

Jacques Lacan and the Concept of the 'Real'

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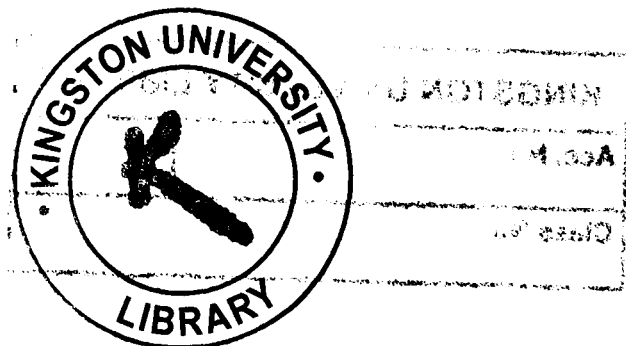
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Abstract

This thesis proposes a new philosophical reading of the work of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. In particular, it is argued that it is Lacan's concept of the 'Real', one of his three registers of the Real, Symbolic and the Imaginary, that provides the crucial conceptual horizon for Lacan's work, early and late, against those who would locate the emergence of the centrality of the Real only late in Lacan's teaching. The thesis sets out to establish the conceptual genesis and multiple instantiations of the concept of the Real in both Lacan's articles and seminars, arguing that, far from being a hypostatized 'outside' to the Symbolic and Imaginary, the Real is to be understood as immanent to both. Further, Lacan's theory of language is highlighted as revealing the particularity of the Real, especially through the concept of the material signifier. In developing a novel typology of the 'signifier-in-relation' and the 'signifier-in-isolation', the thesis underscores the singularity of Lacan's theory of language and its transcendence of its roots in Saussure's linguistics. Finally, the Real is shown to have a central pertinence to the novel theory of the body proposed in Lacan's final seminars, a theory of the body that is itself shown to be intimately connected to Lacan's theory of language, and to his revision of Freud's theories of primary narcissism.

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INTRODUCTION – APPROACHING THE REAL¹

This thesis concerns the concept of the ‘Real’ in the work of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Lacan proposed an ambitious, at times highly abstract, and always philosophically suggestive reading of Freud, intended to provide a strong theoretical basis for the creative renewal of psychoanalytic practice. My thesis aims to provide a sustained, synthetic reading of the broad sweep of Lacan’s work, from articles in the 1940s on the question of primary narcissism in the formation of the ego through to his final seminars thirty years later, with a view to reconstructing perhaps the most elusive of his concepts, the ‘Real’. The Real, I argue, must be understood as the central, determining concept of Lacan’s work, early and late, without which his metapsychology² would succumb to one of two fates: either the temptations of linguistic idealism, whereby psychoanalysis would risk being reduced to a form of hermeneutics, or a theoretical and clinical overinvestment in the narcissistic projections of the ego, rendered as the properly curative object of analysis.³

I argue that the emerging concern for the questions of Symbolic determination and Imaginary misrecognition that motor Lacan’s theoretical production in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s are appreciable only when the Real is assumed to have emerged, from the beginning, as the conceptual horizon of psychoanalysis as reconceived by Lacan. At one and the same time, my thesis resists reducing the Real to a schematic

¹ References to those of Lacan’s seminars that have been published take the form ‘S’ followed by the relevant seminar number and page number, as in ‘Sx p.x’. Details as to the publication status of the seminars referenced can be found in the bibliography. All references to the unpublished seminars are to Cormac Gallagher’s unofficial translations, with references following the form ‘Sx, lesson of xxx’, and all references to published seminars are to Jacques-Alain Miller’s edited series, with references to the English version where available. I have sometimes made use of Gallagher’s translations even where a published seminar exists in French. All references to Lacan’s *Écrits* are to Bruce Fink’s 2006 English translation; publication details are located in the bibliography under ‘Abbreviations’.

² My use of the term ‘metapsychology’, familiar from Freud’s own usage, is intended to signal the philosophical, synthetic ambitions of Lacan’s theory, whilst recognizing its distance from ‘philosophy’ per se, a distance that will be interrogated at different points throughout the thesis; see especially Chapter Five, and the Conclusion.

³ Lacan’s orientation of psychoanalytic theory away from the ego as the proper seat of the subject, and from any psychoanalytic practice that would shore up the ego, is reflected in his long rhetorical battle with ‘ego psychology’ as developed initially by Heinz Hartmann from Anna Freud’s work on defense mechanisms, and is reflected more generally in his hostility to any attempt to link psychoanalytic practice with the adaptation of the subject to the norms of wider society. (S1 p.11; A. Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense: The Writings of Anna Freud*, vol. 2, (New York, International Universities Press Inc., 1971); H. Hartmann, *Ego Psychology and the Problem of Adaptation*, (New York, International Universities Press Inc., 1968); P. Van-Haute, *Against Adaptation: Lacan’s ‘Subversion of the Subject’*, (New York, Other Press, 2002).

definition; instead, I have allowed my enquiry to trace the multiple ways in which Lacan conceives the Real, often in a position of inextricable co-definition with other, crucial concepts in Lacan's work, and very rarely taking the form of direct, unambiguous conceptualization or nomination. The Real is situated conceptually in much the same way as it operates within the life of the subject, which is to say as a remainder, an excess, and thus as something appreciable only through other concepts or notions. This is not to deny the possibility of *any* definition of the Real, but to signal that singular or stable definitions must be held in suspicion in favour of an appreciation of the multiplicity of ways in which the Real is figured throughout Lacan's work.

Methodologically, I have approached Lacan's theoretical work as a complex whole, while resisting the urge to paper over the inherently fragmentary and often ambiguous nature of Lacan's arguments. The Lacan that emerges is not a 'philosopher', at least not of the kind that he would himself criticize for an overbearing urge to systemization⁴; nonetheless, there are, I argue, significant underlying continuities in Lacan's articles and seminars that congregate around the question of the Real as it interacts with the other crucial concepts of Lacan's metapsychology, and it is this underlying continuity – persistent if not unitary – that I argue renders problematic the schematic dividing of Lacan's work into artificial, teleological stages. Against the common reading that assigns the Real to a position of importance only in the final of Lacan's seminars of the 1970s, I argue that every stage of Lacan's theoretical development can be understood as an attempt to more precisely delineate the Real as the object particular to psychoanalytic enquiry, an object that, in its multiple instantiations, refuses any linear periodization or temporal delimitation.

Commenting on the work of Julia Kristeva, Charles Shepherdson articulates my own skepticism as to the periodization of Lacan's work well: "The academic reception of many other thinkers is marked by precisely the same structural conflict, in which two incompatible images are offered to our gaze. Often, the problem is resolved by appeal

⁴ Lacan's frequently caustic comments on philosophy as a discipline bear all the hallmarks of strawmen, as in his dismissal of Hegel's highly complex and psychoanalytically suggestive concept of *Aufhebung* as "one of philosophy's pretty little dreams". (S20 p.86). Nonetheless, it is principally the recuperative or sublative dimension of philosophy, more specifically in its German idealist manifestation, that Lacan seeks to oppose with psychoanalysis' emphasis on detotalisation, and as such his sweeping statements on philosophy have a polemical function at least.

to a *historical narrative*, which allows us to split the author into two parts by locating one interpretation at an “early stage” of the writer’s career, and the other at a “later stage”.⁵ The question of the Real especially seems to provoke this tendency in commentators on Lacan, as in the following quote from Paul Verhaeghe: “The early Lacan will elaborate this determinism in a scientific way, by interpreting this dark unconscious as a linguistic system, governed by laws and thus predictable. The later Lacan concentrates on the drive and the real, thus making room for unpredictability and causality as such”⁶; One of the central tasks of my thesis is to refute this interpretation, showing instead the thorough interpenetration of the questions of Symbolic law, of causation, and of the question of the Real as they are formulated and reformulated through the entirety of Lacan’s work.

Marc de Kesel provides one of the most recent articulations of the alternative to my position, whereby the Real only comes to prominence in the later stages of Lacan’s work: “Of course, there is a difference between the Lacan of the fifties, when it was all about the signifier, and the Lacan of the sixties and seventies where one sees a continually renewed emphasis on the Real.”⁷ In so far as I will insist that the Real is only appreciable conceptually as fundamentally linked to the question of the signifier, I will come to reject de Kesel’s claim here, although his comments directly following the above quote bring his position a little closer to my own: “the crucial point here is that the concept of *das Ding* is not so much a break with Lacan’s emphasis on the signifier, as its intensification. [...] Lacan presumes a procedure operating entirely within a universe of signifiers. [...] Yet, [...] the “thing” is a remainder of the “signifying” act of judgment. It is that which a priori escapes the “logos”⁸. De Kesel leaves undetermined here how the Real (here as ‘*das Ding*’) can be both entirely within a “universe of signifiers” and be the remainder of that universe. This paradox is explainable, I will argue, only by drawing out Lacan’s understanding of the Real element of signification, what I call the ‘signifier-in-isolation’, and by emphasizing

⁵ C. Shepherdson, *Vital Signs : Nature, Culture, Psychoanalysis*, (New York, Routledge, 2000), p.57; emphasis in the original.

⁶ P. Verhaeghe, ‘Causality in Science and Psychoanalysis’ in J. Glynos and Y. Stavrakakis (ed.), *Lacan and Science*, (London, Karnac, 2002), p.126.

⁷ M. de Kesel, *Eros and Ethics : Reading Jacques Lacan’s Seminar VII*, (Albany NY., State University of New York Press, 2009), p.88.

⁸ M. de Kesel, *Eros and Ethics : Reading Jacques Lacan’s Seminar VII*, (Albany NY., State University of New York Press, 2009), p.88-89.

the intuitive, multidimensional geometry through which Lacan figures the relation of the Real to the signifier.

METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

The thesis should be taken as an immanent reading of Lacan; I have largely avoided comparing Lacanian ideas with preexisting philosophical concepts, principally as a means of allowing the singularity and difficulty of Lacan's project to emerge unhindered, and to allow it to, in turn, reflect on the persistent philosophical binaries and commonplaces that it puts in question.⁹ More specifically, I argue that Lacan's reconfiguration of Freud puts into question many of the underlying polarities that continue to provide sustenance to Western philosophic thought, even as they have come under sustained, critical suspicion for at least half a century. Further, Lacan's specifically psychoanalytic questioning of this underlying conceptual architecture of European thought forms the basis, I argue, for a distinctive theoretical practice that risks being too readily subsumed under the general critical rubrics of structuralism, post-structuralism or post-modernism.¹⁰ My aim, in part, is to allow these singular elements of Lacan's theoretical practice to emerge. The Real, in turn, will come to occupy the central place in the specific, metapsychological reconfiguration of psychoanalysis that Lacan's theoretical work embodies.

My practice of reading takes seriously what Althusser and his followers considered imperative when attempting a critical reading, namely the importance of a particular attention to the assumptions and underlying lacunae that emerge throughout the history of a discourse and that provide a privileged symptomatic insight into the

⁹ In this, my thesis could be considered in the recent lineage of philosophical readings of Lacan by young scholars, distinguished by their immanent reconstruction of Lacanian theory as an alternative to philosophical comparativism. Three representative, and no doubt superior, texts are P. Van-Haute, *Against Adaptation : Lacan's 'Subversion of the Subject'*, (New York, Other Press, 2002); L. Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness : A Philosophical Reading of Lacan*, (Cambridge, MA., MIT Press, 2007) and E. Pluth, *Signifiers and Acts : Freedom in Lacan's Theory of the Subject*, (Albany NY, State University of New York Press, 2007).

¹⁰ In so far as Lacan lived and taught within the same milieu as other authors later packaged in the terms of structuralism and post-structuralism, this is unsurprising, and it is no doubt true that Lacan shares preoccupations with a number of other thinkers of his time. Nonetheless, my approach is motivated by the belief that Lacan's work, especially in so far as it is situated outside the bounds of academic philosophy and within the cross-disciplinary terrain of psychoanalysis, has much that is distinct from, even antagonistic to, the broader movements that defined his time.

broader conceptual intent at hand.¹¹ It was in the nature of Lacan's approach to the production of theory that easy generalizations and definitions are noticeable by their absence (although ambiguous aphorisms proliferate), and as a result I have not tried to reduce Lacan's Real to any simple formulae or slogan; to do so would be to betray the specificity of the concept, even as that specificity gains its particular contours precisely in its refusal to be reduced to a particular slogan or unchanging definition or set of definitions. Instead, my account of the Real emerges through my reading of other important axes of Lacan's theoretical apparatus, axes that gain their coherence and importance via an alliance with the various functions and consequences we can progressively ascribe to the Real as it develops over the course of Lacan's teaching.

The Real, then, must be distinguished from any broader concept of 'reality'; reality, for Lacan, is generated across the registers of the Imaginary and the Symbolic. In some of his earlier texts, the Real as a substantive is occasionally used to designate something like biological need, most often when Lacan is describing the situation of objects prior to their being taking up in the Imaginary field of primary narcissism or in the vicissitudes of the signifier.¹² At one at the same time, the Real, as distinct from biological 'need' and even before it is situated substantively alongside the Imaginary

¹¹ "I merely proposed a '*symptomatic*' reading of the works of Marx and of Marxism, one with another, i.e., the progressive and systematic production of a reflection of the problematic on its objects such as to make them *visible*, and the disinterment, the production of the deepest-lying problematic which will allow us to *see* what could otherwise only have existed allusively or practically." (L. Althusser and É. Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster, (London, New Left Books, 1970), p.32; emphasis in the original). In so far as Lacan avoids a schematic elaboration of his terms, and perhaps especially the Real, my reading proceeds with a similar ethic of revealing what I take to be the "deepest-lying problematic" of Lacan's work, namely the Real in its multiple instantiations. In this sense, my approach might be fruitfully compared to the way that Pierre Macherey, extending Althusser, defines an interpretative or immanent approach to texts: "Interpretation is repetition, but a strange repetition that *says more by saying less*: a purifying repetition, at the end of which a hidden meaning appears in all its naked truth" and "we have posited the principles of an immanent criticism: the work encloses a meaning which must be released; the letter of the work is the mask, eloquent and deceptive, which this meaning bears". (P. Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, (London, Routledge, 1978), p.76; emphasis in the original). Underlying this method is the belief in both the dense materiality of texts, which is to say their immanently productive quality, and the fact that all texts are nested in other texts as they recompose themselves across time and space; Lacan's work, nonetheless, contains, under its surface of polysemous productivity, strong continuities that my thesis attempts to bring to light, continuities that particularly congregate around the concept of the Real.

¹² In 1953, Lacan writes of the subject's "satisfactions whose objects are in the Real, plain and simple." (J. Lacan, 'The Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real', unpublished translation by Scott Savaiano; French text available as 'Le symbolique, l'imaginaire et le réel' in *Bulletin de l'Association Freudienne* 1, p.4-13). A similar conflation of the Real with the commonsensical notion of 'reality' can be found in the multiple references to the 'real object' in Lacan's first seminar, where the substantive nonetheless also operates as part of the triad of the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real, and thus as distinct from any notion of 'reality'. (S1, *passim*).

and the Symbolic beginning in 1953, is detectable in its germination in the writings on primary narcissism.¹³ As a result, much of my reading of the writings on primary narcissism that precede 1953 will retrospectively confer on certain persistent themes, particularly surrounding the intrinsically antagonistic quality of identification, the status of the Real, a move justified by the subsequent association of these qualities with the concept in Lacan's later writings. Here again, my methodology seeks to accommodate the nature of my object, as something both resistant to any final stabilization but nonetheless foundational to the very psychoanalytic enterprise. As Lacan writes in his first seminar, "it is not for nothing that the real is always in the background, and that I never refer to it directly in our commentaries here. It is, quite precisely, and quite properly speaking, excluded." (S1 p.206). Lacan's choice of expression here, especially the indirect emphasis achieved through the use of "quite precisely" and "quite properly speaking", underlines my wider thesis of the Real as forming the very horizon of conceptual possibility for Lacan's revision of Freud. But this horizon is just as much "in the background", in that it is only ever revealed indirectly, as a deceptive remainder attached to other concepts.

Lacan divided his account of metapsychology, then, into three registers, theorized in various ways as interpenetrating and mutually dependent. The Symbolic, the register that encompasses language and the broader differential systems through which subjects are produced as signifying, encapsulates a theory of signification that, I argue, is distinct from the structural linguistic concerns that initially served to influence it. Far from being radically 'outside' the Symbolic, moreover, my account of Lacan's Real locates it deep within the contours of Lacan's singular theory of language, an account that privileges the intervention of the sense-less and the 'material' as constitutive of signification more generally. In order to make sense of Lacan's various avatars for the material signifier isolated from sense – including the 'letter' and the 'unary trait' – I develop a novel typology of the 'signifier-in-isolation' and the 'signifier-in-relation'. The 'signifier-in-isolation' designates the signifier as it exists as a material mark, isolated from networks of relational meaning; the 'signifier-in-relation', by contrast, designates the signifier in its better-known state,

¹³ Especially in the articles 'Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis' (*Écrits* p.82-102) and 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience' (*Écrits* p.75-82); see my discussion in Chapter One.

differentially related to all other signifiers and productive of meaning, as insisted upon in Saussure's structural linguistics.¹⁴ Multiple chapters engage this typology in the various ways in which it provides a sharper understanding of Lacan's Real, and in so far as it prevents a hypostatization of the Real as something absolutely outside the bounds of the Symbolic.

The Imaginary, as the conceptual index of those processes that constitute the ego out of the movements of primary narcissism, is found in my reading to be both a wellspring and product of the Real. Primary narcissism is interrogated as the site of an initial recognition in Lacan of the constitutivity and non-dialectical irrevocability of antagonism, both in the nascent subject of pre-Oedipal identification and the subject of the Symbolic, an antagonism, moreover, that will be progressively allied with the Real as 'traumatic', a gradual process of crystallization that can be said to find its culmination in the 11th Seminar.¹⁵ Refusing to isolate the Imaginary as the early concern of a Lacan progressively more concerned with the question of the Symbolic, I instead show the absolute conceptual dependence of the Imaginary on the signifier in its material, isolated aspect – theorized as the 'signifier-in-isolation', and itself the source for aspects of Lacan's later conceptualization of the avatars of the Real, most notably *objet petit a*, the object-cause of desire. Primary narcissism, as the process that inaugurates the ego as an object of misrecognition, is predicated, I argue, on what Lacan calls a prior "symbolic matrix"¹⁶ that should be taken to be supportive of the very function of the Imaginary, as enabling the specular, misrecognized identifications that form the basis of the ego.

LACAN STUDIES NOW

How is my thesis situated in relation to the general field of Lacan studies, in philosophy and elsewhere? This brief section will outline in broad terms the reception of Lacan in Anglophone academia, with a view to defining my own place within the still-fecund field of non-clinical psychoanalytic studies. Lacan's reception in

¹⁴ F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, (London, Peter Owen Publishers, 1974).

¹⁵ See, in particular, Lacan's appropriation of Aristotle's distinction between 'tuche' and 'automaton' in the 11th Seminar, p.53.

¹⁶ J. Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the *I* As Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience' in *Écrits* p.76.

Anglophone, non-clinical academia came via two broad routes, defined by more general trends of the late 1970s and 1980s, both scholarly and political. The first was the return to psychoanalysis initiated by feminist scholars and activists of the 1970s, keen to furnish feminism with a theoretically sophisticated account of the gendered subject. Lacan seemed to offer, via his critical reconstruction of Freud, an account of the psyche that rejected any stable link with biology, and thus offered an account of subjectivity and ideology that refused to naturalize sexual difference. The key text in this first trend was Jacqueline Rose and Juliet Mitchell's *Feminine Sexuality*, which presented, for the first time in English, translations of Lacan's writing on the 'non-existence' of the sexual relationship from his Seminar 20, contextualized by introductory essays that set the tone for a partial feminist rapprochement with psychoanalysis. This was by no means unequivocal, however; in her essay, Rose comments "Lacan was implicated in the phallogentrism he described, just as his utterance constantly rejoins the mastery which he sought to undermine."¹⁷

Nonetheless, the feminist engagement with Lacan gained ground in the burgeoning field of film studies, with Laura Mulvey providing a canonical, and much contested, reading of the psychoanalytic concept of the 'gaze' as it related to the subordination of the female subject position in film, situating even more explicitly Lacan's work within the broader tradition of ideology critique.¹⁸ The journal *Screen* became the venue for much of the writing on Lacan in this vein, with literary theorists, in particular Colin MacCabe, making explicit the potential link between Marxist criticism and the account of signification offered in Lacan's revision of Freud.¹⁹ Arguably, however, these authors offered less a particular interpretation of *Lacan*, and more a theoretical putting to use of certain *Lacanian themes* that often bled into a more general incorporation of semiotics and the structuralist tradition into cultural analysis, broadly conceived.

¹⁷ Jacqueline Rose, 'Introduction – II' in J. Mitchell and J. Rose, *Feminine Sexuality : Jacques Lacan and the école Freudienne*, (New York, Macmillan, 1982), p.56.

¹⁸ L. Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Screen* 16.3, Autumn 1975, p.6-18.

¹⁹ See, among a number of relevant articles by MacCabe, 'Theory and Film : Principles of Realism and Pleasure' in *Screen* 17.3, Autumn 1976, p.7-28; the general ethos of *Screen's* marriage of post-Althusserian Marxist criticism and psychoanalytic theory was laid out in R. Coward and J. Ellis, *Language and Materialism : Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject*, (London, Routledge, 1977).

The second, broad trend came from those working within the tradition of European philosophy, especially in its phenomenological, post-Hegelian variant. Scholars such as David Macey, Malcolm Bowie and Peter Dews all sought, despite their divergent intellectual backgrounds, to situate Lacan within a particularly philosophical lineage, most often defined by the key influence of phenomenology, and more specifically post-Hegelian phenomenology as conceived as a particular kind of philosophical anthropology.²⁰ Lacan, for these scholars, reproduced, at the level of a structuralist account of language, the phenomenological concern for identity, and the struggle for recognition incarnated most famously in the ‘master/slave’ dialectic of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Dews is perhaps most faithful to this general equation of Lacan with philosophical anthropology in its Hegelian heritage, but all three helped create a general scholarly climate for Lacan’s reception that valued the influence of post-Kantian European philosophy at least on a par with that of Freud in any understanding of Lacan’s project. David Macey broke with some of the presuppositions of this reception by emphasizing the influence of French phenomenology on Lacan, as well as his situation within a particular milieu of French psychiatry, but his take on Lacan’s ‘contexts’ nonetheless sought to explain Lacan by virtue of his influences, a method that this thesis rejects for reasons I have already touched upon.

In his later work on Lacan, Bowie claimed to diverge somewhat from this phenomenological emphasis by identifying what he took to be two general trends in Lacan’s work, only one of which nonetheless cleaves, according to Bowie at least, to the legacy of Hegelian phenomenology:

It seems to be that Lacan has two versions, at least, of the All. One is a thoroughgoing metaphysical version, which says, in the manner very much of Hegelian phenomenology, that by this or that modeling operation performed upon consciousness or upon consciousness extended into its concomitant unconscious we can produce a theory of everything that falls within the human domain. [...] There is a metaphysical ambition in Lacan that has a strange

²⁰ See P. Dews, *Logics of Disintegration : Poststructuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory*, 2nd ed., (New York, Verso, 2007) [1987]; D. Macey, *Lacan in Contexts*, (New York, Verso, 1988); M. Bowie, *Lacan*, (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1993).

totalizing ring to it. But there is another quality altogether in his writing [...] Here we all individually are, in what we speak, in what we desire, in what we produce by way of theoretical or artistic statement, spinning ourselves out along a signifying chain. Here we all frailly are, talking our way through, with no end in sight except death²¹

One might certainly question the extent to which these two trends in Lacan identified by Bowie are truly distinct; after all, the Heideggerian finitude of death that Bowie identifies as the defining trait of the ‘second’ Lacan of the signifier is thoroughly intertwined, as a broader characterization of Lacan that I think is ultimately inadequate, with the first insistence on a Lacan of an Hegelian inheritance. My own take on Lacan will depart considerably from Bowie’s emphasis here, both in rejecting the primacy of a phenomenological outlook at the center of Lacan’s account of the subject, and in rejecting the reduction of Lacan’s theory of the Symbolic to that of a mere analytics of finitude, the latent humanism of which (despite its Heideggerian heritage) proving incompatible with the psychoanalysis of the Real that I propose is Lacan’s singular contribution. But Bowie’s quote usefully contextualizes what I think can be identified as a broad trend in ‘Lacan studies’ as it was imported into the particular context of the English translation of European philosophical thought, as it was disseminated in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

In the last twenty or so years, the work of various Slovenian philosophers, and most especially that of Slavoj Žižek, has definitively restored Lacan as an object of philosophical and critical theoretical study. Arguably, prior to the publication in English of Žižek’s *The Sublime Object of Ideology* in 1989²², Lacan’s star had faded considerably in Anglophone academe, if not in the burgeoning Lacanian clinical field as it spread to South America and continued its position of dominance in French analytic practice.²³ The work of Jacques Derrida, and perhaps especially the

²¹ Malcolm Bowie, ‘Lacan After the Fall : An Interview With Malcolm Bowie’ in M. Bowie, *Psychoanalysis and the Future of Theory*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1993), p.148.

²² S. Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, (London, Verso, 1989).

²³ François Cusset provides a comprehensive account of the reception, repackaging and waxing and waning reputations of post-war French philosophers in Anglophone, but especially American, academe in his *French Theory*, which includes an incisive account of Lacan’s reception in American scholarship. (F. Cusset, *French Theory : How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze and Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, trans. Jeff Fort, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

labyrinthine texts of a generalized ‘deconstruction’ in literary studies that followed, had served to render the claims of psychoanalysis, predicated as they seemed to be on a cross-cultural and ahistorical conception of the unconscious, unpalatable.²⁴ Feminist theory had continued to question the apparent heteronormativity and sexism of even Lacan’s radical revision of Freudian theory, highlighting in particular the persistence of the ‘phallus’ as a privileged signifier of identity, if only a ‘decentered’ and desubstantialised one.²⁵ With the arrival of Žižek, many of the specifically clinical problematics that seemed to motivate most writing around Lacan following its partial eclipse in philosophy also began to fade, replaced by a Lacan whose work most particularly proposed a theory of the subject, and a theory of Symbolic and Imaginary misidentification that could be of use in the analysis of contemporary ideological formations.

The Lacan that emerged with Žižek, then, was very much a Lacan as filtered through the particular concerns of political critique, a critique that would shift from a concern with ‘radical democracy’ and of the question of a post-foundational theory of the subject to a more consistent engagement with the Marxist tradition in Žižek’s texts of the late 1990’s and early 2000’s.²⁶ Furthermore, the source of Žižek’s interpretation of Lacan, one that seemed to take particular inspiration from the 11th Seminar and selected seminars of the 1970s, was self-confessedly Jacques-Alain Miller, whose scattered writings in the 1980s provided the basis for a formalization of Lacanian

²⁴ For an illuminating series of essays on Lacan from a broadly deconstructive position, some positive and some negative, including Derrida’s pertinent and penetrating critique of Lacan’s reading of Poe, see J.P. Muller and W.J. Richardson (eds.), *The Purloined Poe : Lacan, Derrida, and Psychoanalytic Reading*, (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1987).

²⁵ See, in particular, J. Butler, *Bodies That Matter : On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’*, (New York, Routledge, 1993); J. Gallop, *The Daughter’s Seduction : Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1986). Butler’s influential critique of Lacan centers on the supposed fixity of his concept of Symbolic law: “the symbolic law in Lacan can be subject to the same kind of critique that Nietzsche formulated of the notion of God: the power attributed to this prior and ideal power is derived and deflected from the attribution itself.” I would want, with Žižek and others, to emphasize, by contrast, that aspect of Lacan’s account of the Symbolic that foregrounds the substantial inexistence of the law that Lacan represents in the matheme for the ‘barred Other’ in the graph of desire constructed in ‘The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire’. (*Écrits* p.671-703). There is, of course, a strong current of feminist thought that draws positively on Lacan, including E. Grosz, *Jacques Lacan : A Feminist Introduction*, (New York, Routledge, 1990); J. Butler, *Gender Trouble : Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York, Routledge, 1990); K. Campbell, *Jacques Lacan and Feminist Epistemology*, (New York, Routledge, 2004).

²⁶ Many of Žižek’s most sustained readings of politics via Lacanian concepts, taking in his gradual move away from Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s ‘radical democracy’ and towards Marxism, can be found in the collection *The Universal Exception*. (S. Žižek, *The Universal Exception : Selected Writings*, ed. R. Butler and S. Stephens, (London, Continuum, 2006).

theory around the question of the contingency of subjective identity.²⁷ It's fair to say that the motive for Žižek's appropriation of this particular account of Lacan was his broader, philosophical desire to rehabilitate Hegel, albeit a Hegel stripped of much of the teleological and idealistic characteristics that had been the source of much of the critique of German idealism in post-war France.²⁸ As he developed his reading in numerous books in the 1990s, Žižek's Hegel, as a thinker of non-identity and the 'parallax' between 'subject' and 'substance', began to take on many of the characteristics of Žižek's Lacan, with the suspicion arising even among some of his epigones that the collapsing into one of the two thinkers risked stripping both of their specificity.²⁹ The work of Adrian Johnston has been invaluable in extracting the philosophical core from Žižek's increasingly short and repetitive publications, although the resulting 'transcendental materialism' of the subject, whereby a material ground generates the 'more-than-material' domain of the Symbolic, sometimes reads more like Johnston's own construction, indebted to Žižek but deploying a systematicity ultimately alien to the original author.³⁰ Johnston deals with Lacan more directly in his first book *Time Driven : Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive*, which usefully reorients Lacan studies around the concept of a split drive in its

²⁷ See J-A. Miller, 'Matrix' in *Lacanian Ink* 12, Fall 1997, p.45-51; J-A. Miller, 'Jacques Lacan' in *Psychoanalytic Notebooks of the London Circle* 8, 2002, p.9-22; J-A. Miller, 'H20 : Suture in Obsessionality' in *Hystoria : Lacan Study Notes* 6-9, 1988, p.34-44; Miller provides a particularly formalistic reading of Lacan, and it is arguably Miller who has most influentially propagated the notion that Lacan's seminars of the 1970s, in their supposed turn definitively towards the Real, mark a break in Lacan's work, an argument that my thesis attempts to counter. Miller's latter argument is expressed most plainly in his 'Lacan's Later Teaching', although there he also emphasizes the continuity underlying the different phases of Lacan's teaching, and openly labels his isolation of a 'late Lacan' as a "biographical construction": "There is something called Lacan's late teaching, so called because I have isolated it with this signifier, giving it ex-sistence. [...] I've thus isolated a cut that individualizes his later teaching. Isolating it this way is a biographical construction. How can we describe this cut? It isn't obvious; it is bound up on continuity." (J-A Miller, 'Lacan's Later Teaching', trans. Barbara P. Fulks, in *Lacanian Ink* 20, Spring 2002, p.4).

²⁸ Judith Butler offers a theoretically sensitive account of both the critique of, and dependence upon, Hegel in post-war Paris in her *Subjects of Desire*. (J. Butler, *Subjects of Desire : Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth Century France*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1999).

²⁹ This conflation is seen most clearly in *The Parallax View*, where Žižek's project to create a simultaneously Hegelian and Lacanian logic of contingency reaches its apotheosis. The following quote, ostensibly a reflection on Kant and Hegel, is highly similar to descriptions elsewhere of Lacan, especially of the non-existence of Lacan's 'big Other': "there is nothing "beyond", the "Beyond" is only the void of the impossibility/failure of its own representation – or, as Hegel put it at the end of the chapter on consciousness in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, beyond the veil of phenomena, the consciousness finds only what it itself has put there." (S. Žižek, *The Parallax View*, (Cambridge, MA., MIT Press, 2006). p.389-340 n.19). Compare with the following on Lacan: "The final dénouement of *The Golden Bowl* offers no solution proper, no act that would tear the web of lies apart, or in Lacanian terms, would disclose the big Other's non-existence." (*The Parallax View* p.143).

³⁰ A. Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology : A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity*, (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2008).

distinction from desire.³¹ The resulting emphasis on the inherent pathology in Lacan's concept of the subject proved influential while composing this thesis, perhaps most especially in my final reflections on the concepts of 'materiality' and 'materialism' in Lacan, where the concept of the drive underlies many of my claims.

Other thinkers of the Slovenian school have arguably been more cautious in keeping their interests in German idealism and psychoanalysis at a distance from one another, and have certainly been more attentive to the specificity of Lacan's writings. Alenka Zupančič's innovative reading of ethics via both Kant and Lacan³² also contributed to a more general field of readings that mined Lacan's writings for their ontological implications, implications that were brought to bear on the questions of sexuality and gender in particular. In the US, Charles Shepherdson and Joan Copjec³³ both combined a critical theoretical reading of Lacan, mobilized as a thinker who could usefully complicate the historicism and culturalism that had grown up in U.S. 'Continental' thought, with a critical attention to the ways in which French feminist thinkers had appropriated aspects of Lacan's thought in their distinction between biological sex and sexuality, with 'sex' posited as a category reducible neither to pure biology or pure 'culture'.³⁴ Shepherdson's reflections on the resistance in Lacan of dualities of nature and culture, of the signifier and the body, were influential on my readings of these topics, especially in my final chapter, although my own readings cleave more closely to the letter of Lacan's text and resist some of the generalizations that pepper Shepherdson's argument. Copjec, for her part, has drawn attention to the resonances between Kant's critical philosophy and Lacanian psychoanalysis, and my own reading of Kant *vis á vis* Lacan in the third chapter of this thesis bears this influence, although my own interpolation of Kantian themes is rather more limited and perhaps more cautiously expressed. The virtue of such readings for the more general, philosophical interpreter of Lacan lies in their respect for the philosophical ambition of Lacan's take on the relationship between sexuality, the Symbolic, and the

³¹ A. Johnston, *Time Driven : Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive*, (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2005).

³² A. Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real : Kant and Lacan*, (New York, Verso, 2000).

³³ C. Shepherdson, *Vital Signs : Nature, Culture, Psychoanalysis*, (New York, Routledge, 2000); C. Shepherdson, *Lacan and the Limits of Language*, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2008); J. Copjec, *Read my Desire : Lacan against the Historicists*, (Cambridge, MA., MIT Press, 1996); J. Copjec, *Imagine There's No Woman : Ethics and Sublimation*, (Cambridge, MA., MIT Press, 2004).

³⁴ For a critical account of the French feminist use of 'sex', see S. Sandford, 'Sex : A transdisciplinary concept' in *Radical Philosophy* 165, January/February 2011.

Real, and I have been inspired by the stringency of this approach in writing this thesis, for instance in my commentary on the ‘formulas of sexuation’ in Chapter Three.

In the last few years, a series of readings of Lacan have emerged that are distinguished by their practice of immanent reading (see note 8 above), and by their relative downgrading of philosophical comparativism as a tool to explicate Lacanian theory. Instead, the singularity and strangeness of Lacan’s writings are revealed in readings that are refreshingly cognizant of the multiplicity of disciplines that are nested within Lacan’s discourse, while nonetheless refusing to *reduce* that discourse to one or other of its influences. In France, Guy le Gaufet has taken seriously Lacan’s use of mathematical formulations, providing a virtuosic reading of the concept of sexuation that I have made use of in this thesis; his suspicion of the reduction of Lacan’s theory of language to the influence of Saussure also chimes with my own insistence on the particularity of Lacan’s conception of the Symbolic.³⁵

Lorenzo Chiesa’s publication in 2007 of *Subjectivity and Otherness : A Philosophical Reading of Lacan*³⁶ served as the spur to this project, and I have adopted part what I take to be Chiesa’s methodology, predicated on a close reading of the subtle modulation of concepts as they evolve throughout Lacan’s seminar. I disagree with aspects of Chiesa’s periodization of Lacan’s work, particularly his positing of Seminar 7 as a decisive break in Lacan’s development of the Real, but his sense of the importance of the Real as something immanent to the Symbolic and the Imaginary is perhaps the most important precedent to my own reflections in this thesis. In particular, Chiesa’s subtle delineation of the relation between the different phases of Lacan’s commentary on the signifier, and his concomitant concern for the Real as it is interlaced with language, have inspired my own, often different, readings of the Real in the Symbolic.

³⁵ G. Le Gaufey, *Le pas-tout de Lacan*, (Paris, EPEL, 2006); See especially the chapter ‘Towards a Critical Reading of the Formulas of Sexuation’, an English translation of which is available here: <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/TOWARDS-A-CRITICAL-READING-2506.pdf>.

³⁶ L. Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness : A Philosophical Reading of Lacan*, (Cambridge, MA., MIT Press, 2007).

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter One addresses a number of texts concerned with primary narcissism, but most especially Lacan's famous article concerning the 'Mirror Stage' published, in its final version, in 1949. There, I argue, Lacan articulates the 'image of the other' and the signifier in a constitutive bind, underpinning the development of the nascent subject even while the dyadic logic of Imaginary specularity promotes an aggressivity threatening to the very subject it helps constitute. This image of the other, as underpinned by the isolated signifier yet to accede to the full relational logic of the Symbolic, is in turn shown to be the foundation for Lacan's later development of a specific object proper to his revision of Freud; Lacan's *objet petit a*, as an object posited by Lacan in the Real, is thus directly connected to the early development of a theory of the Imaginary. In developing this argument, I show that any attempt to shoehorn Lacan's account of the development of the ego into a Hegelian or quasi-Hegelian reading is inadequate, in so far as, for Lacan but not Hegel (or the Hegel as propagated by Kojève, the Hegel of intersubjective recognition³⁷), the antagonism produced by the movements of primary narcissism is fundamentally and constitutively irrevocable, disbarred from any recuperative sublation or supersession as it maintains the seat of the ego, suspended in a logic split between constitution and threatened dissipation.

Chapter Two accounts for the intrication of a theory of the Symbolic and the Real, building upon the foundations laid in Lacan's account of the Imaginary, insisting that the two must be read as complementary and coterminous. Lacan's particular account of language, I argue, has been too often devalued by its effective reduction to the influence of structural linguistics, and in particular to the influence of Saussure's account of the differential generation of meaning in signification;³⁸ Lacan, we are

³⁷ See A. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel : Lectures on 'The Phenomenology of Spirit'*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1980).

³⁸ Michael Lewis' reading of Lacan vis a vis Derrida frequently risks this reduction, as in the following reflection on the concept of the 'signifier' in Lacan: "Signifiers as such are nothing besides their references to other signifiers. This means that signifiers are nothing besides the differences *between* signifiers", a statement that Lewis at least partially contradicts a few sentences further on with "Each signifier is composed of traces which mark the absence of *other* signifiers. These traces are real, material things." (M. Lewis, *Derrida and Lacan : Another Writing*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p.24). On the one hand, the signifier is reduced to a pure difference, what I call the aspect of the 'signifier in-relation', while on the other these signifiers, nothing in themselves, are composed

often told, modified the Saussurean sign so as to make it amenable to a theory of the unconscious, but the essential features of Saussure's structural account of signification remain.³⁹ For Lacan, by contrast, psychoanalysis finds its purpose at the point at which signification breaks down, when the unity of the signifier and the signified is breached, and when the underlying materiality of language, taken in particular to be embodied by what I call the signifier-in-isolation, is revealed. Instead of positing 1953 and the beginning of the seminar as a break announced by the intrusion of structural linguistics in Lacan's theoretical corpus, I insist instead on the underlying continuity between the account of the formative power of the 'image of the other' in primary narcissism and the "symbolic matrix" already identified by the 1949 paper on the 'Mirror Stage'; through an analysis of Lacan's writing on Poe, as well as his reflections on the centrality of the failure of the accession to the Symbolic in psychosis, I identify the centrality of a novel theory of language in Lacan's metapsychology as it bears more generally on the questions implied in the concept of the Real. To what extent is the Real an 'outside' to the Symbolic, and to what extent does the materiality of signification as a horizon of human subjectivity require the further elaboration of a logic of the Real, conceived as part of that general insistence on the materiality of the signifier?

nonetheless of real, material 'traces', begging the question of how something that is nothing-in-itself might nonetheless be posited as material. It is my contention that this confusion can be overcome, not by conflating the Derridean language of the 'trace' with Lacan's use of 'signifier', but only by recognizing Lacan's transcendence of the Saussurean insistence on the relationality of signification; while absolutely central to Lacan's concept of the Symbolic, this relationality cannot account for the entirety of the signifier's importance for psychoanalysis. Instead, its material dimension, what I call its being in-isolation, must be explained as fundamentally outside the Saussurean logic of the sign, and intimately connected to the category of the Real; given the confusion above, it is not surprising that Lewis misconceives the Real as something fundamentally outside the Symbolic: "This is why Lacan describes the real as 'the impossible' – impossible to refer to by means of the signifier. The real can only be alienated or 'murdered' by the symbolic" (p.32) and "To be materialist one must begin from the pre-symbolic real" (p.52). Lewis discusses the materiality of the signifier with more precision in the chapter 'The real writing of Lacan : another writing'. (p.202-270).

³⁹ An extreme form of this reduction of Lacan to Saussure can be found in John Milbank's recent book-length debate with Slavoj Žižek: "Lacan famously reworked the Saussurian triad of signifier-signified-referent as the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real. But because the diachronic series was for him more fundamentally a synchronic set, any sequence of images was always secretly governed by the chain of abstract symbols." (J. Milbank, 'The Double Glory, or Paradox versus Dialectics : On Not Quite Agreeing With Slavoj Žižek' in S. Žižek and J. Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ : Paradox or Dialectic?*, ed. Creston Davis, (Cambridge MA., MIT Press, 2009), p.120). Here, the quick association of Lacan with Saussure's emphasis on the synchronic is amplified by the wholly inaccurate mapping of Lacan's registers onto the components of Saussure's sign. The result is not only to traduce those non- if not anti-Saussurean dimensions to Lacan's theory of language, but to also hypostatize the Real as equivalent to a worldly referent independent of the signifier; both of these assumptions are fundamentally challenged in this thesis.

Chapter Three develops these crucial questions through an enquiry into Lacan's insistent spatialisation of his conceptual apparatus. While increasing attention has been focused on the use of mathematical topology in Lacan's seminars of the 1970s,⁴⁰ my primary focus in Chapter Three is to understand how a certain, informal geometry underpinned Lacan's account of the registers, a geometry that provides a particular insight into the complex, multi-dimensional intrication of the Real in the Symbolic and the Imaginary. That intuitive geometry, I argue, is present from at least the articles on primary narcissism from the 1940s, and significantly prefigures the increasing formalization of space as it relates to psychoanalysis through the eventual, sustained recourse to topology, in particular in the seminar of 1974-5, 'R.S.I.'. Through a cautious and critical use of Kant's distinction between a 'boundary' and a 'limit' to possible knowledge, I highlight the ways in which the spatial relation between the Real and the Symbolic, in particular, figures the more general critique in Lacan of the philosophical distinction between ontology and epistemology. In so far as the Real, as both an 'internal' and 'external' limit to Symbolic subjectivity, marks a central, yet alien antagonism proper to human subjectivity, what, in Kant, is frequently rendered as merely a question of the limits to knowledge becomes inherent to the psychoanalytic account of the subject, displacing the priorities of a certain philosophical lineage whilst insisting on the specificity of the object and methodology of psychoanalysis through its presentation of an intuitively spatialised theory of the subject.

Whereas, in previous chapters, the question of psychopathology, and in particular the question of Lacan's structural reworking of the notion of differential symptomatology in psychoanalysis, was largely bracketed, Chapter Four provides a sustained reading of these structures as they relate to the Real. While it is frequently claimed that hysteria, as the paradigmatic affliction of Freud's founding theories, should be taken as the more general index for an understanding of the psychoanalytic subject, dramatizing as it does the routing of desire through the Other, I argue by contrast that it is obsessional neurosis that serves as the central pathology to Lacan's more general reconfiguration of psychoanalysis around the question of the Real. Again deploying

⁴⁰ See, for example, E. Ragland and D. Milovanovic (eds.), *Lacan : Topologically Speaking*, (New York, Other Press, 2004).

my typology of the signifier-in-isolation and the signifier-in-relation, I argue that the relative subjective balance between the two signifying logics determines to a significant extent the symptom or symptoms of any particular subject. Lacan, even more than Freud, proposes a de-medicalization of psychoanalysis, such that no subjective structure could be said to provide a normative center from which deviations might be measured, and as a result, my reflections on Lacan's account of psychopathology bear on his more general reorientation of psychoanalysis towards a Real that cannot be captured within the confines of positivist measurement. Furthermore, Chapter Four prepares the ground for the discussion, the culmination of the argument of the thesis more generally, of Lacan's universalization of the symptom in his later seminars around the concept of the *sinthome*.

Chapter Five, then, aims to consolidate and extend a number of the central themes of the thesis, especially with respect to the question of psychoanalysis as a materialism, and with regard to the Real as it assists in the conceptualization of a psychoanalytic theory of the body. Chapter Five advances, via a reading of a number of unpublished seminars from the 1970s, a theory of the body predicated on the materiality of the signifier-in-isolation as it 'ports' with the body conceived as always-already in fragments; a fragmentation understood as encompassing the subject's Imaginary relation to the body, and the body as written and re-written through the isolation and materialization of the symptom. Here, the bodily symptom is understood less as an expression of the meaning of the subject's inner conflicts and more as the sense-less repetitive signifier that provides the subject with a precarious consistency. The questions, then, of consistency, of formalization, and of the theory of writing that specifically results from Lacan's materialism are broached in this final chapter, with a view to making fully concrete the constitutive relation between the Lacanian account of signification and the concept of the Real, a relation that echoes throughout the thesis. The chapter contains an explication and expression of the material symptom qua *sinthome* through a reading of Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, a play whose central character displays an orientation towards language which epitomizes, in exaggerated form, Lacan's insistence on the importance and persistence of the Real as it manifests in the materiality of the signifier-in-isolation.

What I hope emerges from this thesis is an account of the Real true to its refractory, immanent development throughout the broad sweep of Lacan's work, one that respects the polyphony at the heart of Lacan's theoretical enterprise, whilst also recognizing the centrality and importance of the Real as the fulcrum around which the Lacanian project, in all its phases and digressions, turns.⁴¹ Put schematically, I hope to have shown both the *functions* and *consequences* of the Real, with its functions gradually coalescing around the persistence of a logic of simultaneous constitution and threatened dissolution, and its consequences manifesting in the various forms through which an irrecoverable antagonism takes its place at the very center of human subjectivity. As Geneviève Morel has recently put it, "The concept of the real has been rooted in the Freudian clinic since the beginnings of psychoanalysis"⁴², and this thesis demonstrates that Lacan reaffirmed its centrality from the very beginning of his reconstruction of Freudian theory. This affirmation, further, results in a metapsychology with profound implications for philosophy as it continues to interrogate the concept of the 'subject', and the relation of that subject to language, to the body, and to the relationship between necessity and contingency.⁴³

⁴¹ Freud employs the analogy of the smashing of a crystal to explain the refraction of the psychopathological psyche: "If we throw a crystal to the floor, it breaks; but not into haphazard pieces. It comes apart along its lines of cleavage into fragments whose boundaries, though they are invisible, were predetermined by the crystal's structure. Mental patients are split and broken structures of this kind." (S. Freud, S.E vol. 22, p.59). This suggestive analogy can also be used to help illustrate both the Real as it diffuses throughout Lacan's conceptual apparatus without ever attaining its own delimited substantiality, and to illustrate too the very *consequences* of the Real as an antagonism, splintering the human subject. While not in itself conceivable as a limited, self-enclosed concept, the Real nonetheless has *effects*, the impact of which allow the tracing of its multiple influence and instantiations in the structure of the subject, much as Freud's crystal has invisible faultlines that determine its fracturing.

⁴² G. Morel, *Sexual Ambiguities*, trans. Lindsay Watson, (London, Karnac, 2011), p.17.

⁴³ To this extent, my thesis rejects recent attempts by Barbara Cassin to claim Lacan for sophistry; briefly, Cassin interprets Lacan's insistence on a material non-sense as the condition of sense, a key concern of this thesis, as being indicative of Lacan's more general belonging to the tradition of sophistry, a tradition that, she wagers, must be reengaged with if philosophy is to reaffirm its own contemporaneity. To the contrary, I hold that Lacan's central insistence on the materiality of signification and the centrality of non-sense to sense has profound, precisely philosophical implications, for instance as to the relation of the subject to the concept of the 'body'; see especially Chapter Five. Cassin writes, "On the side of philosophy, the sense of a word, given in its definition, says the essence of the thing, and this is why there cannot be univocity: a "man" is a man. On the side of Lacan, the unique sense, the one-sense, is un-sense, that is to say the deprived-of-sense (homophony always already enacts the equivocal)". (A. Badiou and B. Cassin, *Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel : Deux leçons sur 'L'Étourdit' de Lacan*, (Paris, Fayard, 2010), p.24-25; translation taken from B. Bosteels, 'Translator's Introduction' in A. Badiou, *Wittgenstein's Antiphilosophy*, trans. Bruno Bosteels, (New York, Verso, 2011), p.30-31).



CHAPTER ONE - THE IMAGINARY AND THE REAL

“We are told that man is the measure of all things. But where is his own measure? Is it to be found in himself?” – Jacques Lacan, S2, p.68.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter tries to discern in Lacan's account of the Imaginary register, and in particular in his various engagements with the constitutivity of the image of the ‘other’, the beginnings of what he would come to define as the Real. As I’ve already signaled in my Introduction, I aim to take Lacan at his word, when he insists that the object of Freudian concern is the Real, that which persists ‘beyond the pleasure principle’.¹ While my Introduction also outlined the extent to which over-hasty periodisations of Lacan's work reduce its essential complexity, it is necessary to begin this investigation of the Real with texts produced relatively early on in Lacan's career so as to trace the lineage of concepts that would come to define the concept, as it becomes part of the triad of the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real in 1953. I will focus, in particular, on a text often cited but rarely understood in the fullness of its ambiguity and implication, ‘The Mirror State as Formative of the Function of the *I* As Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience’ (*Écrits* p.75-82). Through a close reading, I hope to emphasise how Hegelian readings of the Mirror Stage, while correct in identifying the key influence of Kojève's reading of Hegel's master/slave dialectic on Lacan's account of ego formation, underplay the *deformative* aspects of the image of the Other that act as a bar to any overcoming of Imaginary antagonism, aspects that, I will argue, later coalesce as what we might designate as the Real in the Imaginary, the presence of an irrecurable antagonism at the heart of the subject. The aim is not to deny the constitutive nature of the mirror image, but to emphasise the co-implication in Lacan's account of ego formation of that which defines the contours of the self and that which comes to threaten it, and to appreciate in turn how this double logic forms the basis for the Real as it is threaded throughout Lacan’s work. The vicissitudes of primary narcissism, that is to say, persist even for those subjects who successfully negotiate

¹ “The real is that which always lies behind the automaton, and it is quite obvious, throughout Freud's research, that it is this that is the object of his concern.” (S11 p.54).

Symbolic castration, and the antagonism proper to the Imaginary persists within Lacan's wider metapsychology as the Real.

The concerns of the chapter inevitably bring the psychoanalytic debate over the role of the image in subject formation into contact with a number of philosophical concerns. In particular, Lacan's account of ego formation provides, I will argue, a counter-argument to any phenomenological emphasis on conscious intentionality and symmetry in the subject/object relationship. Lacan will be shown to have transcended a purely dialectical, developmental or synthetic account of ego formation through the radical ambiguity rendered as central to his concept of the Imaginary and its object, the ego, co-developing as it does both formative and deformative accounts of the image of the other. In making this argument, I will insist that the Imaginary and the egoic image can only be understood in co-implication with the Symbolic; to a certain degree, the Imaginary register is only coherent if we already presuppose the mapping of proto-Symbolic, pre-Oedipal co-ordinates such that the subject is able to incorporate basic relations of self and other. I would like to add to this argument, however, that the Real too, taken to be much more than simply that which is not taken up in the Imaginary or the Symbolic, must be presupposed if the aggressivity and antagonistic rivalry proper to Imaginary identification is to be fully understood. To this end, I will turn to lesser-known papers roughly contemporaneous with Lacan's famous paper on the Mirror Stage.

One of the cornerstones of my argument in this chapter, further, will be that certain, key concepts that Lacan begins to develop early in his career will significantly prefigure later concepts that more explicitly become associated with the register of the Real. I hope that through a reading of Lacan's particular appropriation of the Freudian notions of the 'ideal-ego' and the 'ego-ideal', one might see the tentative beginnings of what will become *objet petit a*, the concept Lacan claimed to consider his most important innovation. Later chapters will flesh out the centrality of this concept and its very particular relationship to the Real, but here at least one might begin to see the early 'staining' of the Imaginary with the Real through the development of a particular, important axis of Lacanian metapsychology, developing over the course of the 1950s and 1960s and eventuating in the concept of the object-cause. It should be noted at this early stage that, by using the term 'Imaginary' to designate the general set of concerns

Lacan addressed surrounding the question of the ego and its complicated relationship to images of the other, I am using a term Lacan himself would only introduce as a substantive in 1953²; nonetheless, it seems clear that what will eventually come under the banner of the Imaginary is exactly the question of the ‘ideal-ego’ and the ‘ego-ideal’, and the process of primary narcissism and identification more generally.

It is a standard claim of Lacanian scholarship that Lacan's three registers of human experience, Symbolic, Imaginary and Real, are only conceivable when considered together, linked as in a Borromean knot, the figure Lacan will increasingly invoke by the 1970s to emphasise the interconnectedness of his registers of experience.³ This chapter, indeed this thesis, will further consolidate this claim, with the notable caveat that it is the Real that ultimately *overdetermines* the three registers, acting as their particular and paradoxical centre of conceptual gravity. If, as I'd like to argue, the development of the notion of the Imaginary, in particular through the account of the Mirror Stage, sets the scene for Lacan's later imbrication of the image (qua gaze of the Other) within the parameters of a traumatic Real, then it is only right that those aspects of this register that tend towards deformation, towards ontological decompletion, should be emphasised as much as any quasi-Hegelian constitutivity granted to the power of the image of the other in the constitution of the ego.

The trope of asymmetry, of a radical alienation that places the subject-to-be out of joint in relation to the image she encounters in the (literal and figurative) mirror can, I think, be cautiously expanded to encompass a general logic in Lacan's account of ego formation, one that tends towards a radically pessimistic account of the captation of the ego within misrecognised and constraining forms of identification. If Kojève,

² In the first seminar, and in the article “Le symbolique, l’imaginaire et le réel” in *Bulletin interne de l’Association française de psychanalyse* 1953.

³ Bruce Fink combines a recognition of this interconnection of the registers with a restatement of the periodization of Lacan’s work, whereby the Real progressively comes to prominence at the expense of the Symbolic, that this thesis opposes, although Fink interestingly dates this overcoming as beginning in the late 1950s: “the [...] Lacanian twist which, in the late 1950s and 1960s, shifts so many of Lacan’s terms from the symbolic to the real. (This process finally comes to an end, in a sense, when Lacan encounters the Borromean knot which takes the three registers – the imaginary, the symbolic and the real – as equally important.)”. (B. Fink, *The Lacanian Subject : Between Language and Jouissance*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997), p.123). This chapter will emphasise, by contrast, the ways in which Lacan derives from the Imaginary in its alliance with the Symbolic, rather than from the Symbolic alone, elements, most notably *objet petit a*, that would coalesce within the category of the Real in the 1960s; this coalescence, further, acts as a retroactive affirmation of the centrality of the Real from the beginning of Lacan’s reflections on primary narcissism in the 1940s.

according to his particular reading of Hegel, emphasises these negative valences of subjective constitution only to resolve them in a recuperative sublation, Lacan will insist that such points of negativity persist as a condition vital for any coherent account of subjectivity. A distinction, then, underpins this chapter between, on the one hand, the iterative *process* of identification that results in the formation of the ego – a process closely tied by Lacan to the images of rivalry and aggression redolent in Kojève’s account of Hegel’s master/slave dialectic – and the *result* of that process, a result that for Hegel via Kojève, in sharp distinction to Lacan, is one of recuperation through recognition.⁴

Woven throughout the chapter is a sense of the *immanence* of excessive or antagonistic elements, associated with aggressivity and deformation, to the Imaginary. In examining Lacan’s account of the ‘dual relationship’ between the nascent ego and the image of the other situated logically, if not temporally, prior to the emergence of the subject in the Symbolic, I hope to prefigure a more expansive, philosophical treatment of Lacan’s questioning of the ontological distinction between immanence and transcendence as it is figured in Lacan’s topology of the subject, the signifier, and the body. The emergent Real that Lacan traces through the various figures of the Imaginary – ego, ego-ideal, ideal-ego and so on – emerges immanently from the movements of primary identification or narcissism, movements that come to produce their own element of excess or antagonism. While it is true that Lacan occasionally refers to the Real at this stage in his teaching interchangeably with a commonsense notion of ‘reality’, he largely stays true to Freud’s insistence in *The Interpretation of*

⁴ This emphasis in Kojève on the recuperative outcome of the struggle between Hegel’s ‘master and slave’ (more accurately ‘lord and bondsman’) derives in part from his anthropological reading of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a reading predicated on the importance of mutual, intersubjective recognition for the evolution of consciousness, and for the progressive realisation of humanity’s social and political institutions: “Man can be truly “satisfied”, History can end, only in and by the formation of a Society, of a State, in which the strictly particular, personal, individual value of each is recognized as such, in its very particularity, by *all* [...] As long as the Master is opposed to the Slave, as long as Mastery and Slavery exist, the synthesis of the Particular and the Universal cannot be realized, and human existence will never be “satisfied”. (A. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel : Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. James H. Nichols Jr., (Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 1980) [1947], p.58; emphasis in the original). By contrast, and although pitched at a different level of analysis, Lacan’s account of the evolution of the subject insists forcibly on non-recognition, miscommunication and irreducible but constitutive antagonism. This is not to deny the centrality for Kojève of conflict in the development of consciousness, but simply to acknowledge the generally optimistic character of his reading of the Spirit’s *telos*.

Dreams that the Real is to be located at the 'navel' of reality, at its inherent, imminent limit.⁵

To begin, however, it is worth clarifying at least in a preliminary fashion how the 'Real' might be defined as a specific object of enquiry, and to preview the methodological approach I will take throughout this thesis in dealing with the polysemousness of Lacan's conceptual innovations.

MULTIPLE REALS?

This brief section aims to acclimatise the reader to the various associated meanings and functions that Lacan would gather under his concept of the Real, and to emphasise, in advance of my discussion of the Imaginary and the Mirror Stage, the extent to which any 'definition' of the Real can only be made in conjunction with other Lacanian terms, terms whose relational configuration at any given point serves to potentially alter the wider meaning of each term involved. To even speak of 'defining' the Real, however, poses the philosophical reader of Lacan a number of problems, not least that one of Lacan's most insistent definitions of the Real highlights that, whatever 'it' is, it escapes language. In his discussion of Freud's dream of Irma's Injection in his second seminar, for instance, Lacan defines the Real as the point at which "words cease." (S2 p.164).

At least at this simple level of definition, one we will quickly supercede, the Real has much in common with the Kantian conception of 'noumena', the logically presupposed but constitutively unknowable outside of temporal, spatial and – for Lacan most importantly – symbolic reality.⁶ A Kantian reading is given credence by the manner in which Lacan insists on a strict separation of his conception of reality, and that of the Real; reality, on this reading, is a construct of Imaginary and Symbolic elements as they coalesce in desire and in fantasy, while the Real lies entirely outside

⁵ S. Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud vol. 4 : The Interpretation of Dreams part 1*, (London, Hogarth Press, 1900), p.525 [hereafter S.E].

⁶ Ellie Ragland-Sullivan offers a concise definition of the 'Real' as reduced to Kant's noumena with the following: "we arrive at a picture of the Real as that which *is* - minus its representation, description, or interpretation." (E. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis*, (Chicago, University of Illinois Press), p.188; my emphasis).

the ambit of human perception and experience.⁷ Even at this early stage in his teaching, however, Lacan will offer more positive definitions of his concept, allying it at different points with something approaching biological need, while elsewhere situating the Real less as an absolute outside to the Imaginary and Symbolic axis but, rather, as something that intervenes at the border or limit of either register. We can identify these ostensibly conflicting valences of the Real, just two among many potential inflections of the term, by tracing their usage in the little-read lecture ‘The Symbolic, The Imaginary and the Real’ from 1953.⁸

In this article, Lacan gives a clear account of the relevance of his “registers” of human experience to the psychoanalytic clinic. Early on, during a discussion of Freud’s ‘pleasure principle’ in relation to neurosis, Lacan distinguishes between the neurotic subject’s “illusory” or “hallucinated” reality – that of the Symbolic and the Imaginary – and what he calls the subject’s “satisfactions whose objects are in the Real, plain and simple.” (S.I.R. p.3). Here, Lacan is referring to what he will elsewhere refer to as ‘need’, any human appetite that can be satisfied through a biological act. The Real that Lacan invokes here is that of biological impulse, appetite or instinct, always-already mediated by the intervention of the Symbolic but *logically*, at least, separable from the far more complex and mediated instances of (Symbolic) demand and desire. Later, however, in a discussion of the Symbolic, Lacan writes of “hauling the expression of analysis back to the real”, a process he elaborates as “always correlated to a putting in parentheses (viz. the exclusion) of what Freud placed in the register of the death instinct, or that which he more or less called the repetition compulsion.” (S.I.R. p.15).

The Real identified by Lacan in this passage is more ambiguously situated in relation to the Symbolic, and seems to depart from its prior, purely biological meaning. It seems clear that this second ‘Real’ cannot be that of biology, in so far as Lacan associates it with the “expression of analysis”, with something central to the analytic process as Lacan wishes to reconstruct it. Lacan also writes that “there is, in analysis, an entire part of the Real of the subject that precisely does escape us” (S.I.R. p.2);

⁷ As Lacan writes in his fourteenth seminar, “It is quite useless to exhaust oneself in articulating the reality of desire because, primordially, desire and reality are related in a seamless texture”. (S14, lesson of 16.11.66).

⁸ Unpublished translation by Scott Savaiano; hereafter S.I.R. Available in French as ‘Le symbolique, l’imaginaire et le réel’ in *Bulletin interne de l’Association française de psychanalyse* 1953.

Lacan both allies the Real with the “expression” of analysis, with something central to his reconfiguration of analysis around his theory of the registers, while at the same time posing the Real as specifically connected to the question of the subject, and in particular to something that “escapes”: from the association of the Real with biology, to an invocation of the explicitly philosophical category of the ‘subject’, and some element that seems to resist incorporation within it. Lacan goes on to associate this part of the subject that escapes as implicated in “a certain number of opacities that oppose themselves to us and that from then on tend to transform analysis” (S.I.R. p.3).

Having defined the Real as central to his particular vision of analysis, Lacan quickly identifies this central element of analytic expression as something that nonetheless reveals the ‘opaque’ limit of analysis. As a practise, then, analysis centres on the Real, as that which is expressive of the specificity of psychoanalytic practise, and yet this centrality simultaneously embodies the opaque limits of analytic possibility. It seems clear that multiple, perhaps conflicting definitions of the Real are at work here, but it’s also clear, even at this relatively early stage in Lacan’s career, how central the relation of the *subject* to the Real was for Lacan, a relation that is rendered as problematic, as something that might elude us, and that serves to specify, further, something particular to psychoanalysis as a practise of knowledge. We have moved, very quickly, from any simple assignation of the Real to biological need.

Taken together, then, these brief scattered remarks by Lacan already point to the conceptual polysemy inherent in the Real, and our quick elucidation of them here lays the ground for the more specific account of the Real in its relation to the Imaginary that occupies the rest of the chapter.

THE ‘MIRROR STAGE’

Lacan's account of the 'Mirror Stage', originally understood as a stage in child development and first elaborated in 1936 at the 14th International Psychoanalytical Congress at Marianbad, remains one of the most influential contributions to clinical psychoanalysis since Freud. As well as contributing to the then-emerging field of child psychoanalysis and to the analysis of ego formation and ego consolidation more generally, Lacan's paper has had a major impact on disciplines as diverse as literary

and cinema studies and political theory. It was largely the Lacan of the Mirror Stage, or of the Imaginary more generally, that was first imported into Anglophone critical theory via its appropriation by cinema studies in the 1970s.⁹ While the work inspired by this text has been frequently fruitful and important, generating alliances where previously psychoanalytic theory had been often been isolated by its attachment to the clinic, the relative ease by which the Mirror Stage article has been incorporated into diverse academic contexts has, I think, prevented a full and thorough survey of its ambiguities and implications. There is, further, a tendency to read the article as if it is more broadly indicative of a ‘phenomenological Lacan’, gradually superceded by the Lacan of Saussurean linguistics.¹⁰ To the contrary, I will show the co-implication of Lacan’s account of identification here with his already pronounced interest in language, and the extent to which this co-implication bars any tenable account of identification in Lacan as fundamentally phenomenological in character. While my interest in Lacan’s thesis lies principally in its theoretical and philosophical import, it is worth briefly sketching the thesis in its clinical specificity before addressing the

⁹ The work of Laura Mulvey, in particular her essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ in *Screen*, 16.3, 1975, p. 6–18, is the central reference here. Mulvey’s use of the Lacanian concept of ‘gaze’ in reference to the objectification of female sexuality onscreen has come in for significant criticism from Joan Copjec and others, suggesting as she does, contra Lacan, that the gaze is to be found on the side of the subject, rather than as an object exterior to, but constitutive of, the subject’s field of vision. See Copjec’s discussion in *Read my Desire : Lacan against the Historicists*, (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1994), p.18-19. Lacan’s most extensive discussion of the gaze is to be found in S11 p.67-79.

¹⁰ Peter Dews has interpreted this period of Lacan’s work as a progressive working out of a fundamentally Hegelian, phenomenological logic of self-consciousness: “It would scarcely be an overstatement to affirm that the entire first phase of Lacan’s work as a psychoanalyst, from his first address to the *International Psychoanalytic Association* in 1936 [when the first version of the ‘Mirror Stage’ paper was delivered] to the ceremonial announcement of his apostasy from official Freudianism in the *Discours de Rome* of 1953, is dominated by the elaboration of this Hegelian account of the dilemmas of self-consciousness and their resolution, in which the fundamental contributions of Freud and Hegel are enriched from sources as diverse as animal ethology and the phenomenology of Heidegger.” (P. Dews, *Logics of Disintegration : Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory*, (New York, Verso, 2007), p.66 [1987]). As this chapter makes clear, my own reading of Lacan’s ‘Mirror Stage’, and of his theory of primary narcissism more generally, fundamentally opposes this thesis: instead of merely elaborating or extending a Hegelian (itself rather more Kojévian) logic of reciprocal identification, Lacan uses the Kojévian emphasis on recognition as a foil that he quickly supercedes, in favour of an account of identification that establishes an irreconcilable antagonism at the heart of the subject. Further, as I’ll show, this antagonism is only heightened through its alliance with language; by contrast, Dews imputes to Lacan a view of language as a vehicle of mediation, a view contradicted by the theory of language present even at this early stage in Lacan’s teaching, and as I’ll reconstruct it over the next few chapters: “It is important to note, however, that Lacan differs from Hegel and Kojève in his suggestion that conflict, far from requiring a historical and political solution, has always been potentially resolved through the prior possibility of mediation inherent in language.” (p.72). This reading of Lacan reduces his theory of language to influences that are only ever a source to be overcome in Lacan’s construction of a precisely non-mediatory, material theory of language, in alliance with the antagonism proper to primary narcissism. If we can be said to ‘use’ language, it is as we would use a “a very poor instrument”, as Lacan writes in his first seminar. (S1 p.2).

ambiguities that, I would like to argue, point Lacan's account of the formation of the ego towards elements that would later be formalised around the concept of the Real.

Lacan's theory of the Mirror Stage found its origin in experiments conducted by his friend Henri Wallon, a French psychologist whose central role in influencing Lacan's theory of ego formation has frequently been underremarked by Lacanians.¹¹ In 1931 Wallon conducted a series of experiments intended to examine the difference between the development of human and chimpanzee infants. Introducing a 6 month old child to its image in a mirror, Wallon noticed that the child would act jubilantly and become fascinated, whereas the chimp quickly lost interest. Wallon concluded that the human infant, despite its relative prematurity, could recognise the image as itself. Lacan significantly develops the implications of Wallon's experiment, arguing that the child's fascination with its image points to a fundamental structure of human subjectivity. As Evans has noted, “[w]hereas in 1936-49, Lacan seems to see it [the Mirror Stage] as a stage which can be located at a specific time in the development of the child with a beginning (6 months) and an end (18 months), by the end of this period there are already signs he is broadening the concept.”¹² There seems little doubt that by 1949, and certainly by the time of the beginning of Lacan's weekly seminar in 1953, Lacan had concluded that the Mirror Stage marks the most important stage in the pre-Oedipal life of the child, as well as a more general dynamic of the introjection of images that would continue into adult life, defined by the register of the Imaginary.¹³

THE IMAGE OF THE OTHER

In his 1949 article, Lacan emphasises the extent to which the thesis of the Mirror Stage is “at odds with any philosophy directly stemming from the cogito”,¹⁴ insisting that any illusory self-grounding provided by the formation of the ego is undercut by the

¹¹ For a comprehensive collection of essays detailing Lacan's relation to Wallon's work, see E. Jalley (ed.), *Freud, Wallon, Lacan. L'enfant au miroir*, (Paris, EPEL, 1998).

¹² D. Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, (London, Routledge, 1996), p.115.

¹³ “This is what I insist upon in my theory of the mirror-stage – the sight alone of the whole form of the human body gives the subject an imaginary mastery over his body, one which is premature in relation to a real mastery. [...] This is the original adventure through which man, for the first time, has the experience of seeing himself, of reflecting on himself and conceiving of himself as other than he is”. (S1 p.79).

¹⁴ J. Lacan, ‘The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I As Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience’ in *Écrits* p.75; hereafter ‘Mirror Stage’.

very sources of that self-grounding, predicated as they are on alienation in the chimeric image of the other. The human infant is especially susceptible to captation by the image of the other, Lacan argues, due to the prematurity of the child at birth and in the first months of development. Motor co-ordination at this stage of development is limited, and the child is totally dependent on a primary caregiver for the most basic of life preserving activities. Further, the child experiences their undeveloped motor skills as the evidence of a fragmented, dissipated body, a body unmasterable in its demands and (literally) unseeable as a unity. As Lacan rather floridly puts it, the body here appears in the form of “disconnected limbs or of organs exoscopically represented, growing wings and taking up arms for internal persecutions that the visionary Hieronymus Bosch fixed for all time in painting.” (‘Mirror Stage’ p.78).

The mirror image, then, provides the first explication of unity for the child, sculpting a bridge between the chaotic experiences of movement and motor (in)coordination and the static surface of the image presented. Importantly, this gap remains open by virtue of the exteriority of the source of unity, preserving the moment of alienation and projection even as the assumption of the image provides a minimal amount of co-ordination and an illusory sense of mastery. As Lacan writes, “the total form on his body, by which the subject anticipates the maturation of his power in a mirage, is given to him only as a gestalt, that is, in an exteriority.” (‘Mirror Stage’ p.76). The perpetual exteriority of the “mirage”, that is, sustains the original moment of alienation given in the mirror reflection. It's worth drawing out the sense here of an emergent topology of the body, and what we might identify as the beginning of Lacan's ventures into expanding the dimensionality of how we conceive the relationship between psyche, body and the world. (It is no accident that Lacan (as edited by Jacques-Alain Miller) will head his discussion of the Imaginary in his first seminar with the title ‘The Topic of the Imaginary’ – see S1 p.73). By emphasising the inherent exteriority of what we come to misrecognise as an egoic interiority, perhaps even that which is most interior, Lacan is taking the first steps in developing what will, by his Seminar 11, be a complex topological demonstration of how that which seems innermost is constituted in a space radically distinct from any simple inside/outside opposition. Later chapters will develop this logic more thoroughly.

Early in his 1949 presentation of the Mirror Stage, Lacan emphasises the primacy and temporally primary importance of what he calls the “symbolic matrix” into which a child is born. (‘Mirror Stage’ p.76). We might think of this matrix in terms of the name chosen for the child even before birth, and the opaque parental desire such a choice may signify, but at a more formal level the presence as constitutive background of a pre-Oedipal, nascent but nonetheless crucial level of symbolic abstraction acts as a further factor in rendering the child susceptible to alienation in the image. It is only, further, through the prior curving of subjective space, the beginnings of the Symbolic, that outside/inside, self/other distinctions might begin to impinge upon the senses, to be fixed at the level of the Imaginary in the ‘ideal-ego’ qua image of the other.¹⁵ Lacan’s thinking here is in sharp distinction to the phenomenological prioritisation of the act of a transcendental consciousness; any account of the synthetic activity of consciousness ignores, for Lacan, the prior and constricting symbolic abstraction necessary for phenomena to become meaningfully present to the subject, and the very limits of that meaningfulness embodied in the opacity of the signifier.¹⁶ There is, even in 1949, no contradiction for Lacan in arguing that the child’s “jubilant assumption of his specular image by the kind of being – still trapped in his motor impotence and nursling dependence – the little man at the *infans* stage thus seems to me to manifest in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form”. (‘Mirror Stage’ p.76). That is, the primacy of the image is sustained by a minimal symbolic level, registering at the egoic level what Lacan will later define as the ‘materiality’ of language in its earliest instance, the signifier abstracted from relations of meaning, reduced to an abstract form of placing or coordination. Later,

¹⁵ This crucial priority of the Symbolic is articulated in the eleventh seminar as follows: “Before any experience, before any individual deduction, even before those collective experiences that may be related only to social needs are inscribed in it, something organizes this field, inscribes its initial lines of force. This is the function that Claude Lèvi-Strauss shows us to be the truth of the totemic function, and which reduces its appearance – the primary classificatory function.” (S11 p.20).

¹⁶ As Lacan puts it in his fifth seminar, “there is here an essential phenomenological level, and we cannot avoid it. But neither must we yield to its mirage alone, namely prostrate ourselves, because it is here effectively that we encounter a little of this danger at the level of this personalist attitude which leads easily enough into mystical prostration” (S5, lesson of 8.1.1958) and “People are brought to a halt [...] by the limits of understanding when they try to understand at all costs; this is what I am trying to get you to go beyond a little by telling you that one can go a little further by stopping oneself trying to understand. And it is for this reason that I am not a phenomenologist.” (S6, lesson of 3.6.1959); the limits of this “understanding” are inherent in the movements of the signifier, as I will demonstrate. It should be noted here that Lacan frequently uses the term ‘phenomenological’ in his early seminars, but he does so to differentiate the specific field of specular identification (the “essential phenomenological level” in the quote above); there is no accompanying identification with the conclusions of phenomenology as a school of philosophical thought.

Lacan will consolidate the materialist underpinnings of his philosophy of language with the concept of 'the letter', to be examined in Chapter Two.¹⁷

Elsewhere in the 'Mirror Stage', Lacan will refer to the result of imagistic identification as a "finally donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure" ('Mirror Stage' p.78), but this minimal interplay between a nascent symbolic matrix and the image of the other (or, to put it in more formal Lacanian terms, the beginnings of an asymmetric relation between the other and the 'big Other' of the Symbolic) points, I think, to a primordial *instability* in the shifting registers that Lacan identifies in human subjectivity. Just as, at this early stage, the child is caught between the bodily reality of fragmentation and displacement and the relative fixity of scopic identification, so at a more abstract level the very first elements of symbolic placing point to the eventual, if only partial, capitulation of the ego to the rupture of the unconscious. Even after the resolution of the Oedipus complex, the antagonism between Imaginary formations and Symbolic co-ordinates can be identified as a primary source of anxiety for the subject, and the subtle implication of the importance of the 'symbolic matrix' even at this early stage of identification provides a glimpse of this. As Lacan writes, "this form [the image of the other] situates the agency known as the ego [...] in a fictional direction *that will forever remain irreducible for any single individual* [...] no matter how successful the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve, as *I*, his discordance with his own reality." ('Mirror Stage' p.76; my emphasis). Thus, even successful progression through the Oedipus complex does not negate the antagonism central to any process of identification; it remains "irreducible".

The subject's introjection of an 'ideal-ego' – the identification in the mirror image of the other of a surface of totality that compensates for the experience of bodily

¹⁷ In his eighth seminar on Transference, Lacan will return to this minimal symbolic level through the concept of the 'unary trait'. The unary trait functions as an important stage in the genesis of what I will come to call the 'signifier-in-isolation', and is an important conceptual instance of Lacan's insistence on the interpenetration of the Imaginary and the Symbolic. As I'll demonstrate in the next chapter, the material or isolated signifier or unary trait can be associated with the Real, as the side of signification allied with non-sense and the foreclosure of meaning: "We must conceive of [the] gaze of the Other as being interiorised by a sign. That is enough. *Ein einziger Zug*. There is no need for a whole field of organization and a massive introjection. This point I of the single trait, this sign of an assent to the Other, of the choice of love, on which the subject can work, is there somewhere, and is dealt with in the sequence of the mirror play." (S8 p.418).

dissipation – is, thus, a fundamentally *ambiguous* process, one that questions any reduction of what will become, for Lacan, the register of the Imaginary to a simply reparative function. (As influentially argued for by Peter Dews; see note 9 above). One must ward, further, against positing the role of the image in terms of a symmetrical opposition to the pre-Oedipal subject, just as the post-Oedipal subject will never symmetrically encounter or possess the object-cause of desire. As Lacan writes in his ‘Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis’, “it is the subjective possibility of the mirror projection [...] into the other’s field that gives human space its originally “geometrical” structure, a structure I would willingly characterise as *kaleidoscopic*”. (‘Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis’ in *Écrits* p.99). If, as in a kaleidoscope, Imaginary space consists of a series of mirrored reflections that persist in a heteronomous field of relations, symmetry, at least in its simple or dyadic form, is alien to the nascent ego, what it may aspire to but ultimately never achieve.

It is worth reflecting a little further, then, on the precise status of this paradoxical image, what Lacan, in 1949, calls variously a ‘gestalt’, betraying his indebtedness to the school of gestalt psychology, an ‘imago’, a term used to distinguish the importance and specificity of mirror images as constitutive of the ego, and ‘ideal-ego’, a term that locates the specificity of the image of the other within the developing subjective economy of the subject. Each of these respective terms are used with varying degrees of consistency by Lacan, and by 1953 and the beginning of the seminar, the algebraic notation *a* qua image of the other will come to stand in for these varying differences in meaning.¹⁸ Nonetheless, each term carries a very particular emphasis which affords us a glimpse of how Lacan’s theory of the image, and of the Imaginary more generally, will develop during the 1950s.

Lacan’s invocation of gestalt psychology is both suggestive and misleading. A school of German psychology emphasising the self-organising holistic form of a patient’s experience, Lacan borrows from the school the primacy of images in the constitution

¹⁸ It is worth noting here that, once the notion of *objet petit a* develops in the late 1950s, the notation ‘i(a)’ will come to replace ‘a’ as the notation for the image of the other qua ideal-ego, as in the development of the ‘graph of desire’ in Seminar 4, assuming its final form in ‘The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire’ in *Écrits* p.690.

of the subject.¹⁹ Crucially, however, Lacan's interest in the formative power of the image carries with it an equal interest in the deformative and aggressive consequences of imagistic identification as noted above, in contradiction to the Gestalt school's emphasis on holism and its recuperative effect.²⁰ Further, Lacan will fundamentally reject any theory of the image, phenomenological or psychological, founded on empiricism, on any theoretical foregrounding of sensory experience; indeed, this rejection extends to a more general rejection of empiricism as the foundation of psychoanalysis as a science.²¹ Instead, we might think of Lacan's account of the Mirror Stage and his broader account of the Imaginary in terms of a fundamental questioning of the notion that subjective interiority is ever fully or unproblematically *opposed* to the world of objects in a relation of intentionality; rather, the image of the other remains at least partially foreign, exterior to the nascent subject, even as it remains crucial in defining the contours of subjectivity as such. The image of the other, then, will always retain its *objectal* quality, and as such will never be fully integrated into any putatively harmonious position.²² The image of the other comes, fundamentally, from an 'outside' whose opposition to any 'inside' is already complicated by the interstitial topology of the developing subject, a topology that Lacan will come, by the mid 1960s, to instantiate through the figure of the Moebius strip, the Klein bottle, among other topological figures.

¹⁹ For a contemporary account of gestalt theory, see F-M Staemmler, *Aggression, Time, and Understanding: Contributions to the Evolution of Gestalt Therapy*, (New York, Routledge, 2009).

²⁰ Lacan offers the following critique of Gestalt theory's reliance on a conception of the whole in his 'Seminar on the "Purloined Letter"': "Cut a letter into small pieces, and it remains the letter it is – and this in a completely different sense than *Gestalttheorie* can account for with the latent vitalism in its notion of the whole." (*Écrits* p.16).

²¹ "I shall take advantage of your kindness in assuming we agree that a science cannot be conditioned upon empiricism." ('The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious' in *Écrits* p.672).

²² In his 1938 encyclopaedia entry 'Family Complexes in the Formation of the Individual', Lacan relates the image in primary narcissism to the object in a discussion of psychosis, commenting that "narcissism is expressed in the forms of the object" and "the object can rediscover [...] the primary narcissistic structure at which its formation was arrested". The 'object' here is the object invested by the psychotic, in a moment of crisis, with the significance and meaning otherwise invested in the image of the other in primary narcissism. By 1949 and the 'Mirror Stage' article, Lacan will have generalised this relation of the image and the object, such that the image in primary narcissism attains the quality of an object in all processes of narcissistic identification. Later, this objectal quality of the image will be incorporated in Lacan's concept of *objet petit a*. (J. Lacan, 'Family Complexes in the Formation of the Individual' [1938], unpublished translation by Cormac Gallagher: <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/FAMILY-COMPLEXES-IN-THE-FORMATION-OF-THE-INDIVIDUAL2.pdf>; available in French as 'Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l'individu' in *Autres écrits*, (Paris, Le Seuil, 2001) p.23-84).

The most important and enduring name given by Lacan for the formative power of the image of the other, however, is the 'ideal-ego' in its comparison with the 'ego-ideal', terms he borrows directly from Freud. Lacan will distinguish the two terms, imbuing both with meanings that point consistently and significantly towards the Real. Freud, in his 'On Narcissism : An Introduction' from 1914, writes of the ideal-ego as "an ideal in himself [the subject] by which he measures his actual ego"²³ only to, a few pages later, write of the ego-ideal in much the same terms, only suggesting that the ego-ideal comes from "without", and that it can "impos[e] severe conditions upon the satisfaction of the libido through objects."²⁴ Laplanche and Pontalis, in their dictionary of psychoanalytic terms, argue that "[Freud] makes no distinction, conceptually speaking, between 'Ideal-ich' (ideal-ego) and 'Ich-ideal' (ego-ideal)", while noting that "A number of post-Freudian authors have used the pair constituted by these two terms to designate two distinct intrapsychic formations."²⁵ Lacan, no doubt one of the post-Freudians referred to by Laplanche and Pontalis, will delineate specific meanings for each term, especially in his first seminar. There, in a discussion with Serge Leclaire on Freud's 'On Narcissism', Lacan writes "one [ideal-ego] is on the plane of the imaginary, and the other [ego-ideal] is on the plane of the symbolic". (S1 p.134). The 'image of the other', qua 'ideal-ego', is internalised as a measure from which the subject compares him or herself, a comparison then compounded by the redoubled reflection of this ideal in the Symbolic, as an 'ego-ideal', an imagined gaze, that judges the subject's inherently inadequate attempts at self-definition.

A particularly paradoxical quality of Lacan's account of the ideal-ego/ego-ideal opposition emerges here. If, as I've argued, one cannot reduce the 'image of the other' to an object of pure interiority, then equally one cannot ascribe a *purely* objectal status to the image of the other, or its Symbolic reflection qua 'ego-ideal', either, precisely because it is only in the narcissistic misrecognition and mis-appropriation of the image that the image becomes anything for the subject at all. The image, then, is as ambiguous in its very placing as it is in its effects upon the subject's developing psychic economy. The nascent subject projects a sense of narcissistic power on the image of the other, and such an action is, I would like to argue, structurally similar to

²³ S. Freud, S.E vol. 14, p.93.

²⁴ S. Freud, S.E vol. 14, p.100.

²⁵ J. Laplanche and J-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, (London, Hogarth Press, 1973), p. 201 [1967].

the relationship Lacan will later develop between the subject and *objet-petit-a*; there too, the object-cause of desire is itself only a form that registers within a certain signifiatory formation of the unconscious, despite ‘causing’ the eruption of desire within the subject from a putative ‘outside’.²⁶ In other words, *objet-petit a*, like the image of the other, functions according to a topological logic of the interpenetration of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, of subjective motivation and objective cause. In both cases, it is the formally paradoxical properties of the objects or images in question that promote their efficacy, an efficacy that registers in the constitutive alienation of the subject.

Lacan’s efforts in elaborating the disharmonious relationship between the developing subject and the image point to a philosophical questioning of the self-directed agency of the subject, and it is in the polemical commentary Lacan offers on existentialism in the final pages of the 1949 Mirror Stage article that this intent becomes clearest. There, Lacan notes how, in general terms, his investigations into the Mirror Stage point to an “existential negativity” at the heart of being, a negativity he acknowledges has also been recognised by “the contemporary philosophy of being and nothingness”, an obvious reference to Sartre. (‘Mirror Stage’ p.79). Lacan quickly qualifies his comments, however, criticising Sartre for grasping the constitutivity of negativity “only within the limits of a self-sufficiency of consciousness, which, being on its premises, ties the illusion of autonomy in which it puts its faith to the ego’s constitutive misrecognitions.” (‘Mirror Stage’ p.80).

This is an over-simplification of Sartre’s account of autonomy, predicated as it is on an overly reductive choice between an account of the a priori determination of existence or the “illusion” of self-sufficient autonomy and freedom. This is a binary Sartre wouldn’t recognise²⁷, but the accent on autonomy as illusion highlights a

²⁶ In his 11th Seminar, Lacan describes the subject’s interaction with *objet petit a* in terms redolent of our account of the ambiguity of the ‘image of the other’: “The function of the exercise with this object refers to an alienation, and not to some supposed mastery, which is difficult to imagine being increased in an endless repetition, whereas the endless repetition that is in question reveals the radical vacillation of the subject.” (S11 p.239). Just as the ‘image of the other’ and its crystallization in the ‘ideal-ego’ cannot be assimilated to the ‘mastery’ of a recuperative recognition or sublation, so the *objet petit a* is equally the index of a fundamental and irrevocable alienation.

²⁷ Sartre emphasized the work of realization involved for any subject to assume an autonomous existence; as he writes, “The technical and philosophical concept of freedom, the only one which we are considering here, means only the autonomy of choice. It is necessary, however, to note that the choice, being identical with acting, supposes a commencement of realization in order that the choice

tension in Lacan's thought that will persist throughout the seminar. Lacan, that is to say, vacillates between aspects of both the Imaginary and the Symbolic that seem to suggest a passively constituted subject of the unconscious, and between those elements most often associated with the Real that hint at the perpetual reconstitution of the unconscious through the intervention of the Real qua cause and through the temporality of retroaction. Even within the discussion of the developing ego in 1949, however, one glimpses what will later be developed as a far more nuanced theoretical balance in Lacanian metapsychology between the constitutivity of negativity and the paradoxical 'freedoms' gifted by the contingency of the Real; one might even claim that Lacan significantly sells short his account of the ego in his polemical engagement with Sartre, failing to recognise that by nuancing the ambiguity of the image of the other, defined as both threatening and a lure, asymmetrically objectal and yet libidinally invested by the subject, the hold on the subject by its ideal-ego is far from secure; at the very least, this is an unfreedom 'chosen' and invested by the subject.

As noted above, then, one can begin to see a conceptual genealogy extending from the ideal-ego to the later development of the object-cause of desire, if only because both disrupt any unilateral ascription of causality to the subject or object; rather, the subject's libidinal investment in the image of the other in the Mirror Stage and the subject's raising of a contingent object to the dignity of cause in the dialectic of desire developed by Lacan in the 1960s complicates and nuances the psychoanalytic debate over the determinism of the unconscious. We will now turn to the concept of the 'ego-ideal' in more depth.

EGO-IDEAL

In his *How To Read Lacan*, Slavoj Žižek provides a concise distinction between Lacan's theory of the ideal-ego, the ego-ideal and the superego:

Lacan introduces a precise distinction between these three terms: the "ideal ego" stands for the idealized self-image of the subject (the way I would like to be, I would like others to see me); the Ego-Ideal is the

may be distinguished from the dream and the wish." (J-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness : An Essay on Philosophical Ontology*, (New York, Washington Square Press, 1993), p.483).

agency whose gaze I try to impress with my ego image, the big Other who watches over me and propels me to give my best, the ideal I try to follow and actualize; and the superego is this same agency in its revengeful, sadistic, punishing, aspect.²⁸

Žižek's definitions lose in accuracy what they make up for in concision as I'll demonstrate below, but the contrast sketched by Žižek between Ideal-Ego and Ego-Ideal bears on questions of the relationship between the development of the ego and the Real. In this section, I'll give an exposition of the relationship between the two concepts in Lacan's teaching, with a view to, in a final section, further developing the 'ideal-ego' and the 'ego-ideal' as conceptual prefigurations of Lacan's later concept of *objet petit a*, reaffirming my broader argument regarding the co-development of the concepts of the Imaginary and the Real. While the general thrust of this chapter concerns the beginnings of Lacan's notion of the Imaginary and its inherent conceptual interconnection with the Real, this section will require some comments on the similar imbrications of the Symbolic and the Real, a theme to be developed more fully in Chapter 2.

As Dylan Evans has noted, we might furnish our distinction between 'ideal-ego' and 'ego-ideal' with reference to the distinction, already present in Freud, between projection and introjection.²⁹ While the constitution of an ideal-ego involves the introjection of images of the other, taken in their surface totality as an illusory model for the ego and installed within the ego from the mirror reflection, it is principally in the active *projections* and *exclusions* instigated by the subject that the ego-ideal (qua imagined Symbolic point that provides a sense of coherence for the nascent subject) develops. As Lacan writes in his first seminar, "the specific domain of the primitive ego [...] is constituted by a splitting, by a differentiation from the external world – what is included inside is differentiated from what is rejected by the processes of exclusion, *Aufstossung*, and of projection." (S1 p.79). I have noted above the many complexities that problematise any simple assignation of 'interiority' to the notion of the ideal-ego, involving as it does a complicated dialectic between the nascent subject

²⁸ S. Žižek, *How To Read Lacan*, (London, Granta, 2007), p.80.

²⁹ D. Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, (London, Routledge, 2006), p.131.

and an ‘outside’ at least partially constituted by the subject herself via libidinal investment, and equally one shouldn’t over hastily assign a similarly reductive ‘outside’ to the ego-ideal, in the sense of it being placed definitively ‘outside’ the subject in the domain of the Symbolic. Nonetheless, some of the theoretical force of Lacan’s distinction between the two forms of ego identification lies in the opaqueness and at least partial *otherness* to the subject of the ego-ideal, its opacity linked to the general opacity of the signifier.

If the ideal-ego becomes, eventually, a libidinally invested source of internal egoic self-reinforcement, the ego-ideal remains, by contrast, clouded by the confusion and opacity of the pre-Oedipal “symbolic matrix”. In an assessment of his predecessors in psychology and psychiatry written in 1966, Lacan will emphasise the fearful ambivalence of the introjected Ideal, commenting that “regardless of what covers the image [ego-ideal], nevertheless, the latter merely centres a power that is deceptive insofar as it diverts alienation [...] toward the totalitarian rivalry which prevails due to the fact that the semblable exercises a dyadic fascination [...] it is the figure of Hegelian murder.” (‘On My Antecedents’ in *Écrits* p.56). Here again, the figure of the other, installed as a source of authority, is simultaneously a mask of the division of the subject, an internal foreignness that is as much a source of aggression as it is of internal consistency and egoic reinforcement. It is this crucial point that Žižek’s elision of the ego-ideal with the big Other (as the “agency whose gaze I try to impress”) above misses: the big Other of the Symbolic must be presupposed for the ego-ideal to function, but the ego-ideal remains, nonetheless, a more particularistic and yet more ambivalent point of egoic attachment for the subject, picked out against the general backdrop of the Other of the signifier. It is worth finessing further our account of the ‘ego-ideal’ through an attention to the first seminar.

Lacan’s first seminar addresses the question of the ego-ideal principally through the invocation of optics. In particular, Lacan invokes an “optical model” or experiment, using both a concave and plane mirror. The concave mirror produces a ‘real reflection’ of a hidden flowerpot, a reflection in turn reflected in the plane mirror, producing a virtual image. The subject can only see this image when situated in a particular field of vision; as Lacan writes, “Beyond the eye, the rays continue their movement, and diverge once again. But for the eye, they are convergent, and give a real image” (S1

p.78). That is to say, the reflective rays coming from the two mirrors converge at the point at which the subject is stood, thus emblematising the collaboration of the Imaginary and the Symbolic. We can interpret the plane mirror as representing the Symbolic; it must be presupposed so that the otherwise inverted image produced by the concave mirror, the mirror we might take to broadly represent the function of the Imaginary, can reach the subject, who is positioned, as we've noted, so that the rays produced by both mirrors converge in a identifiable image. Note here, again, the mutual implication of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, terms now firmly established in Lacan's vocabulary. More specifically, the optical model illustrates the way in which the subject's relationship to the Symbolic effects her relationship to the Imaginary, and in particular to the various images that serve to constitute and reinforce the ego. As Lacan writes, "My position in the imaginary [...] is only conceivable insofar as one finds a guide beyond the imaginary, on the level of the symbolic plane." (S1 p.141); this plane, taken as the general plane of the Symbolic, is represented in Lacan's optical example by the plane mirror, diverting and curving the 'real reflection' for the gaze of the subject.

In what might this 'guide', the ego-ideal, consist? First and foremost, the ego-ideal should be understood as an imagined point of scrutiny, equivalent in pre-Oedipal development to the words of the primary caregiver and their expectations of particular behaviour. As noted above, the naming of the child prior to her birth and the general backdrop of largely obscure signifiers that surround the developing child results in a minimal form of Symbolic mapping, a web of incompletely understood demands that provide a bed for the totalising forms of Imaginary identification. Into this schema, the ego-ideal provides a proto-Symbolic crystallisation of the law, of what will become, upon the resolution of the Oedipus complex, the surety of the Name-of-the-Father. In so far as we can legitimately distinguish between an interiority and exteriority of the nascent subject – and I have indicated the conceptual difficulties in doing so – the ego-ideal as partially obscure point of subjective measure is internalised by the subject, shoring up the ego while at the same time providing the beginnings of what will become identification with the big Other of the Symbolic order. As Bruce Fink puts it, "The subject comes into being here insofar as she identifies with the Other's view of her (replete as it is with the Other's ideals and values); in other words, she internalises

the ideal for her that the Other has, what she would have to be in order to be ideal in the Other's eyes : ego-ideal.”³⁰

In so far as pre-Oedipal identification, reliant as it is on the Symbolic as much as it on the Imaginary, requires an interiorised point of consistency assumed as the other's expectation, Fink's description holds. But I'd like to emphasise a point of inconsistency and ambiguity in the status of the 'Other' that Fink describes, an ambiguity that Fink, like Žižek quoted above, elides. While it is clear that the Symbolic provides the material or ground for identification in the subject's post-Oedipal life, there is a certain obscurity in the more general status of the other of identification in the pre-Oedipal stage of ego development discussed by Lacan in his Mirror Stage article and in the first seminar. Just as, in my discussion of the ideal-ego, I sought to show how the ambiguity of the image of the other serves to undermine any account of the formation of the ego that overly emphasises the ego's inter-subjective stability, I similarly claim that the ego-ideal is constitutively caught between at least *two* 'others', generating a tension and obscurity that will later find conceptual clarity and definition in the notion of the Real gaze as part-object. Even as Lacan emphasises in his first seminar the central role of the Symbolic in directing the ego-ideal – in the optical model discussed above, 'tilting' the mirror so as to influence the effect of the images of specular identification on the subject – it is equally clear that the 'other' that the subject takes the ego-ideal from/projects the ego-ideal towards is an *Imaginary* other, which is to say an other related to the mirror image of specular (mis)identification and carved out by the subject as a point of illusory exteriority. The material building blocks that allow the subject to project, and then introject, this imagined point of scrutiny are as much the various misrecognised images that form the Ideal form of the nascent ego as they are the demanding signifiers issued by primary caregivers and others and half-heard by the subject. In a dense and telling remark from his article 'Remarks on Daniel Legache's Presentation', contemporaneous with the first seminar but significantly revised in 1960, Lacan remarks:

the antinomy of images, $i(a)$ and $i'(a)$, being situated for the subject in the imaginary, resolves into a constant transitivity. A sort of ego-ideal-

³⁰ B. Fink, *Lacan to the Letter : Reading 'Écrits' Closely*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 116.

ego is thus produced, whose boundaries [...] are to be taken as propping up *uncertainty* and allowing for rectification, as perpetuating the equivocation of different circumscriptions that vary according to their status, and even as accepting free zones and isolated fiefs into their complex. (*Écrits* p.567; my emphasis).³¹

The particular difficulty of Lacan's prose here reflects, I think, the complex topography of the ego and its constitutive images that his theory of the Mirror Stage had, perhaps, slightly undersold, and in particular the difficulty in defining the source and aim of the specular drive associated with the ego-ideal. The uncertainty that Lacan highlights in the passage, and the transitivity between 'ego' and 'ideal' that threatens to blur the very distinction between the ego and its imagistic others (suggested by Lacan in the 'ego-ideal-ego' concatenation), forms the beginnings of what will become a Real gaze, radically outside any established inside/outside distinction and both threatening and motivating to the subject. It is, I think, significant that this gaze will come to be defined by Lacan, by seminar 11, as being both 'inside and outside' the subject, and we might add that it is similarly torn between different sources and aims, just as the ego-ideal is torn between its Imaginary and Symbolic components. As Lacan writes in the 11th Seminar, "I apprehend the world in a perception that seems to concern the immanence of the *I see myself seeing myself*." (S11 p.81; emphasis in the original). The two 'others' that the ego-ideal issues from and directs towards – the other of the dissipated pre-Oedipal universe of material, isolated signifiers and the other of the misrecognised specular image – generate a third term that is nothing but the uncertain transitivity mentioned by Lacan, a third term that we might provisionally associate with the Real.

The antagonism of the Real, then, is produced in and through egoic identification as a constitutive impasse or tension, generated negatively between rival sources and aims of identification, or, rather, in the very opacity of the distinction between the sources and aims of identification as such. In the case of both the ideal-ego and the ego-ideal, a

³¹ Lacan's insistence on the permeability of the ego and the inevitable transitivity between 'outside' and 'inside' in the construction of the ego echoes, albeit distantly, a number of pre-psychoanalytic accounts of the mind, perhaps most notably that of Hippolyte Bernheim. Bernheim emphasised the "credulity" of the mind in taking outside inferences to be internally generated. See the discussion in George Makari's *Revolution in Mind : The Creation of Psychoanalysis*, (London, Gerald Duckworth & co., 2008), p.30-32.

primary disjunction generative of the Real is that between the Imaginary and Symbolic elements of identification: both forms of the ego require the assumption of a minimal Symbolic matrix but both equally draw upon specular resources that impose their forms of Imaginary unity (contra the radical dissipation of their Symbolic supports) on the fragmented body of the pre-Oedipal nascent subject. Similarly, the slippage in the ideal-ego between the jubilation of the assumption of a mirror surface of totality and the aggressivity generated in the same movement testifies again to the absent third term of the Real; to emphasise again, Lacan will only formalise this ‘third term’ during the long years of his seminar, but its various functions as they would come to be defined – instability, impasse, and a function of constitutive negativity – are present, indeed constitutively central, in Lacan’s very earliest speculations as to the character of pre-Oedipal development.

Furthermore, Lacan, as early as 1948, had identified a number of images important in egoic development associated less with the illusory totality of the mirror image and more with the fragmentation of the infant’s body. In his article of 1948 ‘Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis’, Lacan writes of “imagos of the fragmented body”, images that he associates with “castration, emasculation, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, and bursting open of the body”. (*Écrits* p.105). He goes on to associate such images with social practises of tattooing and circumcision, but for our purposes this identification of a set of images unrelated to the specular function of illusory unity shores up the sense in which the image, for Lacan, serves an ambiguous and paradoxical function: at once veiling the Real fragmentation and dissipation of the pre-Oedipal body while sustaining the violence of pre-Oedipal embodiment through the generation of images that remind the nascent subject of its basis in the dissipation of primary narcissism. Lacan, in his article on ‘aggressiveness’, calls these images “spontaneous themes of [the] imagination” (*Écrits* p.105), and it is only a small conceptual move to associate such a duality of function not with two sets of imagined images – one reparative, one deformative – but rather as being potentially contained within *one* image, whether the mirror image of the other or the imagined Ideal point projected by the nascent self into the Symbolic Other.

This trope of dual (dys)functionality will be a theme developed throughout this thesis; it is, without question, one of the most persistent conceptual motifs in

Lacanian psychoanalysis. In the context of Lacan's early theory of the pre-Oedipal, one might contextualise Lacan's innovations here as a response to the simplifications of American ego-psychology, whose practitioners insisted on a theory of the ego as a defensive and orientating shield against the depredations of the drive, a view that can only selectively find support in Freud.³² By 1953 and the beginning of the seminar, however, the constitutive duality and ambiguity of psychoanalytic concepts finds a particular locus in Lacan's continued revision of his notion of desire, and in particular in the gradual conceptual shift in the notion of the object of desire, with the accent increasingly placed on the role of the object in *causing* desire as such.

FROM 'IDEAL-EGO' (i(a)) TO 'OBJET PETIT A' (a)

In his abandoned seminar on 'The Names of the Father' from 1964, Lacan remarks critically on the Hegelian dialectic. Hegel, he insists, closes his 'System' in the face of anxiety, an anxiety that renders all logic open to disruption and dissolution.³³ Lacan doesn't specify precisely what this anxiety might be, but we can infer that he sees in Hegel an illegitimate suturing of knowledge and being. The dialectic, Lacan writes, is "false and contradicted as much by the testimony of the natural sciences as by the historical progress of the fundamental science, mathematics." ('Names of the Father' p.86). Recapping his previous seminar on anxiety, Lacan comments that anxiety is fundamentally "nondialectisable" ('Names of the Father' p.82), and in so far as his object-cause of desire – *objet petit a* – is the object of anxiety, it too develops according to a logic non-dialectical, even anti-dialectical, in character. As Lacan writes, "I have opposed the psychologizing tradition that distinguishes fear from anxiety by virtue of its correlates in reality. In this I have changed things, maintaining of anxiety – *it is not without an object*. What is that object? The object *petit a*." ('Names of the Father' p.82; emphasis in the original).

³² Heinz Hartmann, *Essays on Ego-Psychology : Selected Problems in Psychoanalytic Theory*, (London, Pan, 1999).

³³ "It is here that anxiety is for us a sign, as was immediately seen by the contemporary of the development of Hegel's system [...] as was seen, sung, and marked by Kierkegaard. Anxiety is for us witness to an essential breach, onto which I bring testimony that Freudian doctrine is that which illuminates." (J. Lacan, 'Introduction to 'The Names of the Father' Seminar', trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, *October* 40, 1987, p.84; hereafter 'Names of the Father').

It is worth registering at this early juncture the significance of Lacan's insistence on the inability of Hegelian logic to capture the paradoxical character of the psychoanalytic object. If it is commonplace to associate the development of Lacan's early ideas as discussed above with Hegel's account of the lord and bondsman in his *Phenomenology*³⁴, then such a reading is placed in question if, as I argue, the precisely *non-dialectical* object finds its genesis in a concept, ideal-ego, located and consolidated at this putatively 'Hegelian' stage of Lacan's thinking. Lacan himself makes this link explicit when he describes the 'i(a)' qua image of the other, in a discussion of the myth of Oedipus, as the "complement" to the object-cause of desire: "He [Oedipus] is thus the victim of a lure, through which what issues forth from him and confronts him is not the true *petit a*, but its complement, the specular image : i(a)". ('Names of the Father' p.86). The remarks that follow lay the ground for a more comprehensive discussion of *objet petit a* to be undertaken in a subsequent chapter; the main aim here is to underline the conceptual continuity, pointing toward the Real, that is traceable from Lacan's pre-1953 work on the (de)formative constitutivity of the image of the Other and his metapsychological breakthrough in developing the notion of the Real object-cause.

In his seminars of 1957-1958 and 1958-1959, Lacan presents his *matheme* of fantasy, whereby the divided subject of the signifier 'faces' the object of desire, mediated by a

³⁴ Mikkel Borch-Jacobson, in a manner not dissimilar to Dews, provides a strong reading of Lacan's Kojève-derived Hegelian influence in his *Lacan : The Absolute Master*, as in the following: "it was no accident that the laughter of Kojève the man, of the Wise Man incarnated in Alexandre, is where Lacan recognized the rift of the "subject supposed to know." Indeed, Kojève proposed a "humanist" and "anthropological" interpretation of Hegel in his course [...] Insofar as Lacan, in many ways, was the most consequential representative of this tradition of thought, it is important to pause here for a moment." My own reading of Lacan's interpolation of the theme of the master/slave dialectic emphasises, by contrast, the non-Hegelian, and strictly anti-humanist, insistence on the irrecoverability of antagonism at the heart of subjective identification. Borch-Jacobsen recognises, nonetheless, the transcendence in Lacan of Kojève's influence, as in the following: "[Kojève's] problem of "humanism" was also his [Lacan's], and so he remained to the end "the son of his times." Of his *Kojévian* times, that is, since this problem – the problem of the human, all too human, mortality of the Wise Man – is, we must emphasize, in no way a Hegelian problem, and for a very simple reason: namely, that absolute knowledge, as its name indicates, is not in any sense a knowledge or science of finite man." This chapter nonetheless, and indeed this thesis more generally, questions that Lacan's work can be so fully characterised within the terms of anthropological finitude proposed by Borch-Jacobsen; to the contrary, the prominence of the signifier in the life of the subject, when articulated with the Freudian death-drive, paradoxically implies a certain repetitive, insistent immortality in, if not of, the subject, from the 'Mirror Stage' article onwards. The traumatic, divisive antagonism proper to primary narcissism, moreover, puts in question Borch-Jacobson's wish to ally Lacan with the centred subject of humanism. (M. Borch-Jacobson, *Lacan : The Absolute Master*, (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1991), p.12).

fantasmatic screen.³⁵ Whereas in his pre-seminar writings on primary narcissism, the algebraic notation ‘a’ signified the specular image of the other qua alter-ego, Lacan now distinguishes between ‘i(a)’ as the Imaginary image of the other as discussed above and ‘a’ as what he describes in the seminar as the “imaginary object”, an object that the child fantasises can be detached from the body. (S5, lesson of 15.1.58). Critically invoking the object-relations theory of Melanie Klein as he had in the seminar of the previous year, Lacan figures the psychoanalytic object as implicated in the ways in which the child is raised to the level of an object in the dyadic exchange between the imagined desire of the mother and the needs of the child. If on this account i(a) can be understood, as above, as the Imaginary, internalised *image* of proto-Symbolic identification, ‘a’ by contrast represents an extendable imaginary part of the body, a body already captured by forms of Imaginary identification and captured, at least in part, by the signifier. As Lacan writes, “I would like to point out that castration is a symbolic act, whose agent is someone real [real here used in the common sense]: the mother or the father who tells him: “it’s going to be cut off”, and whose object is an imaginary object.” (S5, lesson of 15.1.58).

Lacan discusses his object in the context of an elaboration of the Oedipus complex that complicates his earlier account of pre-Oedipal identification, principally by emphasising the importance of the mother’s desire in situating the child’s first points of identification. (Melanie Klein is again acknowledged here in her reference to the power of maternal desire, although Lacan is equally critical of the broader theoretical ends to which her insights are applied).³⁶ The imaginary object, on this reading, serves to connect the subject to prior forms of identification, particularly the specular image of the Mirror Stage and the Imaginary phallus of castration, while it nonetheless, in its extendibility, accords with the Symbolic logic of substitution and translatability. As Lacan writes, “Perversion, deviation, even delusion are articulated in an objectification which ties the imaginary and the symbolic together. [...] it is a question of the relationships of the subject to the signifier”. (Seminar 6, lesson of 12.11.58); the plural “relationships” is important here, in so far as the imaginary object represents both the

³⁵ “the elucidation of the following formula as being the constant formula of the phantasy in the unconscious: $\$ \leftrightarrow a$ ”. (S6, lesson of 10.12.58).

³⁶ “The child, in what is articulated by the psychiatrists, specifically Mrs. Melanie Klein, has a whole series of first relationships which are established with the body of the mother [...] represented here in a primitive experience which we grasp badly from the Kleinian description: the relationship of symbol and of image”. (S6, lesson of 11.02.59).

imaginary relation to the “symbolic matrix” as conceived in primary narcissism, and the fully Symbolic relation of the post-Oedipal subject to her objects of desire.

Both $i(a)$ and ‘a’ are, then, objects of identification, with ‘a’ also serving as the object of the metonymic desire proper to (fully Symbolic) human subjectivity, what Lacan refers to as “the metonymy in being”. (S6, lesson of 19.11.58). Lacan further defines this object as persisting after the resolution of the Oedipus complex, as the residue of Imaginary identification within the Symbolic, tying the subject to the metonymic movements of desire as it was first figured in the images of primary narcissism. As Lacan writes, “I desire you’, articulated within, as I might say, concerning an object, is more or less the following: ‘You are beautiful’, around which there is fixed, there is condensed all these enigmatic images whose profusion is called by me my desire” (Seminar 6, lesson of 19.11.58). It is crucial to emphasise, at this juncture, that it is the status and importance of the Other as desiring that definitively links $i(a)$ and ‘a’, even as both objects are separated temporally and logically by the Oedipus complex and by their relative imbrication in the Symbolic. ‘ $I(a)$ ’ results from the subject’s early struggles with defining itself in distinction to the specular other, while ‘a’, even at this relatively early stage in its development, becomes important for the subject in relation to what the Other expects of the subject’s desire; to this extent, ‘a’ can be understood as functioning, for the Lacan of 1957-1959, as a formal leftover in the Symbolic of the *question* of the (m)Other’s desire, a question that persists through the attempts by the subject to recover something of her original relation to the One of the maternal relationship. As Lacan writes, “it is the imaginary object with which the child has to identify himself to satisfy the desire of the mother [...] the possibility of such a mapping out which [...] opens up the whole possibility of the imaginary.” (S5, lesson of 5.02.58).

Lacan’s critical comments in his ‘Introduction to the ‘Names of the Father’ Seminar’ relating to the Hegelian dialectic can, I think, be explicated further by considering his earlier account of the non-recuperability of this ‘imaginary object’, growing as it does from both ‘ $i(a)$ ’ as the image of the other installed within the subject and from the anxiety-inducing problem of the mOther’s desire. Just as the *image* of the other serves to simultaneously constitute and threaten the nascent identity of the subject, so too ‘a’, as the imaginary *object* of desire, provokes the question of the subject’s fading before

the Other, the hysterical question par excellence that is ultimately, indeed constitutively, irresolvable: “The absent [object] which, as being characteristic of the relationship of desire to the relationship of the subject with the imaginary functions, which is expressed in the formula $\$ \langle \rangle a$, [...] poses for him the question of his subjective elision” (S6, lesson of 7.1.59).

Functioning both as a detachable extension of the subject and as an exterior force threatening the subject’s bounds, the imaginary object thematises the paradox of desire for Lacan, circling artificial barriers of the inside and outside and never finally possessable or knowable for the subject. If, for Kojève’s Hegel, desire is ultimately a desire for recognition predicated on a negativity conspicuous in its contingent movements but statically fixed in form, Lacan here figures desire in relation to an ambivalent relationship to an object that is simultaneously constituting and threatening, in the same way that the pre-Oedipal relationship with the mother is both mourned by the post-Oedipal subject and emerges in fantasy as something over-proximate and anxiety inducing. Lacan takes from Kojève’s Hegel something of the contingent movement of what he calls, in a famous article, the ‘dialectic of desire’, but not the immovability of the *form* of productive negativity, stopping up the movement of desire with objects whose obstinacy consists as much in their refusal to succumb to dialectical supersession as in the impossibility of the subject to ever truly ‘possess’ or know them, situated as they are in the opaque field of the Other. As Lacan writes, “this imaginary object finds itself [...] in a position of being able to condense in itself what can be called [...] the dimension of being, that is can become this veritable lure of being, which the object of human desire is”. (Seminar 6, lesson of 15.4.1959).

Philosophically, we might distinguish between Kojève and Lacan’s logic here in terms of a distinction between dialectic and paradox. While the dialectician seeks an overcoming that retrospectively reconstitutes what it has superseded at a higher level of becoming, the Imaginary (and later Real) object of paradox discussed by Lacan represents an impasse in such a movement, an impasse that can be generative as well as disruptive. The relation discussed above between Lacan’s ‘imaginary object’ of 1957 and the imaginary phallus of the Oedipus complex can serve us further here; the phallus as operator and exchange-object of identity in both the Imaginary and the Symbolic functions precisely in a non-dialectical manner, the phallus being defined as

the signifier that points only to its own loss and that has no complement, but in whose stead one can accede to the complementary, and logically subsequent, impasse of the Symbolic.³⁷ Phallic logic for Lacan should be understood, accordingly, as asymmetrical and non-dialectical, to the extent that the phallus, rather like the “imaginary object”, operates successfully only in the *singularity* and *irresolvability* of the impasses it imposes on the subject.³⁸ I should note here the repetition of a conceptual movement elaborated above in relation to the image of the other; constitutivity and the dissolution of that which is constituted, asymmetry without the dialectical resolution of a third term, remains a constant for Lacan across his work. In a later chapter, I will fully explicate the logic of *objet-petit-a* qua impasse in relation to the turn to mathematical formalisation already apparent in Lacan’s seminar by the beginning of the 1960s. Suffice to note now, however, the radically different versions of constitutive negativity offered by Kojève’s Hegel and Lacan, one motoring a resolution, the other endlessly circling the subject without resolution.³⁹

A common narrative, one developed in particular by Jacques Alain-Miller and his student Slavoj Žižek⁴⁰, situates the discussion of the image of the other and the ‘imaginary object’ in the 1940s and 1950s in stark contrast to the later insistence on *objet-petit-a* as the scrap or remainder of the Real in the Symbolic, a development commonly characterised as something of an ‘epistemological break’ and attributed to Seminar XI, ‘The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis’.⁴¹ The strictly *internal* relation of the Real to the Imaginary as developed in this chapter, however,

³⁷ “S\diamonda as such signifies the following: it is in so far as the subject is deprived of something of himself which took on the value of [the] signifier by virtue of its very alienation. This something is the phallus. It is therefore in so far as the subject is deprived of something which belongs to his very life [...] that a particular object becomes [an] object of desire.” (S6, lesson of 22.4.1959).

³⁸ “The subject, in so far as he identifies himself with the phallus in the face of the other, fragments [...] himself in the presence of something which is the phallus.” (S6, lesson of 7.1.59); here again, the sheer opacity of the imaginary object forces upon the subject a fundamental impasse, a “fragmentation”.

³⁹ Pierre Macherey put this well in his essay ‘The Hegelian Lure : Lacan as Reader of Hegel’: “If Hegel’s words always have their place [for Lacan] [...] it is provided that they are deprived of their initial meaning. Strictly speaking, it could be said [...] that a hallucination is an *Aufhebung*, a negation of the negation, but on the condition of specifying that it is not in this sense that the effect of reality aroused by it could simultaneously reconcile subject and object through a recognition of their common belonging to a third moment [...] Lacan is more concerned with leaving Hegel than with entering him.” (P. Macherey, *In A Materialist Way : Selected Essays*, ed. Warren Montag, trans. Ted Stolze, (New York, Verso, 1998), p. 73-74).

⁴⁰ See, for instance, Jacques-Alain Miller’s essay ‘Semblants et Sinthome’ in *la Cause freudienne*, no. 69, 2007.

⁴¹ See, for example, B. Fink, *The Lacanian Subject : From Language to Jouissance*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 26-30.

allows us to appreciate the ways in which the ‘later’ psychoanalytic object of the Real retains crucial aspects of its Imaginary genesis, not least in relation to the vexed and irresolvable question of the Other’s desire. Perhaps more importantly, however, it is possible to read back from Lacan’s association of the object-cause of desire with the Real, whereby the object-cause of desire resembles a *form* disrupting the movements of the Symbolic, with the image of the Other as an image at odds with the ego it contributes to forming; with, that is, the Real as it manifests both in the antagonistic logic of the Imaginary and in the paradoxical logic of the object-cause. If, finally, the Real as it can be extrapolated from a reading of Lacan’s first writings on the Imaginary names an inherent traumatism or antagonism in the development of subjectivity, Lacan will similarly emphasis the Real as an inherent, internal *function* proper to the Symbolic. In the next chapter, I hope to show how Lacan’s account of the Real in/of the Symbolic complements, rather than contradicts, his parallel attention to the traumatic rift in the nascent ego.

CHAPTER TWO – THE REAL AND THE SYMBOLIC

INTRODUCTION

Having explained how Lacan lays out the formation of the Real, conceived in its relationship to the Imaginary as an immanently produced, and irrecoverable, antagonism proper to identification, I will now outline Lacan's theory of the Symbolic in its intimate interconnection with the Real. While the importance of Saussure and Jakobson's linguistics and Lévi-Strauss' structural anthropology for the development of Lacan's theory of language is indisputable¹, this chapter will argue that Lacan pushed the logic of the structuralist analysis of language to its very limit, and in so doing revealed the Real, the 'ex-timate' limit point inherent to, but disruptive of, all Symbolic logics.

Readings of Lacan influenced by Jacques-Alain Miller's formalisation of the so-called "late Lacan" of the latter half of the 1960s and the 1970s, up to and including Slavoj Žižek's, have tended to posit two kinds of formalism in relation to the Symbolic. The first is identified with Lacan's teaching of the 1950s and 1960s and is defined as a more or less faithful rendering of an orthodox structuralist account of the constitutivity of language for the subject. The second is associated with a later, 'Real' formalism, eclipsing the constitutivity of language in favour of an increasing focus on *jouissance*, the excess enjoyment that motors symptomatic identification but that eludes the structure of language.² I will refute this reading by showing how, from early in Lacan's

¹ For a philosophically rigorous account of the interaction of Saussurean linguistics and structuralism, including Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, see P. Maniglier, *La vie énigmatique des signes : Saussure et la naissance du structuralisme*, (Paris, Editions Léo Scheer, 2006); for a recent account of the early influence of Lévi-Strauss on Lacan, see M. Zafiroopoulos, *Lacan and Lévi-Strauss or the Return to Freud (1951-1957)*, (London, Karnac, 2010).

² Žižek articulates this position as follows: "So, while the 'classic' structuralist Lacan invites me to *dare the truth*, subjectively to assume the truth of my desire inscribed into the big Other, the later Lacan comes much closer to something like *truth or dare*: (the symbolic) truth is for those who *do not dare* – what? To confront the fantasmatic core of (the Real) of their *jouissance*." (S. Žižek, 'Foreword to the Second Edition : Enjoyment Within the Limits of Reason Alone' in *For They Know Not What They Do : Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, (New York, Verso, 2002), p. lxvii). Žižek often makes productive philosophical connections and provocations with these kinds of reductions, but the price is theoretical confusion, as least as far as his use of Lacan is concerned. As this chapter and subsequent chapters will demonstrate, the "fantasmatic core" of the Real precisely cannot be excised from its manifestation in the Symbolic, and from its roots in the Imaginary movements of primary narcissism; Žižek's characterisation further risks rendering the Lacan of the 1950s a linguistic theorist of intersubjective recognition. Instead, as I'll show, Lacan is acutely aware of the thorough interpenetration of the Imaginary, Symbolic and the Real, and of the fundamental opacity of the signifier even as it manifests in the concept of the 'big Other' in his earlier seminars.

seminar, language is rendered by Lacan as a multi-dimensional, *dynamic* structure, containing points of inconsistency and unmeaning that point to the Real. Crucial Lacanian concepts considered in such a way will be the 'unary trait' as a material marker situated, at least logically, prior to the relativisation of Symbolic sense, the 'letter' as the signifier in its isolation from relations of meaning, and the Lacanian reinvention of the notion of the signifier *tout court*, predicated as it is on a displacement of the Saussurian naturalisation of the signifier's connection to the signified.

It is, above all, in the philosophical reception of Lacan, inaugurated by Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's essay *The Title of the Letter*³, that the notion of Lacan as a thinker ultimately beholden, if only implicitly, to an idealist view of language as all that is accessible has taken hold. To the contrary, Lacan, I will argue, registered early in his teaching the importance of recognising the constitutive interpenetration of the Symbolic and the Real, and the subsequent recognition of the constitutive deficiencies of the Symbolic as it moulds the subject. And just as Freud, most notably in his 1925 paper 'Negation', emphasised the prior affirmation necessary for any negative judgment or logic of contradiction⁴, so Lacan, far from being a thinker of a hypostatized linguistic lack or void, insists on the *singularity* and *persistence* of those elements in the Symbolic that immanently escape any negative constitution of reference and that point to the ultimate overdetermination of the Symbolic by the Real.⁵ Overdetermination, to be clear, signifies in this instance the absolute reliance of the production of meaning on those Real elements of the Symbolic that, while

³ P. Lacoue-Labarthe and J-L Nancy, *The Title of the Letter : A Reading of Lacan*, (New York, SUNY Press, 1992).

⁴ Freud's argument is central to his belief that there can be no negation in the unconscious; as a result, the forms of negation that appear in analytic treatment are forms of defense that mask an affirmative unconscious wish. It is especially suggestive, in the light of Lacan's later take on the interaction between affirmative and negative elements in the Symbolic, that Freud considers the manipulation of language to be central to the translation of an affirmation into a negation, and its potential reversal again, as in the following: "The manner in which our patients bring forward their associations during the work of analysis gives us an opportunity for making some interesting observations. [...] 'You ask who this person in the dream can be. It's *not* my mother.' We emend this to: 'So it *is* his mother'." (S. Freud, S.E vol. 19, p.235).

⁵ In an interesting triangulation, Freud's insistence on affirmation as preceding negativity in his 'Negation' finds an echo not only in Lacan's emphasis, to be outlined in this chapter, on the singularity of self-subsistent Real elements within the Symbolic, but also in Deleuze's project of resituating ontological difference as primary: "Negation results from affirmation: this means that negation arises in the wake of affirmation or beside it, but only as the shadow of the more profound genetic element" (G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, (London, Athlone, 1994), p.55).

inherently meaningless, nonetheless provide the ground for meaning's emergence. If Lacan's discussion of the Real in the Imaginary, developed through his rereading of Freud's theory of primary narcissism, emphasises the traumatism inherent to the process of identification, the Real that emerges from the Symbolic, while retaining its Imaginary edge of threat, will come to persist as a formal point, singular and undialectisable, within the logic of signification, both constituting it from within and threatening it from without. Here, the double logic that I argue is central to Lacan's Real reemerges, namely the co-implication of the constitutive and the dissolutive, the formative and the deformative, identified in the previous chapter in relation to processes of identification.

Moreover, just as Lacan's Imaginary threatens any consistent presentation of boundaries of the inside and the outside, so the Real in the Symbolic will threaten any residue of a post-Kantian division between the phenomena of empirical reality and the noumenal outside of any representational system, while avoiding the temptations of Hegelian synthesis. Lacan's philosophy of language will accordingly be distinguished from both the structuralist emphasis on complex totalities, and the post-structuralist logic of a potentially limitless semiotic freeplay; Lacan, I will argue, manages, in part through his co-development of the relationality of the signifier and the material underside of the same, to avoid theorising language either as an internally complex but exhaustive totality, nor as an endlessly creative, pliable resource.⁶

The rich paradox at the heart of Lacan's Symbolic is precisely the *simultaneous* insistence, then, on the irrecoverability of the rift between signifier and signified, and the equal insistence that a limited, contingent, and *material* 'stopping up' of signifiatory freeplay is inevitable, with the notable caveat that such points of consistency are guaranteed not through the ruse of a transcendental signifier or an external guarantor of meaning, but by the repetitive, contingent iteration of the

⁶ Deleuze and Guattari recode the above dichotomy of language as a closed totality and as an endlessly displaceable resource through their distinction between the "despotic sign" and the "sign-figure of the schizo"; by coming down on the side of the flux of deterritorialising, nomadic signification, they serve to reproduce the binary that Lacan significantly complicates: "They [modern societies] vacillate between two poles: the paranoiac despotic sign, the sign-figure of the despot that they try to revive as a unit of code; and the sign-figure of the schizo as a unit of decoded flux, a schiz, a point-sign or flow-break." (G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p.260).

signifier's *materiality*, its tendency to slip loose of networks of relation.⁷ If this logic is most clearly and suggestively articulated by Lacan in his notion of *le sinthome* in the 1970s (see Chapter Five below), its genesis lies much earlier, and it is this Real-in-the-Symbolic, or what I will call the signifier-in-isolation, that is the central claim of a materialist, psychoanalytic account of language.

Some of the confusion that has tended to surround Lacan's account of language might be explained as a result of the profusion of technical terms used throughout the seminar to designate the paradoxical materiality of the signifier. Terms including 'letter', 'unary trait', 'phallic signifier', 'empty signifier' and others are used, if not interchangeably, then to designate different aspects of the same phenomenon, namely the material insistence of the signifier beyond any signifying function. As a result, this chapter begins to develop what will be a central typology to be used throughout the rest of this thesis, namely the distinction between what I call the 'signifier-in-relation' and the 'signifier-in-isolation'.⁸ These concepts are intended to condense Lacan's multifarious terms relating to language into their most pertinent, opposing characteristics: the signifier-in-relation designates the signifier as it exists negatively, defined purely by relation to other signifiers and producing meaning as the result of its perpetual displacement along the axes of metaphor and metonymy, while the signifier-in-isolation designates the signifier as Real, isolated in its material element away from

⁷ In his important recent excavation of the logic of sexuation in Lacan, Guy Le Guafet rightly notes the co-implication in Lacan of a broadly Saussurian logic of differential, negative constitution in signification, and a logic of the singularity of the signifier, derived, in part, from Freud's insistence on the 'singular' identification made by the hysteric with the other; a logic, further, that is precisely non-Saussurean: "His supposed borrowings from Saussure in effect only offered him a differential concept of the signifier, each defined only as being different to all the others. With this notion of unary trait authorised by Freud, Lacan founded something different, a sort of atomism of the signifier". (G. Le Guafey, 'Towards a Critical Reading of the Formulae of Sexuation', unpublished translation by Cormac Gallagher from the French article published in *L'Une-bèvue* no. 22, 2009: <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/TOWARDS-A-CRITICAL-READING-2506.pdf>).

⁸ In his 'The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud', Lacan schematically divides the 'conditions' of the signifier as follows, in a manner close to my own typology of the signifier-in-isolation and the signifier-in-relation: "Now the structure of the signifier is, as is commonly said of language, that it is articulated. This means that its units – no matter where one begins in tracing out their reciprocal encroachments and expanding inclusions – are subject to the twofold condition of being reduced to ultimate differential elements and of combining the latter according to the laws of a closed order." (*Écrits* p.418). As will become clear, the signifier-in-isolation refers to the "ultimate differential elements" as they are abstracted from their combination "according to the laws of a closed order"; the virtue of my distinction lies, I think, in condensing a number of Lacan's own conceptual indications of the signifier's double 'nature' into a typology that, implicitly, forms the lynchpin of Lacan's wider theory of the Symbolic and its interaction with the Real.

the networks of relation that render it conducive to meaning.⁹ I will explain the pertinence and genesis of this typology as the chapter progresses, but for now it is worth emphasising that the signifier-in-isolation and signifier-in-relation should be considered as potential ‘states’ for *any* signifier, rather than as different signifiers or fundamentally different modalities of signification.

Before turning to the particular concepts Lacan introduces to explain the inherence of the Real to the Symbolic, I will consider psychosis as the condition perhaps most revealing of the more general importance of the signifier-in-isolation to both the Symbolic and the Real.

LANGUAGE AND PSYCHOSIS

Lacan succinctly introduces his thesis on psychosis as follows:

Prior to all symbolisation – this priority is not temporal but logical – there is, as the psychoses demonstrate, a stage at which it is possible for a portion of symbolisation not to take place. This initial stage precedes the entire neurotic dialectic, which is due to the fact that neurosis is articulated speech, in so far as the repressed and the return of the repressed are one and the same thing. It can thus happen that something primordial regarding the subject's being does not enter into symbolisation and is not repressed, but rejected. (S3 p.81).

⁹ This division between the signifier-in-relation and the signifier-in-isolation should not be conceived as a ‘merely’ discursive one; as will become clear over the remaining chapters of this thesis, the two aspects of the signifier are intimately connected to the Real as it figures in the drives, and in the psychoanalytic theory of the body. The distinction has at least a partial conceptual antecedent in Freud’s recognition, in his ‘On Narcissism : An Introduction’, of the fundamentally libidinal derivation of what he had considered previously to be two separate types of drive, the sexual drives and the ego drives. In recognising, in the phenomenon of narcissism, the investment of libido in the ego itself, Freud discovered that *all* drives, whether overtly sexual or not, manifest a quantity of sexual, unconscious energy: “we form the idea of there being an original libidinal cathexis of the ego, from which some is later given off to objects, but which fundamentally persists and is related to the object-cathexes much as the body of an amoeba is related to pseudopodia which it puts out.” (S. Freud, ‘On Narcissism : An Introduction’, S.E vol. 10, p.75); similarly, my typology of the signifier-in-isolation and the signifier-in-relation places a causative weight on the signifier-in-isolation, in so far as sense as incarnated in the signifier-in-relation is reliant on the material signifier as the unit which, when combined, allows the emergence of meaning. The link to Freud’s second theorisation of the drives is further justified by my identification of Lacan’s derivation of the isolated signifier in the phenomenon of primary narcissism; Freud, too, establishes the inherence of sexuality in the drives by reference to narcissism, as in the quote above.

If, then, neurosis is predicated on the repression of a signifier or chain of signifiers, psychosis represents a more radical rejection or, to use the term Lacan uses throughout his third seminar, foreclosure. That which is foreclosed is the paternal signifier, the name-of-the-father, or the full institution of the third element or law that breaks up the proto-psychotic dyad of the Imaginary relation.¹⁰ If, in non-psychotic subjectivity, the institution of the Symbolic as the resolution of the Oedipus complex requires the paternal law, as the third term that breaks up the dyad of Imaginary identification, the psychotic has no such chance of Symbolic mediation. The psychotic's relation to language is, then, constitutively and logically determinant of her post-Oedipal being. For the neurotic, alienation in language concomitant with primary repression, the final separation that ends, or at least displaces, the imbroglio of primary narcissism, constitutes a contingent and precarious removal from the proximity of the Real qua identificatory antagonism. For the psychotic, by contrast, even such a meagre 'protection' from the Real is unavailable.

The question remains, however, whether such a proximity to the Real for the psychotic occurs entirely *outside* the logic of the signifier, or whether it is *within* the logic of signification that we might find the Real in its relation to the psychotic; in other words, whether Lacan imposes a stark either/or on the position of the psychotic in relation to the Symbolic: outside it, or within it, and nothing in between. Must psychosis be explained as entirely outside the ambit of Symbolic logic, or is it rather just an *unmediated*, dyadically organised Symbolic logic that prevails in psychotic subjectivity?¹¹ Lacan will equivocate on this, but it is my contention that the latter thesis is the more predominant, and least acknowledged, facet of Lacan's theory of

¹⁰ "the Name-of-the-Father, that is, the metaphor that puts this Name in the place that was first symbolized by the operation of the mother's absence." (J. Lacan, 'On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis', in *Écrits* p.465).

¹¹ Underlying this question is the broader, historical question of the relation of psychoanalysis to hysteria as its founding neurosis, and to the exclusion of psychosis from its remit. Lacan insisted, against the orthodoxy of his time, that psychosis was as foundational and important a condition for both psychoanalytic theory and practise as the neuroses. Jean Allouch articulates this point well: "After the [...] untimely separation that allocated neurotics to the analysts, psychotics to the psychiatrists and the perverse to social reprobation, Jacques Lacan, in his most consistent manner, challenged this separation. From 1932 to 1981, he emphasised that Freudian psychoanalysis could not turn away from "the paranoid field of psychoses" without, *ipso facto*, finding itself incapable of working exactly where it believed itself to be in conquered territory." (Jean Allouch, 'Jacques Lacan: His Struggle' in *Lacan Love : Melbourne Seminars and Other Works*, ed. Maria-Inès Rotmiller de Zentner and Oscar Zentner, (Melbourne, Lituraterre, 2007), p.4); Allouch's reference to "the paranoid field of psychoses" originates from Lacan's fourth Seminar, *La relation d'objet*.

language. The wager of this chapter is that the account of the complex relation between language and psychosis offered by Lacan in his third seminar offers us a more general sense of how language is always-already implicated in an asymmetrical relation of overdetermination with the Real, and how, moreover, Lacan's account of the Symbolic offers us a way out of the forced choice of language as a perpetually creative domain of ever-changing signification, or as a closed, fixed totality ultimately determined by its syntax.¹²

The alternative thesis outlined above, whereby the separation of the Real from the Symbolic is maintained by reference to the supposed rejection of the accession to the Symbolic in psychotic subjectivity, finds superficial support in an oft-cited passage from seminar three. In a discussion of Freud's case of the Wolf Man, Lacan outlines how an early hallucination described by Freud of the cutting of a finger with a knife, an episode that the Wolf Man is unable to recount in speech, illustrates the thesis that "what is refused in the symbolic order re-emerges in the real." (S3 p.13). We are led, initially, to believe, as Lacan baldly states it, that "he [the Wolf Man] has rejected all means of access to castration [...] all access to the register of the symbolic function". (S3 p.13). Just a few lines down, however, Lacan nuances his position, claiming that what is at stake is a "range, a series, of relations" between the Symbolic, the Real and the subject's hallucination, what Lacan "provisionally calls the subject's history in the symbolic." (S3 p.13). Lacan goes on to indicate his hesitation and caution - "I don't know whether I shall retain this combination of terms" - before concluding that "the origin of the neurotic repressed is not situated at the same level of history in the symbolic as that of the repressed in psychosis." (S3 p.13).

What is at stake in Lacan's cautious appraisal of the Wolf Man's hallucination, and perhaps the reason for his uncharacteristic theoretical hesitancy here, is precisely the wider implications of his theory of psychosis for his general account of the interlacing

¹² Broadly speaking, aspects of Jacques Derrida's early emphasis on the trace structure of the signifier can be associated with the thesis of the signifier's creativity, its endless displacement, although Derrida was also careful to emphasise the paradoxicality of the signifier, its role in putting a stop to the potentially infinite production of meaning, especially in his reflections on its role in the institution of Law. Derrida put this most concisely in 'Speech and Phenomena', where he wrote: "infinite *différance* is finite". (J. Derrida, 'Speech and Phenomena', in *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 102). My contention is that Lacan, through his insistence on the signifier's materiality, offers us a more effective vocabulary with which to understand the co-implication of these two facets of the signifier's movements.

of the Symbolic and the Real. We see Lacan inching here towards a recognition, made more explicit elsewhere, that the Symbolic – presupposed, as we saw in Chapter One, even in the predominantly Imaginary domain of egoic identification – is the necessary background of a certain theory of signification for even those psychic processes most associated with the Real of mental disintegration. As quoted above, Lacan needs to insist on the “history” of the subject's relation to the Symbolic as such, and we are enjoined to suppose that such a history is irrevocable, even as he distinguishes between the differing “levels” of such a history in neurotic or psychotic structures. To do otherwise would be to render his account of Oedipal development and the subsequent generalisation of the Imaginary/Symbolic relation incoherent; as we have seen, again in Chapter One, the narcissistic appropriation of the image of the other is theoretically impossible without the minimal co-ordinates of a pre-Oedipal symbolic mapping. The isolated co-ordinates of a proto-Symbolic mapping, that is, ensure that the image of Imaginary narcissism succeeds in interpolating the nascent subject.

This relation between the Real of the Wolf Man's hallucination and the Symbolically-enabled Imaginary identification of the ego is made explicit by Lacan soon after the reflections quoted above. Discussing the nascent ego, Lacan remarks that “one's relationship to the ego is fundamentally ambiguous, one's assumption of the ego is always revocable. In the psychotic subject on the other hand certain elementary phenomena [...] show us the subject completely identified with his ego, with which he speaks, or with the ego assumed entirely along instrumental lines.” (S3 p.14). Here, the implicit importance of Lacan's insistence on the importance of the psychotic subject's “symbolic history” becomes explicit, but only if we recognise that the *aspect* of the Symbolic Lacan is invoking here is not that of the integrated, post-Oedipal relationality of signification, what Lacan refers to here as “full speech” (S3 p.14) and what I have designated as being conditioned by the signifier-in-relation, but those problematically isolated and insistent signifiers dispersed among the movements of primary narcissism.¹³ Here, we come to recognise that, far from the Symbolic being

¹³ We can further explain this relation between the signifier-in-isolation and the signifier-in-relation through Jean Laplanche's concept of the drive-to ‘translation’. For Laplanche, the inassimilable unconscious residues of the traumatic excitation caused by the mother or father's metaphorical ‘seduction’ of the child undergo a process of incessant translation, such that they can be more easily rendered into conscious knowledge. In our terms, the attachment of the movements of primary narcissism to the production of isolated signifiers would constitute the moment of ‘trauma’ in Laplanche's terms, although I would want to emphasise, perhaps even more than Laplanche, the

radically foreclosed or revoked by the phenomena of psychosis, the rejection of the paternal signifier makes operative and primary those *Real aspects of signification* – which is to say, signifiers torn away from the negative constitution of meaningful communication and tied to the aggressive movements of primary identification – that, as we shall see, must be presupposed, if kept at bay, for *any* signification to be operative for the subject. As Lacan says, “it’s as if a third party, his [the Wolf Man’s] lining, were speaking and commenting on his activity.” (S3 p.14). This mysterious “lining”, I propose, is nothing but the Symbolically mandated split caused by the necessity of the identification with the image of the other, an image that is finally inseparable from the isolated, opaque signifiers that support its operation.¹⁴

To speak of a subject’s “lining” is to bring into question the barrier between self and other, between inside and outside. It is through the introjection of alienating images of the other that such a boundary qua ego is constructed, but it is also predicated on a minimal level of unconscious symbolic identification, even if such an identification can only be attached to pre-Oedipal, which is to say opaque, signifiers. The implication of Lacan’s argument here is that, for the psychotic, such a minimal coordination is all that can be guaranteed; with the paternal law being foreclosed, only the closed dyadic logic of the Imaginary can prevail, even as it is supported by the signifier at its most opaque and non-relational. For the common variety neurotic, which by the end of Lacan’s teaching must be considered to be anyone who has acceded fully to the Symbolic, the dyadic logic of demand that accompanies primary narcissism has been nuanced with the metonymy of desire in the signifier; desire, properly speaking, is absent for the psychotic precisely by virtue of the lack of a full installation of the paternal law.

persistence of the isolated aspect of the signifier even after attempts at translation and relativisation within the terms of the signifier-in-relation. (Jean Laplanche, ‘Psychoanalysis, Time and Translation’, in *Seduction, Translation and the Drives*, ed. John Fletcher and Martin Stanton, (London, ICA, 1992).

¹⁴ Serge André usefully reconnects Lacan’s complicated theoretical reflections on the Wolf Man to Freud, a reconnection I will attempt myself below. André emphasises the “pre-historic reality” of the psychotic subject for Freud, a pre-history that is recoded by Lacan as the persistence of the intertwinement of a degraded and dissipated Symbolic with the movements of primary narcissism, what André suggestively associates with that which is “impossible to say”: “The point is to attain a certainty, not a belief; and this certainty is associated not with what fiction says, but with what fiction defines as impossible to say. Here, we may recall the reconstructions to which Freud devoted his attention in the case of the Wolf Man, and the recourse he had to take to the notion of a “pre-historic” reality of the subject.” (Serge André, *What Does A Woman Want*, (New York, Other Press, 1999), p.2).

It is worth asking after the ‘nature’ of this element of the Symbolic, for it is partly in Lacan’s elaboration of this most material, which is to say most insistent and non-relational, aspect of signification that he most fully departs from, and subverts, Saussure’s insistence on the inevitability of the relationship between the signifier and the signified.¹⁵ The signifier is, as such, *material* for Lacan even at this early stage in his teaching; as he puts it in Seminar 3, the signifier “is to be taken in the sense of the material of language.” (S3 p.32). Nonetheless, he devotes a considerable portion of his third seminar in locating the link between this new, especially material aspect of signification, allied with processes of egoic development, and the reality of psychotic structures. It is to these arguments, bearing directly as they do on the constitutive interpenetration of the Real with the Symbolic, that I’ll now turn.

SCHREBER AND THE SYMBOLIC

In a discussion of Freud’s famous case study of Judge Schreber’s paranoia, Lacan puts a particular emphasis on what he calls the “different levels” present in Schreber’s discourse (S3 p.33), and in particular on the role of the neologism as foundational for psychotic expression. Lacan writes, “The meaning of these words [neologisms] that pull you up has the property of referring essentially to meaning *as such*. It’s a meaning that essentially refers to nothing but itself, that remains irreducible [...] Before being reducible to another meaning it signifies within itself something ineffable, it’s a meaning that refers above all to meaning as such.” (S3 p.33). This level of self-

¹⁵ Saussure famously accounts for this connection in his *Course in General Linguistics*. (F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, (London, Peter Owen Publishers, 1974). Nonetheless, there is a side to Saussure’s linguistics that more closely accords with Lacan’s emphasis on the signifier in its isolated aspect. Between 1906 and 1909, Saussure kept a series of notebooks investigating what anagrams might reveal to linguistics. As Jacques-Alain Miller has noted, Saussure derived from a reading of Saturnine verse an alternative understanding of the signifier, as “an enigma [...] *as if* the signifier at the same time enunciated and dissimulated a proper name [...] Saussure himself was bothered by this certitude, worried by it to the point of leaving the considerable collection of his notes on the subject confined in drawers [...] We are in the *as if*, as if the signifier was, as such, a riddle.” (J.-A. Miller, ‘The Written in Speech’, Seminar of 17.1.96, ed. Catherine Bonningue: <http://www.ch-freudien-be.org/Papers/Txt/Miller.pdf>). Saussure noticed in the verses he analysed the repetition of certain phonemes that seemed to indicate a ‘key word’, often a proper name, that was unconnected to the broader semantic organisation of the poem. In so far as these enigmatic phonemes provide a structure to verse without providing a stable ‘signified’, they bear some comparison with the signifier-in-isolation as I’m conceiving it, although the anagram as Saussure understands it has an implication of sense, if not a stable meaning in and of itself. See W. Terrence Gordon and H.G. Schogt, ‘Ferdinand de Saussure : The Anagrams and the *Cours*’ in E.F.K Koerner, S.M. Embleton, J.E. Joseph and H.-J. Neiderehe (eds.), *The Emergence of the Modern Language Sciences : Studies on the Transition From Historical-Comparative to Structural Linguistics in Honour of E.F.K Koerner volume 1 : Historiographical Perspectives*, (Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing, 1999), p.139-151.

referential, what we might call solipsistic signification – to be distinguished from the normal generation of meaning through the negative reference of a signifier to a signifier – is the *primary* mode of signification available to Schreber for Lacan. That is, Schreber's foreclosure of the paternal signifier and his barring from any concomitant access to the metonymy and negativity of desirous signification has made most operative that aspect of signification discussed above as being captured by the dyadic, closed logic of the Imaginary.

There is a sense, then, in which we must read Lacan symptomatically here, or at least emphasise that aspect of his discourse that most fully does justice to his emerging philosophy of language. For a Lacanian theory of language predicated on the Real of the Symbolic to cohere, it cannot be simply psychotics who have access to the material of language's isolated underside, those signifiers identified above as present and constitutive in the moment of Imaginary identification. Logically, it must be assumed that all subjects are subject to this material fundament of signification, in so far as the Imaginary is always-already implied by the invocation of the Symbolic, and vice versa. A successful navigation of the Oedipal imbroglio, then, only allows the emphasis of the Symbolic to fall upon the negatively constituted movements of the signifier-in-relation. But as the title of a section of the seminar on the psychoses states, "the signifier, as such, signifies nothing" (S3 p.183), which is to say that in isolation and at its most material, which according to this logic points to its lack of relation, its lack of reliance on another signifier, the signifier stops up, rather than facilitates, meaning. As Lacan put it in his 'Seminar on the "The Purloined Letter"', in a formulation I will discuss at length in a later section of this chapter, "it is first of all the materiality of the signifier that I have emphasised, that materiality is *singular* in many ways, the first of which is not to allow of partition. Cut a letter into small pieces, and it remains the letter it is". (*Écrits* p.16).¹⁶ This is the signifier as isolated, underpinning the movements of sense as its material ground.

¹⁶ Paul de Man's discussion of Walter Benjamin in his essay 'Reading and History' points out an intriguing parallel between Lacan's concept of the materiality of the signifier and Benjamin's account of allegory, whereby "Allegory is material or materialistic, in Benjamin's sense, because its dependence on the letter, on the literalism of the letter, cuts it off sharply from symbolic and aesthetic syntheses." (P. de Man, 'Reading and History' in *The Resistance to Theory*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1986), p.68). De Man's comments refer to Benjamin's essay 'The Task of the Translator', where, elsewhere, Benjamin's references to a notion of "pure language" as the unreachable horizon of the translator's practise, over and above the specific languages under translation, has suggestive resonances with Lacan's repeated emphasis on the core of language, the material signifier.

It is important to distinguish here between the notion of a signifier that *fails* to signify, and a signifier that actively signifies nothing or *nothingness* as such. In the former case, we are in the logic of the phallus as discussed above; the phallic signifier, by definition, refers only to the decompletion of the Symbolic, and hence refers ultimately to nothing but itself, its own failure to plug up the hole in the Other. As Lacan puts it: “What does *primordial signifier* mean? It's clear that it quite precisely means nothing.” (S3 p.151; emphasis in the original). The latter, those signifiers that, in their isolation, actively signify the nothing, do so insistently within psychotic subjectivity, whereby the lack of a paternal signifier (essentially, a ‘third term’ that dissolves the dyadic logic of the Imaginary) exposes signification to isolation and the failure of relation. Each psychotic signifier, then, is only *countable as one*; it cannot be taken as containing the potential for a total set of meanings, a logic that Lacan will later expand through his account of non-phallic, or “feminine”, sexuality.¹⁷ While it cannot be a focus of my investigations here, there is potential for the theoretical expansion of psychoanalysis' account of the psychotic in focusing on this aspect of signification. Lacanians have often emphasised the role of the Imaginary in making up for the lack of the Name-of-the-Father in psychotic subjectivity¹⁸, but it may be suggestive to emphasise equally the role that ‘proto-signifiers’ play in generating, and in so far as they might support symptoms, stopping up, the hallucinations and disconnected phenomena associated with psychotic symptomatology.

as sense-less: “to turn the symbolizing into the symbolized, to regain pure language fully formed in the linguistic flux, is the tremendous and only capacity of translation. In this pure language – which no longer means or expresses anything but is, as expressionless and creative Word, that which is meant in all languages – all information, all sense, and all intention finally encounter a stratum in which they are destined to be extinguished.” (W. Benjamin, ‘The Task of the Translator’ in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt, (New York, Schocken Books, 1969), p.80). The key difference between Benjamin and Lacan’s account of the sense-less in language, however, and no doubt one difference among many, lies in the ‘direction of travel’, so to speak, between meaning and the meaningless. In Benjamin, one senses, the notion of a “pure language” is designed to indicate a language at a higher level of synthesis, transcending the particular differences of individual vocabularies as the horizon of an ‘ultimate’ translation, always ultimately beyond reach. For Lacan, the sense-less core of the signifier-in-isolation, by contrast, is revealed through the subtraction of relational meaningfulness, uncovering its material basis, a basis that would, furthermore, serve as an impediment to any higher linguistic synthesis, even if only installed as an unreachable horizon.

¹⁷ See Seminars 18, 19 and especially 20.

¹⁸ Massimo Recalcati articulates this common position as follows: “The clinical category of un-triggered psychoses implies, in this perspective, two other fundamental categories: the imaginary compensation and substitution [*suppléance*], in the sense that both are shaped as specific forms of subjective soldering of the psychotic hole.” M. Recalcati, ‘The Empty Subject : Un-triggered Psychoses’, trans. Jorge Jauregui, in *Lacanian ink* 26, Autumn 2005.

In so far, as I've noted in my quotation above, the “priority” of symbolization for Lacan is “logical not temporal” (S3 p.81), we must assume that both aspects of signification – what I'm calling the signifier-in-relation and the signifier in isolation – be presupposed for all subjects, as the Imaginary and the Symbolic are meaningless without a relation of logical co-implication, and in so far as the subject of the Symbolic must make an (Oedipal) wager on the signifier acceding (at a logical ‘time’) to its necessarily relational role. Certain aspects of each of the three registers may be emphasised differently within different psychic structures, but the movements of primary narcissism and the persistence of such forms in a logically post-Oedipal context enjoin us to assume that that aspect of the signifier which cleaves most closely to the Imaginary, those isolated signifiers that merely route the most elementary forms of egoic identification, persist throughout to the degree that *all* signifiers, by their ‘nature’, have the potential to uncouple from relations of meaning and exist in isolation.¹⁹ For the psychotic, it is the potential of the signifier to refer to something other than itself that is lost, namely the signifier in its relational aspect, and Lacan usefully compares this loss with the loss of the fundamental human ability to *deceive*, for signification to say more than it might mean: “You are in the presence of a subject insofar as what he says and does – they're the same thing – can be supposed to have been said and done to deceive you.” (S3 p.81). Lacan's comment highlights the multi-dimensional quality of relational signification, whereby the paradigmatic act of communication is to tell a lie by literally telling the truth; to lose this capacity is to reveal the materiality of the isolated signifier in its brute insistence.

What must be more firmly established in the remainder of this chapter, however, is the more general claim that the Symbolic as such, for all subjects, contains Real elements that point to the constant potential for meaning to dissolve, even as the very same elements form the essential foundation that allows the very horizon of the Symbolic to cohere.²⁰ Important concepts associated in later seminars with the Real, in particular

¹⁹ It is precisely this aspect of signification, its capacity for isolation, that the account of Saussure's influence on Lacan fails to capture. Lacan notes the limits of his inheritance of Saussure's relational account of signification as follows: “while the linearity that Saussure considers to be constitutive of the chain of discourse – in accordance with its emission by a single voice and with the horizontal axis along which it is situated in our writing – is in fact necessary, it is not sufficient.” (‘The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud’ in *Écrits* p.419).

²⁰ Lacan hints at the universality of the Real, isolated aspect of signification in his discussion of psychosis in *Écrits*. There, he writes: “the function of unrealization [in psychosis] is not entirely located in the symbol. For in order for its irruption in the real to be incontrovertible, the symbol need

the revision of the symptom in the context of the *sinthome* in Seminar 23, find their genesis in the conceptual precedence Lacan gives to those points at which unmeaning supports meaning in the Symbolic or, in our terms, when the Real simultaneously supports and threatens the Symbolic from within. It is, in particular, with the connection between this most stubborn and material aspect of the Symbolic and the latterly important concept of *jouissance* that the so called 'late Lacan' will be folded back into his 'earlier' incarnation. Before considering some of those early concepts Lacan coined in the 1950s and 1960s to capture the radical interpenetration of the Symbolic and the Real, it is worth taking a detour through Freud's dream theory to highlight the rigorous grounding Lacan's linguistic materialism has in the writings of psychoanalysis' founder.

FREUD'S NAVEL

It is often asked the extent to which Lacan, while protesting his fidelity to Freud's discovery of psychoanalysis, proposed a revised theory of the subject that far exceeds Freud's intentions.²¹ Such accounts tend to focus on Lacan's importation of structural linguistics into Freudian theory and practise and his 'de-biologisation' of Freud's account of the drives. In this section, I hope to show how, at least in part, Lacan's insistence on the materiality of the signifier as discussed above is present as a theoretical potentiality in Freud's account of dreams. In so doing, I hope to highlight

but present itself, *as it commonly does*, in the form of a broken chain. We also see here the effect every signifier has, once it is perceived of arousing in the *percipiens* an assent composed of the awakening in the *percipiens* 'hidden duplicity by the signifier's manifest ambiguity.' ('On a Question Prior To Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis' in *Écrits* p.449; emphasis added.) This "broken chain" of the signifier, along with the recognition of the signifier's fundamental ambiguity, points at least in germinal form towards the centrality of the aspect of the signifier 'broken' from its chain of relation in all potential instances of signification.

²¹ Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen offers a useful reflection on this question in his 'The Oedipus Problem in Freud and Lacan': "Was Lacan really a Freudian? Was he faithful to Freud's heritage? He seems to suggest that precisely in his lecture "The Freudian Thing" [...] Nevertheless, everyone knows that this return [to Freud] was accomplished after some rather lengthy detours through Wallon, Hegel, Heidegger, Kojève, Saussure, and Lévi-Strauss [...] does this mean that Lacan was *not* Freudian; that, under cover of Freudianism, he constructed a completely original theory of desire? That would be a rather strict interpretation of faithfulness, the very one that Lacan's contemporaries invoked to expel him from the psychoanalytic interpretations. As Plato already remarked, parricide is the inevitable form of faithfulness." (M. Borch-Jacobsen, 'The Oedipus Problem in Freud and Lacan' in *Critical Inquiry* 20.2, Winter 1994, p.267-282). Paul de Man's reflections, expressed in an interview, on his relation to Derrida may also be pertinent to Lacan's relation to Freud: "Gasché in the two articles he has written on this topic [...] says that Derrida and myself are the closest when I do not use his terminology, and the most remote when I use terms such as *deconstruction*: I agree with that entirely." (S. Rosso, 'An Interview with Paul de Man' in P. de Man, *The Resistance to Theory*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p.118; emphasis in the original).

how Lacan's insistence that Freud was ultimately concerned with the psychoanalytic Real, the point of impossibility, repetition and insistence that resists all interpretation, is characterised in the late Freud's preoccupation with the death drive but present already in his account of the navel, or Real, of the dream. Freud shows simultaneously the centrality of this Real to any proper account of the logic of the unconscious, and the inextricability of this Real with signification and its particular manifestation in the unconscious, defined in terms of its movements of displacement and condensation.²²

Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*²³ is widely considered to be the text that announced the arrival of psychoanalysis as a distinct science of the mind. The fact that this text was concerned in the upmost with a particular theory of interpretation, predicated on a distinct and radically non-traditional conception of meaning, of the relation between a sign and its referent, marks it out as perhaps the single most 'proto-Lacanian' text in the Freudian corpus. Freud's analyses of his own dreams and those of his analysands gifted him with the route into the unconscious that had previously been hinted at but ultimately barred by the false promises of hypnosis and the analysis of the physiological degeneration of the brain.²⁴ Freud's account of the 'dreamwork' is complex, and overarching the specific account of the logic of the dream lies a more general conception of language, decoupled from any correspondence theory of truth and defined by an insistence on the retroactive completion of meaning via second-order interpretation. Lacan will complete this logic in his insistence on the intervention of the 'quilting point' or *point de capiton* in a chain of signifiers, retrospectively reconstituting the meaning of a chain of signifiers in a direction that could not be anticipated at its inception (S3 p.268-269), while Freud himself would extend the logic to his theory of trauma, whereby trauma is often constituted by a deferred action that

²² Similarly, it is my contention that Lacan's work, early and late, and following Freud's example, maintains the immanence of the Real to the Symbolic, against the arguments of those who see a gradual displacement of questions of language in the later seminars in favour of accounts of the Real, *jouissance* etc. Underlying this chapter, indeed the totality of this thesis, is the contention that Lacan always considers language as fundamental to the Real, to sexuality and so on, and vice versa. Jean-Jacques Lecercle has articulated the thesis I oppose as follows: "we must make clear that this concept [the *point de capiton*] pertains to the first Lacan – Lacan the linguist – and that thereafter, with the development of his doctrine, it underwent a metaphysical shift rendering it inapt for describing language." (J-J. Lecercle, *A Marxist Philosophy of Language*, (Leiden, Brill, 2006), p.278).

²³ S. Freud, S.E vols. 4 and 5.

²⁴ See 'Making Freudian Theory' in G. Makari, *Revolution in Mind: The Creation of Psychoanalysis*, (London, Gerald Duckworth and Co., 2008), p.9-81.

revives a previously repressed memory.²⁵ Just as *The Interpretation of Dreams* inaugurates psychoanalysis, so too does it prefigure many of the radicalisations of structural linguistics that would come in the wake of structuralism, most auspiciously in Lacan's metapsychology.

As much a 'confession' or self-analysis, the text combines three essential elements: the outline of a methodology of dream interpretation that more broadly encapsulates the importance of free association in the psychoanalytic cure; a series of case studies, some drawn from Freud's own dreams and some from his patients, that show the possibilities of the methodology in action; and the first systematic elaboration of Freud's model of the mind, or what has come to be known as Freud's 'first topology', the system comprising the unconscious, the preconscious and the conscious. For our purposes, it is largely in the elaboration of Freud's method of interpretation that the broader implications relevant to Lacan's theory of signification arise, and in particular in the aporia in interpretation that arises during his discussion of his dream of Irma's injection.

Freud first outlines his dream of his patient Irma early in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.²⁶ In 1895, Freud reports, he treated a young lady who was a close friend both of himself and his family. The lady presented with symptoms of hysterical anxiety and was, Freud reports, "partially relieved of her hysterical symptoms"²⁷ through psychoanalytic treatment. Freud comments on the particular complications that attend treating a friend, noting that the "physician's personal interest is greater, but his authority less."²⁸ During the summer holidays when the treatment was put on hold, Otto Rank, Freud's younger colleague and friend, visited Irma and reported that she was 'better, but not quite well'.²⁹ Freud interprets this comment as something of a snub, noting his anger arising from what he sees as Rank's "taking sides against me to

²⁵ Freud made this observation as early as his unpublished 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' (1895): "Here we have the case of a memory arousing an affect which it did not arouse as an experience, because in the meantime the change [brought about] in puberty had made possible a different understanding of what was remembered. [...] We invariably find that a memory is repressed which has only become a trauma by a *deferred action*." (S. Freud, S.E vol. 1, p.356).

²⁶ S. Freud, S.E vol. 4, p.106-121.

²⁷ S. Freud, S.E vol. 4, p.106.

²⁸ S. Freud, S.E vol. 4, p.106.

²⁹ S. Freud, S.E vol. 4, p.106.

the influence of my patient's relatives".³⁰ The dream in question came to Freud that night. In it, Freud is receiving a number of guests in a great hall. Among them is Irma, who Freud takes aside and urges to continue with the treatment he has proposed. Irma complains of physical symptoms in her throat, stomach and abdomen, and submits after some resistance to an examination by Freud. Freud examines her throat and sees "a big white patch; at another place I saw extensive whitish grey scabs upon some remarkable curly structures which were evidently modelled on the turbinal bones of the nose."³¹ Otto Rank, who is also present, is accused by Dr. M of injecting Irma with "propyl...propyls...propionic acid...trimethylamin"³² with an unclean syringe, this being the cause of the infection. Freud notes that he sees the chemical formula for trimethylamin appear before him at the conclusion of the dream.

Freud's analysis of the dream rigorously delineates the wish fulfillments hiding behind the 'manifest', which is to say surface or literal, dream thoughts. Most insistently, Freud emphasises that, through the physical manifestation of an illness in Irma, his own responsibility for the patient is assuaged (as he is not blamed for having given the injection) and responsibility is transferred to Otto Rank who had previously seemed to have implicitly questioned Freud's professional judgment.³³ Thus, the dream acts as the fulfillment in fantasy of revenge on Rank. More generally, the dream conceals various professional doubts Freud had at the time relating to his earlier regular prescription of cocaine. Intriguingly, however, Freud takes care to insist that his interpretation of the dream, resting as it does largely on obvious extrapolations from conscious concerns, cannot be seen as an *exhaustion* of its potential meaning. He could, Freud writes, "draw further information from it"³⁴, suggesting that he won't do so so as to protect professional confidences, or the dignity of his own unconscious. We might speculate that there is something particular, and particularly meaningful, about Freud's dream of Irma; he uses the dream as a general introduction to his method of dream interpretation, to the method of treating the dream as a puzzle to be deciphered, while significantly omitting some of the more involved, unconsciously derived, forms of interpretation at work in other sections of the book.

³⁰ S. Freud S.E vol. 4, p.106.

³¹ S. Freud S.E vol. 4, p.107.

³² S. Freud S.E vol. 4, p.107.

³³ S. Freud S.E vol. 4, p.118.

³⁴ S. Freud S.E vol. 4, p.121.

It is only much later in the text that Freud, having alluded to the case of Irma's dream a number of times further, questions the possibility of ever exhausting the dream's signification. In a highly suggestive passage that has elicited much commentary, Freud writes:

There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure; this is because we become aware during the work of interpretation that at that point there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unravelled and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown. The dream-thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot, from the nature of things, have any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought. It is at some point where this meshwork is particularly close that the dream-wish grows up, like a mushroom out of a mycelium.³⁵

To fully understand the significance of this passage for our wider concern for a psychoanalytic theory of the signifier and the Real, one must restate the central division in Freudian theory between the manifest content of a dream, and its "latent" content³⁶, which is to say the meaning revealed by following the vacillations of the surface content of a dream, revealing the unconscious meaning beneath. Lacan, in his early articles, noted the formal equivalence of this movement of substitution with the linguistic operation of metonymy, theorised by Jakobson. ('The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud' in *Écrits* p.425). For now, it is worth noting the analogous echo between Freud's duality of the dream-signifier, split between a manifest and latent content, and what I am arguing as the dual function of the signifier more generally, split between its being in-relation and its being in-isolation.

³⁵ S. Freud, S.E vol. 4, p.525.

³⁶ The distinction between 'manifest' and 'latent' dream content would remain a constant in Freud's work, reappearing as late as 1940 in 'An Outline of Psycho-analysis'. (S. Freud, S.E vol. 23).

In the passage above, Freud significantly claims that is in the “most thoroughly interpreted” of dreams that the navel, the point of impossibility, reveals itself most clearly. We can infer from this comment that this point of impossibility is not something expressive of a *lack* of interpretive possibility but, rather, the point at which the very richest of interpretations *stumbles*. We can speculate that this attachment of impossibility to even the most successful of psychoanalytic dream interpretations confers a generality, or constitutive centrality, on this obscure point of non-meaning within the broader interpretative horizon of the dream; such a thesis echoes with Lacan’s insistent interest on the signifier qua material substrate, underlying the multidimensionality of signifiatory space.

According to this comparison, the dream’s navel would seem to be the point at which a chain of dream-signifiers, defined according to the general, negative logic of the signifier-in-relation, falls into a point of opacity, or a point defined by the signifier-in-isolation. While Freud uses the word “tangle” to describe this point of analytic inscrutability, there seems to be little reason to suppose that the mere entanglement of latent dream-signifiers is a block to their interpretation. Elsewhere in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud will take great analytic pleasure in seemingly decoding the most opaque, nay ‘tangled’ of manifest dream contents. Furthermore, Freud’s brief comment above gives us little sense of precisely why, how and to what end the weave of manifest dream-signifiers might falter. We can characterise Freud’s elliptical comments here as establishing an antinomic opposition between meaning and non-meaning in the dream text, an antinomy that fails, I think, to explain why unmeaning should emerge from the web of dream signifiers. It is, I claim, only through Lacan’s insistence on the double character of the signifier, its ability to withdraw from networks of relation, that such an explanation can be advanced, but only when signification is proven to rely on the material ground of the signifier as such, in its insistence. To put it another way, Lacan’s argument constructs the signifier-in-isolation as a quasi-transcendental condition for signification as such, whereas Freud’s accounts of the dream’s navel wishes to explain away the fall into unmeaning as a mere contingency of the unconscious. I will return to this line of argument presently.

Of further interest is Freud's ambiguous use of imagery here. Freud was renowned for the precision of his writing style, and while the above passage has a superficial clarity, a deceptive legibility, it is significantly opaque with regard to the precise status of this end-point or interregnum of dream logic. In the passage at hand, Freud's choice of the word "meshwork" to evoke the opacity and mysteriousness of the dream's navel seems to support our contention that what is at stake in the dream's navel is a *density* or *materiality* of signification, analogous or perhaps equivalent to the isolated signifier defined above. Contrary to an over-abundance of signifiers signaling an end-point to meaning, we might hypothesise that it is in the Real isolation of a signifier from its 'natural state' of relation that subverts meaning from within.

From the very beginning of his teaching, Lacan will construct concepts intended to provide a metapsychological explanation for the aporia described by Freud in his notion of the dream's navel. Lacan makes direct reference to Freud's 'navel' in the third seminar:

sense, the nature of which is to take flight, to define itself as something that flees, but which at the same time presents itself as an extremely full sense, the fleeing of which draws the subject in towards what would be the core of the delusional phenomenon, its navel. You know that Freud uses this term *navel* to designate the point at which the sense of a dream appears to culminate in a hole, a knot, beyond which it is to the core of being that the dream appears to be attached. (S3 p.260; emphasis in the original).

The link made explicit here between the "flight" of sense and its fullness underlines the link we have already established between sense, as it is carried by the signifier-in-relation, and the non-sense of the signifier-in-isolation as sense's material ground. Further, Lacan renders clear here the importance of Freud's recognition of the "navel" of the dream, but in a fashion that underscores the constitutivity of this point of opacity, a "hole" that is related to the very "core of being"; if Freud, as I've argued, wished to associate the dream's navel with the mere contingency of the unconscious, Lacan's own theory of language situates as central the unmeaning of the signifier-in-isolation.

Lacan's reading of Poe's story 'The Purloined Letter' will initiate a series of reflections on what I am calling the signifier-in-isolation and its complex relationship with the negative constitution of meaning, recoded in the suggestive distinction Lacan makes throughout his teaching between the 'signifier' and the 'letter'. In the following section, I will highlight how consistent Lacan's insistence of the Real of the letter was, and how important to Lacan's theoretical system generally is his insistence on the materiality of language. Indeed, the general claim advanced in the remainder of this chapter will be the fundamental, definitional inseparability of the Real and the Symbolic.

LACAN'S LETTER

In an otherwise illuminating essay on Lacan's equation of the letter with the detritus of the signifier, in Luke Thurston's important collection *Re-Inventing the Symptom*, Dany Nobus claims the following: "during the mid-1950s Lacan put the letter on a par with the signifier, the two units circulating strictly within the register of the Symbolic."³⁷ In the remainder of this chapter, I hope to demonstrate the incompatibility of this claim with Lacan's wider philosophy of language. By introducing the 'letter' as a concept *distinct* from the signifier in 1950s, Lacan goes some way towards affirming his later insistence on the implication of the signifier, or an *aspect* of the signifier, in the *Real*, finally articulated through his revision of the symptom as the indissoluble point or absent centre of the subject in his 23rd Seminar. To the extent that Lacan's slogan "the signifier represents the subject for another signifier" (S11 p.207) also seems, on first reading, to suggest the signifier as the transcendental or quasi-transcendental condition of subjectivity, no matter how decentred, it is perhaps unsurprising that both Jacques Derrida and his students Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe have suggested that Lacan's earlier discussion of Poe reintroduces metaphysical suppositions of the signifier as an agent of presence.³⁸ In the following reading, by

³⁷ Dany Nobus, 'Illiterature', in Luke Thurston (ed.), *Re-Inventing The Symptom : Essays on the Final Lacan*, (New York, Other Press, 2002), p.26.

³⁸ "the signifier-letter, in the topology and the psychoanalytico-transcendental semantics with which we are dealing, has a proper place and meaning which form the condition, origin, and destination of the entire circulation, as of the entire logic of the signifier." (J. Derrida, *The Postcard : From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987), p.437). In so far as Lacan insists on the signifier's underlying materiality (qua 'letter') as the condition of the emergence of signification,

contrast, I hope to show how the dual functionality of the signifier allows it to function both as the exchangeable, but never finally 'present' or temporally situated, unit of a negatively constituted and ultimately deferred meaning, and as the stubborn avatar of the Real, disrupting meaning even as it is its very condition. My aim here is not to compare Lacan's interpretation with the text itself; the extent to which Lacan takes interpretative liberties with the inner logic of Poe's tale would only be of relevance if Lacan had aimed to provide a reading of the story literary in character; instead, he uses the raw materials of Poe's narrative as a means to illuminate his nascent theory of signification. I merely aim to show here how misplaced any reading of Lacan's seminar is that would emphasise a putative idealism of the signifier.

Poe's story centres on an unopened letter, stolen from the Queen by an unscrupulous Minister; the letter, it is said, contains compromising information, although the nature of this information is never revealed. The Minister has been blackmailing the victim of his theft after replacing the letter with one of no import. The amateur detective Dupin outwits the Minister by realising that, far from being elaborately hidden, the stolen letter is hidden in plain sight in the Minister's quarters. Upon deceiving the Minister with his own substitute letter, Dupin returns the original letter to the police. This brief summary of the plot of Poe's story highlights the extent to which the content of the letter, while hinted at as potentially damaging, is ultimately irrelevant to the fate of those who become embroiled in its trajectory. Rather, the letter functions as a blank, material object whose movements enrol and place those who come into contact with it. As such, Poe's letter functions for Lacan as a model for the concept of the material signifier that must, he claims, underlie the Saussure-derived model of the negative constitution of meaning in a signifying chain.

Lacan's opening comments suggest the direction his argument will take. He associates the "*insistence* of the signifying chain" ('Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"' in *Écrits*

Derrida is right to signal the precedence of this structuring element in Lacan's broader argument, although it less clear the extent to which this materiality functions as 'transcendental'; rather, the letter is both the condition of sense *and* that which (in its very materiality) makes any final "proper place and meaning" impossible. Derrida risks idealizing here what I am calling the signifier-in-relation, and thus idealizing the endless productivity of the signifier more generally; Lacan, by contrast, is careful to appreciate both aspects of the signifier, its excessive production of meaning and its withdrawal from sense. See also P. Lacoue-Labarthe and J-L. Nancy, *The Title of the Letter : A Reading of Lacan*, (Albany NY., SUNY Press, 1992).

p.6; Lacan's emphasis) with repetition automatism. The Imaginary effects of signification – effects, we might suppose, that construct a general and temporary meaningfulness – “give us nothing of any consistency unless they are related to the symbolic chain that binds and orients them.” (‘Seminar on “The Purloined Letter” in *Écrits* p.6); or, in our terms, the negative construction of meaning via the signifier-in-relation is only sustainable when the linked background of the Real signifier is presupposed. In a discussion of the “power” of the letter, Lacan claims that “the letter exists as a means of power only through the final summons of the pure signifier – either by prolonging its detour, making it reach whom it may concern through an extra transit [...] or by destroying the letter.” (*Écrits* p.23). The reference to the “final summons of the pure signifier” is not, as might be supposed, a reference to the final presencing of the signifier qua letter in the cessation of its movement, but rather a paradoxical reference to the signifier's 'death', its cancelling of that which it might finally come to signify. Thus, the social elevation of a particular character in Poe's story as a result of the content-less letter he carries with him is “not drawn from the letter but, whether he knows it or not, from the personage it constitutes for him.” (*Écrits* p.23).

This potential “personage” would arise as a result, not of the signifier in its indivisible insistence (qua letter), but rather as a result of the purely *Imaginary* effects of the signifier's movement through time and space, the purely contingent and ultimately deceptive attachments of meaning that come to redefine the signifier as something carrying the potential, but never finally the actuality, of meaning *in itself*. In this sense at least, Derrida et. al's accusation that Lacan, in insisting on the substrate of materiality proper to the signifier, posits a transcendental formalism of the empty signifier to ultimately guarantee meaning ‘in the last instance’ should be reversed: far from *guaranteeing* meaning, the signifier qua letter in its material dimension *threatens* the establishment of Imaginary meaning grafted onto its material body by revealing the Imaginary deception inherent in the process of negative reference. Instead, meaning is only temporarily and contingently secured upon the break of a signifying chain, the point that sutures the ‘end’ of a signifying chain to its beginning, while in its very provisionality gesturing towards its own dissolution: “The sentence only exists as completed and its sense comes to it retroactively. [...] A signifying unit presupposes the completion of a certain circle that situates its different elements.” (S3 p.263).

That such meaning clings to the signifier is, for Lacan, not a symptom of the metaphysics of presence but, rather, a symptom of the *absence* of the possibility of such a presence; it is only, finally, by risking itself on the back of the signifier's materiality, its Real existence, that a transitory and temporary structure of meaning may arise. The materiality of the signifier, nonetheless, threatens, and ultimately dethrones, any putative transcendental of the signifying function, considered apart from what Lacan calls here the 'Imaginary' and temporary consolidation of meaning. Paradoxically then, it is only because the letter qua signifier-in-isolation *resists* through its inherent and circular self-reference being pushed into the position of a quasi-transcendental guarantor of meaning that signification can, temporarily, stabilise: in its very 'blankness', its very lack of content, Lacan's letter can support a multiplicity of meanings even as it persists as their constitutive kernel of Real unmeaning.³⁹

Lacan's equation of the letter with a notion of the material in his commentary on Poe rests on the notion that the letter is, in itself, indivisible. Lacan writes: "while it is first of all the materiality of the signifier that I have emphasised, that materiality is *singular* in many ways, the first of which is not to allow of partition. Cut a letter into small pieces, and it remains the letter it is – and this in a completely different sense than *Gestalttheorie* can account for with the latent vitalism in its notion of the whole". ('Seminar on the "Purloined Letter"' in *Écrits* p.16; emphasis in the original). Lacan's

³⁹ There is an instructive comparison to be drawn between the constitutivity of unmeaning in Lacan and deconstructive criticism's emphasis on language's failures. Paul de Man writes, again in his commentary on Benjamin's 'On the Task of the Translator', of that "errancy of language which never reaches the mark", a general errancy that finds particular expression in any attempt at translation. (P. de Man, 'Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator'' in *The Resistance to Theory*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p.92). Nonetheless, as Dennis Porter has noted, the *consequences* of language's structural tendency towards failure adduced by deconstructive theory and Lacanianism are often very different: "The difference between Lacan and de Man can be summed up in one word: the unconscious. Translation is impossible for de Man because without that founding concept of psychoanalysis, the resistance to human meaning of the order of tropes in one language is only compounded by the resistance of a similar order in a second language. Thus, translations not only miss their mark; they also expose more fully how the mark was already missed in the so-called original. Translation is possible in the context of Lacanian theory because it is in our misses, if anywhere, that we know each other and know ourselves." (D. Porter, 'Psychoanalysis and the Translator' in A. Leupin (ed.), *Lacan and the Human Sciences*, (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1991), p.159). Despite the misleadingly humanistic tone of Porter's characterisation of Lacan, his insistence that it is in the 'failure' of language that its constitutive condition lies echoes my own argument that, for Lacan, it is the very senselessness of the isolated signifier that underpins its function as the constitutive ground of sense

emphasis on singularity is worth noting here, and it is particularly suggestive when combined with a critique of Gestalt psychology's holism. As I have emphasised elsewhere both in this and my first chapter, Lacan's project is ultimately to be read as a non-dialectical one, and the implication here, namely that the indivisible letter, while acting as the ground for the Imaginary constitution of sense, is nonetheless singular and unrelated to any overarching horizon or whole, firmly places the letter – contra Nobus above – within the register of the Real; to the extent that the Real permits of no absence, no division, and no mediation, the ontological 'being' of the signifier, paradoxically, escapes the metonymic logic of the Symbolic.⁴⁰

To recap, then: We've seen how Lacan situates his construction of the concept of the letter by emphasising its 'material' dimension. The use of the letter as a putatively separate concept is, here at least, meant to highlight the duality of the signifier. The signifier qua letter, defined as it is through its existence in the Real, is constructed by Lacan as a material unit that underlies, and undermines, the temporary epistemological sedimentation of meaning via the "Imaginary effects" of the signifier-in-relation.

In particular, and to draw this section of the chapter back to the argument presented in relation to psychosis above, we've seen how arguments as to Lacan's supposed presencing of the signifier fail to recognise the necessary *Imaginary* relation of the letter or signifier-in-isolation, its (pre)history in the imbroglio of primary narcissism. The dispersed proto-signifiers that shore up the movement of primary narcissism, minimally co-coordinating the process of ego-formation, seem to live on in the signifier's post-Oedipal isolated dimension, a paradoxical point of non-dialectical collusion between the Imaginary and the Real-in-the-Symbolic that questions Derrida's accusation of a latent formalism to Lacan's theory of signification: what might seem initially to be the positing of a quasi-transcendental form in the guise of the 'letter' is, in fact, a recognition of the complex – which is to say *impure, non-formal* – 'nature' of signification, its paradoxical movement of constitution and displacement and its collusion with the Imaginary. While we've seen how Lacan, in his seminar on Poe, labels the temporary effect of meaning due to the letter's movements 'Imaginary', we must also note the *Imaginary* foundation of this

⁴⁰ As Lacan writes in his second seminar, "there is no absence in the real." (S2, p.313).

paradoxical unit of materiality in the movements of primary narcissism as discussed above. What might seem, then, to be the relatively simple positing of a material, formal substrate and its Imaginary effects, a kind of linguistic structure of form and content, is in fact the overcoming of the form/content division, a theory of signification that posits a Real materiality only to insist on its Imaginary genesis. In consolidating these reflections, I now turn to a second concept Lacan coined to augment his materialism of the letter, the 'unary trait', elaborated extensively in the currently unpublished seminar of 1961-1962 on 'Identification'.

UNARY TRAIT

Of all Lacan's plethora of concepts pertaining to the materiality of signification, the 'unary trait' remains perhaps the least interrogated. Much of the portions of Lacan's teaching that pertain to the concept remain unpublished in either English or French, and it is in his unpublished seminar of 1961-1962 on Identification that Lacan most fully explicates the concept. This section will forward the claim that it is in particular through an understanding of the unary trait that the necessary link between Lacan's account of primary narcissism discussed in Chapter One and his development of the concept of the 'letter' can be established. Here again, Lacan will emphasise the materiality of the signifier in its isolated state, but his theory of the 'unary trait' advances these arguments by further specifying the continuum between primary narcissism, and in particular the formation of the ego-ideal, and the accession to the Symbolic. In what follows, I'll examine the various ways in which Lacan characterises what Evans has called a "primary symbolic term"⁴¹, while questioning whether we might better understand the concept by aligning it firmly with the Real, and less with a Symbolic that might falsely imply structures of relationality that by definition cannot be said to operate within the indivisibility of the unary trait and its history within primary identification.

In some respects, the unary trait represents a refiguring of Lacan's already established theses as to the material substrate of the signifier, the Real unmeaning of the signifier's insistence. Read in this way, the unary trait can be seen as the same unit as the above

⁴¹ D. Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, (London and New York, Verso, 1997), p.86.

discussed 'letter', except viewed from the standpoint of the dissolution of the Oedipus Complex and the logical ascension to the Symbolic. That is, the unary trait conceptually highlights the aspect of the 'letter' that functions as 'proto-signifier', a kind of primitive, pre-Symbolic marker that provides an initial significatory ground for the establishment of the Symbolic proper and its constitution of meaning via negative reference. Viewed another way, however, the unary trait significantly consolidates and extends Lacan's theses as to the materiality of the signifier, and adds a further means of allying Lacan's accounts of the importance of proto-Symbolic elements in both pre-Oedipal and post-Oedipal neurotic or psychotic contexts with his more general account of Imaginary identification. What this account seeks to emphasise is the persistence of the unary trait in post-Oedipal scenarios, and the theoretical necessity of this persistence and continuity for Lacan's project as a whole. If, as I've argued above, the material substrate of the signifier remains a necessity for Lacan's theory of signification as such, so too does the unary trait remain a conceptual necessity for Lacan, particularly when taken as the appearance within the Oedipal dialectic between the Imaginary and the Symbolic of the materiality of the signifier as such.

The original source for Lacan's 'unary trait' is to be found in Freud's 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego'.⁴² There, Freud attempts to account for the minimally social character of what appear to be individual, isolated moments of identification. More specifically, in Chapter 7 of the *Group Psychology*, Freud aims to explain the relationship between love objects and the beginnings of identity, especially as such primary identifications are explicable in later manifestations of hysteria, laying out different forms of identification and their relation to the nascent ego. The preliminary types outlined by Freud pertain to what Lacan would identify as the Imaginary structure of rivalry over the image of the Other; for Freud too, such moments of identification are tied to images of the Other, and they find a particularly relentless efficacy during the imbroglio of rivalry and love/hatred provoked by the Oedipal identification with the parent of the opposite sex. In such instances, there is a formal identity of the love-object, the particular object invested with libido by the nascent subject, and the developing ego, such that the dyadic logic of self/other is internalised by the subject, installing the often vicious dialectic of love/hate within the

⁴² S. Freud S.E vol. 18 p.67-145.

ego and promoting an identificatory ambivalence and precariousness that Lacan chose to particularly underline, as above in Chapter One. Freud also outlines a primary form of attachment to a specific 'trait' or characteristic of the Other that might arise in the place of a substantial investment in a love-object; Freud comments that such an attachment "is a partial and extremely limited one and only borrows a single trait from the person who is its object."⁴³ Freud's characterisation of this form of identification seems to suggest both a pre-Oedipal prominence to this variety of identificatory attachment, providing as it does a kind of minimal formal ground for later, more obviously 'social' forms of belonging, and a persistence in post-Oedipal forms of pathology; indeed, Freud comments that such a form of identification was present in his famous case of 'Dora'.⁴⁴

The benefits of Lacan's formalisation of Freud here are two fold. First, it allows what is implicit in Freud's account – namely, the intimate link between this attachment to a 'part' of the Other and the beginnings of Symbolic logic – to come into full view, and second it overcomes the Freudian ambivalence in the precise role of this concept, a role that vacillates in Freud's account between a specifically temporal manifestation of *early* identification, and a more generalised *pathological* role in the formation of hysterical symptoms.⁴⁵ For Lacan, the location of the unary trait within a more general logic of the materiality of the signifier, both in its proto-Symbolic forms and its more general manifestation as a support of the signifier-in-relation, results in a theoretical generalisation of what threatens to remain a falsely isolated, underdeveloped account in Freud. Just as the proto-Symbolic elements that support the emergence of the ego-ideal persist, for Lacan, as a general support for signification, taking on a particular veracity and importance in psychotic structures as discussed above, so the unary trait persists as the specifically identificatory *aspect* of the materiality of the signifier. I'll now turn to Lacan's 1961-1962 seminar on Identification to assess the specificity of Lacan's arguments.

⁴³ S. Freud S.E vol. 18 p.107.

⁴⁴ S. Freud S.E vol. 18 p.107.

⁴⁵ "We have heard that identification is the earliest and original form of emotional tie; it often happens that under the conditions in which symptoms are constructed, that is, where there is repression and where the mechanisms of the unconscious are dominant, object-choice is turned back into identification." S. Freud S.E vol. 18 p.107; Freud's reflections here find a useful supplement in Lacan's precise distinction between identification as a general stage of subject-formation, and the specific aetiology of neurotic subject positions.

Lacan's seminar on Identification significantly revises and extends a number of Lacanian themes, in particular the relation between psychoanalytic accounts of identity and those proffered by (especially Cartesian) philosophy, and on the potential benefits of a psychoanalytic liaison with formal logic, significantly prefiguring his later use of logic in his reflections on sexuation around the 20th Seminar. More generally, the seminar attempts to bridge the account of the Mirror Stage and primary narcissism and Lacan's theory of signification, and Lacan attempts this by advancing a fragmentary but nonetheless suggestive new theory of *writing*. In the lesson of 17.1.62, Lacan comments: “at the root of the act of the word there is something, a moment at which he [the subject] is inserted into the structure of language [...] included in the idea of an original contemporaneity of writing and of language.” (S9, lesson of 17.1.62). Thus, the subject is birthed at the same moment that writing and language become equivalent. What might Lacan mean here?

First, we should understand 'writing' here as pertaining to the beginnings of signification, those isolated signifiers discussed above; 'language', by contrast, is the relational structure of meaning that the Symbolic will eventually impose on the subject. Furthermore, the use of the word 'writing' suggests a minimal and constrained form of agency; the subject, to some degree, 'chooses' signifiers that will permit the accession to the Symbolic.⁴⁶ Lacan continues: “the word does not create it so much as bind it [...] the genesis of the signifier at a certain level of the real which is one of its axes or roots, is no doubt for us the principle way of connoting the coming to light of effects, called effects of meaning.” (S9, lesson of 17.1.62). The 'binding' that Lacan refers to here is the beginnings of a binding of 'writing' – proto-signification – to relational language, and the source of this 'writing' is to be found in the Real, as a foundation to the “effects of meaning”. It is the signifier in its material aspect (its

⁴⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe provided perhaps the first rigorous account of Lacan's use of the terms 'agency' and 'insistence' in relation to the logic of the signifier, albeit strictly in relation to Lacan's article 'The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud': “The agency of the letter is thus the authority of the letter [...] we must also take account of the possibility of a *Witz*, of a *witticism*: *agency* [instance] indeed is almost like *insistence*”. (J-L. Nancy and P. Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Title of the Letter : A Reading of Lacan*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew, (Albany, New York, SUNY Press, 1992), p.22. [1973]). Restricting themselves largely to a reading of 'The Agency of the Letter...', the authors gloss over the interstitial, partly subjective concept of agency I tentatively approach here, although their insight into the intimate connection between the agency of the letter and its sense-less insistence is important; I discuss Lacanian 'agency' in more depth in Chapter Five.

being ‘in-isolation’) that provides this written, material ground to meaning. It is worth underlining here Lacan’s unequivocal association of such signifiers with the Real, an association that gives the lie to Nobus’ and others wish to definitively separate the instance of the Symbolic from that of the Real. (see Nobus quoted above.)

There is, then, a need for a concept to bridge the primitive *writing* of the proto-Symbolic and the relationally defined structures of Symbolic language that will come to define the subject. The above discussed ‘letter’ is inadequate for Lacan’s purposes here in its very generality; the letter, qua signifier-in-isolation, is a general property of signification whose efficacy is derived precisely from its *withdrawal* from relation, and therefore from identity as such. The letter supports meaning and positions identity even as it persists in its own repetitious meaninglessness, in its own material resistance to Imaginary capture. A bridging concept would require, instead, the ability to form the basis of identification, in a manner less passive, and more active than the letter, more implicative of the *activity* of identity formation. Such a trait, Lacan argues, is found “at the limit of the Cartesian experience”, as a “guarantor, of the most simple structural trait, of the unique trait, absolutely depersonalised [...] not merely of subjective content, but even of all variation which goes beyond this single trait, of this trait which is one by being the single trait.” (S9, lesson of 22.11.61).

Lacan finds, at the limit of any putative Cartesian doubt, the persistence of a non-subjective One, a primary ‘mark’ that, while being a marker of difference as such, provides the ground for the imposition of language qua relational meaning onto the material ground of the signifier. As Lacan puts it, it is “a question of the 1”, of the “primary teacher, the one of ‘pupil X, write out a hundred lines of 1’s for me.’” (S9, lesson of 29.11.61). There is a minimal form of inscription at work in Lacan’s concept of the unary trait that bridges the passivity of the letter and the relational activity of the Symbolic. If the letter is, ultimately, a *passive* element in relation to the subject, defining the place of the participants in Poe’s story without their consent, Lacan finds a certain *active* quality in the unary trait, such that the nascent subject actively *finds or marks* the trait it requires to become amenable to Symbolic logics, as I noted above in relation to the suggestion of agency in the choice of the term ‘writing’. As Lacan writes, if the “thinking being” under consideration “remains at the level of the real in its opacity, it does not immediately follow that he emerges from some being where he

is not identified.” (S9, lesson of 29.11.61). That is, the nascent subject, immersed in the proto-significatory melee of primary narcissism, can find a way past the “opacity” of the real signifier via a minimal, Symbolic form of identification, if a paradoxical form that both resists and allows the eventual submission to the relational, meaning-laden context of Symbolic being.

Thus, the materiality Lacan identifies as inherent to the signifier is similarly inherent to identification, in a sense more general than Freud implies in his ‘Group Psychology’. The logic of the materiality of the signifier requires a similarly generalisable logic of the One, albeit a One that acts as a primitive marker of being, absolutely distinct from any sense of subjective “personhood”, even as it might provide the minimal grounds for the later development of such an Imaginary sense of self. Indeed, implied in Lacan's discussion of the unary trait is the sense that, as well as marking the birth of the subject, the unary trait marks the beginnings of the Symbolic as something both radically intertwined with the emergence of subjectivity, and radically *opaque* to that emergent subjectivity, and the extent to which Lacan will insist on the indivisibility of this trait, this 'beginning' that will persist, can only reinforce the sense in which, for Lacan, signification is a material process of inscription quite separate from Imaginary forms of subjective intentionality. What is especially intriguing in Lacan's various metaphors for the active quality of the unary trait contra 'the letter' – the metaphor of the child writing out 1's is augmented later in the seminar via reference to ‘primitive man’ marking his hunting kills on a piece of wood – is the sense in which Lacan is conceptualising a form of *non-Imaginary*, which is to say non-egoic, intentionality, distinct both from the dyadic concatenations of primary narcissism and the supposedly passive construction of the subject via the Symbolic. An interstitial intentionality imposes itself here, and we might ask whether this intentionality – that of a persistent mark, or trace that in its unitary indivisibility guides the nascent subject towards identification – finds later expression in Lacan's reconfiguration of the symptom as *sinthome*, that is in the reformulation of the 'heart' of the subject as Real advanced in his 23rd Seminar. I'll come to this striking reformulation in later chapters, and in particular in the final chapter where I also return to theme of ‘writing’, but it is worth at least registering here the strict continuity between different phases of Lacan's theoretical work.

Elsewhere in Seminar 9, Lacan is more direct as to the specific role that the unary trait plays in his wider theoretical account of signification. In a reference to set theory, Lacan insists on the use of 'unary' instead of 'single' to account for the “extreme reduction [...] of all the opportunities for qualitative difference” that the unary trait implies. (S6, lesson of 6.12.61). Lacan expands on his invocation of qualitative difference by insisting on the role of the unary trait in answering the “question of defining identity by the *elimination* of qualitative differences by reducing them [...] to a simplified schema: this is supposed to be the mainspring of this recognition characteristic of our apprehension of what is the support of the signifier, the letter.” (S9, lesson of 6.12.61; my emphasis). Thus, the unary trait must be taken as the most minimal possible expression of quantitative difference: a primitive count that lays the ground for the later elaboration of qualitative difference via the signifier-in-relation. Lacan complicates this premise by emphasising that, despite its conceptualisation of the One of an indivisible trait defined by its singularity, the unary trait also allows for difference; indeed, there is, in Lacan's account of the unary trait, an intriguing dialectic between sameness and difference, a sense in which the pure difference of the qualitative signifier requires a quantitative 'sameness' or ground to persist. Lacan claims, “qualitative difference can even on occasion underline the signifying sameness. This sameness is constituted precisely by the fact that the signifier as such serves to connote difference in the pure state, and the proof is that at its first appearance the one manifestly designates multiplicity as such.” (S9, lesson of 6.12.61). Employing the metaphor of a hunter recording his kills with single notches on wood to illustrate his point, Lacan writes “I [the hunter] kill one of them [an animal], I kill another of them, it is a second adventure which I can distinguish by certain traits from the first, but which resembles it essentially by being marked with the same general line.” (S9, lesson of 6.12.61).

As such, the quantitative, singular mark or trait provides the means by which the subject can, if only minimally, begin to distinguish the qualitative Symbolic differences that will come to define his or her subjectivity in a post-Oedipal context. Simultaneously, this quantitative mark or trait represents an initial, pre-Symbolic intentionality that is not, finally, reducible to the closed, dyadic logic of Imaginary narcissism, and which gestures towards the complex, overdetermined forms of agency that will course through the Symbolic once it has been established. Just as the unary

trait is a conceptual bridge between Imaginary forms of narcissism and Symbolic forms of identification, while not, finally, reducible to either, so this form of intentionality is defined by, but not reducible to, Imaginary forms of narcissistic identification and Symbolic constitution via the signifier-in-relation. That it is in this seminar on Identification that Lacan first makes a sustained to topology is not without relevance here; the 'topological turn' is, among other things, an attempt by Lacan to override familiar oppositions – subject/object, the material and the ideal – to formally and accurately conceptualise the unfamiliar location of this form of agency. It is also, significantly, around this time in his teaching that Lacan began to develop more fully his concept of *objet petit a*, the object that is the result of the process of identification with the unary trait that Lacan describes in this seminar, and it is in the articulation of these two 'turns' – to topology, and to the object-cause – that Lacan will come to consolidate and formalise much of what he had, thus far, come to group under the name of the Real. My aim in the following two chapters is to trace how the conjunction of a spatialisation of the Real, conducted partially but not exclusively through the medium of topology, and the formal elaboration of *objet petit a* made concrete a number of the implicit theses as to the Real's centrality already explored in Chapters One and Two. The transcendental project of Immanuel Kant will serve as a useful interlocutor in this investigation.

CHAPTER THREE – SPACE AND THE REAL

INTRODUCTION

Up to now, this thesis has been concerned with the ways in which Lacan, from the 1940s to the beginning of the 1960s, laid the ground for a psychoanalysis predicated on the Real. By showing the place of the Real in the Imaginary and Symbolic, I hope to have begun to show how the concerns of the 'later Lacan', who it is has sometimes been assumed would come to focus on the Real with a resulting subordination of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, were already present in the very earliest of Lacan's theoretical texts. More than this however, I hope to have begun to show how determinant the 'functions' of the Real – Imaginary antagonism, the material insistence of the signifier, the breakdown of meaning in psychosis generalised as a condition of signification - are in the very totality of Lacanian metapsychology. What follows is an examination of how Lacan came to consolidate these earlier reflections through the sustained *spatialisation* of the Real, and of his wider conceptual apparatus.

Lacan invoked topological figures from the 1960s onwards, but his most sustained interrogation of topology came in his seminars of the 1970s. This interrogation resulted from Lacan's frustration at prevailing analytical languages, a frustration that Lacan felt might be overcome through the creative appropriation of mathematical approaches to space, approaches that might provide a means of both formalization and transmissibility.¹ An attention to the 'space' of the psyche, I will argue, affords Lacan crucial insights into the complex relation of the signifier to the subject, and of the Symbolic to the Real. Further, Lacan's reflections on spatiality counter any reduction of the relation of the subject to the signifier and the Real to one of *opposition*, especially that of a simple 'inside/outside' relation. In so far as these relations form the crux of Lacan's wider reconfiguration of psychoanalytic theory, the stakes of Lacan's use of spatial figures are high. In particular, this chapter will detail the ways in which Lacan indirectly or implicitly spatialised his concepts, prior to his sustained turn to topology, as a means of evoking the complex relation between the Real, the subject and the signifier.

¹ As Lacan put it in his twentieth seminar, "Mathematical formalization is our goal, our ideal. Why? Because it alone is *matheme*, in other words, it alone is capable of being integrally transmitted." (S20, p.119).

From the very beginning of his teaching, then, Lacan 'spatialised' his theory of the registers, and while the figure of the Borromean knot came to be introduced, in the seminar of 1971-1972, as a privileged knot to model this interrelation, Lacan's references to knots in the 1950s², as well as his more general habit of figuring the Real in relation to differing intuitive notions of space, render any account of Lacanian spatiality that focuses exclusively on the topological seminars of the 1970s inadequate.³ Thus, I will be attentive to the ways in which the complexity of Lacan's account of the Real in relation to both the subject and the signifier is built via non-topological appeals to varying modes of spatiality, often implicit but nonetheless crucial in appreciating the labyrinthine interaction of the multiple elements of Lacanian metapsychology.

If, as I argue in Chapter Two, the Real-in-the-Symbolic of the signifier-in-isolation suggests a troubling relation of interiority between the Symbolic and the Real, then Lacan will also emphasise the irruptive *externality* of the Real in those instances, such as in psychotic hallucination, when that which is constitutive of reality comes to threaten it, a tension foundational to the Real as we've discussed it thus far. This complication of any dialectic between internality and externality requires a discussion of the different ways in which the Real is spatially articulated with the Imaginary and Symbolic; the irruption of the Real qua trauma implies an 'outside' to the Symbolic, even as the Real, as I've shown, is only theoretically conceivable as being internally articulated within the logic of the signifier, and in particular via its alliance with the

² In his 'The Signification of the Phallus', published in 1958, Lacan refers to the castration complex as "function[ing] as a knot", arguing that the unconscious fear of castration serves as a "dynamic structuring of symptoms". (*Écrits* p.575). This sense of the dense interweaving of symptoms, lending the subject a consistency predicated nonetheless on an unconscious knot related to the threat of castration, would be partially revived in Lacan's late concept of the *sinthome*, elaborated in the 23rd Seminar. Nonetheless, the usage of the term 'knot' here seems intended to be metaphorical, a usage also to be found in 'The Mirror Stage' from 1949, where Lacan refers to the specular entrapments of the ego as a "knot of imaginary servitude." (*Écrits* p.80). From the seminars of the 1970s, by contrast, knots are employed formally so as to bypass the metaphoric and metonymic structure of language; as Lacan writes in the seminar of 1974-1974, "formalisation requires [...] something other than the simple homophony of the saying" (S21, lesson of 21.5.1974), 'homophony' here signaling the tendency of spoken language to partake in the Imaginary logic of resemblance, closely related to the function of metaphor.

³ One of the major works on Lacan and topology, Ellie Ragland and Dragan Milovanovic's edited collection *Lacan : Topologically Speaking*, is somewhat stymied by the lack of consideration of the inherent spatiality in Lacan's ostensibly 'non-topological' texts; as I hope this chapter demonstrates, coming to an understanding of the inherent spatiality of Lacan's conceptual apparatus makes the 'turn' to topology rather more explicable. I will address the most pertinent critic of Lacan's use of topology, Alain Badiou, in Chapter Five. (E. Ragland and D. Milovanovic (eds.), *Lacan : Topologically Speaking*, (New York, Other Press, 2004).

signifier-in-isolation. This chapter will seek to show that it is via various figurations of space that Lacan makes what might seem initially to be an irresolvable paradox – that the Real is simultaneously ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the Symbolic – a central cornerstone of his revision of Freud.

A further claim of the chapter is that Immanuel Kant's conceptual distinction between a ‘boundary’ and a ‘limit’, first elucidated in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, affords us a sharp comparative tool, if applied cautiously, to draw out the various ways in which the Real can be figured in space. As a refinement of his project of delineating the constitutive limits of human knowledge, Kant defined limits as “mere negations that affect a magnitude insofar as it does not possess absolute completeness” and boundaries as “always presuppose[ing] a space that is found outside a certain fixed location, and that encloses that location.”⁴ The benefit of such a distinction, for Kant, lay in distinguishing between mathematical and scientific *limits* – such knowledges are never, by definition, complete for Kant – and metaphysical *boundaries*, existing on the border between the knowable and the unknowable.⁵ There are signal differences between the respective ways Kant and Lacan conceive of space, differences I will address in a short section later in this chapter outlining Kant’s concerns and the comparison with Lacan’s own intuitive geometry, but I hope a tentative counterposition of the critical philosopher and the psychoanalyst will at least help throw into sharper relief the complex interpenetration of Lacan’s concepts as they supercede philosophical distinctions between epistemology and ontology.

BOUNDARY/LIMIT

In this brief section, then, I will introduce the Kantian conceptual distinction of ‘boundary’ and ‘limit’ mentioned above, with a view to making clearer the potential and limits of extending it to Lacan’s concerns for positing constitutive limits on the Symbolic in its relation with the Real. Put schematically, Kant’s distinction usefully condenses the more general impetus of his critical philosophy, which sought to provide a robust philosophical framework for knowledge of the world as it appears

⁴ I. Kant, *Prolegomena To Any Future Metaphysics* [1783], (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 103-104; hereafter *Prolegomena*.

⁵ H. Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 2008), p.279.

empirically, and in so doing to refute the scepticism that threatened to result from Hume's inability to provide an empiricist grounding of causation.⁶ Prior to Kant's publication in 1781 of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, philosophers had struggled to reconcile the emerging, empirical accounts of scientific phenomena influential as a result of Newton's revolutionary reconfiguration of physics, and the traditional demands internal to philosophy for speculative and comprehensive metaphysical insight. Kant sought to preserve both philosophy's particular capacity for a metaphysical, which is to say a non- or extra-empirical, account of freedom, ethics and aesthetics, whilst incorporating necessary, even constitutive, limits to the knowledge that humans could accrue of phenomena as they appeared in a world bounded by time and space. More technically, this required the deduction of a proof of the viability of synthetic a priori knowledge, which is to say knowledge produced as a result of the meeting of empirical phenomena with a transcendental subject imposing innate forms of intuition and understanding such that the world becomes empirically knowable; knowledge of the in-itself, objects as they necessarily exist beyond the limited phenomena that greet limited human understanding, was ruled as impossible by Kant, an impossibility that nonetheless opened philosophy to both a rigorous grounding of empirical knowledge and a domain of practical reason within which the necessity of freedom could be elaborated.

Lacan's own position on the nature of scientific knowledge took much of its influence from the especially rationalist strain of epistemology embodied by the work of Bachelard, Canguilhem and Koyré.⁷ But in so far as Lacan sought to specify psychoanalysis as a particular domain of knowledge predicated on the Real, on the necessary and constitutive antagonisms and failures particular to the subject, an articulation of the relation between the Real and the Symbolic as the general horizon

⁶ A useful account of the debate between Kant and Hume's accounts of the limits of philosophical reason, as well as a good overall survey of the history of German philosophy of the late 17th and 18th Centuries, can be found in F. Beiser, *German Idealism : The Struggle Against Subjectivism*, (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2008); for useful accounts of Kant's critical philosophy, see, among many others, H. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism : An Interpretation and Defense*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1986); M. Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, (New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1997); G. Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy*, (London, The Athlone Press, 1984).

⁷ For an incisive account of Bachelard and Canguilhem's contributions to the philosophy of science, albeit framed by a wider concern for the elaboration of an (Althusserian) Marxist epistemology, see D. Lecourt, *Marxism and Epistemology : Bachelard, Canguilhem and Foucault*, (London, New Left Books, 1975).

of subjectivity was of crucial importance, and it is by figuring this relation in intuitively spatial terms that Lacan, at least until his sustained turn to topology, sought to render his account coherent. Kant's insistence that things-in-themselves were necessarily existent and yet unknowable to human reason serves as a useful analogue to the ways in which Lacan sought to understand the Real, as much as for its differences as for its similarities; the Real, as we've established, is less something absolutely outside the subject's knowledge as it is an internal condition of the emergence of the subject of the Imaginary and the Symbolic as such. Nonetheless, the ways in which Kant posited the difference between boundaries and limits to knowledge bears on Lacan's complex figuration of the internality and externality of the Real to the Symbolic and the Imaginary. Consider, for instance, the following description by Kant of a 'boundary', taken from his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*:

At the beginning of this note I made use of the metaphor of a *boundary* in order to fix the limits of reason with respect to its own appropriate use. The sensible world contains only appearances, which are still not things in themselves, which latter things (noumena) the understanding must therefore assume for the very reason that it cognizes the objects of experience as mere appearances. [...] how does reason proceed in setting boundaries for the understanding [...]? [...] That which is to set its boundary must lie completely outside it, and this is the field of pure intelligible beings. For us, however, as far as concerns the *determination* of the nature of these intelligible beings, this is an empty space (*Prolegomena* p.111; emphasis in the original).

Set out almost programmatically here is both Kant's insistence on the necessity of the existence of things-in-themselves ('noumena'), and our inability to determine their nature. Of particular interest is his definition of a 'boundary', which is here defined as a limit on (metaphysical) knowledge, on the capacity of human understanding to determine the "nature" of intelligible beings, which nonetheless does not proscribe knowledge of their existence, which is a necessity to explain the very appearance of the world of appearance itself. That which sets the place of this boundary is precisely those intelligible beings which we can know the existence of but can not determine the

nature of; the result is the supposition of what Kant calls, suggestively, an “empty space” beyond human understanding, an argumentative use of space that recalls Lacan’s pre-topological, intuitive geometry. Consider the following quote from Lacan’s tenth seminar on Anxiety, on the topic of narcissism:

You remember what I articulated about [narcissistic capture] [...] namely the very precise limit that it introduces as regards what can be invested in the object, and that the residue, [...] what does not manage to invest itself, is going to be properly what gives its support, its material, to the signifying articulation that is going to be called on the other plane – the symbolic one – castration. [...] the same movement by which the subject advances towards *jouissance*, namely towards what is farthest from him, he encounters this intimate break close at hand. (S10, lesson of 14.11.62).

Here, Lacan tries to articulate the complexity of the relation between the subject as it exists as a product of narcissism, of the introjection and projection of the image of the other, and the domain of the Real, and he does so by suggesting something of a paradox, namely that that which is “farthest from him”, the Real as it is manifest in *jouissance*, is encountered as a precisely *internal* limit. Contra Kant, Lacan’s concern here is unquestionably situated at the level of the very constitution of the subject; if it were posed in more traditionally philosophical terms, the argument could be counterposed as ontological against the limit Kant seeks to maintain in the field of epistemology. Of particular interest is the language Lacan employs to designate this internal, and yet somehow external, limit; the limit is posed as a “residue”, a leftover from the process of narcissism, and one senses that little more can be said about it beyond its persistence in the life of the subject. This is distinct from Kant’s “empty space” of intelligible being, but a spatial metaphoric is nonetheless crucial to Lacan’s argument here: the subject advances toward the Real as something external, and encounters it nonetheless as an internal limit, a limit that, further, seems to imply a beyond that cannot, as a result of castration, be reached.

Note, further, Lacan’s insistence here that this Real “gives its support, its material, to the signifying articulation” of castration; it is a broad claim of this thesis that what has

sometimes been separated as the functions of the Imaginary and that of the Symbolic are thoroughly implicated, with the process of narcissism underpinning, in my terms through the persistence of signifiers-in-isolation, the capture of the subject by the Symbolic. What is particularly pertinent to the cautious counterposition of Lacan and Kant here, however, is the way in which Lacan installs as a constitutive condition the very limit the Symbolic subject encounters. In a broadly comparable way, Kant is concerned to appreciate the extent to which the realm of noumena is simultaneously absolutely inaccessible to the subject, and yet acts, in so far as it serves as the condition of the existence of the sensuous manifold, as the very condition of knowledge *tout court*. Again, it should be stressed that Kant's argument, as I have only schematically outlined it here, is situated as an attempt to understand the proper limits and grounds of possible *knowledge*, while Lacan, in a metapsychological mode, is attempting to explicate the very structure of the *subject*, a subject that Kant ruled as itself unknowable in its essence. Nonetheless, at the level of the conceptual organisation of their respective arguments, Lacan and Kant share a concern for the relative spatiality of the subject in its relation with the world. In turn, both Lacan and Kant desubstantialise the subject, in Kant through the positing of a transcendental subject whose synthesising function is the only aspect of its 'nature' that may be deduced, and in Lacan through the immanent distribution of the subject across the registers of the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real.

If Kant's concept of a 'boundary' always implies a space beyond that is unbreachable, limits, by contrast, are "mere negations that affect a magnitude insofar as it does not possess absolute completeness" (*Prolegomena* p.104); if a boundary proposes the inaccessibility of a kind of knowledge, thus setting a firm barrier through which human reason must not stray, a limit negatively marks that knowledge as incomplete in a quantitative sense, as conditioned in experience. As Caygill has commented, a limit for Kant applies to mathematical or scientific knowledge, where something has yet to be counted or understood; a boundary, by contrast, marks the limits of metaphysical knowledge, knowledge "on the boundary of the knowable and the unknowable".⁸ At the level of the subject, it is to this ambiguous border between what is capturable by the Symbolic and what escapes that the concept of the Real explicitly

⁸ H. Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary*, (London, Blackwell, 1995), p.279.

addresses itself. As such, it will largely be Kant's concept of the 'boundary' that will assist us in appreciating the inherent spatiality of Lacan's arguments with respect to the relation between the Real and the Symbolic and the Imaginary. Simultaneously, the marked difference in both the objects and levels of analysis between Kant's critical philosophy and Lacanian psychoanalysis will be dramatised at those moments when the boundary/limit distinction serves to underline our argument.

A REAL TOPOLOGY?

The following short section aims to give a sense of how Lacan related to mathematics and topology, as a means of framing my analysis of Lacan's earlier, often implicit accounts of spatiality. By analysing a passage from Lacan's late seminar 'R.S.I.' I hope to show how the relations between the logic of the signifier and mathematical language bear on the wider question of Lacan's account of the Real. By no means exhaustive, this section nonetheless prepares the ground for my later discussion of the more informal instances of Lacan's spatialisation of the Real, informal instances that establish the inseparability of the Real from a certain idea of space, established prior to the sustained attention to topology conducted in the seminars of the 1970s.

Alexandre Leupin refers to the pre-topological account of psychic space given by Lacan as an "intuitive geometry", an informal use of a metaphors of spatiality that gives way "to a topology that can overcome the imaginary aspects of the schemas to ground them in the logic of the Symbolic order."⁹ In so far as Lacan's early schemas mapping the relation of the subject to the Symbolic Other and to other elements in the psychic economy rely on two dimensions, they remain analogical, at least partly defined by an Imaginary, dyadic logic. Topology, as the branch of mathematics that deals with the continuities of spatial objects as they undergo deformation, allowed Lacan, by contrast, a transmissible and formalisable means of emphasising the interpenetration of the Real, Symbolic and Imaginary. Leupin characterises Lacan's later approach to topology as concerned "not with quantity but only with quality", and thus as being concerned entirely with the structural position of the psychic registers,

⁹ A. Leupin, 'Introduction : Voids and Knots in Knowledge and Truth' in A. Leupin (ed.), *Lacan and the Human Sciences*, (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1991), p.12-13.

not their meaning.¹⁰ Lacan puts this in his 21st Seminar as follows: “Topology for its part, elaborates a space which only starts from [...] the definition of neighbourhood, of proximity.” (Seminar 21, lesson of 15.01.1974).

I would add to Leupin’s account that the turn to topology is as much an attempt to explicate the Real in its integral relation with the Symbolic and the Imaginary, as it is an attempt to “ground them in the logic of the Symbolic order”; indeed, as I have argued, the imbrication of the Real in the Symbolic is such that the logic of the Symbolic is inexplicable without an account of the Real. What topology offers, thus, is a way of modelling the constitutive interconnection of the registers, and the way in which each register is defined only according to its position relative to the others.

In the following quote, Lacan reflects generally on the status of the knot as he conceives it during the year of his seminar of 1974-1975:

The knot is something else. Here, indeed, the function of the plus-one is specified as such. Omit the plus-one, and there no longer is a series – simply from the section of this one-among-others, the others are liberated, each as one. This could be a way, fully material, to make you grasp that One is not a number, even though the series of number is made up ones. It must be admitted that in this series of numbers there is such consistency that one is hard put not to take it for being constitutive of the real. Any approach of the real is for us woven out of number. But wherefrom stems this consistency that lies in number? It is not natural at all, and this is precisely what brings me to approach the category of the real in as much as it is tied to that to which I am inclined to give consistency, the imaginary and the symbolical.¹¹

¹⁰ A. Leupin, ‘Introduction : Voids and Knots in Knowledge and Truth’ in A. Leupin (ed.), *Lacan and the Human Sciences*, (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1991), p.13.

¹¹ S22, lesson of 11.2.75 in *Ornicar?* 3, 1975, p.97-98; translation taken from A. Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. Bruno Bosteels, (New York, Continuum, 2009), p.226.

Lacan assigns to the knot, here, the function of the “plus-one”. By this, Lacan means to emphasise that dimension of a series, in this case a series of numbers, that makes it more than simply a string of isolated units: the knot figures the way in which isolated units are made consistent. The echo here with Lacan's prior theorisation of the logic of the signifier is crucial; just as Lacan had earlier established the necessity of an operation, a 'count', in uniting isolated material signifiers, typified by the ‘unary trait’, so here the knot comes to 'count' isolated units of number. Lacan's insistence, further, that “One is not a number” points to his intent in theorising consistency *as such*, not merely the contingent association of elements prior to the emergence of a series. Just as the Real, via the signifier-in-isolation, is required as material support for the signifier-in-relation, so too does the more 'fundamental' domain of numericality require the assumption of a One as support. Crucially though, this is no One of metaphysical presence and solidity; as Lacan says above, “it is not natural as such”. Rather, the One is retroactively posited as the condition of contingent operations of unity, always under threat by the very (Real) condition that supports them.¹² Again, this is no “natural” or metaphysical priority of order, but rather the intervention of a paradoxical element that grounds and threatens as the constitutive function of its operation.

It is worth emphasising that, from the point of view of number theory and mathematics more generally, no such external operation of consistency is required. As Badiou forcefully articulated it in his critique of Lacanian accounts of the non-identical in relation to science, mathematical logic “lacks nothing it does not produce elsewhere”,¹³ which is to say that mathematical logic is internally self-sufficient. Whilst Badiou's critique was aimed specifically at Jacques-Alain Miller's thesis, in his ‘Suture’, that ‘zero’ in the theory of number operates as a non-identical support for the identity of positive numbers, in a fashion analogous to the relation of the non-identical subject to the logic of the signifier, Badiou's critique obtains here, in so far as Lacan,

¹² Lacan was no doubt thinking here of Frege's positing of zero as the non-identical that underpins the succession of natural numbers, and Jacques-Alain Miller's drawing of an equivalence between the Fregean zero as non-identical and the subject of psychoanalysis. (See G. Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1980) [1884]; J-A. Miller, ‘Suture : Elements of the Logic of the Signifier’, *The Symptom : Online Journal for Lacan.Com* 8, 2007. [1966]: http://www.lacan.com/symptom8_articles/miller8.html).

¹³ A. Badiou, ‘Mark and Lack : On Zero’, trans. Ray Brassier and Zachery Luke Fraser, unpublished manuscript. The French version can be found at <http://www.web.mdx.ac.uk/cahiers/vol10/cpa10.8.badiou.html>.

too, seems to require an eccentric element, here a “plus one”, to provide consistency. Thus, the operation of consistency that Lacan describes above, whereby a “plus-one” unites a series, should be read as an extrapolation that makes use of mathematical tools towards a non-mathematical, and precisely psychoanalytic, purpose: the explication of the paradoxical consistency that defines the subject of the unconscious. Lacan’s positing of mathematical formalization as an ideal should be understood in this context, as a goal that must nonetheless be reconfigured according to the specificity of the objects of psychoanalytic enquiry.

We can understand Lacan’s later, esoteric approach to knots, and indeed his approach to the question of mathematical formalisation more generally, by reflecting briefly on the context and influence of French rationalist philosophy of science on Lacanian theory, and in particular Lacan’s tacit endorsement of the epistemology of Alexandre Koyré. In the introduction to her English translation of Jean-Claude Milner’s *For the Love of Language*, Ann Banfield comments on Koyré’s epistemology as follows:

For there to be science – ie, Galilean science – in Koyré’s account, theory must bring about the formalization or mathematicization of the empirical. That is, science is defined by the conjunction of two factors: the empirical and the mathematical, i.e, a mathematical writing. [...] The past participle ‘mathematicized’ suggests an achievement of the history of science. But there is not just an historically occurring mathematicization of the empirical, as an imposition of form on matter. Koyré’s claim [...] also involves the assumption of a prior condition permitting this mathematicisation: the empirical is discovered to be ‘mathematicisable’ – representable in a formal writing – where the adjective ‘mathematicisable’ designates a quality *inherent in the empirical*.¹⁴

Lacan endorses Koyré’s thesis as to the absolute break announced by Galilean physics, a physics that foregrounds mathematics as its language and that provides a crucial break between scientific and other forms of knowledge: “Science’s position is justified

¹⁴ A. Banfield, ‘Introduction: What do Linguists Want?’, in J-C. Milner, *For The Love of Language*, trans. Ann Banfield, (London, Macmillan, 1990), p.13-14; my emphasis.

by a radical change in the *tempo* of its progress, by the galloping form of its inmixing in our world, and by the chain reactions that characterize what one might call the expansions of its energetics. [...] Koyré is my guide here.”¹⁵ (‘Science and Truth’ in *Écrits* p.726-727). Of particular interest to our explication of Lacan’s quote above from ‘R.S.I.’ is Banfield’s attribution to Koyré of a rejection of any reduction of rationalism to that of an a priori imposition of form upon matter; instead, it is something *within* the domain of the empirical, associated by Koyré with the contingent, that renders it amenable to mathematicisation. Above, Lacan writes of the Real as “woven out of number”, and we can infer that the Lacanian model of formalisation that emerges from the encounter with Koyré is concerned precisely with the status of the amenability of this numerical Real to mathematical capture.

Here again, what is emphasised is an alternative to the structure of metonymy and metaphor inherent to language, or what Lacan refers to elsewhere in his 22nd seminar as the “simple homophony of the saying” (S21, lesson of 21.5.1974), of the tendency of *parole* to mask, in its tendency towards an Imaginary logic of homophonic resemblance, the structure of the Real. The Real, in so far as it is associated above by Lacan with “consistency”, is nonetheless irreducible to the homophonic *resemblances* that characterise the Imaginary; a central question of this chapter, then, is how Lacan holds together these two functions of the Real, that of a non-Imaginary multiplicity, and the function of consistency that serves to bind the Imaginary and the Symbolic in the psychic economy of the subject. It is only through his final conceptual innovation of the *sinthome* that I think Lacan most satisfactorily unites these alternate functions, and there only with partial success, but we can get a good preliminary sense of his attempt to unite a psychoanalytic account of spatiality with the concept of Real through an attention to his pre-topological figurations of space.

Indeed, what Lacan describes in the quote from ‘R.S.I.’ finds a substantial echo in his pioneering work on primary narcissism of the 1940s. There, the ambiguous image of the other serves both to consolidate and threaten the emerging ego, in two directions:

¹⁵ Koyré in fact put as much weight, if not more, on Descartes as he did on Galileo in defining the break of modern science with its Ancient Greek past: “it is not Galileo, in any case, nor Bruno, but Descartes who clearly and distinctly formulated principles of the new science, its dream *de reductione scientiae ad mathematicam*, and of the new, mathematical, cosmology.” (A. Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, (Baltimore, The John Hopkins Press, 1957), p.99).

first via the Imaginary appropriation of the alter-egoic image and second via the introjection of the proto-Symbolic Ideal projected by the Other ('ego-ideal'.) Lacan's theoretical account of the formation of the ego, that is, followed a similar logic of 'consistency' as that discussed above. The ego, like the more abstract series discussed in the quote from 'R.S.I.', is a phantom of consistency, a concatenation of constitutive misrecognitions, undergirded by a Symbolic "plus-one" that promises coherency at the very moment that it serves, potentially, to undermine it. Here, again, we encounter the paradoxical logic of the Real as it impacts on the vicissitudes of primary narcissism: simultaneously constitution, and the threat of dissipation.

IMAGINARY SPACE

Lacan's explicitly topological investigations are prefigured in much of his early investigations into the logic of the signifier. The signifier serves a constitutive rather constituent function for Lacan, and as such it is the operations of the signifier that increasingly come to define the 'contours' of the subject of psychoanalysis, in tandem with the dualistic, reductive spatiality of the Imaginary and primary narcissism. The identification of the pre-Oedipal subject with the ideal-ego represents an initial, 'simple' spatialisation, an initial manifestation of the barrier between inside/outside that will come to be challenged by the multidimensional space of signification, or what Lacan refers to as a "before" characterised by "libidinal frustration" and "an after in which he [the subject] transcends himself in a normative sublimation." ('Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis' in *Écrits* p.97; emphasis in the original). Consider the following quote from Lacan from as early as 1948:

The notion of the role of spatial symmetry in man's narcissistic structure is essential in laying the groundwork for a psychological analysis of space [...] I would say that it is the subjective possibility of the mirror projection of such a field into the other's field that gives human space its originally "geometrical" structure, a structure I would willingly characterise as *kaleidoscopic*. ('Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis' in *Écrits* p.99).

Lacan affirms here the initial subject/other relation that, as I showed in Chapter 1, is subverted and rerouted via the intervention of the isolated signifier and its function of grounding the image of the other. Here, Lacan extends his account of mirror identification – even before the canonical paper on the ‘Mirror Stage’ – beyond a mere stage in child development, and into a general subjective condition. There's a tension in Lacan's theorisation here, however, between the Imaginary binary of self/other and the complex subjective topology suggested by the reference to a “kaleidoscopic” geometrical structuration. We can resolve such a tension by emphasising that, whilst foundational, the duality of Imaginary narcissism is, finally and crucially, a *misrecognition* of the position of the subject, a constitutive misrecognition that, nonetheless, occludes the complex ways in which the subject and the other are intertwined, an intertwining that will be made explicit by the intervention of the signifier. If the space operative in Imaginary narcissism can be reduced to a misrecognised “symmetry”, as Lacan suggests above, we might assume an underlying *asymmetry* that is made explicit by the logic of the signifier.

Elsewhere in the same article, Lacan insists on “the assumption by man of his original fracturing, by which it might be said that at every instant he constitutes his world by committing suicide.” (‘Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis’ in *Écrits* p.101). Thus, the assumption of the priority of the image of the other in the pre-Oedipal relation both constitutes an initial fracturing of subjective space, as well as its necessary foundation. We should recall here Lacan's insistence on the importance of retroaction in the constitution of psychoanalytic time; what might seem to be an initial paradox of the fracturing of a space ‘prior’ to its constitution is, in fact, the realisation of the inextricability of temporal retroaction and the formation of the space of the subject, expressed in the form of the future anterior. Lacan defines this particular form of temporality as follows: “What is realised in my history is neither the past definite of what was, since it is no more, nor even the perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I will have been, given what I am in the process of becoming.” (‘The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis’ in *Écrits* p.247). As such, the subject is perpetually split between the past, an ever receding ground perpetually redrawn, and the future-oriented act of becoming, and this temporal double-movement underpins Lacan’s comments as the subject’s assumption

of his or her “fracturing” above.¹⁶ The subject “commits suicide” by requiring a constant, iterative introjection of the assumed (while ultimately misrecognised) identity of the other, while via this same move, the subject assumes an initial and precarious consistency out of a perpetually reconstituted past. Here we encounter the same double-logic of the Real identified elsewhere, where there is no contradiction between a presupposed, but ever receding originary foundation, and a subversive fracturing, twinned in movements of temporal action and retroaction.

What this early article by Lacan already affords us is the sense in which Lacan's account of space and its relationship to time is modulated by the specificity of his concepts; the space of the Imaginary, we can assume, constitutes a subjective space that is theoretically distinct, if inseparable, from that instituted by the logic of the signifier-in-relation. When read through the terms of Kant's boundary/limit distinction, the space instituted by the specularisation of identification in the Imaginary seems much like a 'limit', to the extent that it encloses the subject in its own movements of projection and introjection, potentially without end. We can assume, by contrast, that the space of the Symbolic explodes such a limit. Despite my comparative references to Kant here and in what follows, it is important to retain and insist on the *specificity* of Lacan's account of space: if, for Kant, space in its relation to time is to be conceived as a transcendental condition of empirical experience, a pure form of intuition, Lacan will introduce variations in the 'type' of space that is instituted by each register. Time, for Kant an a priori, invariant form of pure intuition, figures for Lacan as a *variant structure* that (re)conditions the institution of the space of the psychoanalytic subject. Thus, as above, the subject is perpetually constituted and fractured, and it this movement of constitution and fracturing that renders distinctive Lacan's account of the “becoming” of the subject in time and space. If, for Kant, time and space are absolutely transcendental, they are dialectically interrelated for Lacan, and intimately bound up with the emergence of the subject.

¹⁶ This centrality of retrospection extends to Lacan's definition, in his 15th Seminar, of the psychoanalytic 'act', an act, epitomized by the assumption of subjective destitution that attends the end of analysis, that rests on presuppositions unknowable at the time, and only later reconstructed: “the psychoanalytic act [...], whose paradoxical constitution as I told you consists in the fact that someone can ground an experience [...] on presuppositions that are profoundly unknown to himself.” (S15, lesson of 15.11.67).

Of course, implicit in Lacan's reflections on Imaginary space, and the expectation that Symbolic space might be conceived as a theoretically distinct variant, is a separate, metatheoretical figuration of the *conceptual* 'space' of the interrelation of the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real as such. Quite aside from the specificity of Imaginary and Symbolic space, and their ultimate determination by the Real, is the theoretical multidimensionality of the three registers themselves, famously represented by Lacan from 1972 onwards in the figure of the Borromean knot.¹⁷ The figure of the knot, in this instance, needs to be read in a *dual* light, first as the non-metaphorical instantiation of the inextricability of the Imaginary and Symbolic planes and their ultimate overdetermination by the Real, and secondly as a reflexive figuration of the metatheoretical spatiality of the Lacanian conceptual apparatus as such, affirmed in its multidimensional refusal of the dual logic artificially, if essentially, constituted by primary narcissism and affirmed through the development of the register of the Imaginary.

SYMBOLIC SPACE

The Imaginary, then, opens up a limited kind of space, one limited to a dual relation that traps the nascent subject in an interminable rivalry with its mirror other. This is the extended "suicide" Lacan refers to hyperbolically above in relation to aggressivity, and it is only via the *further* alienation of the subject via the intervention of the signifier that such a perpetual subjective suicide is to be avoided. The Imaginary subject, buckling against the limits of a dualistic identificatory relation, can only intimate a space of three dimensionality that might provide some respite from the imbroglio of projective identification.¹⁸ The subject's nomination via the increasing preponderance of isolated signifiers that prop up her early attempts at ego formation are one such 'hint' of an outside. Lacan alters his language in describing the nature of

¹⁷ See, for example, S20 p.124.

¹⁸ Parenthetically and speculatively, we can sketch out a comparison here between the logic of Imaginary space and the varying powers of imagination so often imputed to the subject in philosophy, Kant being one example. (See I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. P. Guyer and A. Wood, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), A120). Here, we might say, the nascent subject is both compelled to 'imagine' an outside to the narcissistic relation, encouraged by the proliferation of isolated signifiers that name her and gesture towards the multidimensionality of the Symbolic, only to be perpetually rebuffed by the intervention of the dyadically ordered image of the other as the only consistent source of identification. Imagination, on this reading, is ironically forestalled by the primacy of the image itself, conceived as the image of the other in the formation of identity.

this constrictive relation a number of times in the early part of his career. In 1936, for example, he will describe the narcissistic relation as “the equilibrium that the images establish [...] by balancing *a pair of scales*” (‘Beyond the “Reality Principle”’ in *Écrits* p.73) – emphasising the constitutive function of the mirror relation – while in 1946, Lacan will insist “that there is a correlation – due to their strictly parallel seriation – between the quality of aggressive reaction to be expected from a particular form of paranoia and the stage of mental genesis represented by the delusion that is symptomatic of that form”, a delusion that for Lacan is that of misrecognition in the image of the other. (‘Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis’ in *Écrits* p.90). Nonetheless, one senses throughout Lacan's work on this issue that the constitutive function of narcissism and its Real aggressivity and tendency towards paranoia are tightly bound, , even if we find shifts in the manner in which Lacan theorises this bivalence.

How, then, does the installation of the Symbolic affect the spacing of the subject? An initial sense can be gained by examining Lacan's claim that a “signifier represents the subject for another signifier.” (S11 p.207). In so far as the formulation situates the subject in an ambiguous position ‘between’ two signifiers, a spatiality is implied, and attending to it helps to unravel what is a curiously polyvalent but under-explained aphorism. Implicated in this claim is, of course, a theory of the subject and of language more generally, theories that this thesis addresses through the prism of the Real, but I hope to restrict myself here to interrogating the implications for Lacan's account of space, and its imbrication in the concept of the Real more generally.

By reversing the common philosophical (Cartesian) emphasis on the subject representing itself via the medium of language, and by foregrounding the signifier as that which actively represents, by which we should read 'stands in for', the subject, Lacan implies that the space of the psyche, indeed of the being of the subject as psychoanalysis conceives it, is derivative of the exogamous structures of signification, not the intentionality of a prior consciousness. Attendant to this claim is the more specific thesis that the 'space' for the subject, the psychic enclosure that the subject inhabits, is not a fixed, a priori or 'absolute' arena through which a self-present subject might move but is, rather, *constituted and reconstituted* precariously as signifiers 'pass on' the job of standing in for the subject in its absence. A number of closely related but

philosophically distinct arguments are at play here, and it's worth teasing each of them out.

In his third seminar on the psychoses, Lacan proposes a bald definition of the signifier as follows: “Every real signifier is, as such, a signifier that signifies nothing. The more the signifier signifies nothing, the more indestructible it is.” (S3 p.185). The use of ‘real’ is undoubtedly meant here in the common sense, which makes Lacan’s comment all the more striking: in so far as Lacan proposes here a definition of the signifier as such, his insistence on the importance of non-sense, of an active ‘signifying nothing’, to the signifier underlines the centrality of what I have called the signifier-in-isolation to his more general theory of signification. The Real aspect of the signifier, that is to say, its being in-isolation, acts as the formative underside of the better known and celebrated aspect of the signifier as a production of pure difference, of pure relatedness.

Eight years later, in his seminar of 1964-65, Lacan opted to consolidate and restate a number of his theses, especially as they related to the signifier and the Real. There, Lacan writes:

What must be stressed at the outset is that a signifier is that which represents a subject for another signifier. The signifier, producing itself in the field of the Other, makes manifest the subject of its signification. But it functions as a signifier only to reduce the subject in question to being no more than a signifier, to petrify the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, to speak, as subject. There, strictly speaking, is the temporal pulsation in which is established that which is the characteristic of the departure of the unconscious as such – the closing. (S11 p.207.)

Here, Lacan emphasises simultaneously the *representation* of the subject by the signifier, and the *eclipse* of the subject by the signifier, and an accompanying sense of the signifier itself as prone to fading. The signifier, Lacan suggests, has a double and paradoxical function, making “manifest the subject of its signification” while, in the

same move, reducing its subject to itself, provoking the “closing” of the unconscious even as it offers its only chance of representation. Here again, the structure of a simultaneous constitution and dissolution reveals itself, and alerts us to the proximity of Lacan's theory of signification to the more general logic of the Real this thesis has attempted to explicate. The signifier, on this reading, summons forth and eclipses the subject, which can only be associated with the unconscious, as a space of the Real that can only be said to exist *in suspension* between two signifiers. Furthermore, this double function is achieved, we can infer, in so far as the signifier ultimately *signifies nothing*, as indicated in the quote from Seminar Three above; as a point of pure difference, the signifier actively signifies the absence of the subject, as a “nothing” that is represented in its very lack. Here, the true stakes of Lacan's revision of the Freudian unconscious become clear: as something Real, the unconscious can only be said to be manifest in the signifier as it represents the subject for another signifier, and the equivalence drawn between the unconscious and the subject seems decisive.

Just as the isolated signifier, as existing only in isolation, reveals itself through its effects, through the movements of narcissism that it undergirds and the processes of signification that it supports and/or threatens, so the *subject* of the unconscious reveals itself only via the mediation of the signifier, such that, in the very process of its unveiling, the subject disappears into the vehicle of its (re)presentation.

Philosophically, we find here a restatement of Lacan's insistence on the absolute division between knowledge and being¹⁹; what I have called the signifier-in-relation constitutes the battery of signifiers that produce meaning (represented in Lacan's mathemes with ‘S1’), while the fading subject of the unconscious has its being desubstantialised prior to its actualisation, such that we can only retroactively confer presence on a subject forever in suspension between signifiers. As Lacan argues above, such a double move can be characterised as a “temporal pulsation”, but we might equally recognise the inherent *spatiality* of Lacan's argumentation here. Where, then, does the spatiality of the signifier figure in its relation to the Real in the above argument?

¹⁹ Lacan underlines the division between knowledge and being, between thought and being, in a number of the lessons in his fourteenth seminar ‘The Logic of Fantasy’, proposing a re-reading of the Cartesian “cogito ergo sum” as “I am not where I think”. See especially S14, lesson of 21.12.66. I will discuss this seminar at length in Chapter Four. See also ‘The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud’: “What we must say is: I am not, where I am the plaything of my thought; I think about what I am where I do not think I am thinking”. (*Écrits* p.430).

We can identify two theses relating to spatiality in the quote above from Seminar 11. The first relates to the constitutive absence of the unconscious and, by implication, the subject of the unconscious. It is, at least on a first reading, striking how little Lacan directly engages with the Freudian unconscious conceptually, despite its obviously central role in constituting psychoanalysis as a discipline. The reasons for this are complex, but provisionally one can claim that Lacan's theory of the unconscious is so closely bound to his more general theory of signification and the subject that to conceptually isolate the term too readily would undermine the inherence of unconsciousness, of what we could call a generative non-intentionality, to signification as such. The unconscious, we can say, is distributed immanently among the movements of signification such that to conceptually isolate it as the province of a psychological individual would be miss its true 'nature'. The movements of the signifier, thus, keeping the subject of the unconscious forever in suspense, radically desubstantialises both the unconscious and the subject, such that the unconscious, far from being dramatically *distinct* from consciousness, is related in a Moeibus-like topology to the general field of signification and sense itself. Put another way, we can again invoke Kant's definition of a boundary as "always presuppose[ing] a space that is found outside a certain fixed location, and that encloses that location" (*Prolegomena* p.103); in so far as the unconscious must similarly be presupposed as radically exterior to the operations of the signifier, it can be said that it exists outside the boundary of conscious, post-Oedipal signification. In fact, however, Lacan's conceptualisations make clear that such a boundary is permeable at best; the unconscious, through its manifestation in the absent subject and in the logic of the signifier-in-isolation, is never locatable, never finally ascribable to a simple inside/outside dichotomy. Nonetheless, Kant's concept describes with accuracy the space of the unconscious as "found outside a certain fixed location", distributed as it is according to a multidimensional logic of connection with the subject and the signifier.²⁰

Just as holding the signifier-in-isolation and the signifier-in-relation as two sharply distinct types or facets of the signifier simplifies their complex and simultaneous interrelation, so the subject of the unconscious and the signifier are situated in an asymmetrical space of co-implication. The spatiality of this interrelation will be concretised by Lacan in his explicit and sustained invocation of topological figures in

²⁰ I. Kant, *Prolegomena To Any Future Metaphysics*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), .

the late 1960s and 1970s, but even here Lacan gestures towards a more formal understanding of these relations, writing that “everything emerges from the structure of the signifier. This structure is based on what I first called the function of the cut and which is now articulated, in the development of my discourse, as the topological function of the rim.” (S11 p.206).

There is little explicit elaboration of the pertinence of the “rim” as a figure for the relation between the subject and the signifier in Seminar 11, but the implication of an edge, and of circularity, are central: first, the “temporal pulsion” of the opening of the unconscious mentioned above implies an equal *spatial* movement, whereby the subject and the signifier operate according to the above mentioned logic of an asymmetric eclipse, with the signifier ‘winning out’ over the fading of the subject. The inherent metonymic movement of one signifier to another, however, reinstates and recalls the subject even as it fades into the signifier that supports it, and the result is what Lacan calls “the rim process, the circular process”. (S11 p.209). The implication of an ‘outside’ to signification, that is to say, or even the potential of a substantial subject rendered prior to and generative of signification, is not a myth to be entirely dispelled by a deconstructive insistence on the slippage of the signifier but is, rather, *generated by the very spatiality of the signifier in its relation to the subject*.²¹ Via an endless process of circularity and metonymy, the subject as an implied lack ‘outside’ the realm of the signifier is generated as an effect by the very movement of signification ‘internal’ to the Symbolic itself, in so far as each signifier promises a meaning it can never quite fulfil and that points towards the next signifier in the chain; this is a process that, Lacan suggests, constitutes its own arena of movement. At one and the same time, then, Lacan spatialises both the subject in suspension between signifiers,

²¹ It is possible here, via the reference to a purported ‘outside’ to the signifier, to reconnect Lacan’s spatial problematic with Freud, and specifically with Freud’s gradual abandonment of the seduction theory and his subsequent revision of his theory of trauma. Just as, for Freud, abandoning the theory whereby hysteria is always the product of an external sexual trauma in early childhood results in a recentering of his theory on the constitutivity of ‘internal’, unconscious fantasy, such that trauma must always impinge upon an ‘internal’ unconscious context, so Lacan’s insistence on the complex spatial relation between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ of the signifier negates any sense of the traumatic Real as the absolute outside of signification, in so far as such an absolute outside cannot exist except as a projection of the dyadic logic of the Imaginary. The difference, of course, seems to be that, for Lacan, this recognition, as one of the signal manifestations of the ‘logic’ of the Real, underpins his work from the outset; we can speculate that Lacan benefitted from Freud’s self-criticism by drawing his sense of the spatiality of the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ of the signifier from Freud’s revised theory of trauma. (S. Freud, ‘Letter 69, 21.09.1897’ in *The Origins of Psychoanalysis : Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes: 1887-1902*, ed. Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud and Ernst Kris, trans. Eric Mosbacher and James Strachey, (New York, Basic Books, 1954), p.215).

and an 'outside' which is forever deferred, but whose presence is at least to some degree generative of the movement of signification itself.

Again, reproduced here is something of Kant's logic of the 'boundary', to the extent that a border is marked out while an outside is simultaneously intimated, the 'outside' here being similar to the empty space posited by Kant as that which lies outside a boundary; but by insisting on the role of the signifier in marking out what is a fundamentally subjective domain, Lacan collapses the distinction between epistemology and ontology that is foundational of Kant's account. The Real, we can infer, intervenes here in at least two, intimately related, ways: first, as that implied 'outside' to signification which is always, in fact, intimate to the Symbolic and the movements of metonymy, and second as the very materiality of the movement of signification itself, in particular to the extent that the subject of the unconscious always trails the signifier in its movement, always, we might say, 'returning to its place' behind the signifier even as it shrinks from self-presence. The subject, then, is never 'present' in any strictly temporal sense, but is nonetheless a ghostly presence in the *space* of the signifier, in the implied space of movement between successive signifiers. It's worth emphasising the spatial dynamism inherent in this account of "structure"; far from the immovable structuralism of legend, Lacan's spatialisation of the subject of the Real foregrounds the inevitability of movement via the metonymic circularity of the subject of the signifier.

The Real, then, can be said to overdetermine the subject of the signifier (or the subject of the unconscious), in intertwined and multifarious ways. Principally, the Real figures here as an aspect of the subject itself, when we define the subject through its relation to the spatiality of the signifier as an absent cause, what Lacan in Seminar 11 defines via reference to what Aristotle refers to as 'tuche', a kind of punctuation of the Symbolic chain that fades before the signifier that represents it.²² This facet of the

²² S11 p.54; we can draw a parallel with Althusser here, for whom Spinoza's absent cause, when read through the logic of the complex totality of social formations, serves to legitimate a theory of history without a subject. For Lacan, by contrast, it is precisely the subject itself that must be presupposed as absent cause of Symbolic structure. Lacan's reflections here pose something of a challenge to Althusser's logic, in so far as, for Lacan, the Symbolic cannot be understood in its decompletion without a theory of the subject, and Althusser would himself increasingly address the concept of the subject, albeit largely within the terms of ideology and misrecognition. (L. Althusser and É. Balibar, *Reading Capital*, (London, Verso, 2009). For Althusser's tentative attempt to integrate the psychoanalytic subject into his reading of historical materialism, see the posthumously published

Real we can identify as its *function*, to the extent that the Real provides an absent cause for both the movement of signification and its very arena of action. Just as importantly, however, the Real manifests as a *consequence* here in the intimation of an 'outside' to the signifier, an "empty space" as Kant would have it, both in terms of the subject of the unconscious itself that is both established and eclipsed by its representative signifier, and the intimation of a more substantial outside, intimately tied to the signifier's metonymic movements and the chimeric expectation of a Real enjoyment not subject to the law of the Symbolic castration. In the quote above, Lacan's use of the topological figure of the "rim" further hints at such an outside, to an edge that might be overstepped. As this thesis has repeatedly claimed, such promises of transcendence, whether offered within the bounds of the Imaginary via the lure of the image of the other, or whether situated in relation to the signifier, must be conceived as imminent rather than transcendent in any ontological sense. It is worth turning to the section of Seminar 11 where Lacan addresses the Real as absent cause to explicate this claim further.

THE REAL AS ABSENT CAUSE

Having established the two principle ways in which the Real is spatialised with reference to the logic of the signifier – as the absent subject of the unconscious and as the intimated outside to signification – we can now explore in more detail why Lacan associates the Real with causation. In a suggestive section of his 11th Seminar, Lacan borrows from Aristotle's own investigations into the logic of causality the terms 'tuche' and 'automaton'.²³ Lacan associates the term 'automaton' with "the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle." (S11 p.54). When Lacan subsequently defines 'tuche' as "the encounter with the Real", as "beyond the automaton" (S11 p.53), he is attempting to isolate that aspect of the Real that seems to intervene *ex nihilo*, from an absolute outside. By opposing the Real of an absent cause – the 'tuche' of an encounter – with the repetitive

'Three Notes on the Theory of Discourses' in L. Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy and Other Texts*, trans. G.M. Goshgarian, (London, Verso, 2003).

²³ Aristotle's discussion can be found in the second chapter of his *Physics*. It is arguable whether Lacan's adoption of Aristotle's terms signals any deeper affinity on the topic of causality; for Aristotle, 'tuche' designates a chance, non-purposive occurrence for a reasonable, which is to say human, being, while 'automaton' signals chance in an unreasonable or non-human being. The wider context concerns the predictability and purposiveness of events in nature. For Lacan, both terms have meaning only within the realm of the 'reasonable', or in his terms within the realm of the signifier; within this context at least, 'nature' in Aristotle's sense has little purchase.

automatism of the signifier, Lacan points up the ways in which, within the lifeworld of the subject, the repetition of the signifier can be broken by occurrences that seem inassimable to its logic. Nonetheless, as I'll argue, Lacan must be able to conceive of the Real qua encounter and the repetition of the signifier as linked, as fundamentally intricate, if he is to avoid the hypostatisation of an 'outside' to the signifier that is otherwise fundamentally contradictory of his theoretical enterprise.

Evidence of the inextricability of the Real as absent "encounter" and the signifier comes in the context within which Lacan introduces his borrowings from Aristotle. Psychoanalysis, Lacan writes, "at first sight [...] seems to lead in the direction of idealism". (S11 p.54). Very quickly, however, Lacan insists on the praxological status of psychoanalysis, associating it with the "kernel of the real", language that intentionally echoes Lacan's reflections on the signifier in the Real in his third seminar and elsewhere. (S11 p.54). As I've continually emphasised, the conceptual coherence of Lacan's metapsychology is threatened if we ever divide these functions of the Real in a way other than through the convenience of a schematism. It is, then, through this logic of analytical convenience that Lacan's provisional use of the 'tuche'/'automatism' dyad should be read. As Lacan writes, "In effect, the trauma [qua intervention of the Real from 'outside'] is conceived as having necessarily been marked by the subjectifying homeostatis that orientates the whole functioning defined by the pleasure principle." (S11 p.55). That is to say, the impact of the absent Real, even as it intrudes *as if* from an outside radically unassimilable to the logic of the signifier and thus comes to threaten the subject's consistency, must have already been marked by the signifier, by the prior "homeostasis" present in the subject, to obtain any psychic traction. We can render this point clearer through reference to Koyré's epistemology discussed above; it is not so much that the Real imposes itself from an outside, as form on matter, but rather that the very arrival of the Real as cause is always-already prepared for by the Symbolic context within which it impacts, a context that contains within it the Real aspect of signification as its 'extimate' limit.

Here, Lacan echoes, both through his relatively rare invocation of the Freudian language of the pleasure and reality principles and through the conceptual similarities inherent in his theory of the signifier marking trauma, Freud's well known insistence that it is only through the deferred action of triggering by a signifier that a priorly

repressed trauma might interrupt the mental life of a subject.²⁴ Lacan justifies his equivalence of 'tuche' with trauma through an implicit reference to this Freudian discovery, arguing that "at the origin of the analytic experience, the real [...] presented itself in the form of that which is *unassimilable* in it [to the analytic experience]" (S11 p.55), which is to say as unassimilable to the seemingly closed, repetitive systematicity of the signifier. Thus the signifier prepares in advance the ground upon which the "trauma" of the tuche intervenes, even as the Real qua trauma seems at first to impinge on the subject of the signifier in a way inassimilable to the "homeostasis" that it disturbs, and from an ambiguous place, to again use Kant's language, "outside a certain fixed location." (*Prolegomena* p.103).

Formally, Lacan isolates the Real of the encounter here both to account for the 'origin' of the signifier, and to insist on the co-implication of the Real and the signifier as such; that there is no contradiction between these two functions of the Real, that of the (Real) signifier in its repetition and the absent cause that sets signification in train, is guaranteed by the implied reference to Freud's theory of deferred action. The mode of time, that is, that inheres in the relation between the Real and the signifier is that of *après coup*, or retroaction, where it is only in retrospect that the encounter with the Real can be posited as an origin; as Lacan writes, the psychoanalytic association of the missed encounter with the Real with trauma "imposes [on metapsychology] an apparently accidental origin." (S11 p.55), only "apparently" accidental in the sense that the ground of its emergence must have been prepared by the signifier.

We are led, then, to augment our above account of the *spatiality* of the Real with the mode of *time* specific to the relation of the Real to the signifier, that of retroaction and the future anterior. Further, it is through Lacan's insistence on the constitutive *absence* of the encounter with the Real, an absence we can read as an effect of the signifier's perpetual implication in laying the ground for the Real, that permits Lacan the invocation of both an 'outside', an 'absent cause', to signification, and the simultaneous insistence on the immanence of the Real to signification.²⁵ In a short but highly suggestive passage, Lacan combines a temporal and spatial account of the Real

²⁴ S. Freud, 'Sexual Aetiology of the Neuroses', S.E vol. 3, p.281.

²⁵ Slavoj Žižek puts this as follows: "A certain radical ambiguity pertains to cause: cause is real, the presupposed reef which resists symbolization and disturbs the course of its automaton, yet cause is simultaneously the retroactive product of its own effects." (S. Žižek, 'Is There a Cause of the Subject?', in J. Copjec (ed.), *Supposing the Subject*, (New York, Verso, 1994), p.102).

through the use of the phrase *en souffrance*, which Jacques-Alain Miller translates as ‘in suspense’, or ‘in abeyance’. As Lacan writes, “to this [...] correspond those radical points in the real that I call encounters, and which enable us to conceive reality as *unterlegt, untertragen*, which, with the superb ambiguity of the French language, appear to be translated by the same word – *souffrance*. Reality is in abeyance there, awaiting attention.” (S11 p.56).

Thus, the Real is suspended both spatially and temporally, situated as 'prior' to the signifier as a cause that can only be determined through the machinations of temporal retroaction. Noteworthy here is the echo that Lacan's choice of the term *souffrance* provides with the suspension of the subject between signifiers – spatially, Lacan combines an attention to the Real subject as cause, determined as retroactively 'prior' to the movements of the signifier, with the ways in which that subject finds representation in the very movements of signification it seems to inaugurate. The rich circularity of Lacan's argument should be underscored here; the edge, the circle, and the implied impression of a Möbius strip, a single surface that presents two sides in continuity, all figure implicitly in Lacan's reflections, figures that elsewhere assume a determinate presence in the long years of Lacan's seminar. Further, we can connect Lacan's arguments here, whereby an account of the absent cause of the subject of the unconscious variously defined as 'tuche', as the missed encounter with the Real, defines the being of the subject of psychoanalysis, with his later elaboration of the formulas of sexuation; these formulas, I will argue later in this chapter, significantly complicate Lacan's reflections on the spatiality of the Real in seminar 11.

OBJET PETIT A BETWEEN BOUNDARY AND LIMIT

It is, however, through the concept of *objet petit a* that Lacan most fully develops his concept of the (spatially) absent cause, and we must now turn to how the concept acts as a bridge between the Real as an absolute structural absence and the fading signifier representing the subject for another signifier, in a mode analogous to how the 'unary trait' bridged the divide between the isolated signifiers of primary narcissism and the signifier in the Real discussed in the previous chapter. In an article contemporaneous to Seminar 11, Lacan writes:

The effect of language is the cause introduced in the subject. Through

this effect, he is not cause of himself, he carries in himself the worm of the cause that splits him. The cause of the subject is the signifier without which there wouldn't be any subject in the real. But this subject is what the signifier represents, and the signifier cannot represent anything but for another subject, to which the subject who listens is reduced” (‘Position of the Unconscious’ in *Écrits* p.708).

Here, Lacan compresses a number of the arguments he makes in a rather more sustained and elaborated fashion in Seminar 11. There is, however, a particular ambivalence in the conceptual language Lacan uses in the above quote that I’d like to highlight, an ambivalence that requires the introduction of the concept of *objet petit a*, the object-cause of desire, as a 'bridging concept'. First, Lacan describes as an “effect of language” the cause introduced in the subject; through this cause, we learn, the subject “is not cause of himself”. Whilst superficially consistent with our reflections above on related passages from Seminar 11, Lacan seems to conflate here *language* as cause of the subject, and an already existing subject in the Real: note the ambiguity in Lacan's phrase “cause introduced in the subject”, suggestive of a priorly existing subjectivity. Immediately afterwards, however, Lacan is unequivocal: the “cause of the subject is the signifier”. How are we to make sense of this ambivalence? First, one might speculate that Lacan tacitly assumes the paradoxical circularity of the relation between the subject and the signifier discussed at length above. With this assumed, the tension between the subject and predicate of the first sentence quoted dissipates, such that within the temporality of retroaction one might paradoxically posit the subject *prior* to its actualisation by the cause of the signifier. Nonetheless, I think there's a more general conceptual confusion here that can be resolved by emphasizing the spatial content of Lacan's theory of the subject qua cause, and by turning to the concept of *objet petit a* in particular.

Lacan held that *objet petit a* was his most original contribution to psychoanalytic theory. The validity of this claim is questionable, not least because of the obvious precursors to Lacan's object, most especially in the work of Melanie Klein, and in the work of Donald Winnicott.²⁶ I have already noted the intimate link between the

²⁶ There are certain similarities, albeit within divergent theoretical contexts, between Lacan's concept of the *objet petit a* and Klein's 'good' and 'bad' objects, and in Winnicott's idea of a 'transitional object'; see M. Klein, *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963*, (New York, Free Press, 1984); D.

development of *objet petit a* when figured as the object-cause of desire, and the elaboration of the image of the other in Lacan's early writings on primary narcissism. What I aim to show in this section is the function of *objet petit a* as a placeholder for the Real, or as the instantiation of the Real at the level of post-Oedipal, Symbolic desire. In a fashion analogous to the unary trait, which acts as a bridge between the Real signifier or signifier-in-isolation within the movements of primary narcissism and the general post-Oedipal economy of signification, *objet petit a* represents the Real function of the cause, as situated within the desirous movements of post-Oedipal signification. Instead of reading *objet petit a* as extra-Symbolic – a reading that would, by implication, tear the Real from its necessary Symbolic context – I will show the thorough imbrication of Lacan's object within the mesh of the logic of the signifier, highlighting at one and the same time the paradoxical spatiality that allows Lacan to formally associate the subject with the object-cause of her desire.

As well as providing a sustained discussion of the cause in relation to Aristotle's 'tuche' and 'automaton', Seminar 11 also offers one of the most sustained discussions of *objet petit a* anywhere in Lacan's oeuvre. In the context of a discussion of transference, Lacan turns once more to the question of the absent cause, writing that

the operation and manipulation of the transference are to be regulated in a way that maintains a distance between the point at which the subject sees himself as lovable [the ideal-ego discussed in Chapter One] – [and] that other point where the subject sees himself caused as a lack by *a*, and where *a* fills the gap constituted by the inaugural division of the subject.” (S11 p.270).

Evoked again here is the paradoxicality of the relation between subject and cause discussed above in the quote from *Position of the Unconscious*, but by positing the object as that which “fills the gap” inaugurated by an already existing division, Lacan solves the tension between cause, the subject and the signifier left open in the article. If the signifier “constitute[s] [...] the inaugural division of the subject” (above), the object (from the Real) acts as the subjective element that blocks this gap. At this most simple level of Lacan's argument, we have an absent cause, the 'tuche' and its signifier,

that is mitigated, stopped up by the object-cause of desire. Further, the subject (mis)recognises in the object the *cause* of his division, an extension of the logic of misrecognition locatable within the already discussed trajectory of Lacan's theory of the mirror stage - although here, it is worth noting, the previously unitary lure of the image of the Other discussed at length in Chapter One is split between the "point at which the subject sees himself as lovable" qua ideal-ego and the new element of the object-cause. But what of the situation of the *subject* as Real cause, as discussed above? Lacan continues: "This *a* is presented precisely, in the field of the mirage of the narcissistic function of desire, as the object that cannot be swallowed, as it were, which remains stuck in the gullet of the signifier. It is at this point of lack that the subject has to recognise himself." (S11 p.270).

Here, the object is explicitly located in the "gullet" of the signifier, as a protuberance that is crucially located *within* the domain of signification, but at a degree of asymmetry. Read this way, the object must be seen as that *aspect* of the signifier that, at the level of desire, signifies the breach or break of the subject within the Symbolic chain. The subject, situated in the Real and represented by the signifier, is here made to *coincide with itself as object*, such that the cause of its true division – the retroactive, circular movement of causation between the shock of 'tuche' and the signifier that must precede and exceed it – is elided. It is only with this elision that, Lacan suggests, that the subject's investments in objects of desire might proceed unhindered: the subject must take for the truth of its desire an object that is, at the level of the Real, merely the transitory *effect* of the cause of the subject via the signifier. *Objet petit a* is, at this level, reduced to something of a chimera, a formally non-existent property of signification that, nonetheless, makes its effects known in the circuitous movements of desire. To this extent, we can associate the object with the aforementioned function of the Real, as that which generates the spatial illusion of an 'outside' to the movements of signification.

In spatial terms, then, Lacan's object is situated at the point at which the 'tuche' of the originary encounter with the Real and its representative signifier are replaced by the more general subjective economy of metonymic desire, of the signifier and its generation of libidinal investment. Chiesa and others have maintained that *objet petit a* is best understood, in this sense, as the Real of the Symbolic, as that piece of the Real

that persists within the Symbolic and temporarily fills the gap of the subject²⁷; I think Lacan's reflections here require us to complicate this account. From the purview of desire, the object is the illusory avatar of the Real that stops up the originary division of the signifier in the subject; simultaneously, however, Lacan's object is *nothing but the subject itself as Real cause (qua 'tuche') realised at the level of desire*. The object, that is to say, is nothing but that *facet* of the Real signifier that is situated at the level of desire. Thus, the subject's misrecognition of the object as the cause of its division, and thus as the cause of its desire, is only partially incorrect; while the signifier is, in the first instance, the cause of the subject's division, the object, in so far as it represents the subject at the level of desire, is *nothing but* the signifier as cause that perpetually withdraws. At one level of analysis, then, the Real signifier is formally equivalent to the object. Just as, as I argue above, the 'tuche' of the Real and the signifier are, finally, inextricable, so too does Lacan's object merge into its ostensible opposite, namely the subject of the unconscious.²⁸²⁹

Immediately following the passages cited above, Lacan himself makes explicit the complex relationship between his theory of the cause of the subject and space.

²⁷ The following short quote embodies both Chiesa's admirable stringency in the question of the imbrication of the Real in the Symbolic point, and his association of *objet petit a* with the Real-in-the-Symbolic; I would wish to add the signifier-in-isolation as the key component of the Real as it persists within the bounds of the Symbolic, without which the position of *a* within the Symbolic is less explicable: "the Real of *jouissance* – that of the object *a* – is indeed always a Real-of-the-Symbolic". (L. Chiesa, *Subject and Otherness : A Philosophical Reading of Lacan*, (Cambridge Mass., MIT Press, 2007), p.147).

²⁸ It is on this point, in particular, that I disagree with André Green's survey of *objet petit a*, first presented in Lacan's seminar and then published in the journal *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*. For Green, *objet a* should be associated with a "function of mediation" between the subject and the Other, a thesis that, in its emphasis on a dyadic 'mediation', obscures the complex, multidimensional spatiality that I am arguing is crucial to any thorough understanding of the relation between the subject, the object, and the Other of the signifier. (A. Green, *The Logic of Lacan's 'objet a' and Freudian Theory : Convergences and Questions*, in J.H. Smith and W. Kerrigan (eds.), *Interpreting Lacan*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985), p.161-191).

²⁹ Some accounts of Lacanian theory claim that Lacan, particularly within the context of his battle with ego psychology, insisted on the absolute alterity of the unconscious. What I hope my arguments here regarding the subtle and multidimensional intrication of the subject, the object, and the signifier highlight is that the *consequence* of Lacan's theory of the unconscious is, rather, one of the *immanence* of alterity, manifested in the spatialisation of his conceptual armory. Teresa De Lauretis, in her otherwise superb *Freud's Drive : Psychoanalysis, Literature and Film*, risks caricaturing Lacan in this way in order to further her account of Jean Laplanche's own, supposed over-reliance on figures of alterity: "The constitutive premise of (Lacanian) psychoanalysis – namely, the existence of the unconscious as radical alterity – seemed to preclude the contiguity envisaged by Freud in *The Ego and the Id*". To the contrary, it is precisely this "contiguity", signaled by Freud in 'The Ego and the Id' (and partially prefigured in 'On Narcissism : An Introduction') as the inherently sexual nature of every drive, that Lacan raises to new heights of theoretical rigour in his treatment of the relationship between the subject, the signifier, and the object. (T. De Lauretis, *Freud's Drive : Psychoanalysis, Literature and Film*, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.79.)

Evoking again the logic of the object in its relation to transference – a specific instance of its more general relation to signification and desire – Lacan writes: “the function of the transference may be topologized in the form that I have already produced in my seminar on Identification – namely, the form that I have called on occasion the *internal eight*, that double curve [...] folding back upon itself, and whose essential property is that each of its halves, following one another, comes back to back at each point with the preceding half.” (S11 p.278; emphasis added). Lacan's use of the figure of the eight here nicely renders in spatial terms the complex relation between signifier, cause and subject discussed above: that point at which the figure “fold[s] back upon itself” such that two planes become one is the point at which, as I explain above, the subject as Real cause, already implicated with the signifier that acts as its representative, becomes simultaneously its own *object*, the object-cause whose precarious position spread across the metonymy of the signifier must be perpetually fading from view in order that desire as such might be sustained. The echo here with the logic of the signifier-in-isolation discussed in depth in Chapter Two should be underlined: just as the signifier-in-isolation, while by definition in withdrawal from relation, sustains the mesh of signification as such, so the object-cause merely renders operative at the level of desire the function of the signifier in its material aspect, as it withdraws qua cause, sustaining the movements of signification and desire. The relation here between ‘cause’ and the sustainance of the logic of the signifier is a strange one, to be sure, in so far as it is only by repeatedly punctuating the Symbolic as cause that the signifier’s movements can be sustained. There is, then, something of a conceptual equivalence established by Lacan between the punctual interruption of the subject, and its persistence over time: without the interruption of the signifier’s persistence, that persistence itself could not obtain.³⁰

At different levels of analysis, then, we can identify the ‘cause’ of the subject as the missed encounter with the Real, as the subject in the Real, as the signifier that

³⁰ In her ‘The Cause of the Subject As An Ill-Timed Accident’, Kirsten Hyldgaard captures this ‘accident’ of the causation of the subject in Lacan well: “The senseless accident keeps returning. The foundation of the subject is a trauma, an accidental event, a mishap, even *dystychia*. (“Tough luck” would be a colloquial translation of *dystychia*.) No immediate and evident reason or cause for the subject can be pinpointed. A trauma is understood as an event without necessity; a cause for the subject as an accidental, contingent event.” (‘A Cause of the Subject As An Ill-Timed Accident’ in S. Žižek (ed.), *Jacques Lacan : Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory* vol. 1, (New York, Routledge, 2003), p.235). I would wish to add that, for Lacan, the signifier also manifests as an accident, even as it ‘represents’ the fading subject of the unconscious and thus provides the only locus for the subject’s persistence.

represents the subject for another signifier, and finally as the object itself. What this formal system of conceptual equivalences renders clear is the thorough imbrication of the subject and the signifier in the space of the Real; finally, the *objet petit a* becomes the cipher for this very function of overdetermination, becomes the condensed remainder of a process of perpetual, conceptual displacement.³¹ To this extent, Lacan's object becomes a meta-theoretical element, marking the principle of the overdetermination of the Real as such, whilst simultaneously acting within Lacan's metapsychology as the representative of the signifier's materiality at the level of desire.

SEXUATION AND SPACE³²

Thus far, this chapter has aimed to show the various ways in which Lacan's thought implies a spatialised conception of the subject and the object predicated on the overdetermination of the Real. In the previous two sections, I have shown how Lacan figures the relation between the signifier, the subject and the absent cause through a complex series of spatial equivalences, often distinct from his focus on topology in the latter stages of his teaching. In the last two sections, I showed how the absent cause is theorised by Lacan through one overarching spatial logic premised on the cause qua subject as a perpetually absent but constitutive exception to the Symbolic, an absence represented by the signifier for other subjects. Lacan's *objet petit a* serves to underline the heteronomy of the relationship between the subject, the cause and the signifier, but all three concepts are arranged in a series of conceptual equivalences predicated most importantly on a notion of constitutive (spatial) absence. Through a comparison with Kant's explicitly epistemological theses on the constitutive limits of knowledge, I have hinted at the quasi-ontological commitments of Lacan's theory, or

³¹ In this respect, my account complicates Jacques-Alain Miller's nonetheless important theorisation of the place of *objet petit a* as an avatar of the Real within the Symbolic via the concept of *extimité*: "a is real [...] this a as *plus-de-jouir* founds not only the Other's alterity but also what is real in the Symbolic Other. It is not a matter of a link of integration, of interiorization, but of an articulation of extimacy." My own account acknowledges this asymmetry of the object's relation to the Symbolic, but while also insisting on the intimate link between the object and the signifier-in-isolation as they 'cause' the subject. (J-A. Miller, 'Extimité' in M. Bracher, M.W. Alcorn Jr., R.J. Corthell and F. Massardier-Kenny (eds.), *Lacanian Theory of Discourse : Subject, Structure, and Society*, (New York, New York University Press, 1994), p.81).

³² The inspiration for this section, if not the details of the argument, came from the pioneering work on sexuation by Joan Copjec and Charles Shepherdson. (See 'Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason' in J. Copjec, *Read my Desire : Lacan against the Historicists*, (Cambridge Mass., MIT Press, 1997); C. Shepherdson, *Lacan and the Limits of Language*, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2008).

alternatively the inapplicability of the very distinction between epistemology and ontology in Lacan's thought.

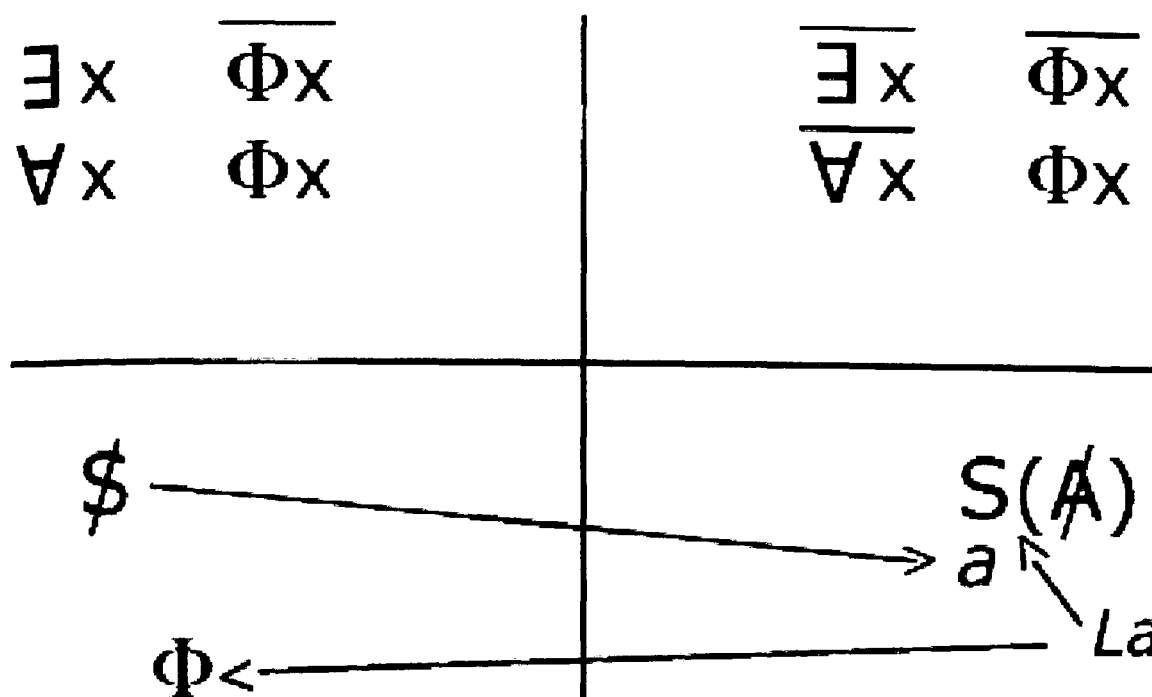
In this section, I will argue that, through his famous formulas of sexuation developed in his 18th, 19th and 20th Seminars, Lacan significantly revised his thinking on the relationship between space, the signifier and the subject, further underlining the specifically metapsychological implications of his foregrounding of the Real, and increasingly associating the order of the Real with both a drive towards formalization, and an impasse or obstacle that serves to undermine any attempt to totalise or fully formalize psychoanalytic theory. The two formulas of sexuation will be read, then, as both a continuance of, and a break with, Lacan's previous attempts to render in spatial terms the imbrication of the Real and the Symbolic, replacing a previously unitary account of psychoanalytic being reliant on the cause qua constitutive absence with *two* distinct orders of being, both distinct in their response to the determination of the Real, represented collectively at this stage of his teaching by his insistence on the lack of a complementary relation between the sexes. My reflections in this chapter will focus on the spatial dimensions of Lacan's arguments surrounding sexuation in relation to the Real and the signifier, with a relative downplaying of their mathematical content. By focusing on the implicit spatiality inherent in Lacan's account of sexuation and its role in revising the previous account of psychoanalytic being in its relation to its cause, I hope to draw out previously unnoticed implications of Lacan's 20th Seminar in particular, and to emphasise the continuity of a time in Lacan's teaching, in the early 70s, often spuriously considered to break substantially with his earlier work.

Far from representing a total break in Lacan's work, the formulas of sexuation introduced in the early 1970s represent a continuation of Lacan's attempt to render psychoanalytic theory consistent through the use of mathematical and logical means. More importantly than this, however, the formulas represent an extension and reelaboration of Lacan's theses on the material signifier, or signifier-in-isolation, discussed in Chapter Two, and a further theoretical entrenchment of the inextricability of the Real and the logic of the signifier. Crucially, Lacan introduces the formulas in his 18th Seminar with the claim that "l'écrit, sur la jouissance". (S18, lesson of 19.05.1971). Just as the material signifier, withdrawn from relation, represents within the field of the Symbolic the remainder of primary narcissism, writing now becomes

for Lacan a materialisation of *jouissance*, of the enjoyment proper to the speaking being. To this extent, the formulas of sexuation, whilst ostensibly a logical formalisation of the two different sexual identities available to the subject of the signifier, are in fact the conceptualisation of two distinct, asymmetrically related registers of psychic reality, intimately tied to the materiality of the signifier.

Further to this, Lacan's theorisation of the formulas of sexuation introduces a further refinement of the Real as both the condition and hitch in the life of the subject. To the extent that both formulas enjoin a singular relation to the Real qua constitutive absence, the formulas are singularly irreducible to one another. Or, as Lacan writes in his 18th Seminar, “in this element of indetermination [...] is signed what is fundamental, which is very precisely that the sexual relationship is not inscribable, cannot be grounded as a relationship.” (S18, lesson of 19.05.1971). Lacan's language is very precise here: what is “signed” is precisely the Real impasse of sexuation, or what in our terms we can designate as the more general lack of a sufficient signifier to 'close' psychoanalytic being, to resolve the impasse between the two sets. The paradoxicality of the Real is strikingly rendered here, via Lacan's recognition that it is via the signifier – that which can “sign” or mark – that the very *unwritability of the Real is registered*. The signifier in its two aspects, material and relational, registers this impasse in those moments when the signifier withdraws; see, especially, my discussion of psychosis in Chapter Two.

Here we should introduce the formulas themselves:



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The complete table, as above, was introduced in Lacan's 20th Seminar. While the top half of the table was familiar from Seminars 18 and 19, the bottom half was new to Seminar 20, and is presented in the context of a sustained discussion of the constitutive limits of discourse. There, Lacan writes: "If analytic discourse indicates that meaning is sexual, that can only be by explaining its limit. There is nowhere any kind of a last word [...] Meaning indicates the direction toward which it fails." (S20 p.79). Here again, Lacan emphasises the inherent, constitutive lack of a totalising relation in psychoanalytic theory, a lack of totality that is induced and sustained by the signifier. These comments, Lacan says, "should make you beware understanding too quickly" (S20 p.79), and we should take Lacan's injunction here seriously: the temptation is to overly restrict our understanding of the formulas by underappreciating their ontological significance, and in particular their intimate relation to Lacan's logic of the signifier.

To take each side of the formulas in turn, the left, "masculine" side suggests the following: there is a form of *jouissance* that is not submitted to the phallic function; all of a man's *jouissance* is phallic. What might seem at first glance to be a simple paradox is, in fact, one of the clearest statements in Lacan's work of the logic of the

³³ Table originally published in S20. This version from <http://www.lacan.com/symptom11/?p=346>.

constitutive exception.³⁴ Masculine sexuation is predicated on a submission to the law of the phallic signifier, or to the logic of symbolic castration; there is no unmediated access to *jouissance*, no final satisfaction of desire without the metonymy of signification. Before explicating this logic further and drawing out its relevance to a spatiality of the Real, it is worth explaining more directly what Lacan means by the term “*jouissance*” in this context. If, for Freud, human psychic life, under the reign of the pleasure principle, is directed towards an increase in pleasure via a decrease in tension, Lacan theorises that, within the general logic of there being a ‘beyond the pleasure principle’ associated with the Real of the signifier, a different type of pleasure-in-pain defines the speaking subject. *Jouissance* can be best understood as linked to the tendency of the signifier to repeat, to withdraw from relation, to insist in the unconscious, and to a more general logic associated with this repetitive function that Freud designated the death drive. Perhaps paradoxically, then, it is through the signifier that a potentially non-symbolic *jouissance* is perpetually incited and refused.³⁵

We can return to our explication of the masculine side of the table through this logic of the incitement of *jouissance*. As I've already indicated above, one of the functions of the Real in relation to the signifier is to incite the expectation of a beyond to signification, an outside similarly intimated in an epistemological register by Kant's notion of the 'boundary'. Within masculine sexuation, the closure of the phallic set is predicated on precisely this implicit spatialisation of an 'outside', a *jouissance* that would not be subject to the law of the signifier, even as it is precisely *through* the signifier, its tendency to repeat, that such a non-phallic *jouissance* is promised. The law, that is, proposes and bars its own transgression. This “masculine” ontology is, then, a revision and extension of that previously analysed with reference to the spatial relation between the signifier, the absent cause and the *objet petit a*: in that instance, the absent cause, variously associated with the 'tuche' qua encounter with the Real and

³⁴ In a lecture entitled ‘The Knowledge of the Psychoanalyst’, Lacan puts this as follows: “What is meant then by the ‘at least one’ as functioning to escape from it? [‘it’ being the phallic function.] I would say that it is the exception. It is indeed the occasion when what is said, without knowing what it says, the proverb that ‘the exception proves the rule’, is there to support us.” (*The Knowledge of the Psychoanalyst* (lecture series), lesson of 3.3.1972; unpublished translation by Cormac Gallagher).

³⁵ *Jouissance*, then, is opposed to pleasure, but it is not quite equivalent to unpleasure; rather, it is a pleasure-in-pain that occurs as a result of the signifier’s unconscious, repetitive insistence. In his seventh seminar, and in a reading of Freud’s ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ that acknowledges Freud’s own recognition of the potential of pain to result in pleasure, Lacan goes so far as to define repetition as “an irruption of *jouissance*.” (S7 p.89).

objet petit a, suggested an outside to signification even as the thorough inextricability of the Real and the signifier prevents the realisation of such a putative transcendence. Within the table above, this spatial logic of an illusory 'outside' to the signifier is revisioned as the very *condition* of masculine being; in order that every man is subject to the phallic law, there must be the assumption, the intimation of an absolute *jouissance* that is an exception to the law. In Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, this exception to phallic *jouissance* is mythically instantiated in the figure of the father of the primal horde with access to the unmediated *jouissance* of every woman, and whose murder by his sons institutes the society constituted under the law of the phallus.³⁶ Lacan's translation of Freud's creation myth into the intricate terms of the spatial arrangement of the subject in relation to the signifier acts here as an extension of the spatiality of the signifier in its tarrying with the Real. Two particular refinements add to Lacan's previous reflections: first, the installation of the Real constitutive exception as the founding element of the masculine sexual economy, and second the (re)affirmation of the relationship between the Real and the signifier in the spatial and logical terms of universality and its exception.

In explicating the bottom half of the masculine side of the table, Lacan remarks: "this \$ [Lacan's matheme for the divided subject of language] never deals with anything by way of a partner but object *a* inscribed on the other side of the bar. He is unable to attain his sexual partner, who is the Other, except inasmuch as his partner is the cause of his desire." (S20 p.80). Here, Lacan underlines the radical asymmetry inherent in his doubling of psychoanalytic sexuation; male sexuation, when attempting to breach the limit of the phallic law, is presented only with *objet petit a*, with the placeholder for the Real in the logic of the signifier. Lacan subtly refines the function of his object here; while above, the object becomes a cipher or condensation of the conceptual equivalence between the absent cause, the signifier and the subject of the unconscious, the object assumes here the role, implied in its previous incarnation, of both the lure and the bar to an unmediated *jouissance*, or to the access of a non-phallic ontological space. As I claimed above, *objet a* functions here as the condition and limit to signification, to the extent that it materialises at the level of the signifier the potential of a radical absence, a

³⁶ S. Freud, S.E vol. 13, p.141-144.

radical totalisation of *jouissance* which is constitutively barred by the very instantiation of the signifier as such. The “bar” here is very much a 'boundary' in Kant's sense, to the extent that it marks a limit even while holding out the possibility of a beyond. Lacan's reflections, further, can be taken as an ontologisation of the boundary, of the installation of the boundary of the Real within the very heart of the psychoanalytic account of reality. At one and the same time, however, we can read this Real boundary as a rejection of the very terms of ontology and epistemology: the boundary marks a certain relation of the subject to knowledge, but this relation is fundamental to his very being. Viewed from one angle, Lacan's arguments appear epistemological, from another ontological, although the implication of the formulas for psychoanalysis more generally mark the very limit of the distinction.

With these refinements of the relation of the Real to the signifier in mind, we can turn to the right side of the table, where the logic of feminine sexuation is articulated. If masculine sexuation is predicated on a firming up of the logic of the constitutive exception via the lure of a potential 'outside' to signification, feminine sexuation is bound by no such limit. Understanding Lacan's argumentation here requires an understanding of the term “not-all”³⁷ that he uses frequently to mark that which is distinctive about feminine sexuality. As Lacan writes, “as soon as Woman is enunciated by way of a not-all, the W cannot be written. There is only barred Woman here” (S20 p.80) and “On the other side, you have the inscription of the woman portion of speaking beings [...] If it [the subject] inscribes itself there, it will not allow for any universality – it will be a not-all” (S20 p.80). Earlier in the seminar, however, Lacan claims: “Analytic experience attests precisely to the fact that everything revolves around phallic *jouissance*, in that woman is defined by a position that I have indicated as “not-all”” (S20 p.7; translation modified).

At one and the same time, then, Lacan seems to be arguing that not-all women are subject to the law of the phallus, to the extent that the feminine side of the table will “not allow for any universality”, while at the same time insisting that “everything

³⁷ In the quotes from Seminar 20 that follow, I have replaced Bruce Fink's translation of the French 'pas-tout' as “non-all” with “not-all”; “not-all” captures more accurately, I think, the meaning of Lacan's detotalisation of the set of feminine sexuation.

revolves around phallic *jouissance*”, which is to say the limited *jouissance* available to the subject after symbolic castration. How are we to unify these seemingly contradictory positions? By insisting that there can be no universality in the set of those in the feminine subject position, Lacan is highlighting the *lack of a constitutive exception* to feminine sexuality; if, within the male position, the posited (but ultimately illusory) exception to the law of the phallus sustains the boundary of the set, there is no such definitional limit to be found in female sexuality. The result is a position of radical ambiguity: while all speaking beings must pass through the phallic law, the lack of an *exception* to this law in the female set results in an ontological dispersal. Each woman, that is, must be individually counted as subject to the law of the phallus, but no group or totality can attest to such an identity³⁸. Here, Lacan is proposing a logic of *singularity*, where the previously outlined relationship between the signifier and its Real exception is collapsed. What results is a radical equivalence between the signifier and the Real, and between the Law and its limit.³⁹ If, in masculine sexuation, the law provokes its own transgression, here the law (qua signifier) and its transgression (as a putative Other *jouissance*) become one and the same.

³⁸ It is important not to construe Lacan’s association of feminine sexuation with the ‘not-all’ with any mysticism of female sexuality; the point is rather to demystify sexuality by insisting on its absolutely ‘barred’ status, its persistence as an antagonism generated by the relation of the subject to the signifier. Guy Le Gaufet puts this well: “a number of commentaries search in the notall for some essence or other of femininity, or for the enjoyment described as feminine, involving everything in a hopeless misunderstanding since what is at stake, from one end of the writings to the other, is deconstructing the possibility of a duality of essences in order to write a non-relationship.” (G. Le Guafey, ‘Some Clinical Consequences of the Logical Difference Between the Sexes’, unpublished translation by Cormac Gallagher: <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Pastout-Clinic-09-2506.pdf>; available in French in the book G. Le Guafey, *Le Pastout de Lacan : consistance logique, conséquences clinique*, (Paris, EPEL, 2006).

³⁹ Guy Le Gaufet renders Lacan’s intentions here in terms of an attack on the logical function of universality, achieved differently according to the different logics rendered in each formula; his subsequent linking of this effort to dethrone universality to the specular image of the other echoes with my own attempt to think the logic of sexuation as continuous with Lacan’s more general project: “in as much as there is an all, it is founded on the existence of the exception of at least one (therefore possibly several), and in as much as there is no exception, the several that exist do not form any all. In both cases, the universal no longer holds up as collecting, without exception, all the elements which, through belonging or through inclusion, would give rise to a compact and homogenous unity. It is always the same attack by Lacan against the encompassing all which he had, from his first seminars, hooked onto the specular image”. (G. Le Guafey, ‘Towards a Critical Reading of the Formulae of Sexuation’, unpublished translation by Cormac Gallagher from the article published in *L’Unebèvue* no. 22: <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/TOWARDS-A-CRITICAL-READING-2506.pdf>).

Lacan continues:

Woman has a relation to the signifier of [the] Other, insofar as, qua Other, it can but remain forever Other. I can only assume here that you will recall my statement that there is no Other of the Other. The Other, that is, the locus in which everything that can be articulated on the basis of the signifier comes to be inscribed, is, in its foundation, the Other in the most radical sense. That is why the signifier, with this open parenthesis, marks the Other as barred: $S(A\text{-barred})$." (S20 p.81).

That there is no Other of the Other, that, that is, there can be no metalanguage or guarantee for the signifier, is realised most directly in feminine sexuation, or what we are reading as a set asymmetrically counterposed to a set predicated on the constitutive exception proper to the signifier. That there is no Other of the Other, that there is no reality without the signifier, doesn't prevent this new set directly inscribing the *limit* of the logic of the signifier as its very positive condition, in a way opposed to that of the masculine set; where the masculine set sets up an exception in order to define its own bounds, the female set refuses such a boundary, immerses itself completely within the logic of the phallus, but in so doing becomes the very embodiment of *the lack of a possible totalisation of signification as such*. There is an echo here, again, of Kant's notion of the 'limit', as signalling the impossibility of an 'outside' to phenomenal or empirical knowledge. For Kant, recall, scientific or mathematical knowledge is by definition never complete, and as such can only be subject to 'limits'. The feminine set, we can say, cannot exist as a boundary which would imply an outside, in so far as there is no constitutive exception that would render its set complete, and as such the membership of the set can only be counted, one by one, as an extensional process potentially without end.

If the male set, further, incites the potential of a spatial 'outside' to securely sit within the limits of the Law, the feminine set escapes the very universalising logic of the Law aside by, paradoxically, *being absolutely submitted to it without exception*. As such, this second set definitively occupies the paradoxical 'space' of the Real, non-totalisable and yet irrevocably bound to the signifier, simultaneously constitutive (in so far as its members are countable) and dissolutive (in so far as the set remains open and without

possibility of definition by a boundary). Implicit in Lacan's theory of the feminine set is a critique of Kant's boundary/limit distinction that has been used as a foil throughout this chapter; if the masculine set cleaves closely to Kant's 'boundary', a limit that posits a putative 'outside', the female set is nothing but this 'outside', but only in so far as it is entirely submitted to the Law without exception. What would be, within the critical paradigm, an inadmissible contradiction is, within psychoanalysis, an analytical necessity. The implications of this for psychoanalytic theory, further, pertain to the ways in which the subject relates to the Real, as that which is posited as, for masculine sexuation, absolutely 'outside' and yet definitional, and which seems to invade the feminine set, even as it is submitted to the phallic law without exception, relationships which have fundamental clinical consequences that cannot be elucidated here.⁴⁰ Here again, the relationship between the Real, the signifier and the subject is figured in a complex intuitive spatiality that transcends the inside/outside relation still maintained in Kant's epistemological delimitation of reasonable knowledge.

As I hinted above, one of Lacan's intentions in revising and doubling his theoretical edifice is to propose a new way of conceiving the relationship between a certain kind of writing and the psychoanalytic account of being. Instead of being unproblematically equatable with language, Lacan suggests that psychoanalysis accords a particular status to writing as something distinct from meaningful 'language', or as he writes, "There is another effect of language, which is writing." (S20 p.46). Writing, on these terms, is a way of organising *jouissance*, or a way of reconfiguring and recombining the relation between the signifier and the Real, set in train initially by the coming-to language of symbolic castration. Writing for Lacan is, then, less the act of an already constituted subject, and more the interminable movement between the signifier and the Real that constitutes the subject in its relation to the signifier. In the context of the formulas of sexuation, the masculine side proposes a subjectivity written according to the logic of the constitutive exception, while the female side introduces a radical dissipation into the set of those submitted absolutely to the (phallic) law of the signifier. To some degree, the postulation of writing in these terms is an extension of

⁴⁰ Although see G. Guafey, 'Some Clinical Consequences of the Logical Differences Between the Sexes', unpublished translation by Cormac Gallagher: <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Pastout-Clinic-09-2506.pdf>; available in French in the book G. Le Guafey, *Le Pastout de Lacan : consistance logique, conséquences clinique*, (Paris, EPEL, 2006).

Lacan's earlier reflections on the relation between the letter qua material signifier, or signifier in the Real, and what I have called the signifier-in-relation; just as my analysis of Lacan's seminar on the 'Purloined Letter' in Chapter Two sought to show, there has always been a sense that, for Lacan, language has the function of both constituting the subject and continuing to *write* the subject, constituting in a double move the contours of psychic reality and the threat of its dissolution. Such a double move is, as we've seen, one of the central features of the Lacanian Real, and it is in particular through the invocation of space that Lacan achieves the theoretical elucidation of the inextricability of the signifier, the subject and the Real. In the following chapter, the general features of psychoanalytic being developed in this chapter will be considered in relation to the psychopathological categories of hysteria, perversion and, in particular, obsessional neurosis; the thematic of writing as constitutive of psychoanalytic subjectivity will be explored in full in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FOUR – THE REAL AND PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

Up to now, this thesis has largely been concerned with articulating the complex, theoretical relationship between Lacan's concept of the Real, and the wider concerns of his metapsychology. In approaching these questions, I have tended to downplay or bracket what is perhaps the most familiar aspect of psychoanalysis as a praxis, namely its approach to psychopathology and the exploration of mental illness. Even when, in Chapter Two, the question of psychosis was central to my wider exploration of the valences of the material signifier, the specifically psychopathological implications of psychosis as a categorisation of mental suffering were left to one side. This chapter, by contrast, will move the question of psychopathology centre stage. Through an investigation of the ways in which Lacan conceives the relationship between hysteria, obsessional neurosis and perversion, I will highlight the centrality in each of a particular relation to the Real, and to the signifier, conceived as split between its state of being in-relation, and of being in-isolation.

In particular, however, I hope to show how it is obsessional neurosis, when taken as a structure, as a relation of the subject to the Real and the signifier, that acts as an especially lucid exemplification of Lacan's more general theory of the subject. While it has often been argued that it is hysteria, especially through its particular highlighting of the routing of desire through the desire of the Other, that best captures the general logic of Lacan's account of psychoanalytic being, I will emphasise, in contrast, the intricate dialectic in obsessional neurosis between a submission to the law of the phallus, and a nostalgia for the imbroglio of primary narcissism and the Imaginary dual relation, traits central to Lacanian subjectivity more generally. Furthermore, I will argue that a sustained examination of the logic of obsessional neurosis affords us a new understanding of how Lacan theoretically relates the two facets of the signifier I have termed, in previous chapters, the signifier-in-relation and the signifier-in-isolation. Obsessional neurosis, I will argue, effects a subjective balance between the signifier-in-isolation, present in the subject as vehicle of the urge to withdraw from the primacy of the phallus and its transition from demand to desire, and the signifier-in-relation, corresponding to the recognition in the obsessional neurotic of the insurmountability of the Symbolic Law, and the inevitable production

of sense and meaning. My reading here will provide the necessary prelude to my reflections in Chapter Five on Lacan's materialist re-reading of the symptom in his 23rd Seminar, whereby the symptom becomes the central element in a revised account of the psychoanalytic subject, with the unmeaning of *jouissance* providing the underpinning to the relativity of signification.

By identifying psychopathological categories as structures, as particular ways in which the subject relates to the Real, desire, *jouissance* and the signifier, Lacan seeks to de-medicalise psychoanalytic discourse. Just as his conceptualisation of the Real has, I have argued, wide ranging consequences for any philosophical interrogation of the limits of language and of subjectivity more generally, so too does Lacan's revisioning of clinical praxis have implications that far exceed the particular limits of the consulting room, particularly as his metapsychological speculations exceed and decompose traditional limits between ontology, epistemology and ethics. In the previous chapter, I showed how, through his elaboration of the logic of *objet petit a* in its relation to the subject as breach in the symbolic chain, and through his formulas of sexuation, Lacan proposes an internally differentiated theory of the psyche, predicated on differing conceptions of spatial and logical totality. My reading of psychopathological structures in this chapter should be taken both as a supplement and revision to the more fundamental or general conceptualisations explored in Chapter Three; there, Lacan's arguments sought to provide a general theoretical horizon for psychoanalytic subjectivity, divided by the early 1970s into alternate, sexuated modes. The elaboration of particular psychopathological structures here aims to connect more intimately with the ongoing movements of desire and signification that subsist within the more general subjective spaces explored in the previous chapter, although with the potential for a particular structure to tarry with and potentially alter the horizon it is dialectically related to.

In my reading of Lacanian hysteria, I return to the third seminar, where Lacan innovatively reads the paradigmatic categories of psychopathology through the lens of psychosis. There, Lacan discusses hysteria as a mode of questioning, a discourse, structured by and generative of an ambivalent relation to the Real of desire, embodied through the movements of metonymy. It is through his discussion of hysteria that Lacan makes most clear the imbrication of his revised notion of psychoanalytic desire

and the more general logic of the signifier, and it is the Real, figured in hysteria as both the subjective centrality of the opaque and inarticulable desire of the Other (linked developmentally to the image of the Other in primary narcissism) and the impossibility of assuming one's desire as one's own, that is truly formative.

Underlying this logic, and indeed formative for all the psychopathological structures discussed by Lacan, is the relative immersion of the subject within the field of the phallic signifier, discussed in the previous chapter through the logic of the constitutive exception in the masculine formula of sexualization. It is through an understanding of how the subject negotiates the installation of the phallus, and the ways in which the phallus manifests as Imaginary, Symbolic and Real, that we might gain a sense of the specificity of Lacan's approach to the Real in relation to psychopathology.

HYSTERIA AND THE REAL

Lacan's reflections on hysteria in his third seminar are intimately related to his reflections on psychosis, and in particular on the negation of the phallic signifier so determinant of the psychotic structure. Psychosis acts as a particular instance of the more general reliance of post-Oedipal subjectivity on the logic of the signifier-in-isolation; for the psychotic, the multidimensional field of signification is reduced to the dualistic logic of the Imaginary, with signifiers unmoored from any determination through difference. It is no coincidence that Lacan chooses to preface his reflections on hysteria in his third seminar by recapping some of his more general theories with regard to the signifier; he writes: "there is the trace, the footprint in the sand, the sign about which Robinson Crusoe makes no mistake. Here sign and object separate. The trace, in its negative aspect, draws the natural sign to a limit at which it becomes evanescent." (S2 p.166). Far from being the mythical instantiation on the body of a particular feminine essence, hysteria can only be understood for Lacan by assuming the separation of a sign from its referent, the trace from that which engendered it. This originary break between the signifier and the signified is generative both of the very motor force that allows desire to persist as the condition of human subjectivity, and of the constitutive ambivalence that forms the basis of the hysterical question.

This question, Lacan argues, "arises for the subject at the level of the signifier" - at the level, we can say, of the cleavage between a signifier and its referent - "of the *to*

be or not to be, at the level of his being.” (S3 p.168; emphasis in the original.) This question, then, forms the basis upon which the ground of the hysterical subject is built. We'd do well to note here the implicit critique of the divide between epistemology and ontology that Lacan adduces here.¹ The hysteric, he suggests, has installed at the very level of his being a question pertaining to the limits of knowledge, and as we'll see, such a question can only concern the Real, and in particular the constitutive limits of the subject in relation to the Real and the signifier. As ontologically constitutive, such questions expand the boundaries beyond the point at which the notion of a discrete epistemology makes sense. As I argued in the previous chapter, Lacan invoked such questions in particular via the function of *objet petit a*, but here they gain a particular force in their intimate connection to the inability of the subject to assume the truth of his or her desire, in so far as that desire is inextricably bound up with the movement of signifiers.

Lacan explicates what such a 'truth' might involve by considering an early case history, originally written by Joseph Eisler.² The case concerns a Hungarian tram conductor, situated in what Lacan describes as a “Protestant” milieu defined by “austerity, stability, peasant tradition.” (S3 p.168). The conductor suffered an accident, being dragged a short distance by a tram, and suffered minor injuries. Soon after, however, the conductor “fell victim to crises characterised by an increase in pain in his lower rib [...] the crises would last several days, returning at regular intervals.

¹ The extent to which Lacan *proposes* an ‘ontology’ is debatable; Lacan himself broaches the question in his 11th Seminar by remarking: “of course, I have my ontology [...] like everyone else, however naïve or elaborate it may be. But, certainly, what I try to outline in my discourse [...] makes no claim to cover the entire field of experience.” (S11 p.72); and yet elsewhere in the same seminar, he remarks: “The gap of the unconscious may be said to be *pre-ontological*. I have stressed that all too often forgotten characteristic [...] of the first emergence of the unconscious, namely, that it does not lend itself to ontology.” (S11 p.29; emphasis in the original). Finally, in Tokyo in 1971, Lacan comments: “it is quite obviously an artifice, psychoanalysis; one should not imagine it is something that would be the discovery of being or of the soul”. (Unpublished translation by Jack W. Stone of the Japanese, itself translated from the French by Takasugo Sakaki in a volume edited by Takuhiko Ichimura and published as *Discourse of Jacques Lacan*, (Tokyo, Kobundo, 1985). My own claim, threaded throughout this thesis but especially in this chapter and the one that follows, is that Lacan’s conceptual apparatus consciously aims to destabilise traditional philosophical divisions between questions of knowledge and questions of the ultimate ‘nature’ of reality; for Lacan, the question of the emergence of the unconscious is ‘pre-ontological’ to the extent that it is founded on the irruption of the signifier, something more traditionally associated with structures of representation and thus with the field of epistemology. Nonetheless, Lacan perhaps errs too much on the side of caution in using the term ‘pre-ontological’, when his discourse seems to operate, in fact, from outside the limits of orthodox philosophical claims around ontology as such.

² M.J. Eisler, ‘A Man’s Unconscious Phantasy of Pregnancy in the Guise of Traumatic Hysteria – A Clinical Contribution to Anal Erotism’, in *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 2, 1921, p.255-286.

They kept getting worse, reaching the point of actually causing the subject to lose consciousness.” (S3 p.169).

A physical cause was lacking, and as a result the Hungarian conductor was sent to see Eisler, who analysed him. Lacan emphasises the superficially ‘adapted’ character of the subject, who had enjoyed prestige at work. Eisler, in the anachronistic fashion of early Freudians, attempted to ascribe the man's hysteria to homosexual tendencies, but as Lacan notes, such an attempt leads to “the same dead end that Freud encountered with the Wolf Man some years before.” (S3 p.169). Lacan notes that what was decisive for the onset of neurosis in the subject was less the reactivation of childhood traumas – Eisler notes the pertinence of a variety of early accidents – but rather the effect of undergoing radiographic tests after his accident with the tram. During the tests, the subject was probed with “mysterious instruments”, and these examinations give rise to a fantasy of pregnancy. (S3 p.170). What becomes central for the subject's hysteria, Lacan argues, “is the question – *What am I?*, or *Am I?*, a relation of being, a fundamental signifier.” (S3 p.170; emphasis in the original). The fantasy of pregnancy is linked by Lacan to an episode in childhood when the subject witnessed a woman miscarrying, when the “doctor had to intervene and carry the infant off in a bag, in pieces, which was all that could be removed.” (S3 p.171).

Most importantly, what is at issue in the Hungarian's neurosis is the trauma of *sexuality*, a trauma that Lacan's formulas of sexuation, as I argued in the previous chapter, align clearly with the Real, both in terms of the subject's spatial arrangement according to the limit of their *jouissance* in a post-Oedipal context, and more broadly in the lingering heritage of the narcissistic relation, with the taking on of sexuality the Symbolic equivalent of the Imaginary introjection of the specular Other. As the formulas emphasise, to become a sexed subject is intimately tied to the taking on of a symbolic identity, but more than this, Lacan's revised Freudianism always situates a subject in terms of the limits of both signification and desire. We can conceive of Lacan's hysterical question in these terms; to ask “what am I?” is, within the bounds of psychoanalytic being, to ask of the *limits* of one's desire, a limit that is, simultaneously, a limit to signification and its constitutive condition. Further, what Lacan's theory of sexuation implies, with its inseparable connection to the fundamental orientation of the subject and its narcissistic pre-history, is that

psychoanalytic being is always-already sexed, to the extent that to be at all is to write oneself and be (re)written according to one's position within a constitutive limit, the limit of the phallic function. The Hungarian hysteric's question is, Lacan suggests, "the question of his integration into the virile function, into the function of the father." (S3 p.171). The hysteric, then, is riven by a question or series of questions that are generally constitutive of psychoanalytic subjectivity, to the extent that the subject always comes into being according to its logical and spatial position in relation to the phallus.

What, then, is the particularity of the hysteric's question, the particular excess that disturbs their psychic equilibrium? Lacan writes: "The problematic nature of his symbolic identification underlies any possible understanding of the observation. [the Hungarian's fantasy of pregnancy.] Everything that's said, expressed, gestured, manifested, assumes its sense only as a function of a response that has to be formulated concerning this fundamentally symbolic relation – *Am I a man or a woman?*." (S3 p.171; emphasis in the original).³ The consequences of such a question for the hysteric, and particularly the masculine subject under consideration in Eisler's example, relate to the situation of the subject in their position relative to the installation of the paternal function. To invoke some of the themes of the first chapter, the successful resolution of the Oedipus complex requires, for Lacan, the transformation of the dual Imaginary relation between the nascent ego and the specular counterpart into the triadic logic of the Symbolic; in the terms we've developed, such a transformation is also necessarily the accession of the logic of the signifier-in-relation over that of the signifier-in-isolation.

As I have emphasised, however, no subject is perfectly installed into the field of the Symbolic, at least in so far as that would entail the exclusion of the Imaginary; the vicissitudes of the Imaginary persist beyond the installation of the paternal function, not simply as a remainder but, as I emphasised in my second chapter, as a necessary condition of signification. The signifier-in-isolation, that is to say, haunts the subject of the signifier as a condition of the production of sense, of the conversion of the

³ It is worth noting that the gender distinction signaled by Lacan here as a "fundamentally symbolic relation" is itself indifferent to the more general logic of the signifier as outlined throughout the seminar, early and late.

repetitive insistence of the isolated signifier into the logic of the Symbolic relation. As Lacan writes : “Freud realized that there are modifications to the imaginary structure of the world and that they interfere with modifications to the symbolic structure”. (S3 p.104).

The fact that, for the hysteric, the question of one's sex persists as the ground of their being confirms that the narcissistic relation continues to define the hysteric's subjectivity after the accession to the Symbolic, even as the particularity of the hysteric's reality is fully determined by the slippage of the signifier. More specifically, the hysteric is haunted by the consequences of the transformation of demand, sustained by the Imaginary relation, into desire, the metonymic structure of which is instituted by the signifier-in-relation. In the seminar directly following that on the psychoses, Lacan conceives of demand specifically in terms of a doubled relation between the nascent subject and the Other whose presence has yet to be dialecticised by the intervention of the signifier. Thus, the pre-Oedipal child's demand for food, while already a demand for something other than the simple object of *need*, namely the confirmation of the mother's love, is defined by a dual relation, intimately tied to the dualistic logic of the narcissistic appropriation of the specular counterpart. (S4 p.182). When placed within the terms of a question, the nascent subject of demand is expectant of an immediate *answer*, whether in the form of the object of need or in terms of its refusal. To simplify somewhat, the nascent subject is placated or frustrated according to the limits of an either/or, an offer of love in the form of the object or frustration in the form of its withdrawal. With the installation of the paternal function and with the taking on of the logic of the signifier, by contrast, demand is transformed into the complex dialectic of desire, where the mediation of the signifier blocks the potential of immediacy bound up in the lure of the Imaginary. There is no immediate answer to the question of what the Other wants of one, and there is no immediate or obvious syntax with which to simply and unambiguously pose the question of one's being.

Where precisely, then, is the hysteric situated in these terms? The persistence of the question of sexual being within the economy of the hysteric's desire signals the situation of the hysteric at the *cusp* of the transition from demand to desire, such that the responsibility of the assumption of desire, and in particular the constitutive

opacity that transforms the relative immediacy of demand into the logic of the signifier-in-relation, are painful to the subject. To the extent, then, that the psychoanalytic subject is, by definition, the subject of desire, the hysterical condition exemplifies the nature of desire in its relation to psychoanalytic being *tout court*.⁴ The fantasy of pregnancy suffered by the Hungarian peasant is as much a fantasy of *certainty* as it is a signal of the ambiguity in the subject's assumption of a sexed identity, to the extent that the physicality of reproduction would negate what is a constitutive ambivalence at the level of the signifier-in-relation and of desire. By fantasising a pregnancy, the subject resolves the question of his being via the either/or logic of *demand* ("I am pregnant; therefore I must be a woman.") rather than via the intricate dialectics of desire. This also sheds some light on what Lacan means by his aphorism "man's desire is desire of the Other." (S11 p.235); the Other is assumed to possess the answers to the questions that animate the psychoanalytic subject, and as a result desire is consistently routed through the Other, as locus of both the signifier and of what Lacan designates as the "subject supposed to know". (S11 p.232).

However, precisely because the locus of the Other is the location of the battery of signifiers, what the subject finds there is opacity and ambiguity, something far removed from the certainty associated with the objects of demand. The signifier-in-relation, as pure difference, is constitutively unable to provide the certainty that the

⁴ This necessarily raises the question of the relation between hysteria as a psychopathological structure, and hysteria (as the subjective structure produced as a result of the dialectisation of desire in the Other) as the general condition of subjectivity. While Lacan, following Freud, extracts from the hysterical condition general conclusions about the structure of subjectivity – desire as the desire of the Other – he also, occasionally, signals the point at which the structure becomes pathological, as the point at which desire becomes trapped as a result of its reliance on the Other. (In commenting on Freud's famous case of hysteria, Lacan writes: "Who is Dora? She is someone who is trapped in a very clear symptomatic state..." (S3 p.174). Nonetheless, Lacan has no wish to posit a point of normativity from which the deviation of mental illness might be measured, and as a result there is a necessary ambiguity in the very notion of 'pathology' as it applies in the psychoanalytic clinic. To a certain extent, all subjects can be said to suffer from desire, and given the centrality for Lacan of alienation in the Other as a very condition of subjectivity, there can only be degrees of suffering that result. Philippe Van Haute and Tomas Geyskens reflect usefully on the problematic relation of pathology to normativity in their discussion of Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*: "the distinction between perversion and normality [in Freud] is [...] reduced to a quantitative problem. Scopic pleasure belongs to normal sexuality. The limit of shame is transgressed in every sexual relation. Thus, the question is not if this limit is transgressed, but rather the extent to which the transgression takes place." (P. Van Haute and T. Geyskens, *Confusion of Tongues : The Primacy of Sexuality in Freud, Ferenczi, and Laplanche*, (New York, Other Press, 2004), p.49). One can infer from Lacan's comments in Seminar 3 that he would wish to posit a similarly quantitative, rather than qualitative, distinction between normality and pathology, although this leaves unresolved the question of the precise point, if indeed there can be such a point, at which, for Lacan, a standardly hysterical or obsessional neurotic subjective structure becomes pathological. In the following chapter, this question receives an at least partial response in the concept of the symptom revised as *sinthome*, as the necessary pathology for any subject.

nascent subject expected at the level of demand, and which the signifier-in-isolation intimates through its repetition and insistence. As a result, the only recourse to the hysteric is the fantasmatic covering of the lack in the Other that such an uncertainty reveals, and that the Hungarian peasant finds in his imagined pregnancy. What is crucial to emphasise, however, is that such a scenario is only possible if one presumes the *relative success of the installation of the paternal function*. As the institution of the logic of the signifier-in-relation, the resolution of the Oedipus complex engenders precisely the conditions through which the radical ambiguity constitutive of hysterical desire arises. As Lacan will insist throughout his teaching, and as the proximity of psychosis to non-psychotic subjectivity discussed in Chapter Two confirms, the adoption of the signifier should be taken less as an adaptive, progressive move in the life of the subject, and more as the confirmation and extension of the radical ambiguity and aggressivity of the Imaginary relation. As Lacan revealingly comments in his seminar on the psychoses, “it's by way of an imaginary conflict that symbolic integration takes place.” (S3 p.212). This holds true not simply because of the persistence of the Imaginary relation into the field of the post-Oedipal Symbolic, but because it is via the transition of the phallus from its Imaginary variant to that of the Symbolic that symbolic castration occurs. The 'successful' integration of the Symbolic is by no means a certainty, and both perversion and obsessional neurosis imply a significantly different relation to the paternal function and the life of desire, but the Real kernel of aggressivity proper to the Imaginary relation is by no means banished by the accession to the Symbolic; to the contrary, the logic of desire both extends and amplifies its potency in the life of the subject.

HYSTERIA AND THE SIGNIFIER-IN-RELATION

As I've implied above, the hysteric suffers as a result of being fully immersed within the paternal function, within the space of the signifier, even as the relative certainty of the narcissistic relation continues to haunt him or her. In contrast to the psychotic, who is utterly without access to the paternal function, and in contrast to the pervert whose accession to the Symbolic is precarious and underdetermined, the hysteric suffers the full weight of the ambiguity of the signifier, and its dialectisation of desire through the movement of metonymy. In this section, I want to argue for an association between the logic of hysteria and the logic of what I have developed as the signifier-

in-relation, the signifier as it exists 'naturally' as pure relational difference. To do so, I will turn to Lacan's 17th Seminar, where he most fully elaborates the 'four discourses', four attempts to anchor psychoanalytic metapsychology in a wider social and historical analysis through the logical manipulation of 'mathemes'. To do full justice to the implications of the discourses for both Lacan's metapsychology and philosophy more generally would require another thesis, so I will restrict myself here to analysing how Lacan's theory of the hysteric's discourse explicates the relation between the hysteric and the signifier-in-relation, and how the intimate relation of the hysteric to the pure difference of the signifier signals the Real in its guise as the remainder of signification, as the inarticulable *objet petit a*.

Lacan represents the discourse of the hysteric as follows :

$$\frac{\$}{a} \longrightarrow \frac{S_1}{S_2}$$

Following the formula clockwise, each place in the formula represents a particular structural position. The upper left position, here occupied by the \$ qua divided subject, is the position of the agent, the particular subjective structure in question. The upper right position is the Other that the agent addresses. In this case, the divided subject addresses a master-signifier, a signifier-in-isolation that, while by definition meaningless in itself, condenses and encompasses a chain of signifiers. Directly beneath this position on the lower right is S2, or the battery of signifiers-in-relation. This position is the position of truth, the truth of the Other whom the hysteric addresses; in this instance, the truth of the Other that the hysteric addresses is the multitude of signifiers whose metonymic movements the hysteric is ultimately captured by. Finally, the lower left position is that of symptomatic production, what is produced by the discourse in question, and what is, finally, the truth of the agent's being. Here, the discourse's result is *objet petit a*, the remainder of the Real that, in this instance, represents the ultimately irrecoverable excess of the desire sustained by the signifier-in-relation, by the incessant movement between objects of desire conditioned by the structure of the signifier.

In expanding on the discourse of the hysteric, Lacan comments: “It cannot be the case [...] that the hysteric's division, symptomatic tearing apart, is motivated as the production of knowledge. Her truth is that she has to be the object *a* in order to be desired.” (S17 p.176.) Here, Lacan acknowledges that the incessant questioning of his or her being that motivates the hysteric, the question of “am I a man or a woman?” discussed above, is never, ultimately, a search for knowledge; indeed, as I imply above, we can argue that the hysteric's desire is precisely to *occlude* knowledge of the paternal relation, of the ambiguous reality of sexuation, in favour of an artificial certainty. This certainty, represented by the figure of S1, the master signifier, in the formula of the discourse, is necessarily chimeric; as an instance of the signifier-in-isolation, the master signifier is formally meaningless, an empty, repetitive formation that conceals its reliance on S2, the signifier-in-relation that is its other facet, its other face. By constantly projecting her desire for certainty on to a master-signifier, Lacan suggests, the hysteric hopes to tame the reality of desire, the constant movements between signifiers that defines signification in the post-Oedipal logic of the signifier-in-relation.

Lacan comments on the desire of the hysteric as follows :

What the hysteric wants [...] is a master. This is absolutely clear [...] She wants a master [...] She wants the other to be a master, and to know lots of things, but at the same time she doesn't want him to know so much that he does not believe she is the supreme price of all his knowledge. In other words, she wants a master she can reign over. She reigns, and he does not govern. (S17 p.129).

Here, Lacan clarifies the certainty that the hysteric desires. Far from desiring a master who truly rules over her, whose knowledge is commensurate with the truth of the post-Oedipal situation, the hysteric desires a master capable of dissimulating the truth of the signifier-in-relation, of the inextricability of desire and symbolic castration. Ultimately, however, the hysteric's complete submission to the demands of the paternal function, to the inextricable soldering of desire to the signifier, occludes the respite that might be open to another subject position – the respite found by the pervert, say, in the identification with the maternal phallus. (see below.) As a result,

the hysteric is bound to the truth of desire, to the truth of the remainder of the signifier's movements, *objet petit a*.

In the last chapter, I analysed Lacan's object as, in part, the condensed figure of the presence of the Real in the Symbolic; as, that is, the stand in within the Symbolic for the radical absence of the Real qua cause, and its role as such is made explicit here. For the hysteric, the object stands in for the ultimately unavoidable limit to desire, for the constitutive inability to avoid the truth of desire as constituted and mediated by the Symbolic. No matter how the hysteric may try to avoid the object, its position in the site of truth confirms the fully operative submission of the hysteric to the law of the father, to the demands of Symbolic law. The object is figured in the discourse of the hysteric both as absence and excess; at the level of the hysteric's address to the master-signifier - "what am I?" - the object is radically excluded in favour of the false certainty of the signifier-in-isolation. At the level of truth, however, the object returns as the excess of desire over the hysteric's demands, as the *answer* that the hysteric fundamentally wishes to avoid.

More generally, though, Lacan's arguments surrounding the hysteric's discourse usefully formalise the relationship between the signifier-in-relation and the Real. As we saw in the last chapter and as the hysteric's economy of desire renders clear, the movements of post-Oedipal signification are intimately bound up with the Real object that represents both the condition of existence of desire itself – its cause – and desire's absolute limit, the absolute inability of the signifier-in-relation to cease its movements and provide a stable answer to desire's questioning. *Objet petit a* is the truth of the hysteric's being, and is situated underneath the position of the agent in Lacan's formula, to the extent that it represents both the necessity of its exclusion within the ostensible demands of the hysteric's question – an admittance of the object at this level would exclude the very possibility of an answer – and the inevitability of its return, as the only possible result of the signifier's irreducible relationality. The Real in this formation is both the unavoidable horizon of the hysteric's desire, and the remainder that must be excluded for the false certainty of the master signifier to function; that is to say, as simultaneously formative and potentially deformative. At one and the same time, the signifier-in-relation's proximity to the master-signifier qua signifier-in-isolation as its alternate side or facet, and the position of the signifier-in-

relation as the only vehicle for the hysteric's question, allows the Real to return in the position of truth.

PERVERSION, THE DRIVE, AND THE REAL

Lacan's writings on perversion extend significantly the implications of Freud's already radical uncoupling of perversion from any claim of sexual abnormality. By the time of writing 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', Freud intimated that all sexuality is, to a degree, perverse, to the extent that human sexuality is irrevocably tainted by the wayward swerve of the drives. Drives, on this reading, are the byproduct of the human being's reliance on the signifier; there is no 'natural' instinct once the aggressivity of the Imaginary relation and the multidimensionality of the Symbolic have taken hold. Unlike Freud, however, Lacan will define perversion almost exclusively in terms of its structural features. For Freud, perversion, while not providing an index from which to measure sexual normalcy, is nonetheless largely defined in terms of particular types of sexual behaviour and symptoms, including homosexuality.⁵ Lacan, by contrast, defines perversion in terms of the structural relationship of the subject to the phallic function, and to the limits of his or her desire. As such, perversion is intimately related to the question of the Real, especially as the pervert will orient their desire around the attempt to transgress the Law, and in so doing reinforce its bounds. This double structure – of the immanence of the Law's constitution and dissolution, of the coincidence of (Real) transgression with the setting of the Law – is a variation on the more general structure of the Real that we have identified throughout this thesis, namely the simultaneity of the Real's constitutive function and its tendency towards dissolution, its logic of simultaneous formation and deformation.

In order to fully appreciate the complexity of perverse structure, it is necessary to get a sense of how the pervert reacts to the installation of the phallic function. If, for the hysteric, the full installation of the phallic law results in an amplification of its constitutive ambiguity, an acceleration of desire's tendency to exist just beyond the grasp of the subject in the locus of the Other, then the pervert exists in a more radical

⁵ S. Freud, 'The Sexual Aberrations', in S.E vol. 7, p.135-148.

relation of precariousness with the dissolution of the Imaginary relation and the transition from demand to desire. Unlike the hysteric, the pervert has only *partially* acceded to the paternal law, and as a result constantly challenges its demands.

In his 11th Seminar, Lacan broaches the question of perversion in the context of a wider discussion of the drive, and in particular by reference to voyeurism as a species of perversion; as, that is, a particular manifestation of the scopic drive. There, Lacan, writes:

At the moment of the act of the voyeur, where is the subject, where is the object? I have told you that the subject is not there in the sense of seeing, at the level of the scopic drive. He is there as pervert and he is situated only at the culmination of the loop. As for the object [...] the loop turns around itself, it is a missile, and it is with it, in perversion, that the target is reached. (S11 p.182).

This is, even by Lacan's standards, an obscure passage, and it requires some considerable explanation. By “loop”, we should take Lacan to mean the loop of the drive. If desire is defined by its tendency towards metonymy, by its moving with the logic of the signifier-in-relation, the drive is defined by its tendency to repeat, by a repetitious insistence that is structured according to the logic of the signifier-in-isolation. Elsewhere in his 11th Seminar, Lacan will refer to the relation of repetition to the signifier as “bound up with a signifying shaping of the real.” (S11 p.40). Further, Lacan will write: “it is necessary to ground [...] repetition first of all in the very split that occurs in the subject in relation to the encounter [...] It is precisely through this that the real finds itself, in the subject, to a very great degree the accomplice of the drive.” (S11 p.69). We find, then, an equivocity between the drive, the signifier-in-isolation, and the Real; the Real, as that which “finds itself” in the subject via the process of repetition, is manifested as the drive, as its “accomplice”. In the original quote above, Lacan suggests that the pervert, when committing a voyeuristic act, is implicated radically in the drive, as situated in its loop. As a result, the pervert, instead of being situated in the standard subject position of the person who looks, is situated at the end of a process of looping, and as a result his subjectivity coincides with the *object*, or the culmination, of his gaze qua drive. The pervert projects themselves as the object that can satisfy the drive, that can both incite

and placate the desire of the Other through the voyeuristic act, and as a result the pervert is both subject *and* object, is the agency that might heal “the very split that occurs in the subject in relation to the encounter.” (S11 p.69).

Where the hysteric finds themselves radically *subject* to the exigencies of desire as a result of the accession to the Symbolic, to the constitutive ambiguity of desire as it is carried by the movements of the signifier-in-relation, the pervert situates him or herself as the *object* of the drive, as the object of a repetitive insistence that might negate the mediatory function of the paternal law. If the hysteric tries to find in the desire of the Other a certainty that will negate the radical opacity of the Symbolic law, the pervert will posit him or herself as precisely the *object* or *bearer* of such a certainty, as the coincidental subject-object that will paper over the gap in the Other. In such a way, the mediating function of the Symbolic is resisted, and, crucially, the signifier is turned towards its repetitive function, an echo of its role in undergirding the process of narcissistic constitution in the pre-Oedipal context.

In order to make the specificity of perversion clearer, Lacan introduces the term “disavowal” to describe the pervert's attitude to the paternal function. (S4 p.194). In a number of his earlier seminars, Lacan also explains in greater detail how the relation to the Imaginary phallus prior to its dialectisation in the accession to the Symbolic functions in perversion, and it is to this explanation that I'll now turn. I hope to show, in particular, how the relation between the movements of primary narcissism and the turn to the signifier-in-relation figure in the context of psychopathology.

How, then, does Lacan conceptualise the Imaginary phallus?⁶ In my first chapter, I detailed the multifarious ways in which the process of primary narcissism is

⁶ It should be noted here that a number of feminist scholars have contested the persistence of the use of the term ‘phallus’ in Lacan to denote the object of exchange in the triad of the child, mother and father as outlined in the fourth and fifth seminars, and Lacan himself will often use the more neutral term ‘part object’. As Judith Butler writes, “Although Lacan explicitly denounces the possibility that the phallus is a body part or an imaginary effect, that repudiation will be read as constitutive of the very symbolic status he confers on the phallus”. (J. Butler, *Bodies That Matter : On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, (New York, Routledge, 1993), p.75). Butler goes on to note that, as implicated in the idealizing function of primary narcissism, the conceptual choice of the term ‘phallus’ serves to “prefigure and valorize which body part will be the site of erotogenization”. (p.76.) Butler is right. I think, in pointing out the contradiction between, on the one hand, the psychoanalytic conceptualisation of a transferable object as the precondition for a certain kind of subjectivising idealisation, while on the other insisting on the particularity of the phallus as both the object and the outcome of that process of exchange, thus

imbricated in the Real, and how important for the development of Lacan's psychoanalytic theory the imbroglio of pre-Oedipal identification is. In a series of revisions of his early writing on narcissism, aggressivity and the mirror relation conducted during his first few seminars, Lacan puts the lie to the charge, sometimes made against him in particular by followers of Melanie Klein, that he neglects the centrality of the desire of the mother in the formative years of the infant, privileging instead the moment at which the child becomes fully subjectivised by assuming the mantle of the Symbolic phallus.⁷ By distinguishing between the Imaginary and Symbolic facets of the phallus in his fourth and fifth seminars, however, Lacan will clearly conceptualise the ways in which the early, Imaginary life of the subject is formative for any understanding of metapsychology, and it is via the centrality of the Imaginary phallus to perversion that Lacan's arguments here gain their clearest expression.

In his fifth seminar on 'The Formations of the Unconscious', Lacan writes of the mother as follows: "This is the mother who comes, who goes, because I am a little being already caught up in the symbolic; it is because I have learned to symbolise that one can say that she comes and goes [...] The question is: where is the signified? What does she want [...] I would really like it to be me that she wants." (S5, lesson of 15.1.58). Here, Lacan, through an implicit reference to Freud's reflections on the game of *fort-da* from his 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', reinstates the importance of reading the early life of the subject as being always-already marked by the Symbolic, by the isolated signifiers of narcissism. Even more importantly, however, he emphasises here the centrality of the desire of the mother, or more precisely the *question* of the mother's desire, to the movements of early identification. The child, Lacan suggests, wants to be the object of the mother's desire, a want that is incited by

deciding in advance what would seem otherwise to be an open process of erotogenisation. One can speculate that Lacan's increasing replacement of the term 'phallus' with 'part object' and, later, 'master signifier', as well as the development of *objet petit a* as a psychoanalytic object of his own, were designed in part to mitigate the effects of this contradiction. And throughout his teaching, Lacan emphasised the fundamental ambiguity of the phallus, as both the source and the dissimulation of castration, or as Lacan put it in his 21st Seminar, the "cause and the mask" of the lack of a sexual relation. (Seminar 21, lesson of 12.02.74).

⁷ See, for example, a number of the exchanges collected in B. Burgoyne and Mary Sullivan (ed.), *The Lacan-Klein Dialogues*, (London, Karnac, 1999). For a Lacanian take on the mother-child dyad in a clinical context that rebuts aspects of the Kleinian critique, see B. Benvenuto, 'Once Upon a Time : The Infant in Lacanian Theory', in B. Burgoyne (ed.), *The Lacan-Klein Dialogues*, (London, Karnac, 1999), p.19-33.

the very constitutive opacity of the mother's desire itself. We have here, in its germinal form, what will become the fate of the hysteric who, as we saw above, is dominated and tormented by the opacity of the Other's desire. Whether the outcome of these formative moments will be hysteria, however, or another subject formation, depends on how the child positions itself relative to the desire it craves.

Lacan continues: "The child himself is the partial object. It is because, at first, he is the partial object that he is led to ask himself: what does this mean, her coming and her going?" (S5, lesson of 15.1.58). The child, then, is fated to assume the role of the object of the mother's desire, to take a position within what is the first, and necessarily truncated, dialectic that will lay the ground for the eventual (logical, rather than temporal) succession of the Symbolic matrix. "This signified of the comings and goings of the mother", Lacan writes, "is the phallus." (S5, lesson of 15.1.58). Thus, the question of the desire of the mother, the originary question that institutes the primary dialectic of narcissistic identification, can be located in an object, an object that the child attempts to become. As Lacan puts it, "The child [...] with more or less luck, may succeed very quickly in making himself a phallus [...] But the imaginary way is not the normal way [...] In the last analysis [...] it is never pure, it is never completely accessible, it always leaves something approximate and unfathomed, even something dual, which results in all the polymorphism of perversion." (S5, lesson of 15.1.58).

The attempt, then, by the child to assume the role of the object of the mother's desire, which is to say the attempt by the child to cancel out the *lack* constitutive of the desire of the mother, is prone to a number of potential hazards. Nonetheless, the logical impasse produced by the child's attempts to become the phallic substitute for the mother's lack is subject to the intervention of the father, coded by Lacan in terms of the paternal metaphor.⁸ Lacan writes: "it is in so far as the father is going to be substituted for the mother as signifier that this ordinary result of metaphor is going to be produced." (S5, lesson of 15.1.58). In simple terms, then, the intervention of the paternal metaphor signals the substitution of the question of the maternal phallus for

⁸ Which, Lacan implies, means that the biological attribution of paternity is of little moment to the assumption of the *metaphoric* role of the paternal signifier – a logic Lacan extends even further in his formulas of sexuation to include the very designation of sex as such; see Chapter Three of this thesis.

the question of the signifier-in-relation and all the concomitant puzzles surrounding the transition from demand to desire. As Lacan writes above, however, it is possible, in fact to be expected, that “something approximate and unfathomed” may result from the attempt to transition the maternal demand into paternal desire, which may result in “all the polymorphism of perversion.” Lacan's words are chosen very carefully here: the use of “approximate” signals the only partial success of the installation of the paternal metaphor in the subjective economy of the pervert. By referring to the “dual” status of the “polymorphism of perversion”, Lacan is signalling that the pervert exists as caught between the demands of the paternal metaphor and its significatory mediation and the immediacy of the maternal demand. By attempting to present him or herself as the object of the drive, as the object of the Other's lack as discussed above, the pervert is *repeating* the early identification with the maternal phallus.

In his recognition of the centrality of maternal desire and in the necessity of a belief in the viability of the maternal phallus in perversion, Lacan follows Freud closely. In his 'An Out-Line of Psychoanalysis', Freud writes of the pervert (in this case the fetishist) as “not recognizing the fact that females have no penis – a fact which is extremely undesirable to him since it is a proof of the possibility of his being castrated himself.”⁹ As a result, Freud and Lacan suggest, the pervert must negate the lack in the Other by offering him or herself up as the object as the drive, precisely to negate the reality of his or her own castration. If the psychotic, as we saw in Chapter Two, suffers the consequences of a total lack of the paternal metaphor, of a total immersion in the logic of the isolated signifier torn from its relationality, then the pervert *sustains* the logic of the signifier-in-isolation, of the isolated, repetitive drive-signifiers of primary narcissism that sustain the dualistic logic of Imaginary identification, as a means of warding off the threat of the Real embodied in desire, in the movements of the signifier-in-relation. What should be clear is that such efforts are in vain: to the extent that the Real's antagonism is as implicated in the aggressivity of the Imaginary relation, of the proximity of the mystery of the mother's desire, as it is in the question of post-Oedipal desire that so haunts the hysteric, the pervert is as captured by its movements of constitution and dissolution as the hysteric who so embodies the success of the paternal metaphor.

⁹ S. Freud, 'An Outline of Psychoanalysis', S.E vol. 23, p.202-203.

PERVERSION AND THE SIGNIFIER-IN-ISOLATION

As I hope is now clear, hysteria and perversion represent radically different ways of dealing with the trauma of symbolic castration. The hysteric searches in the desire of the Other for an answer to the question that plagues their very being, for an answer that might avoid the exigencies of desire and the signifier-in-relation, while the pervert negates the castration of the mother, assuming the position of the maternal phallus in a bid to outmanoeuvre the paternal metaphor. Both subject positions emerge as a response to the Real: hysteria in its attempt to negate the *objet petit a* as the truth of the limit of desire, and perversion through the attempt to become the object of the Other's desire as a means of negating the Real of castration. As I argued above, the hysteric's total submission within the logic of the paternal metaphor, within the movements of the metonymy of desire, closely implicates hysteria within the more general logic of the signifier-in-relation. Equally, however, we can associate the logic of perversion with the signifier-in-isolation, to the extent that the pervert's disavowal of the paternal metaphor is an attempt to maintain the logic of primary narcissism. As I've shown, the emergence of the signifier-in-isolation is radically bound up with the first attempts at identification of the nascent subject, whose Imaginary relations are sustained by scattered, isolated signifiers, not yet inserted into networks of relation. In the revision of the theory of pre-Oedipal relations that Lacan institutes in the quote from Seminar 5 above, the early relation to the mother is posited as the paradigmatic relation of primary narcissism, with the child constructed as the first object of exchange, which is to say as the phallus in its Imaginary aspect. How might we link these two aspects of primary narcissism, the Imaginary phallus and the signifier-in-isolation, and what bearing might their linkage have on our understanding of perversion?

In remarks in the seminar directly following the discussion of the Imaginary phallus quoted above, Lacan further refines his argument as to the status of the mother's desire in relation to primary narcissism. Lacan writes:

the child finds himself depending on the desire of the mother, on the first *symbolization* of the mother as such, and on nothing other than that, namely

that he separates out his effective dependence on her desire from the pure and simple living experience of that dependence [...] by this symbolization something is instituted which is subjectified at a first, primordial level; this subjectification consists simply in posing her as the primordial being who can be there, or not be there.” (S5, lesson of 22.1.58; my emphasis).

On this reading, the child “separates” out the raw lived experience of dependence on the mother, something we can associate with base, biological need, from a primordial symbolization. In another implicit reference to Freud's story of the *fort-da*, Lacan suggests that this primordial separation and symbolization is predicated on a simple dialectic, that of being there or not being there. Freud's reflections concern the throwing of a spool from a child's cot, an action that was accompanied by the signifiers “fort” and “da”, German for “gone” and “there” respectively.¹⁰ We should take Lacan's reflections here as a complement to his reflections elsewhere on the ways in which early, primordial forms of symbolization support Imaginary identification: just as the supporting nods and exclamations of the parent underpin the Imaginary relation of the mirror stage, so a primitive signification is required to support the establishment of the triangular relation between the child, the mother and the Imaginary phallus. The signifier-in-isolation emerges, then, at the moment at which the child begins to distinguish between its need, and the primitive symbolisation that allows it to first establish an Imaginary relation to the world around it.

Perversion, then, is defined by the continuing influence of this early dialectic between the child, its mother and the Imaginary phallus. The precariousness of the installation of the paternal metaphor, of the mediatory logic of the Symbolic, allows the signifier's isolated aspect to continue to exert its influence, in the guise of the pervert's attempts to embody it so as to close the gap in the Other. The necessary fusion between the Imaginary relation and the isolated signifiers that support it maintains an importance in the subjective economy of the pervert that is in striking contrast to the hysteric's total immersion in the logic of the signifier-in-relation. Lacan discusses this persistence in the context of fetishism: “We showed fetishism to be an exemplary perversion in the sense that, there, the child has a certain relationship with this object

¹⁰ S. Freud, ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, S.E vol. 18, p.14-17.

of the beyond of the desire of the mother.” (S5, lesson of 22.1.58). We should take Lacan's comments here as indicating both the pervert's identification with the desire of the mother, and the problematic relation with the “beyond” of this desire; this “beyond” is nothing but the point at which the signifier-in-isolation converts into the triadic, mediatory logic of the signifier-in-relation. Perversion, despite the disavowal of the paternal metaphor that lies at its heart, is nonetheless a neurosis thoroughly implicated in the varying logics of the signifier, despite the attempt by the pervert to refuse the implications of this beyond. While Lacan does not propose a “discourse of the pervert”, we can speculate that it would be the S1 qua signifier-in-isolation that would form the agent for any such discourse, with the truth of the subject position perversion being *objet petit a*, the condensation of the limits of castrated desire that the pervert must, ultimately, face.

We're now in a position to refine our understanding of the relation between perversion and the *objet petit a*, especially as this bears on the fundamental liaison between the subjective economy of the pervert and the Real. In his 18th Seminar, in the context of a wide ranging discussion of the relationship between the signifier and the Real, Lacan comments: “am I present when I am speaking to you? It is necessary that the thing I am addressing you about should be there. The thing [...] is absent there where it holds its place. Or more exactly, that the *objet petit a* which holds that place, when it is removed [...] only leaves the sexual act as I emphasise it, namely castration.” (S18, lesson of 10.3.71). The “thing” that Lacan refers to is related to the *das Ding* first introduced in the 7th Seminar on Ethics. There, Lacan refers to the radically absent figure of the mother's desire as the object of sublimation, which is to say as the object that can only be present when incarnated in a replacement, *objet a*, at the level of the Symbolic.¹¹ The desire that so compels the pervert in the pre-Oedipal relation is, at the level of post-Oedipal desire, condensed in the figure of *objet petit a*, as the object that incites desire but that can never finally satisfy it. The “truth” of the pervert's subjective economy is precisely this object, to the extent that, as Lacan puts it in the 18th Seminar, “when it is removed [...] [it] only leaves the sexual act”. (S18, lesson of 22.1.58). To the extent that the pervert attempts to embody *objet a*, the

¹¹ Lacan insists that direct access to the Thing in the post-Oedipal context is impossible; as he writes in the 7th seminar, “The Thing is characterised by the fact that it is impossible for us to imagine it.” (S7 p.12).

remainder of the mother's desire that persists at the level of the Symbolic, the pervert is in perpetual flight from the reality that underlies the lure of the Lacanian object, namely castration and the paternal metaphor.

The pervert, then, is situated in a double bind in relation to his disavowal of the paternal metaphor. To the degree that he or she is able to embody the object of the Other's desire, in an instantiation of the effort of the pre-Oedipal child to deny the castration of the mother, the pervert is able to partially escape from the effects of castration. But to the degree that the *objet petit a* is functional only in the context of the installation of the paternal metaphor and the accession to the Symbolic, the pervert is drawn to the very reality that he or she seeks to deny, namely the symbolic castration that makes the emergence of the object possible. It is within the interstices of this paradox that the pervert suffers. Further, the logic of the signifier-in-isolation parallels the paradox of the pervert's identification, further underlining the reliance of the pervert on the repetitive insistence of the signifier in its pre-Oedipal configuration: just as the *objet petit a*, while linked to the specular image of the Other so definitional in the narcissistic relation, is nonetheless only functional within the context of the metonymy of desire, so too does the signifier-in-isolation rely on its other face or facet, the tendency of the signifier to enter into relation. The "agent" of the pervert's discourse, then, is the signifier as it is withdrawn from relation, for it is the signifier in this configuration that allows the pervert's desire to plug the gap in the Other to persist, to repeat without succumbing to the metonymic drift of the signifier-in-relation. (To this extent, the signifier-in-isolation, as the signifier that the pervert identifies with in order to satisfy the Other's desire, is equivalent to *objet a* at the level of the Symbolic.) Nonetheless, the pervert is caught by the paradox that, by situating him or herself as *objet petit a*, he or she tacitly reinforces the very logic of castration that they seek to avoid.

OBSessional NEUROSIS AND THE LOGIC OF THE SIGNIFIER

Rather like perversion, obsessional neurosis was defined by Freud largely in terms of its symptoms. Arising as a diagnostic category as early as 1894, Freud associated obsessional neurosis with compulsive thoughts often leading to compulsive behaviour, and with the displacement of the affect of anxiety onto thoughts defined by their incessant nature and impractical content.¹² Moreover, Freud sought to define obsessional neurosis by reference to the theory of the superego, and specifically to the overdevelopment of the superego at the resolution of the Oedipus complex.¹³ The obsessional, on this model, is tormented by the demands of a superego that exceed the capacities of the subject. For Lacan, the importance of the symptomatic traits described by Freud pale in comparison with the structural relations that lies at its root. As with hysteria and perversion, Lacan defines obsessional neurosis as a structural relationship that defines the subject in relation to his or her desire, and to the phallic signifier that is installed at the culmination of the Oedipus complex. In his attempts to define obsessional neurosis as a structure in contrast to that of hysteria, Lacan will assign to the obsessional a subjective composition that is, I will argue, of especial value in defining the relationship between the signifier-in-isolation and the signifier-in-relation. While hysteria offers us the model of the effects of the signifier-in-relation, of the metonymy of desire that afflicts the post-Oedipal subject under the sway of the paternal metaphor, obsessional neurosis bears witness to the dialectical interplay between the signifier-in-relation and the signifier-in-isolation, to a particular nostalgia for the Imaginary relation that is nonetheless fully imbricated in the metonymic movements of the post-Oedipal Symbolic.

Before examining Freud's canonical case study of obsessional neurosis, 'Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis', it is worth tracing the logic of Lacan's commentary on obsession in his third seminar, commentary that is interweaved with his complementary reflections on hysteria. Just as in hysteria, Lacan defines the structure of obsessional neurosis in the context of a question, of a question installed at the very heart of the obsessional character. The questions of both hysteria and obsession are

¹² S. Freud, 'Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis', S.E vol. 10, p.153-251.

¹³ J. Laplanche and J-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, (New York, W.W Norton, 1974) [1967], p.281-282.

explicable only if one understands the dissonance introduced into the logic of the signifier via the question of the subject's being, of their fundamental Real existence, questions that, any 'answers' necessarily arriving within the decompletion of the Symbolic, point to the failure of the signifier to provide stable, meaningful coordinates for subjective understanding. Lacan writes: "There is [...] one thing that evades the symbolic tapestry, it's procreation in its essential root – that one being is born from another. In the symbolic order procreation is covered by the order instituted by this succession between beings. But nothing in the symbolic explains the fact of their individuation, the fact that beings come from beings." (S3 p.179).

To the extent that the Symbolic, at least in its formal aspect, insists beyond the limit of life and death, as a logic that is by definition immortal, questions of the procreation and dissolution of the subject sit at an awkward angle to the movements of the signifier.¹⁴ The subject, that is to say, is always-already "immortal" when viewed from the purview of her immersion within the logic of the signifier. As Lacan puts it, "Why is he [the subject] here? [...] The signifier is incapable of providing him with an answer, for the good reason that it places him beyond death. The signifier already considers him dead, by nature it immortalizes him." (S3 p.180). The question that animates the being of the hysteric – am I a man or a woman? - emerges as a response to this impasse in the Symbolic, and the same is true of the question that institutes obsessional neurosis. Both the hysteric and the obsessional suffer from the inability of the Symbolic relation, and its concomitant and equally deficient Imaginary relation, to answer what Lacan calls their "singular existence". (S3 p.180). The general logic of the signifier, that is to say, is at odds with the *singular* relation of being to desire and the signifier that defines the subject. As we'll see in the next chapter, Lacan will reconceive the relationship between the (Real) singularity of the subject and the general network of signifiers via the reconception of the symptom as *sinthome*, with the radical coming together of the logic of the signifier-in-isolation and the singularity

¹⁴ In a different context and at a different level of analysis, Foucault put this as follows: "The only thing we know at the moment, in all certainty, is that in Western culture the being of man and the being of language have never, at any time, been able to coexist and to articulate themselves one upon the other. Their incompatibility has been one of the fundamental features of our thought." (M. Foucault, *The Order of Things : An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (New York, Vintage, 1970), p.339). If Lacan's claim here is situated at the level of being, at the point of incompatibility between the immortality of the signifier and the mortality of the human body, Foucault examines this tension as it manifests purely at the level of discourse, as a tension internal to the passing of two different epistemes.

of a subject's *jouissance*, but for now, it is worth underlining that, for the obsessional as much as the hysteric, the signifier grates against the question that poses the truth of their being, even as that being is reliant on the signifier for its existence. Here we see the characteristic reproduction of the logic of the Real that is threaded throughout this thesis, which is to say the simultaneity and coincidence of constitution and dissipation, of formation and deformation.

What, though, defines the particularity of the question of obsessional neurosis?

Obsessional neurosis is concerned in particular, Lacan claims, with the question of *death*, and particularly with the paradoxical collision of immortality and death as it is inscribed within the logic of the signifier. As Lacan writes, “the question of death is another mode of the neurotic creation of the question – its obsessional mode.” (S3 p.180). Where the hysteric is paralysed by the question of sexuation, by the enigma of the desire of the Other as it implicates the subject within the choice of sexuality, the obsessional is preoccupied with mortification, and in particular with the *immortality* implied by the desire of the Other as it is represented by the signifier-in-relation.¹⁵ We can pose this another way: for the obsessional, it is the equivalence in their subjective economy of the signifier-in-isolation and the signifier-in-relation, of the signifier qua representative of the drive-derived, solipsistic *jouissance* of the subject isolated from the Other and regressed to the logic of primary narcissism, and by the metonymic immortality of the desire of the Other, as embodied in the movements of the signifier-in-relation attendant upon castration, that causes suffering. The obsessional, that is to say, is paralysed by the desire of the Other, by the question of the Other's desire, and the obsessional behaviours detailed by Freud are so many attempts to render the abyss of the Other's desire inoperable. Notice the almost symmetrical opposition in the approach to the question of the desire of the Other taken by the hysteric and the obsessional: for the hysteric, existence itself is defined by the appropriation of the Other's desire, of the full, even exaggerated acceptance of the law of the paternal

¹⁵ It is for this reason that the obsessional insists on self-mastery, on denying both his or her own castration, and any relation with the Other that might make his or her desire dependent on that Other, a dependency that would highlight, in turn, the contingency and divisibility of his or her own being. Philippe van Haute puts this with characteristic precision in a comparison between obsessional and hysterical fantasy: “In the obsessional neurotic phantasy, the desire of the Other is neutralized; in the hysterical phantasy, by contrast, only the Other desires.” (P. Van Haute, *Against Adaptation : Lacan's "Subversion" of the Subject*, trans. Paul Crowe and Miranda Vankerck, (New York, Other Press, 2002). p.253).

metaphor, of the consequences of one's subjective division, as a means of searching out the certainty of a master-signifier via the circuits of desire; for the obsessional, by contrast, the desire of the Other is a threat to be mitigated by a turning in upon the self, and in particular upon the question of the contingency of one's own existence.

Obsessional neurosis as a diagnostic category in psychoanalysis gained its fullest expression in Freud's discussion of the 'Rat Man', published in 1909 as 'Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis.'¹⁶ The patient came to Freud with persistent and disturbing compulsions and thoughts, including an insistent compulsion to imagine the torture of his father and his fiancé. The case gains its name from the particular variety of torture that the man felt compelled to imagine, namely a method employed militarily where rats would eat into the anus of the victim. The Rat Man was frequently paralysed with terror at the idea that either his father or his fiancé would fall victim to such a fate. The surface irrationality of these compulsive thoughts were compounded by the fact that the man's father had in fact been dead for a number of years. Freud described the preponderance of compulsive behaviours and thoughts in the man as the expressions of unconscious conflict, and in particular the unarticulated ambivalence in his feelings of both love and hate towards his father. He speculated that an early childhood punishment for masturbating, and an early curiosity for and terror of sexual exploration had ultimately led to the excess anxiety experienced by the subject. As Freud put it, "when he was a child of under six he had been guilty of some sexual misdemeanour connected with masturbation and had been soundly castigated for it by his father. This punishment [...] had left behind it an ineradicable grudge against his father and had established him for all time in his role of an interferer with the patient's sexual enjoyment."¹⁷

In a portion of Freud's case study especially suggestive for the arguments of this chapter, Freud reflects on the theoretical consequences of the case of the Rat Man and of the psychoanalytic delineation of obsessional neurosis more generally. There, Freud makes a sharp distinction between the original "obsessive thoughts" that cause suffering in the obsessional and secondary, compensatory thoughts that attempt to rationalise and mitigate the guilt experienced in reaction to the first. Freud writes:

¹⁶ S. Freud, S.E vol. 10, p.153-251.

¹⁷ S. Freud, 'Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis', S.E vol. 10, p.205.

even the phenomenology of obsessional thinking has not yet had sufficient attention paid to it. During the secondary defensive struggle, which the patient carries on against the 'obsessional ideas' that have forced their way into his consciousness, psychical structures make their appearance [...] They are not purely reasonable considerations arising in opposition to obsessional thoughts, but, as it were, hybrids between the two species of thinking; they accept certain of the premises of the obsession they are combating, and thus, while using the weapons of reason, are established upon a basis of pathological thought.¹⁸

Freud's insistence here on the primacy of thought to the logic of what he himself calls "obsessional structures" should give us particular pause. The tendency of the obsessional to become lost in thought is, to some degree, correlative to the defensive nature of obsession that Freud also highlights, and that Lacan recodes in terms of a flight from the consequences of castration. The obsessional, that is, shrinks from the consequences of what Lacan calls the "discourse of the Other", from the fundamental ambiguities of the site of the Other, in favour of the certainty of their own thoughts, no matter how troubling. The obsessional is, in this sense, defined in opposition to the hysteric, whose appropriation of the desire of the Other is a *flight* from thought, from the province of the Self. Further, Freud's distinction between the original thoughts of obsession and secondary forms of defence is salutary in terms of our distinction between the signifier-in-isolation and the signifier-in-relation; routing Freud's observations through the structural logic of Lacan, we can associate the original obsessional thoughts with the signifier-in-isolation, with the tendency of the signifier withdrawn from relation to insist. Equally, the defensive thoughts that seek to rationalise the repetitive insistence of the signifier-in-isolation accord with the logic of the signifier as it inserts itself into networks of meaning: in the very tension between these logics, obsessional neurosis arises.¹⁹

¹⁸ S. Freud, 'Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis', S.E vol. 10, p.222.

¹⁹ Freud further characterises obsessional neurosis in his account of the Rat Man in terms of the satisfaction of "two opposing tendencies", opposing tendencies we can identify, at the level of the Symbolic, with the signifier-in-isolation and the signifier-in-relation: "here (in obsessional neurosis) each of the two opposing tendencies finds satisfaction singly, first one and then the other, though naturally an attempt is made to establish some sort of logical connection (often in defiance of all logic) between the antagonists." (S. Freud, S.E vol. 10, p.194). Freud identifies the compulsion and inaction

Recoding Freud in these terms allows us to make sense of his reflections on the ambiguity of the position of the father in the account of the Rat Man's treatment. There, the father is said to be highly revered, but equally to be the figure of a hatred rooted in the early, and highly formative, sexual explorations of childhood. Allowing for the Lacanian reinvention of the figure of the father at the apex of the Oedipus complex, at the point at which the logic of the signifier-in-isolation partially accedes to the castration implied by the production of sense in the Symbolic, we can say that the troubling ambiguity of the father in the psychic economy of the Rat Man is a result of his simultaneous, conflictual and *equal* capture by the signifier-in-isolation and the signifier-in-relation. To the extent that the Rat Man has been warded off his early onanism via the intervention of the father, his inculcation within the logic of the Symbolic is marked; nonetheless, the legacy of that onanism is a tendency towards an absorption in the Self, in the repetitive insistence of compulsive thoughts that rely on the structure of the signifier-in-isolation. Perfectly balanced within the psychic economy of the obsessional, then, are the two facets of the signifier, and such a balance is anything but peaceful. To the contrary, the two logics continually grate against one another producing the pain of a neurosis.

What is implied here is a certain logic of *translation* between the two facets of the signifier, between the signifier in its Real repetitive insistence withdrawn from relation and its 'natural' logic of relatedness.²⁰ The two levels of obsessional discourse – the original, unmediated repetition of compulsive thoughts and their mediation via

of the obsessional as a product of the vacillation between these two logics, an insight usefully glossed by Jacques-Alain Miller: "Obsessionality is [...] said to involve something that contrasts with hysterical compromise, namely *Zwang* [compulsion], constraint without compromise, which derives its compulsory nature from the temporal deployment of contraries. This concatenation of contraries constitutes the essence of Freud's *Zwang*, differing, as it does, from the condensation typical for hysterical compromise. This implicit formalization may well correspond with Lacan's paired signifiers S1 and S2, a couple which conceals the third it nevertheless includes, namely the interval that separates them. Freud's 'logical connection' appears to refer to the function of this interval." (J-A. Miller, 'H20 : Suture in Obsessionality', *The Symptom* 4, Spring 2003). As one of the instantiations of the signifier-in-isolation, S1, qua master-signifier, corresponds to the non-sense of compulsion, while S2, or the signifier-in-relation in my terms, is the vehicle through which the obsessional's compulsions are rendered meaningful.

²⁰ "Compulsive acts [...], in two successive stages, of which the second neutralizes the first, are a typical occurrence in obsessional neuroses. The patient's consciousness naturally misunderstands them and puts forward a set of secondary motives to account for them – *rationalizes* them, in short." (S. Freud, 'Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis', S.E. vol. 10, p.192; emphasis in the original). Freud's use of the term 'rationalizes' here corresponds to my use of 'translation', 'translation' befitting the situation of my analysis, and that of Lacan, at the level of the Symbolic.

the signifier-in-relation – are related via a transformative translation, what Freud calls the “filling out of an ellipsis.”²¹ Freud expands on his earlier remarks about the two levels of obsessional discourse by expanding on the specifics of the Rat Man's rationalisations, writing:

one of the patient's oldest and favourite obsessions [...] ran as follows: '*If I marry the lady, some misfortune will befall my father* (in the next world.)' If we insert the intermediate steps, which had been skipped but were known to us from the analysis, we get the following train of thought: 'If my father were alive, he would be as furious over my design of marrying the lady as he was in the scene of my childhood; so that I should fly into a rage with him once more [...] and thanks to the omnipotence of my wishes [...] evils would be bound to come upon him.'²²

Here, Freud confirms the process of condensation, equivalent to a kind of metaphorisation, that renders the logic of the second level of the obsessional's discourse equivalent to the dispersed meaning of the signifier-in-relation. What remains, at the level of the signifier in its isolated insistence, an unconscious remainder that refuses the relational logic of Symbolic context, is translated into a highly condensed form that contains within it the truth of the obsessional's flight from paternal authority. The process of translation and condensation by which this occurs is strikingly similar to the translation of manifest dream content to latent dream content, a parallel Freud himself remarks on. There, as here, the signifier operates on the subject in both of its aspects, connecting the unconscious to surface signification through a move from a logic of singular repetitive signification to a relational meaningfulness, or through a gradual sublation of the signifier's Real materiality. It is worth noting too Freud's comment on the “omnipotence” with which the obsessional associates his thoughts: the compulsion felt by the confessional to deny the Other's desire, to resist the truth of his or her own desire's relation to the signifier, results in an inwardness that can easily accrue a sense of omnipotence. The dialectic instituted by the obsessional's preoccupation with the mortality of his or her own desire, as well as the threatening immortality of the signifier-in-relation, inflates the stakes of his or

²¹ S. Freud, 'Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis', S.E vol. 10, p.226.

²² S. Freud, 'Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis', S.E vol. 10, p.226.

her own desire, conceived in isolation even as it relies on the Other of the paternal function.

As I indicated above, what underlies the obsessional's anxious vacillation between his relatively successful submission to the paternal metaphor and his nostalgia for his pre-Oedipal monopolization of his mother's desire, is *objet petit a*, which becomes in this context the condensed cipher for the obsessional's inability to settle on one of the signifier's facets, the idealisation within the economy of the obsessional of their founding ambivalence. The very presence of *objet a* within the logic of the obsessional signals the relative success of the installation of the paternal metaphor, but it also bears testament, in its function as the excess of the Real that leaks into the Symbolic at the point of Symbolic castration, to the obsessional's desire to revert to an Imaginary mode. It is in this context that we should understand Lacan's comment, in his seminar R.S.I., that "obsessional neurosis [...] is the ideal neurosis, which deserves to be called properly speaking ideal." (S22, lesson of 19.11.74). Obsession is ideal both in the sense that it is founded on a process of continuous *idealisation*, of the elevation of thought over relational meaning, and ideal in the sense that it captures, more than any other neurosis, the more fundamental, human division between the logic of the signifier-in-isolation, and the logic of the signifier-in-relation. Lacan's comments are made during a discussion of Freud's writings on religion, and Lacan underlines Freud's association of religion with obsessional neurosis. "God", Lacan comments, "is nothing other than what ensures that starting from language, there cannot be established a relationship between the sexed." (S22, lesson of 19.11.74).

God, in this reading, is nothing but the negative cipher of the incompatibility of the two primary ways of relating to the phallic signifier discussed in the previous chapter in terms of sexualisation, but in the context of obsessional neurosis Lacan's comments can help us understand the inflation of the Self that occurs as a result of the obsessional's defence against the desire of the Other. All that can be left for the obsessional given the impasse between castration and the Imaginary relation that he or she embodies is the elevation of an isolated, onanistic logic of desire to fill the gap. In the case of the Rat Man, this took the form of his obsessive thoughts of his father and fiancé's mortality, itself a projection of his own terror at sexuality and the castrating figure of the father provoked by the admonition he received from his biological father

in childhood. The circuits of the signifier-in-relation, reliant as they are on the success of Symbolic castration, would dilute the repetitive insistence of such a compulsive idealisation, but the obsessional remains at least partially captive to the logic of the signifier-in-isolation, the inherent tendency of which towards repetition underlies even the surface rationalisations that are used to defend against the torment of compulsion²³. Freud confirms this dominance of the signifier-in-isolation even in second order rationalisation, commenting that “What is officially described as an 'obsessional idea' exhibits, therefore, in its distortion from its original wording, traces of the primary defensive struggle. Its distortion enables it to persist, since conscious thought is thus compelled to misapprehend it, just as though it were a dream[.]”²⁴ The religious idealisation of God, Lacan implies above, is structured in a similar fashion, as a second order rationalization of a primary impasse. We can revise our argument above by insisting that, despite the signifier-in-isolation's tie to the primary obsessional thought and the signifier-in-relation's tie to the second order rationalisation, it is the Real signifier-in-isolation that forms the general horizon of the discourse of the obsessional.

We are now in a position to outline the primary structural features of obsessional neurosis, and to argue for the neurosis' centrality to an understanding of Lacanian subjectivity more generally. First, the question that animates obsession, in contrast to hysteria, is that of mortality. The artificial isolation of the desire of the obsessional within the bounds of the Self provokes a reliance on the structure of the signifier-in-isolation, the Real underside of the signifier that facilitates the obsessional's nostalgia for primary narcissism and his submersion in his mother's desire. At one and the same time, the obsessional is relatively successfully installed within the logic of the paternal metaphor, and thus must contend with the threatening immortality implied by the incessant, metonymic movement of the signifier situated in its post-Oedipal networks of meaningfulness. The two facets of the signifier grate against each other, in a fashion that allows neither facet to gain the upper hand. Unlike in hysteria, where the signifier-in-relation and its facilitation of the desire of the Other overwhelms the

²³ The obsessional's repetition, further, testifies to his or her attempt to enact a “ritual purification of desire”, to negate the desire of the Other in so far as it might underline the contingency of the obsessional's being. (S. Schneiderman, *Rat Man*, (New York, New York University Press, 1986), p.90).

²⁴ S. Freud, ‘Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis’, S.E vol. 10, p.224.

subject, and unlike in perversion where the subject disavows the paternal metaphor and embodies the object of the Other's desire as the signifier-in-isolation, both facets remain largely in balance within the obsessional's psychic economy. The result, far from being a harmonious or symmetrical balancing of forces, is a perpetual war between the two foundational logics of obsessional subjectivity. But to the extent that the Real remains foundational for obsessional subjectivity – through its materialisation in the isolated, material signifier and its embodiment in *objet petit a* as the truth of the obsessional's defence against the imprecations of the signifier-in-relation – obsessional neurosis carries a special significance for psychoanalytic metapsychology, one that has been at risk of being eclipsed by the centrality of hysteria to the foundation of psychoanalysis.

What is revealed, then, by the tension generated by the obsessional's equal definition by the two facets of the signifier is, finally, the wider tension identified by this thesis and associated with the Real, the tension between a logic of constitution and a logic of dissipation: the obsessional finds him or herself caught between a tendency towards regression to the aggressive Real logic of primary narcissism, and a tendency towards a submission to the metaphorising logic of the post-Oedipal Symbolic. The overdetermination of the logic of the signifier-in-isolation in the economy of the obsessional's discourse, however, testifies to the more general importance of the Real in psychoanalytic metapsychology, and to the radical imbrication of the Real in the alternate logics of the signifier.

CHAPTER FIVE - LACANIAN MATERIALISM

INTRODUCTION

The following chapter aims to consolidate a number of the themes already broached in this thesis, particularly as they relate to Lacan's writings on materiality, and materialism, and as they point towards a theory of the body in Lacan. As I've intimated in previous chapters, Lacan's systematic revisioning of Freudian theory results in a body of work that makes fundamental and ambitious claims about the nature of reality. One of the ways in which psychoanalysis differs from philosophy, however, is in its assertion of the constitutivity of the "non-all" as the logic of the unconscious, and the suspicion of totalisation that results. Where such an aversion to totalisation differs from Derridean 'deconstruction', and other post-deconstructive contemporary philosophies of difference, is in the willingness of Lacan to assert bold theses that have implications for the totality of human experience, in a manner that is never reducible to claims about language only. This chapter will ally the specificity of the claims made in the previous chapters as to the conceptual centrality of the Real to particular issues at the interface of psychoanalysis and philosophy, especially relating to the question of materiality, and of the body.

If Lacan's Real is the pivotal concept of his theoretical psychoanalysis, then it is through attending to the functions of the Real and its consequences that we might gain an understanding of the wider philosophical implications of Lacanianism, implications that pertain to eminently philosophical issues, such as the relationship between the body and language, between language and the world, the role of the image, without nonetheless acceding to philosophical methodology and philosophical conclusions. To argue that Lacan's work has philosophical consequences, whilst not necessarily being 'philosophy', does not require that one automatically subscribe to Badiou's thesis (and occasionally Lacan's himself) as to Lacan's supposed 'anti-philosophy', the term suggesting too Manichean a division between philosophy and psychoanalysis to do either discourse justice.¹ Lacanian theory is neither 'philosophy'

¹ Lacan's own brief mentions of 'anti-philosophy', as the possible object of study for those who have been exposed to psychoanalysis' detotalising imperatives but who have nonetheless an interest in philosophical questions, came in 1975: 'Peut-être à Vincennes...' in *Autres écrits*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2001), p.314-345; Lacan is on particularly caustic form (and, I think, contradicts his otherwise subtle account of the relation between different forms of discourse as explored in, for example, S17) in his comments on philosophy from 1980: "I rise up in revolt, so to

nor ‘anti-philosophy’, but rather a specifically theoretical type of psychoanalysis that generates its own answers to questions long agonised over in the Western philosophical tradition. Lacan occasionally positioned himself in an anti-philosophical lineage, but it is the wager of this chapter, and this thesis more generally, that such assignations obscure more than they enlighten.

The conceptual fulcrum around which I will explore these philosophical consequences will be the question of materiality. The upshot of my reading of Lacan's philosophy of language in previous chapters is the elaboration of two distinct signifying logics, both defined in relation to the Real: the signifier-in-relation and the signifier-in-isolation. The latter is specifically allied throughout Lacan's work, in its various guises of the ‘letter’, the ‘unary trait’ and so on, with various concepts of materialism and materiality, and I will spend a portion of this chapter outlining how a Lacanian materialism of the signifier, with an allied attention to the intrication of the signifier in the body and vice versa, might help to concretise a psychoanalysis of the Real. As will become clear, there is no reason why Lacan's insistence on the role of the signifier should result in an implicit linguistic idealism, as Derrida and others have claimed²; instead, Lacan's philosophy of language is inexplicable without reference to the Real, and in particular without reference to the *jouissance* that Lacan associates most particularly with the body.

speaking, against philosophy. What is sure is that it is something finite and done with. Even if I expect some rejects to grow out of it.” (J. Lacan, ‘Monsieur A.’ in *Ornicar?* 21-22, Summer 1980, p.17; translation taken from B. Bosteels, ‘Translator’s Introduction’, in A. Badiou, *Wittgenstein’s Antiphilosophy*, trans. Bruno Bosteels, (New York, Verso, 2011), p.7; emphasis in the original). Adrian Johnston provides an illuminating discussion of Lacan’s relation to ‘anti-philosophy’ in his ‘The Philosophy Which Is Not One : Jean-Claude Milner, Alain Badiou, and Lacanian antiphilosophy’ in *S : Journal of the Jan Van Eyck Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique* vol. 3, 2010: <http://www.lineofbeauty.org/index.php/s/article/viewFile/43/108>. Johnston describes Lacan as a “paraphilosopher [...] whose interweavings of the psychoanalytic and the philosophical pave the way for cutting-edge developments in European/European-inspired philosophy”, a diagnosis that provides more of a sense of Lacan’s productive disrespect for disciplinary boundaries than the purely negative ‘antiphilosopher’ is able to. See also Bruno Bosteels’ discussion of antiphilosophy in relation to Lacan, Badiou and Wittgenstein: “The analytical operation [for Lacan], by contrast, also involves a constant questioning of the philosopher’s love of truth, which as a result is put in its place: not subsumed in the objectivity of a meta-language but localized in the topology of the desiring subject.” (B. Bosteels, ‘Translator’s Introduction’, in A. Badiou, *Wittgenstein’s Antiphilosophy*, trans. Bruno Bosteels, (New York, Verso, 2011), p.9. See also J-C. Milner, ‘L’antiphilosophie’ in *L’Œuvre claire : Lacan, la science, la philosophie*, (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1995), p.146-158; F. Regnault, ‘L’antiphilosophie selon Lacan’ in *Conférences d’esthétique lacanienne*, (Paris, Agalma, 1997), p.57-80; C. Soler, ‘Lacan en antiphilosophie’ in *Filozofski Vestnik* 27.2, 2006, p.121-144.

² J. Derrida, ‘Le facteur de la vérité’ in *The Postcard : From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987) p.411-497; J-L. Nancy and P. Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Title of the Letter : A Reading of Lacan*, (Binghamton, SUNY Press, 1992).

Central to this chapter will be Lacan's Seminar 23, where Lacan introduces the *sinthome* as a revision of the psychoanalytic symptom, with significant implications for the entirety of his conceptual apparatus. While my reading of Lacan refuses any strict division of Lacanian theory into 'early' and 'late' periods, it is clear that this seminar represents a significant consolidation of themes relating to the imbrication of the signifier in the Real, some of which had only previously been implicit or inconsistently elaborated. In line with Lacan's own treatment of the writings of James Joyce in this seminar, I will use the literary example of Samuel Beckett, and in particular his short play *Krapps Last Tape*, as an instance of the *jouis-sens*, or enjoyment in writing, that arises from the revisioning of subjectivity around the insistence of the Real signifier. While a number of articles have recently explicated the *sinthome* and its place in Lacan's wider work³, too little has been made of the intimate connection between this 'late' concept and the emphasis throughout Lacan's work on the material signifier as an instantiation of the Real. The insistence on the articulation of the Real in the signifier made throughout this thesis leaves us in a good position to fully situate Lacan's writings in the light of his final innovations. Before turning to Seminar 23, however, it is necessary to trace the logic of materiality associated with the signifier that traverses Lacan's work, and to reconstruct this logic in light of the logic of the Real I have elaborated throughout this thesis.

MATERIALISM/MATERIALITY

Just as Lacan's work cannot easily be assimilated to either philosophy or 'anti-philosophy', so too does the application of philosophical categories to Lacanian theory, overdetermined as they are by their history, pose a number of problems. Lacan flirts continually with philosophical terminology, but equally insistently distances himself from philosophical systems, citing philosophy's tendency to succumb to the temptations of Imaginary closure.⁴ In his 17th Seminar, Lacan makes his previously sporadic comments explicit in linking philosophy to the discourse of the Master, of

³ See L. Thurston (ed.), *Re-inventing the Symptom : Essays on the Final Lacan*, (New York, Other Press, 2002); V. Voruz and B. Wolf (eds.), *The Later Lacan : An Introduction*, (Binghamton, SUNY Press, 2007).

⁴ In his 20th Seminar, Lacan comments caustically, no doubt constructing a strawman, that “*Aufhebung* is one of philosophy's pretty little dreams.” (S20 p.86).

the urge to efface the inconsistency of the signifier through the artificial consistency of an Idea, system or leader. (S17 p.108-109.) Nonetheless, Lacan makes particular reference throughout his work to the distinction between materialism and idealism, broadly construed as the difference between philosophy predicated on the causation of material substances, and philosophy concerned with the centrality of causative non-material ideas or ideals. Lacan frequently allies himself with materialism, to the extent that his psychoanalysis concerns itself with the *resistance* of the material, and in particular to the inability of the Symbolic to totalise its grip on the world. Lacan is equally unwilling, however, to accept a vulgar reductionism whereby 'matter' would be all ('Mirror Stage' in *Écrits* p.90); rather, the underlying dichotomy between the 'inside' of a Symbolically determined subjectivity and an 'outside' of matter is insistently undermined in Lacanian theory, as I've emphasised above.

Judith Butler articulates this interweaving of the Symbolic and the material, in her own terms, as follows: "it is not that one cannot get outside of language in order to grasp materiality in and of itself; rather, every effort to refer to materiality takes place through a signifying process which, in its phenomenality, is always already material. In this sense, then, language and materiality are not opposed, for language both is and refers to that which is material".⁵ Nonetheless, Butler's account risks making do with the discursive substitution of terms – language for materiality, and vice versa – without fully accounting for what is *specifically* material about language and vice versa. The virtue of Lacan's theory of language is to make the material signifier, and the complex relation between the signifier-in-isolation and the signifier-in-relation as I've conceived it, specifically pertinent both to processes of identification and, as this chapter will show, a psychoanalytic theory of the body.

In a broader sense, the question of psychoanalytic materialism engages Lacan for reasons specific to the state of psychoanalytic theory during his lifetime, and results in the calibration of his revision of psychoanalytic theory such that it resists reductive binaries. For Lacan, to insist on the materiality of language and the material basis of his metapsychological claims is to combat what he considered the overt idealism of American ego psychology, whereby the intransigence and difficulty of Freud's ideas

⁵ J. Butler, *Bodies That Matter : On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, (New York, Routledge, 1993), p.68.

and the neuroses they engaged is effaced in favour of a false faith in the claims of the ego – quite literally, ‘ideas’ as they are manifest in the subject’s introjection of an ideal-ego and ego-ideal are taken as the truth of the subject. (S2 p.11). By constructing a materialist psychoanalytic theory of language allied to an account of the fragmented body, Lacan could simultaneously position himself against such prevailing trends while protecting himself against any, differently idealist temptation to over-emphasise the endless, immaterial mutability of the signifier, a mutability that tends to seem utopian, and predicated on an essentially Imaginary faith in the endless possibilities of meaning, when placed against the psychoanalytic phenomena of the painful repetition of sense-less symptoms as they manifest in the signifier. This helps account for the emphasis Lacan placed on the signifier-in-isolation as a material substrate, a material ground both enabling and constricting, to the metonymic movements of the signifier, and can be taken as the beginning of an explanation for an emphasis on the concept of materiality in Lacan’s work.

In his second seminar, Lacan punctuates a discussion of psychoanalysis and cybernetics with a number of suggestive remarks highlighting the species of materialism he wishes to advocate. Lacan writes:

You’d be wrong to think that, when I take up positions which are commonly thought of as anti-organicist, it is because - as someone I like a lot said one day - the nervous system annoys me [...] I think ordinary organicism is a stupidity, but there is another variety which doesn’t in any way neglect material phenomena. (S2 p.82).

On the same page, Lacan associates this ‘non-ordinary’ organicism with entropy, making explicit the link between the materialism Lacan hopes to advance and what he takes from Freud’s late theory of the death drive. Lacan writes: "this entropy, Freud encounters it [...] He has a firm sense that it has some kind of relation to his death drive but without being able [...] to be quite at ease with it." (S2 p.82). We can take Lacan’s reference to an "ordinary organicism" to refer to a kind of vulgar materialism, that in the psychoanalytic context amounts to the reduction of aberrant psychic

phenomena to physical changes in the brain.⁶ While the link between organicism, as the claim that all relevant phenomena originate in living matter, and materialism more broadly conceived is by no means obvious or unproblematic, Lacan implies that the implications of both terms, in their vulgar versions, are the same: the reduction of the complexity of the interrelation between the signifier, the body and the Real to a pre-theoretical conception of matter, illegitimately posited via a reductive insistence on the priority of a dichotomy of substance and its representation. As he explains as early as 1949, it is necessary to leave behind a pre-theoretical concept of matter if the complexities of the phenomena psychoanalysis documents for are to be properly theorised; Lacan characterises such a variety of materialism as a "naive form which has been left behind by authentic materialism." ('The Mirror Stage' in *Écrits* p.90).

There is, then, no room in Lacan's theory for a materialism that neglects the complex, topological intersection between the Real, the body and the signifier. Lacan's arguments in Seminar 2 suggest that the theoretical distinction between the body and language, between the body and the 'mind' more generally, are mistakes that psychoanalysis, perhaps uniquely, can correct. Nonetheless, the question remains as to what precisely this 'non-ordinary' materialism might be, and how it might contribute to psychoanalytic theory more generally. A passage directly succeeding that quoted above makes Lacan's position clearer. Lacan raises the example of the Bell Telephone Company, ostensibly to illuminate a simple point about the increasing "quantification" of communication due to modern technology. Lacan writes:

The Bell Telephone Company needed to economise, that is to say, to pass the greatest number of communications down one single wire [...] That is where the quantification of communication started. So a start was made, as you can see, by dealing with something very far removed from what we here call speech. It had nothing to do with knowing whether what people tell each other makes any sense [...] It is a matter of knowing what are the most economical conditions which enable one to transmit the words people recognise. No one cares about the meaning. Doesn't this underline rather well the point which I

⁶ Arguably, it was the French physician Charcot's ill-fated determination to prove the physical genesis of hysteria that provoked Freud, in reaction, to found psychoanalysis, and thus to open up the space for the 'non-vulgar' materialism Lacan wishes to construct. (G. Makari, *Revolution in Mind : The Creation of Psychoanalysis*, (New York, HarperCollins, 2008).

am emphasising [...] namely that language [...] is something material? (S2 p.32).

The relative simplicity of Lacan's choice of example here could prove deceptive; it contains a number of resonances that must be teased out. Its simple, central, claim, nonetheless, is the dependence of meaning on a material substrate, on the signifier in its isolated state, as a self-subsistent mark isolated from any subsequent relations of sense. The example serves, too, as a dramatisation of the analytic act, with the analysand materially cut off or disembodied from the threat of Imaginary capture by the analyst through the arrangement of the couch, just as two people on the phone are separated by their distance; the references to the "quantification" or rationalisation of communication invokes the move to 'full speech', speech shorn of Imaginary deviations and most expressive of the unconscious. At a higher theoretical level, however, Lacan's example emphasises the centrality of the material underpinnings of language, of the necessity of an understanding of the signifier-in-isolation for any wider understanding of signification. It is worth recalling here one of Lacan's elementary definitions of the 'letter', one of Lacan's synonyms for what I call the signifier-in-isolation; the letter, Lacan insists, is "the material medium [*support*] that concrete discourse borrows from language." ('The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud' in *Écrits* p.413). Contrary to any psychoanalytic discourse that would reduce language to the intersubjective production of meaning, and thus would reduce the analytic act to a mere hermeneutics, Lacan privileges that element of the signifier that is, in principle, meaning-less, isolated and withdrawn from sense, to the extent that metonymic signification, as important as it is in Lacan's metapsychology, would be theoretically inexplicable without the signifier-in-isolation that acts as its support. Thus, the "sense" that Lacan refers to in his example of telephony is completely reliant on a network of materials that support its contingent, and precarious, manifestation. In our terms, this is the opposition between the signifier-in-isolation, the Real of the signifier in its material dimension, and the signifier-in-relation, the signifier as it temporarily connects to networks that, through a process of negative definition, allow sense to emerge, even as it is threatened by the tendency of the signifier to withdraw.

We can say, then, that Lacan, as early as 1954, was moving towards a conception of language that qualifies the importance of surface meaning with a theorisation of the signifier in its material state. Lacan's arguments here bear a significant debt to Freud's insistence, made most clear in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, that psychoanalytic interpretation must contend not with "meaning", but with the *formal* arrangements of the signifier, manifest in processes of condensation and displacement.⁷ The pseudo-Freudianism of the meaningful 'symbol' and the general rubric of 'interpretation' couldn't be further from both Freud and Lacan's intentions here; to the contrary, one must appreciate the material, formal insistence of language over and above its temporary sedimentation in meaning. To privilege meaning would be to valorise the subject of the Imaginary ego over that of the unconscious, and to succumb to the Imaginary temptation of assigning an ultimate agency to the subject of the ego. By insisting on the materialisation of language, Lacan reasserts the polemical urgency of the Freudian unconscious in its decentering of the subject.

Lacan's essay 'The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud' extends this logic of the materiality of the signifier in several directions. Lacan is particularly keen to emphasise both the *exteriority* of the signifier to the subject, and its role in the very *founding* of the subject as such. Lacan writes: "language is not to be confused with the various psychical and somatic functions that serve it in the speaking subject [...] language, with its structure, exists prior to each subject's entry into it at a certain moment in his mental development." ('The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud' in *Écrits* p.413). Thus, the materiality of language pre-exists the subject, constraining in advance the meaning that the subject is able to make, and multiplying the possibilities of that meaning exceeding the egoic intentions of the subject. More than this, however, it is the materiality of language, the logic of the signifier-in-isolation, that embodies the ambivalence of the subject's immersion in the signifier; while forming the "wires" that Lacan invokes in relation to telephony and thus enabling the production of sense, the material signifier simultaneously threatens to disconnect these networks of meaning, plunging the subject into psychosis. The primacy of the material signifier in psychosis, further, must also be taken to reveal the centrality of this facet of the signifier for subjectivity

⁷ S. Freud, S.E vol. 5, p.400-401.

more generally. This helps us understand what Lacan means when he says that language should "not be confused with the various psychical and somatic functions that serve it in the speaking subject": to reduce language to the production of sense at the level of spoken communication is to fundamentally efface the structural, material ground that enables the epiphenomenon of sense as it partakes of "psychical and somatic functions".

The complex relation between meaning and unmeaning, then, between the support and the threat that the signifier-in-isolation induces, marks Lacan's materialism. When language is conceived in these terms, it should be understood less as the extra-material 'representation' of matter, and more as the very "thing" of human experience itself, as mysterious and insistent as any previous theorisation of matter. As a "thing", it embodies the characteristics we might normally associate with physical matter: an insistent permanence, the ability to undergird human projects including those involving communication (think again of Lacan's example of the telephone wire), and, crucially, the potential to disrupt such activities in its stubborn insistence. This precarious relationship between the signifier in its material aspect and the evanescence of meaning is captured by Lacan as follows: "the signifier, by its very nature, always anticipates meaning by deploying its dimension in some sense before it. As is seen at the level of the sentence when the latter is interrupted before the significant term: "I'll never...", "The fact remains...", "" (*Écrits* p.419). Just as the signifier can, through the process of metonymy, slide interminably, so too can the signifier pull away from meaning just at the point at which meaning seems to emerge. This duplicity of signification is expressive of the more general logic of the Real we have observed throughout this thesis, that of the co-existence of constitution and dissipation, of construction and destruction, in the psychic life of the subject. It is also central to the particular 'nature' and temporality of the unconscious.

Elsewhere, Lacan is more explicit about the particular properties that motivate him to designate language as material. In the seminar on Poe, Lacan comments: "it is first of all the materiality of the signifier that I have emphasised, that materiality is *singular* in many ways, the first of which is not to allow of partition." ('Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"' in *Écrits* p.16; emphasis in the original). The wording here is crucial. First, we must emphasise Lacan's association of the material with singularity.

The signifier-in-relation is defined by its resistance to singularity, by its tendency to network, and thus the *materiality* of language is nothing but the signifier-in-isolation, to the extent that it insists as a singularity.⁸ The question of singularity versus the generality of relation pertains also to Lacan's association of a lack of partition to his concept of the material. Here again, it is the signifier-in-isolation that fulfils such a definition. As a singular mark, the signifier in its withdrawn state cannot be divided, and as a result it refuses any process that might reduce it to non-existence. (And we should recall, here, the importance of such a signifier in development, conceptualised by Lacan as the 'unary trait', the primary "insignia of the Other" that marks the beginnings of signification for the subject. (S5 p.304). The signifier-in-relation, via the process of metonymy, can be lost in its own process of slippage; the signifier-in-isolation, qua Real signifier, insists in its very indivisibility. Further, the signifier in its material aspect is "the symbol of but an absence" (*Écrits* p.17), an absence that we associate specifically with the subject of the unconscious, as the subject that fades upon its instantiation in the symbolic chain. The net result of Lacan's materialisation of the signifier is the refusal of any neat division between matter and its representation, or substance and subject; in its place is a theory of language that grants full force to the complex materiality of signification. Such force, it should be reiterated, comes as much from the potential of the signifier to withdraw from relation as it does from the more familiar 'slippage' of the signifier and the resultant indeterminacy of meaning.

THE REAL BODY

Having established a link between the Real of the signifier, or the signifier-in-isolation, and a notion of psychoanalytic materiality, it is necessary to establish where the body, and the "organic" more generally, figures in Lacan's conceptual apparatus. Responding to the accusation that Lacan's revision of Freud idealises the signifier at the expense of the biological and the material, Lacanians will frequently make use of

⁸ This insistence on the singularity of the signifier further endorses the critique of the notion of the 'part' and the 'whole' that Lacan associates with his development of *objet petit a*, and as discussed in Chapter Three; as Lacan writes directly following the quote above, "Cut a letter into small pieces, and it remains the letter it is – and this in a completely different sense than *Gestalttheorie* can account for with the latent vitalism in its notion of the whole." ('Seminar on the "Purloined Letter"' in *Écrits* p.16).

allusions to the body as ‘written’ by the signifier⁹, but systematic attempts to reconstruct a Lacanian theory of the body are rare.¹⁰ This may well be because of the inherent theoretical dangers involved in any attempt to assign causality to the organic within a discipline whose history is littered with essentialised readings of biological causality and a concomitant reduction of the agency of the signifier. It is entirely possible that the Lacanian reticence about the body is a result of a desire not to deaden the polemical force of Lacan's insistence on Symbolic agency, but such hesitancy runs the risk of reducing Lacan's work to the terms of a simplistic dualism of substance/language that undercuts the theoretical innovation of his insistence on the materiality of the signifier.¹¹ We must understand the Lacanian body, then, not as the ‘material’ or substance that is gradually taken up in the idealisations of the signifying chain¹², but rather as a complex materiality that complements and subverts the signifier that it nonetheless relies upon, constituting and undermining the field of signification in a logic familiar to us as that of the Real, of the function of the paradox of constitutivity and dissolution; as I’ll show, the material insistence of the body as Lacan conceives it is continuous with the material insistence of the isolated signifier, and in so far as both are originally ‘in fragments’, isolated, any connection of either

⁹ “The body is written with signifiers.” (Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject : Between Language and Jouissance*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995), p.12).

¹⁰ There are important discussions of the body in Lacanian theory in S. Leclaire, *Psychoanalyzing : On the Order of the Unconscious and the Practise of the Letter*, (Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, 1998) [1968]; Serge André, ‘Otherness of the Body’, in M. Bracher, M.W. Alcorn Jr., R.J. Corthell and F. Massardier-Kenney (eds.), *Lacanian Theory of Discourse : Subject, Structure, and Society*, (New York, New York University Press, 1994); E. Ragland, *Essays on the Pleasures of Death : From Freud to Lacan*, (New York, Routledge, 1995), p.115-144; M. David-Ménard, *Hysteria from Freud to Lacan : Body and Language in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Catherine Porter, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1989); J-A. Miller, ‘Lacanian Biology and the Event of the Body’ in *Lacanian Ink* 18 Spring 2001; C. Soler, ‘The Body in the Teaching of Jacques Lacan’, in *Journal of the Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research* vol. 6 Winter 1995. I will discuss these accounts later in the chapter.

¹¹ Juliet Flower MacCannell's claim that Lacan posits the signifier as “carving a body out of animal substance, a process of carving away a *jouissance* that “returns” only as ghostly “letters” on the body that index what the organic, animal body has lost” reproduces precisely such a reductive, arguably pre-psychoanalytic opposition of the ‘prior’ organic body and the signifier that comes to overwrite it. (J. F. MacCannell, ‘The Real Imaginary : Lacan's Joyce’ in *S : Journal of the Jan Van Eyck Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique*, vol. 1, 2008). As I’ll argue, Lacan proposes instead a kind of co-originary relation between the signifier in its isolated material dimension and the body, conceived as always-already in fragments.

¹² Ellie Ragland risks precisely such a reduction when she writes: “long before language coalesces into a useable grammar system, the unconscious subject of desire begins to be structured by effects of the real of the biological organism” and “language *functions* to tie the biological organism (the real) to images of the body (the imaginary).” As I argue throughout this chapter, this equation of the Real with biology utterly misrepresents Lacan's attempt to destabilise any dichotomy between the lived organism and the signifier. (E. Ragland, *Essays on the Pleasures of Death : From Freud to Lacan*, (New York, Routledge, 1995), p. 116-117; emphasis in the original).

to other elements that may sustain sense or, in the case of the body, desire, is contingent and liable to dissolution.

Writing in 1968, Serge Leclaire gives us a succinct and suggestive account of how one might approach the question of the body in Lacanian terms. There, he writes: "Terms such as *mark* or *fixation* are used necessarily to describe the installation and especially the almost ineradicable persistence of erotogeneity in a point of the body [...] the portals of the body, given their function of exchange, are offered in a preferential and virtually necessary fashion to erotogenization."¹³ Leclaire's remarks come in the context of a discussion of the erotogenic zones in relation to Freud's concept of the drive; as Leclaire notes, Freud undermined his own theoretical consistency by occasionally assigning a biological basis to the drive, where elsewhere he perspicuously places the drive in a liminal space between the body and the psychic, or in his terms between the mental and the somatic.¹⁴ As I've argued, Lacan insists on the drive as inherently deviatory, which is to say as inherently unnatural, and I have noted the dependence on the Lacanian notion of the drive on the logic of the signifier-in-isolation; unlike desire, characterised by its reliance on the metonymic movements of the signifier-in-relation, the drive is 'stuck' in the repetition of the signifier as it withdraws from relations of meaning. As a result, the drive is intimately connected to the logic of primary narcissism as I discussed it in Chapter One, where the introjection and projection of constitutive images of the Other is supported by the signifier in its nascent dimension, fragments that map the beginnings of subjective identity.

Leclaire's reference to "portals" suggests an opening between the body and the signifier. Leclaire goes on to posit the object of desire as that which travels between the two 'points' of the body and the signifier, as an object of exchange "inscribed like the expectation of or call for the return of an impossible "same".¹⁵ Underpinning Leclaire's account is the relative separation of the body, the signifier, and the object, with the articulation of these elements taken to be the central event characterising the

¹³ Serge Leclaire, *Psychoanalyzing : On the Order of the Unconscious and the Practise of the Letter*, (Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, 1998) [1968], p.48; emphasis in the original.

¹⁴ S. Freud, 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes' in S.E vol. 14, p.121-122.

¹⁵ Serge Leclaire, *Psychoanalyzing : On the Order of the Unconscious and the Practise of the Letter*, (Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, 1998) [1968], p.48.

process of desire and the formation of neuroses. Lacan, too, will separate these elements theoretically in order to trace their movements, but for the insistence elsewhere on the inextricability of the signifier and the Real to hold fast, Lacan must ultimately posit the complex, multidimensional, and fundamentally co-constituting *intrication* of these elements, such that their clean separation can ultimately only be a matter of analytical expediency. In the same vein, we must insist that, perhaps contrary to Leclaire's position, the direction of travel between the 'points' of psychoanalytic subjectivity must alternate, such that the signifier and the body are capable of a mutual transformation. Lacan suggests as much when he writes that:

To speak of urethral or anal instinct, or even to mix them together, has no more biological meaning than to tickle one's semblable or to be an undertaker. To highlight animal ethology or the subjective impact of neonatal prematurity in *Hominoidea* does have biological meaning. Symbolic thought must be situated, as I try to do, in relation to scientific thought [...] This relationship must be found in the actual. ('On an Ex Post Facto Syllabary' in *Écrits* p.608).

The relationship of exchange between the biological and the Symbolic is rendered here rhetorically through the reversal of the usual relation between biological causality and its representation: where one might expect a psychoanalyst to accord causality to "anal instinct", Lacan instead argues that psychoanalysis can only make use of biological "meaning" at the point where it meets the Symbolic, as in the intimate connection between "neonatal prematurity" and the susceptibility of the human subject to the depredations of the Imaginary and the signifier. This renders Leclaire's reference to the "impossible same" that the 'portal' between the body and the signifier aims towards a little clearer, in so far as this "impossible same" is nothing but the illusion of a nature prior to Symbolisation. Lacan refuses such a logic, directing us instead to those interstices where the body and the signifier are mutually instantiated for the subject by their interaction; Leclaire refers to this mutual generation as "erotogenization", implying that Freud's "erotogenic zones" - the mouth, the anus, those points on the body that open onto the world - are the product of the interaction of the 'point' of the signifier in its contact with the body. Crucially, however, this process should not be confused for the *erasure* of the body under the signifier; to the contrary, the interaction of body and signifier implies that the body

survives the subject's accession to the Symbolic, persisting as a corollary to the materiality of the signifier-in-isolation, a fragmentary corporeality that mirrors and complements the fragmented and precarious Symbolic.

On this point, it is worth recalling the centrality of images of the fragmented body in Lacan's early articles on aggressivity and the Mirror Stage. The Imaginary constitution of the ego in the mirror stage presupposes the prior establishment of proto-Symbolic elements, precursors of what, in the post-Oedipal Symbolic, will become the signifier-in-isolation, undergirding the production of sense. These isolated signifiers both provide a route out of the anxiety of the child's dissipated Imaginary body, and follow the logic of that fragmented body itself, similarly isolated and disconnected, withdrawn from the ameliorative logic of the part in its relation to the whole that only the signifier-in-relation can provide. As such, the nascent signifier embodies the paradoxical logic of constitution and dissipation that this thesis has insistently traced. In 1948, Lacan writes of the "bursting open of the body" suggested by this originary dissipation, associating practises such as "tattooing, incision and circumcision" with this primal dislocation of the body, revelatory of "a specific relationship between man and his own body." ('Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis' in *Écrits* p.85). If, as I've argued above, one cannot theoretically detach the Imaginary pre-history of the subject from its logically anterior Symbolic life, one is led to assume a certain persistence of the signifiers of such a fragmented body, carried via the logic of the signifier-in-isolation as it persists in the economy of the post-Oedipal subject.¹⁶ At this point, the symbiosis between the materiality of the signifier and that of the body becomes clear, and this observation also allows us to situate the relationship of the erotogenic zones that Leclaire describes to the body and the signifier more generally: such 'zones' are points of temporary coalescence, where the fragmented body assumes a relatively stable relation with the signifiers of desire.

¹⁶ Jacques-Alain Miller articulates this recognition of the interpenetration of the isolated signifier and the Imaginary body in fragments as follows: "Body parts can certainly be represented with other elements, yet they account for signifiers. They are imaginary signifiers whose matter is taken from the image." While Miller gestures here towards a recognition of the co-dependence of the signifier and the Imaginary body, his rendering of the relation through the term "imaginary signifiers" risks imprecision by blurring the distinction between the Imaginary body as it exists in fragments and the Real body as it 'ports' with the signifier-in-isolation; by identifying the particular aspect of the signifier that 'ports' with the body as the signifier-in-isolation, in alliance with *objet petit a*, the argument of this chapter provides the beginnings of a fuller picture of the body as it is theorised across different Lacanian concepts. (J-A. Miller, 'Lacanian Biology and the Event of the Body' in *Lacanian Ink* 18, Spring 2001).

What, in Lacanian theory, allows such a coalescence is the *objet petit a* in its relationship with the repetition of the drive, and it is to the relation of the body to these central concepts that we must now turn.

THE BODY AND THE OBJECT

In previous chapters, I've outlined how Lacan's concept of the *objet petit a* acts as a crucial 'bridging concept', materialising the relation between the absent cause of the subject of the unconscious and the signifier. In Chapter Three, I emphasised how Lacan's object is situated within a general logic of spatialisation, suturing the fissure in the subject while, simultaneously, representing the Real as the truth of subjective division within the register of the Symbolic. On this account, *objet petit a* acts as the embodiment of the general tension of the Real discussed throughout this thesis; viewed from different angles, the object-cause of desire is both the object that fills the void of the absent subject of the unconscious and the 'cause' of that division itself, in so far as it manifests as a positive instantiation of the negativity of the Real. As Lacan writes in his 11th Seminar, "the operation and manipulation of the transference are to be regulated in a way that maintains a distance between the point at which the subject sees himself as lovable [the ideal-ego discussed in Chapter One] – and that other point where the subject sees himself caused as a lack by *a*, and where *a* fills the gap constituted by the inaugural division of the subject." (S11 p.270). The object, then, is itself divided by its different roles, one of the reasons that, finally, the *objet petit a* is never recuperable by the subject, eluding its grasp just as it defines the contours of its desire. One definition of *objet petit a*, then, would be the mediatory element that, paradoxically, is resistant to any dialectical relation with the subject or the signifier; it sits at an angle of asymmetry to both, 'mediating' only in the fullness of its absence.

If *objet petit a* acts as an instantiation of the relation between the absent subject and the signifier that is its only vehicle, a bridging role that aligns it with the role of the unary trait qua mediator between the ideal-ego and the signifier-in-relation, then it is conceivable that it could play a similar conceptual role in the difficult relation between Lacan's concept of the body and the logic of the signifier. Lacan's 14th Seminar, *The Logic of Fantasy*, includes perhaps the most sustained discussion of the object in its relation to both the signifier and the body, and it is to this seminar that I'll

now turn. At the very beginning of the first lesson of that year (1966-7), Lacan echoes the divided logic of the object discussed above, writing: "The \$ represents [...] the division of the subject, which is found at the source of the whole Freudian discovery and which consists in the fact that the subject is, in part, barred from what properly constitutes it qua function of the unconscious. This formula establishes something which is a link, a connection between this subject as thus constituted and something else called *objet petit a*." (S14, lesson of 16.11.66; translation modified). Restated here is the intimate link between the originary division of the subject and the object as it represents this division within the order of the Symbolic. The 'formula of fantasy' that Lacan poses in this lesson aligns the divided subject with the object, and in so doing represents at the level of a logical formalisation the intrication of the subject of the unconscious and the object as the truth of its division: $\$ \diamond a$.

In the same lesson, Lacan goes on to link the object to the body, in an equivocal fashion which poses anew the dilemma of attempting to construct a theory of the body that refuses any theory of originary organicism. Lacan writes:

The *objet petit a*, for its part, results from an operation which has a logical structure which is carried out not *in vivo*, not even on the living being, not at all properly speaking in the confused sense that the term 'body' preserves for us [...] but after all it appears that in this entity of body which is so poorly grasped, there is something that lends itself to this operation of logical structure that remains for us to be determined. You know: breast, scybalum, look, voice, these detachable parts which are nonetheless entirely linked to the body - this is what is involved in the *objet petit a*. (S14, lesson of 16.11.66).

In this contradictory passage, Lacan rhetorically invokes the problem posed by the question of the body to any theory that assigns a constitutive role to the signifier, and which aims to circumvent the strict separation of matter and its representation. The "operation" to which Lacan refers should be taken as the accession to the Symbolic that produces the object as remainder. By taking on the 'Name of the Father', the subject experiences a negative subjective division that is positively represented at the level of the signifier: the conversion of the Imaginary phallus of the child's Imaginary identification into the Symbolic phallus of the logic of the signifier-in-relation results

in the production of the object as a placeholder for the desire the subject will subsequently associate with its logically prior dyadic relations of primary narcissism. At first glance, Lacan seems to rule out the possibility that such a logical process could have anything to do with the body, at least as it is generally construed; the "living being", we learn, has nothing to do with the production of the object. This "being" should be taken as an index for the reductively causal organicism that I discuss above, and that Lacan rejects for failing to account for the constitutivity of the signifier.¹⁷ Nonetheless, there is a concept of the body that one can associate with the *objet petit a*, and specifically one that encompasses the logic of the "detachable" objects of the body that Lacan lists.

Here we're reminded of the logic of the "portal" and the erogenous zones that Leclaire discusses above. The object is allied in the quote above to a certain division of the body that echoes the fragmented body of the Imaginary. This language of parts and fragments, the "detachable parts" of the body that Lacan associates above with the look, the breast and so on - 'parts' that seem to have a particular relation to the formation of desire which, we must emphasise, is resistant to any logic of the 'whole' - is underlined by the repeated references to a logic of the "cut" later in the same lesson I have already quoted. Lacan writes: "This *objet petit a* preserves [...] a fundamental relation with the Other. In effect, the subject has not at all appeared yet with the single cut [...] that the signifier establishes in the real [...] this foreign object which the *objet petit a* is." (S14, lesson of 16.11.66). The object's relation to the Other is ensured by the "cut" that the accession to the signifier represents, in so far as it is by carving out a

¹⁷ Colette Soler notes correctly that "There is a distinction to be made between the organism, the living being, on the one hand, and that which, on the other hand, is called the body. That is a constant in Lacan's teaching." I am unconvinced, however, by Soler's insistence that the body, for Lacan, is equivalent to the "addition of the signifier that makes him One." Soler offers evidence for her claim by reference to Lacan's thesis that "the true body, the primary body [...] is language." While recognising the importance of the fragmented body of the Imaginary, Soler institutes a dichotomy between this imagistic body in fragments and the One of the body of the signifier, a dichotomy that illegitimately conflates Lacan's thesis of language as a kind of 'body' with his wider theory of the body per se: "there is a cohesion in the organism. However, the point is that this cohesion does not suffice to give a body. In order for the organic individuality to become a body, Lacan says that it is necessary for the signifier to introduce the One." As I've argued, the signifier in its isolated state couples with the 'portals' of the body in a fashion that exacerbates, rather than ameliorates, the fragmentation of the Imaginary body. Nonetheless, Soler concludes correctly with a recognition of the alliance between the concept of the body and the concept of the Real in Lacan: "So, of the body and its jouissance, the only thing that can be approached by psychoanalysis, [...] is this object [*objet petit a*], which we can describe as real." (C. Soler, 'The Body in the Teaching of Jacques Lacan' in *Journal of the Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research* vol. 6, Winter 1995).

space for the subject in the Real that the Symbolic becomes efficacious, and through which the object makes its emergence. If the *objet petit a*'s pre-history is in the imbroglio of primary narcissism, and in particular the identification of the child with the mother's Imaginary phallus leading to the formation of the ideal-ego, then its logical, positive form emerges only upon the "cut" of castration. (There is, as a consequence, no object-cause of desire in psychosis, where the cut of castration has failed to emerge).

Underlying these reflections is the sense of a body that, for the subject, is originally in fragments, and that is only appreciable through those of its parts that detach, and in so doing become objects invested with desire. Within the Imaginary, the body is dissipated, associated with imagos of scission, disintegration and so on, and it is through the operation of a cut or scission that the body again comes to the fore, as the site that "ports" (or is internally articulated with) the signifier upon the dissolution of the Imaginary relationship with the mother. For Lacan, this moment, logical rather temporal, is the moment of the birth of subjectivity. As Lacan writes: "The subject begins with the cut." (S14, lesson of 16.11.66). Thus, it is too hasty to describe the emergence of the Symbolic, and the concomitant logic of the signifier-in-relation, as the defining and determinant moment in the birth of subjectivity; simultaneously, a new relationship with the *body* must be born, logically continuous with the fragmented body of the Imaginary covered over by the mirror relation, but distinct in its localisation in "parts", remainders of the "cut" of castration, that take on a special significance. It is only by understanding the relation between these "portals" - the breast, the voice and so on - and the notion of drive that we can reconstruct this 'new' body, one resistant both to the vulgar organicism that so repels Lacan above and the reduction of Lacanian subjectivity to the signifier-in-relation. As we'll see, it is via a theoretical alliance between the material signifier (or signifier-in-isolation), the *objet petit a* and the drive that such a nuanced theory of the body may emerge.

THE BODY IN FRAGMENTS

Continuing with our reading of Seminar 14, Lacan elaborates further on the relation between the signifier and the *objet petit a*, and by doing so leaves open the conceptual space for a new psychoanalysis of the body. Lacan writes: "The signifier does not

designate what is not there, it engenders it. What is not there at the origin is the subject itself. In other words: at the origin there is no Dasein except in the *objet petit a*." (S14, lesson of 16.11.66). Affirmed here is the non-originary status of the subject, in so far as it is determined by the signifier; any moment of 'origin' that psychoanalysis might posit is related to the "cut" that produces the object. In some sense, the pre-history of the object, especially in its guise as the object of primary narcissism, is here invoked in order to reorder the supposed priority of the subject over the object that he or she desires. By contrast, of paramount importance is the object itself as the product of the cut of castration. The signifier "engenders" what is not there by setting up the logic of presence and absence ('fort-da') necessary for the successful transmission of desire; desire, we might say, travels on the back of the signifier-in-relation. But the birth of the signifier, in so far as one can refer to the 'birth' of something that must be presupposed all the way down, is not necessarily co-extensive with the emergence of the subject, or at least the signifier cannot account for the *entirety* of the subject. As Lacan implies above, the "not there" of the subject at the emergence of the *objet petit a* leaves open the space for a part of the subject - remembering that our invocation of 'parts' cannot imply a whole - that is 'not-all' defined by the logic of the signifier-in-relation, and that is somehow connected with *objet petit a*.

Nonetheless, the question of the drive, intimately tied to the question of the body since Freud, does not imply a radical separation of 'bodily' drives and signifiatory desires. As Lacan writes, "For us Freudians [...] what [the] grammatical structure of language represents is exactly the same thing as what ensures that when Freud wants to articulate the drive, he cannot do other than pass by way of grammatical structure [...] It is only in the world of language that the *I want to see* can take on its dominant function leaving it open to know from where and why I am looked at." (S14, lesson of 16.11.66; emphasis in the original). It is only within the domain of language, and the above mentioned logic of presence and absence, that the drives can emerge.¹⁸ But if

¹⁸ It is this utter co-implication of language and the drives that I think Adrian Johnston risks effacing in his otherwise highly suggestive account of the drives' temporal splitting. Apropos of the relation of the drives to the Real, Johnston divides the concept of the Real in two in order to maintain a "pre-Symbolic" domain of the drives: "the Real of *Trieb* qua constitutive antagonism is a second-order Real, namely, the irresolvable tension between the Real of the drive-source and the spatio-temporal reality of the Imaginary-Symbolic drive-objects. The Real therefore has, in this present context, two meanings: Real1 is the pre-Symbolic Real of the axis of iteration's source, the repetitious (a)temporality of

the logic of the drive is as inextricable from the signifier as Lacan suggests, where is the space from which a concept of the body might emerge? Here, our distinction between the signifier-in-isolation and the signifier-in-relation is useful. If, as I've argued above, the signifier-in-relation provides the vehicle for the metonymic movements of desire, then it is the signifier-in-isolation - withdrawn, and formed in the movements of primary narcissism as the support for the dyadic logic of the ideal-ego - that provides the necessary material basis for the non-originary body, for those fragments of the body that will intervene symptomatically through their alliance with isolated signifiers.¹⁹ What emerges from such a synthesis is a body defined, again, not by a dialectic between 'part' and 'whole', and not by any reference to an organic whole 'broken up' or 'written over' by the signifier, but through an *always-already fragmented body*, defined initially by the Imaginary and then supported by the persistence of the signifier-in-isolation in the post-Oedipal context. As Lacan writes in his 22nd seminar, "the body, at least in the analytic perspective, is the body in so far as it creates an orifice [...], that by which it is knotted to some Symbolic or Real." (S22, lesson of 13.5.75).

Here again, the body is invoked in relation to the "orifice", or what Leclaire calls a "portal". The knotting Lacan refers to here seems to situate the body in the Imaginary, in so far as it is only the Symbolic or the Real that the body can be knotted to. From what we have already established, we can implicate *objet petit a* as the element that ties this body of the orifice to the Symbolic or the Real. (This is, no doubt, one of the meanings of Lacan's matheme $\$ \diamond a$). As I argue above (Chapter Three), the object

unmediated *jouissance*; Real2 is the constitutive antagonism between Real1 and the axis of alteration's *Vorstellungen*". (A. Johnston, *Time Driven : Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive*, (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2005), p.329). At least within the theory of the drives (and more broadly the Real) outlined by Lacan, the invocation of a "pre-Symbolic Real" is inconsistent; the drives gain their rotary force by the repetitive insistence of the signifier in its being in-isolation.

¹⁹ My argument here complements the useful reflections of Serge André on Lacan's theory of the body: "[the] distinction between the two faces of the body is coherent with the dialectic of the two *jouissances*. It is not that the Other or the body does not *exist* as real, that it can be eliminated: its signifying nonexistence constitutes a mode of being that is singularly irreducible. In fact, the subject does not have a relation with the body as such that can be formulated: the latter is always a left-over beyond what can be said of the body"; emphasis in the original. My own reading concurs with this up to a point, but my distinction between the signifier-in-isolation and the signifier-in-relation may provide a further refinement of the argument; if the body cannot be 'formulated', it is so at the level of the signifier-in-relation. The signifier-in-isolation, however, provides the necessary ground for the drive-saturated body and the logic of repetition that comes to define the subject's symptoms. (Serge André, 'Otherness of the Body', in M. Bracher, M.W. Alcorn Jr., R.J. Corthell and F. Massardier-Kenney (eds.), *Lacanian Theory of Discourse : Subject, Structure, and Society*, (New York, New York University Press, 1994), p.95).

can be seen as both a hangover from the logic of primary narcissism, and the crystallisation within the Symbolic of the Real impossibility of desire and self-presence in so far as it relies on the slippage of the signifier. Equally, however, the object is implicated in the logic of the drive that I've argued above is supported by the signifier-in-isolation. Lacan's insistence on the always-already fragmented body and the corresponding Imaginary myth of the body as a whole²⁰ requires the knotting of two 'parts' not implicated in a whole. The implied choice Lacan presents between the Symbolic and the Real leads us to isolate that element which is common to both, namely the signifier in its Real dimension, the facet of the signifier most representative of its materiality, the signifier-in-isolation. As a result, the body can interface with the signifier through those elements in both that obey the logic of withdrawal and singularity proper to the assignation of 'materiality' discussed above; the consequence is the beginning of a new, speculative psychoanalytic concept of the body, where the body, originally and always in fragments, intervenes through its materialisation within the logic of the signifier-in-isolation.

Consider, for example, the case of scopophilia. As Lacan says in the quote above, the urge to look and be looked at is only possible within the logic of the signifier, to the extent that the horizon of the signifier institutes the dialectic of presence and absence. But what is particular to the *drive* as it is manifest in a phenomenon such as scopophilia? It is, principally, the *repetition* of the drive as it is carried by the signifier-in-isolation; if voyeurism were to become a *desire*, it would, through its reliance on the signifier-in-relation, be carried metonymically to develop and grow beyond its initial impulse, caught up in the plural associations generated by the standard workings of signification in its post-Oedipal context. But the drive for Lacan, with its circular logic, allows only the incessant repetition of a behaviour, in correlation with the signifier in its most primitive, material state: back and forth, present and absent, seen and not seen, *fort*, *da*. It is at this level, Lacan suggests, that the "portals" of the body exert their influence, as leftovers from the logic of pre-Oedipal narcissism carried through into the logic of the signifier.

²⁰ The "united body" can only be a "myth" for Lacan, a myth that he suggests Freud occasionally succumbed to: "Freud qualified Eros by the One, handing himself over to the myth of the body, of the united body..." (S22, lesson of 17.12.74).

It is worth recalling, here, some of our previous arguments as they relate to the drive and to repetition. In his 11th Seminar, Lacan concentrates on the gaze, implicated in scopophilia, as one of two additional part-objects that he adds to those already elaborated by Freud. (S11 p.67-79). (Lacan's other additional object is the voice.) The gaze, for Lacan, is an instance of the *objet petit a*, in so far as it must be considered detachable from the subject; whereas, in his first seminar, Lacan invokes the gaze of the Other as that which allows the subject to recognise the subjectivity of other subjects (S1 p.215-217), by Seminar 11 the gaze is firmly associated with the Real, as the imperceptible but presupposed gaze of the Other intimately related to the movements of the drive. What, on this account, underlies the logic of scopophilia is the asymmetric relation of the Other to the subject, mediated (without resolution) by the *objet petit a*. As Lacan writes, "*You never look at me from the place at which I see you.*" (S11 p.103; emphasis in the original). The gaze manifests as the object asymmetrically posed to the subject, inassimilable unlike its Imaginary predecessor and ultimately unknowable.

In the same seminar, Lacan is at his most systematic in his treatment of the drive. The drive, he argues, does not attempt to reach a goal, as in the movements of desire; rather, the drive persists in its aim, the circling of the object-cause of desire.²¹ With the body always-already fragmented, interfacing with the signifier through the erogenous zones or Leclaire's "portals", the drive represents the logic, defined by the signifier-in-isolation and the repetition of its circling of the object, that allows particular areas of the body (parts without a whole) to come to prominence. The consequences of this are worth restating: the body, as the 'material' of the drive, is neither reducible to the signifier, nor set apart from it. Instead, the body only comes into contact with the drive via the logic of the signifier-in-isolation, through the repetition of a signifier cut off from the dilatory logic of relation. This "erogenization" of the body, to invoke Leclaire, the creation of "portals" that interact with *objet petit a* on the back of the material signifier, is only theoretically conceivable if we reject any 'prior' whole body; the movements of primary narcissism that we outlined in Chapter One rely on the *misrecognition* of the body as whole, but the primordially of the

²¹ S11 p.168: "This is what Freud tells us. Let us look at what he says – *As far as the object in the drive is concerned, let it be clear that it is, strictly speaking, of no importance. It is a matter of total indifference.*"; emphasis in the original.

signifier, especially in its 'material', isolated dimension, bars us from reifying the organic, as doing so would reintroduce the primacy of a subject prior to its constitution in the Real via the logic of the signifier.

BADIOU AND THE REAL

Perhaps the most important contemporary philosophical reworking of Lacanian themes for our purposes here has come from Alain Badiou; by considering the differing uses of 'materiality' by both thinkers, my attempt to prise out a specifically Lacanian materialism may be made clearer. In Badiou's current period, arising from his equation of ontology with set theoretical mathematics, the philosopher has insisted on Lacan as an "anti-philosopher", as a figure in a broad and persistent history in parallel to that of philosophy as such, a term that Lacan himself occasionally embraced. (See note 1 above).²² In its current manifestation, as outlined in *Being and Event* (1986) and *Logics of Worlds* (2006)²³, Badiou's thought follows Lacan in insisting on the cleavage between knowledge and truth, in Badiou's case represented by the distinction between the 'state of the situation' (qua knowledge, the ideological representation of things as they are) and the 'Event' that emerges from an eccentric point in the situation to re-define the situation in the name of Truth. Crucially, however, Badiou departs from Lacan in insisting on the void, conceived mathematically, as the site of Truth; Lacan, Badiou claims, wishes to align the unrepresentable Truth (or Real) with the *subject*, and as such mitigates against the positive production of the New in the name of an anti-philosophical negativity.²⁴

²² The general features of 'antiphilosophy' for Badiou shift in his various discussions of the term, but the following list of its features from his *Manifesto for Philosophy* is indicative: "The decisive importance of language and its variability in heterogeneous games, doubt as to the pertinence of the concept of truth, rhetorical proximity to the effects of art, pragmatic and open politics". (A. Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Norman Madarasz, (Albany NY, SUNY Press, 1999), p.98; modified translation taken from B. Bosteels, 'Translator's Introduction' in A. Badiou, *Wittgenstein's Philosophy*, (New York, Verso, 2011), p.14). It is questionable how many of these features, if any, apply to Lacan; Badiou's target here, at least, is more likely Wittgenstein. Badiou provides a more equivocal assessment of Lacan's relation to antiphilosophy, acknowledging that the category of truth as it relates to the Real is central to Lacan, in his 'Lacan et Platon : le mathème est-il une idée?' in *Lacan avec les philosophes*, (Paris, Albin Michel, 1991).

²³ A. Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham, (London, Continuum, 2006); A. Badiou, *Logics of Worlds : Being and Event II*, trans. Alberto Toscano, (London, Continuum, 2009).

²⁴ 'Truth : Forcing and the Unnameable' in A. Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, trans. A. Toscano and R. Brassier, (London, Continuum, 2006).

Nonetheless, a different relation between Badiou and Lacan emerges when one considers the work Badiou produced in the 1970s, and in particular that collected in the book *Theory of the Subject*.²⁵ There, Lacan is engaged in particular through the motif of the "cut" discussed above, and through what Badiou calls "scission", within the broader ambition of delineating the subjective features of a radical Leftist (essentially Maoist) philosophy. The book's rhetoric is noticeably influenced by Lacan, and the book was given originally as a series of seminars in much the same allusive, high oratorical style that defined Lacan's later seminars in particular. Through an engagement with this earlier period of Badiou's influential philosophy, a new perspective on the question of the Real in its alliance with the question of materiality might be gained, in particular through the comparison of the logic of the "cut" in its intimate relation to the psychoanalytic body outlined above, and the more general ontological thrust of Badiou's argumentation. Like Deleuze²⁶, Badiou will make innovative if ultimately 'non-Lacanian' use of certain of Lacan's concepts, but unlike Deleuze, Badiou's wider philosophical project bears an affinity with enough of Lacan's "anti-philosophy" to help us, in turn, make more sense of Lacan's materialism. Badiou's argument concerns the distinction between a structural and historical dialectic, derived from both a reconsideration of Hegel and an explicitly non-Lacanian deployment of Lacanian concepts.

In the seminar of February 20th 1978, entitled 'Consistency, second name of the real after the cause', Badiou begins by outlining what he takes to be the "subject's algebraicization" in the writings of the early Lacan. Badiou paints the subject as defined by the Lacan of the 1950s as "without-relation" to the Real, and as defined, at least initially, by a syntactical structure that is reducible to the logic of the signifier. (TS p.224). Thus, for Badiou, the Lacanian subject is first and foremost a production of the signifier, with the Real a radical absence. Badiou doesn't explicitly define the Real as he understands it here, but we can infer that the Real would be anything that doesn't fit into the formal matrices of the signifier, as it assumes its constitutive relation to the subject. As Badiou writes, "If you determine the process starting from its structure, you obtain at least the structural materialism. You avoid the constitution

²⁵ A. Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. Bruno Bosteels, (London, Continuum, 2009) [1982]; hereafter *TS*.

²⁶ Most notably in G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, (London, Continuum, 2004); G. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, (London, Continuum, 2004).

of the real by the subject; you short-circuit the phenomenology of the data of consciousness." (*TS* p.224). The "avoidance" of the constitution of the Real by the subject is traceable to Lacan's insistence, elaborated extensively in this thesis, that the logic of the signifier is primary in relation to the subject. But does it necessarily follow that the subject is therefore *apart* from the Real?; as I've articulated above, the Real is necessarily implied by the logic of signification (in part through the logic of the signifier-in-isolation) and is thoroughly implicated in the body in fragments that forms a necessary material backdrop to psychoanalytic experience. Badiou's broader intent, however, explains his wish to separate the subject from the Real; for Badiou, and very much against my own reading, Lacan's work can be divided into two distinct periods, one defined by algebra and one by topology. (*TS* p.227). Thus, Badiou enjoins us to treat separately the theory of the logic of the signifier - what Badiou refers to here as "idealinguistry", a neologism that we can take to mean linguistic idealism (*TS* p.188) - and the properly materialist insistence on the topology of consistency, that which is necessary to support the subject of revolution.²⁷

Nonetheless, the 'early Lacan's' insistence on the "without-relation" of the subject to the Real manifests something of a materialism for Badiou, the beginnings of the break with the false promises of phenomenology. The "data of consciousness" mentioned in the quote above, aligned with an obfuscatory empiricism in Badiou's philosophy, is rendered inadmissible by positing the signifier in a position of dominance to the subject. In a richly suggestive passage, Badiou asks: "does a syntax [broadly, the logic of the signifier] amount to a matter? We are not so certain. [...] There is [...] an undecidability between, on the one hand, the combinatory and its mainspring as lack, which throws the materialist tension back to the signifying inscription, and, on the other, idealinguistry." (*TS* p.224-225). Here, Badiou seems to conflate, at least implicitly, the question of the signifier as an element of combination, and the syntax that *governs* those movements of combination. On this account, the thesis of the "materialist tension" of the matter of signification, the signifier as such in its determination of the subject, is in danger, through the cleavage of the subject from the site of the Real, of falling into an idealisation of the syntax, or arrangement, of

²⁷ "From the real as cause to the real as consistency one can read a trajectory of integral materialism. Once the numerical succession is engendered in the efficacy of the vanishing term, we must still know what it is that makes all these numbers holds together." (*TS* p.228).

signifiers as such. But such an account fails to distinguish, as I've argued is crucial to Lacan's project and especially as it bears on questions of materiality, between the signifier as it persists in isolation, in its state of unconscious withdrawal, and the signifier as it is taken up into networks of relation, into the combinatory state that Badiou wishes to dissociate from any revised philosophical materialism.

Nevertheless, Badiou grants Lacan an interest "less [in] the law than the illegal, chance-like principle of determination that the law puts into effect" (*TS* p.225), a principle of what we might call 'determined indeterminacy' that captures neatly the coincidence of constitution and dissolution in the logic of the Real. But we must insist that Lacan's broader logic of the signifier, when understood in both its relational and withdrawn (qua material) facets, is not in contradiction to this insistence on the development of "illegal" transgression out of the institution of Symbolic law itself; rather, there is a relation of reciprocity between these two facets of the signifier that is necessary for the coherence of a psychoanalytic account of the subject.

Badiou hopes to find in what he sees as the "topological", later Lacan a principle of consistency that might provide a more robust materialism of the subject. After a long quote from Lacan's 22nd Seminar, a quote that insists on the primacy of the knot in elaborating subjective consistency, Badiou affirms that it is through topology that the static and potentially idealist combinatory algebra of the 'early Lacan' might be overcome. Badiou writes, commenting on Lacan, "What is it that makes the knot into 'something else'? It is because the One does not have the same assignation therein as in the algebraic order. The One of numbers is sustained by the zero in order to repeat itself by addition. The One of the knot holds together the terms of the series." (*TS* p.227). Opposed by Badiou here is the order of number, as at least analogously related to the combinatory of the signifier in the so called "algebraic" Lacan, and the order of topology, orders that, Badiou claims, operate according to different principles of consistency. The One of number requires a non-identical element, or zero, to maintain itself, a principle of coherence analogous, Badiou implies, to the order of the signifier sustained by the absent cause of the subject of the unconscious. Topological consistency, by contrast, "hold together" the terms of the series without recourse to the idealising temptation of an absent placeholder or cause. Badiou continues: "In one case: algorithmic principle of the iteration of the Same, ordered algebra of succession.

In the other: topological principle of partitive cohesion, of knotted interdependence."
(*TS* p.227).

Badiou's argument here is at least partly explicable via reference to the Borromean knot as a model for the cohesion of the subject. There, Badiou claims, there is a holding together of elements that, nonetheless, retain a relative independence, one that might permit the irruption of the New. Algebraic succession, by contrast, is overdetermined by an absent element that ensures its consistency while allowing only the perpetuation of the Same. From this, Badiou identifies "two concepts of the real" in Lacan, "the real of the vanishing, which is in a position of cause for the algebra of the subject, and the real of the knot, which is in a position of consistency for its topology." (*TS* p.228). Two Reals, then, one determined by a "vanishing" that, despite its absence, remains constitutive for the Same of the subject, and the invocation of topology as a principle of open, material coherence. The implication of Badiou's argument is that it is only the 'late Lacan', the Lacan whose theory is supported by reference to topology and the consistency of the knot, that allows the interruption of the new, what Badiou, at this stage in his teaching, refers to as 'force' or 'strength' [*la force*]. Despite this, Badiou insists that Lacan remains, even after his affirmation of the importance of topology, trapped within a logic of lack and loss ultimately indebted to the continuing centrality of the logic of the signifier:

Subjectivization raises the question of its cause, to which Lacan responds with the real as object [this, for Badiou, being the concern of the 'early', pre-1968 Lacan]; subjective process, that of its consistency, to which Lacan henceforth still responds with the real, but in what guise? This is where he leaves us behind, because the Borromean knot such as he conceives it remains haunted by the logic of loss and of dispersion. (*TS* p.244).

Thus, for Badiou, Lacan remains caught in a pre-topological insistence on dispersion as the only alternative to consistency, even as he manipulates the language of topology for his own ends. For Badiou, by contrast, "the opposite of tying the knot is not to cut it but to destroy it. The cut is only the algebraic abstraction of the destruction. Just as the revolution is only an abstract moment of communism." (*TS* p.244). At issue here are two seemingly opposed models of consistency; one, that of

Badiou, that is fully committed to the consequences of the topological formalization of subjectivization, whereby consistency is forged through the forcing of a revolutionary subjectivity, and whereby the forging of such a consistency is necessarily also the foundation of the New, and that of Lacan, where a supposedly Real consistency of the subject is, in fact, reliant on the mythologies of the Imaginary for its support, and is subsequently only a consistency of the Same as a result. As Badiou writes, "As to consistency properly speaking, here it is reascribed to the register of the imaginary, whose tie to the real consists in ex-sisting." (TS p.245). As such, what seemed, via Lacan's use of the Borromean knot, to be a principle of consistency in the Real is reduced, for Badiou, to the Imaginary reproduction of the Same.

Badiou's argument is well made, and it is true that Lacan's sustained turn to topology in the 1970s remained a consequence of his earlier theorisations of spatiality and consistency, as I've argued. There is, however, another way of reading Lacan's theory of subjective consistency. In the quote from Lacan's 22nd Seminar that Badiou uses to critique Lacanian topology, Lacan attempts to theorise the complex relation between consistency, the subject and the Real. There, he faces a potential paradox: by insisting, on the one hand, that the figures of topology are Real instantiations of the subject, Lacan is forced to make an equation between the concept of the Real and with consistency, whereas his previous theorisation of the *Imaginary* as the field of misrecognised identifications that allow the subject to cohere seems to imply that it is the Imaginary that must fulfil such a function of binding, with the Real as that which would *threaten* this internal consistency. Lacan writes:

The real is that there is something common to all three [Symbolic, Imaginary, Real] in a consistency. Now, this consistency lies only in the capacity of forming a knot. Is a mental knot real? Therein lies the question. [...] We are forced not to put the real into consistency. Consistency, to call it by its name, I mean by its correspondence, is of the order of the imaginary. [...] If we can

ensure that the imaginary ex-sists, it is because it is a question of another real.
I say that the effect of meaning ex-sists, and that in this sense, it is real.²⁸

Here, Lacan suggests that the Real is to be found as the element that allows the consistency of the three registers in the Borromean configuration, but that it is not that consistency as such. It is because Lacan has yet to formalise his theory of *le sinthome* as the Real element that affords subjective consistency that his allusions here seem especially inconclusive; I discuss *le sinthome* in detail below. Leaving this aside, however, we are not compelled to accept Badiou's critique as long as we recognise that, as the very principle of the topological organisation of the registers suggests, the Imaginary and the Real *are not, in the final analysis, entirely separate*. The Imaginary, in so far as it is ultimately determined by the Real, should be understood as containing within it *both* a principle of cohesion and one of threat, dramatised in primary narcissism through the irreducible antagonism produced via the process of identification with the image of the Other. Imaginary consistency can only be reduced, as in Badiou's reading, to a contradiction of its supposedly Real status if one ignores the Real-of-the-Imaginary; as Lacan writes above, "it is a question of another real", namely the persistence within the Imaginary of Real elements that govern its operation. And as I've argued, the signifier-in-isolation represents a similar conceptual inheritance at the heart of the Symbolic; Lacan's theory of the Real is supple enough to accommodate both a cohesive and dissolutive function. Indeed, I would argue this is its very definition.

Lacan's introduction of a theory of the fragmented body, then, intimately bound with the materiality of the signifier, renders any stark division, a division that Badiou insists on here, between a 'static' logic of the signifier and an 'open' topological consistency questionable. Indeed, one of the consequences of the logic of the signifier as developed by Lacan is precisely the continuity between the signifier and the subjective consistency elaborated via topology, and mathematics more generally. Lacan, furthermore, permits himself the use of topological and other mathematical

²⁸ S22, lesson of 11.02.74; translation by Bruno Bosteels from his English translation of A. Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, (New York, Continuum, 2009), p.245.

elements only in so far as they help to crystallise a broader, psychoanalytic account of subjective consistency.

A REAL WRITING?

Implied in the articulation of the body, the signifier and the theory of the “cut” is both an extension and revision of Lacan's philosophy of language as I have elaborated it above, and the beginnings of an account of ‘writing’ particular to psychoanalysis. If the signifier is material to the extent that it is both indivisible and localisable (‘The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud’ in *Écrits* p.24), then its intimate imbrication in the fragmented body allows us to extend both our theoretical account of signification and our understanding of what a Lacanian bodily materialism might entail. One way in which the consequences of the psychoanalytic triangulation of the body, the signifier and the object might be understood is through a renewed attention to Lacan's emphasis throughout his teaching on the *singular* and *singularising* effects of the signifier and its consequences for any understanding of subjective consistency. The singularity of the signifier-in-isolation for the subject obtains from its capacity to order the subject's symptom according to its logic of repetition and insistence, as in the example of scopophilia discussed in the previous section. Throughout his teaching Lacan will find new ways to rewrite this singularity as it pertains to subjectivity as such. In his final seminars, in particular, Lacan will propose striking ways to conceive of the materiality of language, and new ways to systemise a theory of signification, or perhaps more accurately 'writing', that has the Real at its centre. It is to these accounts that I'll now turn.

In his 22nd Seminar, Lacan reflects on the Borromean knot as a topological instantiation of the relation between the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real. Throughout, he associates the interrelation of the three registers with a 'writing', intimately tied to the Real. We should take writing in this context to be the ways in which the subject is both 'written' by the signifier in its relation with the Real, and the ways in which the subject comes to 'rewrite' the articulation of signifiers and bodily insistences that define it. Lacan writes: "I think I have justified how the Borromean knot can be written; since it is a writing, a writing that supports a real. This designates [...] that not only can the Real be supported by a writing but that there is no other

tangible idea of the Real." (S22, lesson of 17.12.74). On this account, the Real is manifest in the writing of signifiers in so far as we understand that writing to be the stitching together of the subject, the signifiers that support it, and the fragmented body that participates in the ordering of *jouissance* and the symptom. In so far as each ring of the Borromean knot is tied to the others, cutting one results in the dissolution of the knot. At one and the same time, the Real is situated in a position of privilege in this subjective binding, to the extent that it manifests positively the negatively constituted coming together of formally separate elements: the fragmented body, the material signifier, the object, each of which are determined by the relation they have to the Real, or to the logic of the co-existence of constitution and dissolution.

While advancing this new theory of 'writing' as the modelling and remodelling of the Real subject, Lacan also begins to consolidate his theory of the symptom. It is sometimes assumed that it is only in the final seminars that Lacan comes to insist on the singularity of the symptom and its relation to the Real, mediated through the material signifier, but this claim is to be found in much of the early work on the subject of the signifier. As early as 1957, Lacan would write: "The fact that symptoms are symbolic is not the whole story [...] their use as signifiers distinguishes them from their natural meaning." ('Psychoanalysis and its Teaching' in *Écrits* p.364). We can take this "natural meaning" to imply the logic of the signifier-in-relation as I've outlined it in this thesis. By being used as symptoms, signifiers are diverted from this normal state of relation and exist in a state of repetition, isolated from the production of meaning as it is commonly understood. Lacan continues: "Psychoanalyzable symptoms, whether normal or pathological, can be distinguished not only from diagnostic indices but from all graspable forms of pure expressiveness in so far as they are sustained by a structure that is identical to the structure of language." ('Psychoanalysis and its Teaching' in *Écrits* p.371). Here, Lacan implies that the psychoanalytic symptom, despite being constructed from signifiers, reconfigures those signifiers in such a way that blocks their usual route to "pure expressiveness". Instead, the symptom manifests the material underpinning of the signifier, and in particular its tendency towards repetition; the signifier, denuded of its usual route of travel via the movements of metonymy, remains rooted 'on the spot', tied to the unconscious and the body and manifesting the truth of the subject's relation to the Real. Lacan has yet to explicitly relate this aspect of signification to a broader theory

of writing as it pertains to the Real, but the importance of a material non-expressiveness for an understanding of the symptom as it figures in the subject is crucial here.

Sixteen years later, in the 22nd seminar, Lacan writes: "The important thing is the reference to writing. The repetition of the symptom is this something I have just said is writing in an untamed way, [...] what is involved in the symptom as it is presented in my practise." (S22, lesson of 21.01.75). The alliance made here between the symptom and repetition via the renewed theory of 'writing' should make clear the centrality of the signifier-in-isolation (as the "untamed" and disconnected material of language), in particular as it undergirds the repetition of the symptom. By posing the symptom as implicated in the writing of the subject, Lacan explicitly questions, as he did in 1957, the reduction of the symptom to any rubric of interpretation, of the psychoanalytic relevance of the symptom being associated simply with its potential to be 'resolved' through its articulation with signifiers-in-relation. Instead, the symptom is here placed at the very centre of the subject, as an instance of a broader 'writing' that is defined not by meaning, but by the material *unmeaning* of the signifier-in-isolation. This writing is intimately related to the Real, to the extent that the material signifier, in support of the symptom, 'writes' the subject using that aspect of signification, its being in-isolation, that Lacan situates as the Real underside of signification. As Lacan puts it, "the Real is indeed what I am saying, namely what is only opened up by writing it." (S21, lesson of 12.02.74). The Real manifests in so far as the subject is stitched together through the 'writing' of its very consistency, of its symptom.

To 'write', then, is to stitch together the subject in a singular configuration, defined by the repetition of a symptom particular to the subject in question. As Lacan writes, expanding on the literality of the Borromean knot, "you should clearly understand that it is not a matter of a figure, of a representation, it is a matter of positing that it is the Real that is at stake." (S22, lesson of 15.04.75). Thus, by making primary the material signifier in so far as it links up with and supports the fragmented body and the symptom, Lacan underscores that feature of his theory of language, and indeed of his account of psychoanalytic subjectivity more generally, that I've emphasised throughout this thesis, namely the logic of singularity and repetition that is expressive

of the Real as it manifests in the Symbolic. To be clear, what is revealed at this end point of Lacan's teaching is very much the 'truth' of his entire project, in so far as that project seeks to unveil instances of the Real as the singular horizon of the subject, in its precarious consistency.

The function of the knot and of the 'writing' of the subject, then, reflects, in an iterative process, the logic of the Real in so far as it determines the ontological consistency of the subject. It would be a mistake to consider either the role of topology or the role of the signifier and the 'writing' of the subject in isolation, as Badiou does; to the contrary, both operate as different perspectives on the same phenomenon, namely the intimate intrication of the body, the signifier and the Real. As Lacan writes in his 21st Seminar, "This is what I am trying to support for you this year with the support of a writing, of a writing that is not easy, since it is the one you have seen me handle [...] in the form of the Borromean knot." (S21, lesson of 11.06.74).

Lacan's language is instructive here. First, he freely connects the new emerging theory of writing that binds the body to the signifier with his use of knots, contrary to the algebra of the signifier/topology dichotomy suggested by Badiou. Second, he speaks of this writing as "not easy", and he will subsequently associate it with "How it is presented, I would not say altogether in the Real, but on the path that leads us to the Real." (S21, lesson of 11.06.74). Thus, the difficult act of binding that intertwines the signifier, the body and the Real, is explicable both as knotting, and as a writing, and both should be taken as differing perspectives on the same process. Combined with Lacan's reference to this writing as "untamed" in the quote from Seminar 22 above, and his repeated references to writing as the process that manifests the Real, we can infer that this process is very far from being situated at a frictionless, immaterial remove; to the contrary, and as we shall see in our final section on Lacan's *sinthome*, this subjective binding is as potentially traumatic as any other instance of the Real's interruption in the lifeworld of the subject, even as this writing forms the very material substance of the subject's being.

SINTHOME

Lacan's 23rd Seminar, entitled *Le Sinthome*, is perhaps the most important of his later works. The seminar consolidates a number of themes that had become primary in the seminar in previous years, and in such a way that reconnects these conceptual reworkings to their basis in the Lacan of the 'Mirror Stage' and primary narcissism. In this section, the final section of the main body of my argument, I'd like to reconstruct Lacan's intricate arguments, placing the seemingly new conceptual innovation of *le sinthome* within the wider context of the materiality of the signifier and the Lacanian object. I will not posit Seminar 23 as a final 'break' in Lacan's teaching, but rather as the culmination of the new theory of writing, already rooted in Lacan's prior logic of the signifier-in-isolation, that Lacan had begun to develop in Seminars 20, 21 and 22 and that I began to outline above. As the 'materialisation' of the symptom, and the final confirmation of the absolute, overdetermining centrality of the Real in the constitution of psychoanalytic ontology, *le sinthome* is something of a meta-concept, an avatar for a number of the theoretical concerns that this thesis has attempted to analyse: the materiality of signification, the importance of repetition in the lifeworld of the subject, the rendering of the subject through a certain conception of space. Just as Lacan provides an innovative reading of James Joyce in outlining his reinvention of the symptom, so will I attempt to reconstruct this complex argument through a recourse to literature, and in particular the short play by Samuel Beckett, 'Krappp's Last Tape'. I will argue that, rather than being an 'example' of the logic of *le sinthome*, the play functions as an instantiation of the concept, a direct realisation that captures much of its multivalent significance and that puts into practise the logic of writing that so concerns Lacan at this late stage in his teaching.

Seminar 23, given in 1975-1976 only 5 years prior to Lacan's death, contains Lacan's most sustained discussion of literature, in this case Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*. The discussion of literature that preoccupies much of the seminar is apt given the wider theory of writing that Lacan aims to construct. Again, instead of being 'examples' of this new attempt to articulate the 'writing' of the subject, Joyce, for Lacan, functions as a direct embodiment of this subjective writing, always-already at work both within the texts and within Joyce's life itself. Lacan writes: "Something [...] happened to him [Joyce], and which meant that, what is called [...] the ego, played a

quite different role [...] than the simple role that it plays in what are called common mortals. The ego, in his case, fulfilled a function. A function that of course I cannot account for except by my style of writing." (S23, lesson of 11.05.76). Joyce, then, is possessed of a subjectivity, or at least an ego, somehow different from others, an ego that fulfils a particular function. What might seem like a throwaway statement at the end of the quote, where Lacan insists that he can only address this function through his "style of writing", is in fact key. It is via a certain kind of writing that the function of Joyce's subjectivity will come into being, and it is only by a certain 'styling' that Lacan's own reflections on the topic might gain the traction necessary to convey their importance. Whatever else Lacan might mean here, it seems that "style" and "writing" are to be elevated above any merely representative function. Many years prior to his 23rd Seminar, Lacan quoted Buffon to the effect that "style is the man himself". ('Overture to this Collection' in *Écrits* p.3). Through his reflections on Joyce, Lacan will provide a substantially new sense, even style, to this aphorism.

It is telling that, only a few paragraphs after Lacan's elliptical meditation on writing and style, he will bring up the question of the body in relation to both writing and the particular function that a certain writing held for Joyce. Lacan writes, relating a childhood story told to one of Joyce's biographers:

it happened that his pals tied him to a fence. Someone called Heron [...] had beaten him then for a certain time, helped of course by some other pals. And after the adventure, Joyce questions himself about the fact that, when the thing was over, he had nothing against them. Joyce expresses himself as one might expect from him in a very pertinent way. I mean that he metaphorises something which is nothing less than his relationship to his body. He notes that the whole affair has drained away. He expresses this by saying that it is like a fruit skin. (S23, lesson of 11.05.76).

Why does Lacan take this anecdote to be so important? The story functions on a number of levels, and I will take each in turn. First, Joyce's experience problematises the relationship between the body and the signifier, and in particular the relationship between the subjective experience of having a body, and the function of metaphor; more specifically, the example serves to collapse the function of metaphor into a

directly bodily function. The decision by Joyce to instantly metaphorise the experience of bodily pain, of having his body dramatically attacked, underscores the particular importance for Joyce for the metaphoric potential of the signifier to both incorporate and expel one's body as the site of *jouissance* and of the Real. As Lacan puts it, "he had a reaction of disgust. And this disgust concerns his own body in short. [...] This is altogether left as a possibility; as a possibility of the relationship to his own body as foreign." (S23, lesson of 11.05.76). As above, the body here is suspended between the signifier (the fruit skin) and the potential of its own disappearance; crucially however, Joyce's employment of metaphor does not rid him of his body, but actually underlines its persistence, incorporating it at the very moment of its ostensible rejection. Lacan puts it as follows: "This idea of self, of self as body has something weighty about it. This is what is called the ego. If the ego is said to be narcissistic, it is indeed because there is something at a certain level that supports the body as image." (S23, lesson of 11.05.76). Thus, for Joyce, the 'usual' function of the ego, as mediator of the subject's misrecognized identity and the Real, is here suspended, such that it is the signifier itself, in the process of metaphorisation, that sustains Joyce. Further, this logic has implications for subjectivity *tout court*.

Crucial here is the link Lacan indicates between the function of the signifier in supporting the body (even when, as in the case of the metaphor above, it aims to drive it away), and the ego sustained by the narcissistic image. If nothing else, the triangulation Lacan effects between the function of imagistic narcissism, and the persistence of the body, definitively draws both under the function of the Real; Joyce's ego is paradoxically the site of both the 'surface' of the image, and of the "weighty" body, and both are sustained by a kind of writing that might incorporate both. The psychoanalytic account of narcissism cannot be entirely subsumed under the function of the Imaginary; the Imaginary, to the contrary, both produces antagonistic effects proper to the Real, and is sustained, underwritten, by the materiality of the signifier and the "weight" of the body. At stake, then, is the subjective relation between the body in both is Imaginary and Real instants, and the signifier. It is as a way of conceptually drawing these elements together that Lacan will introduce *le sinthome*.

Later in the same lesson, Lacan makes a number of elliptical remarks on Joyce's relation to the Borromean knot, proposed in the previous year's seminar as

instantiating the structure of the subject in so far as the subject relies on the inextricable knotting of the Real, Symbolic and Imaginary. Lacan suggests that Joyce's ego is sustained by something other than what we have come to understand as the 'Name of the Father', what Lacan refers to here as "the function of the father". (S23, lesson of 11.05.76). The function of the father qua signifier introduces a third term to the dyadic relation of the ego and its ideal, creating the Symbolic space through which the non-psychotic subject might gain a symbolic identity. Lacan frequently uses the neologism *père-version* to indicate what might replace this function for those for whom the "function of the father" isn't operative, although at this stage in his teaching Lacan began to see *all* elements that might provide subjective consistency as contingent, whether related to the father or not. As we saw in Chapter Four, perversion involves the attempt to plug the gap in the Other as a means of disavowing the pervert's own subjective division, of the pervert's necessary reliance on the paternal law. By using the term *père-version*, Lacan is ascribing some of the traits of perversion to Joyce, but equally separating his 'diagnosis' of Joyce's subjectivity from any standard perverted structure. *Père-version*, as well as indicating something of a perverse structure, is equally suggestive of a series of 'versions' of the father, of the function of the father as it allows the accession to the Symbolic. Lacan writes: "the capital I [the Imaginary as figured in the Borromean knot] can simply clear off. It slips away like, like what Joyce feels after having received his beating. [...] The imaginary relationship, well it has no place. It has no place in this case and, if it allows us to think that if Joyce was so interested in *père-version*, it was perhaps for a different reason. Perhaps after all, the beating disgusted him. He was perhaps not a true pervert." (S23, lesson of 11.05.76).

A "true pervert", one infers, would have taken their fair measure of *jouissance* from being beaten, to the extent such an experience would be interpreted as the pervert granting the beating Other the *jouissance* craved for in their own masochistic economy. But Joyce takes no pleasure in the experience, and more importantly seems to have no Imaginary recourse that might smooth over the subjective shock; indeed, his immediate response is a Symbolic metaphorisation via the invocation of the metaphor of the fruit skin. Lacan seems to suggest that this lack of an Imaginary recourse is structural, and that further more, Joyce's interest, expressed in the highly experimental nature of his writing, in other ways of figuring the law of the Father can

be explained for reasons different from that of the pervert. To recap, then, Joyce lacks something of the paternal function, and his lack of an Imaginary recourse suggests that the Borromean structure of his subjectivity has suffered a cut, perhaps related to the lack of a suturing paternal signifier. There remains a gap in Joyce's subjective structure, and it is in attendance to this gap, this hole at the foundation of Joyce's subjective structure, that Lacan's new theory of writing will be constructed. "Through this artifice of writing", Lacan writes, "I would say that the Borromean knot is restored." (S23, lesson of 11.05.76). But how?

Throughout Seminar 23, Lacan makes much reference to the relationship Joyce seemed to have with writing.²⁹ In particular, he emphasises the function that both epiphanies, experiences that Joyce described to his biographers whereby words would seem to materialise what they had previously only described, and enigmas seemed to play in Joyce's subjective economy. Lacan writes: "I have dwelt on this fact that what is striking when one reads this text [Ulysses], is the number of enigmas that Joyce, his text, contains, it is not simply something which abounds, but one can say on which he played." (S23, lesson of 11.05.76). The most obvious property of an enigma is its initial, and perhaps persistent, meaninglessness, and we should immediately draw a parallel between Lacan's fascination with Joycean enigmas and the material unmeaning of the signifier-in-isolation. Joyce, I'd like to suggest, *materialises* language in his writing, such that it is the signifier-in-isolation, the enigmatic material foundation of signification, that prevails in Joyce's work. It is the subjective "play" of this writing that, Lacan argues, affords Joyce the psychic, subjective consistency that would otherwise be provided by the paternal metaphor, the absence of which is a result, for Lacan, of Joyce's tumultuous childhood and his lack of a father figure.

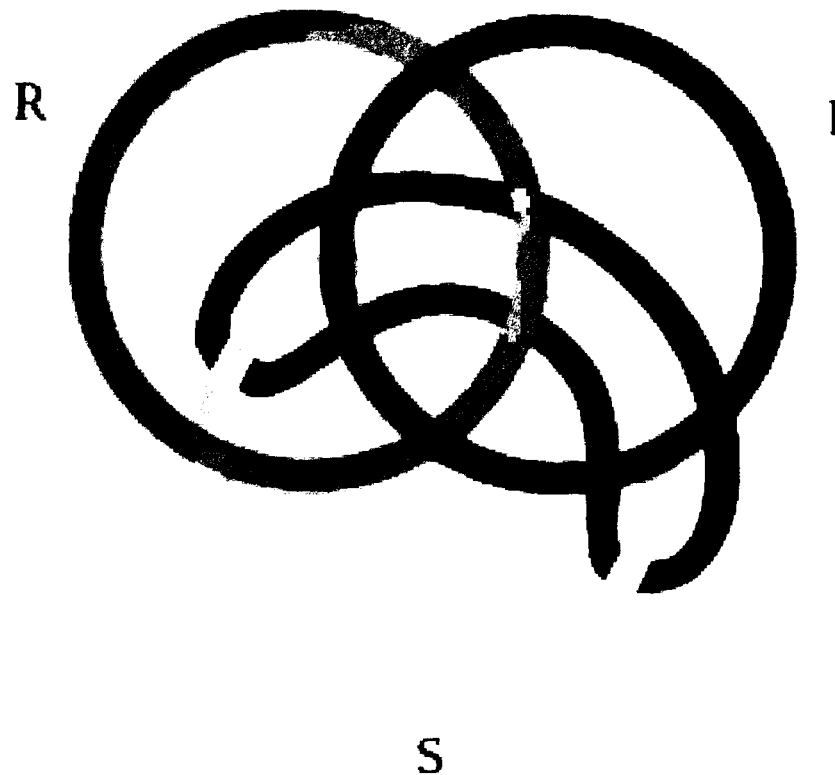
It is this version, or *père-version*, of the binding of the subject that Lacan consolidates with his notion of the *sinthome*. As Lacan writes, "That which constitutes the

²⁹ Darian Leader has written of Joyce's tendency to write obscene letters to his wife, sometimes enjoining her to insert them in her orifices: "He [Joyce] writes obscene prose to his wife Nora, suggesting that she do unspeakable things with the actual letters themselves, such as inserting them into the orifices of her body. The letter here is less a vehicle of meaning than an object as such." (D. Leader, 'Extract from *Why Do Women Write More Letters Than They Post?*' in S. Žižek (ed.), *Jacques Lacan : Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, (New York, Routledge, 2003), p.98). Lacan may have missed a significant complement to his own theory of Joyce's relation to writing in this anecdote, which provides a (literal) meaning to the example of the letter as material object presumably not encompassed by Lacan's own concept of the 'letter'...

Borromean link must be supposed to be tetradic, perversion only means turning towards the father [*version ver le père*], and that in short the father is a symptom or a *sinthome*, as you wish." (S23, lesson of 18.11.75.) As I emphasised in Chapter Three in relation to the question of psychosis, the Law of the father is inherently Symbolic, and has no necessary relation as such to the biological father. Lacan goes a stage further here, insisting that, given the ability of subjects such as Joyce to reach a subjective consistency without having a direct relation with the paternal metaphor, the very paternal metaphor *itself* is just another symptom among many. Furthermore, the symptom itself is nothing if not an exemplar of the signifier-in-isolation, of the signifier withdrawn from relations of signification. Thus, we reach a definition of *le sinthome*, as the meaningless Real element that provides the subject with consistency, whether it is the artifice of paternal authority incarnated in the signifier or any other signifier that refers only to itself, torn from the movements of metonymy. "The existence of the symptom is what is implied by the very position, the one that supposes this enigmatic link of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real." (S23, lesson of 18.11.75).

By invoking Heideggerian "ex-sistence", Lacan highlights the simultaneous belonging and eccentricity that characterises the symptom as it is now conceived; while holding the rings of the Imaginary, Symbolic and the Real together, it belongs strictly to none of them or, rather, it belongs to the Real in so far as the Real overdetermines each register and their binding. Further, in so far as the symptom is now situated as the eccentric element that holds together the three spheres of subjectivity, it follows that such an element would persist in each of the three registers; as well as pointing to the overdetermination of the Real, this insight allows us to identify more specifically how such an element could manifest itself in the psychoanalysis of the Real this thesis has aimed to outline. It is the signifier-in-isolation which has a particular relation to each register of psychoanalytic experience: in the Imaginary, the withdrawn signifier serves to support the movements of primary narcissism; in the Symbolic, the signifier-in-isolation forms the material underside of the signifier-in-relation, and the Real, as the domain of materiality and of the body, functions as the store from which the materiality of the signifier-in-isolation draws. Thus, it is as a signifier-in-isolation that the *sinthome* forms the fourth of the Borromean rings, serving, in its very meaningless insistence, to hold the subject together. As Lacan writes, "the *sinthome* is

characterised by non-equivalence." (S23, lesson of 17.02.76). The signifier-in-relation functions by virtue of a principle of equivalence, while the signifier-in-isolation, or the symptom as it is figured here, persists in an asymmetrical but binding relation to the elements that it holds together.



(Source : <http://www.lineofbeauty.org/index.php/s/article/viewFile/7/55/202>).

BECKETT AND THE *SINTHOME*

While Joyce functions for Lacan as the embodiment of the logic of the *sinthome*, we may be able to underscore a little further the particularity of the relation of the *sinthome* to language and the Real through a brief reading of Beckett, and more specifically his play 'Krapp's Last Tape'. Reflecting on the differences between Joyce and Beckett, further, might also aid our explication of this particularly difficult period in Lacan's teaching.

While both Beckett and Joyce have been associated with literary modernism, then, there are distinctions between the two writers that have wider, theoretical implications for our argument. If Joyce's late work, especially *Finnegans Wake*, instantiates the irruption of the materiality of language as an *excess*, as the over-abundance of

meaning, then Beckett's work, especially his later, shorter plays and novels, represents an operation of subtraction, again revealing language's materiality but via the progressive elimination of semantic meaning rather than through its excess. Joyce, we can say, employs an over-abundance of language and meaning, concatenated and compressed often without the use of punctuation, and in so doing allows meaning to disintegrate, to reveal the self-referring centrality of the signifier-in-isolation to come into view. Consider the following passage from *Finnegans Wake*:

Cry not yet! There's many a smile to Nondum, with sytty maids per man, sir, and the park's so dark by kindlelight. But look what you have in your handself! The movibles are scrawling in motion, marching, all of them ago, in pitpat and zingzang for every busy eerie whig's a bit of a torytale to tell. One's upon a thyme and two's behind their lettice leap and three's among the strubbely beds.³⁰

This short passage reveals a number of the techniques Joyce employs throughout the text to produce the effect of meaning in excess. The effect achieved is less unmeaning or non-sense, but rather the elevation of the logic of the signifier-in-relation to the point at which it fails to signify, or rather that it signifies potentially so *much* that it is language itself, its self-referring materiality, that comes into view over and above any 'intended' semantic content. Sometimes, Joyce will alter the spelling of words while retaining their meaning, allowing the signifying content to persist, only to stop it short in a succession of neologisms or portmanteau words, words that imply so many possible semantic connections that meaning falls short. In the above passage, the first three sentences are more or less explicable, with the narrator introducing the qualities of Nondum, that we assume to be a place. Immediately following, however, Joyce interrupts the flow of meaning with a series of neologisms and alternative spellings - 'movibles', 'pitpat', 'zingzang' - that stop the reader short and direct attention to the signifiers themselves, to their sudden position of isolation and withdrawal. Here is evidence of what Lacan refers to above as Joyce's "playing" with language, simultaneously allowing meaning to develop and forcing attention on the signifiers-in-isolation that provide its material undergirding, highlighting its potential for

³⁰ J. Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, (New York, Penguin, 1999) [1939], p.20.

disintegration in the overproduction of meaning. In this sense, Joyce's work has much in common with how Freud describes the navel of the dream, analysed in Chapter One; there too, the interpretation of a dream's semantic content breaks down at the point at which there are too many routes of potential signification.

Beckett's late work involves an opposite strategy, one that nonetheless achieves a similar effect in forcing attention on the materiality of the signifier. More than this, Beckett's work, and in particular the short play 'Krapp's Last Tape' which will provide the focus for this section, helpfully instantiates the logic of the *sinthome* analysed above. Rather than simply expressing the materiality of signification, and particularly the prominence of the signifier-in-isolation in any act of signification, Beckett reveals the potential for an isolated signifier or set of signifiers to form the binding basis of a precarious subjectivity. Lacan's choice of Joyce in explicating the logic of the *sinthome*, while useful in highlighting the uncoupling of the signifier through a kind of 'semantic overload', is less helpful in understanding the specifically *subtractive* logic of the *sinthome*; the *sinthome*, as a signifier or set of signifiers torn from semantic relation and installed at the centre of the subject, implies a reduction of the psychoanalytic concept of the subject to its barest, material support, effecting a kind of psychoanalytic minimalism that has wide implications for our understanding of language, the body, and the unconscious.³¹

'Krapps Last Tape', written by Beckett in 1958, is a play for one performer, the titular character. Krapp is a "wearish old man", with a "white face. Purple nose. Disordered grey hair."³² We find Krapp in his "den", and the play's action concerns the playing of tapes Krapp has used to record his thoughts at various stages in his life. Krapp comments in a stuttering, often incredulous fashion at his past, and Beckett frequently augments Krapp's monologue with relatively lengthy descriptions of Krapp's meticulous but troubled relationship with his failing body. We're given an early

³¹ Parenthetically, the move towards a subtractive economy of near-silence in the latter stages of Beckett's writing has something of an echo in the near-silence of Lacan's very final seminars; perhaps, just like Beckett, Lacan wanted, in the very form of his lecturing style, to recognise the centrality of a minimal materiality to the theoretical elements - the material body in fragments, the material signifier - he was attempting to conceptualise. We can, less generously, put Lacan's silences down to his encroaching dementia.

³² S. Beckett, 'Krapps Last Tape', in *Collected Shorter Plays*, (New York, Faber and Faber. 2006). p. 55; original text in italics to signal stage directions; hereafter 'Krapps Last Tape'.

insight into the ambiguity of Krapp's relationship with his body through the at least partially comic description Beckett gives of Krapp's attempt to eat a banana:

He stoops, unlocks first drawer, peers into it, feels about inside it, takes out a reel of tape, peers at it, feels about inside it, takes out a large banana, peers at it, locks drawer, puts keys back in his pocket. He turns, advances to edge of stage, halts, strokes banana, peels it, drops skin at his feet, puts end of banana in his mouth and remains motionless, staring vacuously before him. ('Krapps Last Tape' p.56).

Beckett's style here employs the halting, staccato, short sentences common to stage directions, but here they also contribute to our understanding of Krapp's failing powers of mentation and the general sense of disconnection that seems to pervade his existence. We should read the strange repetitions and halting character of his actions here as a foreshadowing of his relationship to the logic of the signifier; as will become clear, Krapp's tendency to repeat his actions almost compulsively, often interrupting one to begin another without resolution, mirrors and complements the ways in which he uses language. Language, for Krapp, has become the very *material of his being*, both in the form of the attenuated and often contested content of the memories recorded on the spools of tape he plays, and in his more general revelling in its material insistence, in the potential of individual signifiers to provide a *jouissance* apart from their potential for semantic relation:

KRAPP: [*Briskly.*] Ah! [*He bends over ledger, turns the pages, finds the entry he wants, reads.*] Box...three...spool...five. [*He raises his head and stares front. With relish.*] Spool! [*Pause.*] Spoooool! [*Happy smile. Pause. He bends over table, starts peering and poking at the boxes.*]
Box...three...three...four...two...[*with surprise*] nine! good God!...seven...ah!
(*'Krapps Last Tape'* p.56).

Clear here is the particularity of Krapp's relation to the signifier. With the drawing out of the 'r' in 'three', and the subsequent repetition and elongation of the pronunciation of 'spool', Krapp isolates signifiers, foregrounding their materiality, their indivisibility. We get a strong sense of the enjoyment that Krapp obtains by tearing

signifiers from their relational context and repeating them; the subsequent intoned series of numbers that follows figures, in numerical form, the isolation of the previous signifiers. When Krapp comes to play one of his spools of tape, any enjoyment obtained is far more ambiguous. As Beckett writes, Krapp frequently "broods" at the unravelling of his past as his words are played from the spools, and he frequently pauses the tape before resuming listening: "[KRAPP *switches off impatiently, winds tape forward, switches on again.*]" ('Krapps Last Tape' p.60). The frustration Krapp encounters upon hearing his past reflections may, of course, be down to his inability to remember the events as they're recounted, but at a deeper level, the pleasure that Krapp obtains from revelling in the materiality of isolated signifiers seems to dissipate as those signifiers are put into relation.

Beckett offers us another example of Krapp's delight in the signifier-in-isolation, in a portion of the play where Krapp uses a dictionary to enquire after the meaning of the word 'viduity', uttered by his past self on one of his spools of tape. After establishing that the word means a "[s]tate - or condition - of being - or remaining - a widow - or widower" Krapp "[*looks up. Puzzled*]" ('Krapps Last Tape' p.59); here again, the halting character of the dialogue serves to isolate the words involved, even as, in this case, they serve to reveal the semantic meaning of a previously unknown signifier. The initial meaning given by the dictionary doesn't fit with the context of its use on the tape, so Krapp reads on, eventually establishing that the word can also signify "'Deep weeds of viduity'...Also of an animal, especially a bird...the vidua or weaver-bird....Black plumage of male...." ('Krapps Last Tape' p.59). Krapp's reaction is telling; instead of trying to fit this newer definition into the context of his reflections on the tape, he instead revels in a portmanteau construction of his own making: "[*He looks up. With relish.*] The vidua-bird!" ('Krapps Last Tape' p.59). Here again, it is in the *materiality* of language, in the way a signifier or set of signifiers sounds and feels, rather than in its meaning, that Krapp gains his enjoyment. For Lacan, as we saw above, such a relation to language also characterised Joyce's subjectivity; Joyce, like Krapp, seemed to have substituted the mediatory function of the Name of the Father with a more general, material relation to language, and especially with the potential of language to exceed or withhold meaning.

In his 16th Seminar, Lacan links this sense of the "play" of language in its material guise with *objet petit a*: "The *a* at the point where here it appears to us, deserves to be called the cause, certainly, but specified in its essence as a privileged cause, plays an admirable sense [...], the play of language in its material form." (S16, lesson of 12.02.69). As I've emphasised in a number of places in this thesis, the object-cause, as the instance in the Symbolic of the absent subject of the Real, is tied intimately to the repetitive, insistent logic of the signifier-in-isolation, to what Lacan calls here "the play of language in its material form." Just as importantly, Lacan suggests here that language itself, and particularly language in its materiality, may itself function not just as the *vehicle* of the object, but as the object qua cause itself. This, I suggest, is precisely the subjective situation of Krapp; language, in its non-semantic aspect, has come to function for him as the cause of desire, as his singular *sinthome*. He displays contempt for his past as it is related on his spools of tape, in a fashion which suggests it as much his past revelling in the semantic quality of language that perturbs him as it is his past behaviour:

KRAPP: Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that. Thank God that's all done with anyway. [...] Everything there, everything, all the-*[realizes this is not being recorded, switches on.]* Everything there, everything on this old muckball, all the light and dark and famine and feasting of... [...] Nothing to say, not a squeak. What's a year now? The sour cud and the iron stool. *[Pause]* Revelled in the word spool. *[With relish.]* Spooooo! Happiest moment of the past half million. ('Krapps Last Tape' p.62).

Krapp seems to shrink from the abundance of incidence and meaning revealed on the spools. The repetition of "Everything there, everything", along with the imagery of "light and dark and famine and feasting" highlights the contrast, variability and semantic fullness of the words he hears himself speak from the past. In contrast, his relation to language is now defined by repetition, by the "revelling" in the extraction of a single signifier. Such forms the 'binding' element of Krapp's subjective structure, as Lacan elaborates it through his reading of Joyce in his 23rd Seminar. If Lacan's aim through elaborating the concept of the *sinthome* is to propose a generalised symptom

derived from the materiality of language, Beckett provides us with a specific example of how such a material symptom can function in the life of a subject.

To the extent, finally, that the *sinthome* functions both an incorporated element, and as something simultaneously external to the general logic of signification and Imaginary capture, we can speak of it in much the same way as Joyce seems to relate to his body. In the discussion above, I emphasised the simultaneous incorporation and expulsion that Joyce's metaphorisation of his body (as a fruit skin) embodies, and the parallel with the spatial situation of *le sinthome* is not coincidental. What it points us towards is the insight, perhaps the theoretical culmination of this thesis, that it is by tying together the psychoanalytic body in fragments, the signifier, and the vicissitudes of primary narcissism in the Imaginary (or the body as image) that the *sinthome* gains its conceptual force. More than this, however, the concept reinforces the sense that, for Lacan, there is no contradiction between a psychoanalysis of the body and a psychoanalysis of the signifier; by outlining the principle of binding through the signifier-in-isolation in its role as *sinthome*, Lacan disturbs any neat separation of the body from its representation, and of organic 'matter' and its representation in the signifier. Instead, and in as much as the Real overdetermines the horizon of Lacanian theory, it is, in the final analysis, a logic of *materiality* that cuts across the body, the signifier and *le sinthome*. Finally, it is worth noting here the reappearance of the paradoxical logic of formation and deformation that I've argued characterises the function of the Real: the power of the *sinthome* lies both in its capacity to hold the subject together, and in the threat that it might at any point come apart, leaving the subject to the violence of subjective dismemberment. The Real, in turn, hovers over the *sinthome* as its more general conceptual condition, instantiated in different ways but ultimately definitional of Lacan's Freudian project.

CONCLUSION – PHILOSOPHICAL PSYCHOANALYSIS?

To conclude, I will reflect briefly on what has been achieved in the preceding chapters, and provide some thoughts on the meta-theoretical status of my thesis; what, finally, is the ‘Real’, both in terms of its position within Lacan’s wider metapsychology and within the particulars of his theory of the subject, and how does the concept dramatise wider questions around the relationship between philosophy and psychoanalysis? Whilst only implicit, these questions are nonetheless suggested by the last chapter, where my attempt to reconstruct Lacan’s theory of the body in and around the concept of the Real begs the wider question of the status of the theory that results. Is what results a theory of the body, of materiality, of the material signifier, and of the subject, strictly proper to psychoanalysis, and if so how does my philosophical methodology – reconstructive, synthetic – gain an epistemological hold on what is, after all, a problem of clinical import?

As I signaled in my Introduction, and as will have become clear through the entirety of the thesis, Lacan hesitates to give succinct, stable definitions of his concepts, and this is perhaps true most of all of the Real. As Lacan writes definitively in his first seminar and as I quoted him in my Introduction, “it is not for nothing that the real is always in the background, and that I never refer to it directly in our commentaries here. It is, quite precisely, and quite properly speaking, excluded.” (S1 p.206). That this declaration should come in the first seminar is apt, setting up as it does both the centrality and elusiveness of the concept that will form the horizon for all that comes after.¹ The exclusion that Lacan writes of here functions on many levels; we can say that, at the level of the subject, the Real is excluded as a constitutive threat, manifest in primary narcissism as the ambiguity of the image of the other, and in the Symbolic as *objet petit a*, the Real element that links up with the signifier-in-isolation. At the meta-theoretical level, which is to say at the level of the overall conceptual structure of Lacan’s work, the Real is excluded, often left only implicitly defined, but here again the exclusion is constitutive: as I’ve argued throughout, the Real nonetheless

¹ It is also these kinds of comments on the Real that might lead one to conclude that the Real is situated fundamentally ‘outside’ the Imaginary and the Symbolic, perhaps even outside the remit of psychoanalysis, but this is not Lacan’s intention here. Instead, this ‘exclusion’ is a topologically complex one that implies a relation of immanence, as I hope I have demonstrated through, for instance, my discussion in Chapter Three of the ‘intuitive geometry’ of Lacan’s interlinking of the registers.

functions as the abiding concern of psychoanalytic theory and practice. How does this constitutive elusiveness function?

As I show in my first chapter, the antagonism installed at the heart of subjectivity through the process of primary narcissism is both partially relieved and perpetuated by the intervention of the Symbolic order. In so far, that is, as the antagonism proper to identification compels the nascent subject to accede to the Symbolic, it is constitutive, bringing about the production of 'full' subjecthood, at least for those subjects not prey to psychosis. And, as I show in Chapter Three, psychosis itself helps reveal the more general condition of the Symbolic for the life of the subject, highlighting as it does the effectivity of the signifier-in-isolation. Antagonism persists through that element of the Symbolic that provided its ground in the process of identification, namely the signifier-in-isolation, and Lacan's later writing will develop the object proper to the Real, *objet petit a*, precisely out of this movement between the Imaginary and Symbolic. Thus, the Real operates here, in its very 'exclusion', through a function of simultaneous *constitution* and threatened *dissipation*, or through a double logic of formation and deformation: at the level of the Imaginary, the Real, as the antagonism at the heart of primary narcissism, both contributes to the constitution of the subject and installs trauma at its center, while at the level of the Symbolic, the object of desire compels the desire that motivates the subject while nonetheless proving opaque, unmasterable, a potential threat, provoking the various questions that, for Lacan, are constitutive of neurosis. (S3 p.168-172).

Chapter Two and the chapters that follow show this logic working in a variety of different areas of psychoanalytic concern. Fundamental to all of those phenomena is the theory of language that I have argued is central to any understanding of the Real. Through my typology of the signifier-in-isolation and the signifier-in-relation, I have shown how, for Lacan, the logic of simultaneous formation and deformation described above is redoubled at the level of the signifier: the signifier, in its two aspects, acts as both the necessary ground for the production of meaning, and the element that, in its material isolation, acts as a potential barrier to that meaning. Here again, the double logic proper to the Real, that of constitutive and threatened dissipation, of formation and deformation, is affirmed. Through this account of the materiality of signification, further, I have shown how Lacan develops a novel, if

allusive, theory of the body; the body, as always-already in fragments, subsists through the alliance between the erogenous zones and the signifier-in-isolation, culminating, in Seminar 23, in the *sinthome* as the persistence of an element that, in its very senselessness, nonetheless provides the subject with a precarious consistency.²

Having identified this logic, we can refine a little our definition of the Real. In so far as it operates as the central concept for Lacan in developing a psychoanalytic account of the subject, the Real is that register that is simultaneously most constitutive and most threatening to the subject of the unconscious. More broadly, however, the Real operates as the meta-theoretical horizon for Lacan in his revision of Freud; it is “that which is always lies behind the automaton, and it is quite obvious, throughout Freud’s research, that it is this that is the object of his concern.” (S11 p.54). But how to account for a concept that seems to define Lacan’s project, while nonetheless appearing only through its articulation with other concepts? As I’ve insisted throughout this thesis, the Real is theoretically legible only if understood as fundamentally intricately with the other registers of psychic reality. In particular, I’ve argued against any attempt to isolate the Real from Lacan’s development of a theory of language, an isolation that threatens to hypostatize the Real as an absolute ‘outside’, something akin to Kant’s ‘noumenal’. As I hope is now clear, to render the Real as absolutely outside the Imaginary and the Symbolic is to condemn Lacan’s theory of the subject to the risk of linguistic idealism, and to traduce the most sophisticated and compelling elements of Lacan’s accounts of primary narcissism and of the body. As a result, however, the Real appears as a conceptual remainder or excess that, even in its very centrality, appears opaque when Lacan’s conceptual architecture is viewed as a whole.

² Geneviève Morel usefully draws out this double logic of the *sinthome*, itself more generally expressive of the Real, as follows, connecting the double logic of the *sinthome* in turn to Freud’s descriptions of symptoms as formations of defense: “The function of compromise between jouissance and defense explains the “strange”, equivocal character of the satisfaction it both contains and conceals: it is experienced as suffering. On the other hand, this function of compromise gives it the therapeutic power to hold things together, and to stabilize the subject by limiting the ravages of jouissance.” (G. Morel, *Sexual Ambiguities*, trans. Lindsay Watson, (London, Karnac, 2011), p.30). The double logic of formation and deformation as I’ve defined it is clear here: the *sinthome* is often experienced as painful, and yet it “holds things together”. Beckett’s ‘Krapp’ is, in this sense, a character exemplary of the subject of the *sinthome*; see Chapter Five.

One possible model for figuring the constitutive elusiveness of the Real is Althusser's theory of a complex, structural totality, and its relation to the notion of 'overdetermination', itself a term borrowed by Althusser from Freud. Put schematically, Althusser sought to reconfigure Marxism as a science, opposed to both the ideological illusions of humanism and the teleological dogmatism of Stalinism.³ To do so, he developed a theory of the political as composed of multiple levels, the interaction of which being too complex to be encapsulated solely through the orthodox Marxist notion of "contradiction". As Althusser writes, "If [...] a vast accumulation of 'contradictions' come into play *in the same court*, some of which are radically heterogeneous – of different *levels* and *points* of application – but which nevertheless 'group themselves' into a ruptural unity, we can no longer talk of the sole, unique power of the general 'contradiction'".⁴ Instead, a number of different elements in the totality interact, although they are framed by what Althusser calls a "basic contradiction" which is "active in all these 'contradictions' and even in their 'fusion'". ('Contradiction and Overdetermination' p.100). Althusser will go on to describe this unity as being ultimately determined by the economic "in the last instance", as the element that, while never simply or unilaterally causative, is none the less required for the complex whole to cohere.⁵

For heuristic purposes, the notion of causation "in the last instance" serves to underline the complex spatial relation of the Real in and over the totality of Lacan's conceptual apparatus, its absence nonetheless 'causing' or forming the horizon of the complex totality of concepts that Lacan used to revise Freud. There are obvious and problematic differences between the two, however, not least that Althusser's imposition of a broadly Spinozist account of the "absent cause" implies, at least if the

³ As Jacques Rancière commented at the time, "was it not [...] Althusser who cleared the way for a Marx who was neither the guarantor of Soviet state power nor the partner of theologians and armchair philosophers?". (J. Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, trans. Emiliano Battista, (New York, Continuum, 2011), p.xix). For a comprehensive, if uncritical, overview of Althusser's revision of Marx and those that followed his program of his research, see R.P. Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992). Among many others, useful accounts are to be found in G. Elliott, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory*, 2nd. ed., (Chicago, Haymarket Books, 2009) and A. Callinicos, *Althusser's Marxism*, (London, Pluto Press, 1976).

⁴ L. Althusser, 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster, (London, Penguin Press, 1969), p.100; emphasis in the original. Hereafter 'Contradiction and Overdetermination'.

⁵ "in real history determination in the last instance by the economy is exercised precisely in the permutations of the principal role between the economy, politics, theory, etc." (L. Althusser, 'Structure in Dominance' in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster, (London, Penguin Press, 1969), p.213).

interposition of Spinoza is to be carried through to its conclusion, the presence of the 'economic' in every instance of the social formation, its existing everywhere and yet 'nowhere' in any isolatable or temporally prior sense.⁶ The Real, however, has a more nuanced and ambiguous relation to the rest of Lacan's theoretical apparatus, in so far as it operates simultaneously at the meta-conceptual level, condensing the contingency that Lacan wishes to preserve in his theory of the subject, and intervening too at the level of the subject as the antagonistic logic of formation and deformation outlined above. Even further, the Real is modulated according to the particular way in which it is instantiated with other of Lacan's crucial concepts; while persisting through a consistent logic of constitutive antagonism, the Real as it appears in the Imaginary cannot be neatly mapped onto the ways in which it manifests through the material signifier in the Symbolic. Indeed, the very diversity of its manifestations, while nonetheless maintaining a consistent logic, is one of the things that prevents Lacan's revision of Freud falling into a formalism, any endless repetition of a single theoretical operation, as Althusser has been criticized for.⁷

Indeed, it is this very diversity of instances through which the Real manifests itself, and the changing ways in which it is articulated with the Symbolic and the Imaginary, that I have sought to chart throughout this thesis. I have emphasized the varying theoretical and clinical problematics that Lacan brings to bear on the question of the Real, through for example my sustained emphasis on the problem of primary narcissism and my concluding remarks on the body. The dangers of formalism that may result from not fully accounting for this multiplicity of instances is one of the risks of the approach of Guy Le Gaufet, who has provided an extraordinary reconstruction of Lacan's appropriation of mathematical logic whilst nonetheless courting the neglect of the essential element of contingency that permeates Lacan's construction of the Real, and that defines his theory of the subject.⁸

⁶ For an excellent account of the vicissitudes of Spinoza's influence on the structural Marxism of Althusser and his followers, see C. Norris, 'Spinoza versus Hegel : the Althusserian Moment' in C. Norris, *Spinoza and the Origins of Modern Critical Theory*. (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1991), p.21-55.

⁷ Althusser's former acolyte, Jacques Rancière, provided a trenchant critique along these lines in his *Althusser's Lesson*. (J. Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, trans. Emiliano Battista, (New York, Continuum, 2011). [1974].

⁸ I have reflected on the positive aspects of Le Gaufey's contribution in Chapters Two and Five. See G. Le Gaufey, *Le pas-tout de Lacan*, (Paris, EPEL, 2006).

If this position of the Real, its position of constitutive tension with the rest of Lacan's conceptual apparatus, were to be replaced by another key concept, for example the Symbolic, theoretical inconsistencies and anachronisms would threaten the critical purchase of Lacan's thought. Positing the Symbolic as the determining horizon of Lacan's metapsychology would, I think, threaten to make of his theoretical advances a mere linguistic idealism, where the signifier, defined narrowly by its being in-relation, would be lauded as the substance of the subject, in a manner reductive of the contingency and paradoxical materiality of the subject as Lacan recognized it. Allowing the Imaginary to occupy the place of the Real would, by contrast, bring Lacan's thought perilously close to the 'ego psychology' he sought to critique, thus blunting the advances he made in recognizing the objectal, deceptive 'nature' of the ego. By identifying the Real, in all of the diversity of its appearances, as the key concept of a modern Freudian thought, Lacan instead allowed an articulation of the contingency of the unconscious with a theory of the subject that resulted in a radical rethinking of the relation of the signifier to desire, of the body to processes of Imaginary identification.

The Real's meta-theoretical position, then, as a constitutive absence structuring the totality of Lacan's metapsychology, bleeds decisively into its role in the particular lifeworld of the subject as Lacan conceives it. In both instances, the 'Real' indexes a *conjunction of necessity and contingency*, linked indelibly to the subject as body, as set of Imaginary identifications, and as product of the signifier. As necessity, the Real defines the contours of Lacan's analytic scope, its conceptual range, and within the lifeworld of the subject, it sets the ground for the production of the subject and of sense, incorporating by the time of the 23rd Seminar the *sinthome* as the very site of the subject's consistency. As contingency, the Real functions as Lacan's conceptual bulwark against any static formalism. Its very difficulty to pin down, that is, acts meta-theoretically to inoculate Lacan's redefinition of metapsychology against any determinism of the signifier, or against any psychologistic or phenomenological reification of Imaginary identification. At the level of the subject, the Real as contingency operates, in the topological manner described in Chapter Three, as the shock of trauma that seems to operate from an 'outside' of the subject but which is, nonetheless, grounded by the internality of the signifier to the subject.

The relation of philosophy to psychoanalysis might, too, be figured according to this schematic of necessity and contingency. Lacan is frequently caustic about philosophy; as he put it in the year prior to his death, he sought to “rise up”⁹ against a discourse that he regarded as falsely suturing the gap between being and knowledge.

Nonetheless, it is clear that his revision of Freud operates through both an extended incorporation and transformation of philosophical concepts, and through the partial borrowing of a philosophical methodology. Lacan’s seminar, we can say, operates as an extended ‘dialogue’, with Lacan’s past theoretical productions as its constant interlocutor. In so far as this dialectical production of concepts has an at least partial autonomy from the clinic – while there is no doubt Lacan constantly revised his metapsychology in the light of his practice, he makes comparatively little use of the clinical ‘case study’ – Lacan’s method is close to the innovative, synthetic philosophical readings provided by a number of his contemporaries.¹⁰

And just as Lacan’s metapsychology puts in question, via its topological intrication of the signifier and the subject, the philosophical distinction between substance and subject, so its position as a practice and as a body of knowledge upsets received, institutional divisions of disciplinary enquiry. In this spirit, my thesis operates as a philosophical reading of psychoanalysis that productively exploits the very ambiguity of psychoanalysis’ discursive position, an ambiguity that is reproduced by Lacan’s own traversing of numerous disciplinary boundaries. Conceptually, it is the ‘Real’ that crystalizes this ambiguity, incarnating as it does both a profoundly philosophical concern for the limit of the relation between knowledge and being, and encapsulating too the definitively psychoanalytic concern for the contingency of the unconscious.

The diversity of appearances of the Real, then, should not stop us from identifying that which *is* definable in this most difficult of concepts, and it is in its role as determining, ‘in the last instance’, the object and the purpose of Lacan’s revision of Freud that the Real operates as the cornerstone of Lacan’s vision of psychoanalysis, as both theory and practice. Finally, then, we can outline those characteristics that define the Real as it persists throughout Lacan’s work: a double logic of formation and

⁹ J. Lacan, ‘Monsieur A.’ in *Ornicar?* 21-22, Summer 1980, p.17.

¹⁰ For a comprehensive and incisive insight into the relation of Lacan’s evolving theory to both his clinical practise and the wider intellectual climate of his time, see E. Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan : An Outline of a Life and History of a System of Thought*, (Cambridge, Polity, 1999).

deformation, an extricable connection to the materiality of the signifier as manifest in the 'signifier-in-isolation', and the theoretical positing, at the very heart of the subject of psychoanalysis, of an irrevocable but constitutive antagonism, conceived as a fusion of necessity and contingency. These are the awkward, difficult truths that Lacan insists must be accounted for by any rigorous thought or practice, clinical or otherwise.

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Abbreviations:

All references to Lacan's Seminar 'Sx p.x' refer to the edited edition prepared by Jacques-Alain Miller. Bibliographic details for each year referenced appear below.

All references to Lacan's Seminar 'Sx, lesson of xx.xx.xx' refer to the unofficial, unpublished translations by Cormac Gallagher from unedited French manuscripts. Bibliographic details for each year referenced appear below.

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