent as it may still remain to its givens, brings out the essential link between memory and law (36). (Lacan, 2006)

Lacan appears to be distinguishing between what he calls a property or capacity of the living being and the ordered chains of a formal linguistic structure upon

which remembering and the Freudian unconscious is organized. Human capacity, and linguistic and mental structure are all interwoven in phenomena and structure in general. The distinction between capacity and structure parallels the distinction between the physiological aspects of vocalization and speech and its cultural/numerical linguistic components. For Freud memory begins with the experience of satisfaction and frustration where the first memory of the mother's breast is registered. This is also the beginning of fantasy life that later will lay the foundations for organized thinking. Memory proper begins with the secondary process and the capacity for reversibility.

The arch between these two forms of memory (fantasy and organized thinking) is reproduced in the relationship between memory and screen memory. In Seminar XXIII Lacan used the distinction between reminiscence and remembrance to underscore this double aspect of memory. Remembering takes place within a structure and its members or component elements are recombined in memory. Memory is a copula of letters and signifiers, implies a record, and is a mental response to demands of the body and the drive. From the point of view of energetics, memory is an attempt to find a constant name or number or to keep the number constant in the Name. To remember is also an ideal or the ideal of a formal structure.

Memory proper is marked by fantasy, trauma, and repression. Screen memories bear the defensive mark of the secondary process that produces a socially acceptable version of memory. To add to this, Rapaport (1951), in the North American ego psychology school, used the literary device of segmenting the me from me-mory. Memory represents 'meness.' Memory is an aspect of our subjective way of representing the world. I guess this notion goes along well with the notion of ego used by Freud and ego psychology, although not necessarily. We appropriate the structure of language not so much to personalize language but to include ourselves into the structure that is passed down through the generations of families and nations.

The appropriation of language represents imaginary-symbolic formations or the imaginary face of the symbolic as represented by the ego ideal. The ego ideal both reveals and conceals the nature of structure and anti-structure. The ego ideal defends/embodies castration but also defends against the Other who can annul the subject. Instead of the capital S being incorporated into the signifying chain, ego memory falsifies the structure by possessing it and attributing it to itself (a false cogito, therefore). This is the key to understanding the question that Freud asked (regarding the unconscious nature of the ego) and that perhaps finally Lacan or Lacanian theory has answered or will answer.

### *The symbolic machine and intersubjectivity*

However, is it enough to say that the discourse of the subject is the discourse of the Other that annuls the subject or the circuit in which the subject is integrated as a machine? Not only is the subject integrated into the machine, but the machine itself and the discourse of the Other is integrated into the actions of the subject.

> What interests me today is the way in which the subjects, owing to their displacement, relay each other in course of the intersubjective repetition. (Lacan 1956, 10)

> This is what happens in repetition automatism. What Freud teaches us in the text I have been commenting on is that the subject follows the channels of the Symbolic. But what is illustrated here is more gripping still: it is not only the subject, but the subjects, caught in their intersubjectivity, who line up—in other words they are our ostriches, to whom we thus return here, and who, more docile than sheep, model their very being on the moment of the signifying chain that runs through them. (idem, 21)

When subjects interact with each other they are enacting, down to the very small details, the machinic structure of the Symbolic together with its imaginary impregnations. The structuring effect of actions may produce what was intended or its unintended opposites. Either way the Other in this case is the unbarred and complete Other of the early Lacan who determines and constitutes a lacking or incomplete subject in its intersubjective relations.

There is an ambiguity between the subject's own unconscious desire, and the structure it reveals, and the plurality of subjects constituted by the public Symbolic order and subjects own private unconscious desire.

Coinciding with the contemporary experience of the fall of personal, social, familial, and political ideals, Lacan signifies this era with the matheme for the lack in the Other: S(Ø). The Other now is barred, castrated, or lacking. However, there is no return to the complete Other of before because now we understand (thanks to Godel) that a complete Other is inconsistent. The Other lacks or is incomplete but this also means desire which represents the truth that cannot be proven within the system and yet this is precisely what makes a system consistent. Although now the Other or the order of numbers or signifiers and statements are revealed as having something missing, this something missing or truth of desire that cannot be proven within a system, or the lack of a signifier, constitutes an organizing hole for the entire structure.

Communication in groups typically does not produce its intended effects since, as Lacan says, between people miscommunication or the misencounter is the norm.

> The first dialogue-between the Prefect of Police and Dupin-is played as if it were between a deaf man and one who hears. That is, it presents the veritable complexity of what is ordinarily simplified, with the most confused of results, in the notion of communication. (idem, 12)

In the late Lacan, the Other is incomplete and lacking rather than the lack being solely on the side of the subject with the subject either rejecting or idealizing the perceived completeness of the Other. With the lack in the Other, or an incomplete Other, the subject can pretend to be complete and reject the Other, or can be adversely affected by the lack in the Other, both of which would be imaginary ma-

noeuvres and results. The subject either refuses to hear or is deaf about the Other's completeness or incompleteness. In addition, the ego is blind with respect to the unconscious determination of the structure or how structure determines the actions and motivations of the subject and the Other.

> The audacious creature is, of course, reduced here to the state of imbecilic blindness which man finds himself in relation to the wall-like letters that dictate his destiny. (idem, 30)

Automaton at work in the signifying machine dictates the fate and repetitions of the subject. However, this form of the machine is consistent with the big Other of the early Lacan. There are two features of the Other worthy of consideration at this point. First, now we know that the big Other is incomplete and lacking and does not even exist! So, the big Other that determines the subject has clay feet and may not even exist yet it performs a function. This lack in the Other also has two characteristics: it provides the empty space to rearticulate the structure and is also the place where the subject in/of the Real can be found.

*The emptiness of the Other and the subject*

The divided, subordinated subject that is annulled/alienated by the Other ($=$S_2 \longrightarrow$\$) is both lacking the object that the Other has taken from the subject and at the same time this object is also missing in the Other. The phallus is the signifier of a lack and it is this lack or emptiness that the subject searches for in the Other. In fact, this is where the emptiness of the subject and that of the Other meet. There is no Being inside the Other and so the Other cannot give the subject his or her Being. Being emerges from the divided subject itself at that place where the signifier fails. This state of affairs can also be represented by the formula for the analyst's discourse (Lacan, 1969):

$$\frac{a}{S_2} \longrightarrow \frac{\$}{S_1}$$

$$\frac{\text{agent}}{\text{truth}} \quad \frac{\text{other}}{\text{production}}$$

As an empty agent, a master of none, or a master of suspended authority, the analyst alternates between being an imaginary object and lacking the *objet a* in the Real. The *a* as a void places the $S_2$ of knowledge in the place of truth for the analyst. \$ in the place of the Other represents that the alleged complete Other lacks or fails to generate new signifiers ($S_1$) in the place of truth. In the analyst's discourse, it is the divided subject in the place of the Other that will now have to produce new signifiers that may be consistent with the savoir in the analyst and the unconscious savoir that emerges in the analysand when the Other of the Unconscious is in the place of truth.

This how the Other is transformed in history and the history of the subject. First the complete Other annuls the subject, then the Other is appropriated (sometimes without a due appraisal of the materiality and gravity of the Other) by the ego, in its imaginary wholeness, completeness, and inconsistency; and finally, in an anti-structural moment, the ego is released from its defensive function and finds itself as a subject, in the proper sense, in the place of the lack of the Other. The lack in the Other is the place where the structure is empty, or incomplete, as an original form of experience and where new relations become possible thanks to the voidness of self that temporarily (in relative sidereal time) re-integrates the structure.

Voidness of self is another way of speaking of the subject of thought as jouissance and not only as a signifier. Thought as a form of jouissance, rather than a signifier, is a form of non-thinking (*apensee*) in relationship to thinking and the signifier. The transcendental subject of knowledge is a *sujet sans substance*. But this is not the same as the annulment of the ego or the subject by the Other of the machine because in the process the machine itself and what is machine-like about a subject is also annulled or found lacking. It is the human subject and not the machine, or the Other not as a machine, that manifests the true undetermined *Tyché* rather than automaton.

To the succession of letters, numbers, and codes Lacan also adds a structure of inhibitions/prohibitions and facilitations (switches—on/off) intrinsic to language that in previous work (Moncayo, 2012) I have argued goes a long way in explaining the problem of the unconscious censor. At different times, or at key moments, there are letters that go missing or that are found missing in the structure and that are required by the repressive function of the structure. Such letters may also have phonological elements that link them to the Real or represent the aspects of letters or writing that bear a link (of jouissance) to a lost object world.

In her paper Brahnam makes another important point in noticing the function of the missing letters in generating displacements that structurally, and in Lacanian terms, represent a crossing from the Symbolic to the Imaginary (the interruptive dislocation patterns mentioned in the text). The imaginary face of the Symbolic and of language constitutes this reminiscence and narrative produced by the Imaginary based on the symbolic structure and the missing letters within the Symbolic that precipitate the construction of a fiction to close the gap left by the missing signifiers. Such crossing is represented in schema L, as noted by the author, but it is also found in the graph of desire in the lower conventional signifying chain or narrative/story that crosses the vector of desire (see graph in pages above).

*Conclusion*

The lower signifying chain attempts to use the social narrative and statement to close the gap in the subject and the Other. A computer only follows rules and programing but cannot invent anything new without a new program from a human subject. It is the human subject and not the machine, or the Other not as a machine,

that manifests the true undetermined *Tyché* rather than automaton. A social narrative generates displacements and a fractioning of numbers. This dislocation pattern within a cybernetic system, generates different symmetrical and asymmetrical patterns that have varying ways of relating to the Lacanian categories of the Symbolic and the Imaginary. Obviously, images are also part of a cybernetic machine or a computer, that like images in dreams conceal the language code on which they are built.

If the social narrative (or s[A]) does not attempt to close the gap in the signifying chain by using $S_2$ type of signifiers, then out this gap, a new $S_1$ of the pure capital Signifier [S] (or the subject of the Real) can emerge. Such signifier can re-arrange the structure of the signifying chain. If the gap or ambiguity of the sentence is left open, then a new $S_1$ can emerge from the place of the signifier of a lack in the Other [S(Ø)]. The last word or $S_2$ of the sentence cannot capture the $S_1$ of Being, so the said or $S_1$ remains behind the saying or the statement. S or $S_1$, let alone Being, cannot manifest in a cybernetic machine because when faced with missing signifiers all a machine can do is to produce an imaginary dislocation pattern.

The further problem to be resolved here is how this imaginary displacement produces not only the conscious ego structure and narrative but also the Imaginary as a privileged semiotic modality of the unconscious. Thanks to this paper we can now think of the imaginary axis of the L schema as an actual and early unconscious structure that would self-replicate in dreams. In dreams, all characters represent the subject (a'—a or i[a]) through a process of imaginary identification and yet for Lacan the subject is the structure of the dream itself and the navel of the dream is the senseless enigmatic signifier pointing to the Real rather than to another signifier or program within the structure. Because the Real operates as a non-trivial hole within each human subject our machinic structure is still under construction and subject to increasing degrees of effectiveness thanks to the vanishing point of the structure.

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S Berlin Brahnam

# ON LACAN'S NEGLECTED COMPUTATIONAL MODEL AND THE OEDIPAL STRUCTURE

## *An Expanded Introduction to "Primordia of Après-Coup, Fractal Memory, and Hidden Letters: Working the Exercises in Lacan's Seminar on The Purloined Letter"*[1]

*Despite the criticisms [my model of the signifying chain in "The Purloined Letter"] has received, some of which were justified . . . you should still manage to find it useful for a long while to come. I am even convinced that it will change with age . . .*

*Jacques Lacan*[2]

Cybernetics opened the door not only for Lacan's return to Freud but also for his mathematical formalizations of psychoanalytic concepts. According to Markos Zafiropoulos, while Lacan was essentially Freudian, his early theoretical position deviated significantly from Freud's.[3] Prior to the 1950s, Lacan contested, for instance, the universality of the Oedipus complex as well as Freud's theories of primary narcissism and the formation of the superego and ego ideal. Lacan's introduction to the ideas of Claude Lévi-Strauss, especially his structural linguistic understanding of the unconscious, which he reduces to a function—"the symbolic function, which no doubt is specifically human, and which is carried out according to the same laws among all men, and actually corresponds to the aggregate of these laws"[4]—equipped Lacan with the tools he needed for a rereading of Freud. While one cannot overestimate the effect that structural linguistics had on the thought of both men, to concentrate on linguistics to the near exclusion of other sources of influence, as Christopher Johnson warns when discussing the development of Lévi-Strauss's formative years, produces a flat, one-dimensional view of their work.[5] As many scholars are beginning to recognize, neglected in both thinkers is the deep impact cybernetics had on the development of their ideas. This influence is nowhere more evident than in the way cybernetics inspired as well as channeled their ambitions to formalize their disciplines.

We are told by Élisabeth Roudinesco that beginning sometime in 1951 Lacan and Lévi-Strauss, along with Émile Benveniste, met with the mathematician Georges-Théodule Guilbaud to work out structures and methods of formalization for the

social sciences.[6] It is hard to say when this group disbanded, but Lacan's friendship with Guilbaud lasted for thirty years and is described by Roudinesco as "in the order of a secret garden"[7] where the two spent much of their time together playing with various mathematical objects (the Möbius strip, cross-cap, Klein bottle, Borromean knot, etc.)—objects that famously made their way into Lacan's writings. Though often misunderstood and sometimes derided, these objects become in Lacan's hands more than mere illustrations or metaphors of key psychoanalytic concepts: they function as scientific models of psychic structures.[8]

The philosopher of science Michael Weisberg defines a model as "an *interpreted structure* that can be used to represent a real or imagined phenomenon,"[9] and he divides scientific models into three broad categories: mathematical models, concrete models, and computational models. Lacan produced all three. Preeminent in the sciences and the focus of most philosophical works on modeling are mathematical models, defined by Weisberg as "abstract structures whose properties can potentially stand in relations to mathematical representations of phenomena."[10] Arguably no other theorist has worked as hard as Lacan to mathematize psychoanalytic concepts. For Lacan, the very "structure of psychoanalysis," to quote Bernard Burgoyne, is "in the structure of mathematics."[11] Lacan's algebraic formulae and predicate logic (such as the basic structure of fantasy $\$\diamond a$ and his expression for the exception to the law of castration $\exists\, x \;\; \Phi x$ ) are all examples of mathematical modeling, as are many of his topological models. Unlike mathematical models, concrete models are described by Weisberg as "physical objects whose physical properties can potentially stand in representational relationships with real-world phenomena."[12] The knot for Lacan is such a model: "I am well aware that my knot," he tells us, "is that by which, and uniquely that by which, the real is introduced as such."[13] Or, as Jacques-Alain Miller explains, "Topology, Lacan says, is not metaphor, it represents a structure, going so far as to propose that in some way the Real itself comes to bear on experience . . . . We represent this topology, we manipulate it spatially; sometimes Lacan enhances its value to the point of showing an enjambment of knots and saying: '*This is the thing itself*.'"[14] Finally, there is the computational model, which is rapidly increasing in scientific value. According to Weisberg, "Computational models are sets of procedures that can potentially stand in relations to a computational description of the behavior of a system."[15] These models are typically algorithmic in that they set forth step-wise instructions for carrying out a set of procedures. Although not computerized, Lacan's suite at the end of his "Seminar on 'The 'Purloined Letter'" presents such a model, with the algorithmic procedures and their inputs and outputs described using diagrams, tables, and verbal descriptions. Weisberg claims that all three types of models can take on a variety of descriptive forms: verbal, mathematical, diagrammatic, pictorial, etc.[16] Models are distinguished by their properties, as defined above, rather than by the forms their descriptions assume.

Due to the unique nature of *what* Lacan's computational model *models* (the structuralization of the psyche, with the model itself already and necessarily implicated in this structure), what materializes in carrying out the computations

in the suite (including beyond the point at which Lacan stops his analysis) is a *representation of real-world phenomenon*. In this respect, Lacan's model is analogous to a model organism, similar to *Drosophila melanogaster* and *Escherichia coli* in biology, except that the *organism itself* is what emerges from the model. Through the recursive application of a simple organizing principle, Lacan's model *evolves primordia of psychic structures* that go beyond those articulated in the L schema to include those encapsulated in the R schema, as I show below. As such the model-system presented at the end of Lacan's seminar is a hybrid that functions both as a computational model and as a concrete model.

The "Primordia" offers a comprehensive analysis of the interconnecting descriptions of this complex model-system. Since Lacan provides the reader with only a few compendious and oftentimes cryptic descriptions of the more prominent features of his model and its productions, my original objective, which gradually broadened, was to equip the reader with a set of tools and a detailed roadmap for navigating this dense and unavoidably technical material.

Lacan justifies his abstruse writing style in his introduction to the *Écrits*: "With this itinerary, of which these writings are the milestones, and this style, which the audience to whom they were addressed required [*Que leur adresse commande*], I want to lead the reader to a consequence in which he must pay the price with elbow grease [*Mettre du sien*]."[17] Bruce Fink comments in his translator's notes that *Que leur adresse commande* can also be translated as "which their skill required" and that "*Mettre du sien*" has the following meanings: "provide some good will, work hard at it, and contribute something of one's own."[18] The latter phrase is repeated in the "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,' "[19] where we are told that the postface was originally addressed to the psychoanalyst as a set of exercises intended for the student "to figure out how a formal language determines the subject"[20] and to learn to listen to the patient "in the proper manner at the moment at which he speaks."[21] Assuming that most analysts have little background in cybernetics and formal languages, I interpret *Que leur adresse commande*, as it relates to the exercises, as an injunction to apply one's psychoanalytic skills to the task, that is, as a challenge to psychoanalyze the model-system by *attending to its chains of signifiers*. As Lacan states in *Seminar V*, "The fact that in the unconscious there are signifying chains, subsisting as such, which from there, structure and act on the organism and influence what appears externally as a symptom, is the heart of the analytic experience."[22] Cryptic and enigmatic in presentation, Lacan's model-system demands a psychoanalysis, and every psychoanalysis requires that the analyst "provide some good will, work hard at it, and contribute something of one's own" to it.

My adventure performing such an analysis began when I was asked by members of a study group, because of my background in computer science, to explain Appendices 1 and 2 in Fink's *Lacanian Subject*,[23] which provides a detailed explication of the material at the end of Lacan's seminar. Put simply, both texts analyze the structures and laws that emerge as a record of pluses and minuses representing an infant's experience of its mother's comings and goings (simulated

by flipping a coin) is transcoded into a series of numbers (1, 2, 3) that in turn is transcoded into a string of letters (α, β, γ, δ). To make it easier to follow Fink's exposition, I made two graphs, which appear as Figures 3 and 4 in the "Primordia," the first a mapping of the letter code onto the 1-3 Network, which is Lacan's transition diagram of the numeric code, and the second my own more traditional transition diagram of the letter code. This second diagram, which relies on the first, makes transparent the underlying numeric codes defining each letter as they flow one into the other. Two obstacles that resulted in an impasse were encountered while reading Fink: I inaccurately learned from him that Lacan's Tables Ω and O contained typographical errors[24] that rendered the tables nearly incomprehensible (Fink corrects this misunderstanding in an erratum), and then I noticed what appeared to be a (minor, but initially confusing) mistake in his acceptance of a certain letter string as valid when, according to the letter transition diagram, it is not.[25]

Although the study group appreciated the practical and aesthetic value of my two figures, the journey through Fink's appendices proved technically thorny; interest waned, and the excursion was abandoned. My interest, however, continued to grow. In making the two graphs of the letter code, I saw vestiges of the original coin's two-sidedness and traces of number trails resurfacing in the letter code whose even loops and odd arcs mesmerized me. I began to glimpse what Lacan meant when he said " ... Freud's text on the *Wunderblock* ... goes far beyond the trivial meaning attributed to it by inattentive readers."[26] I was eager to discover what the different layers in Lacan's model would unveil. So I set aside Lacan and Fink, at least temporarily, determined to follow nothing but the codes.

My method of analysis was simple. I let the model run, investigating its productions until it generated the letter code, whereupon I created a virtual reset point. Thereafter, I systematically repeated runs of letters, first for two time steps, then for three, and so on, tracking the patterns that emerged as all possible strings of a given length were punctuated by a halt. Surprisingly, beginning at time three, some letters that had appeared at previous time steps completely disappeared when strings were halted at a later time, and variations of this disappearing act continued for as long as letters were added and strings were halted. I discovered, in other words, that a halt (an interruption of the chain) always produces a retroactive effect that opens up a hole in the past. I later came to see that it is *via these holes* that the signifying chain is structured and that patterns of repetition emerge.

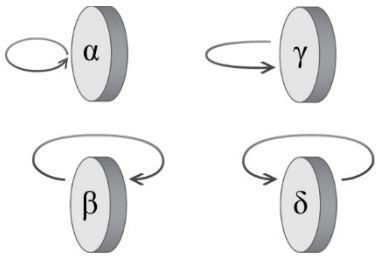


*Figure 1. Two-sidedness of the Letter.*

These holes and the letters that remain at each halt are elaborated replications of the original encoding of presence and absence that was generated by flipping the coin—a coin whose two-sidedness is recast in each letter by the four numeric pathways defining it, two of which include a loop (the two collapsing into a single self-loop in the letter code) and two of which do not. These single loops behave differently, depending on the letter. As illustrated in Figure 1, α and γ have self-loops that return to the side of their origin,[27] potentially generating, as a result, infinite strings of α and γ. In contrast, β and δ have self-loops that connect the letters to their reverse sides, effectively stitching their two sides together, though in opposite directions. Since these arcs terminate on the side opposite their origin, infinite strings of β and δ are not possible. However, the β and δ loops are capable of interweaving, redoubling in infinite repetitions of ββδδ or δδββ.[28] Likewise, the reverse sides of α and γ can intertwine, producing infinite strings of αγ or γα. Originally, I viewed the two-sidedness of each letter as a *moiety*, a term retained in the "Primordia" because of its extensive use in anthropology, especially when describing cultural binaries, divisions, and exchange systems. The separate pathways that the letters take, however, could just as well be viewed as different kinds of "knots" (stitches or weaves) tying the letters together.

When I revisited Lacan after completing the first round of analysis, I discovered that he, too, recognizes the two-sidedness of each letter, which he labels with eight binary numbers in his α, β, γ, δ Network in footnote 28.[29] This network, which is also a transition diagram, confirmed my work on the letter code, as did his Tables Ω and O, which segregate codes of length four into quadrants based on patterns of retroactive deletions of letters at times two and three.[30] I discovered the quadrants by generating all trees four layers deep that detail the interconnections between moieties in all sixteen combinations of starting and ending letters.[31] My analysis confirmed the information contained in Lacan's tables: sixteen strings (four trees/arcs) occupy each quadrant, with each string in a quadrant sharing the same set of missing letters at times two and three. In the "Primordia" I show that these missing letters are caused by a collision of moieties.[32] What is important here, however, is Lacan's view that this retroactive effect at time four illustrates "a rudimentary subjective trajectory, by showing that it is grounded in the actuality

which has the future anterior in its present."[33] He goes on to say, "The fact that, in the interval of this past that it is already insofar as it projects, a hole opens up that is constituted by a certain *caput mortuum* of the signifier . . . suffices to make it depend on absence, obliging it to repeat its contours."[34]

Inexplicably, Lacan ends his analysis of the letter code at time four with the formation of the quadrants, moving on to present the quadrilateral L schema, which he meticulously associates with the letter code by adopting a subset of its rules for the L chain presented in "Parenthesis of Parentheses." I must admit that initially I thought Lacan's method of correlating the letter code with the L schema was rather forced and contrived, but I have since come to see that the two models are integrally connected, precisely in the manner in which he relates them, that is, in terms of the structures developed at time four in the letter code. For it is at this time step that the model-system evolves its first psychic structure as depicted in the L schema.

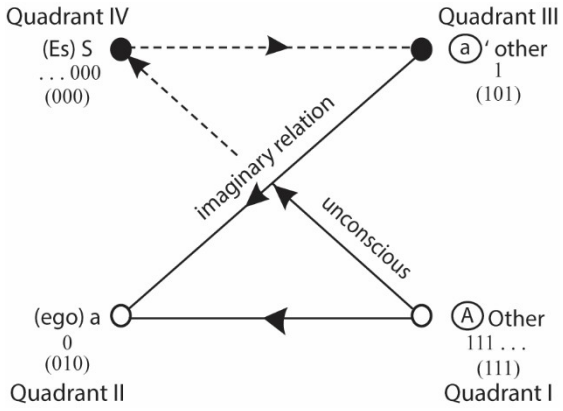


*Figure 2. The L Schema with Quadrants Labeled. Note: 1 in the L chain is α, and 0 is γ. The binary numbers in parentheses are Lacan's binary designations for α and γ moieties.*[35]

In Figure 2, I tie the letter code and the L schema together, highlighting the two-sidedness of the letters discussed above. In the L chain, Lacan transcodes α to 1 and γ to 0. As I explain more fully in the "Primordia", along the imaginary axis we find the infinite oscillations already noted between the reverse sides of α and γ, while at the endpoints of the symbolic axis we discover their self-looping obverses generating infinite streams of 0s (the drives, which according to Freud have no other aim than to loop[36]) and of 1s (the unary trait "by which repetition is marked as such"[37]). The letters β and δ are each transcoded in the L chain into a parenthesis, the redoubled loop ββδδ rewritten as (( )) and referred to by Lacan as "quotes." These two letters function both as connectors, linking the symbolic to the imaginary, and as containers, double and single quoting strings of 0s and alternations of 10 and 01. As containers, β and δ also enclose that which is located

inside the "quotes" (S and the imaginary axis), separating it from that which is located outside (in the field of the Other). Though one could view the L schema on the whole as "double" quoted, the parentheses are difficult to place inside the schema, in part, because they perform such double duties.[38]

What the L schema succeeds in accomplishing, to quote Darian Leader, "is setting out the dynamics of imaginary and symbolic axes,"[39] which is what the letter code up to time four likewise succeeds in doing. Indeed, setting out the relationship between the imaginary and the symbolic is one of the main objectives of Lacan's seminar, these two axes reflected in the *Fort-Da* game and the game of Even and Odd that bracket his discussion of the model-system, the former representing the child's entry into the symbolic and the latter the imaginary axis played out by a schoolboy who racks up wins by mirroring his opponent and then by imagining the next move he is planning. At the moment Lacan leaves off his analysis of the letter code, however, the chains remain penned within their respective quadrants. What is missing at this point in both the letter code and this version of the L schema (Lacan eventually expands it into the R and I schemas, among others) is a description that addresses the Oedipal structure. According to Leader, "It is possible to understand Lacan's [later] development of the Schema … as an attempt to add the Oedipal structure to the imaginary-symbolic dynamic, not in the sense that it was ever properly absent, but rather implicit in the formulation."[40]

Had Lacan continued to follow the chain of letters, the codes would have revealed to him not only the evolution of one special moment at time four, when retroactive holes open up, producing "a certain *caput mortuum* of the signifier,"[41] but another at time five, a moment that rewrites the past by erecting at time three a *single letter/signifier*. An analysis of all five-letter sequences reveals that one of the two letters originally there in position three with the four-letter sequences disappears. The cause of this hole, as determined in the "Primordia", is once again a collision of moieties that displaces some chains located in one quadrant into another: the one representing the missing letter. Exponentially, *from that moment on, a growing number of chains oscillate between two quadrants*, forever chasing what was lost at time three with the five-letter codes and, in so doing, generating repetitive, fractal-like patterns—a wall of language.

In my representation of the L schema above, the Other (A) is situated in Quadrant I since that is the only quadrant containing a string of all 1s (ααα …), and S is located in Quadrant IV, the only quadrant with a string of all 0s (γγγ …). Oscillating patterns are generated between Quadrants I and II and Quadrants IV and III, with the two sets of patterns, as I spell out in Appendix 4 of the "Primordia", literally the reverse or flip side of the other.[42] Thus, it is the case that even here in the letter code the sender always receives its message back from the receiver in reverse. How this message crosses over from S to A, however, is put into question since no intermixing of chains is ever permissible between the paired quadrants.[43] Chains that were confined to their respective quadrants when halting at time four are forever restricted at time five and thereafter to pacing the grounds of their interlinked quarters, the coin's two-sidedness transfigured now

into an impassible rift separating one adjoining pair from the other. Consequently, for the L schema to describe the letter code beyond time four would require a two-sided configuration, one separating the paired quadrants, such as that presented in Figure 3 (left), which, essentially, is the R schema (right).

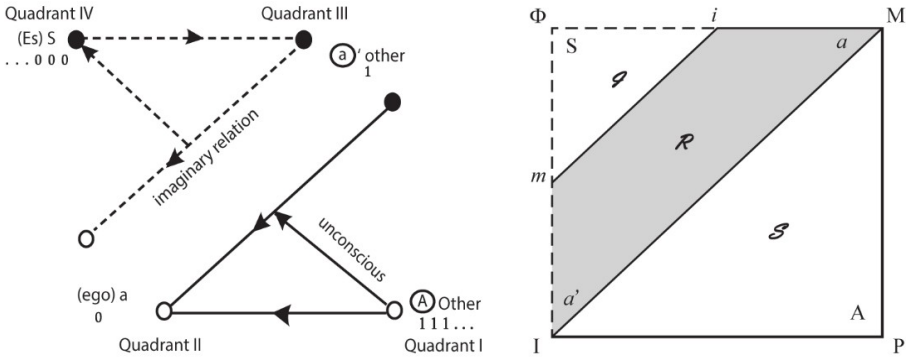


*Figure 3. Two-Sided L Schema (Left) Compared with the R Schema (Right).*[44]

Before addressing the Real, let me pause here for a moment to consider the Oedipus complex as it relates to the psychic structure that emerges with the ascendancy of a single letter—an ascendancy that is immediately lost and endlessly chased after like the letter it displaces. As I remind the reader in the "Primordia", it is at this moment that "a structure and a mechanism for the subject's entry into the symbolic are forged,"[45] this structure having evolved autonomously and, to quote Lacan when speaking of the organizing function of the symbol, "independently of the peculiarities of its human support."[46] This perspective is not too far afield from Freud's supposition that the Oedipus complex is a "phylogenetically inherited schemata, which, like the categories of philosophy, are concerned with the business of 'placing' the impressions derived from actual experience."[47] It is precisely when experience fails to fit into such a structure, as Freud goes on to observe, that we become convinced "of the independent existence of the schema."[48] Leader, reflecting on this passage, concludes that "The Oedipus complex is thus not the result of experience, and its structure must be sought elsewhere."[49] Rather than a phylogenetically inherited schemata, Lacan finds the Oedipal structure, as schematized in the R schema, bound up with the Name-of-the-Father and implicated in the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real. In following the productions of Lacan's model-system, we discover something akin to this structure materializing at a specific moment in time in the letter code and as the consequence of a retroaction ("the *Nachträglichkeit* of the Oedipus complex," Lacan reminds us, "to which as you know I am always insistently drawing your attention"[50]). From this perspective—that is, considering this structure as an emergent property of the most elementary of languages (and thus possibly of all languages) and assuming, too, that what we

find at time five in the letter code is indeed the progenitor of an Oedipal pattern—it is, perhaps, not too unreasonable to suppose along with Freud that the Oedipal structure, rooted as it appears to be in language itself, is universal among human beings, however precarious an individual's or a culture's alignment of their experiences might be in relation to it. Whatever the final verdict on this score, what surprised me in following the letter codes was the emergence of a structure that, unbeknownst to Lacan, appears to provide concrete support for some of his ideas about the Oedipus complex.

But what of Raul Moncayo's inquiry into the impact of the Real on the question of the signifying chain?[51] When it comes to the Real, there are largely two camps in Lacanian scholarship. In one camp are those, such as Moncayo, who divide Lacan into at least two stages, viewing the earlier Lacan as elaborating, to quote Paul Verhaeghe, a "determinism in a scientific way, by interpreting this dark unconscious as a linguistic system, governed by laws and thus predictable,"[52] and the later Lacan as focusing "on the drive and the real, thus making room for unpredictability and causality as such."[53] In the other camp are those epitomized by Tom Eyers, who goes so far as to see the Real "as the central, determining concept of Lacan's work, early and late"[54] and who argues that there are "significant underlying continuities in his articles and seminars that congregate around the question of the Real as it interacts with other crucial concepts of his metapsychology, and it is this underlying continuity—present if not unitary … that renders problematic the schematic division of his work into artificial, teleological stages."[55]

Certainly, this is not the place for me to engage in this debate, and I must confess that my thoughts have yet to mature regarding the intersection of Lacan's computational model and his teachings on the Real. Nonetheless, in response to Moncayo's essay and by way of concluding, I will tentatively and briefly address Lacan's equivalence of the Aristotelian concepts of *automaton* with "the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle"[56] and *Tyche* with the missed, unassimilable encounter with the Real that is beyond (outside) automaton—and attempt to link these two ideas with the evolution in the letter code of the mechanism of retroaction. Towards this end, I will draw heavily on Eyers who, in his discussion on the Real as absent cause, maintains that automaton and *Tyche* are fundamentally intricated: "the very arrival of the Real as cause," he says, "is always-already prepared for by the Symbolic context upon which it impacts, a context that contains within it the Real aspect of the signification as its 'extimate' limit."[57] According to Eyers, *Tyche* is conceived here by Lacan as trauma[58] in the Freudian sense, as a psychic disruption that is the consequence of a deferred action triggered by a signifier, the signifier preparing "in advance the ground upon which the 'trauma' of the *tuche* intervenes."[59] As trauma, "the Real is suspended both spatially and temporally, situated as 'prior' to the signifier as a cause that can only be determined through the machinations of temporal retroaction."[60] Thus, we discover that the relation of the Real to the signifier is that of retroaction and the future anterior, and it is via retroaction that the Real of the encounter can be posited as the origin of the

signifier, just as the automaton (such as we find it structured in the letter code by its gaps) prepares the ground (the mechanism of retroaction) for the Real of the encounter.

[1]"Primordia of Apres-Coup, Fractal Memory, and Hidden Letters" found in this issue of *S*; 202-244. Hereafter the Primordia. Note: this paper is a response to Raul Moncayo's review of my "Primordia of Après-Coup, Fractal Memory, and Hidden Letters." See his "The Symbolic in the Early Lacan as a Cybernetic Machine, as Automaton and *Tyche*, and the Two Forms of the Real," also in this issue of *S*; 245-260.

[2]Jacques Lacan, *Formations of the Unconscious: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book V,* trans. Russell Grigg (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017 [1957-1958]) 5.

[3]Markos Zafiropoulos, *Lacan and Lévi-Strauss or the Return to Freud,* trans. John Holland (London: Karnac Books, 2010 [2003]) 5.

[4]Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology,* trans. Claire Jacobson, and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963) 203.

[5]Christopher Johnson, *Lévi-Strauss: The Formative Years* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[6]Élisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co.: A History of Psychoanalysis in France 1925-1985*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014 [2011]) 560-61. See also Lucien Scubla, "Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, and the Symbolic Order," *La Découverte* 1.37 (2011): 253-69.

[7]Roudinesco, 560.

[8]I have no intention in this essay of addressing the philosophical problem of demarcation as it concerns psychoanalysis in general or Lacan's ideas in particular.

[9]Michael Weisberg, *Simulation and Similarity: Using Models to Understand the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 15.

[10]Weisberg, 7.

[11]Bernard Burgoyne, "From the Letter to the Matheme: Lacan's Scientific Methods," *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 73.

[12]Weisberg, 7.

[13]Jacques Lacan, *The Sinthome: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XXIII*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. A. R. Price (London: Polity, 2016 [1975-1976]) 132.

[14]Jacques-Alain Miller, "Mathemes: Topology in the Teaching of Lacan," *Lacan: Topologically Speaking,* eds. Ellie Ragland and Dragan Milanovic (New York: Other Press, 2004) 28-48; 35.

[15]Weisberg, 7.

[16]Weisberg, 34.

[17]Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1996*)* 5.

[18]Lacan, *Ecrits,* fn. [10,7] 766.

[19]Lacan, *Ecrits,* 31.

[20]Lacan, *Ecrits,* 31.

[21]Lacan, *Ecrits,* 32.

[22]Lacan, *Sem. V,* 388.

[23]Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[24]Lacan makes no major mistakes in the suite (that is, in so far as he explores his model in the final version of the *Écrits*) though admittedly his laconic descriptions lend themselves to misunderstandings. There are also a couple of minor inconsistencies in his description of the L chain rules, which I note below in fn. 25 and in Appendix 2 of the *Primordia*; 228.

[25]Fink appears to accept, for instance, (( )( )), which is ββδβδδ, as a valid string in the letter code (Fink, *The Lacanian Subject, 166)*; the string βδβ, however, is not valid (see Figure 4 and fn. 106 in the "Primordia"). Lacan appears to make the same mistake when discussing the string (()()...()), but whether this is indeed a mistake depends on how the sentence referencing this string is interpreted, see *Écrits,* 41.

[26]Lacan, *Écrits,* 31.

[27]The two sides of each coin correspond to the different rows in Figure 3 in the *Primordia*: the obverse of each letter is represented by rows one and two, which contain underlying numeric triples that contain at least one cycle, and the reverse by rows three and four, which contain three different numeric codes. Thus, α12 (read "alpha one two") in Figure 3 is the obverse side of α, and α34 (read "alpha three four") is the reverse side. Examining Figure 4 in the *Primordia*, we find that α12 returns to its exact point of origin (that is, if it starts off with α1, it continues with α1, likewise with α2) but ɣ12, though returning to the same side, does not exactly return to the same point on that side (it alternates between ɣ1 and ɣ2), this being due to the fact that the numeric codes defining ɣ, *viz.* [222], cycle between two points, that is, the number 2 is itself divided. Thus, the self-loops of all four letters exhibit subtle differences.

[28]For example, given the repeating pattern ββδδββ, etc., the sequence could start with either β1 or β2 and would make the following two walks in Figure 4 in the *Primordia*: 1) β1 to β3 to δ3 to δ1 to β1 to β3, and so on; and 2) β2 to β4 to δ4 to δ2 to β2 to β4, and so on. In each case, we connect the obverse of β to its reverse, the reverse of β to the reverse of δ, and then to its obverse, which connects back to the obverse of β, etc.

[29]Lacan, *Écrits,* 48.

[30]Quadrants are numbered in Tables Ω and O in Figure 6 in the *Primordia*. Table Ω contains quadrants II and III and Table O quadrants I and IV.

[31]See Figure A1.1 in Appendix 1 in the *Primordia*; 225.

[32]See the discussion at the end of Appendix 1 in the *Primordia;* 224, where we find the proximity of moieties (represented by the set of their incoming and outgoing connections) triggering the operation of logical conjunction, or set intersection.

[33]Lacan, *Écrits,* 37.

[34]Lacan, *Écrits,* 37-38.

[35]Lacan, *Écrits,* fn. [28], 48.

[36]Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. XVIII* (Toronto: The Hogarth Press Limited and Clarke, Irwin and Co. LTD, 1922) 1-64. Hereafter *Standard Edition*.

[37]Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XIX,* trans. by Cormac Gallagher, 1972,

[10.5.72], http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Book-19-Oupire-Or-worse.pdf [accessed 22 April, 2018]. Found as well in Adrian Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008) 224. I go over the L schema in much more detail in the *Primordia*.

[38]Fink's attempt to insert these letters at some of the nodes in the L schema is intuitively correct, but the way they function and are nested is somewhat more complicated (see Appendices 2, 3, and 5 in the *Primordia*).

[39]Darian Leader, "The Schema L," *Drawing the Soul: Schemas and Models in Psychoanalysis,* ed. Bernard Burgoyne (London: Karnac Books, 2000) 187.

[40]Leader, 187.

[41]Lacan, *Écrits,* 38.

[42]Reversal is evident in Figure 2 in Lacan's binary encodings of the α and ɣ moieties, where we find the three binary bits defining each moiety flipped at the ends of each L schema axis (note: as pointed out in fn. 27 above, letters are formed by grouping three numbers, and the binary numbers represent a specific type of underlying numeric code: 1 represents a symmetric numeric code and 0 a dissymmetric code).

[43]The quadrant of origin (representing two of four possible first letters of a string) oscillates between itself and another quadrant based on the four possible last letters: (see Table 2 in the *Primordia*; 216.

[44]Based on the R schema presented in *Écrits,* 462.

[45]The *Primordia*; 224.

[46]Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: Norton, 1991) 192.

[47]Freud, *Standard Edition*, Vol. XVII, 119.

[48]Freud, *Standard Edition*, Vol. XVII, 119.

[49]Darian Leader, "Lacan's Myths," *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan,* 43.

[50]Lacan, *Sem. V*, 147.

[51]See note in fn 1 here.

[52]Paul Verhaeghe, "Causality in Science and Psychoanalysis," *Lacan and Science,* eds. J. Glynos and Y. Stavrakakis (London: Karnac Books, 2002) 126.

[53]Verhaeghe, 126.

[54]Tom Eyers, *Lacan and the Concept of the 'Real'* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 1.

[55]Eyers, 2.

[56]Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis. Book XI*, trans. Sheridan, Alan (New York: Norton, 1998 [1973]) 53-54.

[57]Eyers, 80.

[58]See Lacan, *Sem. XI,* 55.

[59]Eyers, 80. Note: *Tyche* is written as *Tuche* by Lacan in Seminar XI.

[60]Eyers, 81.