

University of Southampton

JACQUES LACAN'S RETURN TO FREUD:  
SPACE FOR POSSIBILITY OF REAL IMPOSSIBILITY

by

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For my father and my mother

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF ARTS

PHILOSOPHY

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by Geoffrey Michael Gray

Focusing chiefly on Le Séminaire XI: Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse, Lacan's concept of objet petit a is studied in the context of an initial argument that his ideas are not reducible to a theory of a self-enclosed linguistic system. The 'gaze' and 'voice' variants of objet petit a are examined as topological spaces of an embodied impossibility that pertains to Lacan's realm of the Real. A division of a human subject by signifiers is presented as an indispensable part of a problematic in which objet petit a seemingly offers a shelter from this division. Freud's theories of phantasy and the psychoanalytic concept of a drive are discussed in relation to these issues.

SOYEZ RÉALISTES, DEMANDEZ L'IMPOSSIBLE

Ainsi put-on lire, écrit sur les murs d'un printemps, ce qui, depuis quelques années déjà, était dit par Jacques Lacan en un lieu qu'on se plaisait alors à imaginer confidentiel et clos: le réel, c'est l'impossible. Dans la mare, il avait déjà lancé ce pave que l'objet, par lui chiffré a, n'était repérable que dans la structure, et du côté du réel. Manière - par antiphrase - de substance du sujet clivé, reste de l'articulation signifiante, véritable <cause du desir>, l'objet a, ce déchet, s'impose comme clé de voûte de la pratique psychanalytique: pierre de rebut, il doit en devenir la pierre d'angle.

--Leclaire, 1971, epigraph

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# ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been used for publications which are cited frequently:

- BT      Being and Time. M. Heidegger, 1962.
- E        Ecrits. J. Lacan, 1966.
- e        Ecrits: A Selection. J. Lacan. Translated by A. Sheridan, 1977.
- FF        The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis. Jacques Lacan. Translated by A. Sheridan, 1977.
- F&O      "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality." J. Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, [1964], 1968.
- GW        (Followed by Band number). Sigmund Freud Gesammelte Werke, 1946.
- LP        The Language of Psycho-Analysis. J. Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, [1967], 1973.
- NRE      "The Neurotic's Individual Myth." J.Lacan, 1979.
- PuR A    Critique of Pure Reason. First edition, [1781].
- PuR B    Critique of Pure Reason. Second edition, [1787]. Translated by N. Kemp Smith, 1929.
- S1        Le Séminaire: Livre I, 1953-54. Les écrits techniques de Freud. J. Lacan, 1975.
- S2        Le Séminaire: Livre II, 1954-55. Le moi dans la technique de la psychanalyse. J. Lacan, 1978.
- S7        Le Séminaire: Livre III, 1955-56. L'ego de l'ego. J. Lacan, 1978.
- S11       Le Séminaire: Livre XI, 1964. Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse. J. Lacan, 1973.
- S20       Le Séminaire: Livre XX, 1972-73. Encore. J. Lacan, 1975.
- SE        (Followed by volume number). Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, 1955.
- SRE      "Some Reflections on the Ego." J. Lacan, 1953.
- SZ        Sein und Zeit. M. Heidegger, 1967.

Full details of these publications are supplied in the select bibliography. Other references cite firstly, the surname(s) of the author(s) or authoress; secondly, the date of publication; and thirdly, the page number(s). For example: (Winnicott, 1953, pp.91-92). A date within square brackets denotes the original

publishing date of a work which has been referred to in a translation or in a much later publication. For example: (Merleau-Ponty, [1945], 1962, p. 159); (Hume, [1739-40], 1874, p. 311). The convention has been adopted of altering translations for the sake of accuracy or uniformity without signaling the change.

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The charges of idealism that have been levelled at psychoanalysis from various quarters, and the extent to which the writings of its founding father mystify or even deny large parts of social reality are familiar issues in discussions of the relevance of psychoanalysis to philosophy and the social sciences. The difficulty of these debates stems in part from the fact that Freud's work contains several different theoretical constructions that order the complexity of the world according to an explicit or implicit idea of what the world should be like. Firstly, for example, there is a deterministic conception of human beings in Freud's work that has been criticised for its adherence to a monistic assumption that the world is composed of only one type of phenomenon. In much the same way that Marxism cuts off the world of experience and ideas, so it may also be said, for instance, that Freud's apparent attempt to psychoanalyse society in the way an individual can be psychoanalysed, is also one-sided since it ignores other large parts of reality. Secondly, however, the very idea of "parts" of reality, as well as the question of their relative priority, can be found in Freud's work itself. The relation Freud postulates between a "pleasure principle" and a "reality principle" has frequently been interpreted as a relation between a hedonistic "inner" reality where the human being achieves pleasure through hallucination, and a constraining "outer" reality that gradually, thanks to a faculty Freud calls "perception", asserts the supremacy of a reality principle.

Quite apart from whether this is a correct understanding of the relation that obtains between these two principles, it is an understanding that is unavoidably difficult since it brings into play a series of difficult philosophical dualisms: fact and illusion, subject and object, and truth and falsity. A final example of the diverse theoretical constructions to be found in Freud's work is his use of myth to account for the origin of society and law, and the self-avowed speculation in his later work of an ataraxy that is beyond the pleasure principle, and which involves nothing less profound and recalcitrant than an inherence in life of its apparent opposite — a death drive (SE18 7-64).

Other constructions of a theoretical world can be found in Freud's work. The point is that these diverse constructions should not be reduced to a single homogeneous theory that is made to account for all phenomena with which Freud is concerned. The diversity of these theories is evidence of Freud's intellectual engagement with problems, contradictions and complexities which, in the outside world, are unavoidable and perhaps even insoluble. Yet interpretations of Freud's work, like interpretations of Marx's work, are sometimes guilty of forgetting an undesirable part of a theory, or of elevating one of its more desirable parts into a universal truth. The latter tendency is especially dangerous because it can lead to an over-simplification that breaks the engagement of theory with the complexity of the world, a break which can seal off theory into a self-contained and artificial world of its own.

Examples of this can be found in the proliferation, to which this dissertation contributes, of elaborations and expositions of Jacques Lacan's self-proclaimed "Return to Freud".

Calling for the necessity to rework psychoanalysis at a time when it had become a familiar and standardised technique, Lacan was soon obliged to work outside the institutions of mainstream psychoanalysis. In order to question and extend Freud's concepts rather than merely repeat the latter's findings in a pseudo-scientific manner, Lacan initially kept his seminars open to influences other than those of psychoanalysis such as mysticism, literature and philosophy. Partly in consequence, a psychoanalytic culture has developed that is dominated by Lacanian ideas but is not always shared by those who are qualified to call themselves psychoanalysts. It could be argued that this has, to some extent, dampened Lacan's great advantage over many other French intellectuals of his time: namely, that he was obliged to ground theoretical abstraction in questions concerning a technique and transmission of a certain practice. In spite of these questions being characterised by a strong intellectualist tendency, there is evidence, in both Lacan's Écrits and in his published Seminars, of a thinking that was unusually open to revision and innovation. Yet the appropriation of Lacan's teaching for purposes other than psychoanalysis has occasionally plundered or even parodied his ideas as though they formed a pre-given, monolithic and codified body of dogma. For example, as Macey points out, the British film journal Screen used Lacan's ideas in a strikingly instrumental way, without regard for the history or politics of psychoanalysis, in order to elaborate a Marxist theory of the subject and ideology (Macey, 1988, p.16). As with the appropriation of Lacan by certain strands of literary criticism, there is an attempt to use Lacan's ideas to further a move from a subjective taste-ridden criticism to an emphasis on the need for a



theory of how the human subject loses its ontological status as a source or stable point of meaning. For the human subject has to be theorised as positioned by, and as a function of, certain structures of language.

That Lacan amasses powerful arguments in favour of a theory of a subject who is not so much a source of language, as spoken by language, cannot be denied. Ontology, the core of the study of being, is not appropriate for conceptualising a human subject who is divided by language and who is in the position of a manque-à-être. Furthermore, drawing a sharp distinction between Freud's theory of the unconscious and previous theories, Lacan remarks, in the 29 January 1964 seminar of The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, that the "all too often forgotten characteristic" of the Freudian unconscious is "that it does not lend itself to ontology" (FF30).

In themselves, these claims deserve to be treated with nothing less than seriousness. One of the most attractive features of Lacan's teaching is that he uses, rather than dismisses, Freud's work in order to repudiate certain psychologisms or ontologies of the "individual" that have been attributed to Freud's work. Instead of describing neurosis as a mechanical or chemical malfunctioning rooted inside a skull, as a "fault" located inside the individual, i.e. the human subject conceived in isolation from external factors, Lacan finds in Freud an account of how mental suffering is the effect of certain universal structures, such as language, which we are obliged to inhabit. Approaching Freud from many distinct vantage points, there is nevertheless a constant theme in Lacan's

thought that individual psychology is based on external factors, and that a narrow focus on the individual cannot account for the structures in which we are embedded and by which we are located.

Yet what begins as an honourable attempt to question and extend these ideas, can end up using an unnecessarily complicated but not always rigorous terminology to emphasise the existence of a theory of language in Lacan's teaching that is grounded in structural linguistics. For many years Lacan was fascinated by notions of language as diverse as those of Heidegger and Saussure, although surprisingly he paid little attention to extensive studies of language within psychoanalysis itself (Macey, 1988, p122), or to linguistics in the Anglo-American tradition (e.g. Chomsky). Yet Lacan's blurring of the different terms and levels of these and other thinkers means that he did not so much reach a final theory as operate through what Macey has called "a shifting set of prisms through which the phenomenon of language can be viewed in a variety of ways" (Macey, 1988, p.123). Although in 1953, Lacan defines speech as the central medium of psychoanalysis conceived as a "talking cure" (E237-322, e30-113), it is not until late 1955 or 1956 that speech is defined with reference to any theory of language that is grounded in structural linguistics (E406-36, 493-528; e114-45, 146-78). Even after this date, Lacan's teaching is informed by a curiously truncated and narrow version of linguistics that pays little or no attention to Hjelmslev, Martinet, Harris or Chomsky, and that is restricted to a tendentious reading of Saussure and Jakobson. Yet there has been a tendency within the secondary literature to emphasise

Lacan's use of certain structural linguistic concepts to the point that these concepts are torn from their context and become so broad in meaning as to be banal. "As for language", writes Jameson, "Lacan's model is now the orthodox structuralist one" (Jameson, 1985, p. 118). To understand why Lacan is alleged to belong to a structuralist orthodoxy, it is necessary to examine his use of the idea of a "signifying chain" that is based on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure.

The approach to language elaborated in Saussure's posthumous Cours de linguistique générale concerns his notion of a linguistic sign. This sign does not unite a thing and a name but a concept and an acoustic image. Saussure eventually prefers to call these two elements signified (signifié) and signifier (signifiant) respectively. The specifically "structural" characteristic of this approach is arguably that Saussure had to bracket the referent or "real thing" so that the structure of the sign could be better explained. The linguistic sign becomes a relation of signifier to signified that has been well summarised by Laplanche:

If a signifier refers to a signified, it is only through the mediation of the entire system of signifiers: there is no signifier that does not refer to the absence of others and that is not defined by its position in the system (Laplanche, 1966, p. 154).

As will be shown in chapter one, it is the idea of a signifier defined only by its difference from other signifiers that Lacan will exploit in the sense of an autonomy of a signifier in its relation to a signified. For Lacan, this autonomy implies not only that signifiers and signifieds are

without a fixed relation to each other, but also that each signifier refers only to another signifier and is hence part of a signifying chain. The essential idea of a signifying chain can, arguably, already be found in Saussure. However, Lacan develops this idea firstly by explicitly dividing a signifier from a signified, and secondly, by avoiding certain psychologistic assumptions in Saussure that a signified is a mental image that unlocks a corresponding acoustic image (signifier) in the brain.

Lacan's use of the idea of a signifying chain is productive at two levels. At the level of a conceptual analysis of language, the suspension of a fixed relation between a word and its referent arguably undermines both a naturalist thesis that there is a spontaneous correspondence between language and reality, and the idea that language is a nomenclature. At the level of a return to Freud, considerable advances were made through Lacan's use of Jakobson's concepts of a metaphor and metonymy to theorise the analysand's speech as composed of drifting and discursive levels of meaning, levels that Freud discovered in his analysis of dreams, jokes and parapraxes. With this conceptual armoury, Lacan attacked certain revisionist theories of psychoanalysis (largely found in the work of Anna Freud's group and the American ego psychologists) for describing the ego as having a function of synthesis, and as being a potentially "healthy" faculty that allows the analyst to appeal successfully to the analysand's common sense. Using the above conceptions of language, Lacan attacks this idea that the ego is an inner sanctuary. The autonomy of the signifier in its relation to the signified, and the sliding

of meaning this implies, undermine the ideas of a world that is integrated and of a place within it that is continuous and stable.

However, problems arise in the secondary literature when the idea that signification is never a matter of direct access to a signified is theorised in a totalising fashion that suggests that signifiers define reality in its entirety. It is as though all reality is sealed within a theory of signifiers. The complicated, confusing and even contradictory aspects of reality for which Freud required several diverse theories, are brought under the hegemony of a theory of language that is formulated in unnecessarily complicated terms that have the effect of suggesting reality is language. For example, whilst arguing that Lacan's theory of the signifier can be accommodated into a movement called post-modernism, Finlay writes that in accepting a split in language between signifier and signified, post-modernism "dissolves the other, be it concept, referent or person, into non-existence" (Finlay, 1989, p.53). It is somewhat curious that a commentator should so readily dismiss "the other", when, as will be shown shortly, both an irreducible principle and an essentially polyvalent conception of otherness are central to Lacan's teaching.

At a rather more general level, an attempt to break away from a narrow focus upon the interiority of individual subjects can end up promoting an hermetic theory that is as vulnerable to accusations of idealism as is individualistic psychology.

the shift from a conception of a subject who is a stable source of meaning to a theory of language that seals all reality within the theory ends up pulling away from the outside world. As Macey argues, "The inflationary promotion of 'the signifier' leads inevitably to its conceptual devaluation" (Macey, 1988, p. 133). This is exemplified in the case, cited by Macey, where it is claimed that "labour is structured like a language" (Macey, 1988, p. 133). The claim that workers' activity involves metonymic relations between signifiers because this work becomes "meaningful only at the end of the line" is, to say the least, banal.

However appealing Lacan's ideas might be for adepts of post-modernism or a materialist theory of language, it is important to resist a temptation to hail Lacan's fascination, or, less kindly, flirtation with linguistics or any other approach to language as providing a rigorous theory of language. Confusion, rather than rigour, is the inevitable result of taking seriously Althusser's now classic presentation of the way in which Lacan's theorisation of language is informed by a science of linguistics (Althusser, 1971, p. 191). And even when Lacan's references to non-scientific theories of language in Hegel and Heidegger are examined in detail, contradictions, inconsistencies and misinterpretations arise. .

To be sure, it would be wrong to treat Lacan's fascination with language as anything less than important. Yet it needs to be appreciated that this fascination stems less from a concern with formal, systemic features of language (which would typically characterise a structuralist theory), than from a concern with a

dynamic relation between the human subject and his speech. This relation is dynamic because it involves a principle of otherness, i.e. of unexpected and disturbing flashes of meaning that are conceived as an encounter with an unconscious that is conceptualised as a "discourse of the Other".

This principle of otherness does indeed lead Lacan to theorise the unconscious as "structured like a language". Returning to Freud's early work, Lacan views the mechanisms of displacement and condensation that are discussed there as evidence of the way in which the unconscious is never a signified to which there is direct access. Instead, the unconscious can only be represented through its derivatives, i.e. through condensed and displaced relations between signifiers that Lacan likens to Jakobson's concepts of metaphor and metonymy respectively.

Yet this foregrounding of the unconscious upon relational and synchronic laws of language must be coupled with Lacan's equally important dynamic account of the unconscious. Here, the influence of Saussure and Jakobson becomes less important as Lacan moves towards a position that has more in common with Kojève's interpretation of Hegel (where language provides a medium for recognition), and the theories of Mauss and Lévi-Strauss (where language satisfies a requirement for a third party to mediate any dual relationship). The principle of otherness which an act of speech presupposes turns on an idea of the analysand's speech being an address to the analyst as Other, even if his speech is primarily intended as a lie to this Other. The principle of otherness at stake here is

one that is, to some extent, encapsulated in Lacan's rendering of speech as allowing a possibility of deceit which in turn opens up the possibility of the analysand discovering his "truth" in an inverted form (E9).

In his 1953 paper entitled "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis" (also referred to as the "Rome Discourse"), the possibility of deceit goes hand in hand with Lacan's conception of an ego that seeks to recognise and vindicate itself in an image of its constructed unity. Here, there is a phenomenon of "empty speech", where the "subject seems to be talking in vain about someone who, even if he were his spitting image, can never become one with the assumption of his desire" (E254 e43). The relation between analyst and analysand is defined by a line of fiction where the addressee of the analysand's speech is not the analyst, but the analysand's "Imaginary" semblant of himself. The analyst is addressed as an Imaginary other. In contrast, the analyst is addressed as a veritable, absolute Other beyond the Imaginary other when, through a bond or pact that takes place through a psychoanalytic phenomenon called transference, there emerges a "full speech" where the analyst's reply to the analysand, in so far as it is an unexpected or disturbing find, takes hold of the analysand (E279 e68). The relationship of the analysand to this Other is the main line of the unconscious (S2 288). It is a relationship where the analysand responds to a truth in which he feels implicated but that he does not consciously know. Full speech is enunciated "at the level of recognition in so far as the Word established between



subjects is the pact that transforms men and establishes them as communicating subjects" (S1 125-6). The difference between empty and full speech is summarised in Lacan's statement that "The subject ..... begins the analysis by talking about himself without talking to you, or by talking to you without talking about himself. When he can talk to you about himself, the analysis is over" (E373 n.1).

It is against such a background of the practice of psychoanalysis that one can better understand Lacan's fundamental categories of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. The Imaginary and the Symbolic are linked to the ideas of empty and full speech respectively and concern two points at which alienating splits within the human subject occur. The Imaginary realm in which the first of these splits occurs must be defined with reference to Lacan's concept of a mirror stage (E93-100 e1-7). Although this stage is said by Lacan to occur at a certain period of infancy, it should be understood less as a developmental concept than as a metaphor for roughly the same type of split that is found in the mythic representation of Narcissus looking in the pool oblivious to the voice of Echo. Turning, indeed, to Freud's concept of narcissism, Lacan formulates the ego as an Imaginary fiction, as a phantasy of wholeness that is encoded as an image reflected in a mirror. An alienating split occurs because whilst this image of wholeness and integrity is recognised as being the same as the self, it is nevertheless a misrecognition (méconnaissance) of the self in what is irretrievably other. A mark of identity is found in what is different.

The second split occurs at the point at which the individual becomes subjected to language and has his or her phantasy of wholeness smashed by the operations of an Oedipus complex, itself a carrier of language and culture, which Lacan ultimately defines as co-extensive with a symbolic, i.e. metaphorical, function of the father. The father is conceptualised as a mediating third term with which the child can identify and escape the dual relationship of the Imaginary that Lacan partly theorises as a fascination with the mother. Yet this is not a flesh and blood father but a Name-of-the-Father that is strictly metaphorical in so far as it is both a law shaping the construction of gender and forbidding incest with the mother, and a name that assigns the speaking child a place in the social world. The child's response to the interdiction against incest, to this deprivation of an object (the mother), is said to determine the way in which the sense of lack becomes symbolisable through the generation of a desire which is never fulfilled, but which is always there in a continually displaced and transformed mode.

Along with this phenomenon of desire, the child's henceforth permanent subjection to language is also the price of entry into a Symbolic realm. In chapter three, the precise way in which Lacan claims the subject is divided by language will be examined. The "I" is theorised by Lacan as a site where an apparently constant and consistent self-referential identity of the speaker is continually undermined by a process of a fading or eclipse of this identity.

The realm of the Symbolic is, it should be stressed, a dimension of culture into which the child enters through subjection both to a law of interdiction and to language. For the symbols that comprise this realm are not icons or stylised figurations, but signifiers by which Lacan arrives at a generalised definition of culture. This definition takes place on the basis of certain arguments found in Lévi-Strauss, namely that marriage is governed by a preferential order of kinship, an order which regulates an exchange of women in a commerce that subtends a universality of the prohibition of incest (Lévi-Strauss, [1949], 1969). To the extent that this exchange can be conceptualised in terms of differential relations between signifiers, relations that are unconscious in their structure, an analogy is alleged by Lévi-Strauss to exist between the social exchange of women and an exchange of words. Such an analogy stumbles against several problems, not least of which is the fact that whilst relations between signifiers do not in themselves confer any economic or political power, the institution of polygamy in a society arguably confers both (Macey, 1988, p155). It is nevertheless through an endorsement of this analogy that Lacan claims in both the 1953 paper "The Function and Field of Speech and Language", and in the 1955 paper "The Freudian Thing", that psychoanalysis and anthropology share a common interest in theorising human society as based on unconscious symbolic structures (E237-322, 432 e30-113, 141-2). The rules regulating the exchange of women and instituting the prohibition of incest are described by Lacan as a subjective pivot of a Nature-Culture divide, a pivot that wards off a Biblical threat: the abomination

of the confusion of generations. In short, the law governing this whole structure is the basis upon which Lacan elaborates the realm of the Symbolic as a dimension of culture.

The triad to which the Imaginary and Symbolic belong is completed by a realm of the Real that can be defined as that which is excluded by or unassimilable to the other two realms. Because the Imaginary is a lure in which the subject is captivated by his narcissistic image, he cannot acknowledge this image for what it is - a fiction. The difference between the subject's body and the image cannot be apprehended, since it is by definition excluded from the Imaginary. With reference to the Symbolic realm, it has already been noted that according to Lacan's schema, signifiers refer only to other signifiers and not to signifieds. Again, there is something that is necessarily excluded. The Real is composed of inaccessible but ineliminable residues of the other two realms.

Put experientially, these three realms convey an intensity and irreparability of the way in which the human subject is penetrated by overpowering structures. A question arises, at least for this writer, as to whether all of this should be approached as a destruction or as a problematisation of self-hood. The difference is crucial. If the former is the case, then the human subject must be theorised in negative terms; fragmentation and dispersion of the subject is all that there is. If, on the other hand, sufficient leverage can be found to show that this negativity is not the sum total of Lacan's thought, then it might be possible to find conceptual space for a "problem" rather than a "death" of the subject.

The choice between these alternatives is one way of approaching a question posed by Lacan in 1960: "Once the structure of language has been recognised in the unconscious, what kind of a subject can we conceive for it?" (E800 e298). Although the theory of an unconscious structured like a language rules out the possibility of conceiving the human subject as unified, stable and coherent, it has been argued that it is still necessary for Lacan to theorise the human subject as requiring a uniqueness (Dews, 1984, p.80). In these pages, a thesis will be developed that, in spite of the blurred conceptual terminology that accompanies Lacan's return to Freud, one can find a concern with a hard core of the human subject at the heart of this project. This thesis will be developed through an examination of the way in which in Seminar 11 of 1964, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, Lacan concentrates on a relationship between the human subject and a phenomenon he conceptualises as "objet petit a" (hereafter object a). We have chosen to study this particular Seminar because it demonstrates the way in which object a emerges from the psychoanalytic concept of a drive. Having a close affinity with the objects of the Freudian drives to which Lacan added the gaze and the voice, object a is, it will be argued, Lacan's concept of the subject's relation to an object that remains unassimilable to the differential relations of the Symbolic realm. As an ineliminable residue of the human subject, object a belongs to the realm of the Real. The study of object a offered here will reflect the way in which the linguistic aspect of Lacan's earlier teaching ventures into a concern with various spaces postulated by

psychoanalytic theory. "Stuck in the gullet of the signifier" as Lacan puts it in the conclusion to Seminar 11, object a is to be understood with reference to, but not in terms of, a self-enclosed linguistic system. As a "purely topological" part of the subject from which he is separated (S11 232 FF257), object a will be studied here as a phenomenon in which the subject attempts with difficulty to take refuge from the Symbolic realm where, as has been noted, he is divided by language.

With reference to Freud's theory of the drive (Trieb) as it is presented in Seminar 11, it will be shown how Lacan conceptualises object a spatially in so far as he shows that this object is a hollow space, a space that can never be grasped but only circumvented by the drive. Whilst these elusive and refractory qualities place the object a in the realm of the Real, it should be stressed that this object is nevertheless somehow embodied. It is an albeit separated part of the human subject's body. In chapters three, five and six, the manner in which the drive encircles object a as an empty space will be discussed in terms of how, through trying to see himself seen or hear himself heard, the human subject endeavours to approach this part of himself from which he is separated.

Whilst the concept of object a, as it is presented in Seminar 11, is the concept with which this study is chiefly concerned, it is one that will be approached only after having dealt with certain preparatory issues. These are: the reasons why Lacan's teaching has so frequently been associated with an almost exclusive concern with structural linguistics; the reasons for and nature of Lacan's return to Freud; the precise

way in which the subject is divided by signifiers; and the way in which it is through phantasy that the subject seeks support in the face of division.

It is also necessary to stress that this study of object a makes no pretence at examining either the topological concerns or psychoanalytical conceptions of an object that are found in the publications that precede or follow Seminar 11. Since this thesis therefore studies only a fragment of Lacan's teaching, it is essential in this Introduction to caution the reader against thinking that Lacan's concept of object a has no genealogy or vicissitudes. To show that object a is not an atemporal or immaculately conceived concept, it is necessary to provide some brief pointers towards two important reasons why the problematic of object a does not begin or end with Seminar 11.

In the first place, although Lacan did not formally propose the concept of object a until the preceding tenth series of seminars from 1962 to 1963 (the unpublished, interrupted and discontinued series entitled L'angoisse), the antecedents of this concept can be found under the rubric of das Ding in Seminar 7 of 1959-60, L'éthique de la psychanalyse. Secondly, the reader should be given some indication of why the problematic of topological space, the problematic in terms of which object a is formulated in Seminar 7, culminates in the notion of the borromean knot that is presented in Seminar 22 of 1974-75, "RSI". These two points will now be discussed in turn.

The necessity for a psychoanalytical concept of an object can be found in Freud's various accounts of how the infant starts to discover that the world has an independent existence

that cannot altogether be controlled by him. Crucial to any investigation of this problem is the relation Freud posits between a pleasure principle and a reality principle. It was noted at the beginning of this Introduction that this relation has been interpreted as the replacement of illusion by fact. When separated from a desired external object, the subject conjures the existence of that object through hallucination. The independent existence of this object is realised only when the child starts to suspect that the hallucinated object is not sufficiently tangible or permanent. Yet in L'éthique de la psychanalyse, Lacan's attention is drawn to a passage in Freud which implies that the subject's initial apprehension of an external world be posed in rather different terms (S7 64-5). In Letter 52 of his correspondence with Fliess, Freud's conception of this initial apprehension is ultimately tied to what he calls a complex of the Nebensmensch that separates itself into two parts (cited in S7 64). Only one of these parts can be formulated according to a regulatory and economic principle that a lowering of unpleasurable tension produces pleasure. However, Lacan is primarily interested in the second and more enigmatic part of the Nebensmensch that cannot be formulated along the co-ordinates of a pleasure principle. This other part, which Freud calls das Ding, is, as Lacan puts it, "at the origin isolated by the subject, in his experience of the Nebensmensch, as being of its nature stranger, Fremde" (S7 64-5).

The distinction between these two parts of the Nebensmensch is said by Lacan to be "an original division of the experience of reality" (S7 65). As a stranger who is even hostile on occasion, and in any case the first aspect of exterior reality



encountered by the subject, das Ding is the concept of an object that is said by Lacan to be of its nature "lost as such" ("C'est de sa nature que l'objet est perdu comme tel") (S7 65). This object has never been present and can never be re-found. The subject nevertheless does attempt to re-find such an object, and this attempted re-finding is crucial to the way in which the subject apprehends exterior reality. Lacan notes that these points would seem to be implied by an enigmatic remark in Freud's 1925 paper, "Negation" (S7 65). Freud claims that the first and most immediate aim of constructing a proof of reality is not to verify whether an object perceived to exist really does exist, but rather to re-find an object, to witness that it is still somehow present in reality (SE19 237-8). Lacan infers that das Ding must be identified with Freud's Wiederzufinden: a tendency to re-find is at the foundation of the human subject's orientation towards the object.

This hypothesis is at the kernel of a number of Lacan's theoretical elaborations which will be examined in this study, and which must be introduced here with reference to Freud's drive theory. The precise meaning and function of Freud's term Trieb will be discussed in chapters three and five. For the present purpose of understanding the relation between das Ding and the drive, it is necessary to note the connections between Lacan's elaborations of the drive in Seminars 7 and 11 respectively.

In both Seminars Lacan starts from the assumption that Freud does not conceive of the Trieb as an instinct, i.e. it

is not a pressure of a need such as hunger or thirst which would have a fixed tie to the object that would satisfy it. The drive has a different structure, which raises the question of what is meant by "satisfaction". In Seminar 7, this structure is presented in the context of a discussion of a particular vicissitude of the drive that Freud calls "sublimation" (S7 105-94). In contrast to a drive that is repressed into the unconscious and substituted by something else in consciousness, a sublimated drive is one which achieves a satisfaction that is qualitatively different from the type of satisfaction afforded by the object which originally defined the aim of the drive. The original aim of the drive has been displaced on to another object, a displacement which Lacan views as exemplifying a metonymic passage from one signifier to another, so defining the structure of what he calls "desire" (S7 340). In other words, sublimation allows a satisfaction that is conceptualised in terms of a metonymy, a displacement from one signifier to another where neither the old nor the new object is as important as the indifference of the drive to this changing of the object. With these ideas Lacan proceeds to give the object of the drive the status of das Ding: the object of the drive is in and of itself eternally lacking, and the course of the drive has to be described as a search for an object that can never be found, an impossible object.

This changing of the object permitted by metonymic relations between signifiers might seem to demonstrate Lacan's ultimate reliance upon a structural linguistic theory. However, in Seminar 7, L'éthique de la psychanalyse, there is already

evidence that Lacan has started to formulate these ideas in terms of a topological space which he develops in Seminar 11. In Seminar 7 it is said with reference to das Ding that in order for the human being to follow the path of his pleasure, he must "faire le tour" (S7 114). It is this same idea which Lacan uses some four years later in the 24 June 1964 seminar of Seminar 11 to describe the only course that can be taken by the drive: "la pulsion en fait le tour". The "tour" is both a turn, which implies a circumference and limit around which the drive turns, and a trick. The subject is tricked by the lure of an object that is only a hollow space to be circumvented.

The notion of turning round a limit is then arguably already found in Seminar 7. Implied by this notion is a category of impossibility which may also be found in Seminar 7. The path of the drive is akin to a structure of desire which in Seminar 7 is taken quite firmly out of the possible: "it is nothing other than the impossible where we recognise the topology of our desire" (S7 364). Lacan also brings in a category of impossibility to limit that part of the Nebensmensch that is the pleasure principle: das Ding is "the object impossible to re-find at the level of the pleasure principle" (S7 85). Since, in Seminar 7, Lacan likens the realm of the Symbolic to the pleasure principle, it is necessary to ask whether there is also a category of impossibility that limits the Symbolic. Lacan likens the pleasure principle to the Symbolic realm when he states that "The function of the pleasure principle is in effect to carry the subject from signifier to signifier" (S7 143). That the Symbolic, the realm of differential

relations between signifiers, has a certain limit is implied by Lacan's remark that das Ding is "le hors-signifié" (S7 67).

Some four years later in the 6 May 1964 seminar of Seminar 11, the category of impossibility that limits both the pleasure principle and the realm of the Symbolic is more explicitly posed as the realm of the Real. Stressing that impossibility does not equal the unreal, and that impossibility can be as real as the possible, Lacan places object a in the realm of the Real. In so far as object a is impossible in the sense of being a lack or hollow space, it is defined as a "cause" of the subject's desire. In so far as object a is impossible by virtue of being the object with which the subject tries in vain to fill this hole, object a is defined as "the object" of desire, i.e. the object to which the subject's desire is addressed.

The second main point that needs to be mentioned here is that whilst the concept of object a in Seminar 11 looks back to Lacan's discussion of das Ding from 1959 to 1960, it also looks forward to his discussion, in the "RSI" Seminar of 1974-75, of why a borromean knot is the only suitable concept of the relation between the realms of the Real, Symbolic and Imaginary. Although this is arguably the summation of Lacan's concern with the various "spaces" postulated by psychoanalytic theory, such a concern with space can nevertheless be found throughout Lacan's publications. In chapter five it will be noted that concepts of space emerge from Lacan's early concerns with an image as the proper study of psychology, and identification as the fundamental psychical process. In chapter three it will be noted that Lacan's

conceptualisation of desire is well represented by the continuous and yet distinct sides of a Moebius strip. Even when Lacan's use of spatial concepts is restricted to the idea of a knot, one may discern the presence of this idea in Lacan's teaching long before the presentation of a borromean one in the "RSI" Seminar. In "Propos sur la causalité psychique", a paper written before Lacan's encounter with linguistics in the 1950s, language is alluded to as a "knot of signification" (E166-7). Whilst Macey claims the term derives from the work of Leiris, one is nevertheless reminded of the knots, or at least tangles, that are conveyed by Freud's references in The Interpretation of Dreams to nodal and umbilical points (SE4-5). Furthermore, a reference to a knot also appears in the 15 April 1964 seminar of Seminar 11. In a dense discussion of how transference provides access to the analysand's unconscious, Lacan states that, although it is an open question as to whether this access can be conceived as a Gordian knot, it must nevertheless be conceptualised as a knot of some description that will evoke considerations of topology.

We are now in a better position to ask why the conception of a borromean knot in the "RSI" Seminar should be so particularly important for understanding object a as a topological concept. The broad answer is that in the 15 April 1975 seminar, object a is said to be at the heart of this knot that provides the only conceivable way of understanding how the heterogeneous realms of the Real, Symbolic and Imaginary are nevertheless linked together as a triad.

To understand something of what is at stake here, it is necessary to provide some definitions. Topology may be defined as a study of certain properties of shapes and figures which remain invariant under one-to-one continuous transformations. For example, if certain shapes are imagined as drawn on a piece of rubber that is then arbitrarily distorted, topology will consist of the properties of the drawing that are preserved in spite of this distortion. A borromean knot, according to Lacan's definition, is composed of three knots such that when one of these knots is broken, the other two are broken. Finally, a brief definition needs to be given of how the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary stand in the "RSI" Seminar. In the 16 December 1974 session of this Seminar, Lacan defines the Real as an ex-sistence, that refers to an expulsion of sense; the Symbolic as a hole opened up by signifiers referring only to other signifiers and not to a signified; and the Imaginary as a consistence that refers to a unity.

In the opinion of this writer, it is productive to approach the "RSI" Seminar as Lacan's struggle to convince an audience that in so far as the Real, Symbolic and Imaginary are tied together by a borromean knot that is topological, their tie is one that can only be understood by abstracting oneself from a three-dimensional space. In the 15 April 1975 seminar, Lacan emphasises that his borromean knot is neither a model nor a representation of something other than topology. If this is the case, and if object a is at the heart of this knot, what is it that one is ultimately supposed to be trying to understand?

To answer this question, it seems that one is forced to make a choice. On the one hand, it is possible to refuse the authority of Lacan's statements, and insist that Lacan does indeed use topology as a model, and that the conception of the borromean knot can be accommodated under J.A. Miller's note to the graphs which figure in Écrits: "All the constructions gathered together here have no more than a didactic role: their relation with the structure is one of analogy" (E903 e332). The apparently complex structure of the borromean knot can be argued to be little more than an illustrative image. The topological formulations of object a are not, strictly speaking, mathematical formalisations, but restatements of points which can be made verbally, and which involve no rigorous abstraction.

On the other hand, it is possible to take the view that the topological formulations of both object a and the borromean knot must be treated as part of Lacan's wider search, beginning in the early 1970s, for appropriate mathematical formalisations. In the glossary which accompanies the English translation of Seminar 11, Alan Sheridan notes Lacan's insistence that "'objet petit a' should remain untranslated, thus acquiring, as it were, the status of an algebraic sign" (FF282).

The phrase "as it were" betrays, perhaps, a lack of belief on the part of a commentator who is better known as a translator of Lacan. As a commentator Sheridan appears to have no reason, other than a translator's acceptance of

authorial insistence, to confer an algebraic and untranslatable status upon object a. As Macey argues, "untranslatability may well be a feature of mathematical notations; [but] a refusal to translate the translatable cannot elevate any formula to mathematical status" (Macey, 1988, p. 168). Against this, it should be pointed out that a reflection of the seriousness with which the need for mathematical formalisation was treated, is that acceptance of this need was a necessary condition for working at the Vincennes Département de Psychanalyse (Macey, 1988, p. 172).

Whatever side one takes in this debate, it will be one that is ultimately beyond the scope of this inquiry. The aim here is only to introduce Lacan's formulation of object a in such a way that a tendency to over-theorise Lacan's teaching as the child of Freud and Saussure, is tempered by a demonstration that, for Lacan, a problematic of space is as important as a problematic of language, and that a realm of the Real is as important as the Symbolic and the Imaginary.

This study is divided into three parts. Each part contains two chapters which are, in effect, different contributions to the problem which is dealt with in each part. In the first part, we shall set up a context for approaching Lacan's return to Freud as a return that is clinically orientated towards an early Viennese Freud, but historically based in a French intellectual culture. Instead of offering a review of secondary sources as such in chapter one, we shall take to task an assumption that in Lacanian psychoanalysis, a symptom is interpreted as though sense were being extracted from nonsense. We shall



argue that on the contrary, the subject is introduced to a traumatic non-sense effect of the cuts or divisions which are encountered in a signifying structure which comprises a Symbolic realm. These effects are evidence of a Symbolic realm circulating around its own failure, its own impossibility of being complete. In chapter two, we shall develop a contrast between an ego-psychologistic model of psychoanalysis which Lacan opposes, and the bearings which he took from a French culture imbued with the work of Hegel and Heidegger. It will be shown that instead of basing psychoanalysis upon a model of connaissance where there is a fitting between the human being and the world, Lacan turns to a knowledge which is without ground in a pre-given norm of reality that is immediately accessible to consciousness.

In part two, we shall attempt to deepen this abyss by introducing Lacan's concept of object a. Firstly, we shall show in chapter three what it is that the subject takes shelter from in object a. The subject requires a refuge from his status as a division in a signifying structure where signifiers represent the subject, and where the subject is the effect of signifiers. Secondly, in chapter four we shall present phantasy both as the medium through which the subject searches for this object; and as the warrant for defining this object as belonging to that realm of impossibility which Lacan calls the Real - the realm which is unassimilable to the Imaginary and Symbolic realms.

In part three we shall pursue this distinction between the Imaginary and Symbolic on the one hand and the Real on the

other by examining variants of object a, called by Lacan "object gaze" and "object voice". In chapter five the concept of object gaze will be explored as the subject's position in a space where he attempts in vain to see himself seen by a separated part of himself in which he takes shelter. Lacan's references to the phenomenon known as anamorphosis will be discussed.

In a final chapter the analysis of object a as a spatial problem will be consolidated by demonstrating how this problem is crucial for Lacan's apparently exclusively linguistic concept of the unconscious. It will be shown that in spite of Lacan's aphorism that the unconscious is structured like a language, it is a phenomenon which he nevertheless conceptualises in his later work as a topology of a gap or edge. After working through certain spatial problems that attend Freud's successive formulations of the unconscious, reference will be made to the variant of object a which Lacan calls "object voice". It will be shown how Lacan conceptualises the unconscious as a breaking edge between the realm of the Symbolic as a form of sleep, and the realm of the Real conceptualised as an impossibility to which a father traumatically awakes in a dream.

PART I

LACAN'S TEACHING IN A CONTEXT

## CHAPTER 1

### SENSE AND NON-SENSE OF LACAN'S STYLE

#### INTRODUCTION

Psychoanalysis is usually considered to have affiliations with psychology, a discipline which is defined in the O.E.D. as a study of the nature, functions and phenomena of the human soul or mind. Yet from the beginning of his teaching Lacan has constantly decried this assumption (E795 e294; S11 188-89 FF 206-08).(1) The reason for this can be expressed in terms of the convergence of Freudian and Darwinian thought in the idea that "Man" is an historical idea and not a natural species. There is in human existence no unconditioned possession that can be localised in specialised regions of the brain. The attempt, especially prevalent in the United States, to assimilate psychoanalysis into a general ego psychology of "Man", is dismissed by Lacan as part of an ideological illusion of the potential coherence and unity of a sexed and speaking subject. Instead of referring to the intentional activity of "Man", Lacan says only that the desire of man is desire of the Other

(L'Autre). Here, the capitalisation of the Other designates an unconscious which is ex-centric to the conscious self (E628,693 e264,288-89).

Lacan's teaching, then, has to be introduced as an attempted rupture of this alleged humanist ideology of the unity of "Man".(2) But instead of altogether abandoning the term "Man", Lacan requires that he forgoes the capital letter which lends him a proper name. This now foresaken man is cast on the first page of Lacan's Écrits where, in his version of Buffon's famous aphorism Lacan declares "style is the man to whom one addresses oneself" (E9). In spite of its geographical location on the edge of Lacan's Écrits, we cannot choose to ignore this question of style. For it returns later on in the Écrits as being the very path of Lacan's teaching of a return to Freud

Every return to Freud that occasions a teaching worthy of the name will be produced by way of the path by which the most hidden truth manifests itself in revolutions of culture. This path is the only training that we could claim to transmit to those who follow us. It is called: a style (E 458).

If Lacan somewhat departs from Buffon's original formulation that "style is the very man", (le style est l'homme même), it is because this formulation resonates with the self certitude of "Man" which it was Freud's prerogative to question. In his modified formulation that style is one's addressee, that man addresses himself as style, Lacan can be read as returning us to Freud's point that "the ego is not master in its own house" - (dass das Ich nicht Herr Sei in seinem eigenen Haus). (3) Lacan both returns to and extends Freud's theory of narcissism in order

to show that the ego, the seat of consciousness, gives rise to a set of judgements about reality which are based on self-love. For this reason, a psychoanalytic encounter with the knowledge that one wanted to kill one's father, or that one is a homosexual is a traumatic encounter. For Lacan, the style of the analysand's self address is one that eventually produces a fall from self love, from an ego ideal. Psychoanalysis, as dialogue, is the drama of having one's discourse returned to one's "self" as a relation to the Other. This Other is no person (l'autrui). The analyst, the analysand's interlocutor, is not there as a person, but as a semblant - a pure point that functions as a silent blank screen. This silence, this decline of every plea for empathy is not a simple absence of communication. The analyst is in the position of the Other who maintains a telling silence by sending the analysand's message back to him or her in an inverted form (E9,41,247,298, e40,85). Outside of <sup>a</sup>psychoanalysis, the nearest equivalent to this disturbing encounter of the self as Other is perhaps jealousy.

Lacan's teaching of a return to Freud is therefore partly cast as the issue of returning to the style of the analysand's self address. He inverts the usual meaning of "style" as an ornamentation that one chooses to possess or to discard. Style is the very course of the analytic experience of having one's discourse returned as one's position within a series of structures of which one is not the instigator. In contrast to certain other forms of therapy, the analysand does not select his

existence from a number of available contingencies. He rather reckons with certain necessities and impossibilities that are the irreducible datum of one's experience of being in the world.

In order to pursue this style of the analysand's self address as Other, it is necessary first of all to prepare for an additional question of style. This is the question of Lacan's style of communication.(4) His publications, which are largely in the form of transcripts made by those who attended his regular seminars, present an insurmountable barrier to the reader or commentator who wishes to know "what" Lacan says. One cannot readily say "what" Lacan says for the reason that Lacan's style of communication is preposterously difficult to comprehend. Lacan declares that as a writing, (un écrit), each of his papers published in Écrits are written not to be read (§11 251). Does this simply mean that Lacan is talking about issues which can only be encountered in the analytic session, or can these issues still be theorised, ie., based on general principles which are independent of the facts of each analytic case?

Lacan was first and foremost a practising and teaching clinician. His seminars, difficult though they are, were primarily given in order to transmit knowledge from teacher to trainee analyst. In the course of this transmission, Lacan gradually replaced the classical vocabulary of psychoanalysis with his own terms. He also, particularly in his later developments, introduced a formalism by approaching analytic

principles in terms of topologies and mathemes rather than theories. It is clear, then, that there is a form to Lacan's teaching, that it gives general principles which are not limited to a particular analytic case. But whilst a form exists, it does not lend itself to an automatic functioning. The style of Lacan's communication does not function merely as a vehicle to convey a propositional content that can be easily detached from such a vehicle. Whilst Lacan returns to general principles of Freudian psychoanalysis, they are principles which have to be approached in some other way than that of looking for where they are simply stated. But exactly which reference points are best suited for plotting this way?

### 1.1. STYLE AS POETRY

One way of answering this question is to refer to the occasion which marked the entry of Lacan's teaching into the anglophone world: a symposium held in 1966 at Baltimore to discuss what was informally styled "the structuralist controversy".(5) Lacan had long since presented his paper "Some Reflections on the Ego" to the British Psychoanalytical Society in London in 1951. Yet it was at this American symposium which was attended by the literati, philosophers and social scientists rather than psychoanalysts, that Lacan first stirred an anglophone reception of his teaching as part of a "structuralist controversy". The major resonance of Lacan's teaching in the anglophone world is subsequently heard as the question of the possibility of a literary theory purloined from the supposedly



structural linguistic model of Lacan's psychoanalytic theory (Con Davis, 1983, p. 845). Although Freud himself spoke of a possible kinship between literary texts and psychoanalysis, it is Lacan who has provided aspiration for those who, operating from within the academy, sought to forge this connection in the wake of a "structuralist controversy". One consequence of this, we shall now argue, is that the most viable strategy for battling with Lacan's difficult style is viewed as fidelity to the Latin etymology of a text. Lacan's textum, the narrative goes, has to be read as an intricate web of filiations to be unravelled as though they were some sort of poetry in all but name.

Such an approach is always implicit rather than explicit. It receives its tacit justification from the claim that Lacan's central thesis is that structuralist principles of language are at work in Freud's analysis of the workings of the unconscious. Freud, it is well known, wanted to give his findings the respectability of a set of scientific laws. Yet his model of a scientific law was restricted to nineteenth century concepts of mechanisms, hydraulics and a principle of self regulating equilibrium that is known today as homeostasis. Lacan does not dispute that as a fundamental concept of psychoanalysis, the unconscious can be formulated according to a set of universal laws. Yet his paradigm for such laws is arguably extracted from the study of linguistics which Freud did not have at his disposal (E799 e298). Lacan's aphorism from the 1950's that "the unconscious is structured as or like (comme) a language" means

precisely that the unconscious is structured, ie., is putatively an object of the same type of structural analysis which is applied to language. The unconscious operates according to certain linguistic laws which give it the status of an object of scientific investigation.

So of what exactly do these laws consist? Lacan's answer in 1957 is as follows


To pinpoint the emergence of linguistic science we may say that, as in the case of all sciences in the modern sense, it is contained in the constitutive moment of an algorithm that is its foundation. This algorithm is the following:

$$\frac{S}{s}$$

which is read as: the signifier over the signified, "over" corresponding to the bar separating the two stages (E497 e149).

This distinction and order of priority between signifiers and signifieds can be explained by referring to the work of Ferdinand Saussure, the recognised founder of structural linguistics.

In Saussure's posthumously collected and published Cours de Linguistique Générale, the fundamental object of linguistic study is defined as a system of signs that comprise a language (langue) (Saussure, trans:1983, p.15). Each one of these signs is a double sided entity comprising a concept (the signified signifié), and a sound image (the signifier signifiant). The signified and signifier call for each other like two sides of a coin: "a concept becomes an identifying characteristic of a certain sound, just as a given sound is an identifying characteristic of the corresponding concept" (Ibid., pp.101-02).

Saussure claims that while signified and signifier are intimately united, this bond is quite arbitrary (Ibid., p.67). In the first place, there is - with the dubious exception of onomatopoeia - no natural accord between signifier and signified.(6) Their relation is rather one of convention which is proved by the existence of different languages for signifying the same signified. Thus in France, the signified "boeuf" has as its signifier b-ö-f on one side of the border but o-k-s (Ochs) on the other (Ibid., pp.67-68). In the second place, Saussure claimed that any given signifier and any given signified take on value solely because of the system to which they belong and the relative position that they occupy within it. The value of a signifier and a signified is negatively differential or diacritical. Whilst the French mouton and the English "sheep" are two signifiers that refer to the same signified, they do not have the same value. As a result of the importation of the Norman French "mouton" into the English language,  different signifiers to refer to the animal in the field and the prepared meat on the table. In contrast, the signifier mouton in contemporary French language refers to both. It has a different value because it occupies a different relative position within the language system (Ibid., p.114).

It is, then, not in nineteenth century concepts of physics that Lacan finds a scientific paradigm of psychoanalytic theory, but in the Saussurian principle that a system of signs permeate the entire structure of language. Yet it does not follow that

Lacan is superimposing an uncritical reception of Saussure upon Freud's work. It is now necessary to show why Lacan is radically modifying Saussure when, in the above algorithm, he places the signifier and the signified respectively above and below the bar.

Vincent Descombes provides a useful statement of three canons of structuralist thought which follow from Saussure's position, and which are arguably present in a certain period of Lacan's thought. The first canon is that "The signifier precedes the signified" (Descombes,[1979],1980,p.95). Lacan rejects the bond Saussure postulates between signifier and signified because it suggests that "the signifier answers to the function of representing the signified" (E498 e150). Instead Lacan pursues an arbitrary relation between signifier and signified to the point of insisting that "the signifier intrudes into the signified" (E500 e151). In describing a loosening of the bond between signifier and signified as taking place over long periods of time, indeed whole centuries, Saussure wrote "Language is radically powerless to defend itself against the forces which from one moment to the next are shifting the relationship between the signified and signifier (Saussure,trans:1983,p.76). Whilst Saussure is thinking of such shifts as that from the Latin necare "to kill" to the French noyer "to drown", Lacan is conceiving this unfolding of meaning along an axis of time that unfolds according to what he calls a signifying chain. If "it is in the chain of the signifier that meaning insists", it is because the analysand is kept running along a chain of free word

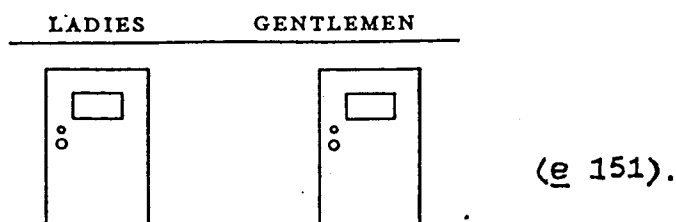
associations where each signifier only takes on its meaning by pointing to another signifier (E502 e153).

This idea of a signifying chain greatly extends the priority of a signifier over a signified. The signified becomes less and less important as the meaning of the analysand's speech resides in the fact that there is an indefinite sliding of meaning from one signifier to another which usually cannot be pinned down to a signified.(7)

A consequence of this is the second canon listed by Descombes: "The subject submits to the law of the signifier" (Descombes,[1979],1980,p.97). If the analysand is kept running along signifying chains, if his or her word associations lead to unforeseen meanings, then this subject's intentions cannot be described as originating his or her utterances. Rather than having an intended meaning for which his language functions as a mere instrument to convey, his discourse will be one that he receives from the treasury of one signifier pointing to another. In analysis, the analysand is only ever represented by what he says, and this representation consists of following rather than leading these signifying chains. It is therefore fair to say, as one secondary source puts it, that "we have to look for the subject within the very structure of the chain, or he is indeed this very chain" (Benvenuto & Kennedy,1986,p.18).

In the 1957 paper "The Instance of the Letter in the

Unconscious", Lacan provides a concrete example of the subject's submission to the signifier (E499 e151):



For Lacan, there is only one criterion for deciding which of these two identical doors to enter. One's decision is determined by the two signifiers "Ladies" and "Gentlemen". The two doors are two signifieds whose difference is solely carved out of these two signifiers "Ladies" and "Gentlemen". Lacan thinks this lavatorial example gives a low blow to the nominalist debate. Far from existing as mere labels, the signifiers "Ladies" and "Gentlemen" determine the signified in a material way (E500 e151).

The final canon listed by Descombes to which Lacan arguably adheres is that "Meaning arises out of non-meaning (Descombes,[1979],1980,p.95). The applicability of this canon to Lacan emerges most forcefully when the latter turns to three books by Freud that are "canonical" with respect to the structuring of the unconscious as a priority of signifiers over signifieds. "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1900), "The Psychopathology of Everyday Life" (1901), and "Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious" (1905), are read by Lacan "as simply a web of examples whose development is inscribed in the formulas

of connexion and substitution [...]" (E522 e170).

Let us begin with "The Interpretation of Dreams". For Freud, unconscious material attaches itself to apparently unrelated and nonsensical structures that the subject assembles upon waking from a dream. One of these processes of attachment which Freud called condensation (Verdichtung) is the operation whereby the dream one recollects after waking has become "brief, meagre and laconic in comparison with the range and wealth of dream thoughts (SE4 279). Another of these processes which Freud called displacement (Verschbiebung), will result in an apparently insignificant element in the dream one assembles upon waking having a major significance in the latent dream thoughts and vice-versa (SE4 305). These two operations of condensation and displacement are likened by Lacan to the respective principles of metaphor and metonymy which Roman Jakobson applied to his analysis of two sorts of language deficiencies which comprise aphasia (Jakobson and Halle, 1956, pp. 76-82). (8) When Freud speaks of condensation, Lacan understands this as essentially a metaphoric structure of the substitution of "one word for another" at a given moment of time (E507 e157). When Freud speaks of displacement, Lacan understands this as essentially a metonymic structure involving a "word to word" connexion via a certain contiguity or delay in time (E506 e156).


As examples of these structures, Willian Richardson gives the

following news headline: "Nixon discusses Watergate affair; Australia has its own Watergate" (Richardson, 1980, p.151; 1982, p.13). "Watergate" signifies a political scandal in both parts of the sentence. But whereas in the first part, "Watergate" metonymically connects with the place where a political scandal was uncovered, the second part involves a metaphoric structure where "Watergate" is a substitute for the term political scandal.

For Lacan, such metaphoric and metonymic relations between words do not only pertain to the relation theorised between the latent thoughts of the dream and the dream one assembles upon waking. The dream is but one unconscious formation since, as Lacan rightly points out, "the efficacy of the unconscious does not cease in the waking state" (E514 e163). In his analysis of jokes and the psychopathology of everyday life, that is, diurnal life, Freud is arguably establishing that spoken words can be symptoms by virtue of the condensed and displaced connections that hold between them. The early Freud of the 1890's defines the formation of a symptom (Symtombildung) as a "false connection" (SE2 67,302). Broadly speaking, Freud means by this that the symptom is a compromise formation whereby ideas that are repressed from consciousness transfer themselves onto other conscious material with which they are tenuously, associatively and unconsciously connected.

Condensed and displaced connections between words can be shown as having the status of a symptom so defined. These



connections do not admit of necessity insofar as it is impossible to predict with which word a given word will be connected. Nor is the connection between these two words made in consciousness. It is Freud's experience that  someone will say, and will then dispute having said, something quite different from what they consciously intended to say. It was indeed this insight that led Freud in the 1890's to abandon hypnosis, and to commence with the psychoanalytic technique of free association. By pledging himself to give voice without exception to every thought which occurs to him, the analysand facilitates the exposure of contradictions and other significant lacunae in his discourse. His free associations facilitate a disassociation: in the process of intending to say one thing, there will emerge the unconscious determinism of his saying something else.

In linking condensation and displacement to metaphoric and metonymic structures, Lacan is making the point that although it is impossible to predict which two words or phrases are connected, the structure of the connection will remain constant. The structure consists of there being either, as in metonymy, a connection between signifiers, or, as in metaphor, a crossing of the bar between signifier and signified (E515 e164).(9) In other words, what is ultimately at stake is Lacan's above re-reading of the Saussurian algorithm as placing "the signifier over the signified, "over" corresponding to the bar separating the two stages" (E497 e149).


Let us look at an example in Freud's work of metaphor, of the crossing of the bar between signifier and signified. In "The Psychopathology of Everyday Life", Freud undertakes the unprecedented act of placing certain apparently marginal slips of speech under the generic concept of a Fehlleistung, a parapraxis. Instead of conceiving a slip of the tongue (Versprechen) as a mere coincidence or accident, Freud viewed it as a speech act in its own right. He tried to show that such a parapraxis, like jokes, dreams, and neurotic symptoms, are compromise formations resulting from antagonism between the subject's conscious intentions and what he has repressed.

One example Freud gives is that once the President of the Lower House of the Austrian Parliament OPENED (erröfnete) the sitting by declaring "Gentlemen: I take notice that a full quorum of members is present and herewith declare the sitting CLOSED (geschlossen)" (GW4 67 SE6 59). The intervention in his speech of the opposite of what he had intended to say betrayed, according to Freud, that the President secretly wished he was already in a position to close the predictably uneventful meeting.

Rather than a sliding of the signifier over the signified which defines metonymy, the Austrian President's parapraxis exemplifies a metaphorical structure where there is a crossing of the bar between signifier and signified. To understand this, we have to look at the connection between this linguistic structure

of metaphor and Freud's concept of repression. The crossing of the bar between signifier and signified is also, in Lacan's schema, a communciation between the unconscious and preconscious agencies of the mind. Whilst these two agencies are different in kind for Freud, there nevertheless has to be skewed connections between them if one is to avoid the psychoparallelism of which Freud warned (SE14 168). The crossing of the bar between signifier and signified involves a first stage of repression, and then a second stage of the return of the repressed in a distorted fashion (SE14 154-56). This first stage of repression is defined by Lacan as consisting of a signifier which falls below the bar, and which thereby attains the rank of a signified (E515,708 e164). This fallen signifier is then replaced by another signifier. This overall process roughly corresponds to the expulsion of an idea from consciousness and its replacement by another idea. Yet in a second stage that is exemplified by the parapraxis of the Austrian President, repressed material intrudes into the conscious text of everyday life.

The main point to grasp here is that once material has fallen below the bar to become the repressed, it is not thereby emptied of its potency. As a pure content of the unconscious, we never have access to this signifier which has become a signified. Yet we nevertheless have access to the derivatives of the unconscious, or, in Lacan's terms, we have access to the way that the signifier which has fallen to the rank of signified itself

becomes replaced by another signifier. On the one hand, this second signifier which in the above example is that of "closed", is a metaphor for what cannot be said - the signified, or the repressed content of exactly why the President might have been wishing to declare the  meeting closed. On the other hand, the substitution of "closed" for "open" exemplifies the compromise structure of the symptom. Repressed material that has fallen to the rank of an unspeakable signified nevertheless insists and persists. It attaches itself to a signifier which can intrude into, or replace the signifier "open".

#### 1.2. FIDELITY TO A TEXT?

Whilst the elaboration of this process has been schematic, it suffices to return us better equipped to the point with which we commenced. This point is that it is frequently assumed that the most viable strategy for battling with Lacan's difficult style is fidelity to a textum. Lacan claims that the above metaphoric structure indicates "that it is in the substitution of signifier for signifier that an effect of signification is produced that is creative or poetic, [...] (E515 e164).(10) Not withstanding a tradition of debate since Plato, Lacan is implying that poetry and psychoanalysis are alike in treating an interplay of metaphors as a means of evoking unspeakable truth.(11) In a psychoanalytic session, "hearing" the thing not said (the unconscious) beneath the thing that is said ("closed") becomes the means for extracting sense from the analysand's inexplicable and nonsensical symptom.

It has been claimed that Lacan's nonsensical style of communication can also be approached in terms of this definition of poetry. His publications are to be read as a textum, as an intricate web of filiations insofar as their style demands the effort of extracting sense from nonsense. It is not simply to dismiss it as a farce that Jane Gallop notes that Lacan put "Ecrits" on the cover of his collection because "un écrit (a writing) in my opinion (à mon sens, literally, in my sense) is not made to be read" (Gallop, 1985, pp. 44-45; §11 251). "The written as not-to-be-read", the writing that to Lacan's sense should not easily make sense allows Gallop to accommodate Lacan's writings under the auspices of what lures us in poetry (Ibid., p. 34). Just as the psychoanalyst listens less to the explicit content of the analysand's speech than to its unintended disclosures and subsequent denials, so, according to Jane Gallop "literary critics learn how to read the letter of the text, how to interpret the style, the form, rather than just reading for content, for ideas" (Ibid., p. 22). The point here is that Lacan's texts have to be read as a critique of the reader's assumption that the text means what it says. They become a place where unintended meanings come into their own. The most professional of readers, the student of literature who is trained to read words as saying something which is not said, turns out to be the best equipped reader of Lacan. "If", Gallop claims, "Lacan is impossible to read in the same way that Joyce is impossible, or Mallarmé or Scève, then the professional reader,

the student of literature, already knows how to read him (Ibid.,p.45). Such a reader is able to decipher sense elsewhere than the stated referent in which the novice would attempt to form a reading of Lacan.

An implication of this is that we should attempt to read Lacan's teachings not merely as in part describing the concept of metaphor, but as performing, as dramatising the metaphoric resources of signifiers. As Antoine Vergote puts it, Lacan's "discourse on the unconscious wants to come forth like the discourse of the unconscious itself" (Vergote,1983,p.217). If, as Anthony Wilden claims, there is a method to the madness of the reader's perpetual struggle with Lacan's publications, it lies in the resemblance between the reader confronting a written text and the analysand confronting a spoken text (Wilden,1968,p.311). What sustains attention to the text or attendance at the analytic session is an expected arrival of a signified. What allows one to terminate analysis or put down the text is the realisation that there is only an interminable chain of signifiers, that one searches in vain for a final truth on which to pin these signifiers. The method in the madness is the signifier's power of suspending the signified.

Via structural linguistics, then, we have moved from the significance Freud attaches to a slip of the tongue to the deciphering of sense out of nonsense on which our reading of Lacan allegedly depends, and with which the literature student is

already acquainted. But this demarcation of the terrain on which we should read Lacan is dubious for the following reasons.

Firstly, whilst Gallop is correct to point out that for many people Lacan is primarily a reading experience, it by no means follows that it is an oeuvre, a "work" that should be read (Gallop, 1985, p. 54). Lacan's legacy rather consists of a teaching. We have already remarked that the majority of his publications to date are transcripts of seminars recorded not by Lacan himself but by members of his audience. Lacan's texts should therefore be regarded as primarily a reading experience of someone else's listening experience. Lacan's Écrits is only apparently an exception to this, since it is a collection of re-worked papers that were given at various seminars and conferences. This predominance of an oral teaching, of a situation conducive to spontaneous interventions and abrupt terminations, means that Lacan's publications become fetishised when read as lines of poetry. Although the notes which Lacan prepared for his seminars are precise in their detail, they were not offered as polished, final and homogenous pieces of work.

Secondly, because literary theory tends to treat Lacan's publications as a piece, it does not take sufficiently seriously the shifts and revisions which occurred during the almost thirty year span of Lacan's teaching. Consider, for example, the two categories that must not be confused in Lacan's teaching: the ego (moi) and the subject - the "I" (je). The former is a

seat of consciousness that is formed through an identification with an image, with a specular counterpart or other. The ego is phenomenologically conceived as formed through the appearance of the human body inhabiting a space. But the latter category of the subject is conceived by Lacan as "an effect of the signifier" which occurs with the advent of speaking a language. The "I" is not seen in space but is a personal pronoun which, as in the phrase "I am lying" may be understood in two different ways: as (i) the I who is attempting to render himself present as a conscious subject; and (ii) the I who recedes from his statement in the very act of making it, the I which for Lacan is already subjected to an unconscious discourse (§11 128 FF 139). This second I is a subject radically ex-centric to himself, a subject who is divided by his words. This subject is not the category that enables the human being to operate as an ego, as a supposed coherence and unity in space. The category of the subject belongs, in the Lacanian teaching, to the realm of discourse which is called the Symbolic whilst the ego belongs to a phenomenological realm of the Imaginary.

This fundamental distinction is the result of an ongoing transformation of Lacan's thought. The distinction is not rigorously applied from the first as though it was a premise that occurred without antecedents. As Richard Klein notes, in Lacan's 1949 paper "The mirror phase as formative of the function of the I (Je)", traces can be found of a confusion of the I with the ego (R.Klein, 1985, p.12). The ego is said to be formed through




the specular image: identification with this image is said to be an exemplar of "the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form[...]" (E94 e2). A subtle shift has occurred between this formulation and Lacan's remark some five years later in December 1954 that "Without a doubt the true I (je) is not the ego" (S2 60).

Yet an anglophone commentator, Jacqueline Rose, seems oblivious to this shift when writing "Lacan then takes the mirror image as the model of the ego function itself, the category which enables the subject to operate as 'I'" (Rose, 1982, pp. 30-31). This statement betrays Rose's insufficient research into the factors which generate Lacan's major distinction between the ego and the I. By basing her own formulation only on Lacan's 1949 paper on the mirror phase, Rose is unable to situate this paper within the context of Lacan's more fundamental point - fundamental for psychoanalytic practice, that the ego does not provide access to the unconscious subject.

This insufficient attunement to the shifts occurring in Lacan's thought leads to the third reason why it is dubious to fetishise Lacan's publications as a "text". The reader is likely to take Lacan's analogy between psychic structures and structural linguistics as a constant parameter of his thought. In the next section, we shall see that when Lacan's interest shifted away from the function of an image to the function of words in the mid 1940's, it was to a phenomenological rather than to a

structuralist view of language that he initially turned. Furthermore, as will be indicated in section four, it was with the passing of his structuralist extravaganza in the late 1950's that Lacan's interest focused on there being psychic phenomena whose cause was the lack of a signifier. That for Lacan something could not be taken up by a signifier, or was at least on the edge of a signifying domain suggests that Gallop's claim that Lacan allied psychoanalysis to linguistics should be read with caution (Gallop, 1985, p. 24).

Finally, and most importantly, there is in Lacan's teaching no justification for Gallop's claim that "Rather than teach psychoanalysis as a basis for understanding literature, Lacan might see psychoanalysis as a regional branch of literary studies" (Ibid.). It is true that Lacan's papers on Gide, Joyce and Poe do not accord with a traditionally reductive method of psychoanalysis whereby it reveals psychic truths as the latent content of a literary work. Such a fixing of words to a final signified would be anathema to Lacan's idea of an indefinite sliding of meaning. Yet one cannot treat this concern with signifiers intruding into a signified as a justification for making psychoanalysis one branch of literary studies. This is not only because Lacan stated many times that he was first and foremost a clinician, but also because such a treatment of psychoanalysis as literature would, as Gallop herself notes, prove ultimately to be a dead end (Ibid., p. 25). Without a clinical background, the literary reader who is faced only with

the lack of a referent in Lacan is likely to undergo the experience psychoanalysis calls transference. Rather than be a passive consumer of the text, the reader will be obliged to contribute something. Implicated in the production of the text, this reader will start  to produce the truths that she wished were in the text in a pure form. But to read the text as a wished-for truth is equivalent to absorbing the text into the absoluteness of the self. To take Lacan's texts as the opportunity for one's own virtuoso performance is to indulge in the omnipotence of self which psychoanalysis views as a sickness of "Man".

### 1.3. LACAN'S ENCOUNTER WITH LANGUAGE PRIOR TO STRUCTURAL LINGUISTICS.

If, then, we have criticised the fetishising of Lacan's teaching into a textum, it is because in manipulating what she sees as a new liberty of style, Gallop remains faithful to the university imperative of a finished, polished and virtuoso performance. To show exactly why Lacan's difficult style of communication requires interrogation rather than performance, we need to press rather than suppress the point that Lacan's teaching lacks a definite, immediate and unquestioned notion of the word. Instead of aspiring to the professional reader's precious, recondite extraction of sense from nonsense, we must show why this style of Lacan's communication, this withholding of sense from language is one of the irreversible conditions of his return to Freud. The question proper to Lacan's difficult

style of communication is how it relates to Freud's encounter, in his practice, of the analyst having something impossible to say.

Let us first ask why the word "signifier" (signifiant) is so readily associated with Lacan's teaching. "Everything" Lacan tells us in Book eleven of the Seminars, "emerges from the structure of the signifier" (§11 188 FF206). We shall see in a moment that for Lacan, the structure of the signifier involves a gap, a question of how a speaking being is caught between different conscious and unconscious orders of discourse. However, in the wake of structuralism, there has been a prevalent tendency, especially in the anglophone world, to underplay this gap. This is the result of treating Lacan's talk of signifiers as primarily an attempt to extend Sassure's enterprise of formalising la langue. As David Macey points out, this received formula partly results from one of the first influential texts that introduced Lacan to an anglophone audience, namely, the English translation of Louis Althusser's paper "Freud and Lacan" (Macey, 1983, p.1). "Lacan", writes Althusser, "would be the first to admit that his attempted theorisation would have been impossible were it not for the emergence of a new science: linguistics" (Althusser, 1971, p.191). (12)

Similar presuppositions are apparent when Richard Wolheim writes that for Lacan, "psychoanalysis is psycholinguistics in its theory" (Wolheim, 1979, p.41). According to John Searle's definition of linguistics, it "attempts to describe the actual

structures - phonological, syntactical, and semantic of natural human languages" (Searle, 1984, p.4). Once it is assumed that Lacan is attempting to ground Freud's work in one or more of these structures, the question arises of whether he rigorously applies or questions the linguistic theories of these structures. It is this assumption which leads Wolheim to make certain criticisms of Saussure which appear a fortiori as criticisms of Lacan. With regard to semantic structures, Wolheim's question is: if one signifier only takes its meaning from another signifier, then "how does meaning ever get started?" (Wolheim, 1979, p.37). With regard to syntax, Wolheim's question is does syntax require a combination of signifiers, "or do we need from the start something that provides more structure, like the sentence or the fact?" (Ibid.). In addition there is for Wolheim a more fundamental problem. Saussure, and by implication Lacan, give no clear indication of how the division of labour between signifier and signified stands in relation to a traditional distinction between what it is "about a word which allows it to pick out things in the world, and those very things (if there are any) which it thereby picks out" (Ibid.). We have no bearings from which to compare the signifier-signified distinction with one that has been drawn between intension and extension, connotation and denotation, sense and reference. (13)

We do not wish to claim that Lacan's teaching is completely exempt from these problems. Nor do we deny that these issues are important in their own right. But we do wish to suggest that one

cannot fruitfully engage with these problems as though Lacan's teaching is the sum of Saussure and Freud, or as though Lacan was returning to a solely "structural linguistic" Freud. The first French publication of Saussure's Cours in 1916 by Payot, and its four subsequent publications up till 1955 would have provided Lacan with access to the central motifs of structural linguistics well before it became established doctrine in France in the 1960's (Dews, 1984, p.63; Harris in Saussure, 1983, p.xiii). As Peter Dews also points out, some of Lacan's "hermeneutic" (and we can ourselves add "phenomenological") assumptions actually interfered with, and produced a guarded reception on Lacan's part of the structuralist view of la langue as a code or formalisable system of signs (Ibid., pp.63-64).

It is in 1936, at least twenty years before the prevalence of "high structuralism" in France, that Lacan defines language as the first given of psychoanalysis (E82). Whilst in this passage, Lacan also defines language as a sign, this is not a sign of structuralism but of a quite different phenomenological orientation (Macey, 1983, p.2). Language, implying the situation of an interlocutor "draws on the simple fact that language, before signifying something, signifies something for someone" (E82). It is not in Saussure, but in Kojève's lectures on Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, and in Merleau-Ponty's early works that Lacan finds this conception of language as a discourse which requires an addressee.

This conception of language as a discourse is still maintained even when Lacan's structuralist period is arguably inaugurated in 1953 with the "Rome Discourse". Interlocution is defined as constitutive of psychoanalysis (E258 e49): there is "no speech without a reply, even if it is met only with silence (E247 e40). Psychoanalytic discourse is conceived here as a passage from empty to full speech, terms which have been likened to Heidegger's distinction between Rede (Discourse) and Gerede (Idle Talk) (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986, p.85). When, in the same paper, Lacan does refer to the linguistic concept of sign, it is in order to refute what he disparagingly calls "sign language" (E297 e84). The figure of eight dance performed by bees for the purposes communicating the existence of nectar, is a set of signs defined as a code or message. But human language cannot be conceived like this since it is rather a knot of signification whereby the same truth is expressed with different words, or different truths are expressed with the same words. It is not as a code or as a formalisable system of signs that one analyses the meaning of discourse as it is found in either Pascal's Tu ne me cherchais pas si tu ne m'avais trouvé (E298 e85), or the joke of the Galican Jew who asked his friend "Why do you tell me you are going to Cracow so I'll believe you are going to Lvov, when you really are going to Cracow?" (E525 e173; S11 127-28 FF139).

We have already seen that in 1957, Lacan likens the condensed and displaced associations of the Traumarbeit

(dreamwork) to the metaphoric and metonymic dimensions of meaning that come out of structuralist linguistics. It is also true that Lacan has drawn attention to Freud's account of how a certain child's separation from his mother<sup>#</sup>hinged on two elementary "fort" and "da" exclamations. For Lacan, these exclamations announce "in the subject the diachronic integration of the dichotomy of the phonemes" (SE18 14-17; E 319 e103). According to Lacan, the child arises from language (naît au langage) at the very moment when he first experiences the binary nature of the fundamental elements of language: phonemes. Thus it seems to be impossible to deny that Lacan is indebted to structural linguistics both for the universal laws which define the operation of the unconscious, and for a bi-polar definition of exactly what kind of structure is assimilated by the burgeoning power of speech in the child.

Yet this is still not tantamount to saying that structural linguistics leads Lacan to ask for the actual phonological, syntactical and semantic structures of a natural human language. It is one thing to ask how words get their meaning, but quite another thing to approach language as a pre-existing structure to which the human being is subjected. In order to conceive this submission to language, Lacan leans heavily on an axiom derived from Saussure that the signifier represents the subject for another signifier. We shall see in chapter three that the implications of this axiom are that no single signifier is sufficient to represent the subject, and that the subject does



not so much represent himself as become represented for something else. For the moment, it is only necessary to note that semiology, the study of structures of meaning, does not in itself provide Lacan with the proof he is looking for that the subject who carries "under his hair the codicil that condemns him to death knows (sait) neither the meaning nor the text, nor in what language it is written, nor even that it had been tattooed under his shaven scalp as he slept" (E803 e302). This "messenger-slave" and the above Galican Jew who pretends to pretend with his words, each exemplify a structure of language which is charged with significance, but which cannot be formulated as the "meaning of meaning" (E498 e150). Such formulations, Lacan remarks, "important as their existence is for the philosopher, turn us away from the locus in which language questions us as to its very nature" (Ibid.). As we shall see in a moment, Lacan finds this "locus", this crucial point or line elsewhere than in the possibility of a metalanguage (E813,816,867-8 e311,314).

#### 1.4. THE FREUDIAN ENCOUNTER WITH NON-SENSE.

In attempting to retrieve Lacan's teaching from a wholesale incorporation into structural linguistics, our aim has been to arrive at a position where it can be shown that he does not conceive the psychanalytic experience as the extraction of sense from nonsense. The first way in which this point can be argued for is by developing the point made above that psychoanalysis is a discourse which requires an addressee, an addressee which

( ) by virtue of *the unconscious* allows the sender to receive his own message back in an inverted form. The analysand's consciously spoken message comes back as an unconscious which does not make sense, and which is traumatic.

The first of three examples we shall give of such a traumatic encounter is taken from Freud's 1909 case history of the "Rat Man" (SE10 151-249). Freud describes his patient's expression during the painful recital of the represented torture that supplied the theme of the Rat Man's obsessional symptoms. The torture was that of a rat forced into the victim's anus. "His face", Freud tells us, "reflected the horror of which he was unaware" (Grausen vor seiner ihn selbst unbekannten Lust) (GW7 392 SE10 167-8). What is horrific for the Rat Man is the emergence of the pleasure he experienced in torturing his father in his phantasy. Its emergence is horrific because it tears apart the consistency with which the Rat Man's obsessional symptoms appeared to be anything but an encounter with pleasure. The horror of the rat torture is one of encountering his being as located not in the conscious avoidance of pleasure, but in a unconscious pleasure of parricide (SE10 168). His being was located in an unconscious truth, in the truth of the Other's pleasure. We use the term Other to designate that his unconscious was so radically cut off from his knowing ego that it appeared as nonsensical, as a gap in his sense. Consider that it was Freud who had to help the Rat Man utter the phrase "into his anus". The Rat Man himself remained speechless before this

phrase (SE10 167-8). Without the analyst taking up the position of giving the patient's message back to him as his other, there was something so non\_sensical about this discourse that it proved impossible to say.

It is in the context of this interruption that we should review Wolheim's grounds for emphasising Lacan's claim that "Everything emerges from the structure of the signifier" (S11 188 FF206). "This structure" Lacan continues, "is based on what I first called the function of the cut" (Ibid.)(14) In seeking to convey the idea that for Lacan "speech is everything", Wolheim makes a misleading generalisation. What is in question for Lacan is less a speech act than a structure of discourse (Leader,1986,p.16). Lacan was to stress that discourse is not speech, that it instead concerns from where the subject speaks, the position from which he speaks. The subject is cut between different orders of discourse belonging to (i) an enunciation (énonciation) that is the act of speaking words from the position of the conscious ego; and (ii) a statement ("énoncé") of an unconscious being that issues from these words. The disjunction between these two positions is an oscillation where the enunciation "trembles with the vacillation that comes back to it from its own statement (E802 e300). The subject oscillates between searching for words with which to say what he thinks he knows, and fading from those words in the course of their betraying truths which are not consciously known.

The second example of why, for Lacan, the unconscious does not emerge as sense is taken from Freud's notion of phantasy as involving something impossible to say. In the above example, Freud is concerned with treating the symptom as a message. The Rat Man's obsessional concern for the well being of his father is traced to the Rat Man's unconscious motive for hating his father as an interferer with his desires. Freud thereby shows that this apparently inexplicable obsessional symptom can be interpreted by listening for an unconscious that is betrayed in the parapraxes and other lacunae of the Rat Man's speech. Yet some ten years later in 1919, Freud openly acknowledges that such a method of interpretation comes up against a certain limit. In 1900, Freud had alluded to a limit of interpretation when mentioning the existence of an unfathomable point in all dreams (SE4 111 SE5 525). In the 1919 paper, "A Child is Being Beaten", Freud treats this beating phantasy as exemplifying a limit where the source, the recipient and executor of the beating could never be established with certainty: "Nothing could be ascertained that threw any light upon all these questions - only the hesitant reply: 'I know nothing more about it - a child is being beaten'" (SE17 181). Freud's account of this phantasy, and its importance for understanding Lacan's concept of fundamental phantasy are irreducible to a play of the signifier in which the reader contributes his own sense. Indulged in by many of Freud's patients, this beating phantasy appeared to Freud as the expression of some fundamental and universal datum. Since there are no grounds for treating it as a contingent which can be assigned

its place in the subject's history, Freud instead looked upon it as a structural datum whose only possible transposition into historical terms is in the form of a myth (SE17 193). Lacan takes up the importance of myth when he defines neurosis as a question that is posed for the subject "from where it was before the subject came into the world" - (the phrase Freud used when explaining the Oedipal complex to little Hans)" (E520 e168).

The final aspect of Freud's work which is irreducible to the deciphering of sense is one that, by its very nature, Freud is forced to leave unresolved in his 1937 paper on an unendliche (indefinite) analysis as opposed to a endliche (definite) analysis (SE23 216-53). The view of analysis as definite is one that is closer to Freud's earlier work on treating the symptom as a message. Analysis is over when analysand has him or herself inserted an apparently inexplicable symptom into a chain of intelligible actions. The apparently absurd nonsensical dream fulfills a repressed wish, whilst the hysterical and obsessional symptom is traced to a compromise structure between repressed desire and its tenuous associative links with conscious material which is sufficiently distant from this desire. The analysis is over once the analysand has transformed the misery of his compulsive symptom "into common unhappiness" (SE2 305).

In 1937 however, Freud admits that analysis can also be indefinite. Psychoanalysis is an impossible profession since it tries to come to grips with the analysand having something

impossible to say, to remember, to act out, to bear. The likelihood of the "Wolf Man" mastering his neurosis in 1914 proved to be far from true. Subsequent pathogenic material "could only be construed as offshoots of his perennial neurosis" (SE23 219). The crux of the matter is evidence "of there being a force which is defending itself by every possible means against recovery and which is resolved to hold onto illness and suffering" (SE23 242). The symptom is no longer conceived by Freud as a message of a repressed desire for pleasure, but as the repetition of past experiences which are manifestly unpleasurable. The analysand's sense of guilt, his need for punishment and other masochistic phenomena lead Freud in 1920 to concede that mental events are not exclusively governed by a homeostatic, self regulating principle of avoiding unpleasure and securing pleasure. Beyond this definition of a pleasure principle, and even in spite of its continuing operation, Freud encounters proof of there being "pleasure of another sort" (SE18 16).

For this type of pleasure, Lacan reserves the name jouissance (E822 e320; S20 9-18). The jouissance effect of the symptom is that the subject does not wish to be cured of his conscious pain because he paradoxically, that is, nonsensically, derives an unconscious pleasure from it. To jouir the symptom one does not necessarily have to be on the analyst's couch. As well as the connotations this French word has with the sexual spasm of the living organism, its meaning can

cover a wider range of phenomena that extend from its mildest forms such as tickling to genocidal wars and suicide squads.

The crucial point here is that for Lacan, psychoanalysis is obliged to construct its maxims not according to sense but to an antinomy. There is a hiatus, a discordance which Freud theorised as the economic paradox of a death drive (Todestrieb) (SE18 34-43). For Freud, what is most driven in the Zwang, in the compulsion to repeat painful experiences is the abolition of what is most vital in the biological organism (Laplanche, 1976, p.107). For Lacan, this antinomy is such that in order to be a human subject, in order to be a sexed and speaking being, it is necessary to be seized by certain toxifying and mortifying structures which in the early 1950's, he formulated as part of the Symbolic (E316-22 e101-07; S2 375). Not covering over this concern with mortification, but assuming it and elaborating it was one of the major preoccupations of Lacan's teaching.

#### CONCLUSION

For these reasons, we must repudiate as too hygienic the view we have attributed to Gallop that for Lacan, words are a bundle of nonsensical signifiers waiting for the Other to discover their sense. Freud's wish to insert the dream or symptom into "a chain of intelligible waking mental acts" is an insertion which, for the analysand, is won via a disturbance of sense that comprises an encounter with the unconscious as a discourse of the Other.

Although Lacan likened the unconscious to a structure of language, this in no way implies a "linguistic" version of psychoanalysis. "Our definition of language la langue" we read in Saussure's Cours, "assumes that we disregard (écartons) everything that does not belong to its system. [...] The actual object of our study is, then, the social product stored in the brain of everyone, that is to say, language" (Saussure, trans: 1983, p.21,24). Over and above Saussure's parole-langue distinction, Lacan employed the term la lalangue to emphasise that the unconscious is the fact of a subject's constitution-division in language. This "la lala" of language is a repetition which is more fragile and traumatic than the object of study which is formulated by structural linguistics: "If we can say that the unconscious is structured as language, it is in that the effects of lalangue, already there as knowledge go well beyond everything the being who speaks is capable of stating" (§20 127). This notion of something impossible to say must be reckoned with when reading Lacan's statement: "Everything emerges from the structure of the signifier". It is an impossibility which can even lead Lacan to replace the notion of the unconscious: "it is a vicious circle to say that we are speaking beings; we are "speaking", a word that can be advantageously substituted for the unconscious" (cited in Heath, 1977-8, p.50).



# FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

- (1) Whether the difference between Lacan's version of psychoanalysis and psychology is as wide as he makes out is an open question. It is interesting that at the second reference quoted in the main text, Lacan distances himself from Jean Piaget's allegedly erroneous notion of the egocentric discourse of the child. Apparently taking the term "egocentric" at face value, Lacan can thereby conveniently contrast Piaget's approach with the notion of a "decentred" subject, of an unconscious subject ex-centric to a conscious self which can be found in Freud. Yet William Richardson has argued for a more subtle relation between Lacan and Piaget (Richardson, 1980, p.154). This argument has its basis in the fact that Piaget writes: "It might seem that the foregoing account makes the subject disappear to leave only the 'impersonal and general', but this is to forget that on the plane of knowledge [...] the subject's activity calls for the continual 'de-centring' without which he cannot become free from his spontaneous intellectual egocentricity" (Piaget, 1969, p.54; cited in Richardson, 1980, p.154).
- (2) See Smirnoff, 1979, pp.55-56.
- (3) GW11 11 SE17 143.
- (4) A controversial discussion of Lacan's style is to be found at footnote 44 of a series of published interviews with Jacques Derrida in Positions, trans: 1981, pp.107-13. Derrida criticises Lacan's style of communication for "reading above all, as an art of evasion. The vivacity of ellipsis too often seemed to me to serve as an avoidance or an envelopment of diverse problems" (Ibid., p.110). Jean Roussel, however, takes a different view: "Lacan's style, by its patient, methodical use of every form of rhetoric, by its ceaseless 'working through', and all the elaborate machinery of its progress to formal perfection, might well seem to mark a dissolution of 'style'" (Roussel, 1968, p.63).
- (5) The official title of this symposium which was held at the John Hopkins Centre, Baltimore, was "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man". See (Eds. Macksey and Donato, 1970), and (Ed. Con Davis, 1983, pp.843-4).
- (6) Dubious because not all nationalities, indeed, perhaps not even more than one nationality would, for example, say "miaow" when imitating the noise of a cat.
- (7) It should however be noted that in the 1960 paper, "Subversion of the Subject and Dialectic of Desire", Lacan

notes the existence in spoken discourse of certain anchoring points (points de caption) "by which the signifier stops the endless sliding (glissement) of signification (E805 e303). Rather than conceding here that a signifier is ultimately bound to a signified, Lacan is conceptualising meaning as sealed by its "reference back" to a previous signification.

- (8) The beauty of Jakobson's study of aphasia is that in addresssing himself quite specifically to the disintegration of language, he provided a means of distinguishing two major structures that co-exist in everyday speech. (Thom,1976,p.439).
- (9) For a more detailed and critical account of this structure than is necessary to give here, see Dews,1984,pp.110-11; Vergote,1983,p.203-4; and Wilden,1972,p.350.
- (10) Lacan's example of a kinship between metaphor and poetry is drawn from the following line from Victor Hugo's "Booz endormi": "His sheaf was neither miserly nor spiteful" (Sa gerbe n'était pas avere ni haineuse) (E506 e156).
- (11) The definition of poetry as metaphorical is controversial if only because certain late modernist poetry, eg., that of William Carlos Williams and e e cummings is explicitly anti-metaphorical.
- (12) See also John Bird's article on Lacan: "Language is the key to Lacan, and Lacan's basic project is to provide a linguistic version of Freud" (Bird,1982,p.7).
- (13) Mounin makes a related but more explicit set of criticisms. His basic point is that Lacan applies Saussure's distinction between signifier and signified without consideration for Saussure's original use of these terms (Mounin,1971,p.11).
- (14) See also E801 e299.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE CULTURE OF LACAN'S RETURN TO FREUD

#### INTRODUCTION

In spite of the points made in the previous chapter concerning the analysand's reception of his unconscious truth, the enigmatic nature of phantasy, and the question of a "beyond" to Freud's pleasure principle, it could still be argued that Freud's overall quest was to secure the triumph of Reason over the irrational. To admit that Freud's interpretation of a dream or symptom is more cogent than previous interpretations is, arguably, tantamount to saying that Freud greatly increased rather than decreased the number of phenomena which can be called rational. Even though Freud defines the unconscious formation of a dream as nothing less than a "transvaluation of all psychical

values" (SE5 654-55), it still remains the case that, as Alisdair MacIntyre points out, Freud never retreated from rationalism as a standard which ought to be achieved (MacIntyre, 1958, p.93). "In the long run" Freud wrote in "The Future of an Illusion", "nothing can withstand reason and experience" (SE21 54).(1)

Consequently, there exists the following crucial difference between Freud and Lacan. In contrast to Freud, there can be no opposition between the rational and the irrational in Lacan's schema since it is devoid of any apperceptive agency such as the ego which could do the work of rectifying errors or disfigurations produced by the unconscious. Far from being a faculty of common sense or a set of learnt criteria for judging what constitutes a norm, the ego is viewed by Lacan as having luring and misrecognising functions which produce judgements based on self love. But if, then, a difference between Freud and Lacan is heard in their use of a category as fundamental as the ego, how could the latter insist in his seminar in 1980 that whilst others could be "Lacanian" if they wanted, he himself was Freudian?(2)

This chapter aims to develop the following partial answer to this question. Lacan's self proclaimed project of returning to Freud is characterised by certain cultural factors. These factors separate Lacan's Paris not merely from Freud's Vienna, but from the alleged Freudian legacy of "ego psychology" which

became accepted practice within the International Psychoanalytic Association (I.P.A.). Basing its theory of knowledge on a model of perception, the orthodoxy of ego psychology then surreptitiously proceeded, after Freud's death, to commit the psychologism of turning the processes of a thinking mind into a normative, immediate and unproblematic definition of reality. We shall see that Lacan's return to Freud is by way of certain theories of knowledge which are not based on immediate perception, and which have their underpinnings in the reception of Hegel and Heidegger in France immediately before and after the second World War. We must, though, begin by noting another cultural factor which is decisive for a return to Freud: the impossibility of giving his German a translation which is free of adoption or adaption.

## 2.1. FREUD: A "STANDARD" EDITION?

Let us examine to what extent it is for reasons to do with translation that Samuel Weber is correct to assert that Freud's style is "generally all the more deceptive for its apparent clarity" (Weber, 1982, xvii). Bruno Bettelheim argues that the style with which Freud usually moves so eloquently in the English Standard Edition is at the cost of making him appear more abstruse and dogmatic than he is in German (Bettelheim, 1982, pp. 52-93). One of Bettelheim's examples is the English translation of Freud's Fehlleistung into the "parapraxis" we encountered in the previous chapter. "Why" Bettelheim asks, "a

combination of Greek words to which one has no emotional response except annoyance at being presented with a basically incomprehensible word?" James Strachey, the chief editor of the Standard Edition, frequently replaces everyday German words with medical words and arcane, learned borrowings from Greek and Latin. When the German and the English translations are compared, it transpires that the former carries ambiguous and emotionally loaded connotations in which the reader feels implicated. In order to reflect this intimacy of style, Bettelheim offers "faulty achievement" as a more suitable rendering of Fehlleistung (Ibid., p.79).

Yet it by no means follows that Freud's German is permeated by a single unequivocal line of thought. Both Bettelheim and Peter Dews point to the presence felt in Freud's work of the Methodenstreit which occurred in late nineteenth century Germany between two types of Wissenschaften (Bettelheim, 1982, p.70; Dews, 1984, pp.38-39). While Freud never explicitly mentions this opposition between the Naturwissenschaften (sciences of nature) and the Geisteswissenschaften (the sciences of spirit), he nevertheless adopts certain forms of causal explanation (Erklären) which characterise the former, and a vocabulary of motives and purposes which characterise the interpretive understanding (Verstehen) of the latter.

However, this tension which has proved too fragile, too complex and unstable to be sustained as the standard of James

strachey's translation. It is the wish to assimilate Freud's work into a medical branch of the epistemology of positive science that explains why, as Bettelheim puts it, "three of Freud's most important new theoretical concepts were translated not into English but into a language whose familiar use today would be for writing medical prescriptions" (Bettelheim, 1982, p.81).(3)

These three terms are das Es, das Ich and das Uber Ich. In everyday German, these terms arouse personal associations which are lost in Strachey's rendering of them into Latin equivalents - the id, the ego and the super ego. Taking the term das Es from Georg Groddeck, Freud used this term to denote not so much an unconscious pole as a storehouse of sexual and sublimated energy that he conveys with the expression "there was something in me at that moment that was stronger than me" (SE20 195).(4) In addition to this force, what gives the term das Es a special resonance in German is that in their early years, most German's have the experience of being referred to by means of the neuter pronoun es (Bettelheim, 1982, p.83). This grammatical neuter is not existentially neutered. Das Es reminds the German reader acquainted with Freud that this is how he or she was referred to during the infantile period to which Freud attributes the existence of precocious, polymorphous sexuality.

Similar arguments are given by Bettelheim to show that das

Ich and das Uber Ich have a deeper personal meaning than the Latin "ego" and "super ego", or even the English equivalents "I" and "above I" (Ibid., pp.81-84). Bettelheim's point here is that whilst Freud carefully chose these terms to communicate certain attitudes towards the world as directly "as a word can", Strachey's translation has the effect of making Freud appear to the anglophone reader "as abstract, depersonalised, highly theoretical, erudite and mechanized" (Ibid., p.52).

We shall, however, continue to use the terms id, ego and super ego because these clumsy substitutions have become irrevocably embedded in the fortune Freud left behind him in the form of the I.P.A.. Crucial here, is the issue of to what extent Freud's formulation in 1923 of the second topology of the mind, that is, the topology of the id, ego and super ego, was taken by other analysts to signal a change in therapeutic aim. We have it from Balint, a practising analyst at the time, that "In practice, this meant a new, additional task: to help the patient repair the faulty places in his ego structure..." (Balint, 1950, p.117). Rather than gaining access to unconscious material through overcoming resistance, the aim of analysis is to curb the id by strengthening the ego which is treated foremost as an apparatus of regulation and adaption to external reality. Credence for this new aim was to be found in Freud's formulation of the relation between the ego and the id as a classical opposition between reason and passion (SE19 25). In 1933, Freud formulated this ostensibly new therapeutic aim as Wo Es war, soll Ich werden



(GW15 86). The Standard Edition renders this as "Where id was, there ego shall be" (SE22 80).

It is not difficult to see why this translation of the therapeutic aim would help further the incorporation of psychoanalysis into a western culture of "success" and "happiness". By Freud's own standards, the aim of increasing the ego's rational control over the id is a work of culture (Kulturarbeit). It is akin to the draining of the Zuyder Zee (Ibid.). Apparently offering the certainty that the ego is one's true civilised self, and that the id is an untamed "instinctual" self of an animal, psychoanalysis can more readily be domesticated into the ideology of free enterprise. This ideology offers a choice between asserting the true self and festering with the false self. The psychoanalytic goal achieves consistency with this ideology by relying on both a hierarchical ordering of the ego and the id, and on the possibility of the analysand identifying with an ideal rationality which the analyst supposedly embodies.

Although the tradition of ego psychology is not exhausted by such motifs of hierarchy and possibility, they can nevertheless be presented as the indices from which Lacan develops his opposition to the type of psychoanalysis which is based on this tradition. In 1955, Lacan offered a rendering of Wo Es war, soll Ich werden which reverses the order of priority between the ego and the id. Instead of Le moi doit déloger le ça - (a

translation which is comparable in meaning to Strachey's "Where id was, there ego shall be"), Lacan offers Là où c'était (There where it was), c'est mon devoir que je vienne à être (it is my duty that I should come to being) (E417-8 e128-9). Here Lacan claims that if in saying Wo Es war... Freud had meant the Es to be le ca and the Ich to be le moi, he would have on each occasion used the objectifying article das. Lacan takes this as licence for rendering Es into French not as le ca, but as a ce that elides with était to make a sound similar to the third person singular of the reflexive verb s'être when pronounced in the imperfect tense. The ce, the "it" is no longer le ca or the id, but rather that which Lacan calls the mode of absolute subjectivity which Freud discovered in its radical eccentricity. Instead of referring to an order of priority between the ego and the id - (le moi and le ca), Freud's phrase now refers to a human subject who is divided between two places, who is obligated to be where it is no longer. In the next chapter, we shall see why this division concerns a subject who is both represented in the Other, ie., in the signifying structure, and yet excluded from it.

For the moment, it is only necessary to note why it is not according to criteria of translation that one should assess Lacan's reading of Wo Es war.... His remarks are rather an effort to direct us towards certain philosophical underpinnings in Freud. Elsewhere, again in 1955, Lacan is less enigmatic about these underpinnings

In the classical theoretical perspective, there is between subject and object a co-fitting, a cognizance (co-naissance) [...] for a theory of knowledge (connaissance) is at the heart of all elaboration of the relation between man and his world.

It is an altogether different register of relations that the Freudian field is situated (§2 261).

By examining why Lacan was opposed to a psychoanalytic practice based on a model of connaissance, we will be in a better position to understand the difference between the respective types of psychoanalysis offered by Lacan and ego psychology.

## 2.2 EGO PSYCHOLOGY

### 2.2.1. PSYCHOLOGISM.

As early as the 1936 paper "Beyond the Reality Principle", Lacan was criticising the second generation of psychanalysts for basing their methods upon certain presuppositions of late nineteenth century associationist psychology. (E74). Amongst these presuppositions which have been well documented by Paul Bercherie, are a conception of the mind as a tabula rasa for receiving sense data, and a principle of mental "atomism" which divides psychic activity into ideas, representations, images and other irreducible elements which are then combined mechanically (Bercherie, 1983, pp. 105-57). According to Lacan, associationism is also dominated by a principle of rationalism which divides psychic phenomena into those which operate as rational knowledge (la connaissance rationnelle), and those which are outside rational knowledge such as feelings, beliefs, deliriums, intuitions and dreams (E78). Whilst the first type of phenomena provide access to "true" reality, the latter belong to

the "illusory" reality. At the basis of this crude division is a psychologism, ie., a psychology which is in the wrong place to the extent that alleged psychical processes are conflated with ontological claims about the nature of reality.

Despite its pretensions to objectivity and materialism, much that passed under the name of French psychology at the end of the nineteenth century was, in Lacan's view, based on a psychologism of dissolving existence into certain atomist and sensualist idealisations of the thinking mind (E74). In psychology, these idealisations are turned into ontological claims about people as well as inanimate objects. This means that human existence is reduced to the ideality of objects which are themselves reducible to operations performed by consciousness upon those objects. Human existence is understood in terms of the excitations of sensory organs by external objects, reflexes, and reactions of the organism. The relation of the subject to his or her world can only be discussed in terms of immediate, sensible modes of experience.

#### 2.2.2. FREUD'S "PERCEPTION-CONSCIOUSNESS" SYSTEM.

How does psychologism supply the basis of ego psychology? The latter attempts to relate the acquisitions of psychoanalysis to other disciplines such as learning-theory and child psychology. To this end, it conceives how cognitive functions such as perception mature in the individual. These conceptions are more sophisticated than those provided by the study of associative

connections between sense data that characterise traditional psychology. Yet insofar as ego psychology takes the ego as a faculty for heeding to a reality that is exhausted by what is given in immediate perception, it can be said to aspire to the same pure and immutable ideal of objectivity. The point we must demonstrate is that reality given in immediate perception is identified with, and idealised into, the very essence of the material world for the subject.

Ego psychology's warrant for attaching so much importance to immediate perception thus conceived is one that it claims to find in Freud. As early as the 1895 "Project" (Entwurf), Freud defined perception as the ability to receive sensible qualities (SE1 308, LP84-88). Not without some difficulty Freud attempted, for the greater part of his career, to combine perception and consciousness into a single system designated in the "Project" as the system "W", and in the metapsychological works of 1915 onwards as the system "perception-consciousness" (Pcpts-Cs). However, the latter system is informally conceived of as early as "The Interpretation of Dreams"([1899] 1900): consciousness is defined there as "a sense organ for the perception of psychical qualities" (SE5 615).

When, in 1923 Freud develops his second topography of the mind, he views the "perception-consciousness" system as the medium through which the ego becomes "that part of the id which

has been modified by the direct influence of the external world (SE19 25). Freud is clear that the original source of the ego is the id (das Es) (SE23 198-99). The differentiation of the ego from the id starts from the "perception-consciousness" system which is likened to the surface or cortical layer of a vesicle of living matter. The ego

has been developed out of the id's cortical layer, which, though being adapted to the reception and exclusion of stimuli, is in direct contact with the external world (reality). Starting from conscious perception it has subjected to its influence ever larger regions and deeper strata of the id (SE23 198-99).

But this surface differentiation of the ego from the id does not mean there is now no relation between them. As well as being a former part of the id which now comes under the influence of the external world, the ego is also given the self preservative function of seeking "to bring the influence of the external world to bear upon the id and its tendencies, and endeavours to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle which reigns unrestrictedly in the id (SE19 25). The ego will interpolate the demands and restrictions of the external world between (i) the demand made by the drives (Trieben) which comprise the id; and (ii) the action that satisfies this demand. The ego will determine whether that desired satisfaction is to be pursued, postponed, or repressed. What was originally a surface portion of the id endowed with conscious perception has now become a separate agency called the ego. The latter is bound, by definition of its role of representing reality, to provide a means of controlling the id. "For the ego," Freud writes,

"perception plays the part which in the id falls to the drive"  
(SE19 25).

### 2.2.3. RECTIFICATION

Here, then, is the warrant which ego psychology finds in Freud for defining the subject's world in terms of what is immediately given to the ego in perception. From this theory, it is but one step to the normative concept of existence which lies at the very heart of ego psychology. As Lacan puts it, there is "an almost imperceptible transition from the concept of the ego defined as the perception-consciousness system,[...]to the concept of the ego as correlative with an absolute reality" (E304 e90). Freud's theory of how a conscious perception system enjoys immediate access to reality becomes, in the hands of ego psychology, a proof for determining what is and what is not real.

This move is justified with reference to Freud's own construction of a proof of reality. Realitätsprüfung (translated by Strachey as "reality testing") becomes the act of referring to a stable norm against which the degree of realism of the subject's desires and phantasies may be judged. Under this term which he introduced in 1911, Freud places two quite different functions (GW8 230-38, SE12 213-26).(5) On the one hand, the proof functions to discriminate between the merely "represented" or hallucinated and the actually perceived. On the other hand, the proof enables the former to be eradicated from the latter. By taking its warrant from Freud's assertion of this priority, ego psychology moves from relying on the actually perceived as a theory of knowledge, to  $\subset$  a definition of what

constitutes reality.

A vicious circle of psychologism is operating here (Heaton, 1982, p. 67). A correct judgement as to what is real will depend on the correct functioning of the mind, above all on the development of the ego. And this development will consist of the ego being above all an apparatus that rectifies and adapts itself to reality. In therapeutic practice, this circle consists on the one hand of viewing the symptom as the ego's deviation from the demands of reality, and on the other, of an appeal to a rational portion of the ego, known as the autonomous ego, in order to rectify this deviation.

For ego psychology, the question of a possible causal link between common sense and the patient's complaint does not enter psychoanalysis. For its aim is to suppress what is pathological through adaptation to whatever norms and principles the majority of citizens accept. Thus, according to Anna Freud

We speak of normality when we feel that there is a satisfactory maternal equilibrium that corresponds to an equal degree of adaptation to the environment. On the other hand, internal conflicts and disturbances and a failure to establish a harmonious relationship with the outside world describe the pathological case (A. Freud, cited in Roustang, 1982, p. 23)

#### 2.2.4. "ONLY A RELATIVELY HEALTHY NEUROTIC CAN BE PSYCHOANALYSED..."

An implication of this doctrine is that an applicant for Psychoanalysis must already be tacitly identifying with the the very norms to which psychoanalysis pledges to adapt him.



According to Greenson "Only a relatively healthy neurotic can be psychoanalysed without major modifications or deviations" (Greenson,1967,p.45). Relative health is the degree to which there exists an autonomous, non-conflictual sphere of the ego which is sheltered from the problems which one brings to the analyst (E590 e231).

This shelter is necessary for two reasons. Firstly, in order to undergo the painful experiences of analysis, ie., transference and the reliving of one's infantile past, it is necessary that the patient can "still live in the real world" (Greenson,1967,p.34). Whilst analytic work requires the patient to risk regression to an infantile past, it is equally the case that "those who cannot return readily to reality are poor risks for psychoanalysis" (Ibid.). Secondly, it is this non-conflictual portion of the ego which enables the patient to identify with the norm of reality which the analyst embodies or represents. This identification, known as the "working alliance", is the condition of a relatively non-neurotic, rational relationship between analyst and patient (Ibid.,pp.29,46,47). The prerequisite for analysis is the patient's ability to oscillate between neurotic transference and identification with the analyst's assessment of a standard of reality.

Psychoanalysis consists, then, of a finger clicking movement between two portions of the ego: an autonomous, conflict free ego

and an experiencing, subjective irrational ego. Since the aim of analysis is to increase the relative strength of the former portion over the latter, we can define the aim of analysis as a hierarchical ordering. Since the achievement of this aim requires the working alliance, we can define the prerequisite of analysis as a possibility, as a potentiality of a portion of the ego to be rational, to be "reason-able".

It is on the basis of this hierarchy and this possibility that ego psychology understands the imperative "where id is, there ego shall be". The patient's illness is viewed as the infection of her ego with the seething cauldron of instincts (Trieben) that comprise the id. It is a conflict-free portion of the ego which represents civilisation and which is potentially capable of taming what is in the cauldron (R.Klein,1985,p.11). Thus analysis turns on a hierarchical ordering of the human and animal parts of the human. It is the possibility of the former vanquishing the latter which defines the therapeutic goal as that of strengthening the autonomous ego. Psychoanalysis, defined from this view, consists of replicating an already defined standard of the human through a totemic act of conquering the outsiders who invade it. The alert reader notices the vicious circle of this directive: the patient can only be his or her true human self by taking up arms against what is less than human.

In addition to this vicious circle there is a paradox which

relates to the above description of psychologism. In order to theorise the ego as re-adapting and subordinating itself to given norms, ego psychology has to credit the ego with an ideal and absolute existence which is independent of a situation or historical location. Ego psychology never explicitly asks how the ego can passively assimilate itself to the world when at the same time nothing of that world can appear to it except through representations that are solely the ego's property.

A portion of the ego is therefore autonomous for a more profound reason than that of being immune from conflict. Its autonomy is based on an assumption at stake in the philosophical concept of the ego. Here, representations of the world are taken as the ego's property. They are representations which owe their existence to a seat of consciousness that is built to cushion the idea of an absolute determinate being. For ego psychology, the functions through which the ego is said to cognize reality - judgement, intention, crawling, grasping, walking etc. are secured by an ego that is autonomous in the sense that it alone is capable of synthesizing these functions. The ego is an absolute, determinate being in the sense that it alone brings together, in a single operation, these discrete functions that occupy different points of space and different temporalities. Whilst it is through these functions that the ego encounters the "facticity" of the world, it is a facticity which is co-ordinated by the ego. The paradox is that for ego psychology, adaption to the outside world is confirmed not

through the ego's implantation in a historical location, but in a timeless and transparent cogitation.

### 2.3. FROM VIENNA TO PARIS

The sympathy of the Société Psychanalytique de Paris with the above principles of ego psychology, its emphasis upon strengthening the ego's capacity to internalise social norms and to defend itself against the unconscious, was no doubt a major cause of Lacan's secession from this Society in 1953 (Benvenuto and Kennedy, 1986, p.79). Such a dispute concerning the basic axioms of psychoanalysis is played for higher stakes than the nitpicking of minor aspects of Freudian doctrine. The meaning of Lacan's self-proclaimed return to Freud is defined by the former in 1955 as a "return to the meaning of Freud" (E405 e117). What is to be returned is a sens which Sherridan translates as "meaning" but which can also be translated as "direction". The direction leads eastwards towards the concepts of the unconscious and sexuality as they were formulated by the early Viennese Freud in the first decade of this century, and not, in the first instance, as they were formulated by the Freud of the second topology of 1923. According to Lacan, the eternal city of Freud's discovery is conditional on whether "it can be said that as a result of that discovery the true centre of the human being was no longer to be found in the same place assigned to it by a whole humanist tradition" (E401 e114). Unlike Rome, Freud's eternal city is without internal sanctuary. The fortune of the Vatican is to be compared with tracing whatever aspects of

Freud's work demonstrate his point that "the ego is not master in its own house" (GW12 11 SE17 143).

For two reasons, this trace to which Lacan returns cannot so easily be located in Vienna. Firstly, by virtue of his Jewish fate it is not true to say that Freud was ever firmly implanted in this city. He was, as Lacan puts it, a hôte de passage, a temporary guest who would later view the cause of psychoanalysis as taking itself out of what he saw as the Jewish ghetto (E402 e115). Secondly, it should be asked whether Lacan's contesting of ego psychology and his allegiance to Vienna produced a specifically French culture of psychoanalysis. To question the views on which the I.P.A. builds its fortune, to trace the andere Schauplatz (other stage scene) of a Viennese Freud, Lacan develops a working vocabulary that is imbued with a French intellectual culture: desire, the signifier, the Other. It is to a brief examination of the part played by Lacan in assimilating psychoanalysis into a French intellectual culture that we must now turn.

The formation of the ties between France and the early psychoanalytic centre of Vienna have been well documented by Elisabeth Roudinesco and Victor Smirnoff (Roudinesco, 1986, Smirnoff, 1979). For our purposes, the most salient points which they raise are as follows.

Freud's student days under Charcot at the Salpêtrière in

paris were to prove the turning point of his career from neurology to psychopathology. Yet Charcot was nevertheless a landmark in a country which, by Freud's later standards, reacted reticently to psychoanalysis. In his 1925 "autobiography", Freud describes this reticence as different in kind from the acrimony he had encountered in trying to introduce psychoanalysis into other countries (SE20 62). In a private letter to Jung, he is more explicit: the obstacle to establishing a French psychoanalytic movement is "essentially of a national nature" (cited in Smirnoff, 1979, p.19).

Apart from xenophobia or linguistic barriers, it is a question of a style that is culturally specific. To the calculated, rational Cartesian approach of a psychiatric tradition that extended from Pinel to Délasiauve, Freud would have seemed part of a rigid and doctrinaire tradition of German psychophysiology. The objections raised against psychoanalysis in France are, Freud wrote, as though "French sensitiveness is offended by the pedantry and crudity of psychoanalytic terminology" (SE20 62).(6) It was the difficulty of fulfilling these expectations that resulted in French interest in psychoanalysis developing in literary circles well before the medical profession were alerted to its existence (SE20 62).

When, as late as 1926, psychoanalysis eventually became institutionalised in France with its own journal and society, this would still not necessarily have signified adhesion to the

viennese cause of psychoanalysis. Unlike Vienna, or the Berlin of Abraham or the Budapest of Ferenczi, the vast majority of analysts in France were not of Jewish or minority origin. Predominantly French Catholics or Protestants from the Suisse romande, their cause was not, as it was for Freud, Ferenczi and Abraham, the Sache of taking psychoanalysis out of the Jewish ghetto (Smirnoff, 1979, pp. 35-36). In France, the taking up of Freud's theories of the unconscious and sexuality would have meant questioning the religious and moral positions of faith and rationalism. That the more disturbing aspects of Freud's work were not taken up in this partly Latin country is demonstrated by how it was possible for Édouard Pichon, a fervent Catholic, to practise psychoanalysis while passionately defending free will and marriage as the basis of civilisation (Ibid., p. 43). There was a gulf between the French and the Freud of Vienna who, whilst conceding that monogamy and legitimacy were the basis of civilisation, did not extol this as a virtue (SE 9 181-204).

Here, then, are some of the foremost reasons for saying that the practice of psychoanalysis in France was culturally specific well before Lacan's teaching began in 1953. It was not, he states at this time, the doctrinal dispute with the pharisee, or the fiscal dispute with the shopkeeper, which had led to his secession from the Paris Psychoanalytic Society in that year (E 246 e 38). The reason is rather the more fundamental one that French "orthodox" practice, its sympathy with ego psychology, ignores what is revolutionary in Freud's "classical"

practice. But if, then, Lacan returns to a classical Viennese Freud, does this mean that Lacan sees his task as that of an underlabourer, of a disciple who works for his Master?

The answer is as complex as it is culturally specific. It is explicitly stated by Lacan in 1953 that if the "master's place remains empty, it is not so much a result of his own passing as that of an increasing obliteration of the meaning (sens) of his work" (E244 e36). The "vacancy" of the psychoanalytic establishment cannot be excused on grounds of indecision as to who should occupy the place of the founding leader. It is to an oeuvre, and not to a leader that Lacan expresses allegiance in 1953. Lacan's return to the meaning of Freud is, as was noted in chapter one, by way of a teaching. The three procedures which Smirnoff defines as major characteristics of Lacan's teaching - a polemic, a re-reading of Freud, and an elaboration of theory are arguably the hallmark of a French intellectual culture (Smirnoff, 1979, p.52).

Such a culture is apparent when Lacan states in 1953 that although it would be premature to break with Freud's classical terminology, it nevertheless seems that psychoanalysis could well recover its health by establishing the equivalence of these terms in "the language of contemporary anthropology, or even to the latest problems in philosophy" (E240 e32). Whilst this anthropological reference is undoubtedly to Lévi-Strauss, there



is a strong likelihood that the allusion to philosophy is to the reception of Heidegger and Hegel in France immediately after the second world war. Later on in the same paper Lacan states: "the undertaking of the psychoanalyst acts in our time as the mediator between the man of care and the man of absolute knowledge" (E321 e105). Whilst Lacan never advocated a synthesis of psychoanalysis and philosophy, this remark suggests the depth of the sources from which his earlier work derived inspiration. As one commentator puts it

Whether or not the mediation suggested in Lacan's remark is ultimately feasible, the fact remains that any attempt to understand his thought in terms of its philosophical underpinnings must begin by assessing separately the influence of each of these thinkers on him in turn (Richardson, 1983, p.139).

We wish to argue that these underpinnings must initially be tackled as a cultural phenomenon. The enthusiastic reception of Hegel and Heidegger in post-second world war France has been well documented (Derrida, [1972], 1982, pp.111-36; Descombes, [1979], 1980, pp.27-54; Kelly, 1983). Lacan attended the lectures on Hegel given by the Russian emigre Alexandre Kojève at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris from 1933-39. He was also personally acquainted with Jean Hyppolite who produced the first French translation of Hegel's La Phénoménologie d'Esp̄rit in 1939.(7) It is incorrect to assume that Hegel's work was previously virtually unknown in France (Kelly, 1981, pp.29-30). Yet it is fair to say that after 1945, Hyppolite and Kojève played a formidable part in replacing a theological and speculative Hegel with the articulation of an existentialist Hegel. Whereas Hegel's thesis of "absolute knowledge" had been thought of as a

form of a priori reasoning that set itself above history, it was conceived by Kojève as corresponding to a final stage in human history. The Phenomenology of Spirit is read by Kojève as an account of a passage towards an end of alienation, and as propounding an atheism which is the antithesis of Christian God. This transcendent other of the human subject turns out to be the creation of the human subject. Since the human subject now recognizes himself as what he had taken to be the other, the word God can be replaced by "Man" (Descombes, 1980,p.29.). According to Derrida, it was under the name of existentialism that this will to recover the attributes of "Man" spread well beyond Hegel studies to authorise an anthropological reading of Heidegger's Being and Time (Derrida,1982,p.117). Heidegger's letter to Jean Buffret, witten in 1946, and translated into French in 1953, is evidence that this anthropological reading was sufficiently prevalent to have provoked Heidegger into openly refuting it as the direction of his thought (Descombes,1980,p.30).

There are three points to note here. Firstly, we have seen that Lacan launches a return to Freud's discovery that the ego is not the master of its own house. But the philosophical underpinnings of this return have apparently just been located in a common trait in post second world war France of authorising "Man", ie., a self-reflecting ego, as the common ground of Hegel and Heidegger. Secondly, there is little recognition at this time of the term "Man" as a cultural artifact. "Everything" writes Derrida, "occurs as if the sign "man" had no origin, no

historical, cultural or linguistic limit" (Derrida, 1982, p. 116). Finally, the question arises as to how, in the light of this, we should read the always allusive, sometimes <sup>i</sup>critical and sometimes laudatory references to Hegel and Heidegger that are scattered throughout Lacan's teaching. With the "structuralist" movement that followed the French existentialist concern with "Man", his status as "animal rationale", as a purposive and ensouled bodily being is subjected to a critique which remains content to cast Hegel and Heidegger into anthropocentric shadows (Ibid., p. 119). Absent is any thorough examination of whether Hegel and Heidegger aim to delimit or criticise "Man" as an unquestioned premise.

Lacan's relation to Hegel can in one respect be read as consistent with this "structuralist" orientation. He refuses to take from Hegel any reference to absolute knowledge. According to Lacan, Hegel's "error" in the Phenomenology of Spirit is his naive assumption that the human subject can emerge from a state of self-ignorance to secure a complete and transparent self-knowledge through the language and culture (E292, 809-10 e80, 307; S11 201 FF221). (8) Thanks to an uncritical reception of Kojève, Lacan equates the final chapter of the Phenomenology of Spirit with the culminating point of a trajectory in which "Man" discovers himself to be the author of his relation to the world.

However, it is possible, indeed necessary, to read Lacan's relation to Hegel and Heidegger as existing otherwise than his

stated relation to these thinkers. To read off that relation from an inventory of those statements, to assume that the word of the man must prevail over his direction (sens) would be to locate "Man" in the central position which Freud undermines, and which leads Lacan to Vienna. Despite Lacan's criticisms of what he sees as the idealising tendencies of Hegel and Heidegger, these thinkers are nevertheless working in his teaching to denounce the location of "Man" as the author of the world.

#### 2.4. HEGEL AND HEIDEGGER

Consider first, the place of Hegel in Lacan's 1949 paper on "The Mirror Phase" (E93-100 e1-7). Lacan's positioning here of a screen, of a spatial caption between the subject and the world is heavily laden with Hegel's dialectical account of how the identity of self-consciousness only exists through being recognised by another. In finding in Hegel's "Master-Slave" dialectic the structure of a screen, Lacan is far from assuming that Hegel is exhausted by the above anthropological motif. It is existentialist psychoanalysis, and its flight into the ultimate self-sufficiency of consciousness, which Lacan distances himself from in "The Mirror Phase" paper (E99 e6).

Such a Hegelian dialectical framework does not apply only to Lacan's early work on the nature and function of an image. It is argued by Lacan as early as 1951 that the key psychoanalytic task of interpreting transference requires a dialectical method (E225). Even after 1953 when the subject's relation to the

world is said to turn on an identification with a signifier rather than an image, there is a dialectical process at stake.

To understand why, compare ego psychology's concern with a subordination of reason to passion, of an id to an ego, with an aspect of Freud's work in the 1890's to which Lacan returns. It is clear at the end of the Studies on Hysteria that Freud is focussing not on a split between thinking and feeling, but with how the subject's access to the world is mediated by a "false connection" (SE2 67,302). The subject identifies with signifiers that have no immediate connections, but only displaced associative connections with a repressed traumatic experience. This same structure is apparent in the Rat Man's horror, discussed in chapter one, at the connection between a repressed phantasy of killing his father, and his obsessional fears and self-prohibitions. Between the Rat Man's obsessional preoccupation with the rat torture and the intensity of his relation towards his father, there lay an associative connection. But it is precisely this connection which the Rat Man must constantly ward off or interrupt. The interval which the Rat Man interpolates between the obsessional symptom and his repressed attitude towards his father demonstrate that an opaque screen is a condition for the subject's relation to the world. The Rat Man's world falls short of its objects: his obsessional symptoms are an elaborate technique for isolating himself from these objects.

Let us now turn to how Heidegger is also at work in Lacan's teaching. In Being and Time, Heidegger distinguishes between "being" and the "Being of beings" (SZ2-5 BT21-24). The latter is not itself a being. Being does not have any entity or attribute that defines a being. Nor can the universality of Being be defined as a class or a genus. (SZ3 BT22). The originality of Heidegger arguably consists of his maintaining this distinction in the face of previous thinking which slides over the Being of beings towards being (Levinas, [1947], 1967, p.54). The meaning of Being as different from being is posed by Heidegger as a question which lacks an answer. Although the question has engaged western philosophy since its Greek origins, it has become an obscure question without direction. The initial task of Being and Time is not so much to answer this question as to first work out an adequate way of formulating it (SZ5 BT24). The elaboration takes the form of a circle because whilst what is questioned is Being, the questioning is itself a mode of the Being of a being which Heidegger calls Dasein (SZ7 BT27).

One might object that this circular procedure is doomed to fail by the very virtue of the fact that the inquiry will necessarily be presupposing the Being of Dasein which it purports to yield as the end product of an inquiry. Yet for Heidegger, this objection carries no weight since the task of unfolding Dasein's Being is not one of grounding something by deduction from a premise (SZ7-8 BT27-8). Rather than a

vicious circle of reasoning, what emerges in Being and Time is a remarkable backward and forward relation between what is questioned (Being), and the questioning itself as a mode of Being of a being (Dasein).

This back and forth movement determines the structure of the inquiry. On the one hand, the Being that is asked about is the Being of a being of Dasein, which always understands itself in terms of its existence. The inquiry is an existential one. The Being of Dasein is not an essence traditionally conceived of in opposition to existence (SZ42 BT67-68). On the other hand, this existence does not have the ontological signification of the traditional term existentia (Ibid.). The Being of Dasein's existence is not a tangible property. Dasein's existence lies rather in how its Being is an issue for Dasein (Ibid.). Whereas it is axiomatic for ego psychology that existence is a pre-given norm, it is equally fundamental for Heidegger that a particular Dasein's existence is a question for that Dasein. Being, as an issue, is not secondary to Dasein's existence but is definitive of it. Whether the issue is faced or neglected it will be constitutive of the Being of Dasein (SZ12-13 BT33).

This existential analytic of Dasein lays down three structures: Geworfenheit, Entwurf and Verfall. Translated into English as "thrownness", and into French as deréliction (Levinas, [1947], 1967, p.83), Geworfenheit designates the manner

in which Dasein's existence has always already been seized and realised as certain possibilities (SZ135 BT174). "Thrownness" implies the facticity of Dasein's being delivered over to its "there", to the Da of its Sein. Yet this facticity is not the brutum factum of a type of outside authority or perceived reality which is ascribed by ego psychology to Freud's reality principle. The facticity of thrownness rather concerns the way Dasein's understanding of its existence is rooted in being brought before itself in the mood (Stimmung) that it has (Ibid.). The mood is equivalent to neither a model of *connaissance*, of knowledge by acquaintance, nor to the ancient adage of "knowing thyself" which underlies rational enlightenment. In other words, Heidegger distinguishes the mood from the same models of knowledge form which Lacan distinguishes psychoanalysis. Utterly foreign to a form of detached contemplation, "the mood brings Dasein before the 'that-it-is' of its 'there', which, as such, stares it in the face with the inexorability of an enigma" (SZ136 BT175).

Whilst "thrownness" is a backward reference to being always already delivered over, the term Entwurf entails that Dasein's understanding of itself is grounded in a forward reference of a "projection". This projection has nothing to do with behaving according to a pre-meditated plan, but is rather a transcendence that aims at a horizon or depth from which Dasein understands itself in terms of its possibilities (SZ145 BT185). These backward and forward movements of thrownness and projecting are



not successive or distinct moments of Dasein's existence. The relation between these terms rather shows the necessarily circular nature of the understanding of Being in which Dasein maintains itself. Dasein's projection is always the projection of a being which is thrown into existence. It is a thrown projection - a geworfener Entwurf.

The third existential structure in which Dasein's understanding of itself is grounded is that of Verfall, of a "fall" (SZ175-80 BT219-24). Falling reveals "a basic kind of Being which belongs to everydayness" (SZ175 BT219). This everydayness does not express a negative judgement of some contaminating property from which Dasein might rid itself in another culture. Falling rather expresses once again the circular back and forth quality of the question of Dasein's Being. Being, we have seen, is distinct from beings. Yet the fallenness of Dasein's Being, its grounding in everydayness, entails that Being always falls back upon being and is nothing without those beings. Far from having fallen into something which it is essentially not, Dasein's everydayness is rather the most fundamental evidence for Dasein's existentiality (SZ179 BT223-4). Only if Dasein were regarded as an isolated I, as a subject pitted against a world of objects, would it be possible to equate Dasein's fallenness with the impure existence of Being. Yet the whole of Heidegger's effort in Being and Time is to elaborate the circularity of Being and being, of the interrogated and the interrogator, as bound up with

an attempt to avoid a subject-object dichotomy. Dasein's existence as thrown into its projects, and as falling into everydayness arguably undercuts this dichotomy. An attempt to reach an adequation between thought and existence is no longer the fundamental aim.

It would be too much of a convenient coincidence to define the structures of thrownness, projecting and fallenness as manifestly present in the Freudian texts to which Lacan returns. Nevertheless, it is possible, whilst bearing in mind the function of those terms in Being and Time, to deepen one's appreciation of why, in Lacan's view, Freudian psychoanalysis concerns structures that are prior to cognition and volition. Thrownness, projection and fallenness are to be radically distinguished from a conscious ego because they are the structures of a Dasein that is thoroughly de-centred and ex-centric to itself.

Such a major assumption is implicitly at work in Freud's 1919 paper "The Uncanny" (Das Unheimliche) (SE19 219-52). Crucial to Freud's attempt to define "the uncanny" is his notion of a compulsion to repeat. Drawing upon his own experience of having been not simply lost in a foreign town, but of having unintentionally returned three times to one of its quarters -(the characteristics of which he "could no longer remain in doubt"), Freud describes the uncanny experience as far from being novel, alien and separate from us. This uncanny experience rather exhibits a structure of thrownness, of being always already tied

to a certain horizon or depth. The mood that inexorably brings Dasein before the enigma of its there, is similar to the way that through the repetition compulsion, the unconscious does not return as a conscious awareness of some item or entity that comprises a being. Thanks to the sight of the painted female faces at the windows, Freud's unconscious returned as the inescapable presence of a gap or discontinuity in conscious knowledge. As Lacan was to stress, Freud's Wiederholen (repeating) is not Reproduzieren (remembering) (S11 49 FF50).

The structure of projection is also present in the uncanny experience for two reasons. Firstly, as a compulsion to repeat, the uncanny can be described as having the same temporal structure as a projection that is always thrown. In each case, there is a circular structure in which, as well as a transcendence or "going beyond" which is always bound to that which has gone before, there is a contemporary repetition of past material rather than the memory of it as a past event.

The second reason why the structure of projection is present in the uncanny experience is found in Heidegger's statement "In Projection, Being is understood, though not ontologically conceived" (SZ147 BT187). The uncanny is a projection that is thrown into an experience for which there is no adequate concept. Freud points out the experience of the Unheimliche remains outside of a proper home in language. Many languages are without a word for this experience whilst others, such as

portuguese or Italian, remain content with what are at best circumlocutions (SE17 221). The English word "uncanny" is itself an inadequate compromise on the "unhomely" aspect of the Umheimliche. Like the "lack" of a word for Heidegger's Being (Bernasconi, 1985, pp. 49-64), the uncanny cannot be simply named for "what" it is.

Finally, the structure of fallenness is at work in "The Uncanny" paper insofar as that paper concerns an experience which is inscribed in everydayness. Although the uncanny is neither novel nor alien, it cannot be equated with impurity or a fall from a more rarified state. Its everydayness should rather be thought of as a fundamental entanglement not with rule governed behaviour, but with the exception to the rule. What is repeated in the uncanny experience is precisely a particular which is out of tune with the general.

Heidegger's analysis of Dasein is not however exhausted by this triple structure of thrownness, projection and falling. These structures reveal themselves more fundamentally in the phenomena of death. (SZ235-67 BT279-311). Far from lending something additional to this triple structure, death belongs in a distinctive sense to the Being of Dasein. For when understood existentially, death is not equivalent to a demise that contrasts with the biological or physiological fact of vitality. Death is rather a possible impossibility of existence, an impossibility into which Dasein is thrown towards an end that is ahead of

itself, and from which it falls by fleeing (SZ251-52 BT295). By so conceiving death as an absolute, irreversible possibility of an impossibility that is impending, Heidegger departs from a religious and philosophical tradition which defines death as either a passage to another existence, or as a passage to nothingness. Death is rather conceived by Heidegger in terms which have more than a superficial resemblance to Freud's death drive. Integral rather than peripheral to Dasein's existence, death is compounded with life in a polar relation in which the former is a limit which defines the possibility of the latter. In 1953, it is as such a concept of limit that Lacan reads Freud's death drive. As the Symbolic, ie., the domain of signifiers that define and organise the sexed and speaking human being, the death drive is an a priori condition which "essentially expresses the limit of the historical function of the subject" (E318 e103).

But whilst as late as 1955, Lacan still calls the death drive but a mask of the Symbolic (S2 374), it is later that he equates this concept of limit with an alternative definition we have given of the Symbolic network of signifiers. As a collection of holes tied together with string, the signifying network acquires the status of a limit for another reason than that of being a prior determining condition which the subject cannot exceed. The possibility of an impossibility, if not an impotence, in the Symbolic Other resides precisely in the fact that here is a residue which escapes or is lost from the signifying order. We

shall show later that from this perspective, death is the measure to which the human being's existence is grounded in a desire which is nothing other than the gaps opened up by the signifiers which comprise the Symbolic.

It would therefore seem that Lacan and Heidegger are alike in having a conception of impossibility which departs from a traditional conception. We have become accustomed, through the influence of different Kantian and Hegelian traditions to jettisoning the question of impossibility. Kant's "Transcendental Dialectic" shows how a search for an absolute, unconditioned realm of experience is a projection which can only yield empty abstractions or hypostatic assumptions. A science of metaphysics is impossible for Kant. Impossibility is equated with a totality that is transcendent of experience and which is not a transcendental precondition of experience. Hegel's alternative approach to the discipline of metaphysics is that of attempting to demonstrate that totality is not transcendent, not inapplicable, but immanent and thus within the realm of knowledge. In the Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel demonstrates that totality does not transcend the limits of possible experience, but must necessarily be true of that experience. There is a strictly immanent metaphysics in which totality is achieved through an ordinary consciousness examining itself according to its own successive standards. For Kant then, impossibility marks what is not possible for us. For Hegel, this impossibility must be shown to satisfy the conditions of what is

possible for an ordinary consciousness. In neither case, is impossibility itself treated as a necessary condition of experience.

### CONCLUSION

In this chapter, it has been shown that although Freud was a strong advocate of rationalism, Lacan nevertheless returns to a quite different meaning (sens) of Freud which is found before the 1923 topology of the id, ego, and super ego. Although Lacan's teaching is self-consciously cast as a return to Freud, there are significant differences between these two thinkers which can to some extent be explored in terms of cultural factors. Claiming that ego psychology has no warrant for turning the ego into an agency that rectifies itself around a given norm of reality, Lacan's alternative views of psychoanalytic practice are in part indebted to French readings of Hegel and Heidegger. Lacan's references to these thinkers are polemical and didactic. But they nevertheless allow him to develop and strengthen the claim that before the 1923 topology, Freud's work was inscribed in neither a subject-object relation nor an opposition between reason and passion, but in a concern with ex-centric structures of thought which are prior to those of cognition and volition.

### FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

- (1) See also Wolheim, 1971, p. 234.
- (2) Séminaire de Caracas, July 1980 - cited in Alan Juranville, 1984, p. 6.

- (3) This pejorative remark is apposite if only because it was on the basis of these three terms, that a psychoanalytic practice was founded in the United States which was given state legislature in 1927 as the exclusive province of medical doctors.
- (4) See Groddeck, 1923, trans: 1949.
- (5) We are referring here only to Freud's use of the term Realitätsprüfung as it is found in the 1911 paper "Formulation of the Two Principles of Mental Functioning" (SE12 215), and not to Freud's different use of this term in his 1925 paper "Negation" (SE19 237-8).
- (6) Significant here is the letter which René Laforgue wrote to Freud in 1923 suggesting a programme of French translations and publications of his work. Reminding Freud that "the French reader expects that all be exposed with brevity and clarity", Laforgue added that the French discuss difficult problems by reducing them to a "question of form" (cited in Smirnoff, 1979, p.25).
- (7) This translation by Hyppolite was decisive for subsequent Hegel scholarship in France. For the first time, there was a standard with which to compare the interpretations of Hegel by Kojève and Jean Wahl. "It would", writes Michael Kelly, "be no exaggeration to suggest that this translation was the basis on which the existentialist Hegelianism of post-war fashion was constructed. Its importance was all the greater since it was another ten years before the major Science of Logic was translated, and the rational structures of the Hegelian dialectic could therefore still be studied in the elderly and defective Vera edition of the shorter Logic from the Encyclopedia" (Kelly, 1981, pp.29-30).
- (8) Lacan claims that along with the ego that Descartes conceived, the final chapter of Hegel's Phenomenology concerns "the deceptive accentuation of the I in action at the expense of the opacity of the signifier that determines the I; and the sliding movement (glissement) by which the Bewusstsein serves to cover up the confusion of the Selbst eventually reveals, with all Hegel's own rigour, the reason for his error in the Phenomenology of Spirit (E809-10 e307).



PART II

PROVOCATION OF REAL IMPOSSIBILITY

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE RELATION OF THE SUBJECT TO ITS CHAIN OF DISCOURSE

##### INTRODUCTION

The threads of the two previous chapters can be weaved into two strands of argument. Firstly, Lacan's statement that "everything emerges from the structure of the signifier" should not be read as the advocacy of a "linguistic" version of psychoanalysis. The structure of the signifier requires an account of the relation between the subject and language which differs radically from the definition of structure as a discursive code or some other closed system. Furthermore, psychoanalysis is not, in Lacan's view, a procedure for deciphering sense from apparent nonsense. Secondly, Lacan's return to Freud is both

fuelled by, and assimilated into a French intellectual culture which is orientated around dialectic rather than hierarchy, and a de-centring discourse rather than an adequation between subject and object that is provided by a model of knowledge as connaissance.

The aim of this chapter is to consolidate these two strands of argument by examining exactly how, for Lacan, the human subject is divided by the signifiers which comprise the chain of its discourse. Firstly, we shall examine the structure and the consequences of Lacan's concept of a division where the subject is "cut out" by the signifier in both senses of that phrase. On the one hand, the contours of the subject's existence are represented by signifiers. The primacy and materiality of signifiers is due to the fact that, as Stephen Heath puts it, "far from the necessity that being be for me to speak of it, I must first of all speak for the problem for the problem of being to arise" (Heath, 1977-8, p.50). On the other hand, it is not that Lacan denies the existence of dumb people, but rather, as we shall see, that this objection is based on a limited definition of the subject's insertion into language. That speaking subjects are themselves subject to an exclusion from language is the second way in which the subject is "cut out", ie., barred by the signifier. Secondly, we shall examine some of the consequences of this division: the existence of desire as an effect of discourse, and the strategies which are taken by the subject to bridge or cross this division.

### 3.1. HYSTERIA

Let us begin by examining the way a concept of a divided subject emerges from Freud's treatment of hysteria in late nineteenth century Vienna - a treatment which eventually becomes the advent of psychoanalysis. As the subject of the oldest piece of known medical writing, hysteria has a philological source in "a womb" (Veith,1970; Wajeman,1982,p.11). Yet this source divides into a heterogeneous, plural and most enigmatic account of a disease. According to Freud, hysteria had become the "bête noire" of medicine" (SE1 41). For it was held that in hysteria anything was possible, and no credence was given to the hysteric about anything"(SE3 19). Associated in the Middle Ages with witchcraft and contagion, hysteria had become a disjunction between the possibility that the hysteric is saying something, and the impossibility of reducing these statements to a body of knowledge. Hysteria rather gave rise to diverse, even contradictory enunciations that its symptoms are multiple or single, that it is a disease in its own right or the imitation of a disease, that its aetiology is organic or mental, that it exists or does not exist. (Wajeman,1982,p.11).

The disappearance of hysteria today raises a question of whether this is because of the absence of a fixed set of symptoms, and whether there has been a change in the function of medical knowledge since the late nineteenth century. The error of equating hysteria with a fixed set of symptoms was already

clear to the Freud of the Studies on Hysteria who declared "hysteria is not an independent clinical entity" (SE2 259). If there is no such thing as a pure hysterical order, then (i) the prevalence of hysteria in the late nineteenth century and its absence today; and (ii) the assumption that hysteria pertains to women rather than men are a reflection of conditions under which medical knowledge is produced.(1)

This is confirmed by looking at the conditions which led Charcot and the School of the Salpêtrière to restore "dignity" to hysteria (SE3 19). Charcot's treatment of hysteria "as just another topic in neuropathology" was the result of his taking the position of senior physician in a section of the Salpêtrière hospital where epileptics and hysterics were housed together for the first time (SE3 20). Whereas the seizures of epileptics remained unchanged in this new location, hysterics revealed a tendency to mimic these seizures. If Charcot had confined himself to describing this state of affairs, he would have merely reproduced an already accepted point of view. In an 1843 issue of The Lancet, R.B.Todd remarks that "the hysterical convulsion appears as an exaggerated and imperfect imitation of the epileptic" (cited in Leader, 1986, p.15). Hysterical symptoms such as contorsions and arched postures lacked any organic lesion that could be found post mortem. That such symptoms were rather a failed imitation of an organic symptom was suggested by the elegance and co-ordination with which the hysteric performed these movements. However, Charcot's monumental step lay in

giving hysteria and epilepsy a differentiation not merely in terms of the one being a failed mimesis of the other, but rather in terms of a radical disjunction between the hysterical and the anatomical body. Although the hysteric's bodily symptoms lacked any organic lesion, they were nevertheless ideogenic in character. To prove this point, Charcot used a technique of hypnosis to artificially reproduce those paralyses which he had earlier differentiated from organic ones. According to Freud, Charcot thereby

succeeded in proving, by an unbroken chain of argument, that these paralyses were the result of ideas which had dominated the patient's brain at moments of a special disposition. In this way, the mechanism of a hysterical phenomenon was explained for the first time (SE3 22).

If this discovery ultimately played a strictly limited role in Charcot's thinking, it was to prove vital for the attempt of others, including Freud, to study hysteria on a more comprehensive psychological foundation. (SE20 14 SE3 22). In a comparative study of organic and hysterical paralyses of 1893, Freud unsettles the view that the latter can be delimited according to a fixed ordering of anatomical knowledge (SE1 160-72). If hysteria imitates certain types of organic disorders, it is nevertheless distinguished from them on three counts. Firstly, hysterical symptoms are more disassociated and more piecemeal than those of organic disorders (SE1 164). Secondly hysterical paralyses occur with greater intensity (Ibid.). Finally, it is the fact that these first two points are witnessed simultaneously in hysteria which provides its greatest contrast with the types of organic diseases which it apparently imitates

(Ibid.). This leads Freud to follow Charcot in claiming that whilst hysteria has no organic lesion, it nevertheless has a "dynamic" or "functional" lesion which is "completely independent of the anatomy of the nervous system, since "in its paralyses and other manifestations hysteria behaves as though anatomy did not exist or as though it had no knowledge of it" (SE1 169, his emphasis). Freud is thereby pressing further with the disjunction between the hysterical and the anatomical body which was implied by Charcot's use of hypnosis to reproduce ideogenic symptoms.

The body in question in hysterical paralysis is an alteration in everyday, popular conceptions of parts of the body. These conceptions are founded not on a deep knowledge of anatomy but on tactile and especially visual perceptions. For example, a leg will be hysterically paralysed as far up as its insertion into the hip, whilst an hysterical paralysis of an upper limb will be limited to that part of an arm which is visible under clothing (SE1 169). For Freud, this means that hysteria can be considered as having ideogenic features which are irreducible to physiology. The hysterical paralysis of the arm now consists of "the fact that the conception of the arm cannot enter into association with the other ideas constituting the ego of which the subject's body forms an important part" (SE1 170). In other words, this hysterical body is immersed in ideas that comprise the ego but which have become disassociated from each other. Here, Freud begins to talk of the hysterical body as a

function of a splitting process of the ego. It is first and foremost this splitting which differentiates the hysterical lesion from an organic lesion.

To pursue this differentiation, it is necessary to turn to the two terms "idea" (Vorstellung) and "affect" (Affekt) which Freud borrows from the German psychology and philosophy of his day. In Freud's early work, the Vorstellung or idea is usually equated with the memory of a traumatic (and usually sexual) event which has been repressed from consciousness. The paralysed arm is the persistence, in a displaced form, of the affect which was attached to this idea or memory.

For the editors of the Standard Edition, the affect is "much the same as what we mean by "feeling" or "emotion" (SE3 66). It is, however, more expedient to define the affect as the qualitative expression, whether vague or well defined, of a quantity of excitation or psychological energy (LP13-14). In the present context, the affect consists of a repugnance attached to some idea or memory of a traumatic event (SE1 170-1). There is repugnance at letting a certain memory enter into connection with other conscious associations. Consequently, there is a splitting whereby although the memory itself is barred from consciousness, its affect, ie., the repugnance which is attached to it, will persist as that which Freud at this time called a "subconscious association" (SE1 171). The affect persists by virtue of being subconsciously displaced into the somatic sphere, into the



paralysis of the arm.

To summarise: there is a disjunction between the organic and hysterical lesion. This is because the latter lesion results from a certain idea or memory concerning a bodily organ. This idea or memory is loaded with an affect that is repugnant to the conscious ego. Consequently the idea is refused entry into consciousness and is rendered innocuous. But the affect of repugnance with which this memory is loaded will persist through being displaced into the somatic sphere.

This split between an idea and an affect, this disassociation of an idea from consciousness and the resulting association of its affect with the hysteric's body allows one to approach the hysterical symptom as having a logical structure. Displacement (Verschiebung) supplies the logical connection between this disassociation which consists of repression (Verdrängung) and this association which produces a compulsion (Zwang).

In the Project, Freud schematises what happens. He designates compulsion as A and repression as B. Before analysis, A is a compulsion such as an hysterical paralysis of the arm. The subject does not know why part of his or her arm is periodically subject to a paralysis. Although he regards it as absurd, it is a compulsion insofar as he cannot prevent it (SE1 348). In analysis, it is discovered that there is a repressed

idea B which makes the hysteric's compulsion intelligible (SE1 349). There is evidence that B is in some way connected with A. The connection is such that A has stepped into B's place; it has become a substitute for B. Before analysis, the incongruity between A and B is the result of a twofold fact: firstly, that the hysteric is not consciously aware of B; and secondly, that she is aware of A rather than of B. After analysis, the following conclusion can be deduced: for every A (compulsion) there is a corresponding B (repression).

To the extent that A and B are interdependent, there is a dialectical relation between them. This dialectic is also due to the fact that a change undergone in the one is a function of a change undergone in the other. Displacement is precisely the operation whereby "something has been added to A which has been subtracted from B" (SE1 350). The amount of affect which was in the past attached to the now repressed idea B, is the degree of intensity with which A, the compulsion, is exercised (SE1 352-4).


In the course of analysis, the missing connection between compulsion and repression will be traced (SE20 20). Whilst Charcot used hypnosis to stimulate hysteria, Freud emphasised that from the start he was using this technique in "another manner" for "questioning the patient upon the origin of his symptom" (SE20 19). Here, Freud was seeking that which was fundamental in Breuer's discovery that the hysteric's symptoms

"disappeared as soon as the event which had given rise to them was reproduced in her hypnosis" (SE2 35). For Breuer, the "logical consistency" of this hypnotic technique was that it enabled the patient to give utterance to the very affectivity which had accompanied the repressed idea, and which had been displaced onto a bodily symptom. The absence of an organic lesion ceased to be an obstacle to crediting diverse hysterical symptoms with a logical consistency. They can be viewed as a function of the same structure whereby each symptom is the displacement of an affect that could be alleviated by the utterance of a precise word or phrase. The logical consistency of the hysteric's symptom was that the body spoke as long as words did not speak.

Such a therapeutic procedure was called "cathartic": the patient's words purged, with a dramatic intensity, the memory of a traumatic experience which had undergone repression immediately. It was insofar as Freud used hypnosis to achieve this catharsis that he could later declare that psychoanalysts are the "legitimate heirs" of hypnosis" (SE16 462).

To show the justice of this estimate, we need first to answer a possible objection to the above discussion. By attaching so much importance to the splitting of an idea from its affect, Freud is surely endorsing the very antagonism he later concedes to exist between reason and passion (SE19 25). The objection would be that in formulating the symptom as an affect, Freud is

treating it as a feeling or emotion that has "got out of hand", and which must be restored, in analysis, to the control of consciousness. By recollecting the memory or idea to which the affect was initially attached, the patient is, ostensibly, relying on the rational faculty of her conscious ego. In short, there is no radical difference between Freud's early practice and that of ego psychology.

This argument is mistaken on two counts. Firstly, it neglects the fact that the connection between a repressed idea and its compulsive affect is made via displacement. This is not a conscious operation. Displacement is the operation whereby the affective portion of repressed material joins onto material with which it is apparently incongruous. As a connection between the repressed idea to which the affect was originally attached and the body onto which it is now grafted, displacement eludes consciousness. This elusion testifies not to the alternatives of reason and passion, but to the subordination of the human being to a sliding of meaning, to the body coming to be invested with all the psychical intensity that was originally attached to an idea or memory. Secondly, given this point that displacement is an unconscious sliding of meaning, it would be foolhardy of a psychoanalyst to attempt  to restore it directly to consciousness. Whilst Freud used hypnosis to trace the missing connection between a compulsion and an as yet unknown act of repression, it is nevertheless a process of tracing which is an anathema to the patient's consciousness. Far

from a rational conscious ego supplying the means of this tracing, it is a tracing which is made possible by the phenomena of resistance (Widerstand).

Resistance is first defined by Freud in negative terms: it is the act of the conscious ego obstructing access to repressed material (SE1 266). Yet in a very short time, Freud shifted from viewing resistance as an obstacle that brings "work to a halt" to realising that resistance was itself a means of reaching the repressed (SE2 269). The intensity at work in resistance, and the sum of energy or affect once attached to the repressed idea were one and the same. An aversion on the part of the ego which had once driven out the pathogenic idea out of association was now opposing its return to memory: "The hysterical patient's 'not knowing' was in fact a 'not wanting to know' - a not wanting which might be to a greater or less extent conscious" (SE2 269-70).

It was for this reason that if psychoanalysis is the "legitimate heir" of hypnosis, it is because the latter technique eventually becomes redundant. Hypnosis becomes redundant when Freud recognises that, as Lacan puts it, "hypnotic recollection is, no doubt, a reproduction of the past, but it is above all a spoken representation" (E255 e47). The catharsis of the weight of the affect that causes the compulsive symptom is an analytic piece of work. It is necessary to put the symptom into words. It is with these words that a resistance increases in

proportion to the its proximity to repressed material.

Hypnosis becomes redundant for the task of giving voice, without exception, to all the thoughts which enter consciousness. If the patient wants to allow himself such an exception, this is a sure sign of resistance. "Free association" was Freud's name for this technique of giving voice. It is, as Lacan puts it, a cunning term for a forced labour that is deprived of the escape which the exception would permit (E248 e41). It is the nearly always impossible task of the analysand remaining faithful to the pledge of free association which uncovers the resistance less as a resistance to "something", than as a resistance conceived as the very movement of the analysand's discourse. In eventually giving resistance a scope as broad as "whatever interrupts the progress of analytic work", Freud was defining analytic work as an encounter with the gaps, slips and imperfections of the analysand's speech (SE5 517). Free association is the analytic work of encountering a rupture, a breach in one's spoken trains of thought. It is only this rupture that points towards the repressed material of the unconscious. "Free association" as Jacques-Alain Miller puts it, "necessarily disassociates the subject from himself" (Miller, 1986,p.7). There is a subject who is divided, who is subjected to discourse.

### 3.2. THE DIVIDED SUBJECT: PART 1 - SUTURE

It is with this idea of a division that we can begin to approach Lacan's notion of a subject who is divided by signifiers. What we have just been examining in Freud are

various conceptions of splitting which to a large extent avoid the difficulties of rigid spatial imagery which, as we shall see in chapter six, so often feature in Freud's division of the mind into different localities. The above account of division has required not so much a cerebral localisation of processes and entities as a logic, a logic which Lacan takes up as a logic of the signifier. We must now show that this logic is irreducible to a psychology of a mind divided within its unity.

In chapter one we saw that there is a principle which is common to Saussure's definition and Lacan's definition of a signifier. Their common ground is a commitment to a differential rather than to a substantialist view of language. Rather than having positive elements or intrinsic properties, language is said to be composed of elements which are empty "in themselves" since they only take on their identity through their opposition to other elements. On this view, a single signifier cannot exist in isolation from a second signifier. Lacan's structuralist heritage is that the minimum number of signifiers is two. It is this heritage which is at work in his eventual definition of the signifier as representing the subject for another signifier (S11 188 FF207).

The fundamental divergences of Lacan's thinking and structuralism are threefold. Firstly, Lacan rejects Saussure's postulation of a bond between signifier and signified. The

signifier does not represent but intrudes into the signified (E498,500 e150,151). Secondly, this leads Lacan to claim that the immediate structure in question is that of a signifying chain whereby each signifier only takes on its meaning by signifying to another signifier (E502 e153). Thirdly, whilst Saussure supposes that the differential relations between signifiers form a set, Lacan defines this set as the Other (E549,551 e194,195).

It would, however, be more accurate to define this third divergence as the highlighting of a problem which is implicit in Saussure. Here, Lacan refers to Bertrand Russell's paradox that there cannot be a set of all elements which are not members of themselves

We can say that language is constituted by a set of signifiers - for example, ba, ta, pa, etc., etc. - a set which is finite. Each signifier is able to support the same process with regard to the subject, and it is very probable that the process of the integers is only a special case of this relation between signifiers. The definition of this collection of signifiers is that they constitute what I call the Other. The difference afforded by the existence of language is that each signifier (contrary to the unitary trait of the integer number) is, in most cases, not identical with itself - precisely because we have a collection of signifiers, and in this collection one signifier may or not designate itself. This is well known and is the principle of Russell's paradox. If you take the set of all elements which are not members of themselves,

x ~~∉~~ x

the set that you constitute with such elements leads to a paradox which, as you know, leads to a contradiction. In simple terms, this only means that in a universe of discourse nothing contains everything, and here you find again the gap that constitutes the subject (Lacan, 1966, p.193).

Let us examine this quotation step by step. Whilst for



Lacan, the discourse of the Other is complete, ie., comprised of a finite set of signifiers, it is nevertheless comprised of signifiers which more often than not require another signifier to be complete in themselves. This follows from the differential rather than substantialist view of language which Lacan is adopting. Defined as such, this type of signifier which comprises language contrasts with the unitary trait, with the distinctive unity of an integer number, ie., a complete or whole number. It is this type of signifier with which we shall concern ourselves in what follows. This type of signifier is not like an integer number but is rather like a certain definition of zero. Whilst zero circulates among integers in order to make them integral to a series of numbers, it is not itself a number. The concept of the "not identical with itself" which is assigned by zero circulates, in the same way, around the chain of signifiers which comprise the discourse of the Other.

This allows us to drive a wedge between Lacan's aphorism that the unconscious is the discourse of the Other, and Lévi-Strauss' definition of the unconscious as systems of kinship and other forms of exchange. It is certainly true that in the "Rome Discourse" and elsewhere, Lacan acknowledges his debt to Lévi-Strauss' hypothesis that the unconscious is a system of intercommunication which defines not only language, but cultures and customs (E276-79 e66-68).(2) But whereas Levi-Strauss is speaking of a code in which the semantic value of each symbol is fixed by decree, it is for good reason that Lacan later ceased to

speak of codes and preferred to talk of the signifier.<sup>i</sup>(3) For Lacan, "what is omitted in the platitude of modern information theory is the fact that one can only speak of code if it is already the code of the Other" (E807 e305). Missing from this definition of structure as a code is the concept of "the not identical with itself" which is assigned by the number zero. To be sure, by using the notion of the "zero phoneme" that was introduced into phonology by Jakobson, Lévi-Strauss could conceive unconscious exchange as a free play that lacks a fixed point or transcendental guarantee. A type of supplementary structure, to be discussed in the last section of this chapter, "stands in" for this lack (Wilden, 1968, p.128). Yet this does not offset what Descombes appropriately calls Lévi-Strauss' "pantheistic" notion that these structures of exchange somehow replicate the structures of the brain, which are themselves replicating the structure of the cosmos (Descombes, 1980, p.102).

That zero has to appear in the discourse of the Other, in the finite set of signifiers which comprise the Symbolic, is precisely what prevents the Symbolic from being assimilated into a sociologism or notion of "deep structure". If this universe precedes and determines the subject, it is because the condition of entering that discourse is that this subject take the place of zero. This is why Lacan can say in the above quotation "that in a universe of discourse nothing contains everything, and here you find again the gap that constitutes the subject". As one commentator points out, if this is a form of Russell's paradox,

then it is one which amounts to a play on the word "nothing" (Simms, 1987, p. 127-28). On the one hand, in this universe which Lacan calls the Symbolic, there are no signifiers, that is, no "things" which contain everything. On the other hand, there is a domain, "nothing", which does contain everything.

It has been argued by Simms that these two interpretations of "nothing" represent "the same equivocation over a name by which Frege arrived at the 1 from 0" (Ibid. p. 128). This can be understood by examining the concept of "suture" which Miller develops by "working across" Frege's text, a concept which he claims is at work in Lacan's teaching. (4) Miller's point concerns the way in which "1 is only the unit which constitutes the number as such, and not the 1 in its personal identity as number with its own particular place and proper name in the series of numbers" (Miller, 1977-8, p. 29). To the extent that the 1 excludes reference to the 1 in its personal identity as number, let there be the concept "not identical with itself". But if truth is to be saved, there can be no thing which falls under this concept. A concept of things which are not identical with themselves is contradictory to the dimension of truth. In order to maintain on the one hand, that number is not the 1 in its personal identity, and on the other hand, the identity of a thing with itself which preserves truth, the zero must be inscribed in the order of number. It is only with a zero number, with a system in which the 0 that subsumes nothing in the real but a blank is counted as 1, that a concept of the "not identical

with itself" can be articulated whilst still preserving truth.

Yet if this zero number thereby guarantees the logicality of the generation of number, then it must also ensure that other numbers are equally independent of the not identical with itself. This is shown by Frege's idea of the operation of the successor. The 0 is counted as number and thereby becomes a substitute, a "stand in" for the place of the "not identical with itself". The 1 and each subsequent number is a repetition of this substitution. The gap opened up here is, as Miller points out, one that exists between on the one hand, the order of the real, and on the other, the order of number "which is that of discourse bound by truth" (Miller, 1977-8, p.31). In the former order, 3 subsumes three things since zero figures here as a pure and simple absence. In the latter order, where the 0 is counted as 1, we find that the number assigned to the concept "member of the series of natural numbers ending with 3" is four. In accordance with the formula for the successor, the 0 is counted as 1, and each subsequent number is a repetition of this act of substitution. If  $0=1$ ,  $1=2$  and  $2=3$  then, before the 3, there are three numbers. The three is, on this view, the fourth.

It is in such a way that number can be understood as having the same structure as that which Lacan calls the signifying chain. The entirety of the number system depends on both a metaphorical relation where 1 stands in the place of 0, and on a metonymic relation where each subsequent number will repeat this

substitution. As Miller puts it

The generating repetition of the series of numbers is sustained by this, that the zero passes, first along a vertical axis, across the bar which limits the field of truth in order to be represented there as one, subsequently cancelling out as meaning in each of the names of the numbers which are caught up in the metonymic chain of successional progression (Miller, 1977-8, p.31).

On the one hand, in the formula  $n+1$ , the addition sign + indicates a vertical axis where there is a transgression. There is a crossing of the bar between the two respective orders of (i) zero as the concept of the "not identical with itself"; and (ii) the representation of zero as 1, as a member of a number system where the not identical with itself must be excluded. We can say here that the crossing of the bar between these two orders is equivalent in Lacan's schema to the repression of a signified to a position below the Saussurian bar. For Lacan, what is necessary for the emergence of discourse is that the signified be replaced by a signifier, that the signified slide underneath the signifier (E502-03 e153-54). Here, the signified is analogous to the order of the "not identical with itself", whilst the signifier is similar to the primary notch by which a primitive hunter marks the killing of one animal he has killed, a one which would otherwise be indistinguishable from nine other single killings (§11 129 FF141). From this Lacan deduces that in order to enter and to proceed in discourse as a one, as an "I", the subject must count the zero lack as a 1, as a unary trait that is identical with itself. As well as the first person pronoun "I", this unary trait can also be a proper name.

On the other hand, there is a horizontal axis, where the passage from  $n$  to its successor is equivalent to Lacan's notion of a chain of discourse where every signifier, unable to signify itself, requires another signifier. On this level, the subject's relation to the chain of discourse has a metonymic structure where, as Miller puts it, "the definition of the subject comes down to the possibility of one signifier more" (Miller, 1977-8, p.33, his emphasis).

With these ideas, we can demonstrate that when Lacan returns to Freud's concept of the Spaltung of the psyche, he does not read this splitting psychologically as an opposition within a unified mind. The foregoing considerations show how, as Miller argues, it is possible to conceive the division of the subject as discourse, as the relation between these vertical and horizontal axes.

The impossible object, which the discourse of logic summons as the not identical with itself and then rejects as the pure negative, which it summons and rejects in order to constitute itself as that which it is, which it summons and rejects wanting to know nothing of it, we name this object, insofar as it functions as the excess which operates in the series of numbers, the subject. (Ibid., p.32, his emphasis).

The division of the subject is the relation that exists between (i) the unary trait, the proper name or "I" which is substituted for the "not identical with itself"; and (ii) the promise of one signifier more, of sealing the lack which the not identical produces. The subject is inscribed in discourse through this circulation of a lack, of a non-identity which is always defined by the possibility of another signifier.

Given this, there are precise reasons why Miller should use the medical and anatomical term "suture" to describe the relation of the subject to its chain of discourse (Ibid., p.25). A suture is a sown together wound, a cut joined by stitching, or a line of junction between between two contiguous plates. That the subject is the place of such a joined cut is precisely what Lacan is asserting when he claims that "everything emerges from the structure of the signifier" (S11 108 FF206). The structure is based on the function of a cut, a cut which Lacan defines elsewhere as having its strongest form as the bar between signifier and signified (E801 e299). That the subject should be determined by the place of the cut is articulated by the Lacanian algorithm of the "barred S" (S). This bar is not part of a "linguistic" attempt to systematise language, but is rather the matrix of the vertical and horizontal axes through which the subject becomes the suture where neither the gap of the cut, nor its joining have priority. The subject "re-replaces" the gap of the not identical, whence is deduced the metonymic structure of the repeated differentiation of this identity, a repetition which comes down to the possibility of one signifier more.

The concept of suture holds together both definitions of how the subject is "cut out" by the signifier, definitions which are analogous to the above account of the "opening" and "closing" of number. The signifier is representative of the subject insofar as it delivers up the lack in the form of the 1, of the unary

trait of the "I" or proper name. But the subject is also the effect of the signifier insofar as the trait is abolished in the requirement for a successor, for another signifier. The stake of the suture is well formulated by Stephen Heath: "the I is a division but joins all the same, the stand-in is the lack in the structure but nevertheless, simultaneously, the possibility of a coherence, of the filling in" (Heath, 1977-8, p. 56, his emphasis). It is suture, the relation of the lack to the trait, and not a "sealed" code of intercommunication that should be considered when thinking of the Lacanian jargon "the signifier".

### 3.3. THE DIVIDED SUBJECT: PART 2 - THE VEL OF ALIENATION.

This relation of a subject's lack to a trait of a "stand-in" signifier is, in effect, what Lacan calls the relation of the subject to the Other, to the set of signifiers that comprise discourse: "The Other is the locus in which is situated the chain of the signifier which commands all that is going to be able to make the subject present" (§11 185 FF203). But, in accordance with the concept of suture, there is also a process of gap where the subject fades or disappears from its presentation in the Other. If the subject appears first in the Other, this is because the first signifier, the unary signifier, inscribes the subject there just as much as the hunter's initial killing of an animal is counted by the single notch or stroke. But, as Lacan puts it, "when this signifier, this one, is established - the reckoning is one one" (§11 129 FF141, his emphasis). Just as the zero lack is delivered up in the form of



the 1 to be abolished in the successor, so "it is at the level, not of the one, but of the one one, at the level of the reckoning (du compte) that the subject has to situate himself as such" (Ibid.). The unary signifier represents the subject for another signifier, and this other signifier has as its effect the disappearance of the subject from the Other (§11 199 FF218). (5)

It is an encounter with the interval between these two moments of the signifier which the Lacan of 1964 defines as an essential part of psycho<sup>a</sup>analysis. Whilst the psychoanalytic technique of ego psychology is organised around a reality principle, Lacan claims that psychoanalysis consists of mapping the subject not in relation to this perceived reality, but in relation to this suturing by the signifier.

The predicament to which the analysand is thereby introduced is not an arbitrary convention, nor is it merely a model. The predicament is rather, as Lacan says, a "part of language itself" which should be distinguished when studying linguistics. (§11 192 FF212). The predicament is that the appearance of the subject in the Other as the unary "I", and his fading from that position by virtue of being represented for another signifier, are mutually exclusive. The necessity for one aspect to be eclipsed by the other aspect is aptly described by Miller: the structure of the subject is a "flickering in eclipses" (Miller, 1977-8, p.34). Whilst the subject is neither one nor the other of these two

aspects, this is not because he is in the position of some third term which oscillates between his appearance in the Other and his fading from the Other. This "neither one nor the other" is rather the predicament where both these opposed aspects define the subject, but where both cannot be simultaneously assigned precisely because they are opposed.

This predicament can be further understood by considering three ways in which the conjunction "or" denotes a choice. Firstly, there is an "or" which is exhaustive in the sense that the alternative which is chosen will automatically exclude the other alternative. "You can go to Milan or Madrid" presents a choice where arriving in one city excludes a simultaneous arrival in the other. Secondly, there is an "or" which denotes an equivalence between the choices. Whether he goes abroad by boat or plane, by "hook" or by "crook" is unimportant. All ways are in the interests of leaving Great Britain before North Sea oil is exhausted.

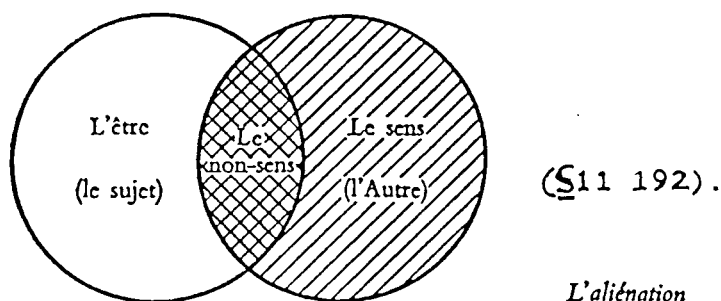
Lastly, there is a type of "or" which is exemplified in the choice which is announced by a mugger in a Bedford-Stuyvesant subway. He effectively says "Your money or your life!" If the victim chooses to retain the money, he probably loses both his money and his life. If he chooses to retain his life, he has a life deprived of something. On the one hand, the "or" here cannot represent an absolute choice between two alternatives which have nothing in common. A loss of money will result from either

choice. On the other hand though, it is hardly a matter of indifference whether or not one's life is forfeited. The victim's choice is a decision between life and death. Rather than a decision between money or life, the victim is obliged to decide between (i) forfeiting money only; or (ii) forfeiting money and life. Whatever alternative is chosen, the money will be lost. These two alternatives therefore have a point of intersection even though they are not equivalent. It is this type of choice which for Lacan, defines the analysand's predicament as an "alienating vel"

The vel of alienation is defined by a choice whose properties depend on this, that there is, in the joining, one element that, whatever the choice operating may be, has as its consequence a neither one, nor the other. The choice, then, is a matter of knowing whether one wishes to preserve one of the parts, the other disappearing in any case.

Let us illustrate this with what we are dealing with here, namely, the being of the subject, that which is there beneath the sense. If we choose being, the subject disappears, it eludes us, it falls into non-sense. If we choose sense, the sense survives only deprived of that part of non-sense that is, strictly speaking, that which constitutes in the realization of the subject, the unconscious. In other words, it is of the nature of this sense, as it emerges in the field of the Other, to be in a large part eclipsed by the disappearance of being, induced by the very function of the signifier. (§11 191-2 FF211).

This vel of alienation is represented by Lacan in the following Venn diagram:



In order for this being to become the "I", the subject, it must be placed under sense. "Placed under" corresponds here to Lacan's appropriation of the Saussurian bar as dividing signified from signifier. "Placed under" entails a vertical axis along which being, the signified, is repressed to a position below the bar so that its original position above the bar is replaced by a signifier. What is necessary for this being to enter into the sense bestowing activity of nominating itself as a unary trait, as an "I" that is identical with itself, is that he be submitted to the set of signifiers which comprise the Other. Without this submission, this placing of being under the Other, there would be no subject: "the subject disappears, it eludes us, it falls into non-sense." This non-sense is represented by the unshaded portion of the left hand circle. The status of the subject here as a parenthesis shows that the subject as such does not strictly belong to this circle.

But as soon as we have learnt that the subject, as such, can only exist in the portion of the left hand circle which intersects with the right hand circle, we also learn that as this unary "I", he "survives only deprived of that part of non-sense [...] which constitutes in the realisation of the subject, the unconscious." For the following reason, there is no such thing as a subject who is without an unconscious. For the unconscious is

precisely the measure to which the the subject, the unary trait of the "I", cannot be represented in its purity but only in its effects of requiring one signifier more. The cross-hatched area in the diagram which marks the subject's insertion into the Other must be marked as non-sense, ie., as excluding the possibility of the subject existing in the Other as identical to itself.

The two difficult points we have tried to articulate in the previous two paragraphs are encapsulated in Heath's remark that "I must of all speak, and first of all be spoken, be bespoken: produced from and for the Other" (Heath, 1977-8, p. 50, his emphasis). To be a subject, an "I", it is necessary to be represented in the Other, the cost of which is that this subject emerges there not as the cause, author or owner of its representations, but as their effect. Represented as the possibility of another signifier with which it is not identical, the subject is no more able to enjoy sense here than it could as the "being" portion of the left hand circle which is totally outside the Other. This is why Lacan defines the cross-hatched intersection of the diagram not as a joining of the two circles, but as a domain that is "neither one nor the other". On the one hand, this area is not the "being" because it marks a subject who is "placed under" the Other. On the other hand, this area does not belong to sense since this subject is excluded from identity. Consequently, the choice between the two circles of being and sense is neither an absolute nor an indifferent choice, but a choice which is akin to deciding between money or money and life. Just as whatever choice

is made, the money is forfeited, so in the choice between being and sense, the sense is always forfeited. What remains is always non-sense since either the being is excluded from the domain of the Other that provides the unary trait, or else the subject enters the Other only to encounter there its identity as the requirement for another signifier.

Here, then, is an ultimate justification for that part of our thesis which asserts that Lacan viewed psychonalysis as an encounter with non-sense, and not as an extraction of sense from nonsense. What operates in the interpretation of a symptom is not the deciphering of a concealed or forgotten sense which is potentially subject to the recall of consciousness, but rather "the articulation in the symptom of signifiers without any sense" (E842). Alternating between his representation in the Other as a unary trait, and his exclusion from being represented in the Other as identity, the analysand is introduced to a division which Lacan marks by striking the "S" of the subject who is in front of the capital "A" of l'Autre - "~~S~~(A)". The predicament expressed by the algebra "~~S~~(A)" is that of a subject who does not know where to put himself. Represented by and yet excluded from the signifier, the subject is condemned to appear as a "flickering" which Lacan evokes thus: "There where it was just now, there where it nearly was, between this extinction which still glows and this blossoming forth which comes to grief, I can come to be by disappearing from what is said by me" (E801 e300).

This impasse is provocatively viewed by Lacan as the psychoanalytic operation of Freud's Wo Es war, soll Ich werden. The "I", that is, the subject rather than the id, is not a source of sense but an effect of non-sense where "Where the subject was" corresponds to the French imperfect il y avait. There was previously a being but it can be there no longer since it must be represented in the Other as a subject. This representation has as its effect the fading of the subject from the Other: "what there was there disappears from being now only a signifier" (E840).

So far, we have only sketched out the logic of this predicament. We have hardly touched on the part it plays in shaping the course or aim of a Lacanian psychoanalysis. But before turning to this issue, we should note that although Lacan's formulation of this predicament is based on a reading of Frege's Foundations of Arithmetic, it is a reading which is as "strategic" as his reading of Saussure. Lacan is undoubtedly attributing certain ideas to a primary source which are not found there in exactly the same form. Furthermore, it could be argued that Lacan conveniently elides some of the internal criticisms which could be made of these primary sources. But even if this is true, little would be gained from now proceeding to show that Lacan is simply "wrong" by virtue of these alleged travesties. In saying that Lacan's reading of Frege is "strategic", we mean that the impetus for that reading is, of course, a psychoanalytic theory of the subject. It is more philosophically penetrating to

ask for the reasons that necessitated that reading in the first place.

We can speculate that Lacan's strategic reading of Frege was necessitated by the requirement for a concept of the divided subject that could not be collapsed into a crude existentialist notion that the individual's self-experience is constantly negated by an outside world. This type of division is one where the individual withdraws from the world into an empty and negative inner self. Here, alienation is the fact of the Other as a polar opposite of an authentic or true self who is the inherent origin and reference-point of experience. Such suppositions that the self is a potentially present entity, and that the Other is "enmity", "inauthenticity" or "contamination" of the self are voiced when Ronald Laing writes albeit specifically of schizophrenia

The false-self system to be described here exists as the complement of an 'inner' self which is occupied in maintaining its identity by being transcendent, unembodied, and thus never to be grasped, pinpointed, trapped, possessed. Its aim is to be a pure subject, without any objective existence. Thus except in certain possible safe moments the individual seeks to regard the whole of his objective existence as the expression of a false self (Laing, 1965, p. 94).

In contrast to this position, our efforts have been directed towards showing a division of the subject that displaces the concept of the identical with itself which underlies the notion of the subject as a potentially present entity. For Lacan, the Other is not a "false-self" complement of an "inner self" for a profound reason. The Other is not one pole of a division but is



the place where the subject emerges, in the first instance, as a division. The subject cannot exist as other than this division where the signifier is representative of the subject and where the subject is the effect of the signifier. If Lacan's remark that there is "no Other of the Other" is not an empty expression, it is here that it will find its status (E813,818 e311,316). Rather than the logic of R.D. Laing's "complement", we are driven, as we shall now see, to think rather of the logic of a supplement.

#### 3.4. THE object (a) CAUSE OF DESIRE, SEPARATION AND THE END OF AN ANALYSIS

##### 3.4.1. DESIRE

With this account of alienation in place, the question arises as to how the analysand clings to a support which he or she builds to ensure a complete representation in the Other. This support is a supplement rather than a complement for the following reason. Whilst it is an adjunct, a non-essential attribute of the signifying chain, it is nevertheless a contingency, a material element which offers the subject the possibility of being positively present, of being embodied or incarnated within the signifying chain that comprises the construction of reality which Lacan calls the Symbolic. Although formally outside, and irreducible to the differential relations which comprise the Symbolic, this support plays a causal role within it. This support serves as an alibi, as a seemingly coherent thread with which the subject can take refuge from being

merely the suture of a signifying chain. Lacan's name for this supplementary mark which is exterior and yet causally operative within the Symbolic is l'objet petit a, a term we shall translate as object a. Let us try to configure this object by first of all examining why Lacan defines this object as a "cause of desire".

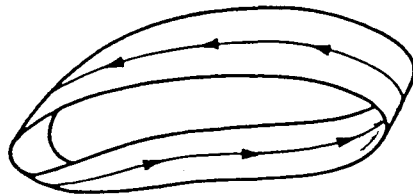
Replying to the suggestion that his use of the term desire was a recourse to psychologism, Lacan remarked that "the problem of desire is not psychological any more than is the unsolved problem of Socrates' desire" (§11 17 FF13).(6) There are two ways of understanding why Lacan's use of the term desire is not reducible to wishful thinking or to any other intentional act of aiming at a substance. Firstly, in Kojève's lectures on Hegel which Lacan attended, desire is defined as an absolute condition, and not as a demand which could be filled or completed (Kojève, [1947] 1980). Such a definition of desire is non-regressive: it does not coincide with a nostalgia, with a longing for a something which is presently lacking but potentially retrievable. Definitive of the human being's way of existing as alterity, desire is not terminated by any act of consumption, caress or liturgy. The desirable is an alterity which is as absolute and as unanticipatable as death.

This leads to a second way of understanding the status of desire in Lacan's teaching. If desire is defined as alterity, that is, as non-adequate to its concept, it can only be conceived

as lacking its concept. For Lacan, this type of lack can be derived from the subject's sutured relation to the signifying chain, from the way he or she appears with a signifier only to disappear through being represented there not for him or herself but for another signifier: "to find oneself as desirer is the opposite of getting oneself recognised as the subject of it, for it is as a derivation of the signifying chain that the channel of desire flows" (E623 e259). This derivation amounts to Lacan's claim that "the subject has to find the constituting structure of his desire in the same gap opened up by the effect of the signifiers in those who come to represent the Other for him" (E628 e264). Desire, according to Lacan, is only ever recognized by the subject as "desire of the Other", that is, as a desire for complete representation in the signifying chain. Such a point of representation would have to be immune from the suturing of the unity and identity of a reflexive consciousness. But the impossibility of conceiving such a point is due to the subject's articulation of desire being no less exempt from the fading effects of the signifying chain than any other articulation. Since desire for this point of non-fading is produced in and through the effects of fading from the signifying chain, it will be a point which is equally subject to these effects. The relation of the desirer to what is desired is an internal one where, as Lacan puts it, "it is precisely because desire is articulated that it is not articulable" (E804 e302). The effects of fading that necessitate desire for this point of non-fading serve also as a proof that the subject is

sufficiently seized by those fading effects for it to be impossible to articulate this point.

This claim can be topologically illustrated as a Moebius strip:



Desire of a complete representation in the Other will, topologically, always come back to the incomplete representation which produced that desire in the first place. Desire is only ever equivalent to a movement of the signifying chain around an empty space - a movement which can only ever lead back to its point of departure; and an emptiness that exists by virtue of the impossibility of this space ever being crossed. This space, which is the subject's complete representation in the Other, is only ever circumvented.

#### 3.4.2. object (a) AS CAUSE OF DESIRE

For Lacan, such a concept of desire has the following consequences. On the one hand, the continuous torsion described by the Moebius surface is operative in constituting a limit, an edge or lining of psychic functioning. On the other hand, the void circumvented by this torsion can only be illustrated

topologically as a non-Euclidean space. The relationship between these two considerations must be understood as an epistemological problem which is at the centre of Freud's 1915 paper on the metapsychology of the drive (SE14 117-40). A fundamental assumption of this paper is that the base elements of human knowledge and perception are organised as a relation between on the one hand, a surface consisting of the entire skin and mucous membrane of the human body, and on the other hand, objects which have passed through the apertures of this body surface to become separated from it by space. The crucial point is that these objects are somehow, for want of a better word, "identified" as retaining something of each human being's uniqueness. Even though they are physically separated from the subject's body, the voice, breath, saliva, odour, faeces, urine, menstrual blood, semen, hair etc. are, from another point of view, attributes which define each human subject's uniqueness. Although this phenomenon can be intuitively appreciated, it cannot be adequately formulated in terms of a subject beholding an external object before his consciousness. The mechanisms by which these disconnected objects are identified as belonging to a person's body cannot be localised in a meaning of which the subject is a source. The subject is organised by intense forms of attachment to these objects long before he is in a position to recognize that he is physically separated from them.

This claim receives its elaboration and support in the correlations Freud draws between various organisations of the

drive and the body surface (SE7 135-243). The correlations Freud establishes between the mouth and various forms of cannibalistic devouring, and between the anal aperture and forms of retaining and expelling are not trite attempts to localise the origin of human discourse in a mysteriously endogenous set of "instincts". For these correlations raise an array of philosophical questions about the organisation of the human body as a body of space. This body of space is not a function of a priori schemas which are subjectively imposed on reality, but is a function of an ordering which is entirely independent of the subject. As Lacan puts it "the fascination of the stain is anterior to the view that discovers it" (S11 245 FF273). A part of the subject's mapping in space is resistant to being sucked, seen, heard, expelled and retained as though a reflexive consciousness was the source of these actions.

These mappings are, in fact, what Lacan calls the oral, gazed, auditory and anal variants of the object a (S11 95-97 FF103-04). They are mappings of the subject in a space which is "purely topological" (S11 232 FF257). Rather than forming representations of his voice, and of his appearance; and rather than consciously deciding what is to be expelled and retained, it is far more the case that the subject is mapped as a body of space where he is himself sucked, gazed, heard, retained and expelled. The relation of the conscious subject to this mapping of himself is not a correspondence, but a lure which has the same topological surface as the above Moebius band which circumvents a

void which can never be grasped.

This claim can be elaborated by turning to Freud's account of the various fates which the drives undergo in the course of different perversions (SE14 125-40). In the pairs sadism-masochism, voyeurism-exhibitionism there is not only a transition from an active to a passive aim (Ziel) of the drive, but also a replacement of the drive's external object by the subject's own self. These opposite types of aim and object are, at a profound level, the continuous Moebius surface of a subject who can only articulate his desire as the lack of articulation from which he desires exemption. The pervert seeks to perceive, to behold before himself the forms of the object a by which he is mapped in space as sucked, gazed, heard, retained and expelled. For him or her there exists this possibility of perceiving, repeating and mastering the organisation of his or her gratification. But he or she is in fact searching for an object a, for his or her "lining" from which he or she has been separated in space, but which is resistant to becoming an object for consciousness. In describing the transition from sadism to masochism, and from voyeurism to exhibitionism as a "turning round against the subject's own self", and as a "reversal" of a drive's active aim, Freud can be read as underscoring how the pervert pursues a Moebius-like torsion that leads only to the underside of his or her original problem. To make his or her object emerge in perceived reality, he or she can at best only perform a complete circumvention of this object.

This illustrates part of the reason why Lacan calls the object a "cause of desire". This non-specular object consists of the various forms by which the subject is lured into seeking a part of him or herself that exists as a void in topological space, and which he or she can never retrieve. Such an evanescent status of the object a cannot be understood as a Kantian problem of the relation between a noumenon and phenomenon, between a surface and something behind it which the subject cannot represent (§11 98 FF106). In Lacan's schema the subject's projections fall short of that world because they are projections which are subordinated to, and dependent upon, the human subject receiving spatial co-ordinates that he does not himself organise. We shall return to this issue in chapter five.

What grounds are there, then, for our having claimed at the beginning of this section that it is with the object a, this object which is resistant to representation, that the analysand attempts to supplement his or her suture in the signifying chain? The answer is that although the object a lacks representation, this does not in itself exclude the possibility that this lack itself can be somehow recognised or symbolised. For Lacan, the symbol of that lack is the phallus (§11 95 FF103). Here, the phallus is to be distinguished from the anatomical mark of the penis. The phallus stands rather for the ordering of human discourse around a symbolic form of (i) identifying with a



father's injunction to enjoy, (an identification that figures in Freud's work as the resolution of the Oedipus complex); and (ii) obeying the father's interdiction on enjoyment that is found in Freud's reading of Robertson Smith's conjectures on the function of totem and taboo (SE7 226 SE13 100-61). Because this injunction and this interdiction are mutually exclusive they define the phallus as an impossible ideal with which the subject cannot correspond. It is this lack of correspondence which, for Lacan, provides the sole means of identifying with the phallus. The phallus functions to order discourse around a symbol of ideal enjoyment that is presently lacking. But Lacan is also clear that under this symbol there is subsumed a representation of the object a (§11 95 FF103). The phallus is well suited for representing this lack of a representation of object a. For insofar as the phallus signifies a supreme enjoyment which is lacking, it can become a metaphor par excellence of the unique, elusive and non-specular part of the body that is separated from the subject in topological space.

It is by virtue of being subsumed under the phallic symbol of lack that the object a supplements rather than complements the subject's suture in the signifying chain. The suture is the fact that the analysand's discourse keeps bumping into an empty space, a space where the analysand is excluded by signifiers as soon as he or she is represented by them. Yet the aim of an analysis, as it is defined by Lacan in 1964, is not only to exacerbate this suture, but to proceed from there to the question

of how this suture is incarnated. The clinical problem is to grasp how this suture determines the grosser pound of flesh that constitutes the eroticism of the human organism. Encountering his or her suture in the Other, the analysand takes shelter in object a defined as the part of his body which lacks representation, but which is subsumed under the phallic symbol of lack.

The classic example of this is to be found in Freud's account of fetishism (SE21 152-57; SE23 202-04). For Freud, the structure of fetishism betrays nothing less than a "universal characteristic of neurosis" (SE23 204). Fetishism consists of a fixation to part of an object, a part which supplements, ie., "re-replaces" a flaw in phallic signification which Freud calls castration. Developing a particularly intense attachment to a tenor's voice, or to a person's shoe or eyebrow, the subject identifies with a partial object that takes on a meaning so intimate as to become a substitute for the object a which the subject endeavours to specularise. The fetish object bears a remarkable similarity to Lacan's definition of the object a as a produit de déchet, as an apparently insignificant piece of litter or waste which is significant for the subject only because it exists as though it were a separated part of his own body (cited in Nasio, 1971, p.108). This partial object is an incarnation of the subject which serves as an alibi for positing oneself elsewhere than this flaw in the phallic network of signifiers.

#### 4.3.3. SEPARATION: AN <ENDLICHE> OR AN <UNENDLICHE>

##### ANALYSIS?

It is at this point that the question arises of how the Lacan of the early 1960's defined the criteria for terminating an analysis. If, at this time, Lacan had presented analysis only in terms of the operation of alienation, then it could plausibly be argued that analysis has finished once it has demonstrated the division of the subject by signifiers, and the impossibility of fully representing oneself by signifiers. But it is clear from both his 1960 paper "Position of the Unconscious", and from his 1964 series of seminars that alongside alienation, Lacan placed another operation called "separation" (E842 S11 193-95, 199-200 FF213-15, 218-19). The analytic aim is, as Lacan sees it at this time, not only to introduce the subject to his being cut by the signifying chain, but also to facilitate a passage from this bloody terrain to a point that can be sustained outside it: "through the function of the object a, the subject separates himself off, ceases to be linked to the vacillation of being, in the sense that it forms the essence of alienation" (S11 232 FF258).

Separation is an analytic operation which can be thought of as the achievement of an ascesis or purification: "the

fundamental mainspring of the analytic operation is the maintenance of a distance between the I - identification - and the a" (§11 245 FF273). The analysand becomes able to sustain him or herself from a point where his or her ideal existence as a sexual identity, as an "I" that is constructed on a plane of phallic identification, is distanced from the structuring of the libidinous body surface which up till now has been identified with a phallic network of signifiers. In other words, the object a, this non-specular embodiment of the subject's positive presence in the Symbolic Other, is no longer subsumed under an identification with a body of phallic signifiers. The incompleteness of the subject's representation in the signifying chain, his or her position there as castrated, is separated from the question of how to represent an eroticism of the body that does not necessarily lie within this domain.

This passage from alienation to separation is, in effect, a passage from a closed space which is bounded by phallic identification, to a point outside it where the analysand has some choice in deciding whether to subordinate him or herself to this symbol of lack. This passage does not consist of neutering or denying the libidinal lining of the subject, but of separating the existence of a sexed being from a sexual identity which is predicated on being identical with the phallus.

Since Lacan closely ties separation to what is meant by the end of an analysis, it is an operation which contrasts sharply

with the presuppositions of Freud's 1937 paper on the difference between an endliche and an unendliche analysis (SE23 216-53). For Freud, the end of analysis can, at one level be justified solely on pragmatic grounds that there is no need to fear a repetition of symptoms. Here, the end is "indefinite" in the sense that although the analysand is no longer suffering from his symptoms, his repressed material has nevertheless not been fully analysed (SE23 219). In contrast, a "definite" end of analysis would result from achieving what analysis is only superlatively able to do. It would succeed in "resolving every one of the patient's repressions and filling in all the gaps in his memory" (SE23 220). Freud is pessimistic about the possibility of this definite end. It could be achieved only by mastering the "bedrock" of neurosis that is castration anxiety in men, and penis envy in women (Ibid., p.250-53). The end of analysis is almost invariably indefinite by virtue of an impasse that is the analysand's entanglement in a knot of phallic identification. Thus the space of analysis for Freud is a closed one where it is virtually impossible for the analysand to move to a point outside of it.

Yet, it is the possibility of reaching and sustaining such a point which Lacan takes up with the analytic technique of separation. The possibility of finding a point from which to separate from the phallus is precisely that this symbol of lack does not say all. The question of there being something more to be said is one which Lacan elevates in Encore to the

non-existence of a sexual relation (rapport) between the sexes (§20 53-59). Since a supposedly sexual relation, as opposed to sexual activity would be identical to a oneness, to a single indivisible unity which is the phallus, there are no two terms between which there can be a relation.(7)

### CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have discussed two related issues: the structure of the subject as divided by the signifying chain, and the status of the subject's object as an object which functions as a supplement for the subject status within the signifying chain as a suture.(8) The discussion of the first issue focused on how the subject's representation in the signifying chain entails an exclusion from it. The price the subject pays for being inserted in discourse, for appearing there as the unary trait, is that he partakes of the non-sense which is, strictly speaking, Lacan's definition of the unconscious.(9)

Our objective here was to vindicate the part of our thesis which asserts that although Lacan was concerned to theorise the structure of the human subject, this is a structure which is irreducible to a crude structuralist attempt to reduce the subject's linguistic activity to a closed formal system of la langue. It is true that for Lacan, the structure of language is not only the structure of the subject, but is indeed structure as such. But this structure, with which psychoanalysis is so chronically concerned, is not representable as a closed surface.

If Mobian topology is best suited to represent this structure, it is because <sup>the topology</sup> this is a suture where neither the gap nor the join is conceived of as prior. As with the Moebius strip, the one surface is always the other.

The discussion of the second issue focused on the object a as embodying a positive presence of the subject which is excluded from the signifying chain, but which is nevertheless subsumed under phallic identification.<sup>(1)</sup> The operation of separating the object a from such identification was presented as defining the "end" of a Lacanian analysis in the early 1960's. The object a is, ultimately, the subject himself in the domain which Lacan calls the Real; a domain which, as we shall now see, is distinct from reality and is searched for in phantasy.

very few reports, and the data are not as good as those of the 1960's and 1970's.

#### FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

- (1) Giving their secretary the task of prescribing regular medication for the housewife's recurring "headache", many general practioners view it as a neurological symptom of an "I cannot cope" which is outside their jurisdiction. On the one hand, this could suggest that hysteria today is part of an unarticulated pathology of the woman's position in the conjugal family. On the other hand, this suggests that hysteria has fallen once again to the rank of a bête noire of medicine. Hysteria, so defined, does not receive a coherent diagnois in present day medicine. Why should this be so? No answer will suffice which does not attempt to link its definition of hysteria to successive normative concepts of what a woman should and should not be. That such concepts are produced by different social orderings is well shown by Michel Foucault's account of sexuality as a historical construct of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Foucault, 1980). Consider firstly, Freud's claim that by touching areas of the body described by female hysterics as painful, he could provoke them into throwing their head back, and into experiencing a voluptuous "tickling sensation" of pleasure rather than pain (SE2 137). Since Freud likened these reactions to an hysterical

attack - itself deemed "an equivalent of coition", we can see how the "hysterization" of women's bodies at the end of the nineteenth century was an attempt, by men, to analyse this body as being saturated with a charge of sexuality (SE9 234). Through such medical "advance", Foucault claims, a female body could be isolated "by means of a pathology intrinsic to it" and placed "in organic communication with the social body (whose regulated fecundity it was supposed to ensure)" (Foucault, 1980, p.104). In other words, hysteria is constructed in the nineteenth century as part of a wider definition of the female body as a sexuality to be controlled and administered by the social body. For example, the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860's legalised the forcible internment and examination of suspected female prostitutes in response to the spread of venereal diseases in garrison and port towns. As Rose points out, the Victorian definitions of the hysteric as the over-educated woman, or the woman who indulges in uncontrolled or non-procreative sexuality (conjugal onanism) are based on a category of the woman as disordered or diseased when she falls short of submitting her reproductive capacities to the needs and social well being of the nation (Rose, 1983(a), pp.11-12). In short, as well as there being no fixed pathology of hysteria, there is also no intrinsic tie between hysteria and the woman. Hysteria is based on a normative concept of woman which is socially constructed, but which then takes on a de facto existence. That hysteria was not the sole prerogative of a woman's aberrant body is testified to by both Freud's analysis of a male hysteric, and by his failed analysis of a female patient (Dora) as an hysteric (SE1 25-31; SE7 7-122).

- (2) See Lévi-Strauss, 1968.
- (3) As Descombes points out, "The notion of the 'human mind' 'unconsciously' elaborating structures is so vague that perhaps it would be wiser not to look for its meaning, particularly since Levi-Strauss has little more to say on the subject [...] The significance of this mysterious unconscious hardly matters, as the issue of what Lévi-Strauss's hypothesis might mean will only arise when the "universal code" is discovered..." (Descombes, 1980, p.102).
- (4) The main thread of Frege's argument is found in Grundlagen der Arithmetik, translated under the title The Foundations of Arithmetic, Basil Blackwell, 1953.
- (5) This is a disappearance for which Lacan prefers to use the English word "fading" (§11 199 FF218).



- (6) It was Socrates, Lacan reminds us, who declared that instead of equating desire with an original subjectivity, he placed it in the position of an object (S11 17 FF13). For a further elaboration of this see Lacan, (E825 e322; and Lemoine-Luccioni, 1985-6.
- (7) The manifold questions these points raise, firstly about the existence and possibility of challenging apparently stable gender identities; and secondly, about the degree to which Lacan's teaching is itself an exemplar of how female sexuality has always been theorised by males within masculine parameters, are well beyond the scope of this inquiry. Some starting points are to be found in Benvenuto, 1986; Irigaray, 1980; Mitchell and Rose, 1982; and Mykita, 1983.
- (8) To make good the claim that object a can operate as a supplement we should bear in mind two things: that a supplement can be defined as something that serves to remedy a deficiency, and that the status of object a as a supplement concerns the way in which it is grafted onto or subsumed under the problematic of a lack that is organized by a castration complex. For Lacan, the castration complex does not consist only of the child's deprivation of being the maternal phallus, of being the imaginary object of the mother's desire. Castration also concerns the way in which this lack of an imaginary object is to be represented symbolically. Castration is the symbolic lack of an imaginary object (Dor, 1985, p.106). It is in terms of the problematic of how this lack is to be symbolized that the close tie between object a and the phallus must be understood. In the 4 March 1964 seminar Lacan defines this relation as follows: "The object a is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off as organ. This serves as a symbol of the lack, that is to say, of the phallus, not as such, but in so far as it is lacking. It must, therefore, be an object that is, firstly, separable and, secondly, that has some relation to the lack" (FF 103, our emphasis). There are two points to note here: object a is said to be separable, and to serve as a symbol. This latter point is obviously somewhat different from saying that object a is a symbol. This serving defines object a in its supplementary role of remedying an absence of any representation of the lack of being the maternal phallus, of being the imaginary object of the mother's desire. If it is in Freud's account of fetishism (see p.138) that we catch a glimpse of this process, it is because the second quality of object a, its separability, is to be found there. As a particularly intense attachment to an apparently insignificant object, fetishism represents the lack brought about by castration. The subject's libidinal attachment to a shoe or an eyebrow can be explained as the subject's attachment to an object which embodies a separable part of himself that is object a. As an attachment to object a, the fetishistic object does not fill or solve the lack. What this attachment to object a remedies or supplements is rather an absence of any other immediate way of symbolizing the lack. At the risk of "freezing" a relation

between a set of terms that Lacan was constantly reformulating, this is how the present writer wishes to formulate what he (rather than Lacan) has called the supplementary role of object a. The reader is also referred to footnote 10 of this chapter which concerns the phallus.

- (9) The discussion of this structure referred to Lacan's presentation of a Venn diagram (p.123). The metaphysical connotations of the "being" portion of this diagram, its apparent evocation of a fixed, stable and a priori essence of the human subject would seem to contradict the claim made in the General Introduction that Lacan undermines, or at least explicitly refuses to contribute to, a problematic of an ontology of the human subject. In one respect, this discrepancy exemplifies the way in which Lacan's blurring of different levels and concepts can lead him to make an illustrative or pedagogical point with a term that is rejected in another context. However, a closer examination of the particular seminar in which the Venn diagram stands suggests that the use of the term "being" refers to a "sexed living being" who must be theorized as a lack rather than a unity. The Venn diagram is presented in the 27 May 1964 seminar where, in section 1, Lacan sees himself as following Freud in saying that the method of reproducing the human species is not automatically or unproblematically represented in the human psyche. Lacan takes the story of "Daphnis and Chloe" as illustrating that "the human being has always to learn from scratch" what to do, a learning that psychoanalysis ultimately theorizes as the subject's insertion into a Symbolic realm, into a field of the Other. This insertion is made possible by the castration and Oedipus complexes. The "being" portion of the Venn diagram arguably refers, then, to a sexed living being who is already lacking by virtue of the fact that he or she is unable to situate him- or herself unproblematically in a cycle of sexual reproduction. As Lacan puts it, "sexuality is represented in the psyche by a relation of the subject that is deduced from something other than sexuality itself" (FF 204). There is further evidence to support this point that the "being" of the left-hand circle of the Venn diagram concerns a sexed living being who is already lacking something before appearing in the field of the Other that is designated by the right-hand circle. For, in this same seminar, Lacan speaks of sexuality as the overlap of two lacks (FF 204-05). The first is the above-mentioned lack of an unproblematical representation of human reproduction. The second lack concerns the subject's division by signifiers as he or she achieves such representation through being caught in a realm of signifiers that define the Oedipus and castration complexes, and which form part of the field of the Other. It is only by remembering that this Venn diagram refers to problems of psychoanalytic practice and technique that one can understand why "being" and "sense" exclude each other, so that, as illustrated by the centre of this diagram, their overlap constitutes a dimension of non-sense that is the unconscious. We have already noted that whilst it is through its emergence in the field of the Other that the human subject can represent itself, this representation is achieved only at the price of being subjected to signifiers. A signifier represents the subject for another signifier. Yet this dependency on a signifying chain is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the emergence of non-sense that is designated by the centre of the Venn diagram. In order for the operation of "alienation" to take place in


psychoanalysis, the priority of signifiers over signifieds in determining meaning, the ceaseless movement of signifiers representing the subject for other signifiers, has to be exacerbated to a pitch where this movement deprives the subject of any fixed reference point. The unconscious is encountered not as a set of intellectual reasons for the subject's dependence on signifiers, but as an irreducible, inexhaustible and senseless character of meaning qua chain of signifiers.

- (10) Our various references to the phallus as a "symbol of lack" (pp.136-7, 185, 252), as an "impossible ideal" (pp.137) and as a "master signifier" (p.252) can be clarified by noting first of all why the phallus is such a difficult, controversial but key concept in psychoanalysis. The arguments which have been advanced by both certain leading analysts of Freud's day, and by more recent feminist interest in psychoanalysis, centre on whether gender is a construct or an innate, natural differentiation founded upon a genital determinism. If, as Freud argues in the "Three Essays" on Sexuality (1905), boy and girl are originally polymorphous and potentially bisexual, then the former option would seem to be the case (SE7 123-243). In a much later discussion of infantile sexuality in 1923, Freud claims firstly that for both sexes, a single genital organ, the male organ, organizes infantile sexuality (SE19 139-45). Yet this is immediately qualified by a statement that this entails a primacy of the phallus rather than a genital primacy (SE19 139-45). This can be read as lending plausibility to the claim made by Joël Dor that at the very moment when Freud seems to concede the importance of a single sexual organ, of a biological and innate determination, he situates this organ outside of any anatomical reference (Dor, 1985, p.94). The phallus is not the penis and it is in these terms that one can read Freud's account in the "Three Essays" on Sexuality of a castration complex and phallic phase in both sexes. An anatomical difference is conceived rather than perceived as castration, a castration that consists of a lack of an attribute which is not anatomical — the phallus. However, the eminently Lacanian view that for Freud the phallus is not the penis, and that gender is constructed rather than biologically given, must be qualified by noting that for Freud, the question of the construction of one of the two genders must be put in abeyance. Freud asserts that "Psychoanalysis does not try to describe what a woman is — that would be a task it could scarcely perform — but sets about inquiring how she comes into being, how a woman develops out of a child with a bisexual disposition (cited in Macey, 1988, p.178). As Macey points out, if, as the first part of this statement implies, femininity is something that psychoanalysis cannot describe, then it is only to be expected that psychoanalysis cannot account for its construction (Macey, 1988, p.178). There is a sense in which the phallus stands as a monument to something that the founding father of psychoanalysis cannot, by his own admission, describe or explain. Lacanian assertions to the contrary notwithstanding, Freud does not in fact make a systematic distinction between the phallus and the penis (Macey, 1988, p.185). Yet it is against Lacan's use of the former term, as distinct from the latter term, that any claim that he has gone beyond Freud in accounting for the construction of gender has to be justified. In defining the phallus as "a signifier" in the 1958 paper "The Signification of the Phallus", (E685-95. e281-90), Lacan can

be read as ridding psychoanalysis of its biological and natural references, and as attempting to account for the construction of gender with a theory of symbolism that derives from structural anthropology and linguistics. Yet one can argue that something is amiss with an overall argument where it is the realm of the Symbolic that provides the key to the phallus, and where the phallus is also theorized as a condition of entry into, and as a key to understanding, the Symbolic. It can be argued that Lacan merely substitutes a symbolic phallus for a biological penis, that the term phallus is used as a euphemism, and that Lacan's symbolic or structural gloss on Freud's account of a castration complex does not in itself generate any theoretical advance. A frustrating aspect of Lacan's use of the term phallus is that even when an attempt is made to follow his arguments in their own terms, it is found that the concept of the phallus ultimately becomes what it is not supposed to be. On the one hand, an attempt to integrate this concept into a theory of the symbolic derived from Lévi-Strauss encounters the problem that this theory arguably founds sexual difference in natural gender categories. According to Macey "Lévi-Strauss's gender categories are profoundly naturalist: women are 'not primarily a sign of social value, but a natural stimulant' to a promiscuous male desire which is presumably just as natural" (Macey, 1988, p.154). On the other hand, an attempt to follow through the logic of Lacan's claim that the phallus is a signifier, that it is defined solely by differences from other signifiers, encounters the problem that the phallus is set apart from such a definition of the signifier. For the phallus is defined by Lacan as a "privileged signifier" or even as a "signifier of signifiers" (E522 e170). As Jacques Derrida points out, such a privileging of the signifier "phallus" can mean only that it is a transcendental term, an element which allows a system to function without being reducible to part of that system, an element which determines without itself being determined (Derrida, 1975).

It is only against this somewhat confused background that one can attempt to give conceptual precision to Lacan's notion of the phallus. Lacan treats the phallus as a key to the Freudian castration and Oedipus complexes, and as a hinge between the realms of the Imaginary and the Symbolic. A lack of the phallus is a phenomenon initially encountered by a child in an Imaginary realm where his or her relation to the mother is such that the child tries to make him or herself the object that she is supposed to lack. This object is the phallus. Here, the child's relation to the phallus is assured by the fact that the mother is still, at this time, an "imaginary other" for the child. The child will identify itself as being the sole and unique object of her desire, a desire that is, strictly speaking, a lack of the phallus. At this time, there exists for the child the possibility of being the phallus, the object that is desired by the mother, by an imaginary other. The two crucial points here are the sense in which the child can be the phallus, and the fact that the phallus pertains to an Imaginary realm. Later on in childhood, a further complex occurs with the intervention of a father in this mother-child relationship. This intervention is equivalent to a law of interdiction where it is the father rather than the child who has a right to the mother, and where the father wields a threat of castration for transgressing an interdiction of incest. The child is obliged to renounce being the phallus, the imaginary object of the mother's desire, and to inscribe himself instead in a realm

where a problematic of being the phallus becomes a problematic of having the phallus, of having whatever it is that gives the father a right to the mother. For the child, the father is, at this time, not simply a rival claimant to the mother but someone who occupies the single site, the unique place of having a right to the mother. This father is not composed of flesh and blood since he is instead a Symbolic Name of the Father, a signifier of having the phallus with which the child must now identify.

Our various references in this thesis to the phallus as a "symbol of lack" (pp.136,185,252) can be understood in terms of  the above transition from being an Imaginary phallus to having a Symbolic phallus. The child who identifies himself as being the object of an other's desire becomes the child who desires to have the phallus, and who thereby becomes a subject of desire. The subject's desire to have the phallus, and hence the possibility of one's insertion into the Symbolic realm is achieved only by way of the Symbolic Name of the Father's rupture of an earlier possibility of being the unique object of the mother's desire. In other words, the first of these possibilities depends upon the termination of the second possibility. It is for this reason that the phallus can be defined as a "symbol of lack". The phallus is a signifier (symbol) of desire that is co-extensive with a loss and lack of being the object of the other's desire.

The phallus is an "impossible ideal" (p.137) to the extent that whilst having the phallus, i.e. taking up a position in relation to the Name of the Father, appears as a solution to filling the lack of being the phallus, this is not a solution at all since it is only a mode of representing this lack. The price of entry into the Symbolic is that one is forever a subject of desire, a desire that is generated both by an interdiction of incest and by an ~~injunction~~ that boys and girls should respond in different, predetermined ways to their deprivation of being the phallus.

The phallus is a "master signifier" (p.252) in so far as it is the key to an Oedipal triangle that represents the way in which masculinity and femininity are constructed.

For a clarification of the relations that obtain between object a and castration the reader is referred to footnote 8 of this chapter.

(In the opinion of this writer, Freud's use of the Oedipus myth provided, in ~~its~~ day, a powerful concept of how a person becomes masculine or feminine. Yet whilst the existence of sexuality in childhood cannot easily be denied, the alleged desire of children towards a parent must be placed within a contemporary context of a "discovery" that there are powerful and very often destructive sexual components in the relations of adults towards children. It is both tempting and provocative to think the Oedipus complex might make more psychological sense if, after Oedipus's mother, it were renamed the "Jocasta complex" (Smail,1987,p.114),)

## CHAPTER 4

### PHANTASY

But as for knowing who is responsible for the setting, it is not enough for the psychoanalyst to rely on the resources of his science, nor on the support of myth. He must also become a philosopher (F&O 17).

### INTRODUCTION

Whenever thought is caught in a circle, Maurice Blanchot writes, this is because it has touched upon something original beyond which it cannot move except to return (Blanchot, 1982, p.93). In plunging into the "private theatre" of Anna O's inner world of imagination, Breuer could not have realised that the phantastic

aspect of this world would eventually amount to far more than romances or fictions for allowing catharsis. For it is with the notion of Phantasien that classical psychoanalysis comes closest to pursuing the circular movement described by Blanchot. Reduced to its essentials, the notion of phantasy supplies, like Freud's notion of the drive, the lever for raising the theory of knowledge on which psychoanalysis is based. The dexterous manoeuvres Freud must perform to account for the nature and function of phantasy oscillate between the contingent arrangement of images and "hints", and the functioning of a permanent datum within a structure; between the inadequacies of conceiving subjective illusion or factual events as causing phantasy; and between the possible origin of phantasy and the possibility that an origin is itself the phantasy. These oscillations are not so much a set of contradictions as a consequence of Freud's ambitious aspiration to bring his notions of phantasy under a single theory of knowledge: "The contents of the clearly conscious phantasies of perverts (which in favourable circumstances can be transformed into manifest behaviour), of the delusional fears of paranoiacs (which are projected in a hostile sense onto other people), and of the unconscious phantasies of hysterics (which psycho-analysis reveals behind their symptoms) - all of these coincide with one another even down to their details (SE7 165,fn.2).

By examining firstly, how certain differences between hysterical and obsessional symptoms can be traced to different

underlying phantasies; secondly, the reasons for Freud's eventual indifference to assigning a phantasy's origin to a factual event; and thirdly, Freud's attempt to refine his account of the structure of a recurring phantasy into a limited number of core propositions, we shall see why Lacan has good reason to view phantasy as enframing the subject's search for a detached part of him or herself - the object a. The incommensurability of this part with the order of representations which define the subject's reality, will allow us to introduce Lacan's domain of the Real as a limit of psychic functioning which must be distinguished from the reality which it bounds.

#### 4.1. HYSTERICAL AND OBSESSIONAL PHANTASIES

##### 4.1.1. THE STRUCTURE OF NEUROSIS AS A QUESTION

If, as we saw in the previous chapter, Freud attributed a structure to a malady of hysteria which had been the <sup>^</sup>bête noire of medicine, a question arises as to the degree to which Freud viewed other neuroses such as obsessions, phobias and anxiety as diverging from this structure. Although in the Studies on Hysteria Freud writes that before giving a diagnosis he resolved to treat "all the other neuroses in question in the same way as hysteria", he nevertheless concedes that the question was forced upon him "of what, after all, essentially characterizes hysteria and what distinguishes it from other neuroses" (SE2 256-7).

The first of these two quotations returns us afresh to



Lacan's remark that

Analysis is not a matter of discovering in a particular case the differential feature of the theory, and in doing so believe that one is explaining why your daughter is silent - for the point at issue is to get her to speak, and this effect proceeds from a type of intervention that has nothing to do with a differential feature (S11 15-16 FF11 Lacan's emphasis).

Lacan is returning us to the fact that the ethic of psychoanalysis, in contrast to other forms of therapy, is that of getting the analysand to speak in free associations which can themselves emerge as a symptom. A certain phenomenon is described by Freud in the Studies on Hysteria as a "talking away" of the hysterical symptom, or as a hysterical symptom that "joins in the conversation" to the extent that it increases in intensity during the patient's free associations (SE2 148,296). Hysterization, the trait of hysterical discourse that arises in the analysis of any of neurosis, consists of the symptom finding an addressee in the Other-(the position which the analyst initially occupies in the analysis). On this view, then, all those who pass by the analytic couch must initially pass by the hysterical discourse, whether their symptoms be hysterical, obsessional or phobic. The psychoanalysis of any neurosis is hysterically infected to the extent that it involves a subject addressing a demand to the Other for knowledge. Through this artifice of a supposed knowledge, the analysand becomes hystericised to the extent that he or she assumes a division between existing conscious knowledge and the animation to produce an knowledge of the unconscious.

Yet in claiming that hysteria was not an independent

clinical entity, that it rarely exists in a pure form, but rather as a component of a mixed neurosis, Freud was refuting the view that its structure could be pinned to a finite catalogue of its manifest symptoms.(1) The error of reducing the link between structure and manifest symptom to a straightforward cause and effect relation was one that Freud described as a feature of a "wild" or ready-made analysis.(2) Just as the symptomology of anxiety-states is not necessarily diagnosable as anxiety-neurosis, so perversion is not necessarily the accurate diagnosis of *people* who repeatedly show their genitals. Since the latter is the activity of demanding a response from an Other who is supposed to contain the knowledge one is looking for, this symptom has a hysterical structure. To talk, as Freud did, of mixed neuroses is to talk of different clinical structures that exist beyond the foreground of the subject's symptom. We are going to see that these structures consist of different modes of phantasy.

Let us begin, though, by seeing what sort of orientation we can take from Lacan. Although Lacan replaced the classical vocabulary of psychoanalysis with his own terms, he nevertheless does not add anything when he returns to the classical Freudian structure of neuroses.(3) It is in the "Rome Discourse" that we find one of Lacan's earliest formulations of the relation between structure and symptom: "the symptom resolves itself entirely in an analysis of language, because the symptom is itself structured like a language, because it is from language that speech must be

delivered" (E269 e59). The symptom such as a paralysed arm is structured like a language insofar as it only makes "sense" when read as a concealed and distorted expression of thought. The "original" thought is reached by means of free association and, consequently, the inconsistencies and halting of the analysand's speech. For these lacunae of speech intersect with thought associations which lead back to the incompatible idea which has been repressed.

Yet it is ultimately not this sense aspect of the symptom which interests Lacan. His interest rather lies in the fact that the symptom has an addressee. In the "Rome Discourse", Lacan claims that the analysand's message takes the form of a question, of a demand for a reply:

In order to know how to reply to the subject in analysis, the procedure is to recognize first of all where his ego is, the ego that Freud himself defined as an ego formed of a verbal nucleus; in other words, to know through whom and for whom the subject poses his question (E303 e89 Lacan's emphases).

This question is inseparable from transference, from the way that the neurotic clings to the Other, to the position of the analyst as a subject supposed to know. It is in order to deny that there is a hole in this Other, that this Other does not finally contain the object a to which the analysand clings, that the hysteric's question is "what does the Other want?" whilst the obsessional's question is "does this Other enjoy?" (Silvestre, 1986, p.11). We must now show that when the symptom is understood as having this structure of a question, its status

as a spoken message becomes less important than its being the measure of the neurotic's phantasy of maintaining or denying desire of the Other.

#### 4.1.2. FROM SYMPTOM TO PHANTASY

Consider first that in 1894, Freud turns to the question of the different fates that befall the affect detached from a repressed idea (SE3 48-58). Whilst in hysteria the affect is displaced onto something somatic, the detached affect is, in obsessional neurosis, "obliged to remain in the psychical sphere" (SE3 52). In other words, obsessional neurosis does not, in the first instance, concern the somatic sphere. Obsessional neurosis concerns only the psychical sphere where there exists a "false connection" between a first idea (the one that has been repressed), and a second idea which compulsively registers in the patient's consciousness as a prohibition or command which she must obey. The urgency with which Lady Macbeth wished to rid her hand of its "spot" is one example. Isolated from the repressed idea, this compulsion is inexplicable. It can only be explained as part of an underlying structure that consists of a division between two sets of ideas that have an opposite trend, and which are carried out successively rather than simultaneously. Macbeth's action of carrying out his wife's injunction was soon succeeded by the latter carrying out a second action which aimed at undoing or reversing the first. Lady Macbeth's washing of her hands was, according to Freud, "designed to replace by physical purity the moral purity which she

regretted as having lost" (SE3 79). This washing of the hands is obsessive by virtue of its rhythmic, repetitive performance which, as we shall see, Freud likens to a ceremony or religious rite. Thus, whilst hysterical and obsessional neurosis converge insofar as they are both structured as a compromise between the repression of an idea and the displaced affect, they diverge with respect to the way this affect becomes lodged in a somatic or psychic sphere. From this fundamental difference there follows a number of less obvious differences.

In one respect, hysterical and obsessional structures respectively correspond to the operations of condensation and displacement which Freud defines as forming the manifest dream. To appreciate this, we need to note Freud's point at the end of the Studies on Hysteria that there is rarely a single symptom that has arisen from a single trauma, but rather a succession of pathogenic ideas which give rise to a number of symptoms which are partially independent, and partially linked. (SE2 287-8).

Freud can be read here as saying that there is a splitting not simply between two signifiers, but rather between two sets of signifiers. Whereas the hysterical structure can be characterised as an intersection between two sets via an element they have in common, the obsessional structure is that of promoting an interval between two elements that are within the same set. On the one hand, a parallel can be drawn between the hysterical structure of intersection and the dream mechanism that Freud

described as condensing various elements into a disparate unity (SE4 279-304). On the other hand, a parallel can be drawn between the obsessional structure of maintaining a distance between two related ideas in the same set, and the dream mechanism of displacing the centre of the latent dream thoughts into a peripheral aspect of the manifest dream (SE4 305-09). A useful guiding motto for grasping these points is that whereas the hysteric puts two into one, the obsessional divides one into two. As Freud writes

What regularly occurs in hysteria is that a compromise is arrived at which enables both the opposing tendencies to find expression simultaneously - which kills two birds with one stone; whereas here [in obsessional neurosis] each of the two opposing tendencies finds satisfaction singly, first one and then the other (SE10 192).

In giving hysteria and obsessional neuroses these respective structures, we see more clearly than before Lacan's point that the subject is divided by the signifier. The hysterical symptom consists of one element playing a dual role. This element is confronting or, better still, straddling a division between signifiers. The symptom is the result of a struggle, of a diversion of energy to combine in one element the ideogenic material that is repressed, and the affect operating on the body. The hysterical symptom of vomiting is traced by Freud to the affect detached from the experience of discovering a dead animal in a rotting state whilst picking up windfalls in an orchard. Simultaneously, the symptom connects with (i) the repugnance towards the rotting carcass which supplies the repressed ideogenic content, and (ii) a response of the body to eating

rotten food which expresses the affect, the traumatic force of this repugnance (SE3 196). This structure again emerges when Freud describes an hysterical patient who with one hand pressed her dress against her body, whilst trying with the other hand to tear it from the body (SE9 166). This hysterical symptom consisted of simultaneously taking the place of the seduced and the seducer, of both the sexual component that was seeking expression, and the sexual component which was being suppressed.

In contrast to this hysterical structure of simultaneity, the obsessional does his or her best to eradicate a causal connection between an idea and an affect that already exists. The first of the above two examples of hysterical structure concerns the revival of an affect attached to a repressed memory. In contrast, obsessional neurosis is centred on immobilising, on blocking the emergence of the affect. Thus the voluptuous or sexual content of an idea which the subject is trying to forget is displaced by another idea which is ill-adapted for being associated with the affect that originally belonged to the first idea. It is this attempted severance of a causal connection which accounts for the apparent absurdity of many obsessions. Excessive degrees of self doubt, the repetition of protective measures such as testing, counting, listing and checking, and fastidious exorcistic rituals of self cleanliness are the attempt to prevent the affect of a once pleasurable idea from returning to consciousness.

These obsessive compulsions to repeat an act, this Zwang of the Zwangsneurose, is eventually described by Freud as involving two elaborate techniques of "undoing what has been done", and "isolating" (SE20 119)(4). On the one hand, a causal relation between a repressed idea and its affect is severed through a technique "in which one action is cancelled out by a second, so that it is as though neither action had taken place, whereas in reality, both have (SE20 119). On the other hand, the attempted interruption of the causal connection is as though the obsessional "interpolates an interval during which nothing further must happen - during which he must perceive nothing and do nothing" (SE20 120). The obsessional is divided by the signifier: to eradicate their connection he must become the desert that exists between them.

So far, this account of hysterical and obsessional structure can still be read as treating the symptom as betraying an underlying message. The inexplicable hysterical vomiting, and the absurd obsesssional washing of hands can be traced, via the logical connections of condensation and displacement, to a repressed idea. The symptom is a compromise structure insofar as it betrays the existence of repressed material that has returned to consciousness in a displaced and unrecognisable form. To this extent, the adjective "repressed" is synonymous with the unconscious. Yet as early as 1908 Freud claimed that the unconscious consisted of more than a repressed idea:

Anyone who studies hysteria, [...] soon finds his interest turned away from its symptoms to the




phantasies from which they proceed. The technique of psycho-analysis enables us in the first place to infer from the symptoms what those unconscious phantasies are [...](SE9 162).

The symptom still has a structure by virtue of its being connected with unconscious material. Yet it is the word "phantasies" (Phantasieren) rather than the "repressed" which Freud uses to denote such material. A year later, in 1909, Freud published another paper on hysteria which begins, "When one carries out the psycho-analysis of a hysterical woman patient whose complaint is manifested in attacks, one soon becomes convinced that these attacks are nothing else but phantasies [...]"(SE9 229).

#### 4.1.3. PHANTASY AND THE INSTITUTIONS OF ART AND RELIGION

As a result of the hysterical symptom having an unconscious phantasy structure, it raises a problem more fundamental than that of treating the symptom as a message. We are now going to see that it was the view that such structures were inherent in culture which led Freud to compare hysterical and obsessional neurosis to the respective institutions of art and religion (SE13 73).(5) The symptom has a structure which is central to the individual's existence rather than its embarrassing exception.

In the above mentioned papers on hysteria, this neurosis is defined as a dramatisation. The simultaneous actions of clasp and tearing off a dress can be traced to a structure which is "plastically portrayed" in attacks which are the

translation of an underlying phantasy into motor activity and its representation in pantomime (SE9 229). A tie can be drawn between the "mime" aspect of pantomime, its absence of speech, and Freud's initial view of hysterical symptoms as a message that has not been put into words at an appropriate past moment, and which has been displaced onto something somatic. Reminding us of the Roman actor who performed in a dumb show, the O.E.D. defines the pantomimic act as performed by "one who expresses his meaning by gestures and actions without words." Our discussion of psychoanalytic ideas on hysteria has throughout been laden with references to drama, theatre and pantomime.(6) In the previous chapter it was shown that Freud's theme of disparity between  the hysterical and the organic symptom was developed at a time when it was assumed that the former was a failed mimesis of the latter. It has also been noted that the swellings or paralyses of the hysterical body are the artifice with which a displaced affect plays itself out.

By different means, this dispersion of the subject into an institution of culture is equally true for the obsessional. As we have seen, the obsessional both isolates two acts in his or her mind so they cannot come up against each other, and wishes to negate the earlier first act with the later second act of renunciation or prohibition. Freud described this first unconscious act as having a degree of silent intensity that is matched by the degree of noisiness and ever renewed strength of the second act (SE13 30). The obsessional subject disappears

into representing an assuagement of the living which Freud likens to the institution of religion (SE9 117). On the one hand, the obsessional's counting of every banknote before parting with it, his renunciation of the best of the food he has just cooked, and his refusal to sit on any chair but one are an ingenious set of rituals for ensuring that an original enjoyment remains inert, without life. On the other hand, this attempt to ward off enjoyment is an emptying of him or herself as a living subject. The bewildering complexity of the Rat Man's journey to the post office exemplifies how the obsessional subject buries himself in a self enclosed, narcissistic labyrinth of rituals for mortifying an original enjoyment. The obsessional thereby refuses a classical opposition between reason and passion: his or her neurosis is a passionate reasoning. The obsessional is a passionate worker, a solitary omnipotent thinker who is fuelled with the pious passion of blocking the emergence of his past enjoyment.


The cunning of the obsessional's reasoning is that enjoyment can no longer be recognised as his own. To achieve a negative answer to the question "does it enjoy?" the obsessional must, through his rituals and renunciations, be represented as a corpse. He becomes but an agency for taking stringent measures against backsliding into the living. In his phantasy, the representation of death takes the place of the subject himself. If the hysterical symptom is the motor means of Pantomimic representation, then the obsessional's symptom is the

motor means of being represented as a cadaver.

"In the beginning was the Deed" ("Im Anfang war die Tat"). With this phrase from Goethe's Faust, (I,iii), Freud concludes one of his discussions of culture as a collective mind. Forms of prohibition such as totem and taboo are said to be the exercise of a persistent sense of guilt over a past deed (SE13 159). Yet when we look for this origin in factual reality we are disappointed (SE13 159). Our cultural legacy of remorse and atonement for past crimes lies rather in the doctrine of original sin. Freud argues that Christian mythology transported this Orphic doctrine into a doctrine of original sin that was committed against God the Father (SE13 154).(7) Without entering into the details of Freud's argument here, it suffices to say that he claims there is more than a superficial resemblance between the underlying doctrine of obsessional neurosis and religion. In each case, the son's parricide against a father is followed by a sacrificial and burning sense of filial guilt. The contradiction is that a dead father's presence becomes stronger than a living one had ever been (SE13 143). The sons annihilate the father because he stands in the way of their enjoyment. But this produces a reaction of guilt that takes the form of a steadfast obedience to the dead father's interdiction. For Freud, this obedience is equivalent to the disappearance of the obsessional subject into a representation of death.

#### 4.1.4. PHANTASY: DEFENCE AGAINST LACK IN THE OTHER

Now that the difference between the hysterical and the obsessional phantasy has been outlined, we can return to why Lacan thinks neurosis has the structure of a question. For the obsessional the question is: Does the Other enjoy? The doubt and protective measures of this neurotic are a sign that he or she is without a certainty of knowing that there is a negative answer to this question. In the phantasy, the obsessional tries to fill up this hole in knowledge by providing his or her own answer. This answer takes the form of the phantasy that the Other is inert and, therefore, cannot enjoy. For the hysteric, the question is: What enjoyment does the Other want? The hysteric aims at a knowledge which is missing from the Other. Phantasy consists of offering to the Other what one thinks it lacks.

If phantasy is a construction of a support for answering these questions, it is, in effect, a reply to the impasses of sexuality which Freud calls castration. The common point of the hysterical and obsessional phantasy is that the subject searches for an object with which to defend him or herself against a lack in the Other which is equivalent to castration. Whilst the hysteric identifies with the object that the Other lacks, and thereby to some extent assumes the existence of that lack, the possessive obsessional protects a narcissistic object from any exposure to the flaw in the Other. In both cases, this object is the object a that functions as an alibi for being elsewhere than  the division which is opened by signifiers. It is with

this object that the subject attempts, in spite of this division, to build his existence as an individu, as an undivided subject. What is important in the phantasy is the way the subject tries to eradicate this division by clinging to an object a.

Although the following quotation from Lacan's "Rome Discourse" was formulated before he conceived the object a as such, it provides a lucid formulation of his essential theme that different neuroses are different modalities of a question addressed to the Other.

The hysterical subject captures this object in an elaborate intrigue and, his ego is in the third party by whose mediation the subject enjoys that object in which his question is incarnated. The obsessional subject drags into the cage of his narcissism the objects in which his question reverberates back and forth in the multiplied alibi of mortal figures and, subduing their heady acrobatics, addresses its ambiguous homage towards the box in which he himself has his seat, that of the master who cannot see himself.

Trahit sua quemque voluptas; one identifies himself with the spectacle, and the other puts one on (l'autre donne à voir)

For the hysterical subject, for whom the technical term "acting out" takes on its literal meaning since he is acting outside himself, you have to get him to recognize where his action is situated. For the obsessional neurotic, you have to get him to recognize you in the spectator, invisible from the stage, to whom he is united by the mediation of death (E303-04 e89-90).

#### 4.2. TIME OF PHANTASY: AN OPAQUE RELATION TO ORIGIN

##### 4.2.1. NACHTRÄGLICHKEIT AND TRAUMA: INTRODUCTION OF THE REAL

The increasing importance of phantasy in Freud's work from 1905 to 1920 cannot be separated from the following question that confronted him. Was the originating cause of the patient's pathology factual, imagined or somehow neither? There is much evidence that throughout his career, Freud treated the symptom as

the pathogenic force of an actual experience which could be dated. In the previous chapter we saw that repression is one of the axioms on which Freud's quest for knowledge was founded. The analytic work of uncovering repressed ideas goes hand in hand with uncovering that which came before. To recover a repressed idea is to recover an anterior state, a recovery which led Freud to name archeology as the discipline closest to psychoanalysis:

There is, in fact, no better analogy for repression, by which something of the mind is at once made accessible and preserved, than the burial of the sort to which Pompeii fell a victim and from which it could emerge once more through the work of spades (SE9 40)

A repressed idea and the persistence of its displaced affect comprise a genesis of the hysterical symptom which, from the beginning, Freud relates to the occurrence of a particular traumatic event (SE2 10). His formulation that "hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences" (der Hysteriche leide[t] grösenteils an Reminiszenzen) encapsulates the notion that hysteria is the outcome of a psychological trauma that consists of the failure, for various reasons, to sufficiently react to an event at the time of its occurrence (GW1 86 SE2 7).

Freud's attempt to trace the cause of a neurosis to its underlying bedrock is seen when he searches, with the passionate conviction of a detective, for the date of the Wolf Man's witnessing of parental coitus (SE17 38-41, 48-60). This search suggests that Freud could not resign himself to accepting such scenes as a product of pure imagination (F&O 8). It seems, then, that two constant factors of Freud's work are a theory and a

practice of passing from the analysand's present condition to an underlying bedrock that lies in the past. Expressed as a theory, this idea is, to take just one example, embodied in such kindred terms of the Freudian lexicon as Rückbildung, Rückwendung, and Rückgreifen (LP387). The idea of a "retrogressing" (rückläufige) excitation, of walking back, of retracing one steps, is one of the key characteristics that Freud assigned to dreaming (SE5 542-3).(8) In terms of therapeutic practice, we can note Freud's remark that "analytic work deserves to be recognized as genuine psycho-analysis only when it has succeeded in removing the amnesia which conceals from the adult his knowledge of his childhood from its beginning" (SE17 183). The analysand's liberation from the present distortions of his truth coincides with his having brought his past origins into the present time.

Yet the transformation of the gaps of amnesia into anamnesis is ambiguous. Is the latter akin to realising the immanence of the past in a present existence, or does the present moment become rather a projection into the future which has relinquished the weight of the past? The former conception is found in the Bergsonian notion of duration: the present instant bears the whole burden of the preceding ones. The latter conception is voiced by such expressions as "to turn over a new leaf", or "to let bygones be bygones". They assert that to have some share in determining what is to come, the past should be left as past. In the "Rome Discourse", Lacan claims that neither



of these views are taken up by Freud. The question for Freud is rather one of "balancing the scales" so that "conjectures about the past are balanced against promises of the future, upon the single knife edge or fulcrum of chronological certainties" (E256 e48).

It is Lacan who must be credited with having drawn attention to a temporal structure which Freud refers to as "deferred action" (Nachträglichkeit) (SE17 44,48,58,77,107,109,112). Such deferred action undermines the idea that the present time is simply an effect of a past cause. For the significance of a past moment now depends on its activation by a present one. Freud remarks that although the Wolf Man's phobia of animals ostensibly resulted from a dream concerning wolves, it was nevertheless a dream that "brought into deferred operation his observation of intercourse" (SE17 109). Whilst Freud was forever searching for the date of this observation, it was nevertheless not this event itself which was traumatic, but its reconstruction, its decomposition and later recomposition according to the laws of the unconscious that formed the later dream of wolves.

This temporal schema of two situations is in fact the emergence, some twenty years later, of the schema Freud had outlined as early as the Project (1895). There, Freud attempted to account for the clinical fact that hysterical patients frequently recalled a phenomenon that is being increasingly re-discovered today: a sexual advance of an adult

towards a child (SE1 356). Between 1895 and 1897, Freud theorised a "scene of seduction" in terms of a connection between repression and sexuality which does not, in the last instance, turn on the event of the seduction. Freud rather finds the mainspring of the intrinsic connection between sexuality and repression in the structure and development of the former. The repressed memory from which hysteria originates involves a deferred action insofar as this memory has "a greater releasing power subsequently than had been produced by the experience corresponding to it" (SE1 221). Sexuality is the necessary condition for this. For puberty should be interpolated between the original childhood experience of seduction, and the subsequent event which revives this experience as a memory (SE1 221). Freud's theory of seduction purports to trace a present experience to a past event, to display its root in a historical contingency. But underlying this contingency is a structure of deferred action of what is already there. The deferred action of the traumatic seduction testifies, in Freud's view, to puberty, to the later possibly pathogenic awakening of a sexuality that was already there. Theorised by Freud as an experience having a quality which is ascribed to it after the fact, (nachträglich), the traumatic nature of this seduction should not be viewed as a form of delayed discharge. It is not as though a first scene is only triggered by virtue of an energy belonging solely to the second scene. The issue at stake is rather how this second scene arouses an earlier scene of endogenous origin. The first scene requires Freud to postulate

the existence of a sexuality which exists from the very first, and which therefore excludes the possibility of retrieving a time before its commencement.

This point is supported by Freud's use of the word trauma to describe the initial scene. With its Greek etymology of not only an injury, but also the effects of this injury upon the organism as a whole, the notion of the trauma is applied by Freud "to an experience which within a short period of time presents the mind with an increase of stimulus too powerful to be dealt with or worked off in the normal way [...]" (GWXI 284 SE16 275). If this trauma has to undergo a deferred revision, it is because it consists of whatever it has been impossible in the first instance to incorporate into a meaningful context. When conceived as such an impossibility, the trauma cannot be an experience of a given and unproblematic domain that ego psychology calls perceived reality. The trauma is rather an experience of something which cannot be fully assimilated by the human subject, an experience of something which is "too much". The trauma is the epitome of an excess that Lacan calls the Real:

Is it not remarkable that, at the origin of the analytic experience, the Real (le réel) should have presented itself in the form of that which is unassimilable in it - in the form of the trauma, determining all that follows, and imposing on it an apparently accidental origin? (S11 55 FF55)

What we have in the deferred action of a traumatic experience of seduction is the incorporation, at a later date, of the Real of sex into the domain of signifiers, into the symbolic domain where sexuality is organised as an identification

with the signifiers of masculinity and femininity. On the model of the Venn diagram with which Lacan illustrates the operation of alienation, the trauma is unassimilable because it occurs on the side of the being. The trauma is invested with significance only later when sexuality has been organised in terms of the division of the subject by the binary signifiers masculinity-femininity, homosexuality-heterosexuality.

#### 4.2.2. "I KNOW NOTHING MORE ABOUT IT..." PHANTASY AS A LIMIT TO PSYCHIC FUNCTIONING


How, then, can this help us to understand the structure of phantasy? Our answer to this question will consist of showing that in his attempt to trace pathogenic material back to its underlying bedrock in the past, Freud is forced to concede the existence of this unassimilable antecedent domain which Lacan calls the Real. We must now show that what is at work in Freud's various concepts of phantasy, is the discordance between the desire to define the bedrock of the neurosis as an event (and hence the need to look still further back), and a conceptual necessity to establish phantasy as having a structural permanence and function which is prior to the event.

The Real, as a category of an unassimilable domain, is at work in Freud's early texts even when he is not explicitly addressing the deferred action of a trauma. In the Studies on Hysteria, Freud concedes that the analysand's "I can't remember having thought it" does not necessarily testify to

resistance (SE2 300). The status of past reality as a factual event is put into question when Freud asks "are we to suppose that we are really dealing with thoughts which never came about, which merely had a possibility of existing, so that treatment would lie in the accomplishment of a psychical act which did not take place at the time?" (Ibid., his emphasis). In postulating a past domain which can never be remembered in its unadulterated form, Freud eventually came to question not only whether we have memories from childhood as opposed to relating to it, but also whether the analysand does indeed ever remember repressed material as opposed to repeating it as a contemporary experience (SE3 322).(9) In each case, Freud is determining a limit to psychic functioning. There is, Freud concedes, a domain which "remains unknown to us in its original form", which is outside the signifying domain (SE2 322).


As far as the formation of phantasy is concerned, this domain presents Freud with the following intractable problem. Although a wish is articulated through phantasy, it cannot be conceived as an intentional object that is aimed at or imagined. If the subject's unconscious or repressed wish is represented in phantasy, it is there as a sequence in which an observing or participating subject has multiple parts to play in a scenario or script of which he himself is not the organiser. For example, whilst Freud noted the frequency with which his patients admitted to having indulged in the phantasy "a child is being beaten", the subject was there in only in a "desubjectivized" form (SE17

179-204). By this we mean that the subject was placed in an order of representation that was not of his making. The observing or participating position of the subject in the beating was an algebraic "x", a completely empty variable which he did not himself determine. Questions as to who was beating and who was beaten, and questions therefore about whether the phantasy had a sadistic or masochistic nature, received "only the hesitant reply: 'I know nothing more about it: a child is being beaten'" (SE17 181). The subject is present in that phantasy as a hole in knowledge: he knows "nothing more" of the scenario in which he is caught. He forms no representation of a wished for object, but is himself represented as occupying multiple positions within a setting.

Given, then, that the human subject is the recipient and not the source of this phantasy structure, Freud was obliged to question the axis on which phantasy was traditionally conceived. The German word Phantasie means the contents of creative activity which animate the imagination, contents which are usually thought of by distinguishing them from perceived reality. But the above organising and antecedent structure means that in dealing with phantasy, we are not just talking about a subject's imaginative faculty, or even, more broadly, of the illusory products of the mind. In the 1911 paper "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning", it is clear Freud does not so regard phantasy as a subjective illusion which cannot be sustained when confronted with  a correct apprehension of

reality (SE12 215-26). Such a confrontation would seem to be the essence of this paper when it is read, dubiously, as an account of how a system for perceiving reality gradually encroaches upon a mind that previously sought gratification only by means of hallucination.(10) But even if this reading is granted, it is still the case that in this paper, Freud explicitly names phantasy and sexuality as the two domains which are resistant to being subsumed by the reality principle (Ibid.). Phantasy has to be understood here as achieving a full force of reality for the subject, and as having a specific reality answerable to its own laws. Phantasy cannot therefore be envisaged only on the lines of an integration of the pleasure principle into the reality principle; an integration which is evoked by ego psychology as staking an order of priority between the merely represented and the actually perceived, between subjective illusion and objective reality.

However, in the absence of any new category for conceiving phantasy as structured by a reality which is neither subjective illusion nor objective fact, Freud appears caught between these alternatives. In the 1916-17 Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis (SE16 368), Freud claims that the analyst is faced with the dilemma of either (i) telling the analysand that he or she is examining phantasies rather than reality, illusion rather than fact; or (ii) withholding this piece of information from the analysand until this particular piece of

analytic work is completed. The risk of the former strategy is that of causing analysands to lose all interest in the analysis since they expect their psychopathology to be traced to a factual cause. Yet the risk of leaving the analysand with the belief that he is dealing with reality is that he  will be annoyed when he finds it is otherwise.

Freud's attempted exit from this dilemma is his use of the term "psychical reality" (SE5 620; SE13 159; SE16 368). By claiming that neurotics are tormented by a psychical force which is not just a subjective illusion, but is as real in its effects as a material force, and by also distinguishing this "psychical reality" from material reality, Freud sought to overcome the oppositions he was caught between. But beyond a useful rhetoric for asserting that the study of mental activity is as valid as the sciences of material nature, it is difficult to see how the term psychical reality can function as a concept for generating theory. The definition of phantasy as a psychical rather than a material reality is as much committed to dualistic thinking as the alleged opposition between the principles of reality and pleasure (F&O 3).

At a deeper level however, such dualistic thinking is due not so much to an inadequacy of Freud's conceptual apparatus, as to the intractable nature of the problem. Caught, like the analysand himself, between the alternatives of fact and illusion, Freud is unable to conceptualise adequately the phantasy as a



structure where the subject forms no representation of a desired object, but is instead participating in a scenario of which he is represented. By now tracing the notion of phantasy as it emerges from the difficulty of dating the child seduction scene mentioned above, it will be shown that Freud is obliged to conceive phantasy as having an atemporal structure.

#### 4.2.3. PHANTASIES OF ORIGIN IN A SECRET DISCOURSE

We have already noted that as a trauma, the child's seduction is Freud's way of establishing an intrinsic relationship between repression and sexuality. The seduction theory is that (i) repression emerges from a delayed development of sexuality that by its very nature has a traumatic effect; and (ii) that this trauma has a structure which is peculiar to the adult's sexual approach to the child. These are the two components of the overall theory that the child only fully registers the adult's sexual approach much later. If the trauma is a deferred action, it is because the child's supposedly innocent indifference to the adult's intrusion before puberty, is followed by the later repugnance at perverse sexual meaning that is constructed from the point of view of an adult. The earlier passivity of being the recipient of the other's action is followed by the trauma that accompanies the subject's expulsion of the memory of this event. The mainspring of the trauma appears to lie in the contrast between on the one hand, a too early and too little excitation which defines the first scenario, and on the other hand, a too late and too great a sum

of excitation which defines the second scenario.

However, each of these oppositions eventually collapses. If there is a later repugnance from within, it is surely evidence of having internalised sexuality according to a normative, prohibitory external reality. If there is an earlier passive innocence, it does not follow that at the time of its occurrence, the seduction had no meaning for the subject. If puberty stimulates the awakening of this meaning, it follows that this meaning has a latent existence at the time of the seduction. Although sexuality is neither somatically channelled nor sufficiently represented, there must already exist an endogenous factor of sexuality at the time of its seduction.

In his letter to Fliess of 21 September 1897, Freud writes that he has abandoned his seduction theory.(11) He adduces a number of reasons for his disbelief in the occurrence of the first event. As well as the clinical reason of the analysand being unable to trace its occurrence, there is, Freud claims, the problem that in every case the father would have to be blamed as a pervert - a remark that can hardly pass without comment at a time when it is being increasingly realised that this is indeed the case.(12) In addition, Freud recognised the role of unconscious phantasy: "There are no indications of reality in the unconscious, so that one cannot distinguish between the truth and the fiction that is invested with affect" (SE1 260). This entails that the idea of the sexual trauma can no longer be

sustained. In the same letter, Freud confides that he is now obliged to renounce both "the complete resolution of a neurosis and the certain knowledge of its aetiology in childhood" (SE1 260). In other words, Freud has abandoned the realistic chronological approach to the seduction.

At this time (1897), two complementary directions for theorising the phantasy are mentioned by Freud. Either it can be considered as the adult's resolution of an earlier event which is not an earlier seduction, or it can be considered as an hallucinatory tendency which is hereditary (SE1 260). Freud is then, at least for the moment, operating with the opposition between the strict happening and internal imagery, between objective reality and subjective illusion. As Laplanche and Pontalis point out, although we now have the phantasy, the recognition that the seduction was a fiction rather than a factual event, we have lost the structure of the deferred action of the factual event (F&O 7). Previously, there was the idea that a memory later produces a more powerful release of excitation than the experience of which it is the memory. But now there is the treatment of the phantasy as a purely imaginary efflorescence of a sexuality that is indeed recognised as having a latent existence in childhood. It is the formulation, culminating in the "Three Essays on Sexuality", of a polymorphous infantile sexuality which is basically endogenous in its development, which allows Freud to conceive of the phantasy element of the trauma as a secondary expression of this biological reality (SE7

173-206). The trauma occurs to the human organism by virtue of certain characteristics of biological evolution. It is the biological reality of sexuality beginning twice over, once in his childhood and once at puberty, and not the structure of deferred action which is recognised as traumatic.

However, it was also in 1897, at the time of abandoning the seduction theory, that Freud recognised the importance of the Oedipus Complex (SE1 265). Rather than this discovery itself causing Freud to abandon the search for chronology, it highlighted the structure of deferred action that was intrinsic to the theory of seduction. The realisation in 1897 that the Oedipus myth "seizes on a compulsion which everyone recognises" points towards locating the sexual trauma not in an endogenous and biological history, but in a time factor that is prehistorical, that is embedded in myth and which precedes the event.

The following question therefore arises: How is Freud to articulate the trauma both as part of an endogenous sexuality based on successive libidinal stages, and as a conception of the trauma as the Oedipus Complex - the interruption of an original enjoyment by the imperative to take up one's position in a pre-given structure of interpersonal relationships? The former evolutionary time scale seems opposed to the mythical time scale of the child being obliged to enact its role in a drama that has already been set. The two themes are not reconciled. To the

extent that the trauma is an event, its bedrock lies in the particular experience of the individual. But to the extent that the trauma is the stage setting of the human infant in a drama which is not of his own making, it is established on something other than the event.

This tension is apparent in Freud's use of the term Urszene ("original scene" or "primal scene"), which he eventually reserves for the child's observation of parental coitus. As is shown in the case of the Wolf Man, the question of the veracity of such scenes has no easy answer in Freud's work. As Lacan rightly says

Freud demands a total objectification of proof so long as it is a question of dating the primal scene but he no more than presupposes all the re-subjectifications of the event that seem to him to be necessary to explain its effects at each turning-point where  $\langle \rangle$  the subject re-structures himself - that is, as many restructurings of the event as take place, as he puts it, nachträglich, at a later date (après coup) (E256 e48).

On the one hand, the fact that Freud attempted to date the scene is evidence that he could not accept it as a phantasy equivalent to a purely imaginary creation. On the other hand, Freud has to evoke the same structure of deferred action that underlies the seduction theory that he had abandoned some twenty years previously. The happening that the child observed at an earlier time only takes on pathogenic significance with the later occasion of his dream.

It is this impossibility of unequivocally determining

whether the traumatic primal scene is something factually experienced by the subject, or whether it is a fiction which led Freud in 1915 to introduce a new concept which is reducible to neither of these alternatives. The German prefix Ur is now reserved not only for the Ursenzen (primal scenes), but for other phantasies: "I call such phantasies - of the observation of sexual intercourse between the parents, of seduction, of castration, and others "primal phantasies" (Urphantastien) (GW10 242, SE14 269).(13) Freud uses the term primal phantasy to describe the trauma of the primal scene without having to commit himself either way to whether it was a fiction or a factual event (SE17 97). In his 1918 addition to the 1914 draft of the Wolf Man case history, Freud is content, therefore, to give the verdict that the factual or fictitious reality of the primal scene is inconclusive (non liquet) (SE17 59-60). As Lacan puts it, this primal scene, as a primal phantasy, is a "factitious fact" (fait factice) (S11 67 FF70). It is ultimately a matter of indifference to Freud as to whether the primal scene has actually occurred

The only impression we gain is that these events of childhood are somehow demanded as a necessity, that they are among the essential elements of a neurosis. If they have occurred in reality so much to the good; but if they have been withheld by reality, they are put together from hints and supplemented by phantasy. The outcome is the same, and up to the present we have not succeeded in pointing to any difference in their consequences, whether phantasy or reality has had the greater share in these events of childhood (SE16 370 our emphasis).

This is an appropriate place to consider the element of truth in the dictum that the origins of phantasy are the

phantasy of an origin. In placing under the term "primal phantasy" not only the observation of parental intercourse, but also seduction and castration, Freud was conceiving the primal phantasy as the dramatisation of whatever has become a central enigma of the analysand's existence (SE14 269). Such questions as what it is for the human subject to be the ideal type of his or her sex, or how the distinction between the sexes originated, are viewed by Freud as responsible for the ultimate organisation of phantasy life. Because these primal phantasies are universal, they amount to more than the illusory or contingent imaginings of a single subject. Beneath the question-like structure of diverse hysterical and obsessional phantasies, there is the above typical structure of primal phantasy as one which marks the disappearance of the subject himself into the question of his species type. Allowing the child to map himself in relation to a form of a parental enjoyment that is already there, the primal scene, as a primal phantasy, is neither imagination nor evidence that the child experiences the phantasy material as a factual event. These primal phantasies have a "reality of a sort", because they are constructed out of the transcendent principles that organise the subject. In other words, we seem to arrive at the Aristotelean question of the relation between the individual and his belonging to a species which transcends his singular existence. Evidence for this is that Freud found only one feasible explanation of primal phantasy - phylogenesis

It seems to me quite possible that all the things that are told to us to-day in an analysis as phantasy [...] were once real occurrences in the primaeval times of the human family, and that children in their phantasies

are simply filling in the gaps in individual truth with prehistoric truth (SE16 371).(14)

This transmission of prehistoric truth is transcendent with respect to its structure but not to its content. Only by means of this transcendent structure can Freud avoid the opposition between conceiving the "already there" as a factual event or as imagination. The structure is composed of signifiers that cannot be reduced to an empirical father, to an event of sexual seduction or to any other signified. The primal phantasies of seduction, castration etc. are a "phylogenetic endowment" because they are built from a battery of signifiers, from a storage of the "antiquities of human development" that antecede any particular signified (SE16 371).

But we must be careful in saying that the structure of the primal phantasy is irreducible to the contingent happening. Although the structure is transcendent, its content is, as Freud puts it in the last quotation but one, "put together from hints". Whilst the time of storing these prehistoric truths lies beyond the subject's history, they are summoned through perceptual registers of reality. "Phantasies", Freud wrote in 1897, "are made up of things experienced and heard" (SE1 248,252).

Although Freud stresses that the Wolf Man's primal scene is a deferred reconstruction, he is careful to differentiate his position from Jung's notion of retrospective phantasies (Zurückphantasieren) (SE17 97,103). Whereas for Jung, the phantasy is retrospective by virtue of the subject appealing to myth to make sense of contingent facts, Freud is concerned with



integrating the fact into the very transcendent structure of the phantasy. The deferred aspect of constructing the primal scene has to be placed alongside its provocation by such contingent elements as noises heard at night or the sight of dogs copulating. Such "hints" as the sounds at night of parents who in modest homes waken the child, or the sounds that the child is himself afraid to make lest he fall foul of the dictum that children be seen but not heard, and the injunction therefore that at night his presence be imperceptible, comprise a silent or secretive discourse in which he must find his way. The fact of the noise waited for and heard in the night puts the subject in the position of having silently to answer to something. He is already on a stage where, through the phantasy, he is himself articulated as caught within this murmuring and secretive scenario of "things experienced and heard". The child cannot not reply to the central enigmas of existence which are posed by these secret rumblings.

This secrecy transcends the question of whether Freud's patients had lived in parental domiciles that were sufficiently salubrious for them to have slept in a separate room. This secrecy is rather, as Michel Foucault has argued, a form through which discourses on sexuality were produced and proliferated in eighteenth and nineteenth Europe (Foucault, 1980, pp. 104-06). The deployment of adult sexuality as a hidden private pleasure, as a ritual in which the loudest of the body's excesses must pass as though never heard, is far from being a denial of the existence

of such pleasure. Through the unmooring of sex from kinship alliance, the discourse of "sexuality" was constructed around medicalising and personalising a secret secretion as being at the core of personal identity. No longer reducible to procreation alliances that secure the transfer of even the most minimal wealth and property, "sex" was constructed, in Foucault's view, as a bonding to an unspoken imperative of the nineteenth century to yield to the cry that potentially lies somewhere and everywhere in each healthy body.

The emergence of psychoanalysis at this time is itself part of the production of this discourse of sexuality. Its roots lie in a cathartic therapy where the analysand delivers him or herself from a quota of affect which Freud likens to the spreading of an electric charge over the surface of the body (SE3 60). This charge has to become too relentless and powerful to be bound by the common decency of secrecy. Read as the production of a power and not as a restriction of sexuality, this mapping of creative flesh around a secret felicity is reflected not only in the hysterization of women's bodies but also in the pedagogization of the series of repertoires known as children's sex. The mobilisation of bourgeois society around a secular campaign to eradicate infantile masturbation, the collective adult view of this precocious pleasure as a danger which the first 1911 edition of the O.E.D. calls "abusing oneself", was far from being a strategy for ignoring or denying sexuality. On the contrary, it served to objectify the

impression that children's bodies are saturated with a sexuality to be controlled by others. The campaign was, as Foucault puts it, "using these tenuous pleasures as a prop, constituting them as secrets (that is, forcing them into hiding so as to make possible their discovery)" (Foucault, 1980, p. 43). (15)

This historical construct of sexuality as an adherence to various repertoires of secrecy, and the status of this secrecy as a de facto norm simply by virtue of its existence, give rise to a socially sanctioned genital order of conformity, deviation and pathology. There are acceptable and unmentionable things which shape an adult enjoyment that is initially an opaque mystery for the child. Because child abuse and other "things experienced and heard" testify to this adult enjoyment, they also provide the child with the only available "hints" for constructing a knowledge of this enjoyment. But insofar as this construction is an original or primal phantasy, it is not a construction where the subject is representing an object of knowledge for his/her own convenience. This phantasy rather consists of the child being represented in a structure where his enjoyment is detached from any natural object, and where, by this very fact, it starts existing as sexuality. The primal phantasy is the setting of a limiting or bounding edge to the possibility of a subject knowing the original or essential form of his enjoyment: "I know nothing more about it..." said the many patients who reported their beating phantasies to Freud. Appearing in the phantasy in a desubjectivized form, as being any

one of its participants rather than its author, the subject is represented as a void of knowledge which alone can define the essential form of his or her enjoyment.

We have argued, then, that in his quest for knowledge of the bedrock of the sexual trauma, of an original cause beyond which we need not go, Freud is finally obliged to conceptualise phantasy as turning on a limit of knowledge, or on a point which is unassimilable to knowledge. Since we are now going to examine Lacan's schematization of this point as the Real, and since we have just shown the requirement for such a schema, it is worth repeating his question

Is it not remarkable that, at the origin of the analytic experience, the Real should have presented itself in the form of that which is unassimilable in it - in the form of the trauma, determining all that follows, and imposing on it an apparently accidental origin? (§11 55 FF55, his emphasis).

#### 4.3. THE REAL OF THE PHANTASY AS DISTINCT FROM ITS REALITY

We have arrived at a position where the common measure of hysterical, obsessional and primal phantasies can be thought of as the functioning, within a structure, of a point or an edge of impossibility, of something that is unassimilable to reality. Hysterical and obsessional phantasies are supple modalities of attempting to take shelter in this impossible point that is immune from the inaugural division of the subject that is opened by signifiers. The hysteric, in his or her pantomimic alterations, has trouble in closing this division through posing him or herself as the object which is lacking from the set of signifiers which Lacan calls the Other. The obsessional fails

to ward off his or her division by means of precautionary checks and ritual procedures. In each case, the subject is searching for a point which Lacan calls the object a, a point which it is impossible for the hysteric or obsessional to identify with except by identifying with the phallus as a symbol of a lack in the signifying chain. We have also seen that primal phantasies are a setting of the subject's several possible positions in relation to an edge or limit of knowledge which he or she cannot cross.

Lacan's name for this point or edge of an impossibility is, as the last quotation shows, the Real (le réel). From now on it will thus be necessary to maintain a rigorous distinction between (i) the Real; and (ii) reality understood as the construction of the subject in the sphere of representations. We will take these representations to be comprised of Lacan's Imaginary and Symbolic domains. It is these two domains of images and signifiers respectively that the subject moves in relations of identification and exchange. This distinction between the Real and reality will now be elaborated by means of examining the three propositions with which Freud conceptualises the phantasy "a child is being beaten". We will argue that the first and third propositions mark the subject's position in reality, whilst the second proposition exemplifies the status and function of the Real as an impossibility. These three propositions are underlined in the following schema:

- |     |   |         |                                   |
|-----|---|---------|-----------------------------------|
| (1) | <u>"My father is beating the child"</u>                           |         |                                   |
|     | ("My father does not love this<br>other child, he loves only me") | reality | Imaginary                         |
| (2) | <u>"I am being beaten by my father"</u>                           | Real    | object a<br>( <u>jouissance</u> ) |
| (3) | <u>"a child is being beaten"</u><br>("I am probably looking on")  | reality | Symbolic                          |

The first proposition of the beating phantasy designates an element of love and hate. Freud points to this element when he writes: "I am betraying a great deal of what is to be brought forward later when instead of this [proposition] I say 'My father is beating the child, whom I hate'" (SE17 185, his emphasis). In order to elaborate the nature of this hatred, Freud gives another translation of proposition 1: "My father does not love this other child, he loves only me" (Ibid., p.187, his emphasis). What occupies the centre of the stage is a love-hate relationship which can only be understood in terms of a sibling rivalry that is associated with the Oedipal complex. "My father loves only me" is the egoistical aspiration of someone who has "resolved" the Oedipal complex by seeking the unremitting love of the father to the point of wanting to exclude others from it. Since this egoistic factor is the essence of proposition 1, it is, for Freud, doubtful "whether the phantasy ought to be described as purely 'sexual', nor can one venture to call it 'sadistic'" (Ibid.).

According to Freud, the essential difference between this proposition and proposition 3 is that the latter indicates a phantasy which "now has strong and unambiguous sexual excitement

attached to it, and so provides a means for masturbatory satisfaction" (SE17 186). With this third proposition, the presence of the father is a symbolic one: he is there as "a teacher or some other person of authority" (SE17 190). The person whose phantasy this is appears "almost as a spectator", as someone who is represented in the phantasy as "probably looking on" at the beating of usually more than one child (SE17 186). What introduces an erotic masturbatory enjoyment into this phantasy is the combination of its sadistic form with the masochistic satisfaction that is derived from it (SE17 191). This sadistic form is derived from the portion of hatred of the father that occurred during the Oedipus complex. This sadistic trend has now combined with the wave of guilt and self-punishment which transformed this hatred into a love of the father. The combination takes the form of the subject witnessing a figure of authority actively denying his love for "unspecified children who are [...], nothing more than substitutes for the child itself" (Ibid., our emphasis). In other words, this third proposition that "a child is being beaten" states the phantasy of someone observing, as though from an extraneous position, the beating of him or herself. The subject simultaneously indulges in (i) a repressed passive phantasy of still being loved by the father figure (he beats only others); whilst (ii) nevertheless being subject to the guilt that follows the Oedipal hatred of the father (the others who are beaten are but substitutes for the subject himself).

This third proposition is, then, radically different from the first. Only this proposition states an essentially sado-masochistic phantasy. Thus, as John Forrester has argued, one cannot pass in an unbroken linear sequence from the first proposition to the third. The almost purely egoistical phantasy "My father is beating the child" cannot be said to give rise directly to the erotic phantasy "a child is being beaten" (Forrester, 1980, p.152). To make the connection, Freud needs to formulate the second proposition. "I am being beaten by my father" introduces the masochism which combines with the repressed sadistic hatred of the father to form the third proposition. There are two points here. Firstly, Freud is clear that this masochistic trend is not only composed of a passive aim, but is also characterised by a drive which obtains its satisfaction from unpleasure (SE17 194). (This would be the place to return to Freud's hypothesis, mentioned in chapter one, of a death drive which seeks a pleasure of "another sort", a pleasure which is "beyond" the pleasure principle, and for which Lacan reserves the name jouissance). Secondly, since the main purpose of introducing the second proposition is to supply a bridge between the first and the third, it lacks the empirical confirmation of the other two. It nevertheless has a necessity of its own

This second phase is the most important and the most momentous of all. But we may say of it in a certain sense that it has never had a real existence. It is never remembered, it has never succeeded in becoming conscious. It is a construction of analysis, but it is no less a necessity on that account (SE17 185, our emphasis).



But what sort of necessity is this? It is, we shall argue, one which corresponds to the necessity which leads Lacan to a notion of the Real as distinct from the Imaginary and Symbolic registers which form the subject's reality.

Let us first examine why proposition 1 and 3 correspond to these forms of reality. Although Lacan's Imaginary register involves an auto-erotic element that is arguably missing from the first proposition, one can nevertheless attempt to draw the following parallels. Lacan's register of a narcissistic subject who makes judgements based on self-love is reflected in proposition 1 where the father's beating of an other is the proof that he loves "me". Lacan's Symbolic register of the insertion of the human subject into signifiers is reflected in Freud's third proposition. The subject is inserted into the respective structures of the Oedipus and Totem and Taboo myths since he or she simulataneously (i) obeys the injunction to identify with the father to the point of receiving his exclusive love (he beats the others); but where (ii) insurmountable guilt of having once hated him is represented as a punishment for having transgressed his interdiction - (the others who are beaten are but substitutes for the subject him or herself).

To understand why the second proposition is altogether exempt from the Imaginary and Symbolic registers of reality which it bridges, we must note that Freud defines this proposition as a "construction of analysis". In his 1937 paper,

"Constructions in Analysis", Freud distinguishes between a construction and an interpretation (SE23 261). Interpretation is applied to single elements such as a parapraxis or free association which comprise the overall chaotic and heterogeneous collection of the analysand's phrases. Interpretation posits an equivalence between these piecemeal elements and the surface symptoms of a pathology. In contrast, a construction is not concerned with the status of the word as a symptom but with what can best be called the core or bedrock of a neurosis. Rather than emerging from the analysand's free associations, a construction initially arises out of the analyst's theoretical schema. A particular construction cannot be verified in the same way as an interpretation (ie., in terms of the intensity of the analysand's resistance to the underlying message which is betrayed by his laconic speech).

One of the main aims of Freud's 1937 paper is to show that constructions are nevertheless not vulnerable to the sort of accusation, later advanced by Karl Popper, that psychoanalytic propositions have no truth value since they are ad hoc and thereby unfalsifiable (Popper, [1963], 1972, pp.37-38). Rather than interpret the analysand's "no" as a resistance to the construction, the analyst must interpret it as evidence that part of the truth has yet to be uncovered. Put another way, the truth of the construction must be gauged by its subsequent effects on the course of the analysis. If nothing further develops after the analysand's direct "yes" or "no" response to the

construction, the analyst should conclude that his construction is incorrect (SE23 261). But it is equally possible for the "no", for the falsification of the construction, to be followed by free associations which are consistent with the construction. Quoting the words of Polonius, Freud writes that in this case "our bait of falsehood has taken a carp of truth" (SE23 262). Similarly, the patient's "yes" has no truth value unless the analysand later produces new material which develops and concludes the construction (SE23 262). In other words, a construction is verified only through its relayed effects. As Freud puts it "If the construction is wrong, there is no change in the patient, but if it is right or gives an approximation to the truth, he reacts to it with an unmistakeable aggravation of his symptoms and of his general condition" (SE23 265). To summarise: the construction at the time it is posed to the analysand is simply an "x", a completely empty value whose direct confirmation or denial is of little importance. What is important is whether and how a construction takes its value from its effects. The construction is true if, and only if, it is truly followed. The essential, then, is that the truth of the construction lies not in its correspondence with the subject's reality, but in its relayed effects upon that reality.

As an example of such a construction, the second proposition of the beating phantasy has what John Forrester has called an "architectonic" necessity (Forrester, 1980, p.152). Allowing the movement from egoism to erotism, from the Imaginary to the

symbolic by postulating an earlier Oedipal hatred of the father as  $\odot$  turned onto the subject himself, proposition 2 supplies the overall structure of the beating phantasy whilst lacking a place within it. On the one hand, proposition 2 is foreclosed from the Imaginary and Symbolic orderings of reality which it connects. On the other hand, the truth value of proposition 2 lies in its relayed effects upon these orderings. Let us examine these last two points in greater detail.

Whilst the masochistic element of proposition 2 testifies to the Oedipus complex being forced in a particular direction, it is, Freud claims, a direction which compels the sexual constitution "to leave an unusual residue behind" (SE17 192). Here, masochism is not only a passive aim of the sexual drive. It also entails a residue of libido which is out of place, which has no place in the Symbolic construction of the subject's reality. In Lacan's jargon, this residue has "arisen from some primitive separation, from some act of auto-mutilation induced  $\odot$  by the very approach of the Real, its name in our algebra being object a" (S11 78 FF83). The object a here is the "waste product", the part from which the subject becomes detached as a condition of being inserted in the Symbolic. Whence the status of this part as the Real, as a domain which remains outside the sphere of reality in which subject moves in relations between signifiers. Although, then, proposition 2 organises reality insofar as it supplies the architectonic for connecting propositions 1 and 3, it nevertheless coincides with

the Real by virtue of stating the impossibility for this architectonic to exist as an element among others which is within this structure. It is rather the residue of the sexual constitution which is "left behind". This definition of impossibility can therefore be distinguished from the Kantian and Hegelian definitions which were discussed at the end of chapter two. Object  $a$  is neither a noumenon nor an impossibility that can be brought into the realm of the possible. The impossibility of object  $a$  concerns a heterogeneity which is nevertheless embodied. Object  $a$  is a separated part of the subject's own body which can only be circumvented but never grasped.

Like Freud's notion of phylogenesis, proposition 2 cannot be verified in reality as having taken "place" there. Proposition 2 can only be verified in terms of the relayed effects that follow it. In the analysis of the beating phantasy, these effects lie in the possibility of the analysand moving from the narcissistic location of his enjoyment in proposition 1, to the specular enjoyment of seeing himself fully inscribed in a Symbolic order in proposition 3. Thinking of the motif which Lacan calls the fundamental phantasy, we can say that the truth of the second proposition is the truth of the overall beating phantasy. Taken together, propositions 1 and 3 define the subject's reality as divided between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, a division which the subject can only cross via

proposition 2 that there is a residue, a domain which resists incorporation into these two axes. Our efforts in the next chapter will be directed towards configuring this residue which Lacan calls the object  $a$ , and which he defines as existing in a "purely topological" space. What are we to make of this space?

#### FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

- (1) It was this view that Freud condemned when he wrote "Whenever a hysterical sign [...], was found in a complicated case of psychical degeneracy, the whole condition was described as one of "hysteria", so that the worst and most contradictory things were found together under this label (SE2 259).
- (2) "'Wild' Psychoanalysis" (SE11 221-27).
- (3) It is, however, arguable that it is the field of psychiatry in which Lacan began his career that he adds to the Freudian clinical picture. For example, Benvenuto and Kennedy write that "It is in Lacan's first publication as sole author ("Structure of paranoid psychoses"), that one can see the beginnings of an original contribution and hints of later preoccupations with structure and language" (Benvenuto and Kennedy, p.31). A reference to this publication of Lacan's may be found in the bibliography.
- (4) As Laplanche and Pontalis note, "'obsessional neurosis'" is not an exact equivalent of the German term Zwangneurose: Zwang can refer not only to compulsive thoughts and obsessions (Zwangsvorstellungen) but also to compulsive acts (Zwangshandlungen) and emotions (Zwangsaffekte) (LP 282).
- (5) These views of Freud were not confined to the neuroses. At the same time, he compared paranoia to the institution of philosophy (SE13 73).
- (6) That a dramatic structure was attributed to hysteria well before psychoanalysis is well documented by Veith, 1970.
- Freud defines this Orphic doctrine as follows. Mankind, according to this doctrine, had descended from the Titans who had killed the young Dionysus-Zagreus and had torn him to pieces. The burden of this crime weighed upon them. (SE13 153-54).
- See also the term "retrogressive excitation" which Breuer uses in the Studies on Hysteria to characterise the organ

of memory (SE2 189).

- 9) Much later Freud suggests that the immediacy and proximity of repressed material is brought into the sphere of analysis not necessarily through memory, but through "acting out" (agieren) (SE18 18; SE12 151). The analysand does not recall his past in memory but repeats it in present behaviour: "The patient cannot remember the whole of what is repressed in him, and what he cannot remember may be precisely the essential part of it [...] He is obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience" (SE18 18). Through actions which can include the attempt to destroy, to disown his repressed history, the analysand's immersion in this history becomes patent in the analysis. The possibility of the analysand representing his past becomes the impossibility of abandoning it in his present actions. The contrast Freud draws between remembering (reproduzieren) and repetition (wiederholen) is one which treats the latter as the "living out" of childhood conflict in a symbolic form. The meaning of the word "symbolic" is not so far removed from Lacan's Symbolic. The living out of past conflicts in a symbolic form is the operation of a subject who is condemned to appear only as the division of alienation. Rather than recalling his past, and thereby experiencing himself as a source of meaning, the subject experiences himself as the action of division by signifiers.
- 10) The reading of this paper as a subordination of the pleasure principle to the reality principle is dubious because Freud is rather formulating the reality principle as a means of better securing pleasure by deferring it. See Lacan (S2 107), and Safouan, 1983, p.20,34).
- 11) Freud writes "[...] I will confide in you at once the great secret that has slowly been dawning on me in the last few months. I no longer believe in my neurotica [theory of the neuroses] (SE1 259).
- 12) This remark obviously upsets any notion that as a more enlightened member of the nineteenth century liberal professions, Freud was exempt from the codes of practice that shaped the socially sanctioned genital order in which he lived. Florence Rush has powerfully argued that children who are by Freud's own criteria sexually aware, often perceive the difference between phantasy and reality more accurately than adults; that Freud's assignment of child seduction to the domain of phantasy is therefore spurious; and that as in the film Gaslight, Freud was deliberately seeking to destroy another's perception of reality (Rush, 1980, pp.80-104). Yet as well as ideological and cultural reasons preventing Freud from naming the father as a class of pervert, there is a logical reason. In transposing the myth of Oedipus onto the organisation of genitality, Freud

shows that the father must take on a symbolic value. It is the father who wields the threat of castration which the child must identify with long before he himself ceases to be a child, and becomes an empirical father. Because this symbolic father exceeds an actual father, there is a sense in which no empirical person can actually occupy this symbolic place. This means that a person's identification with this symbolic place necessarily involves a fundamental imperfection: a dehiscence that can be viewed as a deviation from, as a failure to correspond with the phallic ideal that supports him as a symbolic construct. If Freud withdraws from naming the child-abusing father as a pervert, there is nevertheless another aspect of this perversion which Freud names as the father who is lacking in his potency. As Leader points out, it is the sick fathers of Freud's patients who haunt the Studies on Hysteria, and the syphilitic father of Dora which haunts her case history (Leader, 1986, p.19). In these cases, the hysteric's father is presented as deficient in relation to a symbolic function of an ideal that supports him. Thus the socially sanctioned genital order which the symbolic father organises is, in this sense, already an inevitable perversion. It is an order composed of different codes and practices which necessarily amount to something less than this ideal. Yet in stretching the term perversion on the racks of etymology, Lacan has given us a père - version, that is, a version of the father (père) where it is necessary to ask of what exactly he is a version. For Freud, it is not as though the symbolic father could be replaced with some more realistic norm with which individuals could choose to comply. Occupying the symbolic place that metaphorizes the sexual drive, and which displaces and internalises its object, the father stands also in Freud's vocabulary for the impossibility of grasping what is "beneath" or "covered over" by this complex and displaced organisation of a genital order. As a symbolic matrix that organises sexuality, the father is not a perversion in the sense of being but one variant or deviation of sexuality as a "thing in itself". The idealised father is an exception ie., a perversion which ends up by taking the rule along with it (Laplanche, 1976, p.23). His symbolic place which no empirical person can occupy is an exception or perversion which ends up undermining or destroying biologicistic and sociologicistic notions of sexuality. These notions operate, like sexual manuals, as a mandate for what it is for men and women to be truly normal. But what alone can be normal for Freud is perversion. It is necessary, he claims, to take seriously the strange possibility "that something in the nature of the sexual drive is unfavourable to the achievement of complete satisfaction (SE11 188-99).

3) See also (SE16 370-71, SE17 97).

4) See also (SE17 119).



(15) See also Stephen Marcus, 1966.

PART III

THE IMMANENCE OF REAL IMPOSSIBILITY:

TOWARDS TOPOLOGICAL SPACE

## CHAPTER 5

### A BODY OF SPACE

#### (FROM AN IMAGE AS BEYOND THE REALITY PRINCIPLE TO THE IMMANENCE OF THE REAL IN OBJECT GAZE)

Some of Euclid's axioms, which appear to common sense to be necessary, and were formerly supposed to be necessary by philosophers, are now known to derive their appearance of necessity from our mere familiarity with actual space, and not from any a priori logical foundation. By imagining worlds in which these axioms are false, the mathematicians have used logic to loosen the prejudices of common sense, and to show the possibility of spaces differing - some more, some less - from that in which we live. [...] Thus the position is completely reversed. Formerly it appeared that experience left only one kind of space to logic, and logic showed this one kind to be impossible. Now, logic presents many kinds of space as possible apart from experience, and experience only partially decides between them. (Russell, 1912, pp.85-86).

### INTRODUCTION

The previous two chapters have provoked an area of psychoanalysis that cannot be entirely configured in terms of a causal theory of language. In the 1946 paper, "Remarks on psychic causality", Lacan arguably did place causality on the side of the signifier (E166-67). Yet we have seen that by the

early 1960's, Lacan's teaching had progressed towards locating psychic causality in an object a, "cause of desire". Functioning as a means for taking shelter in gaps opened up by signifiers, this object is itself excluded from signifiers. Belonging to a hard core which is resistant to symbolisation, this object is "stuck in the gullet" of signifiers. It lies in the domain which Lacan calls the Real. The object a is a part of a sexed being which is incorporate, a non-specular part of the body which although unembodied in signifiers, is nevertheless still a body. It is a body which is "purely topological". This in spite of the pervasive assumption that structural linguistics supplies the overall framework of Lacan's teaching, it is necessary when elaborating object a to turn to an analysis of space rather than language.

That a concern with space can be dated as far back as Lacan's 1949 paper on "The Mirror Phase", is sometimes overlooked. In Wilfried Ver Eecke's comparatively rigorous account of the antecedents of this paper, there is a conspicuous absence of any mention of Lacan's reference to Roger Callois' use of the term legendary psychasthenia "to classify morphological mimicry as an obsession with space in its derealizing effect" (Ver Eecke, 1983, pp. 113-38; E96 e3). Another spatial ingredient of Lacan's theory of the mirror phase is the role played by inverted symmetry in the organisation of the human being's narcissistic structure (E95 e2). In preferring to call this narcissistic structure kaleidoscopic

rather than geometrical (E122 e27), Lacan's formulation is prognostic of a non-geometrical structure which he formulates in 1953 as belonging even to speech: "This structure is different from the spatialization of a circumference or of the sphere in which some people like to schematize the limits of the living being and his milieu: it corresponds rather to the relational group that symbolic logic designates topologically as an annulus" (E320 e105). It is the connotations and possibilities of, precisely, a topological space which are suggested by Lacan when he returns to Freud's 1923 topography as having involved "restoring in all its rigour the separation, [...], between the field of the ego and that of the unconscious first discovered by him, by showing the 'transverse' position of the first in relation to the second..." (E433 e142). The question of space also arises when, as we saw in chapter three, Lacan defines the end of an analysis as the possibility of sustaining a point outside the closed space of alienation.

There are, then, grounds for saying that a concern with space can be found in Lacan's teaching long before his 1964 definition of object a as an existence which is "purely topological" (S11 232 FF257). The aim of this chapter is to point to a common denominator of Lacan's concern in 1949 with the nature and function of a mimetic space, and his formulations in 1964 of why the gaze variant of the object a pertains to a non-geometrical space. This common denominator is, we shall argue, a structure within which any actual "seeing" takes place,

but which chronically grasps the living agent as a body of space which is "gazed" long before it is in a position to "see". The distinction between the reality and the Real shall have to be elaborated in terms of this common denominator.

### 5.1. SPACE IN A PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

To situate this argument, we must first examine the link between the human subject and space which is found in a philosophical tradition.

In his differentiation between objects which are "incongruent counterparts" of one another, Kant sides with Newton's view that space is a particular and not a relation between particulars. For Newton: "absolute space, in its own nature, without relation to anything external, remains always similar and imovable" (cited in Korner, 1955, p.33). Kant's well known example of "incongruent counterparts" is a pair of gloves. Whilst they are similar to each other, these two gloves cannot simultaneously or even successively occupy the same space. The difference between these incongruent counterparts is, for Kant, an example of those "differences which refer solely to the absolute and original space, because only through it is the relationship of physical objects is possible" (Ibid., p.34, Kant's emphasis).

In The Critique of Pure Reason, Kant develops a proof of this absolute space by considering the relation between space and

spaces: "if we speak of diverse spaces, we mean thereby only parts of one and the same unique space" (PuR A25 B39). It is not as though these parts are like bricks which exist before they form an overall building. The parts cannot precede the one embracing space since "they can be thought only as in it" (Ibid., Kant's emphasis).

Kant also offers proofs of the a priori character of this space. Space has to be shown as pertaining to an a priori judgement, that is, a type of judgement which is "independent of all experience and even of all impressions of the senses" (PuR B2). The independence in question here is a logical one. Space and the senses must stand to each other in such a way that neither entails the other nor negates the other. Kant's most convincing proof of this a priori character of space is that although we can think of a space which is empty of objects, we cannot represent the absence of space to ourselves (PuR A24 B38-9). If space was an a posteriori judgement, that is, a judgement which is logically dependent on impressions of sense, then space would be an adjunct, a non-essential attribute of these impressions. We would be able to imagine a non-spatial elephant as easily as we can imagine a pink elephant. The proof of the a priori character of space is that whilst we can imagine this colour attribute, we cannot likewise imagine this non-spatial attribute. The representation of the elephant's colour must presuppose the representation of space. Because space is presupposed, it "cannot, therefore, be empirically obtained

from the relations of outer appearance" (PuR A23 B38). Space "must therefore be regarded as the condition of the possibility of appearances, and not as a determination dependent upon them" (PuR A24 B39).

Satisfied that space is an a priori condition, Kant proceeds to show that space is also a principle which is capable of generating a a priori synthetic knowledge. Kant's criterion for distinguishing synthetic knowledge from analytic knowledge turns on the logical relation that holds between a subject and a predicate. The one type of geometry that existed in Kant's day, the Euclidean, is viewed by him as a body of knowledge which determines the properties of space as both a priori and synthetic (PuR A25 B40-1). The geometral proposition that space has three dimensions is a priori insofar as it is logically dependent of any perception or empirical experience of an object. This proposition is also synthetic insofar as "three dimensional space" is a proposition about space which is not already contained in the meaning of the term space, and which is therefore not an analytic proposition. The existence of two dimensional space, for example, prevents us from saying that space is necessarily three dimensional.

To summarise: Kant offers the prospect of space being (i) absolute or all-embracing; (ii) a representation which is independent of all judgements concerning sense experience; and (iii) a representation which nevertheless cannot be formulated as



a set of judgements that have predicates which are already contained in the subject. From this threefold thesis, Kant infers both what he calls the empirical reality of space and the transcendental ideality of space (PuR A27-28 B44). The status of space as a synthetic rather than an analytic judgement, establishes "the reality, that is, the objective validity, of space of whatever can be represented to us outwardly as object (Ibid. Kant's emphasis). But from the status of space as something given a priori, Kant infers that space exists as a part of the actual world only with regard to the conditions under which it can be known. Like an irremovable pair of spectacles, space is a permanent form through which we are affected by objects. Space is transcendently ideal insofar as it is a subjective condition of perception. The consequence Kant draws from this is well known: "space comprehends all things that appear to us as external, but not all things in themselves" (PuR A27 B43). Although space is empirically real, it is not an intrinsic property of external objects. Such properties of the "thing in itself" are quite unknown to us, since what we can alone know is a world which is moulded by a subjective form of perception.

Although, today, the reasons for Kant's postulation of the "Thing in itself" are viewed as philosophically inadequate, it is not difficult to understand why he should have needed this metaphysical concept. If space and time are forms of knowledge by which we can alone have knowledge of the world, then this will

inevitably set limits to the meaningful use of the phrase "a truly external world". Without the "Thing in itself", it would be impossible to speak of a world that is genuinely prior to and independent of the cognitive mind. Yet this assumption of the reality of thing in themselves is nevertheless an ad hoc hypothesis for saving Kant's overall argument. Once this assumption has been allowed to enter the back door, it must stay there whilst Kant welcomes through the front door the a priori conditions under which a world can be known. Kant's house is without a meeting place for these superior and inferior guests. Things in themselves comprise a reality which can never be known, and what alone are known are the phenomenal objects that can never disclose the things in themselves which are transcendent to every experience.

For different reasons, the requirement for fixing a limit to the subject's knowledge of world is found in the work of other philosophers. Consider the argument of Bishop Berkley that far from there being thing in themselves, there is nothing which can be meaningfully said about the existence of a world which is independent of the perceiving mind. In claiming that "to be is to be perceived", Berkley was not in the first instance denying that unperceived things exist. His point was a more profound one that it is not sufficient merely to assert the existence of a mind independent world. We must also be prepared to explain and justify this assertion. In order to know the type of space we call distance, we would have to perceive it. Yet Berkley's

premise in A New Theory of Vision is that

It is, I think, agreed by all, that distance of itself, and immediately, cannot be seen. For distance being a line directed to end-wise to the eye, it projects only one point in the fund of the eye. Which point remains invariably the same, whether the distance be longer or shorter. (Berkley, 1709, sec. II, his emphasis)

The word "distance" here gives no trouble since it is clear that Berkley means a distance from the eye at right angles to the fund (retina) of the eye. The question is what does Berkley mean when he says distance is "not immediately seen"? For Berkley, what alone can immediately be seen is a two-dimensional arrangement, a plane or flat surface of light and colours. In the same way that I can hear the noise of a car but not the car itself, so, for Berkley, I can immediately see the light and colours of two objects in space but not the distance between them. According to Berkley, distance is "rather an act of judgement grounded on experience rather than on sense (Ibid., sec. III). A blind person whose sight had only recently been restored would have no such experience. He would "have no idea of distance by sight, the sun and stars, the remotest objects would all seem to be in his eye" (Ibid., sec. XL). In short, there is no necessary connection between (i) the two dimensional arrangements that are immediately seen; and (ii) the capacity to define distance as a line directed at a right angle to the eye. It is only because the mind constantly encounters a correspondence between these two things that there has grown a habitual or customary connection between them (Ibid., sec. XVII).

The problem with Berkley's argument is that it conflates the

conditions under which we come to see, with what is seen. His argument that because the projection onto the retina is two-dimensional, we cannot see three dimensions is one which holds only if we assume that the immediate object of sight is the retina. As Armstrong has argued

The fact that if seeing is to occur, we must have a two-dimensional picture projected onto the retina does not prove that what we see must be that two-dimensional picture, any more than the fact that vision cannot occur unless our optic nerve is in working order proves that what we see is the optic nerve. (Armstrong, 1960, pp. 10, his emphasis).

If the former argument seems more plausible than the latter, it is only because what is formed on the retina is a two-dimensional simulacrum of the object seen, while the optic nerve does not at all replicate the object seen. Whilst it can still be argued that Berkley's account does not commit this fallacy of identifying what is seen with the conditions under which it is seen, or at least ~~that~~<sup>it</sup> commits the fallacy in a subtler form, this would lead us too far away from the main problem. The point is that this alleged fallacy shows why the Kantian notion of things in themselves was necessary. It placed a limit between the knowing subject and an external world which prevented them from being placed in the same box.

A confusion of what is known with the conditions under which it is known is also found on the first page of Hume's A Treatise of Human Nature. Hume assumes that perception is the name of a genus of which there are two species: "Those perceptions which enter with most force and violence we name

impressions [...]. By ideas I mean the faint images of these ideas in thinking and reasoning [...] (Hume, [1739-40], 1874, p.311). Because sense impressions enter the mind with an intense impact, they stamp the mind with images which serve as more permanent replicas, traces or copies of those original impressions. An image is thus inherently like a sense impression. It has intruded into consciousness. In the absence of a concept of a "Thing in itself", there is nothing in the schema to show why an image, sense impression or any other condition of knowing a chair, for example, is not, and cannot be, a facsimile of a chair in the mind.

In order to demolish the view that pictures of external objects can genuinely exist in the mind, Ryle argues that whilst imaging occurs, images are not at all seen in the mind (Ryle, 1949, p.234). Since the lips of a doll in front of a child's face are not smiling, it would seem necessary to locate the smile as a picture somehow suspended in the child's mind. Yet, for Ryle, this is absurd because it implies that the child is imagining an "unattached smile, and no doll-owner would be satisfied with an unsmiling doll plus a separate and impossible simulacrum of a smile suspended somewhere else" (Ibid., p.235). It could of course be objected that it is precisely because the child is imagining that it sees the smile, that he or she is unaware of the fact that the smile is detached from the doll's face. Yet Ryle's main point still holds that there is no effigy or picture of the smile hanging in the mind as though it were a physical

phenomenon inhabiting space. There is not a smile at all for although the child "is really picturing her doll smiling, she is not looking at a picture of a smile" (*Ibid.*,). Ryle's use of the term "picturing" here is equivalent to his use of the term "fancying" to describe the activity people perform when they imagine themselves witnessing phenomena they are not witnessing.

Although Ryle succeeds in demolishing the spurious equation between imagination and seeing pictures in the mind, he has little to say about what is positively happening when people imagine they hear or see something they do not see or hear. It is here that Jean Paul-Sartre goes much further. Having criticised, in a similar vein to Ryle, the error of thinking an image is in consciousness, Sartre proceeds to show that an image mediates the relationship of consciousness to an object

And what exactly is the image? Evidently it is not the chair: in general, the object of the image is not itself an image. Shall we say then that the image is the total synthetic organization, consciousness? But this consciousness is an actual and concrete nature, which exists in and for itself and which can always occur to reflection without any intermediary. The word image can therefore indicate only the relation of consciousness to the object; in other words, it means a certain manner in which the object makes its appearance to consciousness, or, if one prefers, a certain way in which consciousness presents an object to itself. The fact of the matter is that the expression "mental image" is confusing. It would be better to say "the consciousness of Peter as an image" or "the imaginative consciousness of Peter". But since the word image is of long standing we cannot reject it completely. However, in order to avoid all ambiguity, we must repeat at this point that an image is nothing else than a relationship. (Sartre, [1940], 1948, p.5).

For Sartre, the image is a consciousness insofar as it is  
<sup>a</sup> synthetic act of consciousness relating to an intended object.

sartre proceeds to this definition by way of examining the image in its relation to percepts and concepts. As in perception, the imaged object such as a cube of sugar only presents itself in profiles. Its six sides are not presented to consciousness simultaneously. This explains why it is so often assumed that an image is seen. It gives the impression of being an object which is observed from certain points that will exclude other points of view. But whereas perceiving an object from different positions will reveal more and more features of that object, the imaged object reveals no further features. Unlike the slow formation of a perceived knowledge, the image presents itself immediately for what it is: "I shall never find anything in it but what I put there" (Sartre,[1940],1948,p.7). The object of the image is therefore more like a concept than a percept. Produced by a single act of consciousness, the image is yielded en bloc. It contains nothing over and above that conscious act which could be perceived from another point of view. The image is, then, not a picture in consciousness, but a sui generis synthetic act of consciousness. It synthesises (i) a representative or figurative element which exists as though it were the percept of a concrete sensible object; with (ii) an object which is quite independent of perception, and which is never anything more than the consciousness one has of it.

When Sartre describes this aspect as an object which is intended, and which is aimed at by consciousness, he would seem to be implying nothing more than a product of creative will

(Ibid., p.5,9,15). But Sartre's definition of an image also has an underlying affinity with Husserl's attempt to rid philosophy of a hiatus between, or a conflation of, a thing qua thing and a thing qua object of someone's cognitive consciousness. We have seen that this cleavage is bound to arise for a thinker like Kant who carries out a transcendental deduction of a priori conditions of a comprehensible world. From the assumption that this world is comprehensible one can declare only the essential conditions of its being comprehended. The transcendental inquiry does not allow one to say anything about the world as it exists outside of the apodeictic conditions under which it can be known. It is only by allowing for the unknown quantity of the noumenon existing behind this known world that Kant can avoid totally collapsing objects into the conditions of knowing them. From Husserl's standpoint, this cleavage between reason and reality is removed by asking not how knowledge is possible, but how it is real and actual. The task is not to deduce the possibility of knowing the world, but to show that this knowledge is as actual as the world of which it is a part. The phenomenological movement which Husserl inaugurated is concerned not only with knowledge but with its implantation in the "structure of the world". This is well put by Merleau-Ponty when he writes

What distinguishes intentionality from the Kantian relation to a possible object is that the unity of the world, before being posited by knowledge in a specific act of identification, is "lived" as ready-made or already there (Merleau-Ponty, [1945], 1962, p.xvii).

In this respect, it is useful to note the way Merleau-Ponty



himself proceeds when he attempts to answer the question: What makes the colour red meaningful? (Merleau-Ponty, [1964], 1968, p.132). His analysis is neither an admission that red must be a Kantian "Thing in itself", nor a category mistake of thinking that red somehow - pace Hume - enters into consciousness. For he analyses red neither as an a priori condition of a cognitive consciousness, nor as atomic sensations of light and colour. Red is analysed as a knowledge which is sunk in a certain constellation of which red is but one node. Recalling Claudel's phrase that a certain blueness of the sea is exceeded only by blood that would be more red, Merleau-Ponty says "The color is yet a variant in another dimension of variation, that of its relations with its surroundings (Ibid., p.132). As with Sartre's definition of an image as an act of consciousness intending an object, the point being made is that philosophy must ask not for a proof of a world being independent of a mind which is already given, but how the subject's knowledge is caught and emeshed in a facticity that Heidegger calls the Weltlichkeit der Welt. What causes the world to be the world is not its primary embodiment of rationality but the fact that it is "lived through" as a nexus of meanings that are already made or are already there.

Merleau-Ponty's analysis of red is therefore more than a discussion of an act of synthesis performed by consciousness. His analysis shows that this act is merely the outer covering of a more fundamental problem of understanding the field of vision

as a bodily space, a space which merges<sup>with</sup> the very being of the seer's body. Space is analysed not as a condition of the possibility of knowing the world but as the caption of the knower in a space which is his existence. The space which Merleau-Ponty calls bodily space is one where "to be a body, is to be tied to a certain world,...;our body is not primarily in space: it is of it" (Merleau-Ponty,[1945],1962,p.148). Elsewhere, Merleau-Ponty writes that "he who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it, unless he is of it" (Merleau-Ponty,[1964],1968,pp.134-5, his emphasis). The limit between the seer and the world is no longer things in themselves, but the fact that the seer is caught in, and cannot dislocate himself from the seen.

This principle of caption provides a context for exploring both a fundamental narcissistic catchment which is implied by Lacan's idea of a "mirror phase", and his analysis of a non-specular variant of the object a which he calls the object gaze (l'objet du regard). In each case, the central task is to generate a theory of space which is irreducible to a relation between a phenomenon and a noumenon. Instead of suspending space in a dialectic between a subjective representation and how it somehow refers to something "outer", Lacan analyses the effects upon the human organism of its being captivated by an image or a photograph that is not itself caught or produced by the mind's eye. The appearance of this image or photograph must be analysed as beyond a simple act of seeing of which the subject is the

source. Let us now examine this in greater detail.

## 5.2. MIMETIC SPACE

### 5.2.1. THE ANTECEDENTS OF LACAN'S EARLY FORMULATIONS OF AN IMAGE.

The antecedents of Lacan's remarks on space are found elsewhere than in attempts by Freud to give the psyche an anatomical localisation. For they are initially found in the works of a number of psychologists and philosophers who had, by the mid. 1930's, been working for some twenty years on problems presented for theories of perception, of knowledge and of the structures of the body. Many of these works are listed in the bibliographies of Lacan's 1932 doctoral thesis De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité, and Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception (1945). Amongst these works are Henri Wallon's on the function of the "imaginary" and of how the infant develops a notion of its own body (Wallon, 1931); Gelb and Goldstein's work on how the human organism is constructed by forces which are outside of its control (Gelb and Goldstein, 1920); the work of existentialist psychiatrists such as Binswanger who to some extent equate a notion of "Being in the World" with being subject to processes which are not known by human subjects (Binswanger, 1930); the work of Paul Schilder on the notion of a body image (Schilder, 1935); Minkowski's work on a notion of "lived distance" (Minkowski, 1930); and the work of certain Gestalt psychologists such as

Koffka who were systematically theorising Gestalt forms as determining the ability of the human organism to perceive (Koffka,1922,1935). In these works, a classical Anglo-Saxon empiricist analysis of space is hardly mentioned since that analysis does not sufficiently engage with a fundamental thesis. This is the thesis that in all three domains of perception, knowledge and structures of the human body there is no direct experience of phenomena, but only an experience mediated by the intervention of a particular image structure. Sartre's definition of an image as "nothing else than a relationship" testifies to this notion of mediation.

The thesis that there is no veridical access to phenomena is encapsulated in the work of Roger Callois which Lacan acknowledges in his 1949 paper "The Mirror Phase as Formative of the I" (E96 e3). In Le mythe et l'homme (1938), Callois develops an account of what is happening to a living organism (not necessarily human) as it adapts mimetically to the milieu of its environment (Callois,1938,pp.35-119). Challenging a pragmatic view that mimetic adaption increases a species' chances of survival, Callois argues that mimesis has dastard consequences for both the life expectancy of the organism and its chances of reproduction. In other words, the function of mimetically responding to the environment is analysed by Callois as a function which is deleterious to the organism. From this Callois deduces that

the organism is no longer the origin of its co-ordinates, but a point among others; it is

dispossessed of its privilege and, in the strong sense of the term, no longer knows where to put itself (Callois, 1938, pp. 107-8 his emphasis)

A mimetic image organises the living organism as a body of space to which it is subordinated, and of which it is not the source. Lacan's early thinking on the nature and function of an image will be now be examined in the context of this point.

### 5.2.2. 1936: BEYOND THE REALITY PRINCIPLE

Animal ethologists use the term "imprinting" to describe the processes by which certain characteristics or traits of the family are inherent in the offspring's behavioural patterns and perceptual sets. The importance which Lacan accords to an image in 1936 can be crudely grasped by referring to this idea. For at this time, Lacan defines the analytic aim as the isolation of a self-image which is comprised of traits that may be discovered in a "family portrait" (E84). The analytic aim is to reconstitute in the analysand's consciousness the most fundamental traits that have been imprinted on him or her. These traits are the single hall-marks or typings through which the analysand had recognised a loved or feared parent, or a rival brother. The permanence and efficacy of these traits which comprise the analysand's overall self-image are not encountered in empirical reality but through a piece of analytical work. The analyst's action

must be defined essentially as a double movement whereby the image, first of all diffuse and broken (brisée), is regressively assimilated to reality, in order to be progressively disassimilated from reality, that is to say, restored to its own reality (E85, his emphasis).

Through the essentially unruffled or "blank wall" technique of the analyst, that is, his refusal to yield to the analysand's imprecations, provocations, and ruses, there will emerge a self-image that was previously inconsistent or confused. A Lacanian analysis in 1936 does not remove these traits or claim to make a past formation past. On the contrary, it aims to demonstrate the permanence, uniqueness and density of these traits, and to give the subject a limited degree of mastery over them (E85). The analysand is offered the opportunity to cease trying to coincide with whatever the norms of the surrounding say he should be, and instead to accept that these traits determine him as a unique actor in a harlequinade of which he can, to some extent, be his own metteur en scène.

Thus, in 1936, it is for chiefly optimistic reasons that Lacan defined this notion of an image as having implications which go "beyond" the idea that analysis re-adapts the ego around a stable and unproblematically given reality. Instead of miming a confused image, the analysand can bring that image to the clear light of day, and thereby become a mimetic actor who has a relative degree of self-determination. The degree of autonomy which Lacan allows here is curtailed when he later argues that the living being participates in mimetic space in such a way that it is not omnipotently able to act without that space or able to withdraw from it. In short, Lacan's position is one where the Real has not yet emerged as distinct from reality. For as we shall now show, this distinction emerges only when mimetic space

is viewed not merely as an underlying reality which is glossed or distorted, but rather as setting a limit which is at a considerable cost to the species which must participate within it.

### 5.2.3. 1949: THE MIRROR PHASE

Lacan's well known 1949 paper on the mirror phase does not contain his first formulations of the essential ideas that are found there. These ideas were initially presented at the 1936 fourteenth International Psychoanalytic Congress in Marienbad. Since these original formulations have never been published, one can but speculate that they receive not only a more condensed summary in the 1949 paper, but also a more far reaching exploration of their ramifications. The 1949 paper is without the optimistic assumption of the 1936 paper "Beyond the Reality Principle" that ~~the~~ the analysand can attain ~~a~~ perspicacious knowledge of his self-image. An image is now formulated as a spatial caption which "situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone, or rather, which will only rejoin the emergence of the subject asymptotically" (E94 e2). An image approaches the human living organism but it never meets that organism within a finite distance.

To understand this, consider first Lacan's reference to Wolfgang Kohler's observation of the behaviour of chimpanzees in front of a mirror (E93 e1).(1) The reference is given in

order to show that the six to eighteen month old infant's reaction to a mirror image is just the reverse of the chimpanzee who soon loses interest in trying to cling to something that is not palpably there. The central question this raises for Lacan is not whether the infant's instrumental intelligence is outdone by the chimpanzee's, but another question which "is fraught with significance for the philosopher": is it the infant or the chimpanzee who is better adjusted to reality? At the very <sup>17</sup>lest, this question makes a definition of reality a problem rather than a common sense given.

On the one hand, the human being is better adjusted to reality than the chimpanzee if, and only if, reality is defined not as naive and unadulterated, but as constructed out of glosses. On the other hand, if reality is defined as that which the chimpanzee alone "recognises", ie., that an image is ungraspable since it is different or an other, then it has to be conceded that the human being does not enjoy direct access to the reality of this difference or otherness. His reality is mediated because he assumes the image is identical with himself when it is other. With this example, we have already touched on two issues which are raised by Lacan in the 1949 paper on the mirror phase. The first is the way a certain field of knowledge can be defined as a systematic misrecognition (méconnaissance). The second is the problem of moving from an apodeictic account of an inherent faculty of perception to an identification with an exteriority which does not presuppose, but actually constitutes a cognitive



consciousness.

Before placing these two problems in the context of Lacan's 1949 paper on the mirror phase, it is necessary to note a third problem of what is meant by a body image. In the previous section, we noted the fallacy of thinking that an image is a picture which is suspended in the mind. For the present purposes, a body image must be defined as something which is not, in any ordinary sense of the word "seen" at all. It is rather, to use the best of a set of inappropriate words, "felt". A body image is less a mode of knowledge or representation than an ~~intuitive~~ structure, a part of the fabric of the subject's existence and motility.

Consider Merleau-Ponty's account of how a body retains its consistency after a trauma (Merleau-Ponty, [1945], 1962, p.81). After a stroke or an amputation of a limb, the subject frequently continues to rely on his limb as though it was still there, or else he locates the paralysed side of the body on the undamaged side. To be sure, the subject can acknowledge these handicaps resulting from a stroke with detached contemplation. Yet in his everyday attitude to the world he does not know of this bodily disablement. The phantom limb suggests that in the course of the daily momentum of tasks, responsibilities, and anxieties, the cripple still requires the wholeness of his body to be the pivot of the world. Conversely, the wholeness of the body ceases to be recognised when a part of a body image is eradicated by a stroke.

When given a pair of gloves, the subject will glove one hand whilst leaving the other bare. Both hands were used to put on this single glove, and yet there is no reason for him to accept the ungloved object as his. Although it may appear to him as a hand, there is no body image corresponding to it. Here, the left and right hand gloves are not, as they are for Kant, "incongruent counterparts" which correspond solely to "absolute and original space". The space occupied by one glove is a body which is absent from the space occupied by the other glove. Hence the justification for postulating a body image which does not necessarily demonstrate an a priori mode of representing an extraneous object. Rather than a categorical activity of a pre-existing cognitive faculty, a body image is evidence that cognition is subordinated to another principle. Rational cognition is permeated by the effects of a body which is possessed by space.

With these preparatory remarks in place, we can analyse Lacan's definition of what he calls a mirror phase (2)

We have only to understand the mirror phase as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to this term: to know the transformation produced in the subject when he assumes an image (E94 e2, Lacan's emphasis).

Why should this identification with an image produce a transformation, a decisive turning point rather than a period of development? Lacan's answer concerns the alleged scientific fact of a specific prematurity of human birth (E96 e4; SRE15). The anatomical incompleteness of the human brain, and the infant's

initial lack of motor and sensory co-ordination entail that unlike most other creatures, the human offspring is almost totally dependent and helpless at birth. In contrast to this organic insufficiency and discord of the infant's Innenwelt, a recognition of a mirror image has a sudden formative power. The child reacts with fascination and joy at the appearance of a contrasting size (un relief de stature). And this relation is a turning point because it signifies the unco-ordinated human being's emergence into an outside world (Umwelt) which offers verification of a self mastery to which he can look forward. Through identification with a mirror image, an existence limited by biological prematurity is transformed into part of a world which holds out the possibility of identity.

It is here that a difference between defining an image as a knowledge or representation on the one hand, and as an ontological structure on the other is most acute. If it is assumed that the former definition is at work here, then the question immediately arises of how, other than through a prior knowledge, the infant can be said to identify himself as a bodily unity which he objectively lacks.(3) Any attempt to account for this identification by abstracting it a posteriori (from experience) will come up against the logical problem that in order for the infant to identify with this image, he must already have a prior knowledge, however tacit, of what is to be identified. It therefore seems that we are forced into defining this identified image as a matrix and first outline of the human

form which is transcendently ideal. Yet as Laplanche argues, the mirror phase is misconstrued when an attempt is made to reduce it to the experience which it describes. The infant's experience of recognising his Gestalt shape in the concrete, technical instrument of a mirror "is only the index of something that occurs, in any event, without that apparatus (Laplanche, 1976, p. 81). Once the infant's identification with this image is understood as a metaphor *for a spatial* structure rather than a description of a mental act, it is no longer necessary to begin with a priori and non-evident suppositions that themselves need explaining. The condition on which identification depends is not an inherent capacity of the mind to project or introject an image, but a spatial structure which exists prior to and independently of the mind's creations. The fact of the matter is that the term "identification" is confusing. It suggests, to Anglo-Saxon thinking at least, a mental act when what is in question here is a caption, a mimetic seizure.

Before examining this seizure let us note Lacan's remark that "the total form of the body by which the subject anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his power is given to him only as a Gestalt, that is to say, in an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constituent than constituted" (E94-5 e2). As Merleau-Ponty points out, a notion of a Gestalt image challenges psychologism since it shows that the truth of the percept is not the transcendental subject's synthesis of

atomistic sensations, but rather his existence in a space which it is impossible to hold, array or objectify before him (Merleau-Ponty, [1945], 1962, p.59). Consider the well known definition of a Gestalt image as a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts. This amounts to the fact that the Gestalt exceeds and is irreducible to a perspectival space of points that can be joined by lines that converge in a retina, in a single transcendental point that unifies and connects a manifold of space. The Gestalt phenomenon indicates a different organisation of space. This space is organised as a series of vectors, as a velocity or force which has a magnitude and direction which eludes the retina.

This elision raises the question of whether recognition of a Gestalt body image can be called connaissance knowledge defined as connaissance. The occasions on which Lacan comes closest to calling this recognition a connaissance are when he formulates it as genesis or exemplar of the essential function of the ego. But we learn immediately that this function is "very nearly that systematic refusal to acknowledge reality (méconnaissance systématique de la réalité) which French analysts refer to in talking about the psychoses" (SRE 12). To understand this function of méconnaissance (misrecognition) we must refer firstly to the notion of power which is at work in Hegel's "Master-Slave" dialectic.(4) It emerges from this dialectic that self-consciousness exists only by being recognised. The existence of self-consciousness presupposes recognition by an


other. But a radical misrecognition is entailed by Hegel's remark that

Self-consciousness is faced by another self-consciousness; it has come out of itself. This has a twofold significance: first, it has lost itself, for it finds itself as an other being; secondly, in doing so it has superseded the other, for it does not see the other as an essential being, but in the other sees its own self (Hegel, (1807), trans:p.111, his emphasis).

The self recognises itself in an other and yet it radically misrecognises that other as the self. Lacan transposes this into the idea that the infant misrecognises its identity because it is identified not in the identical, but in the different, in the other. Misrecognition here is less a form of knowledge than a ~~seizure~~ where identity is a difference, where the same is an other. The mimetic seizure of the human agent, its being dispossessed of the privilege of being the constitutive origin of its spatial co-ordinates, is the effect of this structure. For Lacan, the subject's jubilant rejoicing at the first sign of his oneness, of his identity in an image is but his submission to an other - a submission to, or seizure by space that necessarily divides and thereby cancels that oneness.

Hegel's "Master-Slave" relationship therefore allows us to elaborate a logical relation that is not usually distinguished in psychological accounts of how identity with an other is the operation whereby human subjectivity is constituted. As with Freud's notion of primal phantasy, this misrecognition of self cannot be analysed as an illusion, error or any other activity which emanates from a mind. It is not the subject who is

responsible for meconnaissance, for misrecognising himself as other. He himself forms no distorted representation or any other form of representation. He is himself represented by a spatial caption that provides the first sign of his presence to himself, a presence that is positioned not in the identical but in the different.

Freud's 1914 theory of a narcissistic ego provides another angle for approaching this problem (SE14 73-102). One of the reasons for Freud writing the paper "On Narcissism" was to give credence to the existence of libido at a time when Jung was seeking evidence that libido, a sum of psychical energy, was not an originally sexual energy emanating from erotic sources (Jung, [1912], trans:1933, pp.77-78; SE14 79-81; SE11 214, fn.1). The issue turns on what is happening when the schizophrenic, as opposed to the hysterical or obsessional neurotic, completely withdraws his libido from external objects. Freud's answer is that this withdrawal is not evidence of the entire banishment of libido, but is rather the sign that  libido has been "directed to the ego and thus gives rise to an attitude which may be called narcissism" (SE14 75). The concept of narcissism, then, is inseparable from the idea that the ego is an exercise of a libidinal economy. The ego has to be thought of in terms of a law of equilibrium which states that if libido is not directed towards external objects, then it cannot simply have disappeared but is rather channelled onto the ego itself (SE14 76).

More than this though, Freud writes, "we must grant the ego a primary investment (Beseztung) of libido" (SE14 76). Freud's emphasis). The ego is not merely a domain through which libido passes, but is the very location of this energy in a dammed state. Freud likens this relation between the ego and libido to the relation between an amoeba and the pseudopodia which protrude from it (SE14 75; SE17 139). The libido's attachment to external objects is always precarious since it is like the pseudopodia into which the substance of the amoeba's body extends: it can be withdrawn at any time to form a unit that is closed off from its surroundings.

The ego, then, is fundamentally narcissistic because it is the exercise of a usually outwardly directed but primarily inwardly directed sexual energy. But if this is the case, there is little means of stating what else a narcissistic ego could be over and above that allocation of libido which Freud calls auto-erotism. How is a narcissistic ego to be distinguished from the auto-erotic drives? Freud acknowledges this problem when he writes

we are bound to suppose that a unity comparable to the ego cannot exist from the start; the ego has to be developed. The auto-erotic drives, however, are there from the very first; so there must be something added to auto-erotism - a new psychical action - in order to bring about narcissism (SE14 76-7).

Although Freud never formulated this "new psychical action", the quotation gives one clue as to its nature. Narcissistic ego is different from the polymorphous organisation of the drives because



the former is a unity. Whatever the "new psychical action" is, it will have the task of organising this unity.

The promise of a unity, of a unified body is, we have seen, precisely why Lacan conceives the mirror phase as a "transformation", a significant turning point. It can be argued that its significance is also that it supplies the "new psychical action". The Gestalt body image coheres the disorganised parts of the body that are at play in auto-erotism in Freud's case, and motor incapacity in Lacan's case. This claim is supported by Freud's much later point that "The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego, it is not merely a surface of this body but is itself the projection of this surface" (SE19 26). Narcissistic ego is constituted as a body of space, as a body surface that becomes, outside its vital functions, a libidinal object. Lacan's paper on the mirror phase therefore not only fills a gap in Freud's theory, but is itself enriched by the way Freud's theory can show that the child's (mis)recognition of its mirror image involves a profoundly libidinal relationship.

To summarise: identification with a mirror image is a knowledge only insofar as it structures the ego as a function of reconnaissance. The mirror phase is an identification not with the identical but with an ideal unity of the body that is different from the biological state of the living organism. This identification is also the "new psychical action" which organises the ego as a nucleus given to consciousness which is opaque to

transparent reflection. The ego                      is an organisation of the passions which is invested with a libidinal dynamism or erotic energy. The ego makes a set of judgements about reality which are based on a self-love which is organised by the body image.

These claims for which we have argued make a sham of the idea that the human agent is a body of space which is organised by this agent's perception of the world. The ego, as a function of misrecognition, marks the subordination of perception to a mimetic space which places a limit, from the outside, on the cognitive faculties of a subject of knowledge. What the subject cannot "see" in the mirror image is an organic insufficiency, his lack of sensory and motor co-ordination. This biological reality is placed, so to speak out of bounds. It has become a blind spot of vision, a hole or flaw in a cognitive faculty. What is responsible for the subject being a recipient of its image is this hole and not the vividness with which impressions - pace Hume - impinge upon consciousness. As Blanchot writes in another context

The image according to the ordinary analysis, is secondary to the object. It is what follows. We see, then we imagine. After the object comes the image [...]. But this remove is not the simple displacement of a moveable object which would nevertheless remain the same [...] Here, the distance is in the heart of the thing. [...] having become image, instantly it has become that which no one can grasp, the unreal, the impossible. It is not the same thing at a distance but the thing as distance (Blanchot, [1955], 1982, pp. 255-56 our emphasis).

The reason why distance cannot be grasped is not - pace Berkley

- because distance is excluded from what is amenable to a faculty of perception which belongs to the human subject. Distance cannot be grasped because there is an essential void or elision of this cognitive faculty. The profound invisibility of distance between a unified body image and an unco-ordinated organism, between an Innenwelt and an Umwelt, is inseparable from the hollowing of this faculty as a fault in the world, a fault which from this moment onwards is never secondary.

In contrast to Lacan's more optimistic position in 1936, the Real is now far from a perceived reality that can be subsumed under Freud's early formulations of a reality principle. The Real has become a part of the living organism which it is no longer possible to cognize since cognition has been mimetically seized by a libidinal body image that is interposed between us and the world. The Real is henceforth an asymptotic Innenwelt, a part of the living organism which is continually approached, but which it is impossible to rejoin. For this reason, the mirror image does not, after all, ultimately correspond with Sartre's definition of an image as "nothing else than a relationship". Identification with a mirror image organises not so much a relation as dehiscence between the Real of a living body and the reality of the Umwelt which is organised as a body image. A relation would imply that between this Real and this reality there exists an intermediate space which connects them. But there is only the distance of which Blanchot speaks - a gap which it is impossible to cross and which allows us to say that the

Real must be defined as an impossibility. The possibility of crossing the gap between the body and this image is the very mirage which organises the narcissistic structure of the ego.

### 5.3. 1964: THE OBJECT GAZE

The sphere of Lacan's thinking we have just delineated, this phenomenological concern with an image, is usually assumed to exemplify a massive privileging of vision (Heath, 1976-7, p. 56). The mirror phase with its specular image allegedly allows the seer's look to be returned to him. Yet the foregoing analysis has undermined this privileging of vision by showing that the mirror phase involves a blind spot of vision. It is the distance between the seer and the perfect image, this distance which is not seen which is important. Rather than dismiss Lacan's early phenomenological concern with an image as marginal, or as a false start to his later theme of the subject's division by signifiers, it is necessary to ask how the mirror phase itself organises some albeit different form of the "sliding away" of the subject. There is no clean break between the mirror phase, with its blind spot of vision, and Lacan's concept of the modality of object a which he calls "object gaze". Both escape a reflexive form of vision that can see itself seeing itself (S11 71 FF 74). In the seminar of February 19 1964 in which Lacan elaborates the "object gaze", he implies that the specular image of the mirror phase does indeed concern the function of a gaze which elides vision (Ibid.).

To be sure, the "object gaze" is a non-specular object. It is an evanescent object rather than a mirage-like image. Yet our account of the latter was intended to open up certain philosophical questions which provide access to the former. In what follows these questions will first of all be couched in psychoanalytic terms. The antecedents of the "object gaze" will initially be traced to the notion of a "transitional object" which was developed by the British psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott. After pursuing this point by examining Freud's notion of the Schautrieb ("look drive"), we will briefly examine some of the philosophical issues which are raised by Lacan's argument that the object of the "look drive" eludes the eye, and becomes by that measure "object gaze."

### 5.3.1. LACAN'S DEBT TO WINNICOTT'S TRANSITIONAL OBJECT

In a letter he sent to Winnicott dated 5 August 1960 (published in Ornicar?, numero 33), and in his 1960 paper "Subversion of the Subject and Dialectic of Desire", Lacan recognised the importance of Winnicott's concept of a "transitional object" (E814 e312). In order to introduce this concept in his 1953 paper "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena", Winnicott pointed to an intermediate area between two sets of phenomena that are separated by a time interval (Winnicott, 1953, p.89). The first is the infant's early auto-erotic activity such as thumbsucking. The second is that later on, the infant who is a few months old becomes attached to a teddy, or to some other hard or soft toy, or to a piece of

material. Between this oral erotism and playing with an external object stand transitional phenomena: parts of an external object such as a sheet or handkerchief are put in the infant's mouth without his actually sucking them (Ibid., pp.90-91).

To appreciate this intermediary experience of an object it is useful to refer to the previous two chapters. In the first place, the experience has the logical structure of "neither-nor" that was discussed in chapter three. The handkerchief or piece of cloth is neither the subject's "being" nor the subject's complete representation in the Symbolic Other. The fact that this object is not sucked by the infant obviously sets it apart from the narcissistic object of the thumb. The transitional object is, as Winnicott formulates it in the sub-title of his paper, "the first not-me possession". Yet, as a possession, this object is caressed and valued more intimately than the later external object of a teddy or doll. Like the Venn diagram in chapter three, the transitional object marks an intermediary space where it is impossible to assign arrows that point in either direction. The transitional object "is not an internal object (which is a mental concept) - it is a possession. Yet it is not (for the infant) an external object either" (Ibid., p.95).

In the second place, this means that the transitional object belongs, like the notion of phantasy, to that class of phenomena which is reducible to neither imagination nor fact, to neither the

state of the nursling as a monad entirely closed in upon itself, nor to objective perception based upon reality testing.

For Lacan, the importance of this transitional object is that it functions as a "detachment" (E814 e312). The paradox of possessively guarding an object that is "not-me" has to be conceived in terms of an object that was once taken inside the infant (like the thumb), and which now stands outside him (like the teddy). Crucial here is Winnicott's use of the word "breast" to designate not only this part of the mother's flesh, but also "the whole technique of mothering" (Winnicott, 1953 p.95, fn.12). The transitional object marks the omnipotence with which the child encounters the breast as an inseparable part of himself. But it also marks the experience of the breast as an absence which is outside of his control.

It is tempting to call the transitional object a symbolic substitute for a breast that is no longer there. Yet Winnicott expresses his reservation. The significance of the transitional object is not its symbolic value so much as its actuality. It is not sufficient to treat the relation between the mother's breast and the transitional object as a relation of metonymy, of contiguity. Winnicott expresses the difference in these terms: while the wafer of the Blessed Sacrament is the body for the Rome Catholic community, it is for the Protestant a reminder of a body departed from this world (Winnicott, 1953, pp.91-92). To say, as Winnicott does, that the object is a possession of

a me that was there, is only another way of saying that the object is part of a me that is no longer there. In other words, as well as having one value as a reminder of a past presence, it has another value as what is left over from the subject's ability to articulate his presence. Consider, here, Freud's remark in "The Three Essays on Sexuality" that an object is probably lost at the moment when (and not after) the infant forms an overall representation (Gesamtvorstellung) of the person to whom the breast that procures satisfaction belongs. (GW5 123 SE7 222). The child's cry is an appeal, a demand addressed to this representation that indicates the taking up of the child into a signifying structure. But hand in hand with this goes the loss of an object for two reasons. Firstly, there are not sufficient signifiers for the child to articulate what he wants, and secondly the reply to this demand will never be sufficient for the child.

This loss of an object is decisive for Freud's later use of the term (Realitätsprüfung). The first and most immediate aim of constructing a proof of reality is stated in Freud's 1925 "Negation" paper as "not to find an object in real perception that corresponds to the one presented, but to refind such an object, to convince oneself that it is still there" (SE19 238-39, his emphasis). This refinding is similar to what Lacan means by a domain of the Real that is resistant to signification. In each case, the support on which the subject builds his reality is the possibility of appropriating an object that ~~is~~ from a



signifying structure. Lacan is indebted to Winnicott's transitional object because it paves the way for placing the object in the context of a lack in the signifying structure, a lack which Lacan formulates as "cause of desire."

This allows Lacan to develop a relation between the drive and its object which differs sharply from the relation developed by Melanie Klein. The latter draws an equivalence between the drives conceived as seated in the incorporating and expelling functions of the body, and the infant's phantasised relation to the benevolent or persecutory traits of the mother. Freud's idea that in infancy the drives are successively located around the oral, anal and genital zones of the body is transposed by Klein into a subjective intentionality, into the aim of incorporating or expelling the mother as a phantasised "good" or "bad" object. Yet Winnicott's idea of a transitional object, of an object that is neither an internal narcissistic object, nor the full apprehension of an external object, points Lacan in a direction which is the reverse of Klein's position. The Kleinian notion of the object as incorporated or expelled by the drive suggests that the object is ultimately controlled or mastered by the drive. Yet Lacan conceptualises the object as controlling the drive in the sense of outwitting it or defeating it. Accepting Freud's idea that the drive has its source (Quelle) in the limiting membranes of numerous bodily orifices, Lacan conceptualises the aim (Ziel) of the drive as the itinerary of moving around an object without ever grasping it.

Lacan exemplifies this point with the metaphor of a single mouth kissing itself which Freud gave as a metaphor of auto-erotism (SE7 182; S11 164 FF179). In this metaphor, of which the nearest pictorial equivalent is perhaps one of Francis Bacon's paintings, pleasure for the mouth is something more and something less than either pleasure of the mouth, or pleasure of objects such as food that are literally grasped by the mouth. On the one hand, the impossibility of a mouth kissing itself exemplifies that the object of the drive has to be something more than an auto-erotic object. (S11 164 FF179). The mouth in this metaphor becomes the mouth's other. It is an object that is "not-me". On the other hand, this exteriority is one which the mouth can only circumvent as a hollow or void. The mouth is a "not-me", but this does not mean it is a palpable object outside me.

There is thus an equivalence between (i) Freud's 1925 definition of Realitätsprüfung, of constructing a proof of reality as a search for a lost object; and (ii) the object of the drive as resistant to its being found. In each case the object is something from which the human subject is detached. The object marks the impossibility of the subject joining himself to what was there before the cry, before he articulated himself with signifiers. In contrast to the alienating effects of the Symbolic, to the mortification of the subject by signifiers that we examined in chapter three, Lacan places this "lost" object on

the side of the living (vivant). Because this realm of the living cannot be incorporated into a signifying structure, it can only be represented in the way that Freud himself represented that which is outside signification. For Lacan turns, if not to phylogenesis, then at least still to myth. It is with his notion of the "lamella" that Lacan follows Aristophanes in mythologising the human living substance as small particles, particles which have ever since endeavoured to reunite. (E846, §11 179-80 187 FF197-8 205).

These small particles are the signifiers masculine and feminine. Their division can be pictured as akin to the two thin plate-like shells found in the class of molluscs, including oysters, which are known as Lamellibranchia. There exists a gap, however fine, between the signifiers of masculinity and femininity that are as crystallised and as brittle as the calcium composing these two shells. Standing on opposite sides, these two shells describe an opposition into which the sexed living being (l'être vivant sexué) cannot be completely solidified (§11 180 FF198). For there is a residue of that being which is the gap between these two shells: "what is represented by the lamella [is] not sexed polarity, the relation between masculine and feminine, but the relation between the living subject and that which he loses by having to pass, for his reproduction, through the sexual cycle (§11 181 FF199). Freud's "libido", his idea of a pure, immortal and irrepressible energy becomes the energy that is foremost directed towards recovering this

vitality, this most profound lost object of the human creature. The myth of the lamella stands for the gap-like structure of what is subtracted from the human subject by virtue of having to enter an order of sexual difference.

Such an argument must undoubtedly sound spurious to those who wish to identify Lacan's teaching with the outright rejection of any anthropological notion of the essential attributes of the human being. We should therefore repeat the point that emerged in our discussion of alienation: Lacan is concerned not with the contingent reasons for a loss, but with the logical necessity of this loss. One must take account of this necessity when Lacan talks of libido as a search for the "lost" part of the human being. It entails that the success of the subject's attempt to join himself is impossible. That is why the drive can only circumvent rather than grasp this "lost" object. The essential characteristic of Lacan's object a is this impossibility, an impossibility which defines the immanence of the Real in the object a. The four types of object a that Lacan discusses correspond to the four hollow objects that are encircled by the oral, anal, invocatory and scopic drives. It is the impossibility built into the object of the last of these drives, the object of the gaze to which we shall now confine ourselves.

### 5.3.2. THE "OBJECT GAZE" APPROACHED VIA FREUD'S SCHAUTRIEB

The key to Lacan's discussion of the "object gaze" is that

while the "scopic" or "look" drive Freud referred to as the schautrieb endeavours to see its object, it cannot succeed in doing so since this object is non specular. (GW10 222-23 SE14 129-30; S11 159-69 FF174-86). Starting from an elaboration of Freud's Schautrieb which Freud apparently placed in the domain of vision, we will then give some examples to show why the object of this drive eludes the eye.

### 5.3.2.1. definition of the object of the <Schautrieb> as non-specular

According to Lacan, the enigmatic character of Freud's discussion of this "look" drive is that "the subject is not there in the sense of seeing", and "what one looks at cannot be seen" (S11 166 FF182). Instead, Lacan argues, the activity of the Schautrieb is concentrated around "a making oneself seen" (se faire voir) (S11 177 FF195). It is true that Freud first of all makes a distinction between the activity of beschauen, of looking at an object; and the passivity of beschaut werden, of being looked at (GW10 222 SE14 129). But in the next stage of Freud's elaboration, he brings the active beschauen and passive beschaut werden together by claiming that before the emergence of this active-passive opposition, the Schautrieb has an object which is part of the subject's body (GW10 222 SE14 130). Before acquiring the aim of either looking at an external object, or being looked at, the subject looks at a part of his own body. It is here that Lacan centres his formulation of the Schautrieb around this "making

oneself seen" (se faire voir) (S11 177 FF195). Crucial here is the circularity of the Schautrieb. There is an outwards-and-back movement around an object that remains elusive. This object can only be circumvented as the presence of a hole, of a void.

To be sure, it is another member of of the subject's body, the organ of the eye which forms the departure and end of this Schautrieb. But the loop-like course of the drive, its forward and backward movement to the same position, is due to its encircling an object which although part of the subject himself, is ultimately that empty hollow object which we encountered in the mouth kissing itself. Neither the voyeurism of looking at an external object, nor the exhibitionism of seeing oneself being looked at by another person can grasp this object. Certainly they form a binary opposition which defines the two poles of the drive. But these are terminal points that stabilise the drive in its vain detour around an object whose visualisation is impossible.

#### 5.3.2.2. exemplification

The possibility that this object can be seen is a possibility which Freud integrates into the structure of the primal phantasy. The 1915 paper in which Freud introduces primal phantasies ("A Case of Paranoia") leaves no doubt in this respect (SE14 263-72). There, he describes the case of a woman who was convinced she was being photographed whilst lying with her lover. The click of a camera shutter which she claimed to have heard incited a delusion that she was being seen. What is

important for showing that her delusion is irreducible to the visual is that she heard this noise coming from behind a thick curtain. She could not see the camera, let alone see that it was looking at her. Hence her delusion cannot be reduced to either the voyeuristic pole of seeing an external object, nor to the more profound exhibitionist pole of seeing an external object seeing her. The object can only be schematised as marking her disappearance into the invisible position of the camera itself. This is suggested by the grounds Freud gives for tracing the noise she allegedly heard to the position of listening in which the child witnesses the primal scene (SE14 269). We saw in the last chapter that as a primal phantasy, the primal scene concerns less a spectating subject than a subject who disappears into, who does not know where to place himself in relation to a secretive discourse going on prior to and independently of him or her. The woman's delusion of being photographed by the camera is the subject's attempt to see a part of himself which is impossible to see, a part which in terms of the primal phantasy is the subject's answer to an inexorable enigma in which he must somehow find his way.

It is with a similar scenario that Sartre also attempts to convey how I can be an object for a gaze without being apprehended by an eye

What most often manifests a gaze (regard) is the convergence of two ocular globes in my direction. But the gaze will be given just as well on occasion when there is a rustling of branches, or the sound of a footstep followed by silence, or the slight opening of a shutter,

or a light movement of a curtain [...]. [...] for the eye is not at first apprehended as a sensible organ of vision but as a support for the gaze (Sartre,[1943],1958,pp.257-58, his emphasis).

In Being and Nothingness Sartre describes someone who is looking through a keyhole, and who is suddenly surprised by the sound of footsteps coming from behind him (Ibid.,pp.259-60). These two actions would seem reducible to the voyeurist and exhibitionist poles of Freud's Schautrieb. The voyeur strains his eyes to see through the keyhole an object that the door bars from his vision. He is then disturbed by the realisation that he is himself the object of someone else's look. Like the exhibitionist he sees himself being seen. It seems that this scenario is placed squarely within the domain of vision. There are the eyes with which the voyeurist sees and the eyes with which he is seen.

Yet Sartre's analysis is explicitly directed towards obtaining a split or a difference in kind between the ocular globe of the eye and a non-specular gaze. On the one hand, the jealousy, curiosity or vice that solicits the voyeur's act does not concern a geometrical plane of vision in which size, depth and distance are rooted in a fixed point of reference which is the subject himself. The space traversed by the gaze, as opposed to his eyes, is not within the thought of a transcendental subject of consciousness. The "sliding away" of such a subject is marked by the voyeur's attempt to see his own desire, to see behind the keyhole the object of which he is jealous. The spectacle to be "seen" is this jealousy. It is the object which he lacks and which the other has. It is an object which he cannot appropriate



in vision. As Lacan puts it, "What the voyeur is looking for and finds is merely a shadow, a shadow behind a curtain" (§11 166 ff182). Through the keyhole he will phantasise the most graceful of girls who is only to be "seen" as a hairy athlete. The voyeur's gaze is therefore absorbed by this object of lack to such an extent that there is no transcendental point outside this lack which he can occupy. The spectacle to be seen is, as Sartre puts it, the cause of his being as much drunk in by things as ink is by an ink blotter (Sartre,[1943],1958,p.259). He is absorbed by the impossible task of seeing his lack as an object. He cannot withdraw from this lack so as to contemplate it as an object which is outside him.

On the other hand, although thanks to the sound of footsteps, the voyeur is addressed by another's gaze, he is no more seen than he was previously seeing an object. At a first glance, it would seem that the voyeuristic pole of the Schautrieb has returned to its exhibitionist pole: the subject now sees himself through apprehending someone seeing him. The presence of the other person apparently paralyses the voyeur into an excessive self-consciousness, into the shame that he is indeed the object of this other person's negative judgement. The other person who knows of the voyeur's action has made this action alien to the voyeur. The other has in this sense annihilated the voyeur as voyeur.

But this analysis of the voyeur being placed outside his

voyeuristic action cannot be pushed through the veins of a subject who transcends himself, who can see himself as an object. The other's gaze rather renders this "transcendence as transcended" (Ibid.,p.262-63). The voyeur does not now see himself as an objective property that can be clearly defined in space. Instead of the other's gaze carving the voyeur out in space, it dissolves the the subject into a complex which Sartre calls "situation" (Ibid.,p.263). This situation is the voyeur's "derealisation" in space. He decomposes under the other's gaze into the numerous facets from which he can be seen from the standpoint of the world. He can no more see these facets of the "situation" than he can catch his living glance in a mirror. In short, the other's gaze is grasped "not in the clear vision of what he can make out of my act", but in the annihilation of the possibility of seeing himself as seen by the other (Ibid., p.264).

These elucidations enable us to understand Freud's Schautrieb as ultimately based not on an antinomy between the seer and the seen, but on the antinomy between the eye and something which elides the subject of vision. The seeing subject is elided here not through a failure to see a difference between the organic insufficiency of the body and the Gestalt image of bodily unity, but through his attempts indeed to see something: his object a. The voyeurism of seeing an external object and the exhibitionism of seeing oneself seen are a binary opposition between signifiers which describe opposite

contours of a space that exists as a void by virtue of its vanishing in the eye's approach. The "making oneself seen" which is fundamental to the Schautrieb is finally the subject's search for a part of himself which does not appear in reality since it exists in the domain of the Real.

### 5.3.3. THE SPLIT BETWEEN THE EYE AND THE GAZE

It could be objected that this discussion of the Schautrieb is relevant only as a description of perversion and not as an analysis of the link between the human subject and space. Alternatively, it might be said that this torsion of "making oneself seen" is only the demonstration of a blurred or distorted appearance of a single, absolute space that can still be analysed on a Kantian model of a transcendent position of consciousness. In order to demonstrate that the Schautrieb is less this pure position than the inherence of the subject in a space, let us first note that the status of the Schautrieb as a sexual perversion on the one hand, and its existential or spatial significance on the other, are not mutually exclusive. Although it is sexuality which has become perverted, this is no longer defined as a separate order closed in upon itself. Sexuality is analysed by Freud on the model of a drive that is characterised by the relatively undetermined nature of its force, the contingency of its aim and the variability of its object. Once this overall indeterminacy is accepted, it becomes analytically rather than synthetically true to say that all existence can have a sexual significance. In other words, this statement which

encapsulates the thesis of pansexualism that is attributed to Freud is a tautology. As Merleau-Ponty has indicated, the question proper to Freud's thesis that sexual drives are irreducible to separate, self-enclosed and localisable functions is not whether "existence has a sexual significance", but whether "every sexual phenomenon has an existential significance" (Merleau-Ponty, [1945], 1962, p.159).

The indeterminacy of the drive has an existential significance which can be analysed in spatial terms as a certain movement and distance. According to Zeno's argument, a moving body must be identical throughout all the phases of its motion. Movement, in order to be movement, must be movement of the same something. Yet, Freud's account of the Schautrieb rather concerns a moving subject who is caught up in a torsion-like movement, who cannot disentangle himself from this torsion at any point in its course from activity to passivity. Exemption from that entanglement, identity with the stable object of Zeno's argument would be that impossible part of himself that he cannot see. The subject who is subjected to the Schautrieb cannot be located in a space which is underneath or elsewhere than the course of this torsion. The indeterminacy of the Schautrieb has an existential significance because it is a sexual phenomenon which exists only as a movement of turning round a non-specular space.

Similarly, the Schautrieb implies a distance which cannot

be analysed in terms of a transcendental and immutable position which is outside that distance. What we must understand is how the Schautrieb vindicates Merleau-Ponty's point that there can be an encounter with distance which can be understood "only as being in the distance" (Ibid., p.265). We have already noted that for Berkley, distance is not given to sight since the retina receives only a flat projection. Depth is invisible for Berkley because it is tacitly equated with a breadth seen from the side, with a plane which is positioned at right angles to the flat projection received by the eye. I am simply badly placed to see this plane of depth which could be seen from another position as a breadth. Berkley's argument is therefore based on a definition of depth as relative, as secondary, to a position of a seeing subject. Yet Lacan's idea of a mirror phase has provided a different reason for saying that distance cannot be seen. Rather than an analysis of the modes through which the ego confers significance on objects in an external space by narcissistically inverting them as its own space, the mirror phase undermines the tacit supposition here that there is a pure position of consciousness which is anterior to the problem of how it then synthesises space as a single, indivisible unity. It is necessary to pass from the problem of distance as a mode through which the ego spatializes (organises) the world, to the problem of drawing an equivalence between the construction of the ego and its being spatialized as distance or cleavage. As an indeterminacy, the distance at stake in the Schautrieb must be defined in a similar vein. This distance is not the space

between a mind-independent object and the position of the seeing subject, but an evanescence that exists by virtue of the subject's attempt to specularise in the Symbolic reality of the phallus, a part of himself which exists in a domain of impossibility which Lacan calls the Real.

Lacan pursues these issues further by attempting to place a wedge between on the one hand, his analysis of the object gaze, and on the other hand, a correspondence that arguably exists between perspectival space and an omnipotent, intellectualist and fixed hold on the world which is arguably presupposed by classical rationalism. Perspectival laws are a geometral organisation of space as it is seen by the retina. The laws of perspective are a formulation of how points in space are joined by paths of light which travel in straight lines that converge in an eye. This eye can be thought of as defining the position of the seer as a single, pure and indivisible position which unifies and connects the manifold of space which lies before it. Lacan's strategy here is a twofold one. Firstly, he argues that this perspectival construction of space undermines itself in its own terms. For it has no need of the eye in which this space converges: "What is at issue in geometral perspective is only the mapping (reperage) of space not sight" (§11 81 FF86). Lacan then proceeds to disengage the topological space of the object gaze from this essentially non-visual space of perspective. Let us examine these two arguments in turn.

### 5.3.3.1. A disengagement of perspective from vision

The appearance of the world according to laws of perspective is not, as Herbert Read claimed, a convention, but is rather based on what E.H.Gombrich called the incontrovertible fact of experience that we do not see round corners (Gombrich,1962, pp.209-11). In a painting by Van Eyck or a drawing by Durer, the laws of perspective are "convincing" not because they represent a three dimensional world as it is, but because they represent the world as it appears to the eye. In wishing to place perspectival laws of vision outside this privileged eye, Lacan turns to Descartes' discussion of dioptics. The action of the eyes according to the laws of perspective is one which Descartes represents as the conjugated action of the two batons of the blind person of his day. It can therefore be argued that the blind person has as much access to the laws of perspective as someone who sees. It is in Diderot's Letter on the blind [1749] that Lacan finds support for this argument (§11 81,86 FF 86,92). If seeing is reduced to the geometral laws of perspective, then the blind person's manipulation of two crossed sticks has an analogous function to the organ of the eye. The point at which the blind person's batons cross is, like the eye, a privileged or geometral point. It is the point of convergence of rays of light that are analogous to the batons themselves (Diderot,[1749],1951,p.6). Furthermore, in the same way that a hand placed between the eye and the object will prevent the eye from seeing the object, the blind person's batons will also encounter this obstacle (Ibid.,p.6).(5)

Given this argument that geometral space can be reconstructed by a blind person, it follows that such mapping of space is not equivalent to a domain of vision from which the blind person is exempt. It is here that Lacan turns to Jurgis Baltrušaitis' book on anamorphosis. This is a phenomenon in which points in space are still mapped according to the perspectival laws of lines of light that converge in an eye. Seen from head on, the resulting image will appear enlarged and distorted. The lines of perspective here have an oblique relation to the eye. But when seen from the side, this image will appear regular and proportioned since the configuration is now parallel to the eye. Holbein's painting The Ambassadors exemplifies this anamorphic structure.(6) When seen from head on, a strange oblique image resembling a phallus appears in the foreground of this picture. But when seen from a position which itself has an oblique relation to the picture, this object is recognisable as a skull. For Lacan, this example of anamorphosis is a limiting case of what happens when the laws of perspective are pushed to their limit. Anamorphosis is not proof that perspective is a convention. It is rather, as Gombrich puts it, a "display of the magic skill of perspective" since it is still representing the world according to the fact that light does not easily travel round corners (Gombrich,1962,p.213). Constructed according to the series of straight lines between two positions in space, anamorphosis is still the interrogation of geometral laws. It is a phenomenon that could still, with much time and



patience, be constructed by the blind person. Yet of Holbein's anamorphic construction of what appears as a skull from one spatial position and as a phallus from another, Lacan rhetorically asks

How can we not see here, immanent in the geometral dimension - a partial dimension in the field of the gaze, a dimension which has nothing to do with vision as such - something symbolic of the function of the lack, of the appearance of the phallic ghost? (S11 82 FF88).

The significance of Holbein's painting for Lacan is similar to that of the Orvieto frescoes for Freud (SE6 pp.1-7). Both imply an opposition of death and sexuality. Lacan is quite clear as to the ambiguous meaning of Holbein's anamorphic painting. To identify with the master signifier of the phallus, the eye must be blind to the skull which represents symbolic castration, to the status of the phallus as but a symbol of lack. This ambiguous status of the anamorphic object as both a skull and a phallus could be analysed in terms of a certain coalescence that was discussed in chapter three. This coalescence exists between (i) the lack of representation of the object a; and (ii) the phallus as a symbol of a lack of identity with an ideal. But more importantly for the present purposes, this ambiguity demonstrates the antinomy between the course of Freud's Schautrieb and its hollow, empty object. The eye traverses a phallic object, its seeing becomes a desire for the phallic object only on condition that the eye cannot see this object as the lack of the living being which is represented by the skull. Like Oedipus, the spectator of Holbein's painting cannot look at the desired object without the risk of blindness (ie.,

obliviousness) to the castration that is already there.

### 5.3.3.2. The disengagement of space from perspective

Although the analogy is clever, this account of anamorphosis does not, then, give us the field of the gaze as such, that is, a field which is entirely outside the geometral basis of vision that can be constructed by a blind person. It is finally not in the straight lines of geometral perspective to which Lacan turns, but to the rays of light which these lines represent (§11 88 FF94). So far, we have only examined these lines as the means for establishing a correspondence from one point to another in space. This correspondence can be constructed by the blind man with a series of threads. But once it is asked what these threads represent, it has to be conceded that the blind person is without the ocular bowl which diffuses, refracts and is flooded by the light. This is why the blind person is sometimes not immediately recognisable as such. His eyes can be more open than someone who does see. He is without the series of mechanisms and defenses of an iris that blinks or screws itself up when confronted by a too bright and potentially damaging light.

To show that the relation between the subject and the light is other than the geometral mapping of space, Lacan gives an example that occurred when he was in a fishing boat. The question is why Lacan was so disturbed when one of the crew shouted to him "You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you." He

was disturbed because that brightly glittering can did "see" him: "It was looking at me at the level of the point of light at which everything that looks at me is situated [...]" (§11 89 FF95). This point which solicits the seer at every moment is not the geometral Archimedean point of the eye grasping perspectival space, but "the shimmering (ruissellement) of a surface that is not, in advance, situated for me in its distance" (§11 89 FF96). The gleam of light from the can was an opacity, an iridescence overflowing and blinding the eye as the centre of geometral vision.

Like the lover who thought she heard sounds behind the curtain, Lacan was "photo-graphed" by this gaze of light (§11 98 FF106). The addition of a hyphen not usually present between these two words indicates the following ambiguity. On the one hand, as in perspective, there is still a "graph" of space. Space is still mapped according to a structural formula. On the other hand, this mapping does not start from the subject, but from the light. We are thereby brought back to the issue of mimicry, of how we are not the origin of our spatial co-ordinates. Mimicry is the process of the creature being "photo-graphed", that is, graphed by photosensitive cells according to a formula which is not at the disposal of the creature. The creature does not need to be aware of the emergence, of the contrast or of the intensification of the effects produced by its photosensitive cells. The human subject, as Lacan's example demonstrates, is no less exempt from being this exercise of a gaze. The can floating

in the water did not submit itself to a sovereign seer. It placed Lacan in the position of someone who is seen by an opacity of light that he profoundly does not see, that is too bright to see.

We are now in a better position to appreciate why, as has been assumed at all times, the organisation of the human subject as a body of space is not the Kantian problem of <sup>of</sup> noumenon~~on~~ that is behind an appearance. The gaze is rather that outside towards which Merleau-Ponty gestures when he says that the human being inhabits a spectacle which he does not himself compose. (Merleau-Ponty, [1945], 1962, p.250). As in mimicry, the subject is situated in a picture which is a seizure from which he cannot extricate himself. The status of the object gaze as a variant of the object a is given in the fact that what the subject wishes to see involves this lure. The shimmering iridescence of the light, the opacity of this object for which I am "photo-graphed" is finally the evanescence of object a. This object exists topologically as a space which the subject can only circumvent, a circumvention from which the subject can never withdraw into a pure transcendental Kantian position, a position which is without condition since it is itself a prior and absolute condition.

#### CONCLUSION

This account of Lacan's "object gaze" does not purport to be comprehensive. It is but an overture to the philosophical issues of geometry, perspective, and light which are raised by

Lacan's claim that the object gaze exists as a non-specular object.<sup>(7)</sup> The wedge that has been placed between the eye and the gaze, between geometral lines of perspective that converge in a retina and a light which is too much for the retina, is an extension rather than an undermining of the blind spot of vision which can be deduced from Lacan's earlier work on the notion of a mirror image.<sup>(8)</sup> In both cases, there is a necessary disappearance of the idea that the visible has its foundation in a sovereign seer. Vision is theorised as a structure in which a part of the subject is necessarily excluded, and becomes by that measure an impossibility which Lacan calls the Real. The difference between the two is that the first is a structure of the visible, while the second is a structure of the invisible. The difference between the two is that the first is a structure of the visible, while the second is a structure of the invisible.

#### FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

- (1) Kohler had this to say: "Rana [a chimpanzee]...gazed long and intently into the mirror, looked up and then down, put it to her face and licked it once, stared into it again, and suddenly her free hand rose and grasped - as though at a body behind the mirror. But as she grasped emptiness she dropped the mirror sideways in her astonishment. Then she lifted it again, stared fixedly at the other ape, and again was misled into grasping into empty space. She became impatient and struck out violently behind the mirror [...]. She held the mirror still in one hand, drew back her arm as far as possible behind her back, gazed with an air of indifference at the other animal, then suddenly made a pounce with her free hand. However, both she and the rest soon became used to this side of the affair, and concentrated all their interest on the image; this interest did not decrease [...] but remained so strong that the playing with reflecting surfaces became one of the most popular and permanent of their 'fashions'" (Kohler, [1925], trans: 1957, pp. 268-9). Unlike the human infant, the chimpanzee merely remains fascinated by an image which it does not recognize as its own.
- (2) Although Sherridan translates stade as stage, it is, as will be shown, important to take note of Laplanche and Pontalis' point that "As Lacan has indicated himself, the word "phase" is no doubt better adapted here than stage in that it suggests a turning point rather than a period in the process of psycho-biological maturation (LP 252).

- (3) But see also Winnicott's response to Lacan in his 1967 paper "Mirror-role of Mother and Family in Child Development" (Winnicott, 1971, pp. 111-18). Winnicott claims that the mother's face is the precursor of the mirror phase. The mother's face reflects an image to the child before the advent of separating off the not-me from the me. Thus, at this time, the child recognises an image of itself which is determined by what it sees in the mother's face. A mother whose face is unresponsive, or worse still, is rigid with her own defenses will have a detrimental effect upon the child. As one of Winnicott's patient's puts it: "Wouldn't it be awful if the child looked into the mirror and saw nothing!" (*Ibid.*, p. 116).
- (4) Evidence to support this claim can be found in Lacan's 1948 paper "Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis" where he states that psychoanalytic action is developed in and through "a dialectical grasp of meaning" (E102 e9). The presupposition of this dialectic is said to consist of a subject who manifests himself to the intention of another.
- (5) The equivalence of the blind man's use of a stick with visual perception is well formulated by Merleau-Ponty in these terms: "One is tempted to say that through the sensations produced by the pressure of the stick on the hand, the blind man builds up the stick along with its various positions, and that the latter then mediate a second order object, the external thing. It would appear in this case that perception is always a reading off from the same sense-data, but constantly accelerated, and operating with ever more attenuated signals. But habit does not consist in interpreting the pressures of the stick on the hand as indications of certain positions of the stick, and these as signs of an external object, since it relieves us of the necessity of doing so. The pressures on the hand and the stick are no longer given; the stick is no longer an object perceived by the blind man, but an instrument with which he perceives" (Merleau-Ponty, [1945], trans: 1962, p. 152, his emphasis).
- (6) This picture hangs in The National Gallery, London, and is reproduced on the cover of Book 11 of Lacan's seminars. The National Portrait Gallery, London, houses another anamorphic painting of Edward VI by an unknown artist. This painting is reproduced in Gombrich's Art and Illusion (Gombrich, 1962, p. 197, 213).
- (7) The non-specular quality of object a evokes a contrast with the undeniably specular quality of the realm of the Imaginary. As the more general term, the realm of the Imaginary embraces a number of more specific and related concepts that include not only the "captivating" functions of an image but also the specular, smooth, shiny and reflecting quality of a mirror image. Entailing that the image is an "other" that is reflected back to the subject as its self, this specular quality

becomes the basis upon which the realm of the Imaginary can be elaborated as a relationship with an "other". Strictly speaking, this is a relation between the ego and its imaginary other that is both intrasubjective and intersubjective. Intrasubjectively, the relation is a narcissistic one where the self is recognized in an other that is profoundly different from the self. Intersubjectively, the self remains within the realm of the Imaginary as long as it seeks to recognize and vindicate a narcissistic image in another person. Both intrasubjectively and intersubjectively, this concept of a specular image can be likened to Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic. By marked contrast, object a is profoundly non-specular and the subject's relation to this object is non-reciprocal. It is because the self is seen by the gaze variant of object a without the self being able to see what is looking that Lacan can speak of a split between the eye and the gaze in the seminar of 19 February 1964. The woman (described on pages 241-42) who felt <sup>that</sup> she was under a gaze could herself see neither the seer nor what was seen. We have also noted (pages 253-54) that whilst the glittering can in the water did "see" Lacan, its shimmering surface was too bright for such "seeing" to be reciprocal. It is opacity and elision that defines the non-specular quality of object a.

- (8) The distinction made in this chapter between a mimetic space of the mirror image and a topological space of object a can be summarized as follows. The concept of mimetic space has been placed in the context of Lacan's earlier work, prior to 1950, concerning the function and formative effects of an image. With respect to this function, Lacan refers to biological and ethological studies of deceptive and ensnaring functions of an image in cycles of animal behaviour, particularly sexual behaviour (Forrester, 1987, p.83). "Lure" and "captation" become the key terms in Lacan's earlier work for a discussion of both mimicry itself and the dimensions of travesty, masquerade and parade through which it is deployed. With respect to the formative effects of an image, a concept of mimetic space is required by Lacan at a time when he regarded identification as the fundamental psychical process. In order to strengthen and extend a tie between Freud's concept of narcissism and his (Freud's) account of the formation of the ego, Lacan moves away from an ethological notion of imprinting towards what is essentially an optical schema: the reflection of an image in a mirror. In Lacan's paper on the mirror stage (E93-100 p1-7), the ego is formed in a mimetic space where the human being is captivated by a mirror reflection of an inverted, Gestalt image of the surface of his unco-ordinated body. This captivation "freezes" a body that is unco-ordinated in the sense that the child's drives are constantly in flux. Lacan emphasizes certain structural rather than developmental implications of this mimetic space. The ego identifies itself in what is profoundly different from rather than the same as the self. It is for this reason that the ego is formed through an identification that must be defined as a méconnaissance. Henceforth, it is impossible for there to be a fusion or refusion of (1) the apparent smoothness, totality and continuity of the Gestalt image; and (2) the actual discontinuity and fragmentation that defines the self. At the risk of falling foul of Lacan's ruling not to take the mirror stage too literally, we could say that the impossibility to which we have just referred is witnessed in the difficulty we have of looking at ourselves in a mirror without catching ourselves doing the looking. As a result of being all too conscious of seeing ourselves seeing and seeing ourselves seen we tend to idealize the image that we see.

On the one hand, this idealization marks an impossibility of fusing the self into an identity of the seer and seen. On pages 230-31 we have defined this impossibility as a gap between a living organism and its image that cannot be crossed. On the other hand, there is nevertheless a "Master-Slave" relation between the seer and the image seen. There is both a narcissistic relation to the self and a situation where another person is identified with as an "imaginary other", as an other who is an extension of the self. By contrast, the topological space that defines the gaze variant of object a concerns a space in which I am seen without myself being able to see either the seer or what is seen. It is as though I am seen by someone or something which is inside a car with black windows. In order to stress this point that when I am under a gaze I do not see it as a gaze, that it is not a seen gaze, we have referred in this chapter to Lacan's reference to Sartre (pp.242-43). The gaze can be experienced as a rustling of branches or a sound of a footstep followed by silence (Sartre, [1943], 1958, pp.257-58). This non-reciprocal structure of the gaze has to be put in the context of the subject's attempt to witness a separated part of himself which is the eternally lacking object a. This attempt can be elaborated only with reference to a torsion or circumvention that defines the structure of desire and the structure of the drive. Irrespective of which particular variant of object a is being formulated, and regardless of the particular mode in which the subject tries to configure object a, there is always the structure of a lack, of an object that is approached, circumvented but never grasped. For Lacan, this constancy is best formulated as a topological space. For it is topology that allows a study of properties which remain invariant under one-to-one continuous transformations. Whilst the position of terms within a structure may change, the structure itself does not.



## CHAPTER 6

### THE UNCONSCIOUS IS "MISSING"

#### (FROM LOCALITY TO THE IMMANENCE OF THE REAL IN OBJECT VOICE)

#### INTRODUCTION

To make good our thesis that problems of space are as fundamental to psychoanalysis as those of language, we owe it to ourselves in this final chapter to return to that concept which has been narrated as exclusively linguistic. The point of departure for this study was that the unconscious is a relation between the human subject and language that is more fragile and traumatic than the object of study which is formulated by structural linguistics. Through a detailed examination of certain spatial problems which attend Freud's several successive hypotheses of the unconscious, we shall attempt to point the aphorism that the

unconscious is structured as or like a language towards a certain trauma which is found in that oneiric work which provided Freud with a royal road to the unconscious: Die Traumdeutung. We shall argue that although Freud never finally succeeded in driving a complete wedge between psychical space and cerebral localisation, it is upon the existence of such a wedge that Lacan's return to the Freudian unconscious depends. We shall see that for Lacan, the unconscious is not so much a theory of a position or location in space as a topology of the operation of a breaking edge between the Symbolic and the Real which defines a certain trauma. This edge makes the unconscious a definition of a limit which does not so much divide a noumenon from a phenomenon as yield a non-Euclidean relation of envelopment and proximity that can best be thought of as a "missed encounter". The traumatic quality of the unconscious is, we shall conclude, its status as "missing".

#### 6.1. THE DESCRIPTIVE-TOPOGRAPHICAL HYPOTHESIS

Within psychoanalytical literature, the noun "the unconscious" (das Unbewusste) is first used by Breuer in the Studies on Hysteria (SE2 45). There it names the emergence, in hypnosis, of a dream like state of consciousness which is cut off from associative connection with the rest of consciousness.(1) This "splitting of consciousness" is initially conceived by Freud as the fate which, as we have seen in chapter three, befalls an idea which is incompatible with consciousness and is consequently repressed from consciousness. Hence the

unconscious is first introduced by Freud as a way of characterising the status of ideas which have incurred repression. As Freud later put it: "we obtain our concept of the unconscious from the theory of repression" (SE19 15).

From the beginning, however, Freud was opposed to the assumption espoused by Janet, and to a lesser extent by Breuer, that this so called unconscious was a "secondary consciousness", ie., that it was not different in kind from consciousness (SE2 238, SE3 45-46, 51).(2) Later, in the 1915 paper "The Unconscious", Freud points out that the notion of a secondary consciousness involves an infinite regression (SE14 170). If a secondary consciousness means nothing more than that different mental processes are unaware of each other's existence, then there is the possibility of a third, fourth and possibly unlimited number of states of consciousness. But the chief reason why the unconscious cannot be a "secondary consciousness" is that it is a psychical state which lacks consciousness. We have learnt in chapter three that the unconscious mechanism of displacement produces somatic or compulsive phenomena which are inexplicable to consciousness. The hysterical or obsessional symptom is the displacement of an affective force which is said to be "quite out of proportion to any that would have arisen in the conscious mind alone" (SE2 238).

Both Alisdair MacIntyre and Wolheim point out that Freud initially uses the term "unconscious" for descriptive rather than

explanatory purposes (MacIntyre, 1958, p. 49, 71; Wolheim, 1971, pp. 159-60). Describing contents that are not present in the field of consciousness, the adjective "unconscious" extends ordinary language. It is an addition to an existing catalogue of mental states. The necessity and legitimacy of postulating this unconscious state depends on whether Freud succeeds in using this postulate to relate certain conscious acts which would otherwise remain disconnected and thereby unintelligible. It is Freud's thesis that these acts which include slips of the tongue, manifest dream reports and compulsive symptoms, fall into a demonstrable connection if an unconscious state is interpolated between them (SE14 167).

What is interpolated is the concept, obtained from the theory of repression, that certain ideas are not only expelled from consciousness, but remain active once they are expelled. In other words, their expulsion from consciousness is not equivalent to their annihilation. Through slips of the tongue, manifest dream reports etc. they may appear in consciousness in a disfigured form. With this postulation of ideas that are expelled from consciousness, and yet are potentially operative there, we find the main difference between the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious and previous conceptions found in the work of Dwelshauvers and Edward von Hartmann.

Two problems emerge from this schema. The first emerges from this notion that the unconscious is not simply a graveyard

for repressed ideas but a storehouse for ideas that can re-enter consciousness. This commits Freud to the further claim that the unconscious has a capacity for retention or even memory.

Secondly, although the unconscious is, here, a heuristic and interpolated hypothesis, it is nevertheless also an assertion about a hitherto undiscovered process, happening or entity in the world. To the extent that Freud is making an existential claim, we are entitled to ask what type of space pertains to this entity, if indeed, it can be called an entity. We shall examine these two problems in turn.

#### 6.1.1. THE UNCONSCIOUS AS A MEMORY TRACE

It was the claim that perception is a function of consciousness which led Freud to postulate an incompatibility between consciousness and memory (SE18 25). The former's receptive capacity and the latter's retentive capacity exhibit an incompatibility which Breuer likened to the different functions of a telescopic lens and a photographic negative (SE2 188-89, fn.1). Like the telescopic lens, consciousness possesses an ever ready receptive capacity for receiving new stimuli. Yet this means that consciousness cannot also possess the capacity to permanently record these stimuli like the photographic negative. For if a receptive capacity was also a retentive one, then the former capacity would very soon become exhausted. Like a sheet of paper filled with writing, there would be no more room on this surface for further information. The receptive capacity for somehow transcribing these perceptions into a permanent record,

into memory, must be located elsewhere than consciousness.

The distribution of perceptive and retentive capacities to different localities is schematised in "The Interpretation of Dreams"

a system in the very front of the apparatus receives the perceptual stimuli but retains no trace of them and thus has no memory, while behind it there lies a second system which transforms the momentary excitations of the first system into permanent traces. (SE5 538).

Here, in 1899, is a psychological representation of a schema of memory which Freud had discussed four years previously in the "Project" in neurological terms (SE1 299-30). In order to account there for both an unlimited receptive capacity of the mind and for the retentive capacity of permanent traces, Freud makes a distinction between two classes of neurones. Whilst a concept of permeable neurones is needed to formulate the mind's capacity to be fresh for new excitations, the concept of impermeable neurones is needed to show how they are permanently altered by a passage of excitation. In passing from one impermeable neurone to another, the excitation runs into a certain resistance. Whenever resistance is reduced there is said to be a Bahnung, a breaching or, as Strachey translates this word, a "facilitation" (SE1 300). It is as though the excitation is a force that breaks open a certain path or road (Bahn) which is the neurone. The laying down of a memory consists of a given excitation opting for a pathway that is already breached in preference to one where no such breaching has occurred.

In "The Interpretation of Dreams" these neurological terms have been ostensibly replaced by a psychological schema. Yet the fundamental argument remains the same. The unconscious is a system for permanently storing impulses or excitations. By virtue of recording such impulses these memory traces "retain permanently something more than the mere content of the perceptions which impinge on the system-perception" (SE5 538-39, Freud's emphasis). As a memory trace, the unconscious cannot be assimilated into the empiricist notion of the engram defined as an impression bearing a resemblance to a corresponding reality (LP248). Rather than making such an appeal to a resemblance between a memory and the object of which it is the memory, Freud is denying any sensory quality to the impulse which is transmitted from one memory trace to another (SE5 540). Such sensory qualities are only attributable to the perception system of consciousness. In contrast, the different unconscious memory traces each consist of a group of associative ideas which will, with varying frequency, be traversed by a quantity, ie., the sum of excitation or impulse.

#### 6.1.2. AN ANATOMICAL THEORY OF THE MIND

This problem that a single psychical apparatus cannot carry out two contradictory functions of receiving and preserving memory traces leads to the second problem. For the differentiation of this apparatus into one function that is performed behind the other is conducive to a topography, to a

recognition of distinct locations. The idea presented in the studies on Hysteria of consciousness as a "defile" which only allows one unconscious memory at a time to pass through it, also implies a theory of places, of a set of positions in psychical space. As MacIntyre points out, it does not suffice to equate Freud's talk of "spatial metaphors" with the way that in ordinary language we speak of the mind in spatial terms when we mean nothing spatial (MacIntyre, 1958, p.32). Unlike someone who speaks of a mind "full" of thoughts, or of thoughts "drifting into" the mind, Freud seems to be inexorably wedded to the idea that the mind is a place or set of places in which ideas move. Freud's remark in "The Interpretation of Dreams" that "the psychical apparatus must be constructed like a reflex apparatus" suggests that he is conceiving different psychical systems as different physiological or anatomical substrates (SE5 538). What is surprising about this schema of 1899 is that it still incorporates a large part of the theoretical structure which Freud used in his earlier neurological work. The notion of the reflex arc is itself rooted in the anatomical and physiological theories of cerebral localisation which predominated during the second half of the nineteenth century (LP449-50).

But we encounter another point of view when we read in "The Interpretation of Dreams" of Freud's pledge to "avoid the temptation to determine psychical locality in any anatomical fashion", of his reassurance that "there is no need for the hypothesis that the psychic systems are arranged in spatial



order", and of his warning that "thoughts and psychical structures in general must never be regarded as localised in organic elements of the nervous system" (SE5 536,537,611, Freud's emphasis). Beyond their pedagogical value, these remarks raise the question of how else to schematise such non-tangible psychical systems. Freud likens the psychical apparatus to both a telescopic lens and a photographic negative precisely in order to avoid anatomical reference. Like the occurrence of different images at ideal points between different lenses, the psychical system comes into being at points where no tangible component is located. To the extent that the unconscious is primarily a system of retaining permanent records of perceptions which impinge upon the psychical apparatus, it corresponds to the photographic negative as an inscription of light. To the extent that the perception-consciousness system receives images, it is like the optical lense which receives the passage of light rays.

Freud was aware of the limitations of this schema. He cannot at this time adequately combine these different telescopic and photographic functions into a single apparatus which both retains its receptive capacity for an unlimited length of time, and lays down permanent traces of the excitations which have been received. Nor can he provide an appropriate metaphor to depict the latter system as behind the perception-consciousness system. These inabilities suggest that the two receptive and retentive systems are as mutually exclusive as a piece of paper which allows only a limited number of words

to be permanently recorded; and a slate surface which can always receive more words but only at the cost of erasing its existing words. It is not until some twenty five years later that Freud published a paper in which these receptive and retentive capacities are combined in the analogy of the Wunderblock (the "mystic writing pad") (SE19 227-32).(3) Hence it is as a writing instrument rather than an optical instrument Freud that finds the appropriate metaphor of a retentive capacity which has a depth which lies behind its receptive surface.

Let us therefore conclude that whilst, in order to conceive different psychical functions, Freud is obliged to rely largely on neurological theories of cerebral localisation, he is nevertheless not satisfied with the anatomical localisation of functions which is an integral part of those theories.

## 6. 2. THE FUNCTIONAL-DYNAMIC HYPOTHESIS

Even in the early texts we have been examining, it emerges that a topology, a theory of places was not Freud's only way of schematising the mind. In another section of "The Interpretation of Dreams", Freud attempts to move away from the idea that the unconscious is a transcription into permanent traces of perceptual stimuli that are received in another place of the psyche. Rather than different inscriptions of the same content, the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious involves a dynamic factor: a sum of energy that is attached to one of these domains of the mind is withdrawn from the other.

Instead of using spatial metaphors that suggest struggle between opposed parties for the same piece of ground, of an unconscious that forces its way through consciousness, Freud proposes

that some particular mental grouping has had an investment (Besetzung) of energy attached to it or withdrawn from it, so that the structure in question has come under sway of a particular agency (Instanz) or been withdrawn from it. What we are doing here is once again to replace a topographical way of representing things by a dynamic one (SE5 610).

This dynamic conception of the unconscious eventually leads Freud to claim that the unconscious is comprised of a set of mechanisms, and perhaps even a sum of energy which is endogenous to it. This view principally emerges in three papers written between 1912 and 1915: "A Note on the Unconscious in Psychoanalysis" [1912], (SE12 255-66); "Repression" [1915] (SE14 146-58); and "The Unconscious" [1915] (SE14 166-204).

Our aim here is limited to pointing to an inconsistency that is found in Freud's concept of the unconscious at this time. On the one hand, Freud uses a language derived from the study of hydraulics and mechanical forces to conceive the different compartments of the mind as the exertion or withdrawal of separate, autonomous pressures and counter-pressures. On the other hand, this generates a theory which tacitly requires a teleological vocabulary of intentions or motives which conflicts with this mechanistic explanation.

In both his letter to Fliess dated 6 December 1896, and in "The Interpretation of Dreams" Freud establishes that between the unconscious system and consciousness there lies a preconscious

domain (Vorbewusste) (SE1 234; SE5 499). Used here in a descriptive sense, the term preconscious allows Freud to distinguish between (i) ideas which though not yet conscious are very nearly capable of becoming so; and (ii) unconscious ideas that are met with strong resistance on the part of consciousness. The preconscious should not be read as a concession on Freud's part that at least a portion of the unconscious must belong to the type of secondary consciousness that he disdained. Not only is the preconscious sharply distinguished from the unconscious, but more importantly Freud interpolates between them a selective barrier which is constituted by a permanent act of censorship (Zensur) (SE14 173). Rigorously exercising its office at the point of transition from the unconscious to the preconscious, this censorship determines which unconscious ideas can be allowed into the preconscious system, and which material must remain repressed in the unconscious.

With this notion of a censor there arises the following question. Does the passage of material from one system to another involve a change of locality ie., a fresh registration of the same material in another place; or does it involve a qualitative change in the idea itself?(4) The topographical hypothesis of the unconscious corresponds to the first of these options. Each permanent trace is a fresh registration in another locality of the same impulse or excitation. Assuming this unconscious registration passes the censor, it can pass into consciousness without any change in its actual state as an

excitation. In contrast, it is the termination of those characteristics belonging exclusively to the unconscious, and the adoption of characteristics belonging exclusively to the preconscious system, which is at stake in the second option mentioned above. This alternative, which Freud called the functional hypothesis, requires that the transposition of an idea from one system to another consists in a qualitative change in the state of the idea.

Freud's decision as to which of these alternatives he should adopt is not abstruse since it depends on the following clinical issue. When the analyst presents the analysand with an idea the latter has repressed, this communication does not in itself produce any change in his condition. The communication does not undo repression. A particular idea remains repressed from consciousness unless or until resistance on the part of consciousness has been overcome. Only then can the conscious idea which is communicated to the analysand enter into connection with the unconscious memory trace. Superficially, such a connection would appear to confirm the above first hypothesis of the topographical hypothesis (SE14 176). The conscious idea and unconscious memory trace are connected as "distinct registrations, topographically separated, of the same content" (Ibid.). However, further reflection reveals that there is no such identity between the previously repressed idea and the idea communicated by the analyst to the analysand. What the analyst says on the one hand, and what was previously experienced and

now repressed on the other hand, are two very different things. Although their contents are similar, the former is an auditory experience whilst the later is the unconscious memory of an experience (Ibid.). Clinical evidence does not, after all, so easily confirm the topographical hypothesis that conscious and unconscious systems are the registration of the same content in a different locality. The difference between these systems must be formulated in some other way.

This way is the topic of the remaining part of Freud's 1915 paper "The Unconscious". To show that the entry of an idea into consciousness will not merely register that idea in a different place, but will change the status of that idea, Freud develops a two pronged argument. Firstly, he shows that the unconscious is a system possessing an endogenous content. Secondly, Freud demonstrates that the unconscious is formed according to certain mechanical laws which are not applicable to any other part of the psyche. This leads Freud to formulate more rigorously than before the idea that repression is the exertion of a certain pressure which must prevail against a certain counter-pressure. We will examine both of these issues in turn.

With respect to the first of these points, Freud claims that the content of the unconscious is comprised of different "ideational representatives" (Vorstellungrepräsentzen) of the drive (GW10 255 SE14 152-53; GW10 275-76 SE14 177). Although Freud never fully clarified this term, it can for the

purposes of the present argument, be said to have a threefold significance. Firstly, ideational representatives are ideas to which the drive becomes fixated in the course of the subject's history. Secondly, it is only in terms of these ideas that a drive can be represented in either consciousness or the unconscious. Thirdly, the idea can be treated as a signifier, as a mark or inscription that cannot be permanently bound to the drive as though it was signified. It<sup>is</sup> these signifiers and not the drive itself which exists as the unconscious (SE14 178). In the previous topographical hypothesis of the mind, the unconscious was the permanent registration of an excitation that could also be conscious and which was not therefore intrinsically unconscious. But now it is claimed that the unconscious is exceptional insofar as it is the only domain where a drive becomes fixated to an ideational representative (SE14 148). The unique property of unconscious processes is that they alone seize and solidify the relation between a drive and its repressed ideational representative.

This leads to the second issue of the formation of the unconscious according to mechanical laws. The fixation is not only a content of the unconscious but also that which constitutes it. The fixation forms a first unconscious nucleus which Freud calls the "primal repressed" (SE14 148-9, 180-81). This nucleus then becomes akin to a magnetic field in that it acts as a pole of attraction for further ideas that have been refused entry into consciousness. However, as well as the unconscious

operating as a force of attraction, it also operates to "push" repressed material back into consciousness. To understand this, it is necessary to look at Freud's use of the term "investment" (Besetzung) to describe the different pressures that are operating in the psychical apparatus. Invested energy is the term used by Freud to show that repression of an ideational representative is far from ensuring that this idea is shelved there in a permanent state of peace and quiet. Rather than a single act of annihilating something, a successful repression "demands a persistent expenditure of force" on the part of consciousness (Ibid., p.151). Freud is employing a "push and pull" theory of mechanism where the "repressed exercises a continuous pressure in the direction of the conscious, so that this pressure must be balanced by an unceasing counter-pressure" (Ibid.). There is therefore a dynamic conflict between opposed conscious and unconscious systems, and the outcome of this conflict is determined by the degree to which the increase in energy of one of these systems is matched by a withdrawal of energy in the other. Moreover, it is possible to notice that it is a functional rather than a topographical hypothesis which is at work here. The passage of an ideational representative from consciousness to the unconscious involves less a fresh registration of that idea, than a change in the state of that idea. The mechanism of repression consists of this idea being invested with the energy of the unconscious system and disinvested of the energy of the conscious system.



It seems, then, that by using a mechanical model Freud relinquishes any need to employ a teleological vocabulary of motives and intentions. Repression is ostensibly governed by mechanical laws that operate without their being known to consciousness. Yet a closer examination shows that the functioning of this mechanism is ultimately dependent upon a conscious intention. We have already noted Freud's claim to have obtained his concept of the unconscious from his theory of repression (SE19 15). Freud defines the essence of repression as lying "simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance from the conscious (SE14 147). This definition reveals that the concept of repression is irreducible to the claim that an idea or content is not known to consciousness. Repression, according to this definition, is also the continuous performance of a task of maintaining a state of ignorance. After initial repression, the material concerned continues to exert a pressure which, if unimpeded, would eventually allow it to re-enter consciousness. To maintain repression, there must be the above unceasing exercise of a counter-pressure on the part of consciousness (SE14 151). The question is how exactly is this counter-pressure triggered by the striving of repressed material to gain entry into consciousness? It is surely a condition of repression that consciousness must somehow know or be aware of the existence of this material. But if this is the case, it is difficult to see how it can coherently be claimed that repression is governed by mechanical laws which operate independently of conscious awareness.

In order to appreciate this problem, we must insert it more deeply in the context of Freud's argument. We have seen that it is an ideational representative of the drive which is repressed. To this ideational representative Freud assigns the aim of satisfying the drive. What is subject to repression is not the failure of the drive to achieve satisfaction, but on the contrary, the pleasure that would be obtained from this satisfaction (SE14 147). Yet because this pleasure is incompatible with conscious aims and intentions, it produces unpleasure for the conscious mind. When the strength of the unpleasure experienced by consciousness becomes greater than the pleasure obtained from satisfying the drive, there arises the condition for repression (SE14 147).

This counter-pressure is a device for avoiding the unpleasure caused, for example, by the subject's conscious awareness that he wanted to kill his father. The schema requires that repression is triggered by one of two things. On the one hand, it could be triggered by the subject's consciousness that the unconscious aim of killing his father is causing him unpleasure. On the other hand, repression could be triggered by the subject being conscious only of a certain unpleasure without being aware that it emanates from a parricidal aim. If the former option is the case, it is necessary to concede the paradoxical notion that in order for repression to be triggered, the subject must to some extent remain conscious of

the material that needs to be repressed. The raison d'être of repression - to banish something from consciousness, would therefore be defeated. If the latter option is the case, it is difficult to see how the exercise of a counter-pressure to counteract this unpleasure could ever be effective. Like a government that seeks to curb a rebellion whilst ignorant of its cause, the conscious subject would have no means of tracing the source of the unpleasure. Whilst at this time Freud spoke of mechanical processes as the "consumation of psychoanalytic research", it is finally the case that he cannot conceive an effective mechanism of repression. Rigorously defined, such a mechanism would have to be independent of both any conscious recognition of the repressed, and of any conscious motive for repression. The requirement for consciousness to possess, in some capacity, a knowledge of what it is repressing is seen as early as the passage in the Studies on Hysteria where Freud introduces the term repression for the first time: "it was a question of things which the patient wished to forget, and therefore intentionally repressed from his conscious thought [...]" (SE2 10,our emphasis). We shall return to this problem in the course of examining Freud's third hypothesis of the mind.

### 6.3. THE ANTHROPOMORPHIC HYPOTHESIS

The dynamic hypothesis we have just examined concerns a conflict between different processes or functions of the mind. Yet, as Wolheim points out, Freud never suggested inner conflict "between conscious and unconscious ideas as such" (Wolheim,1971,

p.175,his emphasis). The conflict is chiefly explained in terms of the incompatibility that was explored in chapter three between an incompatible idea which is repressed, and an agency of defence which exerts repression. In the Studies on Hysteria and elsewhere in his earlier work, Freud's name for this agency is not the unconscious but the ego or "ego-consciousness" (SE2 291). But in spite of this overlap between ego and consciousness, Freud also, at this time, concedes a part of the ego to be unconscious. The ego is infiltrated by an "unconscious pathogenic nucleus"; an infiltration which makes it difficult to establish a rigid dividing line between the ego and an unconscious (SE2 290). Consequently, it can be argued that the term ego is used not so much as a designation for a precise agency or function of the psychic apparatus, as a designation for the "I" (Ich) or personality as a "whole"(!). This point is somewhat eclipsed during the period of the First World War when Freud on the one hand, allotted a narcissistic function to the ego, and on the other hand, defined the unconscious as a fundamental concept of psychoanalysis. Yet in "The Ego and the Id" (1923), the importance of the unconscious fades before the fact that it is now necessary to register the full significance of an unconscious ego


We have come upon something in the ego itself which is also unconscious, which behaves exactly like the repressed - that is, which produces powerful effects without itself being conscious and which requires special work before it can be made conscious. From the point of view of analytic practice, the consequence of this discovery is that we land in endless obscurities and difficulties if we keep to our habitual forms of expression and try, for instance, to derive neuroses from a conflict between the conscious and the unconscious. (SE19 17-18).

Here we arrive at Freud's third hypothesis of the mind which is usually referred to as his second topography. Unlike the rigid divisions of the first topography between the unconscious, the preconscious and consciousness, Freud now engages with domains of the mind which overlap each other. The reason for this demise of a rigid spatial localities emerges from Freud's clinical practice. The original aim of psychoanalysis was to make the unconscious conscious by encountering and overcoming the resistance to it on the part of consciousness. Yet in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920) and "Analysis Definite (Endliche) and Indefinite (Unendliche)" (1937), Freud takes a different view when he examines the consequences for clinical practice of the compulsion to repeat unpleasurable experiences. The unmistakeable evidence that the analysand is repeating such compulsions entails that he or she is resisting not the bringing to consciousness of something unconscious, but the very curative aim of psychoanalysis (SE23 239,242).(5)

This "negative therapeutic reaction", as well as masochism and guilt are now treated as the base elements of neurotic symptoms. In the light of this, the author of "The Ego and the Id" revises two previous assumptions. The first is that the ego serves consciousness insofar as it is an agency for defending consciousness against the return of repressed material. The second assumption is that the unconscious is identical with the repressed ideational representatives of pleasure seeking drives. What is revised in the first assumption is not that the

ego is a defensive agency, but rather that this agency acts exclusively on behalf of consciousness. For there is now a necessity for saying that at least a portion of the ego is a defensive agency acting on behalf of the unconscious. In the previous dynamic schema of the mind, the unconscious was a mechanism that exerted a continuous pressure which would, if unimpeded, force its way into consciousness. But now, in 1923, the emphasis is placed not on the resistance of consciousness to the return of repressed material, but on the resistance of the unconscious itself to being brought to the light of consciousness. The unconscious is resisting, and resistance is a defensive technique of the ego. So a portion of the ego must be unconscious. There is now a part of the ego "which produces powerful effects without itself being conscious and which requires special work before it can be made conscious" (SE19 17). The common denominator of the descriptive and dynamic concepts is the idea that the unconscious is comprised of repressed contents which have been denied access to consciousness. But for the reason stated above, Freud is now duty-bound to state that the unconscious portion of the ego does not coincide with the repressed. This ego portion of the unconscious presents a far greater obstacle to being made conscious than the repressed ever does (SE19 18). But if this is the case, why does Freud apparently contradict himself in the same passage by saying that this unconscious portion of the ego "behaves exactly like the repressed" (SE19 17)? Why should Freud first of all distinguish the unconscious and the repressed,

and then afterwards require the unconscious ego to become, if not identical to the repressed, then at least for all practical purposes as if it was the repressed?

We will be in a better position to answer this question after returning to the initial problem. This is that in contrast to Freud's earlier schema, it is no longer plausible to assume that the analysand can eventually be made consciously aware that he is resisting unconscious material evoked by his free associations. During the earlier years of Freud's practice, it could be assumed firstly, that whenever the analysand's free associations started to fail he was being dominated by a resistance, and secondly, that resistance was a sure sign that his recent associations were facilitating the emergence of repressed material. Even when the analysand consciously denied the dominance of a resistance, this was still a sure sign that he was consciously aware of there being something he did not want to know. But now it has transpired that even when  the analysand is told he is dominated by a resistance "he is still quite unaware of the fact, and, even if he guesses from his unpleasurable feelings that a resistance is now at work in him, he does not know what it is or how to describe it" (SE19 17). In short, Freud has shifted from defining the unconscious as a repressed knowledge which the conscious subject does not want to know, to defining the unconscious as a knowledge which the analysand could still not consciously know even if he was free of any resistance emanating from his conscious ego.

This, then, deepens our understanding of why the analysand should be dominated by a resistance on the part of the unconscious. It follows that the unconscious system must be divided into sub-systems. One part ( ) of the unconscious is now this recently discovered phenomenon of its being a resisting agency. The other part is the material which is resisted. But what exactly is the relation between these two sub-systems? If they are completely separate, the former portion would lack the information necessary to practice resistance. It would have nothing to resist. Conversely, if it is granted that information is available for one of these sub-systems to resist, then resistance could take place but it could not be resistance on the part of the unconscious. For the claim presupposes that this portion of the unconscious would have to be aware of the fact that material in another system needs to be resisted. This returns us to the problem touched upon at the end of the previous section. There, the problem was how one compartment or sub-compartment of the mind can repress something in another compartment without being aware of the contents of that compartment. Now the problem has been transferred onto the relation between the resisting and resisted sub-systems of an unconscious system.

It is useful here to turn to certain arguments which Sartre has put forward against the psychoanalytic concepts of resistance and repression in Being and Nothingness (Sartre, [1943], 1958,



pp.50-54). Sartre argues that the Freudian concepts of repression and resistance are vacuous or incoherent when viewed in their own terms. His basic question is how can one of the compartments of the mind discern that another compartment needs to be resisted or repressed without simultaneously being aware of the material which belongs to that compartment. For if one compartment of the mind represses another compartment that it does not want to know, then it is a surely a necessary condition of that repression that the repressed compartment is already known by the repressing compartment.

By this standard, Sartre argues, the Freudian division of the mind into different compartments of consciousness, preconsciousness and the unconscious is nothing but mere verbal terminology (Ibid., p.53). On the one hand, the relation between these compartments must be such that one of them can only be concealed from another compartment by virtue of being an entirely separate compartment. But this would mean that the two compartments would comprise a perfectly schizoid psyche. There would be two entirely separate selves and thus a vacuous solution to the initial problem of how part of a single psyche could conceal something from another part. If, on the other hand, these respective compartments that know and do not know the same material are condensed into one and the same compartment, then we arrive back at the incoherency stated in the previous paragraph. The reflexive idea of one compartment of the mind concealing something from another compartment implies the unity of one and

the same psyche.

According to Sartre, this problem is not at all mitigated by Freud's attempt to localise the respective resisted and resisting compartments in a preconscious censor (Ibid.,p.53). It is still the case that the censor must either (i) be entirely schizoid to the extent that it serves to conceal something from an entirely separate compartment; or (ii) be the unity that is entailed by one compartment having to know the content of another compartment. In neither case, then, does the Freudian notion of the censor vindicate a mind where compartments are disassociated or divided from each other.

We are now in a better position to appreciate the anomaly noted above that there is a portion of the unconscious which is repressing rather than repressed, but which nevertheless behaves "exactly like" the repressed. This is a desperate attempt on Freud's part to save the repressing agency from the fact that it must ultimately have an awareness of what it is repressing, that it must first of all have access to this material in order "to know" that it needs repressing. The unconscious ego is not part of the repressed contents. It is an agency for carrying out repression. Yet by claiming that the unconscious ego behaves not just like, but "exactly like" the repressed, Freud is conceding that it must have some intimate access to what it is repressing and keeping at a distance.

This conceptual muddle results less from a lack of rigour on Freud's part than from the intractable nature of the problem. The problem is to find a coherent and non-vacuous theory of the interaction of the separate compartments of the mind. Appearing in the first chapter of The Ego and the Id, this muddle can be read as one of the last residues of Freud's grappling with this problem before moving away from it by conceding in the same passage that

the characteristic of being unconscious begins to lose significance for us. It becomes a quality which can have many meanings, a quality which we are unable to make, as we should have hoped to do, the basis of far reaching and inevitable conclusions (SE17 18).

Freud moves away from the problem by introducing a new arrangement of the mind which is undeniably spatial, but which is nevertheless unlike the first topography where one system of the psychical apparatus is situated behind another. The new topography outlined in "The Ego and the Id" and in "The New Introductory Lectures" is compared to a modern painting where different areas overlap and are without rigorous boundaries (SE 22 79). The metaphor is apt for showing that the new schema of the mind does not take place within an overall unity. Freud's description of the new localities is no longer couched in the vocabulary of hydraulics and mechanisms, but in a vocabulary which is shot through with anthropomorphism. It is the language of ideals, self critical faculties and self-images which is registered in Freud's definition, for example, of the id as a reservoir of drives that are disorganised since they lack a will, of the ego as a representative of reason insofar as it is a

surface portion of the id that has contact with the outside world, and of the super ego as a portion of the ego which has both the value of an ideal will, and the task of judging and punishing the ego's failure to achieve this ideal (SE22 73; SE19 25; SE19 35-37). In short, Freud has moved from his recognition in the first topography of mutually exclusive locations - (the unconscious is not a secondary consciousness), to the functions and processes which emerge from each other and which act as homologous homunculi. Although, as stressed before, the overriding reason for this move was the clinical one of encountering a new form of resistance, it is important not to underestimate the degree to which the above conceptual and logical difficulties would have led Freud to change his ideas.

#### 6.4 LACAN'S TOPOLOGY OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

Does the above argument demand a wholesale rejection of the very principle of the unconscious, or should its claim be confined to the impossibility of localising the unconscious in a compartment of the mind? That Freud's imagery of ante-rooms and frontiers between systems of the mind is as abhorrent to Lacan as it is to Ryle is seen when the former takes the latter of these two options: "The unconscious (L'Inconscient) is not a case defining in psychical reality the circle of that which does not have the attribute (or virtue) of consciousness" (E 830 Lacan's emphasis). This formulation comprising two negatives underscores the positive claim that the unconscious nevertheless "is". But how is this "is" to be formulated?

In replacing a definition of the unconscious as content or an entity, with a definition of its being structured as or like (comme) a language, Lacan has shown that the unconscious is a metaphysical name for the effects of the signifying structures that comprise an order of discourse which he calls the Other. The unconscious is "the discourse of the Other" (E265,549,814 e55,193,312). There are two ways of defining this discourse as a condition of the unconscious. Firstly, this discourse of the Other is a symbolic network of structures which are both prior to and formative of the subject's existence. "Before strictly human relations are established", Lacan states, "certain relations have already been determined" (S11 23 FF 20). This is the axiom for which Lacan is indebted to Lévi-Strauss, and which allows him during the early 1950's to conceive the Freudian unconscious as co-extensive with "the most radical agencies of symbolisation in being" (E275 e 64). The order of preferences which govern matrimonial alliance, and the ancestral father who governs kinship nominations are the prime examples of symbols which "envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together, before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him by "flesh and blood" ("par l'os et par la chair") ; so that they bring to his birth [...] the shape of his destiny [...] (E279 e68). These networks of symbols are unconscious insofar as the subject is inserted into them even before he is born. The family relationships that structure the alliance of the analysand's parents and grand-parents form a

prehistory which shapes a destiny to which the analysand, like Oedipus, may be ignorant.(6) Here, then, the unconscious is no longer a problem of a mind which in order to deceive itself must already know what it feigns not to know. The unconscious is rather conceived in transcendental terms as the subject's insertion into a structure which is outside him to the extent it exists independently of any conscious choice or decision.

The second way of defining the unconscious as a discourse of the Other is to note that since it is an order of discourse, it does not refer directly to reality, but to an order of relations between signifiers and other signifiers within which the human subject is a process of suture between signifiers. Here, it is necessary to recall part of the argument given in chapters one and three. Although, as is exemplified in Lacan's reading of the Fort-Da game, Lacan makes use of a structuralist combinatorial structure, he is nevertheless not offering a theory of the meaning or cause of natural language. The unconscious is structured as or like a language not because it is identical to linguistic structures, but rather because the unconscious is part of a wider problem of the effects of the subjection of the human subject to language. Instead of integrating the unconscious into language, Lacan conceives the unconscious as an effect of the human subject existing in opposition to language: "Once the structure of language has been recognized in the unconscious" Lacan asks in 1960, "what kind of a subject can we conceive for it?" (E800 e298). The opposition in which the signifier can

only represent the subject for another signifier, in which the subject lacks a sufficient representation by any single signifier, requires a binary structure. Yet it also shows that the human subject is produced as a process of gap, of falling between signifiers. It is this gap which leads Lacan to define the Fort-Da game as a 'ditch' around which one can only play at jumping" (S11 60 FF62). In more than one period of his teaching, Lacan asserts that the unconscious is this gap opened by signifiers (E628 e264; S11 27 FF25).

For these reasons, we can concur with Heath's point: "To say that the unconscious is structured as a language is not, for Lacan, to say that <sup>it</sup> is simply 'linguistic'" (Heath, 1977, p.51). Thus it will not suffice to say that it is by theorising the unconscious as a formalised law of language that Lacan salvages this concept from the insoluble difficulties of Freud's descriptive, mechanical notions of the mind. Rather than asking for how Lacan ultimately theorises the unconscious, there is more to be gained from asking why, from the early 1960's, Lacan turns to a topology of the unconscious

The place in question is the entrance to the cave in regard to which Plato, as we know, guides us towards the exit, while one imagines seeing the psychoanalyst enter there. But things are less easy, because it is an entrance at which one only ever arrives at closing time (so this place will never be very good for tourists) and because the sole way to have it open a little is to call from within. All of which is not insoluble, if the "open sesame" of the unconscious is its having effect of speech, its being structure of language, but demands of the analyst that he or she come back on the mode of its closure. Gaping, flickering, an alternating suction...that is what we have to give account of, which is what we have understood by founding it in a topology. The structure of that which

closes is inscribed in a geometry wherein space is reduced to a combining: strictly, it is what is called an edge (E838).

Unlike Freud's topographical hypotheses, this topology implies that the unconscious is finally not so much a position, place or function as an edge between the subject and the Other. The emphasis is no longer placed on the unconscious as co-extensive with structures that arguably have a similar transcendental status to those found in Lévi-Strauss' work. Once the emphasis is placed on the opening and closing of a gap in language, the question of formulating the unconscious goes well beyond the etymology of theory in a theoria of contemplation, speculation or sight. Gaping, flickering, opening and closing, the gap of the unconscious has to be described as a topology which is not rigidly fixed since it implies movement. In what follows, we shall attempt to configure this topology by demonstrating firstly, the status of the unconscious as this gap; and secondly, the edge between the Symbolic and the Real which is derived from this gap. Lacan has shown that this gap and this edge are locked in the words of Freud to which we must therefore still return by examining the commedia dell'arte in which the latter pointed (deuten) towards trauma.

#### 6.5. DIE TRAUMDEUTUNG - ("THE INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS")

As well as the above descriptive, mechanical and anthropomorphic hypotheses of the mind, Freud formulates another hypothesis which turns on the difference between two types of presentation (Vorstellung) - between an (essentially visual)



type of presentation which is derived from things, and an (essentially auditory) one derived from words. Although this distinction has its origin in Freud's monograph on aphasia of 1891, and is also found in the Fliess correspondence and in the "Project", in chapter seven of "The Interpretation of Dreams", and in the 1911 paper on "The Two Principles of Mental Functioning", it is only in the last section of "The Unconscious" that Freud elevates it into a criterion for distinguishing between conscious and unconscious states of mind

We now seem to know all at once what the difference is between a conscious and unconscious presentation. The two are not, as we supposed, different psychical localities, nor yet different functional states of investment (Besetzung) in the same locality; but the conscious presentation comprises the presentation of the thing plus the presentation of the word belonging to it, while the unconscious presentation is the presentation of the thing alone (SE14 201).

The essential thesis here is that a conscious idea requires a dual presentation of its object whilst an unconscious idea does not. The latter is without links to a corresponding word presentation.

The somewhat dubious reasons Freud gives for making this distinction should be separated from its important ramifications. A word, Freud claims in his early monograph on aphasia, is associated with, and heavily saturated by images which are of visual, acoustic and kinaesthetic origin (SE14 213-15). Whilst a word presentation consists of these associations, it only acquires its "meaning" by being linked to a thing presentation which is also made up of a variety of visual, acoustic, and other

associations. It is, however, between the acoustic image of word presentations and the visual association of a thing presentation that a link between word and thing presentations is chiefly forged. As well as apparently making the supposition criticised in the previous chapter that one somehow perceives an image in the mind, it also seems that Freud is advancing a dubious thesis of empirical nominalism. The "meaning" of a word presentation is determined by its link to the empirical particulars, to the "sense data" of a thing presentation. Moreover, in defining an unconscious mental state as comprised only of a thing presentation which is not linked to a word presentation, Freud would superficially seem to be advocating the antithesis of Lacan's thesis that the unconscious is structured as or like a language. Unlike a conscious presentation, an unconscious one is pre-verbal. Although an unconscious presentation can be joined to a word presentation, it then becomes by that fact alone a conscious presentation. But the essential thesis that a unconscious presentation is not tied to any single word presentation cannot be dismissed. It is the basis of the process of the disfiguration (Enstellung) which Freud described as the overall effect of the dreamwork, that is, of the processes by which latent thoughts of a dream are transformed into the manifest content which is reported after waking.

The dreamwork can be described as a disfiguration since the connection between these latent and manifest aspects is not

easily recognisable. The latent thoughts have been transposed into another register, and only an effort of interpretation can reconstitute them. This disfiguration of a dream is the result of thing presentations having managed to re-enter consciousness by joining themselves onto word presentations with which they are apparently unconnected. Since an (essentially visual) unconscious presentation is without an intrinsic link to an (essentially acoustic) word presentation, it follows that a necessary condition of an conscious idea being repressed into the unconscious is that its attachment to a word presentation is relinquished. A necessary condition of this idea re-entering conscious is that it is transferred onto certain other word presentations. These processes of transference include the operations of condensation and displacement which Lacan likens to the respective processes of metaphor and metonymy.

For our purposes, these points are important because they provide a hypothesis of the mind which to some extent avoids the difficulties of the descriptive and mechanical hypotheses. When asked in the context of interpreting dreams, the question "How does something unconscious become conscious or vice versa?" is to be answered in terms of a theory of neither places nor pressures but of translation

The dream thoughts and the dream content are presented to us like two versions of the same subject matter in two different languages. Or, more properly, the dream content seems like a transcript (Übertragung) of the dream thoughts into another mode of expression (Ausdrucksweise), whose characters and syntactic laws it is our business to discover by comparing the original and the translation (Übersetzung) (GW2-3 283 SE4 277).

The phrase "into another mode of expression" entails that the word "translation" should not be read lightly here. Freud does not use the word "translation" to designate the undertaking which is found in a traveller's phrase book. For two reasons, translation of a dream is not a matter of plotting isomorphic points of correspondence between two languages. Firstly, as Dalia Judowitz points out, Freud's notion of latent dream thoughts revolutionizes dream interpretation since unlike previous symbolic and allegorical interpretations of dreams, the process of "translation" entails that the meaning of the dream is no longer a referent exterior to the dream (Judowitz, 1979, p.30). It is not as though the latent thoughts and manifest content are mere vehicles for expressing a more profound reality which transcends these vehicles. For Freud, the work of translating the meaning of a dream is ultimately that of transcribing a certain space; a space that exists between two languages

It has long been the habit to regard dreams as identical with their manifest content; but we must now be equally aware of the mistake of confusing dreams with latent dream thoughts (SE5 579, fn.1).

In short, the essence of the dream is neither the manifest content nor the latent thoughts but the relation between them which is established by translation.

The second reason why the translation of a dream is not equivalent to the type of translation that is found in a traveller's phrase book is that the former is not accomplished in a single sudden act. To show that the work of translating the

dream's manifest content into the latent thoughts is piecemeal, that it is element by element that the former is traced into the latter, Freud compares the manifest content to a pictographic script or written picture (Bilderschrift) (SE4 277). This written picture vindicates the above point that as a conscious presentation, the manifest content links an essentially visual nature of a thing presentation to an essentially aural nature of a word presentation. Interpretation is the work of tracing each separate element of this picture back to the word presentation from which it became disconnected due to repression. Thus it is not the task of dream interpretation to trace the manifest content to a set of latent thoughts which consist only of visual thing presentations and which are therefore a pure unconscious. The meaning of the pictograph is not pictorial: it must in a piecemeal fashion be "written out" in words.

However, since it traverses a space between the manifest and latent contents of a dream, the process of dream interpretation can still be said to traverse a space that interests Lacan: the space of a gap in language. Consider, firstly, how Freud links his characterisation of the dreamwork as a disfiguration with his well known thesis that a particular type of motive and purpose can be assigned to a dream: "a dream is a (disfigured) fulfillment of a (suppressed or repressed) wish" (SE4 160). For the author of Die Traumdeutung, dream interpretation points (deuten) at a fulfilled wish (Wunsch). The dream is a privileged sphere of activity where a gap between a wish and its

satisfaction does not yet manifest itself. In other words, Freud subsumes the dream wish under the pleasure principle. His reasoning is thus: "Since a dream shows that a wish fulfilled is believed during sleep, it does away with the wish and makes sleep possible" (SE5 678, his emphasis). In fulfilling a wish, the latent dream thoughts do not challenge or in any way disturb sleep. On the contrary, they support and guard this physiological action which preserves the body.

How, then, can Lacan possibly re-orientate Freud's notion of the dream as closing a rift between a wish and its satisfaction around his own claim that a dream is a formation of unconscious desire, a desire that is opened up as an effect of signifiers? (E628 e264). We have argued in chapter three that desire, for Lacan, cannot be conjoured away by supplying the object that would fulfill it. Desire is intransitive. It seems that Lacan is propounding the sort of rift which, for Freud, the dream must foreclude so as to guard sleep. To Lacan's francophone ears, the vocables "Wunsch" and "wish" are not sounds of satisfaction, but of a damp squib exploding in its suggestion of concupiscence (E620 e257).

This piscine reference is apposite since Lacan argues that desire can be heard in Freud's interpretation of a dream which configures two most delicate types of fish. A patient who was aware of Freud's thesis of wish fulfillment had told him of her manifest dream that ostensibly undermined this thesis. She had

dreamt of a wish that was not fulfilled (SE4 146-51). In the dream, her manifest wish to give a supper party that evening had been frustrated because she only had a little smoked salmon in the house, and all the shops were shut on that Sabbath day. What interests Lacan is the way Freud maintains his thesis of wish fulfillment by interpreting this manifestly unfulfilled wish as the fulfillment of a latent wish for an unfulfilled wish. In other words, this dream does not necessarily undermine the thesis of wish fulfillment since (i) that thesis concerns the dream's latent rather than manifest content; and (ii) the latent wish can consist of a wish for an unfulfilled wish. It is these two points which on the one hand, exempt Lacan from explicitly having to reject Freud's thesis of wish fulfillment, and which on the other hand, allow him to equate this fulfilled wish for an unfulfilled wish with the rift he calls desire.

The full details of Freud's interpretation of this dream need not concern us here. It is only necessary to note that Lacan's argument takes its plausibility from the fact that Freud eventually interprets this dream as having the structure of hysterical identification that was examined in chapter four (SE4 149-50). Whereas Freud initially supposed that it was the analysand herself who was unable to give a supper party, it is also ventured by him that this person was rather the analysand's thin female friend. In the dream, the analysand had put herself in the place of this friend who wished, in the analysand's opinion, to gain sufficient weight to attract the

analysand's husband. In dreaming of a frustrated wish to give a supper party, the analysand was thereby fulfilling her wish to identify with her friend's unsatisfied wish rather than, as in the previous interpretation, jealously preventing her friend from having access to such gratification. In Lacan's opinion, this means it is insufficient to explain this dream as fulfilling a wish. The analysand was identifying not only with what her friend wanted, but also with the unsatisfied nature of her friend's wish. She has the key to what her friend wants - her own husband, and yet she rejects her husband's offer of "caviar" precisely in order to share her friend's unaccomplished gratification. According to Freud, "my patient put herself in her friend's place in the dream because her friend was taking my patient's place in her husband's high opinion" (SE4 150-51). The intriguing aspect of this scenario is that whilst the patient identified with her friend because this friend seemed to have what her husband wanted, the patient nevertheless knew that it was precisely because her friend was thin that she lacked what her husband wanted. The patient identified with what was lacking in her friend. This scenario supports the arguments given in chapter four that neurosis has the structure of a question, that the question of the hysteric in particular is "What does the Other want?", and that the hysteric's strategy for answering this question is to identify with what the Other lacks (pp. 151, 161). The thinness of her friend became the flaw or lack in the Other that the hysteric searches for, and with which she identifies herself.



Lacan interprets this dream as demonstrating a gap in language.

The dream is a formation of the unconscious as a desire which is opened up by a gap that operates in the subject's identification with signifiers (E620 e264). Starting from Freud's argument that this dream can be understood as a wish for an unfulfilled wish, Lacan equates such a wish with the rift in language which he calls desire.

#### 6.6. THE DREAM OF THE BURNING CHILD AND THE IMMANENCE OF THE REAL IN THE OBJECT VOICE

In the series of seminars entitled "The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis" which Lacan gave some six years after the 1958 paper in which he mentions the above dream, he continued to consider the Freudian unconscious as a gap-like structure of discourse. "Discontinuity" Lacan claims, "is the essential form in which the unconscious first appears to us as a phenomenon - discontinuity, in which something is manifested as a vacillation" (S11 28 FF25). Yet this statement betrays an important shift in Lacan's thinking. The word "vacillation" implies that Lacan is no longer concerned only with the existence of a gap, but also with its opening and closing movement which was mentioned in the third section of this chapter. Lacan now emphasises "the pulsative function, as it were, of the unconscious, the necessity of disappearing (évanouissement) that seems to be in some way inherent in it" (S11 44 FF 43). The unconscious is

now conceived temporally as opening itself onto signification in one moment, and then closing itself off from signification in the next. We shall argue that here, Lacan is defining the unconscious as a topology of an edge between the Symbolic and the Real. The concept of the unconscious now oscillates between the two definitions of a net which were mentioned in the general introduction. The unconscious is both the meshed instrument of metaphoric and metonymic relations between signifiers, and the holes in this net that are resistant to signification. To justify this definition of the unconscious, we shall examine the phenomenon of a "waking dream". We shall approach such a dream as an edge between the Symbolic which sends us to sleep and the trauma of the unassimilable Real which wakes us.

"Waking" is an Irish word without any etymological tie to the word "dream" with which it is genitively linked in the phrase "waking dream". In contrast, a rêve de réveil places the dream and the waking along a single associative word chain. Lacan turns their association on a single instant of time which prevents their association being a coincidence. (§11 53-62 FF53-64). We shall see that this association is rather a "missed encounter" between sleeping and waking.

Lacan's first example of this missed encounter is drawn from his own experience of having heard a noise whilst sleeping lightly in his office (§11 55-56 FF56-57). The noise produced a latent dream thought which may well have concerned

something other than this knocking. But when he awoke, his report of the manifest content of the dream was assembled around the knocking. According to this manifest dream, it was the knocking which caused his awakening.

Four factors should be noted here. Firstly, a perception of a noise, perfectly audible in waking life, had caused a sleeper to dream rather than to wake from sleep. Secondly, it follows that the reason for his waking must be sought not in waking life but in his dream of which only the manifest content is known; namely, that he was woken by the invocatory sound of a knocking. Thirdly, if it was from within the dream that he heard this call, if the knocking allowed him to "know" (connaître) in his manifest dream that he had to wake from sleep, then this manifest dream must also have consisted of a knowledge (connaissance) that he was asleep, or even that he was dreaming. (Freud himself was obliged to admit that "throughout our whole sleeping state we know just as certainly that we are dreaming as we know that we are sleeping") (SE5 571). Fourthly, in spite of the content of this knowledge, it is nevertheless still a knowledge that was dreamt. Blanchot is right to say, perhaps in response to Freud's remark, that although someone may think he knows he is dreaming, he nevertheless still only dreams this (Blanchot, [1955], 1982, p.3). To the person who was knocking, it would have seemed that Lacan was either not there at all, or else that he was sleeping away from an appointment which he had possibly made with the caller.

In this example of a waking dream, there is nothing particularly surprising about a sound stimulating a dream.(?) What is curious is that his dream cannot be placed under the sway of either of the two principles which were initially maintained by Freud as dominating mental life. On the one hand, we have seen that Freud places dreams under the pleasure principle. By virtue of fulfilling a wish, the dream prevents any rift between a wish and its satisfaction which might disturb the citadel of sleep. But this function of fulfilling a wish cannot apply to the above dream since it fulfilled a wish (to go on dreaming) which eventually terminated sleep. On the other hand, this dream cannot be subsumed under the reality principle. To be sure, the manifest dream of the knocking, of an exigency or demand that regularly occurs in everyday life, seems to confirm that there is an outside authority of reality bearing down upon the dream. But why, in this case, did Lacan not immediately emerge from his sleep to meet this call from reality of which the dream informed him? Instead of abandoning his sleep so as to respond directly to the knocking, the sleeper's state was prolonged with a momentary dream. His chances of meeting this call from the reality principle were thereby reduced by this length of time.

In this waking dream, the relation between sleeping and waking does not, then, correspond to the idea that through fulfilling a wish, a dream functions to safeguard sleep. On the one hand, the wish which is fulfilled does not have an arbitrary

or external relation to the function it serves of ensuring sleep. Wish fulfillment is now more than a function of sleep since sleep is now also the content of the wish. On the other hand, this wish to sleep is fulfilled only insofar as a dream occurs which opens up an exigency of waking life which causes the sleeper to wake. This is partly why Lacan can speak of an opening and closing movement of the unconscious. A dream, ie., a particular unconscious formation which requires the suspension of waking life, had opened onto an exigency of waking life to which the sleeper was only able to respond by waking one moment later. But a moment later in a time of urgency can be a moment too late. The knocking, the invocation from waking life, had probably ceased and the caller could have departed. The possibility of meeting this exigency of which his unconscious had informed him had probably vanished. The dream was an unconscious formation which was, in effect, a missed encounter.

The next stage of Lacan's argument is to infer this same formulation of the unconscious from the dream Freud places at the head of the last chapter of "The Interpretation of Dreams" (SE5 509-10). This dream, the source of which is unknown, was told to Freud by one of his analysands who had heard it herself in a lecture on dreams. She had repeated some of its elements in a dream of her own in order to express agreement with it in one particular respect of which the reader is never told.

The preliminaries of this dream concern a father who had

continually watched his sick son's bed for several nights and days. When the child died, the father went to sleep in a nearby room but left the door open so that from his bed he could see the room in which his child's body lay encircled by candles.

Meanwhile, he had employed an old man to watch and pray for this dead body. After a few hours the father dreamt that

das Kind an seinem Bette steht, ihn am Arme  
fasst und ihm vorwurfsvoll zuraunt: "Vater, siehst  
du denn nicht, dass Ich verbrenne? (GW2-3 513).

his child was standing beside his bed, caught  
him by the arm and whispered to him reproachfully:  
"Father, can't you see I'm burning? (SE5 509).

On waking from the dream the father observed that part of his son's body had indeed been burned. The old watchman had fallen asleep and meanwhile a candle had fallen onto the arm and wrappings of his child's dead body.

This manifest dream has the same structure as the waking dream mentioned above: it is a missed encounter between sleeping and waking. Like the sound of the knocking, a glare of light perfectly perceptible in waking life had caused the sleeper to form a dream. Furthermore, again like the sound of the knocking, the glare of light from the fallen candle demanded an immediate attention, a demand that would have to be met with the most rapid awakening. But in spite of this, the demand had led the sleeper to form a dream from which he awoke just one moment too late to intervene effectively in the reality of which he was dreaming. As a consequence of responding to the glare of light by dreaming rather than waking immediately, the father awoke to find that one

of the child's arms was already burnt by the flames of the fallen candle.

Freud interprets this dream as fulfilling the father's wish that his dead child behave like a living one (SE5 510). The perception of the glare of the fallen candle had told the sleeper that waking would, as it were, open a rift between his wish and its satisfaction. To have woken as soon as he perceived the light would have shortened his child's life by that length of time. He dreamed precisely in order to fulfill the wish to revive the reproach which his son had once advanced against him.

For Lacan, this dream is not reducible to a function of the pleasure principle, to the fulfillment of a wish that allows the sleeper to continue sleeping (S11 57-58 FF58-60). The father's dream fulfills his wish to encounter his son, but this fulfillment hardly guards sleep as a haven where there is no rift between a wish and its satisfaction that could wake the dreamer. The fulfillment takes the form of a son's whisper which induces not sleep but the shock that wakes the father. The father is woken by the realisation that he cannot see his son who is engulfed by the flames. The dream is a traumatic realisation that he is too late to do something in the waking reality in which he could have done something if he had not been sleeping away from this reality. Far from ensuring sleep, the fulfillment of the dreamer's wish to sleep is the traumatic measure of his having missed the opportunity to save an already biologically

dead from a second avoidable form of ritualistic death by burning. For Lacan, what is nodal in the dream is a missed encounter between the reality principle and the pleasure principle. As soon as the wish was fulfilled, it brought not pleasure but shock, and yet in spite of this shock the father was still too late to respond to the exigency of rescuing his son from the cruel reality of the reality principle.

The reality of the flames in waking life which the father perceived and around which he formed a dream, and the reality of the invocatory whisper in the dream which woke the father are therefore radically different. As a domain of a Symbolic reality, the unconscious had seized upon a perception of a fallen candle and thereby produced new signification that formed a dream. But this dream was located around a whisper that was sufficiently traumatic to cause the father to wake. In our discussion of phantasy, we noted that Lacan defines a trauma as a presentation of reality in the form of that which is unassimilable in it: the Real (§11 55 FF55). The Real is immanent in the invocatory whisper "Father, can't you see...?" What is whispered is a rhetorical question concerning what cannot be visually represented. The Real is on the other side of a limit of representation. The trauma which wakes the father is not simply that this child is burning, but the fact that his child is telling him that he is blind to what is burning on the other side of the other flames. To be sure, the report of the dream yields a disturbing vision of a burning son taking his father by the



arm. But as Lacan points out, this vision designates a "beyond" that can only make itself heard in the dream (§11 58 FF59). Since the flames mark a threshold which the father cannot cross except by forfeiting his own life, the invocatory whisper "can't you see" ridicules the possibility of a father encountering his son in the Real. His son is in a domain which is on the other side of a limit or edge of signification.

We have already seen that Lacan defines object a in terms of a signifying chain circumventing a topological space that it cannot incorporate into its own differential structure. Another variant of this object, the "object voice" (l'objet voix) can now be introduced. The invocatory whisper which is the basis of the above dream deserves the appellation "object voice" by virtue of being not a part of a signifying chain, but a sound that is heard coming from within a space which the father cannot enter and from which he must remain detached. As with Lacan's object gaze, this object voice must be situated in the context of Lacan's notion of the lamella. This notion, it will be recalled, is the means by which Lacan describes in mythical terms a part of the subject's body which is on the side of the sexed living being (l'ê<sup>^</sup>tre vivant sexué), a part which becomes detached from the subject at the time he or she is inscribed with the mortifying, devitalising effects of the Symbolic.

Before returning to the dream of the burning child, let us pause to consider what evidence can be amassed to support this

idea of a detachment of phonic phenomena from signifiers. Central to Lacan's thinking is the idea that a cry or the first inarticulate sounds of an infant can be thought of as the first manifestation of a drive structure. This statement could be taken to mean only that a cry functions as a first vehicle for subjecting the subject to a signifying chain. Yet we have already noted elsewhere that Lacan defines a drive as a signifying chain which can only, as he puts it, fait le tour, ie., be tricked into turning around empty space - a space which defines the object of the drive as object a (S11 153,163 FF168,179). Lacan's analysis of the Fort-Da game as a "ditch" shows how an invocatory drive (as opposed to an instinct which is defined by reference to a satisfying object of need), is characterised by an excess which can be thought of as object a (S11 60,216 FF62,239; Safouan,[1979],1983,p.77). The cry or first inarticulate sounds are not merely an inscription of the subject in the differential relations of the Symbolic Other, but also the casting of a remainder or loss which cannot be taken by the combinatory structure of the Other. In this way, a cry can be formulated as a variant of the object a. As an object voice, the cry is a topological correspondence between a resonance of "loss" or lack in the Other, and a sound that has passed through an orifice of the body to become detached from the body.

As well as being exemplified by the difficulty experienced, for non-physiological reasons, in recognising one's voice on a

tape recorder, this detachment is assumed in various places in the theory and practice of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. In the letter to Fliess of 6 December 1896, Freud describes a certain cry - the hysteric's fits of weeping, as aimed at a Nebensmensch who is mostly "the prehistoric, unforgettable other person who is never equalled by anyone later" (SE1 239). Moreover, the practice known as "primal scream therapy" is, in the last instance, a phantasy of returning to a mythical point that occurs before the loss that accompanies the subject's inscription in the Other. It should also be noted that detachment from a voice figures in Winnicott's formulation of transitional phenomena, ie., of an intermediate space between what he calls the subjective and that which is objectively perceived. Winnicott defines not only the sucked handkerchief as enhancing the child's capacity to recognise the object as "not-me", but also blathering sounds made by the child before articulate speech (Winnicott, 1953, p.90).

Yet, it is in "The Ego and the Id" that Freud comes closest to formulating human sounds as separated from an ordering of reality in which the subject is inscribed. Here, Freud refers to his theme in "The Unconscious" paper that the hall-mark of conscious and preconscious mental states is attachment to word presentations (SE19 20). Such word presentations are defined as residues of memories of words that have, above all else, been heard (SE19 21). This auditory perception is later defined tentatively as as a source of both the ego and the super-ego: "it

is as impossible for the super-ego as for the ego to disclaim its origin from things heard" (SE19 52). But we also learn that it is wrong to think that these sounds are perspicuous perceptions of the external world which pass via the perception-consciousness system (SE19 21,52-3). Word presentations are rather auditory memories of "internal perceptions" which Freud traces to the unknown and uncontrollable forces which are impersonal, which the human subject does not originate and which Groddeck called das Es (the id) (SE19 52). In short, there is an undeveloped theory in Freud of how the super-ego and ego are partly formed by means of auditory perceptions which are not themselves necessary for the functioning of a system which inscribes the subject in an ordering of reality. Certain auditory residues are detached from the perception-consciousness system.

How, then, can the invocatory whisper of the burning child also be conceived as sounds separated from the means by which the subject is inscribed in reality? What enables us to hear the immanence of the Real rather than the Symbolic reality of the signifying chain in this whisper? We have mentioned in chapter three that although the object a is a lack of signification, the signification of this lack coalesces with phallic signifiers of a lack (S11 95-96 FF103-04). The analytic act of separation aims to separate these two lacks. The traumatic aspect of the dream which wakes the father is arguably the occurrence of such a separation. The dream wakes the father precisely because it is formed out of a voice that is evacuated from phallic signification.

What is traumatic about this reproachful whisper is that it is heard as seeking revenge against the Symbolic mythical Father who organises the signifying structures which Freud identifies in the myths of Totem and Taboo and Oedipus. As Lacan asks, what is the son burning with, "if not with [...], the weight of the sins of the father borne by the ghost in the myth of Hamlet which Freud couples with the Oedipus?" (S11 35 FF34). Whilst the phallic function is placed on the side of the mortality and mortification which characterise the signifying structures of the Symbolic -(recall the anamorphic skull), the whisper is on the side of life, of the sexed living being which is the Real.

The whisper wakes the father because it is a momentary apprehension that by virtue of being a Symbolic Father, of assuming a prohibitive function that defines a Father in the Totem and Taboo myth, he had imposed on his son a form of castration. What wakes the father is the horror of realising that during his son's life, he had been endlessly sleeping away from the castration, from the form of symbolic death he had inflicted on his son. The dream is, as Lacan puts it, a ritual or homage to the Real of the sexed being as a missed reality - "the reality that can no longer produce itself except by repeating itself indefinitely in some never attained awakening" (S11 57 FF58). To have definitely woken to the Real in waking life, as opposed to momentarily waking to it in the dream, the father would have had to wake to the horror that a living agent exempt from its mortification by the Symbolic is one which is of

no possible world. It is this impossibility which Lacan defines as the Real.

What is implied here, then, is that in waking life one never fully wakes to full function of the Symbolic Father. "(N)o one" Lacan declares, "can say what the death of a child is, except the father qua father, that is, no conscious being" (§11 58 FF55). Total waking would be the shock of symbolic castration, the shock which though only glimpsed in this dream, is sufficient to wake the father.

It is no mere coincidence that traumatic waking dreams are the first type of dreams which Freud eventually, in 1920, concedes do not comply with the pleasure principle of fulfilling a wish that guards sleep (SE18 32). Positioned at the head of the last chapter of Die Traumdeutung, the father's traumatic dream of the burning child can be considered as indeed pointing (deuten) towards a trauma which is beyond the homeostatic principle of pleasure. Although this dream does not lead Freud to renounce the thesis of wish fulfillment, it is immediately after his discussion of it that he renounces his earlier optimistic ambition of providing a definitive key to dream interpretation (SE5 510-11). A deeper penetration of the mental processes involved in dreaming will end in darkness since there have emerged wider problems for which there is not yet a readily available solution. Whilst the wider problem explicitly emerges some twenty years later as what is beyond the pleasure

principle, the dream of the burning child can be argued to be a premonition of that "beyond" which Lacan calls the Real.

Let us not forget that in the account of the above dream, there is placed between father and son a watchman who is hired so that the father can have some respite from his son's death by sleeping. The watchman allows the father to perform the inhibitory physiological action of sleep that preserves life and which corresponds to the pleasure principle. Yet the watchman's faltering vigilance may be considered as a metaphor for the failure of the pleasure principle. The dream of the burning child that wakes the father is prompted by a light from a candle that falls as a direct consequence of the watchman dozing off into obliviousness of his charge. Such a structure is prognostic of Freud's 1924 paper "The Economic Problem of Masochism": the anaesthetisation of a watchman or guardian serves as a metaphor for the suspension or paralysis of the pleasure principle. (SE19 159).

#### CONCLUSION

By tracing the unconscious through the various stages of its elaboration by Freud, we were able to show that Lacan re-works those elaborations by defining the unconscious first as a gap, and then as a topology of a limit or edge that can only be circumscribed as a traumatically missed encounter between the Symbolic that sends us to sleep, and the Real which wakes us.

This limit does not divide a noumenon from a phenomenon since it is without a transcendental and originating viewpoint of a subject to which the division between a knowable world and things in themselves is relative. Instead of theorising the unconscious as a position, as a locality that must be stated in terms of logical inclusion between an individual and a class, between a container of ideas and the containment of this container in an overall psyche, Lacan develops a topology of the unconscious. Here, space is not - pace - Kant a single and indivisible ether in which things are suspended, but a non-Euclidean space of envelopment and interval.

#### FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

- (1) Strachey notes that the adjectival form (unbewusst) had been used a few years earlier by Freud in an unpublished draft of 1892 (SE2 45).
- (2) See Laplanche and Pontalis, (LP132).
- (3) This apparatus was manufactured in Britain under the name "Printator". Derrida's paper "Freud and the Scene of Writing" remains the most interesting discussion of Freud's paper "A Note on the Mystic Writing Pad" (Derrida, [1966], 1982).
- (4) As Freud puts it: "When a psychical act [...] is transposed from the system "Unconscious" into the system "Consciousness" (or "Preconscious"), are we to suppose that this transposition involves a fresh record - as it were, a second registration of the idea in question, which may thus be situated as well in a fresh psychical locality, and alongside of which the original unconscious registration continues to exist? Or are we rather to believe that the transposition consists in a change in the state of the idea, a change involving the same material and occurring in the same locality? (SE14 174).
- (5) "No stronger impression arises from the resistances during the work of analysis than of there being a force which is defending itself by every possible means against recovery and which is absolutely resolved to hold onto illness and



suffering" (SE23 242).

- (6) Lacan gives the example of the formative effects upon the Rat Man of having parents who occupied very different stations in the hierarchy of the bourgeoisie (NRE 411-12). The prestige which is on the mother's side is reproduced in the Rat Man's life as his father's injunction that he should marry a rich woman. The Rat Man is thereby bound to a symbolic value. But he does not recognise it as such. When reporting it to Freud he can only say "I'm telling you something that certainly has no connection to all that has happened to me" In other words, the binding is largely an unconscious one.
- (7) This second interpretation is itself evidence that the manifest dream radically condenses several possible meanings.
- (8) In "The Interpretation of Dreams", Freud devotes several pages to discussing contemporary literature on external, somatic, psychical and other sources of dream stimuli (SE4 22-42).

### GENERAL CONCLUSION

Let us briefly summarise the arguments we have advanced in the course of this study.

In part one we questioned an assumption that Lacan's teaching can be reduced to an attempt to incorporate Freud's work within a theory of structural linguistics. We also examined the way in which French intellectual culture has influenced Lacan's thought. This enabled us to place his teaching in the context of the doubt which psychoanalysis exhibits towards a centring or grounding of human agency in norms of reality which are immediately accessible to consciousness. The experience of the Umheimliche (uncanny) demonstrated the existence of a void which continental philosophy attempts to hear as a void and not as a temporary fault which can be corrected.

In part two, we elaborated this void in terms of a sutured relation of the human subject to the structure of the signifying chain. This sutured relation was presented as one where the subject emerges as a division and not as one pole of a division. It was noted that the subject's search to fill a void left by this division is conducted according to a phantasmic logic. In the face of a mortifying disappearance from the signifying chain the subject entrusts his or her presence to a separated part of him - or herself that Lacan calls object a. This object was firstly presented as a limit to a set of differential relations between signifiers that comprise a signifying structure. Object a is a limit

in the sense that it is "stuck in the gullet of the signifier". This object was also presented as an impossibility that can be thought of as an extension of Lacan's realm of the Real. Although a part of a realm of impossibility, object a is not the contrary of the possible. For it is causally effective within a signifying structure. Freud's analysis of a child-beating phantasy was used to demonstrate this point. What is at stake, we argued, is an impossibility that is nevertheless real for the human subject: object a is an embodied impossibility. This object concerns a separated part of the human subject's body rather than any impossibility that is a noumenon.

In part three, we followed our conviction that this embodied impossibility has to be configured on a spatial rather than a linguistic model. In chapter five we showed how the gaze variant of object a pertains to a space which the subject of the Schautrieb cannot see. In the final chapter, we argued that although Lacan's concept of the unconscious is usually presented as a linguistic problem, it is nevertheless a concept which points the way towards a spatial analysis of a breaking edge between the Symbolic and the Real.

It will be recalled that this thesis started from a "concepts-out-of-context" problem. It was argued in the General Introduction that Lacan's various conceptualisations of differential relations between signifiers have been elevated into universal truths that become so broad as to be banal. This should not detract from either the theme that speech is central to psychoanalysis (which generates Lacan's interest in language) or from the thesis that the human subject is divided by language. It is tempting to view Lacan's return to Freud as dissolving the concept of "the subject", the very concept which is arguably the raison d'être for the emergence of psychoanalysis in the late nineteenth century. Yet we

have argued that at the heart of Lacan's project, the concept of the subject is reinstated to the extent that object a emerges as an elusive and residual but uneliminable and embodied hard core of the subject that is "stuck in the gullet of the signifier". This object should not be ignored by anyone seeking to discover whether and how the concept of the subject figures in Lacan's teaching.

Conclusions are places for looking not only backwards but also forwards towards further research programmes. The study of object a offered here has chiefly focused on Seminar 11 where it is with reference to Freud's drive theory and to a philosophical distinction between the "eye" and the "gaze" that object a is given a topological formulation. This fragment of Lacan's teaching needs to be placed in the broader context of his venture into topology and an apparently mathematical idiom. In the General Introduction it was noted that one is ultimately forced to decide whether or not to accept this idiom as genuine. Is it simply the most embarrassing aspect of a tendency towards intellectualisation that lacks rigour, or is the use of mathematics necessitated by the fact that a concept such as object a is indeed an algebraic sign that is untranslatable into words? Starting with Lacan's reference in Écrits to the mathematician Georg Cantor (E870), one could study the latter's work with a modest view to establishing some of the links that might perhaps exist between mathematics and psychoanalysis.

This conclusion must also be used as an opportunity to climb down from the heights of Lacan's theoretical alpinisme so as to reflect on whether it really is at such an altitude that his ideas are best approached. The danger is that since the stakes are high, the distances for falling are sufficiently deep for an apparently sophisticated concept to collapse into tautology or banality. It seems to this writer that in spite of Lacan's

talent for abstraction his teaching has not always been best understood by those with similar talents. Credit should rather go to practising psychoanalysts who are able to ground Lacan's ideas in clinical and technical problems that do not necessarily offer a forum for philosophical and epistemological debate. Furthermore, it could be argued that this thesis has to some extent studied Lacan's ideas in an ad hoc way where all problems are purely internal to the theories or concepts being studied. As a riposte to this it must be said that before a theory can be properly criticised it has to be formulated in its own terms. Otherwise one may well prejudge a theory with inappropriate criteria.

A study of this type and length would be incomplete without showing that the ideas it contains have some purchase on what, leaving aside abstraction, can be referred to as the reality in which we live. In so far as Lacan's teaching powerfully undermines the myth of an individual who is a fixed and central source of meaning, it is a teaching that can be used to develop a cogent argument that much of what people in western society take to be their private misery is generated by social structures. These structures, it can be argued, are themselves geared to reinforcing our readiness to accept that anxiety, loneliness and fear are individual problems. Lacan's realm of the Imaginary, the realm that is concerned with the production of coherent images of reality, can be used to convey the way in which certain legal, economic and political structures require us to behave as if there were a stable and integral self in which fault and blame can be localised. The extent to which the mass media conflate an explanation of a disastrous event with the apportioning of individual blame; the way in which welfare bureaucracy finds a rationale in the view that a single mother's plight is an apt punishment for a personal failing; and the degree to which bracing cures for inflation are packaged in terms of

the guilt ordinary people should feel in asking for a living wage, suggest that we live in a culture where it is always as if any social or economic problem is caused by the "inner workings" of people who have choice and volition.

Lacan's realm of the Symbolic where the signifier represents the subject for yet another signifier can be linked to an increasing sophistication with which a constant "babble" of computers, telephones, message machines, sound-systems and the mass media produces a self-referential system in which the human subject becomes increasingly disconnected from personal involvement with anything outside this system. The possibility afforded by a walkman of being "wired for" and insulated by sounds of one's choosing at virtually any time or place; the regularity with which human carnage can appear before us thanks to fleeting, pre-edited and disjointed television images that easily allow us to forget that certain events really do hurt or kill; and the degree to which rhetorical political debate has been replaced by altogether more insidious PR exercises, where credibility is a greater virtue than verity, suggest that the "babble" of the Symbolic is making our lives increasingly cocooned and insubstantial. The experience of tuning a radio allows one to appreciate the way in which this "babble" consists quite literally of a multitude of indistinguishable signifying networks, where any hope of finding a point that is qualitatively different becomes a kind of irksome, obsolete burden.

Finally, the structure of the gaze, stated in its broadest terms, can also facilitate an understanding of the reality in which we live. In Discipline and Punish, Michel Foucault has well-documented the disciplinary structure of a gaze in which I am seen without being able to see either the seer or the way in which I am seen (Foucault, 1979). The classical

example of the panopticon structure, whereby a large number of individuals could be observed by as few as one unseen watcher, has its equivalent in the one-way glass screens to be found in university departments of psychology. It is also useful to note David Smail's comparison of a commissionaire, whose private life is entirely concealed by a public function displayed by his uniform, with a person who dresses so as to package and display his or her body as seductively as possible (Smail, 1987, p. 124). It is not sufficient to describe the latter as ostentatious, since this adjective does not convey this person's determined avoidance of the gaze which is invited. Whilst this person's body is constructed for the gaze of others, this person's eyes carefully meet nobody's gaze. This body exemplifies an "inside-out" structure of the gaze to the extent that a body which is an essentially private concern has been turned into a purely publicised object. Such a structure transforms us into being our own inner disciplinarians. It becomes increasingly impossible to act in a public space without having a feeling of being watched that is worked out through a fixation on whatever practised form of objectivity one knows best.

Each of these points can be read as extending a critique of the myth of the individual which underscores Lacan's teaching. By studying structures that position and fragment people, Lacan moves away from a tendency to which the "psycho-disciplines" are so prone: the use of probing, measuring and normalising techniques to make the plausibility of individual blame seem unavoidable.

Yet, although Lacan challenges the therapeutic assumption of individual fault that is arguably a fundamental assumption of western societies, one is nevertheless left wondering whether the trump card of this line of

argument is an unwitting dismantlement of the need for psychoanalysis itself, be it Lacanian or otherwise. The undermining of the myth of the individual can be read as removing a large part of the justification for spilling out the contents of a private life to someone who momentarily sells his attention. The measure of the degree to which the importance of a private life is now so entrenched in western culture may well be that it has become virtually impossible to abandon the very idea of therapy or analysis, to contemplate seriously the possibility that the "psycho-disciplines" really do not work. We have, as it were, crumbled into a life of ceaseless private contemplation of how we feel, a contemplation in which possibilities for action are drained by a consumption of whatever holds out the promise of satisfying purely private needs and impulses. At any rate, by Lacan's own strictures, it would seem more fulfilling to be a sufferer who acts in a public sphere than to be someone who has found a purely private bliss.



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