

I

Lacan and Postmodern Psychoanalysis

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is twofold: first, to present to the reader an introduction to postmodern psychoanalysis, treating its sources in the structuralism of Ferdinand Saussure (1857–1913), the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss (b. 1908), and linguistics of Roman Jakobson (1896–1982); second, to provide a comprehensive introduction to the thought and practice of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the exemplary form of postmodern psychoanalysis.

In developing his work Lacan came up with a trinity to rival that of Freud: the imaginary, symbolic, and real, which approximate to the ego, the super ego, and id. Taken together, these three registers form the fundamental system around which his theoretical and practical work turns. Accordingly, I have divided this chapter into three principal sections corresponding to the three registers. In each case I show how the register historically emerged in Lacan's work, how it functions as a register, and how it contributed to the maturation of his work. I begin with the imaginary register, and how it constituted the break with a modernist approach to psychoanalysis.

The Imaginary and the Break with Ego-Psychology

The basis for Lacan's disagreement with the climate of psychoanalytic thought, and in particular the dominant school of

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ego-psychology, was Henry Wallon's simple experiment with a mirror. The experiment was designed to draw out the distinction between a human infant at six months and a chimpanzee of the same age. Placed in front of a mirror a chimpanzee's initial interest in his image will quickly diminish; by contrast the child jubilantly assumes the image as his own.

Lacan reasoned that this was because at six months an infant's vision is more developed than its motor skills; so while the child is visually able, its body remains uncoordinated, giving rise to an initial experience of fragmentation and dislocation. However, in the mirror image the child perceives the promise of unity and autonomy, the image uniformly obeying the movements of the infant. As Lacan says: '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' (SI 79). And it is the child's identification with its image that marks the point of the historical emergence of subjectivity for that individual, the birth of the ego. Nonetheless, the ego remains an imaginary or narcissistic identification that the subject makes with a specular image; the ego is therefore an alienating structure – its promise of unity belies the fragmented nature of experience. The identification with the image thereby introduces a split [*Spaltung*] into the subject between the illusory ego [*moi*] and the empirical experience of the self [*je*].

In *Seminar I* Lacan says: 'The mirror stage is not simply a moment in development. It also has an exemplary function' (SI 74). In other words the mirror stage is not merely part of the child's historical maturation; it represents a *synchronic* function, i.e. a permanent structural relation within subjectivity. As a synchronic function it accounts for one of the three registers or orders of the psyche: the *imaginary*. The imaginary order, like the mirror stage, is characterized by a dyadic relation which stands for unity and sameness, a mutual recognition conferred by a narcissistic relation. Hence relations are imaginary to the extent they are relations of the same, such as friends who dress similarly or desire the same object; the desires and actions of each one confirming the other in who he is.

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The imaginary is at the root of frustration, aggression, and violence. Frustration and aggression arise because one can never live up to the image of one's self – we are not primarily whole but discordant. Violence arises because in constituting oneself on the basis of another, one inevitably brings oneself into conflict with another over the object of desire – both will desire the same thing – rivalry thereby transforms desire into violence.

Lacan's critique has not been universally accepted. David Macey argues that Lacan's critique of the ego simply served as a pretext to denounce the whole of American culture, and therefore has more to do with French anti-Americanism in the mid-1960s than the history of psychoanalysis (Macey, 1988, p. 111). For example, Lacan says:

The academic restoration of this 'autonomous ego' justified my view that a misunderstanding was involved in any attempt to strengthen the ego in a type of analysis that took as its criteria of 'success' a successful adaptation to society – a phenomenon of mental abdication that was bound up with the ageing of the psychoanalytic group in the diasporas of war, and the reduction of a distinguished practice to a label suitable to the 'American way of life'. (E 295/809)

However, ego-psychology was already under fire from American ego-psychologists like Erik Erikson. Erikson questioned the unproblematic status accorded to reality in ego-psychology, saying:

Bolstering, bantering, boisterousness, and other 'ego-inflating' behaviour is, of course, part of the American folkways . . . Without it a therapeutic relationship in this country would remain outlandish and non-specific . . . however, is the systematic exploitation of the national practice . . . submerging their anxiety'. (Erikson, 1959, p. 47)

Macey also highlights Bruno Bettelheim's work *Surviving the Holocaust*. Here, Bettelheim, a survivor of Dachau, writes:

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If the author [Bettelheim] should be asked to sum up in one sentence what, during all the time he spent in the camp, was his main problem, he would say: *to safeguard his ego in such a way that, if by any luck he regain liberty, he would be approximately the same person he was when deprived of liberty.* (Bettelheim, 1986, p. 74; Macey, 1988, p. 276)

But to accuse Lacan of wishing to expunge all sense of identity in his critique of the ego is to miss the point. After all, the imaginary remains part of the permanent structure within subjectivity providing for a minimal level of identity between terms, without which no meaningful exchange could take place. A person's name for example belongs to the register of the imaginary to the extent it remains the same throughout their life; in turn it attracts particular types of identification, for example, a name can signify class. Hence what is at stake is not the imaginary *per se*, but the point at which we are alienated from our desire through imaginary identifications, for example the point at which we fall back into repetitive types of behaviour.

The Symbolic

The role of the symbolic comes to the fore in Lacan's work with the Rome Report in 1954. The report shows how indebted Lacan was to Lévi-Strauss during this period, an influence which stretches not just to Lacan's theory of the symbolic but also to its application to Freudian psychoanalysis. Given his influence I shall begin by outlining Lévi-Strauss's central contribution.

Lévi-Strauss

Like Saussure, Lévi-Strauss held to a differential view of language: meaning was a product of a word's location within a system of differences rather than an inherent property of the concept itself. Lévi-Strauss employed this structural approach

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to reading society. What counted when studying rituals was not any biological reasoning but the cultural symbolic structures, the system of differences superimposed on nature and mediating social relations.

Lévi-Strauss was particularly interested in systems of kinship. By looking at the relational differences between elements in rites of kinship he argued that despite the diversity of rituals a singular motif was dominant: exchange. Kinship systems do not prohibit the incestuous biological impulse of man as Freud had claimed; rather, the prohibition obliges the mother, sister or daughter to be given to others. The prohibition of incest is 'the supreme rule of the gift' (Lévi-Strauss, 1969, p. 481):

Marriage regulates the exchange of women by treating them as a sign. Furthermore, 'The prohibition of incest is . . . the fundamental step because of which, by which, but above all in which, the transition from nature to culture is accomplished'. (Lévi-Strauss, 1969, p. 24)

Lévi-Strauss is making three related points. First, culture is a system coterminous with language, a relational system of differences. Second, culture is imposed on nature mediating social relations. Third, the pivotal moment in the transition from nature to culture is the incest taboo that surrounds kinship rituals, which is really a rule obliging symbolic exchange. Put another way, the moment we partake in symbolic exchange is the moment we become cultured. Lévi-Strauss describes his methodological shift from what we perceive as the inherent meaning of rituals to their meaning from a structural viewpoint in terms of the shift from conscious to unconscious: 'Structural linguistics shifts from the study of *conscious* linguistic phenomena to the study of their *unconscious* infrastructure' (Lévi-Strauss, 1963, p. 33). In this way he equates the symbolic with the unconscious; it shapes us and determines patterns of behaviour that at a conscious level are variously described.

Of Lévi-Strauss Lacan writes: 'Isn't it striking that Lévi-Strauss – in suggesting the involvements in myths of language

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structures and of those social laws that regulate marriage ties and kinship – is already conquering the very terrain in which Freud situates the unconscious' (E 72/285). What Lacan discerns in Lévi-Strauss's work is that society is organized like a language at the level of its unconscious; and that the law that governs the subject's entry is the law Freud names in relation to the prohibition of incest: the Oedipal complex. In other words, the Oedipal complex is not a story that has its basis in biological impulses; the Oedipal complex tells a story about a subject's entrance into language.

This insight would serve as the motor for Lacan's studies over the next thirty years. During the 1950s two tasks presented themselves: first, to give a more detailed account of the laws of language or the workings of the symbolic with a view to its impact on subjectivity; second, to integrate the theory of the symbolic into the theory of the Freudian unconscious culminating in his claim, 'the unconscious is structured like a language' (SXI 203).

As always, the precedence for Lacan's claims would be creatively read back into Freud's work so that what appears as a radical revision maintains a curious fidelity to Freud's text. However, it was to Lévi-Strauss's influence, Saussure, that Lacan turned to theorize the precise workings of language and the unconscious.

Language and the unconscious: Saussure

Saussure challenged the accepted view that language is simply a mirror of thoughts or pre-existing ideas, arguing instead that a word's value is produced within a system of differences. In rethinking language Saussure began by breaking it down into its elementary unit, the sign (Figure 1).

The sign comprises the concept (the signified) and the acoustic sound or image (signifier), the phonetic representation or image of the concept. The ellipse represents the structural unity of the sign: what is above determines what is below. The bar represents the co-dependency of the signified and the

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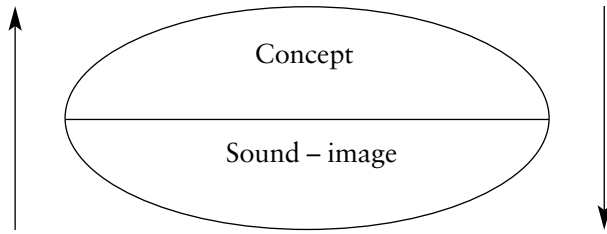


Figure 1. Source: Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 1974, p. 66.

signifier. The concept (signified) and the phonetic sound or image (signifier) are joined like two sides of a sheet of paper.

Saussure's initial insight was that the signifier was arbitrary: there is no inevitable link between the signified and the signifier; the relation was simply one of convention and hence signifiers could change over time. But Saussure carries this further: it is not only the signifiers that change in this arbitrary relation, it is also the signified or concepts that change over time. In other words, the signified is as arbitrary as the signifier, so what counts as value is not some universal concept transcendentally secured, but the articulation of a sign within a system of differences: a word's value is a consequence of its relation to other words. In short, *'the linguistic sign is arbitrary'*.

Lacan fully endorsed the structural approach to language. However, he was not uncritical of Saussure's sign and accordingly introduces his own revisions (Figure 2):

S

S

Figure 2. Source: Lacan, *Écrits 155/515*.

What are the implications of these revisions? First, Lacan reverses the established pattern of Saussure's sign. Instead of the signified (the concept) sitting above the signifier (the acoustic

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sound or image), Lacan sits the signifier on top. The capitalization stresses the dominance of the signifier over the signified; thus, gone is the mutual dependence between the two. Instead we are given a hierarchy: the signifier itself determines the shape of the concept. In other words the signifier is like the sign above a door, and in the process of entering through the door the subject is capitulated to the signifier, given an identity within a system of differences.

Lacan challenges Saussure in this way because he believes Saussure's theory fails to 'jettison the illusion that the signifier serves [*répond à*] the function of representing the signified, or better, that the signifier has to justify [*répondre de*] its existence in terms of any signification whatsoever' (E 142/288). Put in different terms, Lacan's worry is that the sign still suggests that the function of language is to represent. By contrast the elevation of the signifier suggests that language is a 'closed order' [*ordre fermé*] (E 144/501), a differentiated totality that imposes order on life: 'We can take things no further along this path than to demonstrate that no signification can be sustained except by reference to another signification' (E 141/498). So instead of representing a thing, the signifier is the access, meaning is produced from difference alone. And language is characterized by the 'incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier' (E 145/502).

Second, to emphasize the dominance of the signifier Lacan abolishes the neat ellipse that encapsulates the sign (Figure 1). Gone too are the arrows suggesting mutual dependence. Third, the bar takes on a new meaning. For Saussure, the bar functioned like the arrows (Figure 1), as an expression of the co-dependence of the sign, the signifier and signified being as the two sides of a piece of paper. For Lacan the bar literally *bars* access to the signifier thereby 'separating the two levels' (E 141/497):

One thing is certain: this access must not, in any case, carry any signification with it if the algorithm, S/s, with its bar is appropriate to it. For insofar as the algorithm itself is but a

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pure function of the signifier, it can reveal only a signifying structure in this transfer. (E 144/501)

In summary, Lacan endorses a structural view of language yet radicalizes it, wiping out any last vestiges of the material world, anything that may anchor the subject in anything other than the system of signs that constitute language. Lacan's view tends toward a virtual world where at its most polemical even the question of sexual difference is not referred to the physical properties of one's body, but the sign under which one falls (E 143/499).

Language and the unconscious: Jakobson

As Roudinesco puts it, Lacan's operation 'needed more assistance than Saussure alone could supply' and he found it in the work of the Russian linguist and literary critic Roman Jakobson. In his influential paper 'Two aspects of language and two types of aphasic disturbances', Jakobson undertook a brief study of aphasic or speech disorder. Jakobson identified two types: similarity disorder and contiguity disorder.

In similarity disorder the patient can complete given sentences, but has trouble starting them: context is everything. The more statements are dependent upon a context the more the sufferer can cope. For example: 'The sentence "it rains" cannot be produced unless the utterer sees that it is actually raining.' Jakobson argued that in similarity disorder the patient suffers an inability of metaphor as a mode of function. He is unable to easily substitute words outside of the immediate context. In contrast, contiguity disorder 'diminishes the extent and variety of sentences. The syntactical rules organising words into higher units are lost; this loss, called *agrammatism*, causes the degeneration of the sentence into a mere "word heap" Word order becomes chaotic' (Jakobson, 1987, p. 106). For the sufferer of contiguity disorder, the function of metonym is alien; that is, he is unable to easily combine words within any given context. In the final part of his paper Jakobson suggested

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that ‘competition between both devices, metonymic and metaphoric is manifest in . . . the structure of dreams’ (Jakobson, 1987, p. 113). He links symbolism to metaphor (a relation of similarity), and condensation and displacement to metonym (a relation of contiguity).

Lacan reworks both Saussure and Jakobson’s work into the unconscious process that constitutes dream-work as described by Freud (SE 4:277–338). In dream-work the latent or repressed content of the unconscious is made manifest (the process of *distortion*) through the twin themes on *condensation* and *displacement*. In condensation a single idea/image within a dream is used to represent an associative chain of ideas. For example, in ‘Dream of the botanical monograph’ the monograph condenses among others: his wife’s favourite flowers, the forgotten flowers, his failure with cocaine treatment, and his neglect of botany (SE 4:169–73). In displacement, the cathexis associated with one idea is transferred onto another. In the case of Little Hans, fear of the father is transposed onto fear of horses (SE 10:90). Lacan suggests that the process of distortion correlates to the sliding of the signified under the signifier. Following Roman Jakobson, he then argues, albeit differently, that the themes of condensation and displacement depend upon the linguistic conventions of metonym and metaphor:

Entstellung, translated as ‘transposition’ – which Freud shows to be the general precondition for the functioning of the dream – is what I designated earlier, with Saussure, as the sliding of the signified under the signifier, which is always happening (unconsciously let us note) in discourse.

But the two aspects of the signifier’s impact on the signified are also found here:

Verdichtung, ‘condensation’, is the superimposed structure of the signifiers in which metaphor finds its field; its name, condensing in itself the word *Dichtung*, [poetry], shows the mechanism connaturality with poetry, to the extent that it envelops poetry’s own properly traditional function.

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Verschiebung or ‘displacement’ – this transfer of signification that metonymy displays is closer to the German term; it is presented, right from its first appearance in Freud’s work, as the unconscious’ best means by which to foil censorship. (E 152/511)

For Jakobson both condensation and displacement are features of metonym, while metaphor is linked to symbolism. Macey sees the whole metaphor/metonym distinction as problematic. The very difference between the results found by Jakobson and Lacan should alert one to the fact that the typology is not as obvious as it seems (Macey, 1988, pp. 162–3). One could also draw on the work of Umberto Eco, who, in contrast to Lacan, writes that from some perspectives ‘metonym substitution is no different from the process Freud called “displacement”. And just as condensation is involved with the process of displacement, so is metaphor involved’ (Eco, 1984, p. 114). It is not my task here to discern an exacting typography of the relations involved, these comments should simply serve to alert the reader to the complexity of the debate that Lacan’s work overlooks. As Macey sees it, ‘the metaphor-metonymy opposition functions adequately as a convenient – if schematic – topography of forms, though . . . it can easily fall prey to the structuralist enthusiasm for watertight binary systems’ (Macey, 1988, p. 163).

Nonetheless, by invoking the twin figures of metaphor and metonym, Lacan is able to theoretically underpin the unconscious with the structure of language. By reading linguistics back into psychoanalysis, he brings out the forgotten flavour of Freud’s claim that the dream has the structure of a sentence: ‘A dream is a picture puzzle of this sort [a rebus] and our predecessors in the field of dream interpretation have made the mistake of treating the rebus as a pictorial composition’ (SE 4:278). All that remains is to rewrite the Oedipal complex as a story which outlines the subject’s entrance into the symbolic.¹

¹ Macey is highly critical of Lacan’s linguistic endeavour. He argues that it is a ‘curiously truncated or incomplete version of the discipline’

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The Oedipal complex

For Freud the Oedipal complex described the triangular economy of desire that exists between the child, the love of the mother, and the rivalry of the father (SE 4:262). The dyadic relation of the mother/child is broken by the imposition of the father, who triangulates the relation through a prohibition against incest.

For Lacan, the complex tells a more fundamental story about coming to be in language (SV 22.1.58). What is at stake is the Name-of-the-Father [*Nom-du-Père*]. In French the *Nom-du-Père* employs a pun because ‘name’ and ‘no’ are both pronounced ‘*nom*’. Therefore *Nom-du-Père* implies both the name of the actual father and the prohibition he represents. The ‘No’ is actually part of the mother’s speech as in the case: *Wait until your father gets home!* It designates a limit, an authority

(Macey, 1988, p. 121). Missing from it is any attempt to provide a comprehensive discussion of other major theorists of language like Chomsky, Pierce, or Hjelmslev, while of the two he does discuss, Saussure and Jakobson, they are restricted to a theory of the sign and an analysis of aphasia. In turn, there is no sustained attempt to work through Freud systematically, exposing the linguistic elements that Lacan finds so pervading; and no account of or comparison with modern linguistics approaches. Indeed, the fact that most major introductions to modern linguistics relegate Lacan, if they mention him at all, to a few pages, suggests that ‘his relationship with “modern linguistics” is at best one of marginality’ (Macey, 1988, p. 124). Macey suggests that the only consistency is his inconsistency. Despite what purports to be a synchronic account of language, ‘the discussion of Saussure and Jakobson coexist alongside a Heideggerean exploitation of the poetics of phenomenology and of the resources of wild etymologies’ (Macey, 1988, p. 124) – although arguably this is precisely Lacan’s strength. Macey continues: Lacan’s use of etymology not only undermines his claims that meaning is synchronic, but also proves unreliable. For example, Lacan makes the connection between condensation (*Verdichtung*) and metaphor with poetry on the basis of the word *Dichtung*. In other words the relation is justified on the basis of etymology, which cannot in fact be supported. *Dichtung* derives from the Latin *dictare* and *Verdichtung* from the old German *dihan* (Macey, 1988, pp. 139–40, 280, n. 79).

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beyond the mother that grounds her authority (E 208/579). As Lacan says: 'It is in the Name-of-the-Father [*Nom-du-Père*] that we must recognise the basis of the symbolic function which, since the dawn of historical time, has identified his person with the figure of the law' (E 66/278). And because the Name-of-the-Father is simply the support of the symbolic it is not necessary that the biological father serves this role, or indeed a man, it is only necessary that it is implemented. Because, without law, language and meaning descend into anarchy and psychosis.

Elizabeth Roudinesco has suggested a biographical origin to the term. When Sylvia Bataille, the then wife of the writer George Bataille, gave birth to Lacan's daughter Laurence, Lacan was still married to Maria-Louise Blondin (Malou). Because the child was born outside of *his* marriage, French law precluded the child adopting the name of her biological father – Lacan – so it was Sylvia's husband that gave his name to Lacan's child (Roudinesco, 1999, p. 163).

Desire and castration

In the imaginary stage, the child exists in a dyadic relation with the mother. In this pre-Oedipal stage the child strives to be the object of the mother's desire; yet properly speaking desire cannot have an object because desire is established through lack, lack in the symbolic. In other words, desire is a product of the differential structure of language. Desire arises because no single word can ever speak the totality of its meaning, there is always a remainder, and desire is precisely the desire to speak that which by definition cannot be spoken, the constitutive Other of language. For the child, the task to be the object of the mother's desire is therefore an impossible task. Lacan's name for the desire of the mother is the *imaginary phallus* – the child wants to be the imaginary phallus for the mother.

Entering the symbolic entails accepting the father's 'No', which signals the impossibility for the child of being the phallus for the mother. By ceding the task, the child accepts the constitutive lack in language. The child must thereby give up the

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imaginary dream of an attainable wholeness and allow a radical Otherness to sit at his heart, recognizing as a fact of law that the big Other mediates all social relations. The big Other is the governmental force that directs us yet remains spectral, never fully present to us; and in acceptance of the Other of language the child is castrated. In other words, castration is the inability of the child, regardless of sex, to be the phallus for the mother.

Symbolic determinism

In the Rome Report Lacan makes this comment upon Lévi-Strauss's thesis:

In this structure, whose harmony or conflicts govern the restricted or generalised exchange discerned in it by ethnologists, the startled theoretician refinds the whole logic of combinations And this suggests that it is perhaps only our unawareness [*inconscience*] of their permanence that allows us to believe in freedom of choice. (E 65/276-7)

Lacan is startled to discover the degree to which the subject is literally subjugated to the role of the signifier. And this became his major thesis regarding the structural view of the subject, a point forcefully illustrated a few years later in 1956 with the publication of "The seminar on the purloined letter". Here, the circulation of a somewhat compromising letter to the Queen of France determines in advance the various positions the different characters play (the one who has the letter, the one who searches for the letter, etc.).

For Bruce Fink, being subjugated by the signifier has a curious effect on the status of meaning. Because the signified is always sliding under the signifier, the unconscious is that play of the signifier that appears in dreams, slips of the tongue, witticisms, or symptoms. The unconscious is always bursting through, threatening our lives with meaning. This is because the structure of the unconscious is the structure of language, which operates along the lines of metaphor and metonym. These

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figures, coupled with the incessant slippage of the signified, mean language creates a surplus of meaning to which we are subjected: meaning is not as indelibly tied up with the subject as one might imagine. Fink is not denying that our past has a meaningful effect on our present; what is at stake is the surplus of meaning produced by the associations our past generates. As Fink puts it, drawing on the example of Freud's case study of 'the Ratman':

As a child Ratman identified with rats (*Ratten*) as biting creatures that are often treated cruelly by humans, he himself having been severely beaten by his father for having bitten his nurse. Certain ideas then became part of the 'rat complex' due to meaning: rats can spread disease such as syphilis, just like a man's penis. Hence rat = penis. But other ideas become grafted onto the rat complex due to the word *Ratten* itself, not its meaning: *Raten* means instalments, and leads to the equation of rats and florins; *Spielratte* means gambler, and the Rat Man's father, having incurred a debt gambling, becomes drawn into the rat complex. Freud refers to these links as 'verbal bridges' (SE 10:213); they have no meaning per se, deriving entirely from literal relations among words. Insofar as they give rise to symptomatic acts involving payment . . . it is the signifier itself that subjugates the rat man, not meaning. (Fink, 1995, p. 22)

Although we seek to make sense of the world, meaning is largely a product of the unconscious play of the signifier, curiously disembodied from the subject who, as a subject of the unconscious and language, is literally *subjected* to language.

Summary

The symbolic marks the second of the three orders that structure the subject. The symbolic stands for the realm of language, that is to say a differential system which operates according to the laws of metaphor and metonymy; it is the realm of law,

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where the Oedipal conflict is staged and governs all social relations. While the imaginary is characterized by dyadic relations, the symbolic is marked by a triadic structure because it mediates all social relations and introduces the notion of radical alterity into those relations. Entering the symbolic entails giving up the unity offered by imaginary identifications for an all-encompassing structure that is devoid of any fixed relations, haunted by absences, and ultimately determines our decisions. For Lacan, the anxiety created by the symbolic, i.e. the *Other*, is at the heart of neurosis, and it is the analyst's job to help the neurotic extricate him or herself from the grip of the imaginary and accept that anxiety.

The Real

In Lacan's later work of the 1960s he became fascinated by the paradoxes that beset the subject of the symbolic and references to Saussure become scant. The overall effect of the signifier is described in terms of a splitting [*Spaltung*], a term Freud used to describe the ego of a patient which manifests in terms of two mutually exclusive psychical attitudes to the world. In *Seminar XI* this split is interpreted in terms of an impossible either/or choice (*vel*) between being or meaning that the subject must make upon entering the symbolic. The choice is impossible because if we choose being, the subject disappears and we fall into non-meaning; however, if we choose meaning, subjectivity survives but 'emerges in the field of the Other, to be in a large part of its field, eclipsed by the disappearance of being, induced by the very function of the signifier' (SXI 211). Hence one is condemned to appear in the division between being and meaning.

In his earlier work Lacan described this symbolic cut in terms of the split between the subject of the *statement* and the subject of the *enunciation* (E 287/800). The subject of the *statement* is the subject of the conscious dimension of speech, it 'designates the subject insofar as he is currently speaking' (E 287/800). This

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subject is differentiated from the empirical bearer of speech, the subject of *enunciation*, the subject of the unconscious, discerned only in terms of a ‘shifter’, a linguistic inflection that indexes but does not signify the subject. Lacan cites the French *ne* as an example (E 287/800), which, as Fink suggests, finds its equivalent in the English ‘but’ as in the sentence ‘I will not deny *but* that it is a difficult thing’. ‘But’ introduces a ‘hesitation, ambiguity, or uncertainty’ into the sentence. The ‘but’ points to the split within the subject, giving voice to the subject beneath the surface of the statement without explicitly representing her (Fink, 1995, p. 39).

This is because as soon as we try to talk about ourselves we turn ourselves into an object. As Lacan says in ‘Function and Field of Speech’, ‘I identify myself in language, but only by loosing myself in it as an object’ (E 84/299–300). However, as Žižek highlights, this is not to suggest that the subject is some underlying ‘interior richness of meaning which always exceeds its symbolic articulation’, some underlying *ousia*. Rather, ‘the surplus of signification masks a fundamental lack’ (Žižek, 2002, p. 175). As Lacan says: ‘I am not designating . . . the living substratum needed by this phenomenon of the subject, nor any sort of substance’ (SXI 126); signification does not bar access to the subject, it masks the impossibility of the subject:

One therefore does not speak to the subject. It [*calid*] speaks of him, and that is how he apprehends himself; this is all the more necessary in that, before he disappears, as subject beneath the signifier which he becomes, due to the simple fact that it addresses him, he is absolutely nothing . . . an effect of language, in that he is born of this original split, the subject translates a signifying synchrony into this primordial temporal pulsation that is the constitutive fading of his identification. (PU 265)

The economy of this paradox is summed up in Lacan’s order of the real, the final aspect of Lacan’s trinity. As Lacan says, ‘what is refused in the symbolic order re-emerges in the real’

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(SIII 13), hence the real is that which ‘resists symbolisation absolutely’ (SI 66). So when we identify ourselves in language, there is a negative portion we cede, the real. From the standpoint of the symbolic it does not exist, it slips out of view, hence its paradoxical status. The real has the status of the Kantian ‘*object in itself*’ or ‘*noumenon*’, an object not discernible to sensible intuition, discernible only in terms of the effects it produces. It differs however in that it is not the transcendental support of the subject as it is for Kant, but the immanent inertia of the subject that evades symbolization.

It would however be wrong to simply construe the real in terms of a material substratum that refuses to be symbolized. Instead, the real should be construed in terms of the symbolic, in terms of language, because it only comes into effect through the process of symbolization. In other words, the real is not simply outside language, but the very heart around which language wraps itself: it is ‘something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me’ (SVII 71), the ‘intimate exteriority’ that Lacan calls ‘extimacy’ (SVII 139).

The Real Trauma

Freud linked the aetiology of neurosis to traumatic experiences repressed in the unconscious, and sought a cure through an emotional discharge, liberating oneself from the affected memory of the trauma. And just as Freud saw analysis as uniquely positioned to humanly deal with trauma, so too Lacan argues that ‘no praxis is more orientated towards that which, at the heart of experience, is the kernel of the real, than psychoanalysis’ (SXI 53). However, in contrast to Freud, for Lacan the real provides a structural account of trauma in the context of language; the *real* is the constitutive trauma upon which language is built and hence an antagonistic part of us all:

the encounter [with the real] in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter – first presented

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itself in the history of psychoanalysis in the form that was in itself already enough to arouse our attention, that of the trauma. (SXI 55)

The real is ‘the essential object which isn’t an object any longer, but this something faced with which all words cease and all categories fail, the object of anxiety *par excellence*’ (SII 164).

Richard Boothby’s elucidation of Freud and Lacan’s comparative readings of the case of Emma offers an excellent means to grasp what is at stake in Lacan’s reworking of Freudian trauma in terms of language and the real. In the case of Emma (SE 1:353–6), a woman has a phobia of entering shops alone. Initially she recalls an event whereupon entering a shop two female assistants laughed at her, upon which she quickly ran out. In connection with this she recalls they laughed at her clothes, and that one of them had aroused her sexually. However, later on she is able to recall two events some four years earlier when, while purchasing some candy, an old shopkeeper had grabbed her genitals through her clothes. In spite of this experience she returned a second time, but thereafter stayed away and reproached herself for returning (SE 1:353–6). Freud’s question is, why did the second more innocent scene provoke anxiety, why the deferred action? He argues that:

together with the shopkeeper, she remembered his grabbing through her clothes; but since then she had reached puberty. The memory aroused what it certainly was not able to be at the time, a *sexual release*, which was transformed into anxiety. With this anxiety she was afraid that the shop-assistants might repeat the assault, and she ran away. (SE 1:354)

For Lacan, what proves traumatic is not the physical assault as such, but Emma’s failure to understand the desire of the Other. As Boothby puts it:

What was he [the old shopkeeper] after? What did he want? The central point of the trauma was the question concerning the shopkeeper’s desire. In this sense, there was something

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unknown and unknowable in the original confrontation. It was an encounter with the real. (Boothby, 2001, p. 204)

In other words, the origin of this particular phobic reaction was not the anxiety of sexual desire, but our original dependence on language and the Other. In the encounter with the desire of the Other, the subject (Emma) was also forced to encounter the real of her own existence, the unassailable traumatic kernel of her being that resists integration into language.

Assumption of Desire

To summarize the thrust of Lacan's work thus far one could say: when we enter the world of language and symbols a gap opens up between the speaking being (the enunciator) and the language spoken (the enunciated). This gap generates desire, the desire to fill this fundamental gap. However, the structural gap renders the satiation of desire impossible; analysis therefore seeks not to satiate desire but to reconcile one to this perpetual state of non-fulfilment. Thus Lacan says: 'the symbol first manifests itself as the killing of the thing, and this death results in the endless perpetuation of the subject's desire' (E 101/319).

Accordingly one might summarize the ethical thrust of Lacan's work as an ethic of desire, where desire is interpreted primarily as a lack. The aim of analysis is to confront or revisit the constitutive lack upon which subjectivity is founded, to be fully submitted to the effects of the symbolic, to encounter the absolute difference upon which life is built, reconciled in some measure to the lack that is inherent in the symbolic and the human condition as the futile search for the lost object.

However, such a reading is, I argue, highly reductive to the extent it refuses the centrality given to agency in Lacan's work. For example, in his work *Ethics*, Lacan says: the only thing one can be guilty of is 'giving ground relative to one's desire' (SVII 321); and 'the ethics to which psychoanalysis leads us [is] the relation between action and desire' (SVII 313).

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Let us set this in a clinical context with an example taken from a Lacanian case study offered by Marie-Hélène Brousse. A woman wants to have a baby, but she never finds herself in a relation conducive to her wish. She always ends up in abusive relationships. In analysis, it transpires that she can only remember her mother for one thing: saying ‘I’m going to kill you’, and in relationships she repeatedly assumed the position of someone scorned, someone disappearing, someone sitting at home making jam for no one to eat (Brousse, 1995, pp. 109–110).

Of course, on one level her mother’s words conform to the object of her fantasy: death. Yet notice the context: the woman’s desire is to have a child but, because she positions herself as vanishing, she cannot settle into a relationship conducive to that end, namely to bring forth life. In other words, she fails to assume her desire, the desire to have a baby. However, what is at stake here is not the desire for the object as such, but taking the risk of having a baby in the first place, which includes the acceptance of failure. Hence, seen from this perspective a Lacanian ethics does not mean reconciling her to lack, but allowing her to take the risk and find it in herself to initiate the act. For this reason, one should allow for the centrality of agency in Lacan’s work.

Future Anterior: From Lacan to Heidegger

It is possible to trace this balance, between reconciliation to lack, and an emphasis on agency, back to Heidegger’s existential phenomenology in *Being and Time*. Lacan’s association with Heidegger has been well documented by Roudinesco. The two had met in 1955, and Heidegger had granted Lacan permission to translate his article ‘Logos’ into French for a psychoanalytic journal. However, when Heidegger was sent an inscribed copy of *Écrits* he wrote to the psychiatrist Medard Boss, saying, ‘You too have no doubt received Lacan’s large tome (*Écrits*). Personally I haven’t so far been able to get anything at all out of this obviously outlandish text.’ And in another letter he quips,

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'It seems the psychiatrist needs a psychiatrist' (Roudinesco, 1999, p. 231). Lacan would later attempt to dismiss Heidegger's influence on his work, saying: 'for a time at least, I was thought to be obsessed with some kind of philosophy of language, even a Heideggerian one, whereas only a *propaedeutic* reference was involved' (SXI 18). However, one should not miss the mediating role played by Heidegger's favourite grammatical tense – the future anterior – in Lacan's early work.

In grammatical terms the future anterior is a compound tense comprising an auxiliary verb and past participle (the adjectival form of the verb in the past tense). In the future anterior there is always a future expectation, an act which is futurally disposed. For example, *I will be rested if I sleep now*. The past participle (rested) is conditional upon the present possibility (sleep). And because the past is dependent upon a future contingency, it may be retroactively changed or re-transcribed by the future. For example, *If I fail to sleep, I will not be rested*, i.e. the present is dependent upon a future action.

For Heidegger the future anterior is favoured as an expression of 'care' because futural anticipation and retroactivity are *temporal modes of the historicity of the subject*. According to Heidegger we should not be bored, day-dreaming, abstracted from daily life, but exercise an attitude of care which is to say one must 'use time'. In engaging time, Heidegger rejects the view that time is a series of 'nows' (Heidegger, 1962, p. 474), part of a great chain that trails back into the forgotten past while stretching forward into the great unknown. Rather, time is an existential category in which the past and future meet in the possibilities and decisions we embrace in the present. The past refers to the way we are already in the world, the way prior events or tradition have shaped, determined, or opened up possibilities for us. But our past also gets meaning from our future because it is redefined as new events retroactively cast light on what went before. The future illuminates the past in different ways that can coterminously affect the present anew, so the actuality of what has been depends upon the possibilities of what we do with it. For example, if my father was a

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carpenter, it is from my past that the possibility of becoming a carpenter arises, yet the past is only realized to the extent that I project the idea of being a carpenter forward into my future, which in turn is only manifest through *an embodied decision or act in the present*.

Crucially for Heidegger, an attitude of care is sparked by an encounter with one's mortality, a traumatic encounter with death. Faced with the anxiety, life starts to matter in new ways. Temporal nature impresses upon the subject the need to 'anticipate' being with more concern (Heidegger, 1962, p. 387). The subject experiences himself in terms of possibilities and openness to the contingency of the future, but also 'resoluteness'. Through resolute engagement with oneself, being brings forth its own-most 'potentiality-for-Being' (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 267–301), and the past is reaffirmed in alternative ways, dependent upon how the future is anticipated. Heidegger calls the point we first encounter this new perspective the 'moment of vision' (Heidegger, 1962, p. 387). The *moment of vision* occurs when the present is held in 'authentic temporality' and one realizes what it is to be concerned to the utmost with our being in the midst of time.

When Lacan turns to the goals of analysis in the 'Rome Discourse' he clearly relates Heidegger's use of the future anterior to *anamnesis*, the process of remembering one's past:

what is realised in my history is neither the past definite as what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect as what has been in what I am, but the future anterior as what I will have been [*gewesend*], given what I am in the process of becoming. (E 84/300)

By stressing the future anterior Lacan makes the point that the subject is always in a process of becoming or unfolding, he is never a pure event (E 84/300). But in the moment of unfolding, the future anterior also implies a moment of resolution, because the retroactive nature of being calls one to make a decision about *which* past the present will return to in the future, and its manifestation in embodied action:

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[I]n psychoanalytic anamnesis, what is at stake is not reality, but truth, because the effect of full speech is to *reorder past contingencies by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come*, such as they are constituted by the scant freedom through which the subject makes them present. (E 48/256; italics mine)

End of Session: Punctuation and Interpretation

This sense of agency also underlies Lacan's controversial 'end of the session', one of Lacan's principal tools in analysis. The medium of psychoanalysis is speech, in particular 'free-association', in which the patient speaks without censor. It is the analyst's task to listen. The assumption is that speech 'conveys what it does not say' (E 81/294-5). People can say one thing while meaning another. Interpretation involves listening to the analysand. The dialectical nature of the analytic situation provides the arena of conflict where 'the sender receives his own message back from the receiver in an inverted form' (E 83/298) so the sender can hear what it is he or she is saying. This is achieved by punctuation [*punctuation*] in which the analyst actively intervenes, repeating a word or a phrase or alternatively by leaving a silence at the end of the analysand's speech. Through punctuation the initial meaning of a sentence is retroactively reconfigured. For example, the accent in the sentence 'I am a child like father' may fall on the speaker's father: 'I am a child, like father'; or upon the speaker: 'I am a childlike father' (Lee, 1990, p. 89). By repeating a given phrase yet changing the punctuation, the analysand is encouraged to hear the subtext of his own speech, that is, the unconscious.

According to the guidelines of the IPA (International Psychoanalytical Association), the analytic hour should be of a fixed duration: fifty minutes. Such regularity ensures a secure holding space in the manner of the controlling ego. However, during the course of a session Lacan would often end abruptly. This unorthodox break in practice would eventually lead to his

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expulsion from the SPP (Société Psychanalytique de Paris) and later the SFP (Société Française de Psychanalyse) although as Mario L. Beira notes, not all those expelled with Lacan broke this rule; moreover, in Freud's case study of the Wolf-man (SE 17), Freud himself had experimented with the duration of sessions (Beira, 2000, p. 187).

Lacan's argument for doing so was threefold. First, the end of a session should be sensitive to the analysand's discourse. If the analysand reaches an important realization or stumbles upon something significant, with or without realizing it, ending the session on that point will highlight its importance. The ending can thereby serve to throw the analysand back onto his speech because he will inevitably ask 'Why did the session end there, what was the significance of my speech?' Second, Lacan argued that the analysand will imbue every detail of analysis with meaning and hence 'the ending of the session cannot but be experienced by the subject as a punctuation of his progress' (E 96/313). That is to say, even when the end of the session occurs due to pre-ordained standards, the analysand still imbues the end with significance. This being the case, Lacan argues that it makes sense to utilize this end to its full effect. Third, and crucially, ending the session bears on what Lacan calls the '*moment of concluding*' (E 48/257):

the ending of the session – which current technique makes into an interruption that is determined purely by the clock and, as such takes no account of the thread of the subject's discourse – plays the part of a scansion which has the full value of an intervention by the analyst that is designed to precipitate concluding moments. Thus we must free the ending from its routine framework and employ it for all the useful aims of analytic technique. (E 44/252)

When he first introduces the term, it is one of three terms that collectively provide a temporal framework within which Lacan situates the unconscious. Lacan introduces this framework to give a descriptive alternative to Freud's belief in the 'timeless-

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ness' (SE 12:108) of the unconscious (Éc 197–213). Lacan begins with an analogy: a prison governor wishes to release one of three prisoners without taking the responsibility for deciding which one. As such he devises a plan. He takes five disks, three white and two black, and tells the prisoners he will place one of the disks on their backs. Based simply on the colours of the other two, the prisoners must deduce the colour of their own disk. The first to do so is released. The story portrays a time sequence within which the prisoners are situated: the instance of the glance, a time for comprehending, and a moment of concluding. The unconscious is situated between the instance of the glance and the moment of concluding in a somewhat elusive moment of apprehension. However, in terms of the end of the session Lacan's point is that freedom depends upon the quickening of time in regard to the moment of concluding: intervention 'annuls the *times for understanding* in favour of the *moments of concluding* which precipitates the subject's mediation toward deciding the meaning to be attached to the early event' (E 48/257). That is to say, the analysand is situated between knowing he has an opportunity to overcome his neurosis and bringing his neurosis to conclusion through an act of full speech. Interventions like suspending the session force the decisive event in the analysand. As Dany Nobus says:

To put Lacan's principle in more psychological terms: through her interpretations, including the suspension of the session, the analyst has to facilitate and accelerate decision-making processes in the analysand; she has to urge the analysand to make decisions about his life in line with desire, despite the fact that he does not master all the knowledge necessary to be sure that the decisions are right. (Nobus, 2000, p. 159)

The end of the session acts as a form of trauma, an interruption that impresses upon the analysand the need to decide how he or she will re-present his or her experience and assume agency.

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Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to orientate the reader toward Lacanian psychoanalysis, its theory and its practice, with reference to the imaginary, symbolic, and real. For Lacan these registers are all important, assuming the status of transcendental categories. As he says in *Seminar I*, ‘Without these three systems to guide ourselves by, it would be impossible to understand anything of the Freudian technique and experience’ (SI 73). In the following chapters these terms will be put into concrete examples through the engagement with theology. In my exposition I have also highlighted the place given to *agency* as an aspect of Lacanian practice – often lost by postmodern commentators. This has important implications as my argument develops, because the role of agency in analysis helps me make the crucial link between postmodern therapy and the role of Eucharist. As I argue, one way to explain the Eucharist is as a traumatic event (the real) which stimulates the assumption of desire. However, before I arrive there, I want to explore the concept of repetition (receiving everything back in a different form) as this constitutes my methodological appropriation of Lacan as well as mediating the relation between Lacan and Kierkegaard.