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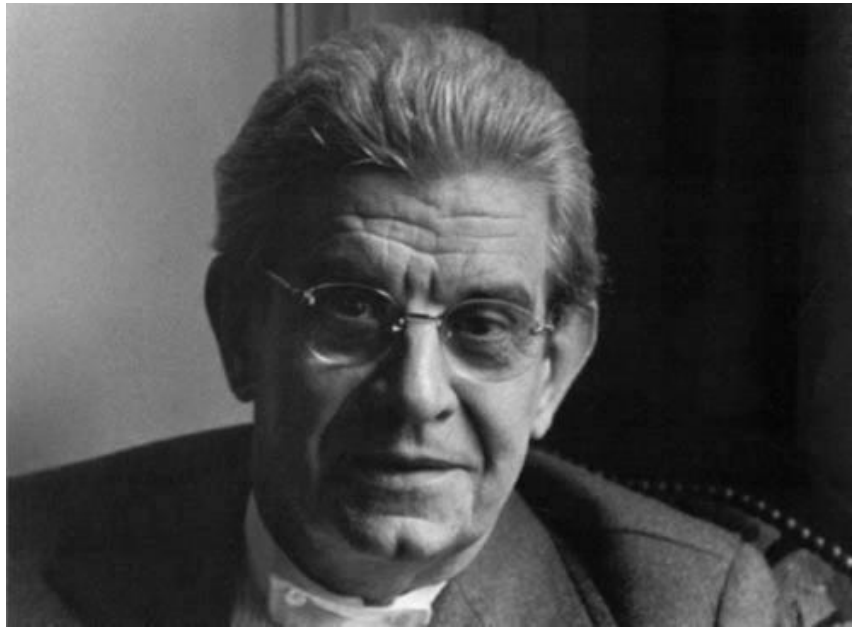
ABSTRACT

The goal of this paper is to provide a "transcendental critical" interpretation of Lacanian psychoanalysis through an examination of the historical circumstances surrounding the development of Lacan's ideas and their underlying philosophical basis. Rather than operating as a closed system, I argue that Lacanian thought functions on the basis of "parallax" between irreconcilable positions (e.g., Kleinian vs. Anna-Freudian psychoanalysis, structuralism vs. poststructuralism) stemming from a central antinomy. To that end, Lacan ought to be understood above all as a critic, in the same vein as Kant and Marx.

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Transcritical Encounters in Lacanian Psychoanalysis



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I. What is Transcendental Criticism?

Eighteenth-century Königsberg was a curious place for a philosopher to have spent his life. Obviously, it was neither the city nor even the century in which the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan lived. Rather, it was home to Immanuel Kant, the founder of transcendental philosophy and arguably the city's most famous inhabitant. As the story goes, despite the immense fame he eventually garnered and the numerous invitations he received to lecture at prestigious state academies across Prussia, Kant never traveled more than a hundred miles from his hometown during his entire life. Why?

Although it was geographically remote, being situated at the eastern corner of the Baltic, Königsberg was far from a provincial town. During Kant's life it was the capital of East Prussia with its own university and representative National Assembly. It was also connected to the rest of the world through its access to the

sea, favored by its location for maritime commerce.¹ In that sense it was much closer to London, the capital of the British Empire, than Berlin. As a major commercial center, it was also a place where different languages and customs intersected: the cosmopolitan milieu of Königsberg meant that one could expand one's knowledge and learn about the world even without travel.²

Kant first encountered the philosophy of Leibniz and Wolff while attending the University of Königsberg. Leibnizian/Wolffian rationalism, which espoused the primacy of the intellectual faculty over the senses, held undisputed sway in Prussia at the time. Yet Königsberg, being in uniquely close proximity to Britain through the North Atlantic trade routes, also fell under the purview of David Hume's empiricist philosophy, which held that rational knowledge was only an abstraction from a more fundamental sensory experience. Following the dominant line of Leibniz/Wolff, the only other choice was to accept Hume's empiricist skepticism, neither of which Kant was satisfied with. So he confined himself to a decade of silence. It was out of this silence that *transcendental criticism* emerged.

Reflecting back on this period of his life in the *Prolegomena to any future metaphysics* [1783], Kant wrote:

I openly confess [that] the suggestion of David Hume was the very thing which many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber, and gave my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy quite a new direction.³

After awakening from his “dogmatic slumber,” Kant could no longer simply accept either the empiricist critique of rationalism or the rationalist critique of empiricism. In Kant's philosophy these two competing schools of thought came to stand for two radically split faculties—understanding and sensibility—which condition our experience of the world. It was therefore not enough to see things from one's own viewpoint (rationalism) or from the viewpoint of another (empiricism). Instead one had to face *the reality that is exposed through difference*.⁴ Thus in his *Critique of pure reason*, published after his emergence from a decade of silence, Kant sought to establish, on the basis of this difference, the limits of

¹ Allen W. Wood, “Kant's Life and Works,” *A companion to Kant*, ed. Graham Bird (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 11.

² Kōjin Karatani, *Transcritique on Kant and Marx* (London: The MIT Press, 2005), 135.

³ Immanuel Kant and Paul Carus, *Kant's Prolegomena to any future metaphysics* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1912), 7.

⁴ Karatani, 3.

reason by means of reason's own self-scrutiny. In other words, it was a *critique of reason by reason*—or a transcendental critique (*transcritique*).⁵

So what does Kant, a sober Enlightenment thinker, have to do with Jacques Lacan, a wild postmodern French theorist? In his formidable *Transcritique*, Japanese philosopher and literary critic Kōjin Karatani performs a “symptomatic” reading of Kant in order to unearth the obscured transcritical dimension of his texts, offering a radical interpretation of Kant's entire philosophical corpus. Using the resulting framework provided by Karatani, I have attempted to turn the Kantian “gaze” back upon Lacan. My contention is that Lacanian psychoanalysis is not a doctrine or a system, but a rigorous critique in the Kantian sense. And similar to Kant's “self-imposed exile” in Königsberg, a city characterized by cultural and social flux, as well as a distinctly cosmopolitan milieu, each break in Lacan's theoretical work (the understanding) corresponds to a moment of institutional crisis within the French psychoanalytic movement (sensibility). By way of his incessant “transposition,” the movement from one institution to the next, Lacan encountered numerous oppositions in various topos (viz., Melanie Klein vs. Anna Freud and structuralism vs. post-structuralism) that could not simply be ignored or synthesized. Instead, as with Kant, one could only assert the irreducible difference inherent to each. It was through these transcritical encounters, I argue, that Lacanian psychoanalysis emerged.

To begin, I first ask the question: “How did Freud enter France?” In other words, what were the historical preconditions of Lacanian psychoanalysis? Following Elisabeth Roudinesco's biographical research on Lacan, I argue that, at least prior to 1926, there was no monolithic channel by which Freud came to be received in France. Rather, his French reception was from the very beginning split between the medical and intellectual spheres. Thus, as both a psychiatrist and a “fellow traveler” amongst the Surrealists, Lacan's heterodox “return to Freud” came to be mediated early on by a wide variety of unlikely sources, including the French psychiatrist Clérambault's dynamic theory of the mind, Salvador Dalí's paranoia-criticism, and Alexandre Kojève's Heideggerian-Marxist reading of Hegel. More precisely, out of the chance encounter between orthodox Freudianism and German phenomenology, Lacan came to formulate what has become his most widely recognized, though somewhat over-emphasized contribution to the psychoanalytic field, namely the “mirror stage” theory. Yet, as I argue, the Imaginary functions of identification and

⁵ Ibid., 47.

misrecognition elaborated in the mirror stage theory presuppose the Symbolic fields of speech and language—a fact that is evident in Lacan’s writing at the time, but which is often overlooked.

I then demonstrate that Freud’s and Lacan’s respective corpora have often been misinterpreted as positive doctrines and coherent systems of thought. My contention, rather, is that both Freud and Lacan are anti-institutional and anti-“systematic” thinkers. Furthermore, Lacan’s work, like Marx’s, is marked by incessant epistemological breaks. Lacan shifts from one theoretical framework to an entirely different problematic, rendering his work impossible to systematize. The first of these subsequent shifts—what I refer to as “transposition” (following Karatani), occurred in 1953, when Lacan broke with his earlier work focusing on the phenomenology of ego-formation and Imaginary identification by way of his encounter with the works of Lévi-Strauss and his subsequent critique of Klein and Anna Freud. This year consequently marked the beginning of Lacan’s “return to Freud,” with his transcendental turn towards the triadic schema of the Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary, as well as his linguistic reading of the unconscious, “the unconscious is structured as a language.” The predominant conception of the unconscious as a domain of subterranean, irrational drives has nothing to do with Freud, according to Lacan. The Freudian unconscious caused such a scandal—not because of the claim that the rational self is subordinated to the much vaster domain of blind irrational instincts,—but because it demonstrated how the unconscious itself obeys its own grammar and logic. The unconscious talks and thinks; it is not the reservoir of wild drives that have to be conquered by the ego, but rather the site where a traumatic truth speaks.⁶

Finally, I focus on the accompanying shift in Lacan’s following his “excommunication” from the International Psychoanalytic Association in 1963. Prior to this second transposition, Lacan had conceived the subject as entirely “subjected” to the structure of the Symbolic (linguistic) order, alienated without remainder. This is evident in his seminar on Edgar Allen Poe’s short detective story “The Purloined Letter,” in which Lacan interprets the purloined letter of the story as a “signifier without a signified,” a signifier that symbolically overdetermines and structures the various positions of the subjects within the signifying chain. After 1963, however, Lacan broke with his earlier formulation of the subject as totally alienated by the signifier. In the “pronounced parallax” between structuralism and post-structuralism, Lacan came to reject the structural determinism of the former, while simultaneously he affirmed it against the latter. He thereby

⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *How to read Lacan* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 1-2.

initiated a “return to Descartes,” arguing that the subject of the unconscious is none other than the Cartesian *cogito*—the void that exists in between systems of thought, in the transcendental topos. In conclusion I examine a concrete instance of the “*cogito* as void” in the transition from modernity to postmodernity in urban space, as well as how our experience of late capitalism is intimately connected to new hegemonic forms of space and time.

In crafting this analysis, each of the three central sections (II-IV) was designed to match one of the three interlocking rings of the Lacanian R.S.I. schema, the so-called “Borromean Knot.” Thus section II focuses primarily on Lacan’s explication of *the Imaginary* order through his theory of the mirror stage and the function of misrecognition inherent to the ego (Kantian transcendental illusion); section III begins with Lacan’s linguistic turn towards a structural elaboration of *the Symbolic* order through his encounter with Lévi-Strauss and Saussurean linguistics (Kantian symbolic-form); and, finally, section IV examines the role of transcendental subjectivity in Lacan’s work and its relationship to *the Real* of ontological difference (the thing-in-itself).

II. Preconditions: The French Reception of Freud

A Split Reception

In the early history of psychoanalysis, France was something of a geographic lacuna: unlike most other countries, it had proven uniquely inhospitable to Freud’s theories—a fact that even Freud himself seems to have been aware of. On June 14, 1907, in a letter addressed to Carl Jung, Freud wrote of their “difficulties with the French,” noting that they were “probably due chiefly to the national character; it has always been hard to import things into France.”⁷ In 1914 he concluded that “[a]mong European countries France has hitherto shown itself the least disposed to welcome psychoanalysis.”

In Paris itself, a conviction still seems to reign (to which Janet himself gave eloquent expression at the Congress in London in 1913) that everything good in psychoanalysis is a repetition of Janet’s views with insignificant modifications and that everything else in it is bad.⁸ Pierre Janet, who was a pioneer in the field of

⁷ Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and William McGuire, *The Freud/Jung letters: The correspondence between Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung*, Bollingen series, 94 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974) 24.

⁸ Sigmund Freud and James Strachey, *On the history of the psycho-analytic movement* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), 36.

psychiatry and one of Freud's chief rivals, gave voice to a number of the criticisms that fostered French resistance to Freud. At the 1913 International Conference on Medicine, for example, Janet claimed that the origins of psychoanalysis were to be found in the work of Jean-Martin Charcot—under whom both he and Freud had studied—and that Freud's contributions to the field were, for the most part, arbitrary. Accordingly, Janet concluded that (Freudian) "psychoanalysis" was simply another term for his own "psychological analysis."⁹



Pierre Janet

Others found Freud's views even more objectionable than did Janet.¹⁰ Freud recounts in his *Autobiographical study* that a "number of papers and newspaper articles... from France ...gave a violent objection to the acceptance of psychoanalysis," an objection that made the "most inaccurate assertions" regarding his relationship to the "French school."¹¹ In the same memoir, Freud recalls the utterances of an unnamed professor of psychology at the Sorbonne who went so far as to declare that psychoanalysis—at least of the Freudian kind—was "inconsistent with the *génie latin*."¹² These remarks, however, appear less surprising when situated within the context of pervasive anti-German sentiment and reactionary nationalism which colored the milieu of the *Belle Époque* and early interwar years in France (and anti-semitism, to be sure, was always just beneath the surface). During this period, psychoanalysis and phenomenology came to be seen as Teutonic inventions aimed primarily at cultural domination. One article in the French newspaper *La Patrie*, for example, referred to psychoanalysis "infiltrating" France and spreading "obscenity and demoralization,"¹³ while a 1928 article in the conservative *Le Temps* cited the Minister of Education, for whom the distinction between Germany and Austria was of little importance, as having said: "I am assured that German youth is being poisoned by Freud. Freudianism is a northern

⁹ Henri F. Ellenberger, *The discovery of the unconscious: the history and evolution of dynamic psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 817-818.

¹⁰ It is worth noting that Janet, in fact, had defended Freud against unwarranted criticism during a meeting of the Paris Psychotherapy Society in June 1914. See Ellenberger, 821.

¹¹ Sigmund Freud, James Strachey, and Peter Gay, *An autobiographical study* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 11.

¹² *Ibid.*, 70.

¹³ Elisabeth Roudinesco, *La bataille de cent ans: histoire de la psychoanalyse en France*, vol. 1: 1885-1939 (Paris: Ramsay, 1982), 283-284.

phenomenon. It cannot succeed in France. Beyond the Rhine, Freudianism will complete the work of dissolution begun by the war.”¹⁴

The few sympathizers Freud had found in the French psychiatric community were not anymore encouraging, expressing a similar desire to defend the national genius of France against the “invasion” of Germanic *Kultur*, even if such a desire was articulated in more moderate terms. Thus, for instance, in his 1922 preface to the second edition of *La Psychoanalyse des névroses et des psychoses*, co-written with Emmanuel Régis, French psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Angélo Hesnard wrote:

And the doctrine of Freud, which springs, not as it has sometimes been said from the French genius of Charcot, but rather from Germanic philosophy, could not meet a more useful ally in its search for the truth than the sense of moderation which is the inspiration behind the French genius.¹⁵

For Hesnard and Régis, as well as others, “moderation” in this context seems to have meant deemphasizing or entirely ignoring certain aspects of Freud’s thought that were seen as being incompatible with the “national character” of France, particularly Freud’s so-called “pansexual” libido theory. Coming to Freud’s defense against charges of “pansexualism,” René Allendy, who along with Hesnard would later become one of the founding members of the Société Psychanalytique de Paris (SPP), argued that “libido” was nothing more than a variant of Henri Bergson’s *élan vital*.¹⁶ It was clear, then, that even those who might have considered themselves sympathetic to Freud’s views chose to reconcile his theories with more well-known French analogues in order to conform to prevailing ideological norms and, in particular, the chauvinist medical establishment. So while the position of Freud’s allies, articulated most clearly in the statement of principle published in the first issue (April 1925) of *L’Évolution psychiatrique*, aimed at centralizing the information on research carried out in France that used Freudian methods, they also sought to adapt psychoanalytic theory “as well as possible to the spirit of [their] race.”¹⁷

If the medical field in France diluted Freud’s theories by identifying them with Janet’s psychology and Bergson’s philosophy—making it difficult, at times, to

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 284.

¹⁵ Angélo Hesnard and Emmanuel Régis, *La psychoanalyse des névroses et des psychoses: Ses applications médicales et extra-médicales* (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1914).

¹⁶ David Macey, *Lacan in contexts* (London: Verso, 1988), 28.

¹⁷ “Avant Propos,” *L’Évolution psychiatrique* 1, no. 1 (1925).

distinguish the claims of Freud's proponents from those of his detractors—the intellectual field, composed of artists, writers, and so on, brought a very different view of Freudianism to the Parisian scene.¹⁸ The Surrealists, such as André Breton, Salvador Dalí, and René Crevel, saw the unconscious as a genuinely new modality for expressing creative thought, one that could be used to subvert codified social norms. Breton gave voice to this view, in all of its bourgeois charm, when he described hysteria as “the greatest poetic discovery of the latter part of the [nineteenth] century,” adding that it “may be considered in every respect a supreme means of expression.”¹⁹ Rather than seeing the neuroses as pathological conditions in need of treatment—as was the predominant view within the medical field—the Surrealists celebrated hysteria for shattering the psychic bond that linked the individual to the external world. Consequently, the Surrealists sought to establish a radical break between psychoanalysis, particularly the “lay” character of Freudian doctrine to which they adhered, and the goals of the French medical establishment, which they regarded with suspicion as fundamentally at odds with their revolutionary aspirations.

There thus emerged two coexisting but contradictory modes in which Freud had entered into French thought. On the one hand, there was the medical channel, represented by the *L'Évolution psychiatrique* group, which included Hesnard, Régis, Allendy, and Edouard Pichon, as well as (starting in 1926) the orthodox Freudians, who coalesced around the SPP, the first Freudian psychoanalytic group in France to be sanctioned by the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA).²⁰ On the other hand, there was the in-tellectual channel, which included the Surrealists, political radicals, and other members of the French intelligentsia. While the former were less interested in a genuine theory of the unconscious, preferring instead the established norms of the medical field, the latter posed itself in direct opposition to the former, postulating a radical discontinuity between two integrated elements—the biological and the cultural—in Freud's thought.²¹

¹⁸ Although Freud had initially come to the conclusion that his ideas had been largely rejected in France, in a footnote added to *On the history of the psycho-analytic movement* in 1923 he remarked that his translated works had now aroused keen interest, “even in France,” but adds that “this is more active in literary circles than in scientific ones” (Freud and Strachey, 37).

¹⁹ André Breton and Marguerite Bonnet, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 949.

²⁰ Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co.: A history of psychoanalysis in France, 1925-1985* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 116.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 8-10.

Lacan

Jacques-Marie Émile Lacan, born on April 13, 1901 in Paris to a Catholic family of vinegar merchants, was one of few doctors at the time who oscillated between the divided medical and intellectual fields. Although a number of the Surrealists such as Louis Aragon, André Breton, Théodore Fraenkel, and Philippe Soupault had all undertaken medical studies, their entrance into the intellectual sphere went hand in hand with the abandonment of their medical careers.²² Lacan, on the other hand, began to work out of a unique space between the two fields while still maintaining ties to the medical establishment, which he joined in 1926 after specializing in psychiatry at the Hôpital Sainte-Anne in Paris. This happened to be the same year that the SPP was founded, although it would take Lacan another eight years to become a member. But while at the Hôpital Sainte-Anne, he became fascinated by cases involving paranoia. Influenced by the work of Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault, Lacan published an important theoretical text in 1931, titled “Structures of Paranoid Psychoses,” in which he made use of Clérambault’s “dynamic” view of psychosis based on the study of underlying psychodynamic processes—a position that happened to be closer Freud’s—as opposed to the prevailing “constitutional” view based on organicism, heredity, and degeneration.²³

Although Lacan had adopted much of the conventional terminology used by the medical field at the time, one of the major sources of inspiration for his 1932 doctoral thesis, “Paranoid Psychosis and Its Relation to Personality,” had been an article written by Salvador Dalí featured in the July 1930 issue of *Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution*. The paper, titled “L’Ane pourri,” focused primarily on Dalí’s notion of “paranoia-criticism,” which saw paranoia as much as an interpretation of reality as a creative activity rooted in the mind’s logic.

Combining Dalí’s surrealist vision with Clérambault’s dynamic psychiatry, Lacan broke with the theory of constitutionalism by formulating a dynamic theory of self-punishment paranoia.²⁴ Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, Lacan’s thesis received a fair share of praise from a number of prominent figures in the Surrealist movement and leaders of the French intelligentsia, while it was almost entirely ignored by the first generation of psychoanalysts in the SPP and the French medical establishment. In the February 1933 issue of *L’Humanité*, for example, Marxist philosopher Paul Nizan hailed the thesis for reflecting the “definite and

²² Ibid., 5.

²³ Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan, European perspectives* (New York: Columbia Press, 1997), 23-24.

²⁴ Ibid., 31.

conscious influence of dialectical materialism,”²⁵ and in May of that year, René Crevel praised Lacan for having made it possible to link together Marxism and psychoanalysis.²⁶ Hence, despite his close ties to the psychiatric community, Lacan had become something of a heroic figure amongst the Surrealists. As Dalí himself had put it, “Because of [Lacan’s thesis] we can for the first time arrive at a complete and homogenous idea of the subject, quite free of the mechanistic mire in which present-day psychiatry is stuck.”²⁷

Beginning in 1934, Lacan enlisted as a training analyst candidate in the SPP. Although he had encountered Freud’s work as early as 1923,²⁸ it was not until his time spent at Hôpital Sainte-Anne, particularly during the years in which he came under the influence of the Surrealist movement, that Lacan made any serious use of Freud’s theories. In 1932, he had translated an article by Freud entitled “Some Neurotic Mechanisms in Jealousy, Paranoia, and Homosexuality” for the *Revue Française de Psychanalyse*.²⁹ That was also the same year in which Lacan entered analysis with Rudolph Loewenstein, who, along with Marie Bonaparte and Raymond de Saussure, was one of the original founders of the SPP, under which the *Revue* was an official organ. Not surprisingly, both Lacan’s translation and his doctoral thesis made use of Freudian terminology that conformed to the prevailing orthodoxy propagated by the IPA, to which both Loewenstein and Bonaparte, as members of the SPP, owed their allegiance.³⁰ Picking up on the “adaptational” current in psychoanalysis, the notion that the agency of the ego functions as the representative of “reality” in the psyche as espoused by Loewenstein (and which foreshadowed

De quelques mécanismes névrotiques
dans la jalousie,
la paranoïa et l’homosexualité

Par S. FREUD

Traduit de l’allemand par Jacques LACAN

(Paru pour la première fois dans *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse*,
Bd VIII, 1922)

A) La jalousie ressortit à ces états affectifs que l’on peut classer, comme on le fait pour la tristesse, comme états normaux. Quand elle paraît manquer dans le caractère et la conduite d’un homme, on est justifié à conclure qu’elle a succombé à un fort refoulement, et en joue dans la vie inconsciente un rôle d’autant plus grand. Les cas de jalousie anormalement renforcée, auxquels l’analyse a affaire, se montrent triplement stratifiés. Ces trois assises ou degrés de la jalousie méritent les dénominations de :

- 1) jalousie de concurrence, ou jalousie normale ;
- 2) jalousie de projection ;
- 3) jalousie dérivante.

Sur la jalousie normale, il y a peu à dire du point de vue de l’analyse. Il est facile de voir qu’essentiellement elle se compose de la tristesse ou douleur de croire perdu l’objet aimé, et de la blessure narcissique, pour autant que celle-ci se laisse isoler de la précédente ; elle s’étend encore aux sentiments d’hostilité contre le rival préféré, et, dans une mesure plus ou moins grande, à l’auto-critique qui veut imputer au propre moi du sujet la responsabilité de la perte amoureuse. Cette jalousie, pour normale que nous la dénommons, n’est pour cela nullement rationnelle, je veux dire issue de situations actuelles, commandée par le moi conscient en fonction de relations réelles et uniquement par lui. Elle prend, en effet, sa racine profonde dans l’inconscient, prolonge les toutes premières tendances de l’affectivité infantile, et remonte au complexe d’Œdipe.

²⁵ Paul Nizan, *L’Humanité*, February 10, 1933.

²⁶ René Crevel and Claude Courtot, *Le clavecin de Diderot* (Paris: J.J. Pauvert, 1966), 163-164.

²⁷ Salvador Dalí, *Le minotaure*, vol. 1 (Paris: Skira, 1933).

²⁸ Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, 13.

²⁹ Jacques Lacan, “De quelques mécanismes névrotiques dans la jalousie, le paranoïa et l’homosexualité,” *RFP* 5, no. 3 (1932): 391-401.

³⁰ As Roudinesco points out, Lacan translated *Trieb* as “instinct,” *Trauer* as “sorrow,” and *Regung* as “tendency.” See Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, 32.

Anna Freud's ego psychology), Lacan remarked that the "therapeutic problem regarding psychosis seems to me to make a psychoanalysis of the ego more necessary than a psychology of the unconscious."³¹

Phenomenology and the Mirror Stage

At the same time as Lacan was increasingly engaging with the orthodox Freudian establishment in France, a new intellectual current was sweeping across Paris. From 1933 to 1939, Alexandre Kojève delivered numerous spellbinding lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology of spirit* that much of the French intelligentsia, including Jacques Lacan, Raymond Queneau, Georges Bataille, André Breton, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, enthusiastically attended. Kojève's highly idiosyncratic reading of Hegel's master-slave dialectic, focusing on the relationship between self-consciousness and Desire (*Begierde*), drew heavily upon the wider intellectual and philosophical developments that were just beginning to reach France. These included György Lukács's attempt to reunite Marx and Hegel in *History and class consciousness*, as well as Alexandre Koyré's lectures on Husserl and the philosophy of science. But perhaps the most influential philosophical work at the time, at least its passage through Kojève, was Martin Heidegger's seminal text *Being and time*, which called for a return to the question of the meaning of Being.

The renewed French intellectual fascination with German thought, and in particular Hegel and Hegelian dialectics, made an especially noticeable impact on the field of psychology. One psychologist in particular who helped carry out this intellectual turn was Henri Wallon, a Marxist psychologist well-acquainted with the works of Freud and Hegel. His dialectical theory of psychical development contended that the human mind passes through a series of stages, each of which is subject to periods of crisis and discontinuity. Wallon's theory proved to be a tremendous influence on Lacan's early phenomenological model of ego-formation, which drew as much on the orthodox reading of Freud that had been transmitted to him through the SPP as it did on Kojève's reading of Hegel. Lacan's concept of the "mirror stage," first elaborated around the mid-1930s using a term he had borrowed from Wallon, describes the genesis of self-consciousness in the mental development of the child via the process of narcissistic identification with its bodily image. This specular reflection, which formed the nascent ego, supplies an Imaginary "wholeness," a misrepresentation of unity, to the child's experience of fragmentary reality, insofar as the child's

³¹ Jacques Lacan, *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 280.

lack of bodily coordination is perceived by the child as an existential disjointedness.

By 1936 Lacan had drafted an early version of the essay on the mirror stage theory, scheduled to be delivered at the first IPA Congress. The congress convened on July 31st in Marienbad, Czechoslovakia, chosen based upon its geographic proximity to Vienna, where Freud was sequestered as a result of his rapidly declining health. The congress was held at a time when Freud's theoretical revisions, which included the introduction of the second topography (ego, superego, and id) and the death drive, were stirring controversy within the psychoanalytic movement. Lacan, however, was largely unaware of the growing schism that was developing at the time. His focus, rather, was still limited to the Parisian scene, where the introduction of Freudian psychoanalysis had lagged behind by nearly a decade.

Critique of Associationism

On August 3rd of that year Lacan rose to deliver his speech. Ten minutes later Ernest Jones, the president of the IPA and one of Freud's most loyal acolytes, interrupted Lacan, preventing the full speech from being delivered.³² Despite the personal setback for him at Marienbad, the principle outcome of the trip, a short article titled "Beyond the 'Reality Principle'," proved to be an important one, marking the beginning of Lacan's "turn" towards a new understanding of Freud. In addition to providing a clue to his later theoretical trajectory with regard to his focus on language, the article also reflects something of a cross-section of Lacan's early influences. These include his clinical research at Hôpital Sainte-Anne, the importance placed on free association, his suspicion of the psychological notion of "reality" (inherited from the Surrealists), as well as the need for developing a scientific theory of ego-formation.³³

The focus of "Beyond the 'Reality Principle'," was to determine what distinguished Freud's so-called "meta-psychology" from the psychology that had preceded it. Lacan points, first of all, to the need for a "critique of

³² Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, 113.

³³ Lacan and Kojève had made plans to compile a comparative interpretation of Hegel and Freud that was to focus on the "genesis of self-consciousness," the "origin of madness," and "the essence of the family," yet it never panned out. However, these three concepts went on to become recurring themes throughout Lacan's early work. See Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, 104-105.

associationism,”³⁴ referring to one of the main principles of Hume’s empirical psychology which Freud had made use of when referring to the mnemonic system’s formation of “associative links,” which carry out the operation of unconscious displacement.³⁵ According to Lacan, these associative links—mental phenomena based on the “experience of the living being’s reactions”—smuggle in the metaphysical notion of “similarity” as *pregiven* through a conceptual sleight of hand.³⁶ In other words, they assert the property of “association” without providing its possible conditions. Furthermore, in associationism psychical phenomena become categorized by intentionality, relegating all phenomena outside the operations of conscious “rational knowledge” to epiphenomena. Against the theory of associationism found in empirical psychology, Lacan contends that Freud’s “revolutionary method” consisted in assigning meaning or value to seemingly meaningless phenomena, such as dreams, slips of the tongue, and bungled actions, in contrast with the “reality principle” which posits that the ego is capable of selectively assigning meaning to psychical phenomena by determining which of these phenomena is closer to “reality.”³⁷

Following his critiques of associationism and the reality principle, Lacan concludes with a brief “phenomenological description of psychoanalytic experience,”³⁸ in which he points to the unique role of language in transference, arguing that analysis can only take place if, first and foremost, there is an analyst who is situated as the analysand’s interlocutor:

[L]anguage, prior to signifying something, signifies to someone. It is simply because the analyst is there listening that the man who speaks addresses him, and since he forces his discourse not to want to say anything, he becomes what this man wants to tell him. What the man says may, in fact, “have no meaning,” but what he says to the analyst conceals one anyway.³⁹

As a result of the transference bond formed between the analyst and the analysand, the analysand’s discourse conceals an unconscious meaning drawn out

³⁴ Jacques Lacan and Bruce Fink, *Écrits: The first complete edition in English* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 59.

³⁵ References to associationism and “associative links” can be found throughout Freud’s work. See Sigmund Freud and James Strachey, *The psychopathology of everyday life* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), 45: Freud writes that childhood memories “owe their retention in the mind not to their own content but to its associative connection with another, repressed subject, they have a good claim to be described, in the term I have adopted for them, as ‘screen memories’” (*ibid.*, emphasis mine).

³⁶ Lacan and Fink, *Écrits*, 60.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

through free association during analysis. According to Lacan, this is because “in [the analysand’s] very reaction to the listener’s refusal [to assume the role of interlocutor], the subject reveals the *image* he has replaced him with.”⁴⁰ These images, formed through the process of identification, compose what Lacan dubbed the “Imaginary” order of the psyche, which, like the ego during the mirror stage, undergo a process of formation and development. Hence the early phase of Lacan’s work, beginning with “Beyond the ‘Reality Principle’,” can be read as an attempt to explain both the genesis of the ego as well as the structure of analysis through the process of Imaginary identification and the phenomenology of language.

The French reception of Freudian psychoanalysis was a peculiar one due in part to the unlikely constellation of political, cultural, geographic, and ideological conditions. In particular, the split channels through which psychoanalysis entered France played a decisive role in Freud’s French reception. While the medical community sought to co-opt Freudian terminology by integrating it with the work of previously existing French analogues, the intellectuals, composed of Surrealists, writers, and the Parisian avant-garde, saw Freudian psychoanalysis as a useful weapon for critiquing bourgeois society and furthering their revolutionary ends. It was within this milieu that Lacan, as both a psychiatrist and a “fellow traveler” amongst the Surrealists, first encountered Freud.

Another unique circumstance was that the emergence of “legitimate” Freudianism, in the form of the SPP (the first IPA-sanctioned psychoanalytic association in France), took place nearly a decade later than elsewhere in Europe. Because of this temporal gap, the orthodox establishment of psychoanalysis came to emerge concurrently with the introduction of German phenomenology in France, which became popular with French intellectuals, many of whom, including Lacan himself, packed the lecture halls of the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* to listen to Kojève and Koyré speak about the philosophies of Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger.

These various trends—the French medical field’s loose adoption of Freudian terminology, the introduction of orthodox Freudianism into France, the explosion of Surrealism and Marxism, as well as Hegelianism, and phenomenology—all played a crucial role in the early development of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Their influence can be seen in Lacan’s formulation of the mirror stage

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

theory, as well as in his critique of associationism and Freud's "reality principle," both of which represent attempts at distancing Freudian theory from the empirical psychology that preceded it. Furthermore, these two theoretical tendencies in Lacan's early work—between ego-formation and language—ought to be understood, not as distinct realms, but rather as theoretically intertwined. As Fredric Jameson notes, "To speak of the Imaginary independently of the Symbolic is to perpetuate the illusion that we could have a relatively pure experience of either."⁴¹

Although Lacan had went on to provide a fuller account of his mirror stage theory in 1949, his thoughts on language at the time of "Beyond the 'Reality Principle'" amounted to something of a prolegomena in need of further elaboration, especially given the importance Freud himself had placed on the intersubjective and phylogenetic dimensions of the unconscious. Yet this step—the step towards an elaboration of a theory of the Symbolic order of speech and language—would have been impossible for Lacan had it not been for the development of structuralism.

III. The Lacanian Turn: Transposition and Critique

Controversial Discussions

One of Freud's peculiarities was that he subjected his theories to constant revision and scrutiny. This is because Freudian theory operated primarily as a critique of previously existing thought: Freud went to great lengths to demonstrate how both his predecessors and contemporaries had erred.⁴² One could say then that he situated his work within a certain "critical space," a topos marked by the alterity of opposed systems of thought, be they empirical or rational. To this extent, Freudian theory was always already transcendental: to view it as a coherent doctrine would be to misrecognize its heterogeneous structure. Thus when Freud died on September 23, 1939, he left behind a huge body of work that lacked a unified system. This led to two major problems. On the one hand, a centralized bureaucracy in the form of the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) was charged with overseeing the impossible task of translating Freud's work into a consistent body of knowledge called

⁴¹ Fredric Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject," *Yale French Studies*, no. 55/56 (1977): 348.

⁴² The same is just as true of Kant's critique of metaphysics and Marx's critique of the political economy. Furthermore, although the various thinkers they criticized have lost much of their contemporary relevance, the critiques themselves have not.

“Freudianism.” On the other hand, the various attempts to unify his corpus led to irresolvable antinomies that divided his followers and pitted them against each other in a series of bitter feuds over who would become the rightful heir to Freud’s legacy. As a result, the critical space was lost.

In the early 1920s Freud carried out a controversial revision of his theories by introducing both the death drive and the second topography (the ego, superego, and id). Although these changes were met with resistance even by Freud’s most loyal followers, who attempted to play down his revisions by attributing them to personal and historical circumstances, most psychoanalysts eventually adopted them. The problem was that no one seemed to agree on their meaning, as Freud had provided a number of contradictory accounts of a variety of key concepts.⁴³ Starting in the mid- to late-1920s, two antithetical currents of thought began to emerge within the psychoanalytic community. One view posited the ego as the fully autonomous product of a differentiation from the id, acting as the representative of “reality” and charged with containing the drives, and the other view rejected the notion of an autonomous ego and instead looked to find its genesis in identification. Consequently, while the first option meant extracting the ego from the id and making it the instrument of the individual’s adaptation to “reality,” the second option moved the ego closer to the id and sought to show how it developed from the unconscious.

The first public eruption of these internal debates occurred in 1936 at the Marienbad congress between the supporters of Melanie Klein and those of Anna Freud. Whereas Klein appeared to emphasize the role of the unconscious, Anna Freud emphasized the role of the ego and “reality adaptation.” Klein drew on Karl Abraham’s work on the psychoses, particularly melancholia, where Abraham located their origin in early infancy, as well as on Freud’s new theory of the death drive. Using the revision of Freudianism that had come about in the 1920s, Klein began to study the first years of life in a child’s psychological development and, as a result of her research, described the very first “object relations”—objects as images endowed with the status of fantasy—as they occurred in infancy.⁴⁴ On the other hand, Anna Freud and her “ego psychology” school, which included Heinz Hartman, Ernst Kris, Rudolph Loewenstein, were unwilling to accept the notion that the id could be in charge of action,

⁴³ As Bruce Fink points out, there are at least four accounts of the ego found in Freud’s corpus: (1) the ego as a projection of the surface of the body; (2) the ego as a precipitate of former object-cathexes; (3) the ego as the representative of reality in the psyche; and (4) the ego as a part of the id that has been specially modified. See Bruce Fink, *Lacan to the letter: Reading Écrits closely* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 41.

⁴⁴ Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, 109.

perception, and thought at the outset. Instead, they argued that there exists an “undifferentiated phase during which both the id and the ego gradually are formed,”⁴⁵ that is, that the ego exists alongside the id from the outset.



Left to right: Anna Freud and Melanie Klein

No conclusion was reached at Marienbad and the disputes subsided as soon as the fourteenth congress came to an end, with Klein and her supporters returning to London and Anna Freud and her supporters to Vienna. Yet with the rise of fascism across continental Europe, many of the Viennese analysts, including Freud himself, began to leave Austria en masse with the intention of settling abroad in England. So after the Anschluss in 1938 and the outbreak of war in Europe the split between the British Psychoanalytical Society (BPS; allied with Klein) and the Viennese school (allied with Anna Freud) became an internal one to the BPS.⁴⁶ As a result, the tensions that had appeared at Marienbad quickly resurfaced in London. The disputes reached a boiling point in October 1942—three years after Freud’s death—when the series of “Controversial Discussions” erupted. For four years, in the midst of war, the disputes once again pitted the Kleinians against the Anna-Freudians, threatening the unity of the international psychoanalytic movement, which now found itself confined to the BPS.⁴⁷

At first the arguments that took place during the Controversial Discussions centered on the appraisal of Klein’s theories, which Anna Freud and her followers contended had strayed too far from Freud’s teaching. Yet this view

⁴⁵ Heinz Hartmann, Ernst Kris, and Rudolph Loewenstein, “Comments on the Formation of Psychic Structure,” *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 2 (1946): 19.

⁴⁶ Phyllis Grosskurth, *Melanie Klein: her world and her work* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 133.

⁴⁷ Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, 191.

was difficult to reconcile with the fact that, during his lifetime, Freud had never repudiated Klein's theories and, in fact, had hinted at his support for them on a number of occasions. However, he had stopped short of directly praising her work, perhaps feeling obliged not to upset his daughter. And now that he had died it was clearly impossible to have him clarify his opinions on the matter. Soon enough, however, the debates shifted to the training of analysts. Anna Freud's party saw the object of analysis as the "undoing of the effects of repression" and the "reduction of defense mechanisms, in order to give the ego better control over the id":

Transference should not be analyzed until the defenses have been reduced. The training technique corresponded to the intersection of the second topography put forward by ego psychology, whose main contributions were linked to Anna Freud. She, Kris, Hartmann, Loewenstein, and the Viennese in general shared the same adaptative [sic] view of psychoanalysis.⁴⁸

On the other hand, the Kleinians argued that treatment began with "recognition of the primacy of the transferential bond" and the necessity of analyzing it from the outset, "regardless of any control the ego might have over the id."⁴⁹ Because Klein and Anna Freud's interpretations of Freudian doctrine proved to be so incompatible, the only solution that the BPS could come up with was to establish two different systems of training. In June 1946 the Controversial Discussions came to an end when the BPS officially divided into three groups: group A taught the theories of Klein, group B taught those of Anna Freud, and the third group consisted of independents.

During the era of the Controversial Discussions, Lacan began to familiarize himself with the analytic techniques of both Melanie Klein and Anna Freud, no doubt as a result of their growing importance after Freud's death and the escalation of their debates within the psychoanalytic movement. Yet his references to their work at the time remained largely didactic and "pre-critical." For example, in his 1949 revision of his mirror stage theory, Lacan wrote of Anna Freud that her work has, "against a frequently expressed prejudice," situated "hysterical repression and its returns at a more archaic stage than obsessive inversion and its isolating processes."⁵⁰ Moreover, Lacan thought that she forcefully articulated, "*the function of misrecognition* that characterizes the ego

⁴⁸ Ibid., 193.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Lacan and Fink, *Écrits*, 79.

in all the defensive structures.”⁵¹ A year earlier, in his paper, “Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis,” Lacan refers positively to Klein’s theory of “bad internal objects,” writing:

Through Klein we have become aware of the function of the imaginary primordial enclosure formed by the imago of the mother’s body...[T]hrough her we have the mapping, drawn by children’s own hands, of the mother’s inner empire, and the historical atlas of the internal divisions in which the imagos of the father and siblings—whether real or virtual—and the subject’s own voracious aggression dispute their deleterious hold over her sacred regions.⁵²

While Klein provided Lacan with an insight into how imagos—Imaginary part-objects—are formed, Anna Freud was perceived by Lacan as having successfully provided an adequate theory of ego-formation. Unlike the psychoanalytic movement at large, Lacan did not view Klein and Anna Freud’s theories of technique as mutually incompatible. Instead, he viewed their work as important contributions to the construction and completion of his own theory of the Imaginary, with the mirror-stage as its paradigm. This engagement marked the beginning of an important theoretical shift in Lacan’s work: the shift towards structuralism.

The Linguistic Turn

In 1949, two important events occurred in the realm of French theory. The first was Lacan’s finalization of his mirror-stage theory, which had been under revision since the early 1930s. The second was the publication of Claude Lévi-Strauss’s ground-breaking anthropological study, *The elementary structures of kinship*, which reshaped the intellectual landscape of post-war France. And it was above all through Lévi-Strauss that Lacan first encountered structuralism.

Born in Brussels in 1908, Lévi-Strauss grew up in Paris and later attended the Sorbonne, where he studied law and philosophy. After receiving his degree, he chose to go abroad instead of continuing his studies in France, but, curiously, not in the official capacity of an anthropologist. From 1935 to 1939 Lévi-Strauss lived in Brazil, where his informal ethnographic fieldwork took the shape of a genuine “philosophical inquiry” not unlike that of Descartes’s, a philosopher

⁵¹ Ibid., 80. Emphasis mine.

⁵² Lacan and Fink, *Écrits*, 93-94.

whose travels also played a decisive role in the development of his theories. Through his studies of the various Brazilian tribes he lived with, Lévi-Strauss came to deduce the principle of “structure” by acknowledging the existence of universal “reason” within the various myths and marriage systems he encountered.⁵³ By starting from the formal operation of “transcendentally reducing” the empirical consciousness of both the observer and the observed,⁵⁴ Lévi-Strauss’s methodology contributed to an intellectual revolution—the advent of structuralism—which, like mathematics, is achieved only when the formal sets of elements and relations can be extracted by excluding all positive content.⁵⁵

Before the publication of Lévi-Strauss’s *The elementary structures of kinship*, which sought to definitively answer the question of incest-prohibition through the structuralist approach, the cultural anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski had travelled to the South Pacific to live amongst the Trobriand Islanders. After four years of study, Malinowski returned from the South Seas and set out to overhaul Freud’s work, focusing in particular on the role of the Oedipus complex in psychoanalytic theory. Freud had argued that the Oedipus complex and its triangular structure were a “natural” universal, deriving their effectiveness from the incest taboo as the necessary condition of all culture. In order to substantiate this view, Freud drew upon the Darwinian myth of the primordial horde, arguing in *Totem and taboo* that the origin of culture was founded on an act of patricide. However, based on his research of the Trobriand Islanders, whose social structure, he had observed, was of a matrilineal type in which the role of the father in procreation came to be ignored, Malinowski questioned the universality of the Oedipus complex and the validity of Freud’s “totemic myth,” arguing instead that the formation of the Oedipus complex was dependent on the family structure typical of the society in question.⁵⁶ His findings led to a controversial debate within the psychoanalytic community regarding the status of anthropological research, although the debate never reached France or the



Claude Lévi-Strauss

⁵³ Karatani, 84-85.

⁵⁴ The notion of “transcendental reduction” is here isomorphic to Husserl’s notion of “eidetic reduction,” in which the determinations of empirical self-evidence are bracketed through the process of doubt that problematizes those given beings, with the transcendental ego of self-reflection implied as a result.

⁵⁵ Karatani, 86.

⁵⁶ Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, 207.

SPP. While the orthodox Freudians continued to assert the validity of a universal Oedipus complex using new fieldwork conducted by Geza Roheim, which contradicted Malinowski's reports, the culturalists argued that the incest taboo did not arise from a universally recognized principle due to the diversity of social structures in which the elementary matrix of the Oedipus complex did not exist.⁵⁷

In 1949 Lévi-Strauss's work shed new light on the question of incest prohibition in a way that completely shifted the terms of the debate. Instead of arguing that there is a "natural" or essential fear of incest or siding with the nominalist view of incest-prohibition as a product of cultural diversity, Lévi-Strauss claimed that the incest taboo provided the very *transition* from nature to culture. "The prohibition of incest is in origin neither purely cultural nor purely natural," he wrote:

Nor is it a composite mixture of elements from both nature and culture. It is the fundamental step because of which, by which, but above all in which, the transition from nature to culture is accomplished. In one sense, it belongs to nature, for it is a general condition of culture. Consequently, we should not be surprised that its formal characteristic, universality, has been taken from nature.⁵⁸

For Lévi-Strauss, the prohibition of incest is neither purely cultural nor purely natural because it is located in the transcendental gap between both registers, the limit point at which they become irreducible to one another. Consequently, by bracketing nature and treating the systems of marriage exchange and kinship as "reasonable," Lévi-Strauss uncovered the formal structure of social organization independent of empirical consciousness. In doing so, he seemingly validated Freud's claim regarding the universal status of the Oedipus complex, to the extent that it was derived, not from a phylogenetic origin as in orthodox Freudianism, but instead from the existence of an *a priori* symbolic function understood as a law governing the unconscious organization of the social structure, such as in marriage exchange and kinship ties.

Yet Lévi-Strauss was also highly critical of Freudian psychoanalysis, comparing its treatment method to shamanism and argued that its function was primarily mythological, acting as a system of collective interpretation in Western societies:

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The elementary structures of kinship* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 24.

A considerable danger thus arises: the treatment (unbeknown to the therapist, naturally), far from leading to the resolution of a specific disturbance within its own context, is reduced to the reorganization of the patient's universe in terms of psychoanalytic interpretations.⁵⁹

If indeed a cure is arrived at through psychoanalysis, then according to Lévi-Strauss its efficacy is predominantly *symbolic* because of the structural reorganization brought about by the collective adoption of the myth. Hence, in his *Introduction to the work of Marcel Mauss*, Lévi-Strauss defends Mauss's characterization of the unconscious as "collective," in contrast to its mystical Jungian association, by conceiving of it as a purely formal empty place in which the symbolic function achieves autonomy.⁶⁰ "Like language," he wrote, "the social is an autonomous reality (the same one, moreover); symbols are more real than what they symbolize, the signifier precedes and determines the signified."⁶¹

Since "Beyond the 'Reality Principle'" Lacan had taken an abiding interest in the dual roles of speech and language in analytic technique, but prior to the work of Lévi-Strauss he had lacked an adequate theory to understand their relationship to psychoanalysis. Thus Lacan first came to view language principally through the lens of phenomenology, as an ideal intersubjective medium. Describing the influence that Lévi-Strauss's work had on his own, Lacan later remarked:

If I wanted to describe how I've been helped and supported by Lévi-Strauss's thinking, I'd say it resides in the stress he has laid... on what I shall call the function of the signifier (in the sense that the word has in linguistics), inasmuch as this signifier, I'd say, not only is distinguishable by its own laws but also prevails over the signified on which it imposes them.⁶²

Although he had been introduced to Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in general linguistics* years earlier, it was primarily through Lévi-Strauss that Lacan was initiated into Saussure's system, the principles of structural linguistics, and, perhaps most importantly, the dichotomy between the signifier and the signified—the two constitutive elements of Saussurean linguistics.

⁵⁹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 183.

⁶⁰ Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, 211.

⁶¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Introduction to the work of Marcel Mauss* (New York: Routledge, 1987), 37.

⁶² Jacques Lacan, "Sur Les Rapports entre le mythe et le rituel," *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie* 3 (1956): 114.

Beyond the simple dichotomy between the signifier and the signified, however, Saussure argued that language is above all a social system governed by difference. “In language,” he wrote, “there are only differences, and *without positive terms*.”⁶³ Saussure’s emphasis on “differences” was made not only in reference to *within* a single relational system, but also *without*—to the existence of “the other,” that is, different systems of languages. It may be said, then—following Karatani—that Saussure’s structural linguistics functioned as a Kantian critique of two opposing tendencies in the field: on the one hand, Wilhelm von Humboldt’s theory of language considered as a self-contained and internally coherent *Volksgeist*, and, on the other hand, historical linguistics, which observed the transformation of language over time as a natural and scientific development independent of consciousness. Accordingly, Saussure’s unique approach was to *reject* the internal consistency of language against the former, while simultaneously to *affirm* it as an enclosed synchronic system against the latter.⁶⁴ In doing so, Saussure came to extract a theory of language *qua* relational structure broken down into its constituent differential elements—the sign—as the product of the “synthesis” between the signifier (the sensible) and the signified (the suprasensible).

Crisis and Transposition

When Louis Althusser avered that Marx had been fundamentally misunderstood, his contention was that the errors in interpretation resulted from the mistaken view that Marx’s body of work could be understood as a coherent whole. Instead, Althusser, drawing on the work of Gaston Bachelard, held that Marxian theory contains a radical “break”—a shift to a fundamentally different problematic, i.e., a different theoretical framework, set of questions posed, and central suppositions.⁶⁵ The same holds true for Lacan, whose work is marked by incessant shifts in theoretical perspective. And like Marx, each major break in Lacan’s corpus corresponds to a moment of transposition, to a topographic shift in theoretical space. While for Marx this shift was geographic, for Lacan it was brought about namely by repeated institutional crises in the French psychoanalytic movement.⁶⁶

The first of such crises occurred on June 16, 1953 when Lacan, along with a number of other prominent French psychoanalysts, resigned from the SPP over

⁶³ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in general linguistics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), 120.

⁶⁴ Karatani, 79.

⁶⁵ Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading “Capital”* (London: Verso, 1998), 25-28.

⁶⁶ Take, for example, Marx’s critique of “German ideology” after his migration to France, his critique of French “utopian socialism” after his migration to England, and finally his critique of English political economy after his exile from Germany in 1848.

the increasingly authoritarian rules governing the training of analysts. Consequently, the exiled group of former SPP analysts decided to form the Société Française de Psychanalyse (SFP), but in abandoning the SPP they unknowingly ceased to remain members of the IPA.⁶⁷ On July 8, Lacan inaugurated the new society with a lecture, “The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real,” which began a new phase of his thought marked by the influence of structuralism. Furthermore, it was in “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis,” written in the same year, that Lacan for the first time drew on Saussure’s distinction between the signifier and the signified when he proposed that “the subject’s unconscious is the other’s discourse.”⁶⁸ This distinction allowed Lacan a radical reinterpretation of Freud’s theory of the unconscious:

We must thus take up Freud’s work again starting with the *Traumdeutung* [*The Interpretation of Dreams*] to remind ourselves that a dream has the structure of a sentence or, rather, to keep to the letter of the work, of a rebus—that is, of a form of writing. . . . What is important is the version of the text, and that, Freud tells us, is given in the telling of the dream—that is, in its rhetoric.⁶⁹

For Lacan, Freudian theory provided an elaboration of the various ways in which the unconscious is “structured like a language,” yet Freud himself remained unaware of his discovery because he lacked a proper theory of language. Accordingly, Lacan claimed that “[t]o ignore the symbolic order is to condemn Freud’s discovery to forgetting and analytic experience to ruin”⁷⁰ because it is the unconscious which is defined by the function of signifiers. Thus in “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud” [1957], Lacan drew on Roman Jakobson’s phonemic theory by reinterpreting Freud’s concepts of condensation and displacement as two fundamental combinations of signifiers: metaphor and metonymy.

On the basis of his R.S.I. schema, composed of the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary, Lacan called for a “return to Freud” in the name of recovering the transcendental core of Freud’s discovery: the attempt to grasp *through language* what exists in the gap between the unconscious and consciousness. As Freud himself had argued in *Moses and monotheism* [1939]:

⁶⁷ Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, 201-202.

⁶⁸ Lacan and Fink, *Écrits*, 219.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 227.

Thought-processes, and what may be analogous to them in the Id, are unconscious *per se* and obtain their entry into consciousness by their connection, via the function of speech, with memory traces of perceptions through touch and ear.⁷¹

Thus Lacan, like Freud, came to extract a theory of the unconscious *qua* transcendental structure, transcendental because the Lacanian categories of the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary—like Freud’s ego, superego, and id—are not things that exist in empirical reality, but are figures about which we can only say that they exist. They are a nothing that exists only as a certain function.⁷² But Lacan’s transcendental stance could not have appeared if it had not been for his encounter with the “pronounced parallax” between the theories of Klein and Anna Freud. In Lacan’s work, this parallax came to take the form of an “antinomy,” the device to reveal both thesis and antithesis as an illusion.

Towards a Transcendental Critique

Although “Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis” contains no direct references or allusions to either Anna Freud or Klein, the same is not true of Seminar I. According to Jacques-Alain Miller, Lacan’s first seminar can be read above all as an application of “Function and Field” to psychoanalytic technique and practice. “In some sense it answers the question, ‘what psychoanalytic technique can be deduced from the thesis: the unconscious is structured like a language?’ If we admit that the unconscious is so structured, how can we practice psychoanalysis?,” writes Miller.⁷³ Nevertheless, Lacan—in typical fashion—provides no ready-made answers to would-be psychoanalytic practitioners. Yet his introductory remarks in Seminar I do contain an important clue to grasping the core of his perspective on analytic technique:

Those who find themselves in a position to follow Freud are confronted with the question as to how the paths we inherit were adopted, reapprehended, and rethought through. So, we cannot

⁷¹ Sigmund Freud and Katherine Jones, *Moses and monotheism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967) 124.

⁷² Karatani argues that Lacan’s R.S.I. schema and Kant’s architectonic of the cognitive faculties are isomorphic: the Lacanian Imaginary/Kantian illusion, the Symbolic/the Kantian form, and the Real/the thing-in-itself. Karatani performs a similar operation with respect to Freud’s second topography, reading it as id/sensibility, ego/understanding, and superego/reason (32-33).

⁷³ Jacques-Alain Miller, “An Introduction to Seminars I and II: Lacan’s Orientation Prior to 1953 (I),” in *Reading seminars I and II: Lacan’s return to Freud*, SUNY series in psychoanalysis and culture, eds. Richeard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, and Maire Jaanus (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 4.

do anything else but gather together what we will contribute to it under the heading of a *critique*, a critique of analytic technique.⁷⁴

As Lacan argues, Seminar I ought to be read above all as a critique: more specifically, as a critique of Klein and Anna Freud and their respective analytic techniques. Thus, in the chapter “Discourse Analysis and Ego Analysis: Anna Freud or Klein,” Lacan poses the two against each other through a restatement of the basic antinomy apropos Freudian theory: that the ego is conceived as both an autonomous function (Anna Freud) and the seat of illusion and error (Klein).⁷⁵ Before going further in the analysis, however, Klein’s and Anna Freud’s opposing techniques require further explication.

First, Anna Freud’s technique is based on the analysis of the ego’s resistance and defenses during transference. Accordingly, ego psychology begins from the standpoint of the analysand’s empirical consciousness of “reality” by bracketing the unconscious as unobservable phenomena outside of the dual Imaginary relation (the analyst’s and analysand’s respective egos). Describing Anna Freud’s technique in greater detail, Lacan remarks:

Anna Freud’s point of view is intellectualist, and leads her into putting forward the view that everything in analysis must be conducted from a median, moderate position, which would be that of the ego. For her everything starts with the education or the persuasion of the ego, and everything must come back to that.⁷⁶

For Anna Freud analysis begins and ends with the ego: its resistances, its defenses, and its effects. Ego psychology therefore seeks to dispel the ego of its illusions by forcing it to adapt to the “reality” of the analyst’s ego. Lacan later criticizes this position by disparagingly referring to it as the “servicing of goods,” since it substitutes one good (the analyst’s) for the analysand’s. But his overarching critique of Anna Freud in Seminar I, derived in part from his theory of the mirror stage, is that she and the ego psychologists overlook the fact that, by its very nature and function, *the ego is nothing other than misrecognition: its basic function is to misrecognize*.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Jacques Lacan and Jacques-Alain Miller, *The seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud’s Papers on Technique, 1953-1954* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 15-16.

⁷⁵ See *Ibid.*, 62-70.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 194.

On the other hand, Klein's technique begins from the "diametrically opposite starting point."⁷⁸ By bracketing the ego (something that she, as Lacan points out, does not even bother to theorize) Klein begins with an *a priori* analysis of the unconscious: she "accepts [the unconscious] from the start, out of habit."⁷⁹ In other words, Kleinian analysis, in bypassing the ego's defenses and resistances, immediately begins with a "deep" analysis of the analysand's unconscious, as in the case of her analysis of a four-year-old schizophrenic boy named Dick in "The Importance of Symbol-Formation in the Formation of the Ego."⁸⁰ As a result, Klein diminishes the transformative significance of the signifier's introduction into analysis while simultaneously overlooking the structural necessity of resistance during transference, which Lacan argues (in Seminar II) is "linked to the register of the ego" and is "an effect of the ego," yet irreducibly expresses an unconscious desire.⁸¹ Furthermore, Klein is led to theorize the unconscious primarily within the register of the Imaginary by limiting introjected part-objects to the realm of phantasy as constituted solely through the process of identification.

Consequently, what Lacan's critique reveals is that the seemingly irreconcilable opposition between Klein and Anna Freud only obfuscates their disavowed proximity. While both techniques differ markedly in that Klein places greater emphasis on the subterranean network of unconscious affects while Anna Freud emphasizes the ego-to-ego bond forged during analysis, both techniques remain limited to the field of the Imaginary. Lacan, on the other hand, argues that our thought is always bound by language, by the alienating Symbolic field of structural form. In Kantian terms, Lacan's technique takes the "transcendental standpoint" towards language,⁸² a point which Fredric Jameson clarifies in his analysis of the Lacanian categories of the Imaginary and the Symbolic:

What is so often problematical about psychoanalytic criticism is therefore not its insistence on the subterranean relationships between the literary text on the one hand and the "obsessive metaphor" or the distant and inaccessible childhood or unconscious fascination on the other: it is rather the absence of any reflection on the transformational process whereby such private materials become public—a transformation which is

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 82-85.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Jacques Lacan and Jacques-Alain Miller, *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, 1991), 228.

⁸² Karatani, 82.

often, to be sure, so undramatic and inconspicuous as the very act of speech itself.⁸³

The transcendental position, therefore, is that the structure of the unconscious can only be grasped in the very *gap* between our unconscious thoughts (Klein) and our everyday consciousness (Anna Freud): in other words, in the fields of speech and language, the locus of the signifier.

Furthermore, for Lacan it is only through language, vis-à-vis the function of metonymy, that Desire is constituted. This is evident in his 1960 *écrits*, “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,” where Lacan introduces what he refers to as “the Other’s question” [*la question de l’Autre*]—the question of “*Chè vuoi?*,” “What does the other want?”—in order to explain the relationship between desire and phantasy.⁸⁴ According to this formula, the subject (the child, for example) desires only insofar as it experiences the Other (the adult) as desiring, as the site of an unfathomable, enigmatic desire. After having been interpellated by the Other, the subject begins to ask itself, “What does the other want from me?” Phantasy therefore functions as an answer to this enigmatic message, which renders the subject’s primordial position: the Other not only addresses the subject with an enigmatic desire, but also confronts the subject with the enigma of their own desire.

According to Lacan, the Other’s enigmatic message (the “*Chè vuoi?*” of Desire) contains a traumatic, repressed kernel around which the subject’s “principal concerns gravitate”⁸⁵—what Lacan refers to in Seminar VII, his 1959-60 seminar on ethics, as “*das Ding*”:

Das Ding is that which I will call the beyond-of-the-signified. It is as a function of this beyond-of-the-signified and of an emotional relationship to it that the subject keeps its distance and is constituted in a kind of relationship characterized by primary affect, prior to any repression.⁸⁶

Consequently, although *das Ding* is situated within the locus of the primordial Real, as the beyond-of-the-signified, it is simultaneously circumscribed by the

⁸³ Jameson, “Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan”, 339.

⁸⁴ Lacan and Fink, *Écrits*, 690.

⁸⁵ Jacques Lacan and Jacques-Alain Miller, *The ethics of psychoanalysis*, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 56.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

Symbolic as an unsymbolizable void. The Symbolic order can thus be interpreted as an attempt to “tame” *das Ding* by lending it signification: this is what Lacan refers to as the binary signifier of the signifying chain, the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen*: it is that which serves to mark something that escapes representation. In other words, *das Ding* animates the Symbolic order to the extent that it provides a kind of “primordial directionality,” as Richard Boothby refers to it, toward the signified. As the wellspring of Desire, it provides the Symbolic—the realm of the signifier and signified—with its fundamental, pre-symbolic and pre-linguistic, condition of possibility.

Hence, just as Kant, by way of his critique of pure reason, came to extract symbolic-form through transcendental reflection (and, for that matter, *mutatis mutandis* for Marx and the concept of value-form),⁸⁷ Lacan—following Freud’s discovery of the unconscious *Wunsch*—came to extract the form of desire as the basis upon which psychoanalytic technique is premised.⁸⁸ But what is crucial about Lacan’s insight is that the transcendental standpoint inevitably accompanies a certain kind of subjectivity, one that goes beyond the illusion of a substantial, Imaginary ego (the Cartesian *res cogitans*). However, in order to grasp why this is the case, one must proceed by way of a detour back through linguistics.

Ethical Subjectivity and Transcendental Space

As put forward earlier, for Saussure a word is the product of the “synthesis” between the signifier and the signified. But this presupposes a subject who is capable of such a synthesis—in Lacanian terms, this stands for the opposition between the subject of the statement (or Kantian analytic judgment) and the subject of the enunciation (synthetic judgment). In this way, both Saussurean linguistics and structuralism take as their premise what Kant called “transcendental apperception X,” the spontaneous “I think” that necessarily accompany all of our representations through the “synthesis” of the structure.⁸⁹ Like the Cartesian *cogito*, it is a nothingness that constitutes the very structure of the system. Thus, when Roman Jakobson expanded upon Saussure’s structural linguistics through his elaboration of phoneme theory, he was forced to introduce the “zero phoneme,” derived from the mathematical unit *e*, as a

⁸⁷ Karatani, 195. One interesting point of comparison between Marx and Lacan here is the isomorphism between transference and the process of exchange: in the latter, the confrontation between buyer and seller generates value; in the former, the Other’s desire is established in the confrontation between analyst and analysand.

⁸⁸ In addition to Desire’s limitation, its impossibility as marked by an insurmountable, noumenal X

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

restatement of transcendental subjectivity, in order to complete his phonemic system.⁹⁰

Along with Jakobson, it was above all Edmund Husserl who elaborated the structural necessity of transcendental subjectivity. In a manner uncannily similar to Lacan's own theoretical trajectory, Husserl began with a clear distinction between two differentiated egos: on the one hand, the (Imaginary) ego of empirical self-reflection; on the other hand, the phenomenological (Symbolic) "I" of the subject's discourse, which "transcendentally reduces" the empirical ego through the unveiling of the symbolic structure (the unconscious).⁹¹ But crucial for both Husserl and Lacan is the (third) subject that emerges as a result of the transcendental reduction—the Lacanian barred subject $\$$ —the subject of enunciation *qua* synthetic judgment. As Bruce Fink remarks in the *The Lacanian subject*:

The subject is split between ego and unconscious, between conscious and unconscious... [But] *the subject is nothing but this very split*... [The barred subject] consists entirely in the fact that a speaking being's two "parts" or avatars share no common ground: they are radically separated.⁹²

Yet Lacan did not begin from the premise of a "split" or "barred" subject. As Lorenzo Chiesa observantly notes, there is a noticeable shift in Lacan's thought between his *écrits*, "The Freudian Thing, or the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis" [1955], and Seminar VII [1959-1960].⁹³ While Lacan had previously identified the subject as fully reducible to the signifier in a manner similar to his structuralist contemporaries who believed that they had overcome the problem of subjectivity, by the time of Seminar VII Lacan reformulated his theory of the subject. Lacan longer identifying the split between the ego and the unconscious as a marker of the structure's dominance. The Lacanian barred subject $\$$ is nothing but this very split: it is the purely formal (empty) signifier

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

⁹¹ See Matheson Russell, *Husserl: a guide for the perplexed* (London: Continuum Books, 2006), 57-79.

⁹² Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian subject: between language and jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 45. It is worth noting a peculiar fact that both Freud and Husserl use the term "Splitting of the Ego" (Ich-Spaltung). But only in Lacanian theory does the connection between their two uses become clear. See Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian meditations: an introduction to phenomenology* (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 35; and Sigmund Freud, "Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defense," in *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XXIII, eds. Sigmund Freud, James Strachey, Anna Freud, Carrie Lee Rothgeb, (Longdon: Hogarth Press, 1953-74).

⁹³ Lorenzo Chiesa, *Subjectivity and otherness: A philosophical reading of Lacan*, Short circuits (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 5.

that “bundles” together the functions of the transcendental structure (Lacan’s R.S.I. schema).

A similar “split” can also be discerned at the level of analytic technique. Psychoanalysis is premised on the analyst/analysand relationship. But this relationship is not a hierarchical one: although the analyst occupies the “teaching” position, it is subordinated to the analysand’s demand for understanding.⁹⁴ Accordingly, there is no “harmonious” relationship, no *rapport*, between the two: in transference, rather, there is a certain “drive” towards misrecognition. The analyst/analysand relationship—like all communication—is therefore constitutively asymmetrical. The problematic “synthesis” between the radically split “sensibility” and “understanding” in analytic technique (between analysand/analyst) thus entails what Kant called “*a priori* synthetic judgment.” For Lacan, analysis ends when the analysand carries out an Act—a *salto mortale*—that traverses the fantasy, an operation by which the function of fantasy is revealed as a means of screening the inconsistency or lack in the Other.⁹⁵ But the problem of “action” is for Lacan above all an ethical question—one that he never stopped thinking about.

In Seminar XI [1964], Lacan enigmatically remarks that “[t]he status of the unconscious . . . is ethical.”⁹⁶ What did he mean by this? To fully grasp the import of Lacan’s theory of ethics, one should return to his earliest work dealing with the specific question of the ethics of psychoanalysis: the 1955 *écrits* “The Freudian Thing.” It is here that Lacan interprets Freud’s enigmatic statement, “*Wo es war, soll ich werden*,” as above all an ethical injunction: not “the ego should conquer the id,” as the ego psychologists had translated it, but “where it was itself, it is my *duty* that I come into being.”⁹⁷ His use of the word “duty” in this context has a strong Kantian overtone: the unconscious functions as an imperative which supplies the subject with a universal “*extimate*” (at once intimate and external) maxim that announces itself both from *within* the subject, while at once *external* to the ego.

Four years after the publication of “The Freudian Thing,” Lacan dedicated his seventh seminar to answering the question of what kind of ethics best suits psychoanalysis. In Seminar VII, he argues that the ethics of psychoanalysis lies

⁹⁴ Karatani, 72.

⁹⁵ See Slavoj Žižek, *The sublime object of ideology* (London: Verso, 1989).

⁹⁶ Jacques Lacan and Jacques-Alain Miller, *The seminar of Jacques Lacan*, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 33.

⁹⁷ Lacan and Fink, *Écrits*, 347-348.

neither in the “service of goods” (eudemonism/utilitarianism) nor in the “Sovereign Good” (metaphysics). This figures directly into his critique of Anna Freud and Klein. Whereas Anna Freud espouses a utilitarian ethics of “reality adaptation,” Klein’s technique aims at elevating the mother’s body to the sublime status of the impossible “Thing,” the most primordial and metaphysical of introjected love-objects. For Klein this provides the subject with its archaic moral orientation, the register of good/bad, its primary locus of unconscious identification.⁹⁸ Lacanian technique, on the other hand, forces the analysand to approach the site of an unbearable truth that lies “beyond the pleasure principle” by confronting the analysand with the elementary deadlock of their Desire. “Insofar as Freud’s position constitutes progress here,” argues Lacan, “the question of ethics is to be articulated from the point of view of the location of man in relation to the Real.”⁹⁹ Thus Lacan’s ethics of psychoanalysis necessarily entails an encounter with a radical alterity in the form of the Lacanian Real (Kant’s “thing-in-itself”), and hence the problem of universality. In ethical terms, for both Kant and Lacan there resides a certain “non-ethical” kernel within ethics itself, which, as Alenka Zupančič notes, appears to the subject as a rupture or discontinuity—one that is paradoxically experienced as impossible:

According to Lacan, the Real is impossible, and the fact that “it happens (to us) does not refute its basic “impossibility”: the Real happens to us (we encounter it) *as impossible*, as “the impossible thing” that turns our symbolic universe upside down and leads to the reconfiguration of this universe. Hence the impossibility of the Real does not prevent it from having effects in the realm of the possible. This is when ethics comes into play, in the question forced upon us by an encounter with the Real: will I act in conformity to what threw me “out of joint,” or will I be ready to reformulate what has hitherto been the foundation of my existence?¹⁰⁰

According to Zupančič, ethics only comes into play when the encounter with the Real forces upon us the question: “Have you acted in conformity with the desire which inhabits you?,” in affinity with Kant’s proposition, “act as if the maxim of

⁹⁸ This reverses Julia Kristeva’s claim that the Lacanian signifier, read by her as the Platonic *eidos*, belongs to the field of metaphysics. Rather, for Lacan the very structure of the act is foreign to the good/bad register, which characterizes Kleinian phantasy. See Julia Kristeva, *Melanie Klein, European Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 140.

⁹⁹ Lacan and Miller, *The ethics of psychoanalysis*, 11.

¹⁰⁰ Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the real: Kant, Lacan* (London: Verso, 2000), 235.

your action were to become by your will a universal law of nature,”¹⁰¹ for it is desire which aims at the impossible, the Real.

Both Freud and Lacan have been traditionally misunderstood as having proposed a set of positive doctrines, methodologies, and clinical practices situated within a coherent school of thought.¹⁰² This view by necessity overlooks the fact that their work exists, rather, as a *critique* of previously existing thought. As critiques, both are marked, if only nascently, by what Louis Althusser called “epistemological break”: a shift to a fundamentally different theoretical framework and central set of questions posed. Thus the various attempts at “synthesizing” the totality of their work into coherent systems have only resulted in dogmatism—and thus the loss of the critical space proper in which they themselves were situated.

During the era of the so-called “Controversial Discussions,” both Klein and Anna Freud claimed legitimacy to Freud’s work, yet by placing contrasting emphasis on conflicting aspects of Freudian theory were radically opposed and ultimately irreconcilable. It was amidst this crisis that Lacanian psychoanalysis, as a critique of these two dominant trends, came into existence. At the formal level, the same is true of Kantian philosophy: the *transcendental* position only emerged out of what Kant referred to as the “pronounced parallax” between Leibnizian/Wolffian rationalism and the skepticism of Locke and Hume. In his strange essay “Dreams of a Visionary Explained by Dreams of Metaphysics,” written more than a decade before the *Critique of pure reason*, Kant confessed:

Formerly I viewed human common sense only from the standpoint of my own; now I put myself into the position of another’s reason outside myself, and observe my judgments, together with their most secret causes, from the point of view of others. It is true that the comparison of both observations results in pronounced parallax, but it is the only means of preventing the optical delusion, and of putting the concept of the power of knowledge in human nature into its true place.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Immanuel Kant and Mary J. Gregor, *Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals*, Cambridge texts in the history of philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 31.

¹⁰² In Freud’s case, the disparate paths travelled by his followers were united by their mutual aim of constructing an edifice known as “Freudianism” out of his work: for example, a theory of self (ego psychology), a theory of objects (object relations), a theory of collectivity (mass psychology), and even a theory of aesthetics (applied psychoanalysis).

¹⁰³ Immanuel Kant and Carl J. Friedrich, *The philosophy of Kant: Immanuel Kant’s moral and political writings* (New York: Modern Library, 1994), 15.

As Karatani argues, Kant is not simply reiterating the commonplace regarding seeing oneself from another's perspective: rather, the "parallax gap" that Kant refers to undermines the internal consistency both of one's own subjective position *as well as another's*. It thus involves an encounter with the radical alterity of the thing-in-itself. This can be grasped by way of Kant's first critique: out of the parallax between empiricism and rationalism, Kant realized that he was not dealing merely with two opposed schools of thought, but rather with two fundamental faculties of human reason itself.¹⁰⁴ Thus with Kant "parallax" came to take the form of antinomy, the inscription of the "alterity of the other" by means of which the *limits* of human reason come to be established *through reason's self-scrutiny*.

A similar transcendental stance lies at the core of Freud and Lacan's heterogeneous work. Just as Freudian psychoanalysis is as different from empirical psychology as it is from Jung's "collective unconscious," Lacanian psychoanalysis is just as much a critique of Anna Freud's ego psychology as it is of Kleinian psychoanalysis. Against the former, Lacan rejected the internal consistency of the analysand's ego and the limitation of the unconscious to the resistances and defenses, while simultaneously he affirmed the centrality of the ego's constitutive function of misrecognition as the basis for speech and language against the latter. Thus by means of his transcendental critique of Anna Freud and Klein through his appropriation of structuralism, Lacan rediscovered the radical core of Freudian psychoanalysis: not the notion that the unconscious determines much of human behavior, but rather the attempt to grasp the gap between the unconscious and consciousness through the form of language.¹⁰⁵ In doing so, Lacan came to extract the form of desire as the transcendental basis upon which psychoanalysis is founded.

At the same time, Lacan's transcritical position, like that of Kant's, necessarily led him towards the question of ethics. This is because the domain of ethics is intimately bound up with the universality of analytic technique, the subject of his critique in Seminars I and II. Yet Lacan's structuralist turn, brought about by his transposition in the form of an institutional crisis within the Société Psychanalytique de Paris, led him to conclude—like a number of other prominent structuralists—that the problematic of subjectivity had been fully resolved through the complete elaboration of the structure as wholly determinative over the subject. It was not until a decade later that Lacan, after

¹⁰⁴ Karatani, 47.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

being “excommunicated” from the Société Française de Psychanalyse, began a thoroughgoing return to the subject of the unconscious.

IV. Transcritical Encounters in the Human Sciences

Lacan’s Purloined Letter

In 1955, around the same time that he began his structuralist turn, Lacan gave a brief presentation on Edgar Allen Poe’s famous short story “The Purloined Letter,” the third of three detective stories featuring the fictional C. Auguste Dupin, an amateur Parisian detective and something of a Sherlock Holmes *avant la lettre*. In Poe’s story, Dupin is contracted by the Prefect of the Police to track down a stolen letter, which is being used for political blackmail. The police launch a series of investigations using logical methods based on both past experience and established systems of thought. But in the end they are unsuccessful because, as Dupin discovers by means of self-reflection (“It is merely,” says the unnamed narrator to Dupin, “an identification of the reasoner’s intellect with that of his opponent”¹⁰⁶), the culprit was an especially clever man who, taking into account the elaborate techniques used by the police, knew to hide the letter in plain sight.

Lacan’s exegesis of Poe’s text can be read as an application of his early structuralist theory of the unconscious, principally expounded in his écrits “On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis” [1957]. Accordingly, and as will be shown momentarily, Lacan came to interpret the purloined letter as a “pure signifier,” a signifier without a signified, that symbolically overdetermines the various subjects of the story, who are situated within the signifying chain (those who receive and are intended to receive the letter). But more importantly, “The Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’” was one of Lacan’s first forays into the field of literary criticism, using fiction as a means of demonstrating his thesis that “the unconscious is structured like a language.”

Yet Lacan’s interpretation of “The Purloined Letter” was not without its critics, perhaps the most famous of whom was Jacques Derrida. In “The Purveyor of Truth” [1975] Derrida argued that Lacan had systematically misread Poe’s text and simultaneously accused him of phallogocentrism. According to Derrida,

¹⁰⁶ Edgar Allen Poe, “The Purloined Letter,” in *The purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida and psychoanalytic reading*, eds. John P. Muller and William J. Richardson (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 15.

Lacan elevates the “lack” (*manque*) of the purloined letter’s signification into its very meaning—into the letter’s truth. Lacan thereby privileges the presence of the phallus as that which anchors this lack vis-à-vis the truth of castration, over the play of signifiers. Derrida sees this above all in Lacan’s aphoristic and ostensibly teleological conclusion to his seminar: that “a letter always arrives at its destination.”¹⁰⁷ For Derrida, on the other hand, a letter can also *not* arrive at its destination. As he explains:

Its “materiality” and “topology” are due to its divisibility, its always possible partition. It can always be fragmented without return, and the system of the symbolic, of castration, of the signifier, of the truth, of the contrast, etc., always attempt to protect the letter from this fragmentation... Not that the letter never arrives at its destination, but that it belongs to the structure of the letter to be capable, always, of not arriving.¹⁰⁸

To paraphrase Barbara Johnson’s analysis, Derrida seems to pose himself against Lacan as the unsystemizable to the systemized, the accidental to the determined, and the “undecidable” to the “destination.”¹⁰⁹ In other words, the opposition posed by Derrida between himself and Lacan functions as a restatement of Kant’s third antinomy: either the subject is free from universal causality (Derrida), or universal causality wholly determines the subject (Lacan).

But, as Johnson is quick to point out, these oppositions are themselves misreadings of the very dynamic of what is at stake in the analysis. Along these lines, the more pertinent question to ask is: why might a letter, according to Lacan, always arrive at its destination? Johnson explains that the logic is essentially one of Imaginary misrecognition, as later articulated by Louis Althusser: the logic by means of which one misrecognizes oneself as the addressee of ideological interpellation. Johnson writes that the, “letter is precisely that which subverts the polarity ‘subjective/objective,’ that which makes subjectivity into something whose position in a structure is situated by an object’s passage through it.”¹¹⁰ For Johnson, “The letter’s destination is thus

¹⁰⁷ Lacan and Fink, *Écrits*, 30.

¹⁰⁸ Jacques Derrida, “The Purveyor of Truth,” in *The purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida and psychoanalytic reading*, eds. John P. Muller and William J. Richardson (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 187. My emphasis.

¹⁰⁹ Barbara Johnson, “The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida,” in *The purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida and psychoanalytic reading*, eds. John P. Muller and William J. Richardson (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 249.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 248.

wherever it is read: the place it assigns to its reader as his own partiality.”¹¹¹ The logic of the “purloined letter” thus involves not a naïve teleology, but rather a short-circuit between *ex post facto* (determinative judgment) and *ex ante facto* (reflective judgment).¹¹² If one views the process backwards from its *contingent* result, the fact that such a result took place must appear to the viewer as structurally *necessary*, as something which conceals behind it some fateful meaning.¹¹³ This logic of interpellation is depicted in Lacan’s quaternary topology of the unconscious found in the so-called “L schema,” as elaborated in “On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis”:

I am, of course, aware of the importance of imaginary impregnations (*Prägung*) in the partializations of the symbolic alternative that give the signifying chain its appearance. Nevertheless, I posit that it is the law specific to this chain which governs the psychoanalytic effects that are determinant for the subject.¹¹⁴

In other words, insofar as the subject is always already caught up in the process of misrecognition, the signifying order operates as a closed synchronic structure with the purloined letter (the signifier) functioning as a blind “automatism” to which the subject is subjected. The diachronic order of signification is thus governed by the signifying automatism, which is concealed by the Imaginary ego-to-ego relationship.¹¹⁵ Yet the notion of the subject depicted in the “L schema” is wholly unthinkable insofar as it is radically de-subjectivized in the field of the Other: the subject becomes totally subjected to the structure, alienated without a remainder. The Symbolic order is thereby reduced to a “structure without a subject.” Thus a letter always arrives at its destination, but at the cost of the radical de-subjectivization of the subject.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Karatani writes that, “In *Critique of Judgment* Kant distinguishes ‘determinative judgments,’ which categorize concrete individual facts by established laws, from ‘reflective judgments,’ which pursue a new universality that subsumes the exceptional facts that are not yet categorized by established laws... Here it is possible to see the distinction between reflective and determinative as analogous to that between *ex ante facto* and *ex post facto*” (187-188).

¹¹³ Žižek, *The sublime object of ideology*, 2-3.

¹¹⁴ Lacan and Fink, *Écrits*, 6.

¹¹⁵ Slavoj Žižek, Rex Butler, and Scott Stephens, *Interrogating the real: Selected writings* (London: Continuum Books, 2005), 30.

Excommunication

When Lacan and a number of his contemporaries, including Françoise Dolto, Serge Leclaire, and Daniel Lagache, decided in 1953 to abandon the SPP, which since 1926 had been the sole psychoanalytic institution in France, they wrongly assumed that they would continue to remain members of the IPA. Instead, the SFP and its members were now no longer affiliated with the international association, a fact that had embarrassed the group's leadership from its inception. And because they had never contemplated a break with the IPA—the center of Freudian legitimacy—they immediately entered into negotiations designed to bring them back in. For this to occur the leadership needed to prove to an IPA commission of inquiry that all of the training analysts (analysts who are allowed to train other analysts) in the SFP obeyed the standard rules involving session length.¹¹⁶

During this period it became increasingly evident that Lacan did not obey the technical rules that had been put in place by the IPA since the 1920s and '30s. These rules stipulated that a typical analysis was supposed to last for at least four years and consist of four to five sessions a week, each session lasting at least fifty minutes.¹¹⁷ The rule governing session length was established in order to limit an analyst's potentially unlimited power: in that regard, it had helped to maintain the internal unity of the IPA during the era of the Controversial Discussions, in which Klein and Anna Freud, as well as their respective followers, vied for control over the association through the training of analysts. Thus, in a January 1954 report to the leaders of the SFP, the IPA's commission of inquiry concluded:

We were unanimously against the Lagache group forming an affiliated Society of the IPA for the following reasons: a) in practical terms the Lagache group cannot give appropriate training to the large number of students they have registered, since Dr. Lagache and Dr. Lacan are the only training analysts; b) more importantly, the training methods of the Lagache group have deviated too far from the procedures of the component Societies and appear unacceptable.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, 203.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹¹⁸ Alain de Mijolla, "Splits in the French Psychoanalytic Movement, Between 1953 and 1964," in *Within time and beyond time: A festschrift for Pearl King*, eds. Riccardo Steiner and Jennifer Johns (London: Karnac, 2001), 12.

The commission of inquiry's decision not to admit the SFP into the IPA centered largely on the issue of "deviated" training methods. This referred mostly to Lacan (and also Françoise Dolto) and his controversial use of "variable-length sessions"—often derogatively referred to as "short sessions" by his critics, although as Adrian Johnston points out this name is misleading since Lacan would either shorten or lengthen sessions, depending on the patient.¹¹⁹

Since the early 1950s, Lacan had defended his use of variable-length sessions to the members of the SPP on a number of separate occasions,¹²⁰ but given the precarious situation now faced by the SFP and its members he could no longer justify his use of them as the practice stood firmly in the way of the SFP's incorporation into the IPA. Thus, Lacan never published the lectures delivered to the SPP on the controversial subject, but he nevertheless went on conducting variable-length sessions secretly within the SFP, while at the same time publicly declaring that he had brought his practice into conformity with the IPA's rule governing session length. In other words, he lied.¹²¹

Lacan justified his variance of session length as a means of combating neurosis. "Neurotics, especially obsessionals, take advantage of fixed-length sessions; they pre-script monologues so as to 'kill time' and avoid the work of free association," writes Johnston. In this way, the rhythm of the sessions can be pressed into the service of resistances. By truncating the sessions at his discretion (Lacan speaks of this as "punctuating" the sessions) Lacan not only thwarts the recitation of nonassociative "filler material", but creates a sense of urgency for the analysand.¹²²

The variable-length session thus interferes with the analysand's attempts to maintain control over their discourse by allowing the analyst, rather than the clock, to determine when the session ought to be brought to an end. So, although his motives for this practice were tinged by suspicion—by shortening session length during training analysis, Lacan was able to produce more practicing analysts than any other training analyst in his school, thus securing a greater amount of financial wealth and institutional influence for himself¹²³—

¹¹⁹ Adrian Johnston, *Time driven: Metapsychology and the splitting of the drive* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 23.

¹²⁰ Roudinesco cites the dates December 1951, June 1952, and February 1953 as those on which Lacan delivered lectures relating to variable-length sessions to the members of the SPP. See Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, 203.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹²² Johnston, *Time driven*, 23-24.

¹²³ Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, 203.

Lacan nevertheless always grounded their use in his theories of analytic technique and, in doing so, decisively demonstrated the importance of temporality in the psychoanalytic clinic.¹²⁴ Accordingly, in “Function and the Field of Speech” [September 1953], Lacan drew out the practical conclusions of his essay “Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty” [1945], arguing that “[s]etting in advance a time limit to an analysis, the first form of active intervention, inaugurated (*pro pudor!*) by Freud himself. . . will invariably leave the subject alienated from his truth.”¹²⁵

At the Copenhagen congress in July 1959, the Central Executive of the IPA ordered that another committee be setup to examine the French candidates. On May 15, 1961, a board of inquiry was dispatched to Paris to begin the investigation of the members of the SFP.¹²⁶ Pierre Turquet, a personal friend of Lacan’s, was appointed by the IPA to conduct the interviews, which included many of Lacan’s former students and analysands. Turquet was encouraged by Serge Leclaire, the President of the SFP, to believe that Lacan would compromise with the Executive Committee by agreeing to limit the number of analysands he had taken on in order to facilitate the incorporation of the SFP and its members—including Lacan himself—into the IPA. But during the two long interviews that Turquet conducted—one in May through June of 1961 and the other in January 1963—he soon realized that Lacan had not abandoned his former practices.¹²⁷

As a result of Turquet’s first report, the Central Executive drew up a list of recommendations consisting of twenty points, which were promulgated at the Edinburgh congress on August 2, 1961. Of the twenty points, Article 13a stipulated that Lacan should not take on any more training analyses or controls.¹²⁸ The other outcome of the Edinburgh congress was that the SFP withdrew its direct request for affiliation with the IPA and accepted the status of a Study Group.¹²⁹ The second report, however, led the Executive Committee to declare at the Stockholm congress in August 1963 that the one non-negotiable

¹²⁴ The peculiar antinomy encountered by psychoanalysis in the realm of temporality has been between “the unconscious is eternal,” as formulated in *Beyond the pleasure principle* and elsewhere, and “the unconscious is temporal,” as formulated in Freud’s theory of phantasy, particularly in the logic of *Nachträglichkeit*. See Johnston, *Time driven*, for an extensive and insightful analysis of this topic. See Sigmund Freud, John Reddick, and Mark Edmundson, *Beyond the pleasure principle and other writings* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

¹²⁵ Lacan and Fink, *Écrits*, 256.

¹²⁶ Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, 246.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 248.

¹²⁸ Mijolla, “Splits in the French Psychoanalytic Movement”, 15.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

requirement for the SFP's membership was its voluntary acceptance of a ban on Lacan's training activities.¹³⁰ The IPA further stipulated that if Leclaire did not follow the measures set out by the so-called Stockholm "Directive," then the IPA's continued sponsorship of the SFP would be jeopardized. Thus the Central Executive forced the SFP's leadership to choose between either Lacan or the group's incorporation into the IPA without him.¹³¹

On October 13, 1963 Lacan was officially removed from the SFP's list of training analysts. The motion, proposed by the Executive Committee, stipulated that "[f]rom this day, Dr. Jacques Lacan will no longer appear on the list of analysts entitled to perform training analyses or supervision."¹³² The motion was signed by SFP members Juliette Favez-Boutonier, Daniel Lagache, Wladimir Granoff and Georges Favez, most of whom soon went on to found the Association Psychanalytique de France (APF), along with a number of Lacan's former pupils (including Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis). In June 1964, the APF, as well as the old SFP, were quickly incorporated into the IPA. Following the motion, the Board of the SFP—the majority of whom were in favor of retaining Lacan as a training analyst—decided on November 11, 1963 not to appeal this decision. As a result, on November 19th a new board was put in place and the members of the old board—including President Serge Leclaire and Vice-President Françoise Dolto—resigned immediately, solidifying around Lacan in opposition to the new leadership. By January 1965, the Study Group SFP was officially dissolved.¹³³

Several months later, on January 15, 1964, Lacan delivered his first lecture since the split with the SFP—now at the prestigious École Normale Supérieure, rather than the Hôpital Sainte-Anne, the site of his past seminars.¹³⁴ In it, he described the ban on his teaching as an "excommunication,"¹³⁵ likening himself to Spinoza who, perhaps more than any philosopher, stands out as a singular *cogito* who refused to belong to any substantial community—"an existence externalized"—living in the interstice between communities after having been excommunicated not only from the Christian church, but also from the Judaic synagogue.¹³⁶ But more importantly, this lecture inaugurated the beginning of Seminar XI in which Lacan—in a manner homologous to his "return to Freud"—embarked on

¹³⁰ Johnston, *Time driven*, 23.

¹³¹ "The International Psycho-Analytical Association Minute. The Study Group SFP," *October* 40 (1987): 79-80.

¹³² Mijolla, "Splits in the French Psychoanalytic Movement", 16.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Lacan and Miller, *The seminar of Jacques Lacan*, Book XI, 2.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹³⁶ Karatani, 96.

something of a “return to Descartes”—that is, a return to the Cartesian *cogito*, the subject of doubt:

I dare to state as a truth that the Freudian field was possible only a certain time after the emergence of the Cartesian subject. In order to understand the Freudian concepts, one must set out on the basis that is the subject who is called—the subject of Cartesian origin.¹³⁷

And further along in Seminar XI, he remarks:

I will now dare to define the Cartesian *I think* as participating in its striving towards certainty, in a sort of abortion. The difference of status given to the subject by the discovered dimension of the Freudian unconscious derives from desire, which must be situated at the level of the *cogito*. Whatever animates, that which any enunciation speaks of, belongs to desire.¹³⁸

Lacan contends therefore that psychoanalysis is a science of specifically Cartesian origin, and that the subject of the unconscious might in some way be identified with the Cartesian subject, the *cogito*, or at the very least that the Cartesian *cogito* functions as the condition of possibility for the subject of the unconscious, insofar as both are derived from unconscious desire (the “subject of enunciation”).

While Lacan’s reading of Descartes remains somewhat idiosyncratic, his claims regarding the *cogito* and its relationship to the unconscious suggest that, far from being the subject of self-transparent consciousness and substantiality, the *cogito* ought to be read, rather, as another way of expressing transcendental subjectivity: *qua* subject, it is the nothingness or void which is operative between systems of thought, as Kant had claimed in the *Critique of pure reason* when he identified the transcendental subject with the thing-in-itself. The *cogito*, in Lacan’s eleventh seminar, can also paradoxically be identified as a constitutive excess or “object-remainder,” what he refers to as *l’objet petit a*—the object-cause of desire and the object of the drive.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, for Lacan the *cogito*

¹³⁷ Lacan and Miller, *The seminar of Jacques Lacan*, Book XI, 47.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹³⁹ The Lacanian *l’objet petit a* may itself be read as parallel to Kant’s conception of the “transcendental object = X,” as argued by Slavoj Žižek in *Tarrying with the negative: Kant, Hegel, and the critique of ideology*, Post-contemporary interventions (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

remains at once wholly irreducible to, and at the same time a product of, the structure of the Symbolic order.

Thus like Spinoza, Lacan found himself exiled from both the orthodox French psychoanalytic establishment and from the very organization that had originally rebelled against it. In that sense, Lacan's lectures on the Cartesian subject can be read as something of a meta-commentary, for not only do they function as a theoretical exegesis of Freud, but also as a reflexive self-reference to his own transposition, to his oscillation between institutions brought about by crisis in analytic technique. Lacan's commentary on the Cartesian *cogito* can therefore be seen neither as external to his theories, nor to his practice. Hence on June 21, 1964—three days before the last lecture of Seminar XI—Lacan announced the founding of his own school of psychoanalysis: the École Freudienne de Paris.¹⁴⁰

The Structuralist Controversy

During the week of October 18–21, 1966, one of the most important developments in post-war intellectual thought took place at the international symposium entitled “The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man,” convened in Baltimore under the auspices of the Johns Hopkins Humanities Center—newly instituted that year. The symposium brought together over one-hundred social theorists from across the Atlantic, including Roland Barthes, Jean Hyppolite, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan, and inaugurated a two-year program of seminars and colloquia “which sought to explore the impact of contemporary ‘structuralist’ thought on critical methods in humanistic and social studies.”¹⁴¹ More importantly, however, was that the symposium marked the first major eruption of an “anti-structuralist” tendency within the humanities—what became known as the “structuralist controversy.” Reflecting back on the event in 1971, Richard Macksey, who oversaw much of the symposium and was himself a speaker there, wrote:

Although the intellectual inheritance was clear, with its preoccupation with articulated sign-systems and the repudiation of the hermeneutic enterprises of the last century, evidence was already available in the Johns Hopkins symposium of the ensuing moment of theoretical deconstruction. The spaces had begun to

¹⁴⁰ Jacques Lacan and Jeffrey Mehlman, “Founding Act,” *October* 40 (1987): 96-105. Worth noting is that the original name of the school was the École Française de Psychanalyse, but it was renamed the École Freudienne de Paris three months later.

¹⁴¹ Richard Macksey, “Preface,” in *The structuralist controversy: the languages of criticism and the sciences of man*, eds. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), xv.

open, not only between neighboring camps but in the conceptual matrix of “structures” itself.¹⁴²

Hence, following Macksey’s reflections, the Humanities Center symposium might very well be regarded as the origins of post-structuralism and of deconstruction.

Historically, the exegesis of Lacanian theory has never been able to clearly identify Lacan as either a structuralist or a post-structuralist. In fact, Lacan has always been looked upon with suspicion by both camps. To poststructuralists, he is viewed as still retaining at least a modicum of “phallogocentrism” and a theoretical attachment to centrality and presence, citing in particular his references to castration, the phallus, and the *point de capiton*. To structuralists, Lacan—especially the latter Lacan of the gaze, theories of *jouissance*, and Joycean language-games—is seen as having abandoned the scientific foundation that structuralism was premised on in favor of indecipherable gnomic propositions. To most others (and certainly there is a grain of truth to this commonplace), Lacan has been viewed as being somewhere in between, and influenced by, both movements.

In a strangely similar way, the same has historically been said of Kant as well, being viewed as a philosopher “in between” two antithetical orientations (empiricism and rationalism) or, in less precise readings, simply an apologist for metaphysics (in the same way that Lacan has been described as an apologist for Freudian psychoanalysis, seen by its critics as no less metaphysical). However, in stark contrast to the logic of “in between” stands that of what Kant called “parallax”: the critique of introspection by means of which one inscribes within self-scrutiny other’s viewpoints, thus revealing the antinomy of their opposition as an illusion, as well as the radical alterity upon which transcendental reflection is premised.¹⁴³ While the logic of “in between” represents a kind of imprecise Aristotelian golden mean, parallax goes beyond both standpoints that it critiques. This is precisely the transcendental standpoint adopted by Lacan after 1963: the standpoint of “pronounced parallax” vis-à-vis structuralism and post-structuralism.

¹⁴² Richard Macksey, “The Space Between—1971,” in *The structuralist controversy: the languages of criticism and the sciences of man*, eds. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), ix.

¹⁴³ Karatani, 44-53.

That structuralism was originally premised on transcendental subjectivity in the form of Jakobson's zero phoneme did not prevent later generations of structuralist thinkers from abandoning the transcendental standpoint, believing that their elaboration of the structure (linguistic or otherwise) had successfully eliminated from modern thought the category of the subject, which consequently came to be conceived as the substantial *ego cogito* of Western metaphysics.¹⁴⁴ Karatani argues that structuralism became an attractive intellectual orientation for those seeking to escape subjectivity and responsibility, while leading other structuralists, such as Althusser, to return to Spinoza's substance monism, thus resulting in structural determinism.¹⁴⁵ The same may also be said of Lacan who, at least prior to 1963, held a similar view to Althusser's apropos the relationship between the totalizing structure and the alienated subject, as seen in his application of the "L schema" to his reading of Poe's "The Purloined Letter," in which the subject becomes totally de-subjectivized without remainder within the linguistic field of the Symbolic order.

Poststructuralism, it may be said, emerged then as a critique of the determinism and closed synchrony of structuralism, the result of structuralist thinkers' abandonment of its latent transcendental premise. This is Jacques Derrida's stance in "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," first delivered at the Humanities Center conference in 1966. By questioning the notion of the structure's center, Derrida effectively destabilizes and deconstructs the apparent fixity of the formal elements within the structure. For Derrida, the, "center...closes off the freeplay it opens up and makes possible. *Qua* center, it is the point at which the substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible":

At the center, the permutation or the transformation of elements...is forbidden...Thus it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which governs the structure, while escaping structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside* it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since

¹⁴⁴ As Fredric Jameson notes, Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology was itself famously referred to as "Kantianism without a transcendental subject." See *Valences of the dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009), 83.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 319 (fn. 60); 120-121. Worth noting is the isomorphism between Spinoza's and Althusser's "ethics of alienation": for Althusser, there is no consciousness outside of ideology, just as for Spinoza there is no substance beyond the immanent One. To that extent, both reside purely within the alienated topos of the cogito, but never oscillate outside of it: hence their thought remains monist. Instead one must learn to "bracket" and "unbracket": without this Will-to-Bracket, according to Karatani, there would be no transcendental subjectivity as such (the "bracketing" subject).

the center does not belong to the totality...the totality *has its center elsewhere*. The center is not the center.¹⁴⁶

In other words, for a structure to properly constitute itself as a stable, coherent, and closed system of differential elements, it must be a *centered* structure. But for Derrida this is a contradiction because the center, as the organizing principle of the structure, escapes structurality. The center is simultaneously inside and outside, within and without. The presence of center becomes a fixed reference point that is paradoxically omitted from reference, and which simultaneously anchors and limits the spontaneous freeplay of the structure's differential elements. Thus the history of the concept of structure, with its "series of substitutions of center for center," is in truth an inheritance of Western metaphysics, the "determination of being as *presence*."¹⁴⁷

The ethics of deconstruction, or what Karatani refers to as "the will-to-deconstruct,"¹⁴⁸ is based on the systematic unveiling of the absence of center, the absence of origin, and the absence of subject in order to suspend the metaphysics of presence and language as a determining system.¹⁴⁹ This also reveals the limits of deconstruction. Freeplay, as the disruption of presence,¹⁵⁰ seems to inevitably entail a certain retreat back to skeptical relativism, an attack on universality, and the aesthetic affirmation of non-presence, in contrast to the Deleuzian affirmation of "expanding the concepts" as a "will-to-(re)construct." Citing Nietzsche, Derrida describes the deconstructionist attitude as "the joyous affirmation of the freeplay of the world and without truth, without origin, offered to an active interpretation... *This affirmation then determines the non-center otherwise than as a loss of the center.*"¹⁵¹

Contra Derrida, Lacan struggles to delineate in Seminar XI the contours of the logics of alienation and separation, conceived as two fundamental and

¹⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *The structuralist controversy: the languages of criticism and the sciences of man*, eds. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 248.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 249. Two examples that come to mind are the presence of the voice, in contrast to the written word and the presence of self. A notable example in political economy, cited by Karatani, is the presence of value qua quantity of labor, in contrast to money as the (always tainted) empirical medium of exchange in the circulation process. See Jacques Derrida and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Of grammatology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

¹⁴⁸ See Kōjin Karatani and Michael Speaks, *Architecture as Metaphor: language, number, money*, Writing Architecture (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995).

¹⁴⁹ Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play," in *The structuralist controversy: the languages of criticism and the sciences of man*, eds. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 258.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 263.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 264. Emphasis mine.

interconnected functions which govern the relationship between the structure and the subject of the signifier. According to Lacan, while *alienation* describes the “fading,” the *aphanisis*, of the subject, insofar as the subject disappears in the face of structural determinism, *separation* denotes the reverse process by which structural determination fails, thereby procuding a certain excess or remainder in the form of the barred subject \mathcal{S} :

By separation, the subject finds, one might say, the weak point of the primal dyad of the signifying articulation, in so far as it is alienating in essence. It is in the interval between these two signifiers that resides the desire offered to the mapping of the subject in the experience of the discourse of the Other.¹⁵²

In other words, alienation in the Other leads to separation from the Other the moment when the *lack* in (or perhaps non-presence of) the Other is fully recognized by the subject.¹⁵³ Thus, just as Saussure rejected the internal consistency of language against von Humboldt’s romantic linguistics and simultaneously affirmed its enclosed structure against historical linguistics, Lacan rejected the notion of a totalizing structure without remainder or separation against the structuralists (the *ex ante facto* stance), while also affirming its necessary alienating totality against the post-structuralists (the *ex post facto* stance), for whom the Humean legacy of skepticism eventually became the dominant yet largely unspoken reference point.

Thus Lacanian psychoanalysis, as a transcendental standpoint that only fully emerged out of the “pronounced parallax” between structuralism and post-structuralism, salvaged the disavowed core of structuralism: the Cartesian *cogito*. The *cogito*, as the void which nonetheless structures the system, may be described as an inversion of the Derridean thesis regarding freeplay: rather than being the absence of the subject, the transcendental subject is nothing but the subject as absence, as an empty signifier. And, given that one can now perhaps reflect upon these debates in a less polemical tone after the waning of the deconstruction’s heyday, Derrida’s work, seen in a new light, does not itself seem wholly opposed to or separate from the transcendental standpoint as

¹⁵² Lacan and Miller, *The seminar of Jacques Lacan*, Book XI, 218.

¹⁵³ See Jacques Lacan, “Of Structure as an Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever,” in *The structuralist controversy: the languages of criticism and the sciences of man*, eds. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007). He writes that the, “relation between the barred subject with this object (a) is the structure which is always found in the phantasm which supports desire” (194). In other words, Lacan restates the above point, which is that fantasy functions to screen the abyss or lack in the Other by means of “filling it out” with the objet a.

articulated above. Perhaps the strongest evidence of this can be seen in the Derridean “anti-concept” of *différance*, which, as neither a word nor a concept, challenges philosophy and its endless striving towards totality, systematicity, and ontological closure, positing instead its inherent impossibility. In the context of this section, such an anti-notion, I hope, no longer seems quite as far removed from the Lacanian barred subject, nor the minimal ontological difference, the constitutive ontological “out-of-jointness,” that they both are premised on.¹⁵⁴

Critique of Postmodernism

In his lecture delivered at the John Hopkins Humanities Center symposium, Lacan curiously remarked that, “The best image to sum up the unconscious is Baltimore in the early morning,”¹⁵⁵ which he prefaced with a brief description of his experience in the city earlier that week:

When I prepared this little talk for you, it was early in the morning. I could see Baltimore through the window and it was a very interesting moment because it was not quite daylight and a neon sign indicated to me every minute the change of time, and naturally there was heavy traffic, and I remarked to myself that exactly all that I could see, except for some trees in the distance, was the result of thoughts, actively thinking thoughts, where the function played by the subjects was not completely obvious. In any case the so-called *Dasein*, as a definition of the subject, was there in this rather intermittent or fading spectator.¹⁵⁶

Lacanian historian David Macey notes the influence of surrealism on Lacan when interpreting this peculiar passage, citing the resemblance between Lacan’s description of Baltimore and certain notable Surrealist paintings, as well as Lacan’s well-known mingling with the Surrealist movement early in his career.¹⁵⁷ But while it is undoubtedly true that the Surrealists profoundly influenced Lacan’s early work, it is my contention, contra Macey, that the true accent of this quote ought to be placed, as strange as it may seem, on the city of

¹⁵⁴ See Jacques Derrida, “Cogito and the History of Madness,” in *Writing and difference* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978). Here Derrida first introduced the term *différance* in his response to Foucault, arguing that the cogito, rather than being in external opposition to madness, involves a passage through madness in the form of universal doubt. Derrida thereby maintained its transcendental topos as a substanceless point of passage, as a vanishing mediator, to use Jameson’s term.

¹⁵⁵ Lacan, “Of Structure as an Inmixing”, 189.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ See Macey, “Baltimore in the Early Morning,” in *Lacan in contexts*.

Baltimore itself, or more precisely, on the fact that structures, as well as the Cartesian *cogito*, far from being mere abstractions, are also concrete. Along these lines, one should recall Lacan's infamous retort to Lucien Goldmann: "If the events of May [1968] demonstrated anything at all, they showed that it was precisely that structures had taken to the streets!"¹⁵⁸

Since the 1970s the world has undergone a profound shift in political, cultural, and economic practices, characterized as the shift from "modernism" to so-called "postmodernism." While modernism has often been understood as a rejection of the positivist strain of Enlightenment thought in favor of epistemological perspectivism as a means of revealing what it still took to be a unified notion of truth,¹⁵⁹ postmodernism has been described by literary critic Terry Eagleton as above all the collapse of the modernist "metanarrative":

Post-modernism signals the death of such "metanarratives" whose secretly terroristic function was to ground and legitimate the illusion of a "universal" human history. We are now in the process of waking from the nightmare of modernity, with its manipulative reason and fetish of the totality, into the laid-back pluralism and language games which has renounced the nostalgic urge to totalize and legitimate itself... Science and philosophy must jettison their grandiose metaphysical claims and view themselves more modestly as just another set of narratives.¹⁶⁰

The shift from modernism to postmodernism thus entails a shift from epistemology to ontology, from truth and appearance to a pure multiplicity of competing narratives, and from perspectivism to the "foregrounding of questions as to how radically different realities may coexist, collide, and interpenetrate."¹⁶¹

Theorists such as Fredric Jameson and David Harvey have also argued that this shift is inherently bound up with the new hegemonic forms in which we experience space and time. Harvey's provocative thesis, following Jameson, is that by analyzing the shifting dimensions of space and time one can adduce the *a priori* grounds upon which the necessary relation between the rise of postmodern

¹⁵⁸ Françoise Dosse, *History of structuralism*, Volume 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 122.

¹⁵⁹ As David Harvey argues, the quintessential modernist gesture is that of one of unveiling the essence behind the realm of appearances. See *The condition of postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of cultural change* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1989), 30

¹⁶⁰ Terry Eagleton, "Awakening from Modernity," *Times Literary Supplement*, February 20, 1987, 194.

¹⁶¹ Harvey, 41.

cultural forms and new flexible modes of capital accumulation are founded. Thus for Harvey the “postmodern condition” is understood as “space-time compression,” in which the collapse of temporality results in the reduction of experience to a series of pure and unrelated presents, and that of space to what Jameson refers to as “contrived depthlessness”: the postmodern fascination with surfaces, mirrors, and appearances.¹⁶² According to Harvey, this leads to new techniques and organizational forms through which surplus-value is extracted.¹⁶³

Citing transformations in architecture and urban design, Harvey points to the evolution of the city of Baltimore during the late-1960s and early-1970s as an exemplary case of this aesthetic, cultural, and economic transition. Post-modernism, according to Harvey, can be seen in the increasing eclecticism and usage of ahistorical pastiche apropos gentrification and urban renewal projects, as well as the appropriation of urban spectacle in the wake of the 1968 race riots.¹⁶⁴ In these instances, the differentiation and juxtaposition in tastes and aesthetic preferences—the intermingling of local and cosmopolitan, classical and modern, etc.—has led not only to renewed forms of production and consumption of so-called “symbolic capital,” the collection of luxury goods attesting to the taste and distinction of the owner,¹⁶⁵ but also to the decline of what Jameson refers to as “cognitive mapping,” our ability to properly grasp the coordinates of social-symbolic reality. Thus the deconstruction of urban space and the collapse of historical narrativity has in part allowed for the proliferation of Capital as the ultimate deconstructive agent in the world.

Given the emphasis on space and time throughout the aforementioned critiques of postmodernity, it is surprising that little mention has been made of the transcendental connection between the works of Marx and Kant’s respective critiques, particularly as a means of exploring the decline of symbolic efficacy under late capitalism. Harvey, for example, mentions Kant briefly in *The condition of postmodernity*, but only in relation to aesthetic judgment. Yet what is crucial in relation to Harvey’s notion of “flexible accumulation” is precisely the transcendental aesthetic: space and time as the *a priori* forms of sensible intuition.

¹⁶² Ibid., 58.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 152-155.

¹⁶⁴ As in the case of the Baltimore City Fair, which marked the beginning of the institutionalized commercialization of urban spectacle. Ibid., 74-89.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 77.

Following Karatani, one can therefore read Marx's notion of relative surplus-value in a distinctly Kantian manner: as the *a priori* grounds of commodity exchange, insofar as the production of surplus-value is necessarily conditioned by both space and time. In the section of *Capital* (Vol. 1), that examines the production of relative surplus-value, Marx implicitly argues just this:

By an increase in the productivity of labour, we mean an alteration in the labour process of such a kind as to shorten the labour-time socially necessarily for the production of a commodity.¹⁶⁶

According to Marx, technological innovation—the constant “self-revolutionizing” of the means of production—unexpectedly does not lead to a decrease in total hours of labor output, but instead functions as a means of increasing the rate of exploitation by allowing the capitalist to extract greater and greater quantities of surplus-value during the labor process. This is achieved, on the one hand, by maintaining the length of the working-day while simultaneously increasing output. The resulting increase in the productivity of labor thus entails a *temporal* shift in the circulation process. On the other hand, the creation of surplus-value through commodity-exchange, according to Marx, “begins where communities have their boundaries, at their points of contact with other communities, or with members of the latter.”¹⁶⁷ Hence the production of surplus-value also relies on the *spatial* difference between *different systems of value*, thus allowing for the exploitation of the gap between unequal levels of what Marx calls “socially necessary labor time.” As Harvey further points out, “[f]lexible accumulation typically exploits a wide range of seemingly contingent geographical circumstances, and reconstitutes them as structured internal elements of its own encompassing logic.”¹⁶⁸ Thus, in some sense, one can draw a line between late-capitalist flexible accumulation and postmodernism as time-space compression principally through the modes of time and space as transcendental conditions both of surplus-value itself and its reified forms of consciousness.

Lacan's structuralist turn in psychoanalysis has been most famously encapsulated in his dictum, “The unconscious is structured like a language.” But what, precisely, is the *subject* of the unconscious? This is the question—the point of reference—that has been persistently posed throughout this section.

¹⁶⁶ Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Ernest Mandel, Ben Fowkes, and David Fernbach, *Capital: A critique of political economy*, Volume 1 (New York: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1990), 431.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁶⁸ Harvey, 294.

Although Lacan's transcendental schema of the Real, Symbolic, and the Imaginary came to be extracted as early as 1953 in the aftermath of the so-called "Controversial Discussions" between Klein and Anna Freud, this discovery nevertheless resulted in the abandonment of the category of the subject. Thus during Lacan's structuralist phase, the subject came to be entirely overdetermined, positing a "structure without a subject":

The coming into operation of the symbolic function in its most radical, absolute usage ends up abolishing the action of the individual so completely that by the same token it eliminates his tragic relation to the world. . . . At the heart of the flow of events, the functioning of reason, the subject from the first move finds himself to be no more than a pawn, forced inside this system, and excluded from any truly dramatic, and consequently tragic, participation in the realization of truth.¹⁶⁹

But starting in 1963, the year in which he was "excommunicated" from the SFP due to his controversial use of variable-length sessions, Lacan inaugurated the beginning of a "return to Descartes" with the introduction of the logic of separation, as opposed to alienation, into his work: a return to the *cogito* as the subject of the unconscious. In that sense, it was a return to the radical foundation upon which structuralism was premised, yet was quickly abandoned by later structuralist thinkers.

While great importance has been repeatedly placed on the significance of the *cogito* in relation to structuralism and post-structuralism, little attention has been paid to its exact function and basis in the actual works of Descartes. So, to briefly cover some new terrain, what is the Cartesian subject and how, precisely, does it relate to the field of the unconscious? In his *Discourse on method*, Descartes writes:

For a long time I had noticed that, as for morals, it is sometimes necessary to follow opinions that one knows to be quite uncertain, all the same as if they were indubitable, as has been said above; but, because I then desired to devote myself solely to the search for the truth, I thought that it was necessary that I were to do completely the contrary, and that I were to reject, as absolutely false, all that in which I could imagine the least doubt, in order to see whether there would remain, after that, something in my

¹⁶⁹ Lacan and Miller, *The seminar of Jacques Lacan*, Book II, 168.

beliefs that were entirely indubitable...I resolved to feign that all the things that had ever entered my mind were no more true than the illusions of my dreams. But, immediately afterward, I took note that, while I wanted thus to think that everything was false, it necessarily had to be that I, who was thinking this, were something. And noticing that this truth—I think, therefore I am—was so firm and so assured that all the most extravagant suppositions of the skeptics were not capable of shaking it, I judged that I could accept it, without scruple, as the first principle of the philosophy that I was seeking.¹⁷⁰

Here Descartes momentarily concludes with his famous aphorism, “I think, therefore I am,” the fundamental axiom of what would later be called “Cartesianism.” However, Descartes himself appears to arrive at this conclusion only by ignoring the distinction he draws between “I think” and “I doubt,” thus allowing for the passage from universal doubt to ontological certainty. In other words, due to this lapsus Descartes mistakenly deduced from the process of doubt the substantial ego of Western metaphysics, thereby eliding the doubting subject apropos its “withdrawal-into-self”—the moment when all knowledge and certainty is bracketed.

In his reading of the above passage found in Seminar XI, Lacan remarks that “Descartes apprehends his *I think* in the enunciation of the *I doubt*, not in its statement, which still bears all of this knowledge to be put in doubt.”¹⁷¹ So while the doubting subject (the subject of enunciation, or Kantian synthetic judgment) belongs to the field of unconscious desire (Lacan picks up on Descartes’s use of the word “desired”), the “I am” (the subject of the statement, or analytic judgment) belongs to the Imaginary field of misrecognition. Hence according to Lacan, the subject of the unconscious is, or at the very least appears to originate with, the Cartesian *cogito*, which according to Kōjin Karatani can be understood as the (subjective) space located in between systems of thought: in the transcendental topos. This is the space in which Lacanian psychoanalysis, as I have argued, is situated.

By way of incessant transposition, Lacan was dogged by the “problematic” of alterity throughout his career. Starting in 1953, he abandoned the SPP and in doing so lost his IPA membership, at which point he began his critique of Klein

¹⁷⁰ René Descartes and George Herrernan, *Discourse on the method : of conducting one’s reason well and of seeking the truth in the sciences : a bilingual edition and an interpretation of René Descartes’ philosophy of method* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), p. 51 [part 4, section 1]

¹⁷¹ Lacan and Miller, *The seminar of Jacques Lacan*, Book XI, 44.

and Anna Freud and “return to Freud.” Later, in 1963, he was forced out of the field of legitimate Freudianism and went on to found the *École Freudienne de Paris*, where he soon encountered the parallax between structuralism and post-structuralism. Finally, in 1969, the year he began his most thoroughgoing formalization of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the administration of the *École Normale Supérieure* attempted to have him fired for allegedly sowing rebellion amongst students in the wake of May 1968.¹⁷² In that regard, the *cogito* as an abstract, purely theoretical space cannot be separated or easily distinguished from its concrete practical position. The two standpoints, theory and practice, are intimately bound together.

V. Conclusion: Towards the Question of Analytic Praxis

This analysis can be summarized in the following question: What is the common gesture shared by Kantian transcendental philosophy and Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalysis? My answer is that both involve an inquiry into the nature and structure of an unconscious, unintuitable realm that lies beyond mere appearances. Kant, for example, discovers the underlying network of *a priori* synthetic judgments, as well as the “synthetic unity of apperception” as an impossible void that nonetheless structures the synthesis of our concepts (formal rules of the understanding) and intuitions (the content of our sense-perceptions). Lacan, meanwhile, explores the various conditions—Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real—that must first be satisfied in order for our experience of “reality” to appear as such.

At another level, I have tried to demonstrate that Kant and Lacan also share another important feature: that of (transcendental) critique. My inspiration for this task came largely from the work of Japanese philosopher and literary critic Kōjin Karatani, who transcodes Kant and Marx by reading them together: *Capital* as a Kantian theory of political economy, and Kantian ethics as implicitly Marxist. In doing so, Karatani succeeds in elucidating the nature and limit of capital’s and reason’s respective drives [*Trieb*]. Furthermore, he goes beyond simply “comparing” Kant with Marx by theorizing the underlying structure and significance of critique, as an elaborate form of self-scrutiny, shared by both thinkers.

My aim was to do something similar with Kant and Lacan. This conclusion, however, offers me the opportunity to bring Marx once again back into the fold,

¹⁷² Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, 341.

and not without good reason. Both Marxism and psychoanalysis share an important feature that distinguishes them from philosophy as such: the unity of theory and practice, or what Georg Lukács dubbed “praxis.” How does one unite the two? While for Marxism the unity of theory and practice is perhaps best typified by Lenin’s repeated exhortations in “What Is to Be Done?” to build a party of professional revolutionaries with the sole aim of bringing about a proletarian revolution,¹⁷³ the corollary for psychoanalysis is not entirely clear, particularly given Freud’s somewhat conservative objections to communism. This is where Lacan plays a deeply informative role. For whereas Freud wrote very little on analytic technique, Lacan devoted his entire life to examining the theoretical and practical problems of analysis, which ought to be understood above all as a kind of psychoanalytic praxis, complete with its own version of the revolutionary event, what Lacan refers to as “the Act.” Hence psychoanalysis, like Marxism, also faces the peculiar problem of how to properly go about translating theory into practice, and vice versa.

The practical thrust of my argument regarding the Cartesian *cogito*, which I believe directly relates to the problem of uniting theory and practice, has centered primarily on its anti-institutional implications. The *cogito*, in this politicized reading, does not inhabit a substantial space, but only that which lies in between spaces, in the “critical space” between opposed systems of thought. Evidence for this lies in the fact that both Marxism and psychoanalysis began within geographical interstices, Marx himself having traversed much of continental Europe during the tumultuous era of revolution and reaction, while the latter emerged both within a distinctly Jewish milieu, as well as in the geographic lacuna between Austria and France. Furthermore, both may be said to have been born out of periods of acute crisis: Marxism out of capitalist crises; psychoanalysis, or the discovery of the unconscious, by way of female hysteria and the crisis of Victorian feminine subjectivity.

At the same time, and perhaps by dint of the fact that Marxism and psychoanalysis are united by the unity of theory and practice, both have faced the recurring formations of orthodoxy, heresies, deviations, and the peculiar resemblance, at a certain historical moment, of the Party to the Church and analysts to clergymen. I say peculiar because both were originally conceived as

¹⁷³ I am even tempted to say, contra Karatani, that Lenin himself endorses an ostensibly Kantian vision of party organization, emphasizing both the importance of the spontaneous intuition, or sensibility, on behalf of workers and trade unions, combined with the necessary, yet purely formal, instructions of the professional revolutionaries’ “understanding,” without which the workers would never attain proletarian class consciousness, i.e., revolutionary consciousness. See Vladimir Il’ich Lenin, *The essential works of Lenin* (New York: Dover, 1987), 74, 108, and 112 in particular.

anti-institutional and anti-systematic standpoints, and so this dilemma highlights the continued need for thinking through the practical and theoretical issues at stake when considering their implications, which I hope to return to in greater detail at a later date.

One last question regarding praxis remains. If psychoanalysis is to be understood through a Kantian transcendental framework, what, then, are its *limits*? After all, Kant's critique of pure reason was intended to establish the limits of reason by means of reason's self-scrutiny. I remarked earlier that Lacan, in a similar manner to Kant's "symbolic-form," as Ernst Cassirer refers to it, and Marx's concept of "value," came to extract the form of desire as the basis of analytic technique by way of his transcendental critique of Klein and Anna Freud. It may be said, then, that it is precisely *desire* which functions as the limit of psychoanalytic theory and practice: the unconscious is necessarily "driven" towards the realization of a pure desire, a desire which aims at the primordial and unattainable Thing, the thing-in-itself *qua* object-cause of desire.

Lacan, however, proposes a paradoxical solution, one that this thesis will leave off on as a point of further reflection: that by coming to terms with desire's inherent impossibility, imposed and simultaneously sustained through the fundamental fantasy by the prohibitive function of Symbolic Law (one here recalls Saint Paul's famous remarks on the relationship between sin and law), this passage allows for the ultimate suspension of desire and the law, opening up a "limitless love" not beyond desire, but rather in its very limitation:

The analyst's desire is not a pure desire. It is a desire to obtain absolute difference, a desire which intervenes when, confronted with the [Master Signifier], the subject is, for the first time, in a position to subject himself to it. Only there may the signification of a limitless love emerge, because it is outside the limits of the law, where alone it may live.¹⁷⁴

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¹⁷⁴ Lacan and Miller, *The seminar of Jacques Lacan*, Book XI, 276.