



The Subject as Contradiction:

Atomicity, the Void & the Aesthetic Experience

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I

Lacan taught a sad lesson: Everyone loses.¹

The notion of the subject as conceived by Jacques Lacan should not be conflated with the subject as conceived by linguists or philosophers or other academic theorists concerned with this notion. For Lacan, the subject is empty, meaning that it neither pertains to relationality nor to positivity. Neither a positive determination can be predicated upon the subject, as is the case in traditional logic and linguistics, nor is the subject to be regarded as some sort of thinking substance, as is the case for modern philosophy, that is, philosophy since Descartes.²

To cite as:

Venetis, Alexander, 2022, "The Subject as Contradiction: Atomicity, the Void & the Aesthetic Experience," *PsyArt* 26, pp. 86-128.

¹ Taken from Ellie Ragland's *Essays on the Pleasures of Death: From Freud and Lacan* (1995).

² From here on I will not distinguish between logic and linguistics but I will solely speak of linguistics. I am aware of the differences related to their respective conceptualizations of the subject – many would differentiate between the two by saying that, for the traditional logician, a subject is that upon which a predicate applies, whereas, for the linguist, a subject is a unit which displays certain syntactic properties as part of its expressing a grammatical relation – yet this is, for my purposes, not relevant. What matters is that both the logician and the linguist's definition of the subject exhibit a *relation* to another logical or grammatical unit which is then treated as determinative to the definition of this very subject. Thus, both in linguistics and in logic the subject is thought in its relationality to something exterior to itself.

Also, Lacan excludes biology from the list of possibilities: (the sum total of) neuronal circuitry cannot ever be designated as the subject. The subject, that is, cannot be reduced to the cerebral or discovered somewhere 'in the flesh.' Yet, Lacan most definitely does not want to give up on the subject either; if anything, Lacan is critical of so-called Structuralist and Post-Structuralist views – by now also belonging to academic *doxa* – in which the subject has vanished altogether. One readily sees that here problems arise: neither does Lacan jettison the subject and proceed in ignoring it altogether, as some in academia do, nor does he opt for simply assuming that there must be (a degree of some kind of) positivity attributable to the subject or that the subject can be defined in relational terms, as yet others in academia do. For Lacan, thus, the subject must be theorized but only as it happens beyond the bounds of academia.

Still, Lacan does take cognizance of a variety of academic articulations regarding the subject, but does so in order to meticulously situate and, in a second instance, segregate his own position *vis-à-vis* academia. His lifelong interest in philosophy, linguistics and several (formal) sciences attests to the fact that Lacan attributed very considerable value to these respective disciplines. Not without importance in this context is the fact that Lacan was a psychiatrist, that is, a physician trained in the empirical science of psychiatry. Hence, the Lacanian subject is not articulated in complete opposition and antagonism to academia's promulgated subject-theories. For Lacan, psychoanalysis needs to posit a subject, but this is not a subject of positivity, so to speak; that is, the Lacanian subject neither bears any positive substance nor definable function. Even ontological qualifications and positive qualities such are suspect. Nonetheless, the academic discourses which inscribe positivity or relational functionality into the subject are a necessary condition upon which the Lacanian subject

could emergence. Thus – and this is crucial – the Lacanian subject is profoundly contradictory: it has no being yet it exists, it escapes all determinations yet it can be theorized, it is a container yet in it nothing determinate is contained. Or, more precisely, there is neither a descriptive multiplicity applicable to it, nor is there anything to be discerned in it. *Finally, thus, the Lacanian subject is atomic.* Yet, this positively charged atomicity is emitting *jouissance*, that is to say, it is ‘spilling over’ in unmediated and immediate excess which is coagulated pain and pleasure without any distinction possible between the former and the latter. By way of definition, *jouissance* is the simultaneity of that which is maximally opposed in its sheer unmediatedness. But pure *jouissance* is pure paradox, or paradox as such, and thus beyond our mental capacities, beyond (re)presentation. Yet, logically demonstrable to be a necessary postulate, on the one hand, whilst unavoidable yet unpredictable as it phenomenally emerges in the guise of contorted affect, on the other hand, the subject has to be posited.

Since it is an effect of the Real of *jouissance* – that is, since it is immediately affective rather than Symbolically and/or Imaginarily mediated – concomitant with it being contradictory, the subject needs to be posited, however, though, without the ascription of any positivity or functionality to it, which is contradictory, too, for to state it is to give it at least some positivity and relate it to some other terms. The Lacanian subject shows itself in the guise of affect rather than as picture or enunciation; its defining character is its sheerly insistent palpability without it being visible or nameable or locatable. Nor is it predictable or avoidable. To illustrate Lacan’s highly sophisticated yet very counterintuitive theory on the subject, I turn to art and the aesthetic experience at the end of this paper. The aesthetic experience is clearly a matter of emotion, of feeling, of affective states of mind. The appearance of affects through art, which range from ecstasy to beauty to ugliness and even to revulsion and disgust in some cases, is premised on the effect of what Lacan calls ‘the Void’ (*le vide*). Right at the heart of subjectivity and being, there resides an emptiness, but this emptiness is not absolutely nothing or absolute nothingness; that is, the emptiness of the

Lacanian Void is not equal to zero. Instead, this emptiness is a contained emptiness, a charged void or hole, which is an effect of castration. And from this very Void *libido* (Freud) or *jouissance* (Lacan) is emitted, as Ellie Ragland explains throughout her very impressive *Essays on the Pleasures of Death: From Freud to Lacan*. Concrete emotional experiences are its partial and temporal phenomenological manifestations, be they joy, love, boredom, horror or disgust. All permutations of affect, the entire spectrum of affect – from the pleasurable to the painful and, very important to Lacan, the pleasurable *in* the painful – are direct effects of the irrevocable, unavoidable, irreparable and ineluctable character of loss. And this loss has *almost* an ontological status for Lacan: only when castration has taken place – only when lack has been instated and loss has been suffered by virtue of a limit having been posited – the Void comes into existence, and this very Void is at the heart of Being. Thus, for Lacan, to be is to be inside the space of negativity – an enclosed hole is borne into being by way of the necessary instatement of loss, by way of the irreducibility of scarring or traumata. Thus, to be is to be traumatized. In short: castration.

As stated, it is hazardous to extrapolate an ontology from Lacanian theory, or even to deduce ontological ramifications, because ontology implies (the possibility of) positivity. Thus, the question, “But what, then, *is* a human being?,” is not on Lacan’s radar, because whatever the answer, however tentative and partial, it would always retroactively reify the presupposition of the subject’s positivity. So, we are left with only one possibility which condenses a negation and an affirmation, showing yet another of the subject’s contradictory faces: the Lacanian subject can only be stated negatively as it relates to academic subject-theories, that is, it can only be stated in terms of what it is not; yet – and here is the affirmative part – the Lacanian subject *is* an enclosed, encinctured or encapsulated nothingness, that is, the Void. The very fact of it being doubly inscribed – *de facto* being the sublation of academic subject-theories, on the one hand, and the sublation of the Void taken as pure nothingness, on the other hand– causes Lacan to do justice to it, if you will, meaning to posit its necessity without trying to ‘tame’ it or even explain it (away).

To Lacan's mind, the subject suddenly irrupts into a multidimensional network of interlinked signifiers, taking the place where a crack or slit in discourse arises. And this is not, as one might readily assume, the unconscious, though it is an effect of it. Things are more complex: the emptiness of the Lacanian subject is due to it being purely formal, purely logical and purely contradictory (Latin, *contra + dicere*: against + to speak; to speak against). But this sounds riddling, not in the least for the obvious reason that one might retort that if X, Y or Z is contradictory, then this very thing cannot be thought, cannot be grasped. And exactly here lies the radical originality – and difficulty – of Lacan's conception of the subject: the subject belongs to the 'beyond' of signification since emptily contradictory, yet it is exactly this very belonging to the 'beyond' which forces us to theoretically recognize it, to give it its pride of place, for we can demonstrate its existence in its efficacy and affective palpability concomitant with its logical necessity. But that does not make it manageable or even representable. Put in Lacanese, the subject is firmly inscribed into the Real, which is the absolutely ineffable yet absolutely necessary. The Real is the impossible, in the full extent of the word, being that which one can neither get rid of, expunge or eliminate nor integrate, neutralize or assuage. Neither to be digested nor to be expectorated, the Real fully subjugates. As Slavoj Žižek clarifies throughout his massive volume, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, the Real is to Lacan what Hegel calls 'The Bone in the Throat.' It is neither part of an organization which is endowed with an inner determination, that is, a structure, nor is it purely contingent and may just as well not raise its ugly head at all. The Real can neither be circumvented and avoided nor predicted and anticipated. It is necessary but not in the structural sense of the word, nor is it sheerly contingent, in the sense of utterly random. Following Žižek, the Real is best envisaged as the necessity of contingency and the contingency of necessity taken together dialectically; they "dialectically supplement each other" (Žižek, 460). Yet, this excludes the possibility of their totalization into the One, hence the dialectical supplementation. But this is abstract and requires, as is frequently the case with Lacanian theory, explanation and defense.

II

I am thinking where I am not, therefore I am where I am not thinking.³

The unconscious is a distinct entity, interpolated on the basis of the lacunae of conscious discourse and made up of another discourse which groups the complements of these lacunary points together in another site.⁴

As stated above, Lacan articulates his view on the subject in opposition to academic articulations of the subject. Yet, this opposition neither implies sheer antagonism nor complete disjunction or integral separation. Actually, due solely to the fact that academia provides such a plurality of subject-theories, Lacan manages to theoretically underpin the psychoanalytic subject. In so doing, he can warrant a segregation between psychoanalysis and this very academic plurality. Rather than alleging these academic theories to be false or negligible, Lacan counterposes by showing their respective limitations. Hence, psychoanalysis is rather 'un-academic'; it assigns primacy to lack of knowledge and lack in being over some presupposed positivity or functionality. I will go through the dominant academic theories step by step and explain how they relate to psychoanalysis as understood by Lacan.⁵

³ Taken from Lacan's "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud" (1957).

⁴ Taken from Anika Lemaire's *Jacques Lacan* (1970), quoted by Owen Hewitson in "What's So Unconscious about the Unconscious?" (2017)

⁵ The Lacanian subject as I present it in this paper is mostly (but not solely) related to the way in which Lacan theorized it in the last phase of his career, often called Lacan's third phase. Even though it seems overly rigid to precisely demarcate Lacan's phases of theoretical development, it is true that in the latter part of the 1930's and the 1940's Lacan was primarily interested in what he calls 'the Imaginary.' In the 1950's and until the mid-1960's he emphasized 'the Symbolic.' The latter part of the 1960's and, in particular, the 1970's were his greatest phase, in which he indulged in his highly theoretical exploration of 'the Real' for which he is so (in)famous. Nonetheless, I will generally refer to Lacan's views as developed over time, for the reason that I must 'sketch' a background in which to place Lacan's thought on the Void. In addition, the 'unacademic' character of psychoanalysis (but, as I will extend on below, stringent logical foundation) finds its apotheosis in Seminar XX: here Lacan extends on his discourse theory first introduced in Seminar XVII indicating that, to his mind, the structure of academic research is premised on the systematization of knowledge as commanding, and thus trying to dominate, indeterminacy – 'we must find the-not-yet-known and seize it!' – whilst psychoanalysis is premised on an indeterminate 'object' – the psychoanalyst – commanding, and thus authorizing, a split subject to speak.

The subject-theories encountered in academia – ranging from linguistics for which a subject is that upon which a predicate applies to modern philosophy for which a subject is a thinking thing (Descartes' *res cogitans*) to even the neurosciences for which the subject is (the sum total of and reduction to) neuronal circuitry – all inscribe into the subject a degree of positivity or relationality of some kind. The subject is a kind of 'fullness' or presence, if you will, a kind of container in which in the end there is (possibly) containment. For example, for linguistics, a predicate applies as a determination to a given subject; that is, a predicate is contained by the subject which functions as its container. For modern philosophy, a thinking thing thinks its own positivity. For Descartes, I can doubt everything, yet I cannot doubt that I am doubting. Thus, doubt becomes that about which I am certain (Lacan 1998 [1964], 126). In the process, being is reified: to be means to think, yet to doubt means to think too, so I can legitimately claim to be. For the neurosciences – certainly in their reductionist variants – neuronal pathways and circuitry are the 'real reality' of the subject; the subject gets reduced to the cerebral, meaning that the dove-tailed character of our experiences is reduced to and understood as mechanistic and biological principles underlying and regulating 'gray matter.' These principles would allegedly be caused by their being inscribed into our biological makeup as chromosomes, genes, DNA and so forth. It is noteworthy to draw one's attention to the way in which these disciplines' respective subject-theories – linguistic, philosophical and neuroscientific – are reflected in Lacan's triad of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real, even though they remain discontinuous to these Lacanian registers.⁶

First, concerning the Imaginary register.⁷ For Lacan, the Imaginary is the space of concordance, application, congruence, reflection-correspondence, identity and convergence.

⁶ See for a book-length, detailed and very perceptive account of Lacan's registers of the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real, Lorenzo Chiesa's *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan* (2007).

⁷ I deliberately speak of the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real as *registers*, for there is a range of phenomena, processes and logical organizations separately inscribed into these three spheres. Especially in the final decade of his teaching, Lacan aimed at developing the mutually dependent yet incommensurable character of these registers, which, at least in part, explains the enormous difficulty of his work from the 1970's. The interdependent yet incommensurable character of the three registers can be thought as follows: a variety of phenomena and processes only *relatively* differing from each other – that is, they are placed on a dimensional spectrum forming a single plurality – dialectically interacts with each of the other registers and their respective dimensional spectrums of

In short: virtuality. Here is inscribed the object-relatedness of our perception/consciousness, as Freud calls it. The ego is its primary 'object,' meaning the agency which comes into being by the process of inclusion and exclusion, acceptance and (r)ejction, leading to a (seemingly) coherent identity. Nevertheless, I objectify myself in being myself, because to be conscious is to be conscious of oneself – consciousness is always self-consciousness.

Lacan's celebrated 'mirror stage theory,' first developed as early as the latter part of the 1940's and reworked several times over the decades, is exemplary for the specular and virtual character of the Imaginary. I deliberately say 'exemplary,' because all too often the Imaginary is reduced to the mirror stage theory, which is incorrect, at best, if not downright ridiculous. Put succinctly, the theory says that I constitute myself in the mirror – both the literal mirror and the metaphorical one, the latter referring to others to whom I mirror myself as they mirror themselves to me – by incrementally folding what I perceive to belong to me inside of me. That is to say, the images of myself as mirrored to myself slowly but surely amalgamate into (a picture of) myself, that is, my Self. However, since this process first occurs around six months of age and subsides at around eighteen months, problems arise: there is a discrepancy between what I specularly *perceive* to be and what I endosomatically *experience* to be, because I perceive a wholeness to the mirror image – the surface of what appears displays no fissures – yet my view of my body in the mirror is always necessarily partial. Meanwhile, I do not have (sufficient) motor control at such a tender age, that is, I cannot (fully) control and regulate the movements of my body yet. Still, I am a single body, though, however fragmented and limited in motor control, and treated as such by caretakers. The discrepancy between sensorial reality and bodily reality is undeniable: on the one hand, perception registers partiality as it relates to endosomatic fragmentation and the reduction

phenomena and processes – that is, their respective pluralities – in which the differences between the pluralities are mutually *absolute*. It is no wonder, then, that even professional logicians and other scholars attending Lacan's yearly held Seminars had great difficulty keeping up. By way of illustration, the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss once claimed in an interview that he had read Lacan's *oeuvre* six times over and had concluded that he could not manage to continue, simply because that would usurp all of his time.

intrinsic to virtual images whilst, on the other hand, wholeness is perceived as it relates to the 'fullness' of the virtual image – that is, images without fissures – and the fact that the body is nonetheless a single unit, which is undeniably experienced when, for example, the infant is being held.

In short, Lacan claims the paradox of being insurmountably fractured yet undeniably unified to lead to jubilation, recognition and identification, on the one hand, and frustration, misrecognition and misidentification, on the other hand. The dissymmetry between the body as endosomatically experienced versus the body as imagistically perceived *produces virtuality*: “[t]he function of the mirror stage thus turns out, in my view, to be a particular case of the function of imagos, which is to establish a relationship between an organism and its reality – or, as they say, between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt*” (Lacan 1966 [1949], 78). Simply put, the world around me and the world within me are at odds with one another.

In summary, I propose the following formulaic statement expressing the nucleus of Lacan’s mirror stage theory: displacement (appearing there where I am not) + inversion (appearing with left and right side inverted from where I am) + reduction (appearing partly but being whole) concomitant with fragmented and limited somatic motor control equals the generation of diametrically opposed affects simultaneously. Love and hate, harmony, and rivalry and so forth are inherently bound together; they are entangled, for they are generated in the other (the mirror or others as mirror) *whilst* lacking in bodily control. Thus, I will experience alienation and identification simultaneously: I am fixed yet aggressive to the virtual perception of what I cannot be for lack of control yet nonetheless want to be for its holism. I am quick to aspire to become what I am not; and I am quick to aspire to be what I cannot become. In short, demands will always be real yet unrealistic. Transposed to lived life, I can never either solely love myself nor solely hate myself; I always love and hate myself, in whatever proportion, at the same time. And even if I could solely hate myself, without even a tinge of love, I would still love to hate myself, because otherwise it would make no sense why I cling to such destructiveness. This means, practically speaking, that

one's emotions will insurmountably be ambivalent and contradictory. Already now a rudimentary concept of *jouissance* emerges; it is not hard to see that clefts, ruptures and antagonisms are seductively lurking at the level of virtuality.

The implication—and this is crucial—is that the Imaginary is geometrically structured. That is to say, the relationships between the relata in the Imaginary register are of spatial kind, of the order of spatiotemporal⁸ organization and thus also representational in kind. Everything one can conjure up in one's mind, everything that may appear in one's mind, can solely be articulated in space and time. It is, then, no coincidence that we speak of the mind's *eye* or our mental *landscape*. No mental picture will be formed of, say, 'circular squares.' Besides the obvious fact that such objects do not exist in empirical reality, they will also never be conceived, grasped or seized by the mind *pictorially*. In addition to seizing the literally pictorial, our capacity for conceptualization, however abstract, requires the Imaginary register, that is, a space regulated by spatiotemporal relationality and its representational potential. Lacan, therefore, situates our capacity of generating meaning, that is, our capacity to collate what is said and what is meant, to the register of virtuality, too. Think, for example, of how a series of words in a sentence form a unified meaning in one's mind – let's say, the gist of the sentence – thus illustrating the Imaginary to be the field of *fusion* and *compression* in addition to being the field of antagonism and fracture as stated above. To 'have' a concept of X, Y or Z is to virtually contain in one's conscious horizon the coordinates of X, Y or Z. In being 'grasped,' the object or series of objects such as the words in a sentence are reconstituted and counted for a single unit. In so doing, a 'slice of reality' is understood, literally: to *under-stand* is to stand under that which has appeared and to carry its weight on one's shoulders, so to speak, to take the thing understood upon oneself and upon one's Self.

⁸ Even though one might say that, strictly speaking, the temporal dimension is not part of geometry as such, for the reason that geometry is only concerned with spatial dimensions of which there are only three and not four, I still include it in the Imaginary, because, as I will extend on below, there is always a time-gap between the observation of relata in space. Thus, at least as it concerns human observation, the temporal dimension can be safely included in here, albeit, strictly speaking, external to geometricity.

Colloquial discourse nicely illustrates the specular character of understanding: when we come to understand someone we are prone to say “I *see* what you mean!” or “I get the *picture!*”

Second, concerning the Symbolic register. This is the register of, amongst others, language as a differential structure, logic and thought, presentation, law, social orders such as hierarchies, kinship relations and the gift-debt dialectic. Descartes famously states, *Cogito ergo sum*: I think therefore I am. In putting forth his dictum, Descartes reifies our Symbolic existence by fusing it with being. The classical metaphysical question – “But what, then, is Being, or being as being, or being as such?” – addresses being and no more or less. The classical metaphysician does not only raise the question about being as being determinate (being taken as being X, Y or Z), but also the question of being as being and nothing but just that: Being. Descartes’ dictum expresses the idea that the ontological minimum of the human being is the fact that he thinks. Thus, thought is attributed to being, thought is *in* being. Even though Descartes’ dictum does not necessarily imply that Being can be reduced to thought, it is implied, though, that the human being’s being is thought, for the reason that it is its guarantor. For modern philosophy, thus, the first principle of our metaphysics – our veritable fundament – is the fact that one is thinking. It is the minimal level of the subject: the subject thinks. Philosophers tend to speak of the Cartesian reduction of being to thinking.

Cartesian thought is of conscious nature. I can doubt a lot –in principle, I can doubt whatever I observe, from my intra-psychic reality to the observable universe – yet I cannot doubt my doubting. So, there must be an exception ‘inside’ the space of my doubting, meaning that even though I can doubt *anything* I cannot doubt *everything*. Doubt, thus, is undoubtedly undoubtable. The simple fact that contradiction is now undeniably introduced is tantamount to invoking the unconscious – or at least paving the way to it – because now there is an opening: due to totalization having become impossible – that is, due to there being no ‘everything,’ no All – one is faced with a fundamental incompleteness. Although Lacan fiercely critiques Cartesianism, he also affirms its importance, in so doing “revealing its

intimate relation to psychoanalysis” (Chiesa, 39). For Lacan, the Cartesian moment in history was a necessity, because it showed us the ineluctability of stalemate which, at least in hindsight, has become the inception of modern philosophy. And because the unavoidability of stalemate – or aporia – is at the heart of psychoanalysis, *modern philosophy was a precondition for the historical emergence of psychoanalysis*.

Now, the problem with Descartes’ dictum is that the former I is not equal to the latter I. Even though the I who states the proposition and the I who is referred to by the proposition are indeed identical, they are nonetheless different. In the language of Transcendental Idealism, they form an analogy, that is, analogy = identity in difference. Heavily influenced by Transcendental Idealism, Lacan would say that Descartes’ dictum fails to register this crucial point: if I refer to myself as a thinking thing, then I can only do so by objectifying myself as being that thinking thing; yet, I can only do so if I admit to being a subject. It turns out that, in Descartes’ view, subject and object collapse into one another as they fuse. A philosopher might retort that Being requires this very collapse, not in the least for the fact that it must stretch over, so to speak, the subject and object; that is, Being must be all-inclusive, must be nothing but full integration, including that which is subjective and that which is objective all at once. The implication of the Lacanian model is that now this all-encompassing inclusivity is exactly that which has become logically impossible, that is, incompleteness has been undeniably introduced yet denied or overlooked. And this is for, at least, two reasons.

First, there is a spatiotemporal problem. There is a distance in space and time between the two I’s of the proposition. As I explained above in the context of the Imaginary, I *am* not what I see in the specular field of virtuality, I only *recognize* what I perceive as myself. Yet, I am not *in* the mirror-image; I simply *appear* to be there. Thus, the first I in Descartes’ proposition is an I constituted via a detour in the otherness of the image. Next, between being where I am and perceiving where I am there must be a temporal interval, meaning that I recognize myself with a certain delay. In short, one must assert there to be a form of mediation, both spatial and temporal. This makes Descartes mistakenly assume thought to

be direct and unified. For Descartes, that is, thought is reliable since unmediated. But this is, in Lacan's view, demonstrably false, for everything specular is always indirect, partial, distorted and distorting; at best, unreliable. And everything whole is also partial as long as it is geometrically conceived, for the reason that perception of objects in space and time is always fragmented, as described above, thus inscribing it into the register of representation. Representation always implies partiality and vice versa. As I already suggested above, the Imaginary merely *subsists* whereas the Symbolic actually *exists*; the Imaginary register is made up of imagistic content which is in the end phantasmatic – not, as sometimes in the literature is claimed, simply illusory – whilst the Symbolic register embodies the order of actuality and is determined by a differential logic, in short, that which is named or potentially nameable, or that which has Symbolic value.

Second, for Lacan, there is a major issue regarding Descartes' thought related to the subject/object dichotomy. The first I of Descartes' dictum refers to the I who speaks, the I who is assumed to be coherent and consistent, that is, a unified speaking agent. It is like saying 'I am the kind of person who is X, Y or Z': the subject who states this is describing and inscribing a partiality in the form of a quality to him- or herself. It does not matter whether the assertion is actually true or not, but, rather, that an assumed wholeness objectifies him- or herself by way of reducing him- or herself to a partiality, which is by definition incoherent, for the reason that a wholeness can never be its own partiality. Otherwise, there would be no difference between wholeness and partiality, which would leave us in the dark about how to differentiate between them. Obviously, one may retort by saying that one is aware of the impossibility of reducing oneself to the partiality of the quality just assigned to oneself, yet due to the fact that one cannot do otherwise than reduce oneself whilst in the Imaginary, one must admit to actually having done so. Another way to put the point is that I cannot describe myself coherently all at once – I cannot be coherent without being inconsistent. Nor can I get away with coherently describing myself inconsistently, the reason being that doing so leads to contradictory statements from which no one can infer what it is I mean. It is, thus, simply

impossible to reduce oneself to thought – something else for that matter – without ending up in senselessness. Thought can never be All, by definition.

Rephrased in Lacan's language, the subject of the statement can never be collapsed into the subject of the enunciation, meaning that the subject cannot ever objectify itself whilst retaining its capacity of being a subject, its capacity of subjective articulation. The former subject is the speaker and the latter subject appears as the 'object' which is spoken of, which is 'being spoken,' if you will. Either one is a coherent I who refers to oneself inconsistently, or one is an incoherent I who refers to oneself consistently. Just as there is necessarily a spatiotemporal interval, as described above in relation to the Imaginary, there must be a difference in logical organization of the I who appears to be coherent and inconsistent and the I who appears incoherent and consistent. In other words, there must be a split; Freud was absolutely right, that is, the human being necessarily displays a cleft, a *Spaltung*. Given this logical necessity, the logic of the Imaginary – the I who speaks in Descartes' dictum – must be heterogeneous to the logic of the Symbolic – the I who is objectified as the latter I in Descartes' dictum. And – this is vital – considering that the Imaginary is of spatiotemporal kind, of spatiotemporal organization, and considering that relations articulated in space and time are the defining feature of the Imaginary, the relations inside the space of the objectified I must be organized in a non-spatiotemporal way. Yet, since to speak is always to be spoken and thus to be represented, this 'being represented' must necessarily appear in three dimensional space. I will come back to this below in the context of the Real.

Thus, by virtue of the fact that Lacan must assert the Symbolic to be cutting through the Imaginary, he must resort to a space which is not *sheerly* geometrical; that is, Lacan must invoke a space which is only partially geometrical and thus partially non-geometrical, so to speak. In other words: a space which is structured topologically. The relata in the hypothetically *pure* Symbolic cannot be pictured or imagined, meaning that pure Symbolic relata are related minus their relations they otherwise would have had in space and time. But in order to perceive anything consciously one needs spatiotemporality, making *the*

appearance of the Symbolic confined to the space governed by the logic of the Imaginary, that is, spatiotemporality. Since the Symbolic cuts through the Imaginary, the latter's symmetry gets bent by the force of the Symbolic, making a hypothetically perfectly symmetrical space warped, twisted and distorted. It is no wonder, then, that Lacan was veritably obsessed with logic and mathematics, as one can see in the gradual yet very visible formalization of his psychoanalytic teaching throughout the decades. Lacan needed a model to analogize on the fact that consciousness is frequently interrupted by alien elements – Otherness devoid of conscious control – as abundantly witnessed in both daily life and the clinical setting. Obviously, this space must be at least partially geometrical, for the simple fact that there appear appearances. Yet, this very space cannot be entirely geometrical either, for there is the necessity to postulate a place of relata devoid of their having articulable relations as the source of that which interrupts in its appearing. Thus, a warped, contorted and bent space of topological structure is theoretically needed to invoke. Stated differently, Lacan has to assert this Otherness to be organized in its non-appearance, but unorganized in the field in which it appears, for the reason that being devoid of conscious control, that is intentionality, must point to it being devoid of spatiotemporal relations. Still, this Other space must have relations of some kind, even though they will not appear, otherwise these relata could not be organized. Thus, one needs organization, that is structure, but without there being the kind of relationality of the space in which its derivatives appear. To cut a long story short, Lacan cannot remain firmly situated inside a sheerly geometrically structured space; he is obliged, that is, to go into a field of topological geometricity, or a logic of place inside space (Greek, *topos + logos*: place/space + logic/reason/discourse etc.; the logic of place *and* the logic of space; the logic of place within space).⁹

⁹ Lacan always claimed to be a faithful Freudian, often insisting he was saying nothing *radically* new compared to what was already articulated by Freud or, at least, implicit in the 'Freudian Field' as he used to call it. There is debate on whether this is entirely true. For now, however, I do want to point out that Freud was demonstrably aware of the need to postulate topological relationality. So, in any case, Lacan does not deviate from Freud by invoking topological geometricity. Suffice it to refer to the following statement from Freud's essay "The Unconscious" (1915): "In summary, the characteristics we can expect to find in the processes belonging to the

As Lacan points out throughout his teaching, Freud has made a truly massive discovery. Cutting through my subjective, intentional, rational and organized speaking there appear irruptive moments in which my Imaginarily organized I breaks down – loses control, if you will – and in which a different ‘voice’ takes over, an unconscious appearance which appears in the time-space of self-consciousness. That is, every now and then – whenever intentionality breaks down, e.g. the famous Freudian *parapraxes* – something speaks through me which necessarily cannot belong *to* me, yet it appears *in* me. But, as one can infer from my account of the subject of the statement versus the subject of the enunciation, unconscious mental activity is only irregularly showing itself, yet it is continuously unfolding and accreting as long as one is a being of language, if only for the fact that one always states and thus is enunciated. Or, there is always a ‘stater’ and a stated, an enunciator and an enunciated. That is, the unconscious functions incessantly but ‘shows up’ irregularly. Hence, the *unconscious*: what Freud calls ‘*unbewusst*’ is neither that which is not readily available by conscious control, nor is it simply that which has vanished from my consciousness, erased from my ‘mental landscape’ if you will. Rather, it is that which irrupts as part and parcel of an organization which does not obey the laws of spatiotemporality and can therefore never be pictured in itself. Yet, it does show up in a pictorially structured space as it ruptures it. Here we have the irregularity of irruption in an otherwise regular space; and, conversely, one can logically deduce the regularity in unconscious organization – that is, its relata without geometrical relations – whilst its appearances can only be observed irregularly. Hence, the human being *must* be endowed with an organized field, a system if you will, which, for lack of a better term, one might call ‘the unconscious,’ because it is logically necessary to postulate. There is necessarily distortion in our observable psychical horizon: our psyches are necessarily bent, warped and twisted. To put it simply, we know that the Freudian

ucs system are: *absence of contradiction, the primary process* (mobility of investments), *timelessness* and *substitution of psychic reality for external reality*” (70, original italics). Some of these characteristics are defining features of relations between relata which are not articulated in time and space such as ‘timelessness,’ but others are, such as the ‘primary process’ as ‘mobility of investment.’

unconscious *as reformulated by Lacan* must exist, for it is logically necessary based on the axiom that, empirically speaking, interruptions of intentionality are constantly witnessed, both in daily life and the clinical setting, not to mention the fact that our perceptions of ourselves and each other are often demonstrably distorted and contorted. By necessity, the hypothetically glassy and private diaphaneity of self-consciousness will always get forcefully yet fleetingly contaminated with appearances ejected from a shared, intersubjective and public space which must be organized yet always remains obscure, that is to say, Other. Many Freudians believe the unconscious to be individual, whilst Jungians view it to be collective; Lacan, however, shows us that it is neither, even though the Jungians really get it backwards: understood properly, the unconscious is “trans-individual” (Chiesa, 41).

Here, things get too complex to fully develop in a single article, yet I do want to extend on the following for a moment. Even though the occurrences of the elements of the unconscious appear necessarily yet contingently, which means that they are neither avoidable nor predictable, the place in which they are bound together – that is, the Other – is organized and thus endowed with inner law-like organizing principles. Even though there is much to say about the purely logical yet non-spatiotemporal organization of language as it has been brilliantly mapped by a number of theorists, for example Roman Jakobson, whose work was later integrated into psychoanalysis by Lacan, fundamentally the Other *is* the Law. It is the Law in its sheer negativity: it is difference as difference without there being entities of which it is their difference. And difference as difference is tantamount to pure interdiction, or interdiction as such (Latin, *inter + dicere*: between + to say; to say in between). Put differently, the (Other as) Law reflects the impossibility of there ever being a purely undifferentiated state of being. Now, Freud’s fundamental discovery has been that even though I speak and, in so doing, display my intentionality, self-control and self-consciousness, I am nonetheless spoken. Yet, this ‘being spoken’ is nothing but being cut, being derailed, being interdicted: being is being only because it is subjected to Difference. I always contradict myself or, perhaps even better, I always contradict my Self. It is not hard to

see that this is something quite different from the usual cliché reading of the Freudian unconscious as a subterranean sphere of the mind – or even worse, an ‘unconscious mind’ – in which all sorts of things happen – usually sexual in nature, of course – to which I simply do not wish to admit. Anyhow, Freud slapped the Western philosophical tradition in the face, in particular those who had exalted the human being to a rational being, by showing philosophy’s Reason to be perhaps not all that rational. Thought, Freud contends, must be split in at least two systems which are necessarily disproportionally related – that is, not integrally disjoined yet incommensurable. The space of the mind is topological in kind, and thus organized, structured and logical; yet, this space is nonetheless bent, warped, twisted and braided. Simply crooked, if you will.

The thesis that the human mind consists of a single space in which there are two divergent, heterogeneous logics operative which then twist this space is radical, not in the least because now there emerges the image of the human being as fundamentally deviated, aberrated and abnormal. Definitely, Freud had already emphasized the perverse character of human sexuality, but its constitutional character has now become even more pronounced, bewildering all moralists: if there is no ‘normality’ then how do you know what is in fact *abnormal*? The answer is that you do not know except for the fact that difference must be inscribed indefinitely: *‘normal’ is that which aspires to meet the norm without ever becoming it.* As early as 1957, Lacan addresses the irrational in Man’s Reason in his seminal text “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason since Freud.” The subtitle says “or Reason since Freud,” meaning that Reason still exists after Freud – one is still ‘endowed’ with it – yet the term must be radically differently conceptualized by forging Freud’s discovery of the necessarily contradictory and thus irrational nature of Man. Put succinctly, not *despite* his irrational constitution but exactly *because* its inevitable irrationality Man is reasonable. Or, everyone has reason to be irrational, which is a contradiction yet true. Drawing it into Lacan’s theory of the subject of the statement and the enunciation, either one is coherent and inconsistent, or incoherent and consistent, that is, either one is lacking in being, castrated

and launched into the Other, which makes one aspire to be what one cannot become. Or, one is lacking in nothing and lives beyond the bounds of socially constituted reality, that is, in psychotic madness.¹⁰

Personally speaking, I find it simply astonishing that, still today, plenty of professional psychoanalysts, who may be both theorists and clinicians, seem to have no clue that the Freudian unconscious *must* be of the order of language, necessarily in and of the Other. And I deliberately say ‘of the order of language’ instead of ‘linguistic,’ because the latter may give the impression that the psychoanalytic unconscious belongs to the field of natural languages, say English or French or German, and that it therefore may be inscribed into the field of linguistics as studied at the universities. This indeed is not the case. But Lacan’s (in)famous dictum ‘The unconscious is structured like a language’ says not without reason ‘*like* a language’; that is, the unconscious is structured as if it were a language. In addition, the word ‘language’ does not refer to the existence of the singular plurality of natural languages spoken on earth; instead, it refers to artificial language as it is the singularly singular, that is, as the automatically proliferating and anonymously unfolding ‘language’ which knows no grammatical exceptions yet is omnipresent in everything which displays organization. Hence, Freud’s unconscious belongs to the field of cybernetics.

Moreover, the Freudian unconscious has no being; it merely exists, meaning that it sheerly operates at the level of Symbolic articulation; it does not refer to or include some postulated ultimate Reality or anything of the sort. Still, its existence is necessary, that is, necessary for all of those who speak, those who as Heidegger puts it ‘dwell in language,’ meaning all members of the human race.¹¹ The Freudian unconscious, thus, is truly universal. Even though it goes beyond the scope of this article to fully address the intricacies

¹⁰ See for an introductory and very readable clinical account of the differences between the Lacanian nosographic structures of neurosis, perversion and psychoses and their clinical treatment, Bruce Fink’s *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique* (1997).

¹¹ Or, to be more precise, all members of the human race minus those who are psychotic, those who have not come to be subjects of language by being subjected to the Law of language. See Fink (1997) for psychotic structure as the universal exception to the Other.

of the Oedipus complex, I must make mention of the fact that Freud's claim regarding the universality of this complex must be true, too. As stated above, lack and loss have, must and will be instated, necessarily so, because limitation cannot be bypassed or overcome. As long as one is a being of language, there is limitation, and if there is limitation then there must a principle which causes it, which instates it. At a minimal level, the Oedipus complex – notice that it is a veritable complex instead of a simplex as it is turned into by many banal and simplistic accounts of it – refers, it seems to me, to the necessary and ineluctable instantiation of loss.¹² By way of example, after the first time a new-born baby is fed its need for food will be satisfied for a certain amount of time. However, not only does the fact that the infant's need for food will reemerge mark (the future of) its oedipalization – it is, after all, a biological fact that humans are born in a state of pure helplessness which continues for years and which makes it completely dependent on others, that is, adults – but it also, very importantly, points to the infant being caught in a stalemate: the infant is now endowed with a memory, however slight or rudimentary, of a satisfaction which is solely premised on its mother providing food – that is, the mother chose to feed her infant intentionally and thus

¹² For a book-length study on the complexities of psychoanalysis (including the Oedipus complex) as it potentially collides, modifies, interrogates and harmonizes with contemporary intellectual culture, science and technology such as cyberspace, see Jerry Aline Flieger's *Is Oedipus Online?: Siting Freud after Freud* (2005). Flieger's account of the knot-like, bent, warped, twisted, braided and non-linear structure of the psychoanalytic field – Lacan's 'Freudian Field' – and its analogues in science and philosophy is a truly original text in Lacanian scholarship, in addition to being rigorous in clarifying the technicalities involved in the constitution of its counterintuitive – and therefore more often than not totally misunderstood – character. In a private conversation between Flieger and myself in Vienna in 2019 Flieger told me that may we be interested in finding the right 'box' for Lacan, a 'school' or 'movement' other than the obvious psychoanalytic one. Formalism is the best option, not Structuralism or Post-Structuralism. It is hard to find the right 'label' for Lacan, but Formalism comes very close indeed. In any case, Flieger's remark illustrates that scholars are simply wrong when they say that Lacan is a typical French Structuralist or Post-Structuralist, for, among other things, Lacan retains the notion of the subject. Lacan, moreover, was averse to fashions and fads, and 'French Theory' has become exactly that. Formalism, by definition, is not yet another fad as it should be taken to refer to a theoretical tradition of Western thought going back to at least Plato's 'Theory of Forms.' For Lacan, Form means Logos and Logos means Form, in the broadest sense of this Greek word: Logos refers to one's ground, fundament, reason, argument, logic, language, discourse, collection, reason, placeholder, container, law etc. In other words, Form is that which is formal, forming and formative and will contain that which is informal, formed, formatted, deformed, reformed, informed etc. It is what Lacan compresses in the concept of 'the Other': the incomplete set of differentials whose elements by being organized will express that which may be conceived. That is, solely that which can be contained can be conceived and for this one needs the container. In fact, the container will be the conceiver of the conceived, so to speak; or, the signifier generates the signified, as Lacan abundantly shows throughout his teaching.

contingently. In other words, the infant is necessarily endowed with a memory (trace) of a satisfaction provided by a maternal object who, by definition, cannot be controlled, dominated or predicted yet also cannot be avoided, dismissed or circumvented, for the simple yet stone-cold fact that the infant is helpless. Hence, the Oedipus complex expresses the necessity, ineluctability and irrevocability of stalemate, contradiction or aporia. In one word: castration.

It should come as no surprise that mainstream, academically institutionalized psychology is more often than not hostile towards psychoanalysis and, to a lesser degree, psychoanalytically oriented psychotherapy.¹³ Not only is psychology's demonstrable banalizing and caricaturizing of central psychoanalytic notions, processes and mechanisms obvious – sometimes so much so that it almost becomes embarrassing to respond, if not simply for the reason that to respond is to acknowledge – but also perfectly explicable. Here again, by way of example, the notion of the unconscious. As is clear by now, the Freudian unconscious belongs to the register of language which must exist yet cannot but virtually subsist in its appearance as part of the Imaginary. But its organization and structure is not virtual in kind, making the unconscious necessarily 'unthinkable,' unrepresentable and ineffable. This, however, does not mean that it is not efficacious (Freud's *Wirkungen*): the unconscious *is* only the moment it is palpable, felt or undergone if you will, thus making it something which works without being contained, whether Imaginarily and pictorially or

¹³ Solely the fact that the American Psychiatric Association has recognized so-called TFP (Transference-Focused Psychotherapy), developed by world-renowned psychoanalyst and psychiatrist, Otto Kernberg, as sufficiently empirically tested in order for it to be 'canonized,' if you will, and put on the list of valid and feasible psychotherapies, whilst, at the same time, denials of both the truth and the efficacy of psychoanalytically oriented psychotherapies keep resounding in academia points to deeply ideological rifts in the world of psychology and psychiatry. Also, it flat-out undermines the standard of 'empirically tested = 'good' or 'right' or 'true.' How come that the facts – empirical facts, that is – are denied when by their own standards 'facts never lie'? Yet another demonstration, in my view, of the irrational nature of human thought as described above. The proven empirical validity yet ongoing 'unacceptability' ascribed to psychoanalysis (and its psychotherapeutic derivatives) applies to more than simply TFP; it also applies to MBT (Mentalization-Based Therapy) and others. Lacan, nonetheless, would have problems with these psychotherapies, not in the least since they are derivatives of Kleinian analysis, which is very powerful yet also too much caught up in the Imaginary, too much virtual and thus too psychological and too little psychoanalytic. In addition, to Lacan's mind, the 'psychologization' of psychoanalysis is a problem, for psychology objectifies the subject, which by definition is very suspect, to say the least, as my remarks on the subject of the statement and the enunciation above illustrate. Also, think here of Immanuel Kant who in his third critique, *The Critique of Judgement* (1790), very powerfully argues that it is epistemologically untenable to objectify the subject, even more so because it is, ethically speaking, irresponsible.

Symbolically and descriptively. It simply irrupts. Mainstream psychology, it seems to me, is solely interested in the geometricity of the human mind reduced, on the one hand, to consciousness or that which is potentially conscious (Freud's 'conscious/pre-conscious') and, on the other hand, the individual's actual observable behaviors, which are obviously observed in space and time. And if the psychologist admits to there being an unconscious, it is simply a neuronal unconscious.¹⁴ Yet, distorted and obfuscated *moments* in consciousness are rationalized away by denying that they are caused by partialities which are a-chronologically and a-spatially *organized*. Here one encounters a bias of the positive, empirical, applied sciences: if it appears without my being able to observe an underlying principle, law etc. with which that which appears is explicable (and predictable) in appearing, then either it cannot be or it must theoretically be negligible since entirely un-organized, which would make it pertain to pure randomness or sheer chaos. This is demonstrably false. But in order to explain this I need to turn to Lacan's Real, the third register.

At the risk of stating the obvious, the Real as Lacan theorizes it is so intricate, so hard to grasp – if at all – and has so many connections, implications, derivations, departures and ramifications that providing a summary of it would be very meagre, at best. Hence, I will focus on the Real solely as it is implicated in my account of the Imaginary and the Symbolic as described above, that is, as it relates to the notion of the Lacanian subject. As I have stated, the typical neuroscientist's belief that may the truth of the subject be discovered – by the application of the scientific method – it will be found in the brain, somewhere intrinsic or reducible to 'gray matter.' The fact that the neurosciences presuppose the brain to be the potential yet sole locus of the truth of the subject – for the simple reason that it cannot be somewhere else, allegedly – is already an admission of a tainted demarcation: due to the obvious fact that there is no life without the brain concomitant with the fact that undoubtedly

¹⁴ See Žižek's response to cognitivism in his already mentioned *Less than Nothing* (2012) and *Lost in Cognition: Psychoanalysis and the Cognitive Sciences* (2014) by Eric Laurent. Both accounts are very convincing in their unveiling of biases, loop-holes and self-refuting logic underlying cognitivism.

brain scans and other instruments used for scientific research show brain activity, functioning and so forth, it is assumed that if there is something real about the human being, it must be the brain or, in any case, situated in the brain. Here the neuroscientists confound the notion of a necessary precondition – the brain *must* be present in order for a human being to exist – with the notion of causation. As briefly mentioned, Lacan flat-out rejects the truth of the human being ever to be discoverable ‘in the flesh’ or, even worse, in the brain, exactly for the reason that cause and locus, cause and precondition, cause and rooting and even cause and causation should not be confused. Practically speaking, for Lacan, one thinks with the body, not simply with the brain, but only as this body has been usurped into language. The body, that is to say, is gradually ‘taken up,’ usurped by the Other, turning its purely organic being – its organicist circular causality – into an object subjected to the order of language, to the order of differential organization, turning it into an entity which is neither natural nor unnatural but, rather, *a-natural*. I will go through this crucial line of Lacan’s thought step by step.

There is a simple yet extraordinarily important biological fact: the human being is born prematurely. As briefly stated above, the human being comes into the world entirely dependent on others, the primordial Other, be it the biological parent(s) or some substitute caretaker(s). For years, an infant cannot take care of its own needs, cannot satisfy, regulate or control its own innate and unavoidable neediness; it needs food, it needs protection, it needs hygienic care and so forth. Since these needs are inextricably related to its survival, the infant does not merely depend on others, it solely survives if its environment responds adequately to its needs, thus making the infant completely helpless. At the first stages of life, thus, the infant is totally overpowered by the Other; the Other eclipses the infant (Freud’s *Hilflosigkeit*). For psychoanalysis, the emphasis is less on the infant’s helplessness as such than on the fact that the infant’s needs must be met by agents in the child’s environment. That is to say, because the infant inescapably depends on adults, its bodily needs necessarily face their continual interpretation by caretakers, meaning the Other. By the Other responding to the infant’s needs, they are *framed* and in being framed they get *formed*. But I

should add that 'interpretation' is to be taken without its usual hermeneutic circularity; it concerns cutting across the flow of life which *is* the infant. Interruptive acts – that is, interdiction – of infantile neediness punctuates its flow and thus *reforms its quasi-formlessness into a proper form*. For example, the rhythm with which the Other comes and goes, the temporal intervals of feeding, the temperature in which the infant is fed, the rhythm of sustained eye contact between the infant and the Other and so forth. These rhythms will create expectations, habits, rigidities, flexibilities and changes in the infant's 'life world,' and may even bring about changes in its reactivity as such. So, impulsive reactivity becomes organized regularity. If a child, for example, comes to know that crying loudly results in additional feeding, then it may start to utilize its capacity of crying as a means to obtain the food. Thus, the first step towards subjectivity is the infant's 'storing' of the way in which it is cared for, whether good or bad or both. There develops, in other words, a rudimentary form of containment: the infant's gradually developing body 'memorizes' and thus stores the way in which its needs are attended to, the way in which its needs are met. The insistent pulse of the sheerly organic infantile body is being gradually but lastingly alienated in the Other, in its language concomitant with its cutting and slashing. Thus, the Other starts to contain the infant, if you will. The Other will gradually encapsulate it.

In order to contain anything one needs containers and this is where the materiality of language enters. Importantly, contrary to what widespread misunderstandings suggest, Lacan has never been an obedient follower of Ferdinand de Saussure's signifiers, signifieds and signs as initially theorized by Saussure himself. Instead, Lacan warps, bends and turns Saussure's semiotics inside out so it is no longer a semiotics but rather a theory of the signifier. That is to say, Lacan subverts Saussure's model, not in order to show that it would be incorrect, but much rather for it to be re-made correctly. As Ragland correctly points out, Lacan reinvented Saussure's semiotic paradigm (Ragland, 196) and a lack of awareness of Lacan's transformation of Saussurianism severely impinges on one's understanding of Lacanian theory. It would go beyond the bounds of a single article to spell out what this

transformation entails, but, for now, it suffices to say that Lacan's notion of the signifier deviates very considerably from Saussure's. Put succinctly, for Lacan, signifiers are containers formed by the efficacy of acts performed, they function as the encapsulated imprints of acts engraved onto and into the body. In addition, the signifier as a potential bearer of meaning and signification is, at least partially, due to it being a vehicle onto which value can be assigned. Signifiers have very sharp edges: they cut as knives do.¹⁵ For example, the framing of the infant's needs by the Other's actions as elicited from these needs' insistent expression leads to their gradual containment. Slowly but surely, the chaotic and impulsive reactivity of the infant's body – Freud's polymorphously perverse infantile body – gets organized. Thus, the body gets 'signifierized'; the body gets 'linguistified,' both the surface and the insides of it. Equally if not more important, the body gets 'cut up,' that is, divided and sub-divided and sub-sub-divided and so forth. In other words – and I find it striking that the literature on Lacan seems to overlook this – in the process of the body being formed by the continual insistence of bodily needs being addressed to the Other, the infantile body gets warped, gets thrown out of balance, gets botched. The body is 'attacked' by language, or to be more precise, the body is assailed by the efficacy of the signifier. There is

¹⁵ If there ever was a concept that Lacan diligently defined, redefined and refined throughout the many years of his teaching, it is the concept of the signifier. Hence, it is very striking (and alarming) that in plenty of academic commentaries on Lacanian theory one encounters the concept of the signifier either diluted to such a degree that it does no justice to Lacan's conceptualization, or simply turned into something that it does not mean. By way of example, plenty of academics seem to think that Lacan's 'signifier' is merely another word for 'word.' This is false. Lacan's definition of the signifier compresses a spectrum of principles, procedures and logical operations intrinsic to whatever organization, that is, the field of language. To name just a few: signifiers are the differentials, from phonemic up to sentential level, which get grouped into supraordinate hierarchical organizations; signifiers are the vehicles of the assignation of value (both libidinal and societal); signifiers are ciphers in the mathematical and linguistic sense of the word, e.g. the relevance of coding/decoding versus ciphering/deciphering as they relate to the powers and limits of interpretation; signifiers are the generators of signifieds, i.e. form produces that which is formed; signifiers are the body as it is gradually socialized and mastered and thus contained; signifiers embody the dialectic between speaking as acting and acting as speaking, that is, performativity; signifiers are causes for effects which, in turn, might become causes for yet other effects; signifiers are the amalgamation of letters; the signifier is the translation of what Freud calls *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*. And sometimes Lacan even uses the term 'signifier' to denote the entirety of possibilities of oppositional arrangements of linguistic units a given language allows for, the so-called 'combinatory.' One can readily see that this is no straightforward Saussurianism any longer. Hence, I claim that even though Lacan appropriates the language of Saussure, he is not all that Saussurian, if you will, at least not in the naïve sense. Lacan, in other words, goes far beyond Saussure.

put pressure on and into the body, gradually abstracting it, leaving it scarred and wounded. Thus, language hurts. Language colonizes (Latin, *colere*: to cultivate, to till).

In a next moment – and these moments are logical rather than chronological – these (already partially transformed since framed) needs will be deployed to reap more than simply their satisfaction: there emerges the demand for recognition of these incrementally stored and thus ‘signifierized’ needs. As the bodily functions get organized and integrated, there emerges the demand for recognition. Whilst the infant’s body is getting organized its purely organic bodily existence transforms into an entity with more or less cohesive zones of visibility: the infant’s needs become deployment of the demand for love. Thus, the body is impalpably *becoming* a signifier – and, again, this is not about words, but about series of effects coagulating into containers which homogenize, diversify, cut up and glue back together that which once was sheerly physical, sheerly organic. It is as if the infant were saying, “I needed milk simply in order to survive, but now I need you to give me the milk, because I demand to know whether you think I am worthy to be surviving!” Everyone knows that children are demanding and in their demandingness they ask for assent, attention and acknowledgement, that is, the assignation of value. They demand to be ciphered as worthy. As their symbolic existence accrues, in other words, their appeal to the Other intensifies.

The transition from sheerly organic ‘bodiliness’ to the symbolically ratified virtuality of corporeality is truly a *trans-formation*; it reflects the gradual entanglement of the Imaginary and the Symbolic as cut through by the Real but also as cutting through the Real. The infant’s neediness is Real, that is, biologically determined and can never be skirted or circumvented. This fact concomitant with another rock-hard biological fact, which is the infant’s profound and long-lasting helplessness, produces the virtuality of the demand for attention, visibility, value and recognition: the demand for love. This demand is object-related, meaning that it entails an act of address – and, as I already pointed out, object-relatedness is part of the spectrum of phenomena inscribed into the register of the Imaginary. Yet, this space of the virtual is by definition lacking in ontology, lacking in ‘fullness’ and thus

incomplete. Metaphorically and literally speaking, I am close and distant to others; I am always alone whilst with others, yet always also with others when alone. The interiority of my mental world is private – I can never share my experiences in a direct one-to-one fashion with others and vice versa – yet this very interiority is also inhabited and populated with the representations of others and our mutual relation. That is, my mind as it can be *perceived* by me stretches as far as the Imaginary stretches, yet I can never contain anything for which I do not have a container; a non-fitting or non-existent container will not or not sufficiently contain. Thus, I ‘make’ knowledge, generate it, by the efficacy of the ‘blows’ of the Other’s signifiers. To know is to be wounded. There is, thus, knowledge without it being perceived as such: even though I can look from a distance at what there is contained in my intrapsychic world due to my *self*-consciousness, I cannot ever perceive the exteriority of form in which all of that is contained, that is to say, its containers. I can only behold that which is contained, yet I am nonetheless implicated in this very containment, thus barring me from ever directly envisaging pure containers. Thus, the Symbolic stretches over the Imaginary – frames it from all sides imaginable – which ranges from the (dis)approval of demandingness to the endosomatic and exosomatic transformative ‘colonization’ by way of subjugation to the efficacy of the signifier, which, in turn, turns the body into exactly just that: a signifier. But the organization of the Symbolic is necessarily partially ‘out of sight’; that is, structured and organized non-spatiotemporally yet efficacious in its bending of geometricity. Thus, I cannot *look into* my own body for the obvious reason that I can only see (a part of) the surface, but even if I could, I would solely see yet more surfaces. Thus, I cannot *know* what is going on inside the body, for the reason that it has knowledge which is not of a geometrical kind, that is, the body ‘knows’ by way of topological organization. Infinitely dense yet infinitely wide, the topological is ‘inside’ the nervous system all the way up to society as such, hence Other. I am nothing and everything at once.

Bodily knowledge and ‘mental knowledge’ are heterogeneous. The knowledge I potentially have *about* my body is necessarily not *in* my body; it is solely knowledge *of* my body

regarding my body. There is, in other words, knowledge of which I myself, at the level of my consciousness, am necessarily not aware. Yet, I do 'feel' it; it appears and then reverberates. That is, I am nonetheless subjected to its efficacy. The knowledge is at the level of pure 'thingness,' at the level of presentation rather than representation. Freud, thus, correctly asserts the unconscious to have as its 'content' thing-presentations (*Sachvorstellungen*) and no word-presentations (*Wordvorstellungen*). These thing-presentations are, in fact, the scars of castration, the leftovers. Lacan calls these scars 'letters' (Ragland, 164): the indelible slashes onto the body that will organize into signifiers in order to usurp that which resists (total) usurpation, that is, the body can never be totally symbolized. Weaning, for example, leaves an infant inextricably endowed with pain and pleasure: the nipple which was pressed into the mouth has left its markers which gradually form a container – signifier, that is – in which there is contained the enjoyment of warmth, attention, being fed and so forth yet, at the same time, it reeks of a caretaker who has left by now, abandoned the infant and by definition catered too little for its unquenchable demand. Thus, 'corporeality' is a very felicitous word. The reality of the *corpus*: a knowledge of bodily kind which is neither accessible to my consciousness, nor to be explained away by relegating it to the sheerly organic. To cut a long story short, here one has the insistence of a knowledge of which in the end no one is knowledgeable. Hence, unconscious.

Now, it turns out that Freud was on the right path when he postulated his drive theory in which the drives (*Triebe*) are presentations which are neither inside the body as such, that is, sheer nature, nor merely psychical, meaning of pure virtuality. Freud, that is, correctly claims the drives to be of the order of both the *soma* and the *psyche* simultaneously. Neither organicist in a circular movement of a whole, nor geometrical in its necessary partiality of a whole or necessary wholeness of a partiality, the unconscious is indeed structured like a(n) (artificial) language. Our bodies collide with the Other, turning life as such into life as beset by language; our bodily experience entails life as entered by and transformed into the *logic of life* (Greek, *bios + logos*: life + logic/language etc.; the logic of life). Put differently, circular

causality has been transformed into topologically warped half-space since attacked by an exteriority which has already undergone the same fate, meaning the Other. One always gets hurt, even more so when one denies it, because those who care (for a child) can never provide enough love, never enough recognition and assent; the demand for love is veritably unquenchable. For example, there is no way to be a good mother, indeed, at best, she is solely 'good enough' as Winnicott pointed out, despite all good intentions. Another example, it is striking that pathologically narcissistic people may have been ornated with goods, money and other shiny objects as children. But nothing can buy love, and this may very well be the cause of the narcissist's inflated ego – that is, his monstrous alienation in virtual geometricity. Literally and metaphorically, the narcissist wants to be on top, loudly claiming to be victor or just as loudly claiming to be victim. His pathological grandiose ego has come to be the site in which the exteriority of standard, norm and law has been usurped. According to himself, the narcissist does not need to admit to being subjected to standard, norm and law since he *is* the standard, norm and law. In a sense, the narcissist's mind does not display the warped but very necessary topological structure of non-pathologically narcissistic persons: there is far too much ego and far too little super-ego, or in the case of full-blown psychopathy no super-ego at all. There is geometricity without the Symbolic properly intersecting it, leading the narcissist to illusorily believe that social relations do not matter; for the narcissist, social space is solely there to conquer others. Veritably animalistic, a psychopathic predator lives at the crossroads of the Imaginary and the Real as do animals. The Symbolic is still there, of course, but solely utilized so as to pretend to be what he cannot be: an ethical human being. He cannot experience love, kindness, altruism, friendship, loyalty or solidarity; he solely experiences sexual lust and aggression, imagistic boasting and violent attacking. In biblical terms: The Beast. There is nothing sincere about the extreme narcissist; he will spill vulgar moralisms so as to mask the absence of a genuine Ethics.

In 1964, Lacan writes in "Position of the Unconscious" that "[t]he effect of language is to introduce the cause into the subject. Through this effect, he is not the cause of himself; he

bears within himself the worm of the cause that splits him. For his cause is the signifier, without which there would be no subject in the real” (708). The infant as demanding of the Other, as lacking in *rappor*t with this very infantile demandingness, produces *some-thing* which fits neither infant nor Other: a subject taken as an object in its infinite indeterminacy. In Lacanian terminology: *objet a*. The cause-of-desire is that which elicits, ignites, blazes and sustains a subject with at least *some kind* of being. A subject, that is, of paradoxical ‘objectness’ which is neither moral nor immoral but a-moral, literally: not of the order of societal *mores*. One deals here with an avatar of infinity as it is produced by finitude; there being a limit posited demarcates the space of the possible, the acceptable, the allowable, the thinkable and so forth, which, in turn, necessarily produces the virtuality of the unacceptable, unallowable, unthinkable, unquenchable and uncontainable: the Real of the Impossible is the Real of *jouissance*. The *objet a* is veritably *a-tomic* (Greek, *a + tomos*: not + a cutting; not to cut; not to divide; indivisible) since nothing ‘fits’ its non-identity and namelessness; it is empty since indescribable, unanalyzable, undecomposable and indestructible, yet also irreducible to zero, making it, finally, purely privately experienced yet effectuated by the veritably anonymous sphere called the Other.

Referring back to the Oedipus Complex briefly mentioned above, Freud had good reason to develop his theories regarding incest and the incest-taboo. Nothing like the banal reading – misreading, that is – of Freud as having said that boys want to have sex with their mothers and girls with their fathers, Lacan shows that Freud has something very different in mind: our infantile needs must be satisfied by the Other, which by framing them forms them and, finally, deforms them exactly as the Other’s demandingness of the infant is specularly yet distortedly mirroring the infant’s innate reactivity turned into virtual demand, not to mention the fact that the Other has its own history of having been warped, bent, knotted and contorted itself. The sex act in adult life embodies the demand for love in the form of pleasure in the hope to stave off the lethality of pure *jouissance*. Indeed, the sex act is an evasion of incest rather than its affirmation; in the sex act one attempts to circumvent the fall into ‘undifferentiatedness,’ so to

speak, they fall into a state of *in-cest*. But the Real hole in whatever assumed totality or whole can never be filled, not in the least because there never was such a thing as the Whole in the first place. And there will never be. In other words: God *is* not, but this very fact lets Him necessarily virtually *subsist*, because to *exist* is to be of language, and to be of language is to be of a lacking Other who causes one's desire, quickly turning satisfactions into repetitions and compulsions, making one cling to the painful, or as Ragland puts it throughout her book, cling to pieces of death. That is to say, one has already died but only to have returned in the *form of the Word* as one was *formed by the Word*. The Bible says that the Word became Flesh; Lacan claims that the Flesh became Word.

III

Whatever we may have learnt from reading the classics we need now in order to judge the work of our contemporaries, for whenever there is life in them they will be casting their net out over some unknown abyss to snare new shapes, and we must throw our imaginations after them if we are to accept with understanding the strange gifts they bring back to us.¹⁶

Though she could not be called an optimist, she had, very profoundly, the conviction that mind is in action against matter, and is winning new footholds in the Void.¹⁷

As I stated in the introduction, the Lacanian subject is empty, the reason being its profoundly contradictory 'nature': the subject needs to be posited but one cannot attribute any positive substance to it. Nor can the subject be defined in its relation(s) to other terms, for example as a unit to which a predicate applies. So, the Lacanian subject is articulated in opposition to academic theories of the subject, be they philosophical, linguistic, or scientific

¹⁶ Taken from Virginia Woolf's essay "Hours in the Library" (1916).

¹⁷ Taken from E.M. Forster's *Virginia Woolf* (1941).

stricto sensu, yet this opposition does not imply a full disjunction. By attributing positive substance to the subject, however much reduced, the academic disciplines leave the door open to a possible ontology of the subject. Important to add here is that it is not so much about whether academics and scientists actively extrapolate an ontology from their respective research fields, but far more about the fact that due to their inability to provide an atomic definition of the subject, there will always be the temptation to slip into ontologizing the subject, if not actively than at least passively. Unwarranted and illegitimate claims about our essences are quick to be extracted from scientific research, despite perhaps the best of intentions. Seen in the light of Lacan's Imaginary, it is not hard to see why this is a problem: the academic disciplines remain susceptible to deducing wholes from partialities, meaning that they will easily slip into phantasmatic answers to the questions of the human being's being. And we can observe the consequences. For example, in the 1990's – the widely advertised so-called 'decade of the brain' – one could not open up a newspaper without encountering yet another article about neuroscientists allegedly being close to 'unravelling the mystery' of human consciousness or even human life itself. We were often told to have a little patience, but within one or, at best, two decades we would be given the definite answer to the question of what a human being actually is. Now, more than two decades later: silence. Triumphalist talk turned out to be masking yet another illusion, yet another fantasy. Lacan would, I suspect, agree with Karl Marx on this point: we are not given a properly scientific, or even a rational, account of the human being but, rather, a chunk of ideology, in the pejorative sense of the word, in the way in which Marx himself understood the term: false consciousness.

For Lacan, the academic disciplines do three things which make them commensurate, that is, which make them have a shared measure and thus display a proportionality, in so doing maintaining a relationship. First, they objectify the subject; second, they inscribe positivity into the subject (or, retain the possibility of the subject's 'ontologization') concomitant with defining it relationally to other terms; third, they provide reductionist

accounts of the subject, being both positive and compound in kind. For Lacan, this is a bad idea, to say the least: it is self-refuting. The academic accounts of the subject are phantasmatic rather than properly scientific; they cannot live up to their pretension of veritably being scientific. Based on the aforementioned account of Lacan's view, I will outline the main reasons for this being so.

In linguistics a subject is that to which a predicate applies. Because this relation is articulated in Imaginary specular space (subject + predicate + their relation of application/congruence etc.), the problem is that linguists simply assume that subject and predicate 'fit,' that their difference in spatiotemporal position will not affect their equality. Yet, it does. They cannot conform, because all distance between relata in space-time make such relata unequal, unsymmetrical. In conjunction with the proposition that a subject *is* that to which a predicate applies a non-sequitur emerges. The application of a predicate cannot ever be the subject's minimum for the reason that this would require the symmetrization of both poles, the subject and the predicate would fuse or, in principle, be fusible. And if not fusible, than at least fully complementary. And this cannot ever be Realized. For Lacan, moreover, reducing the subject to some material substrate, as some influential schools in linguistics propose, is unacceptable. It is simply scientism. Chomskyan linguistics is exemplary here. The human being, according to Chomsky, is innately endowed with algorithmic structures which are causally related to the generation of grammatically correct sentences; allegedly, that is, there would exist such a thing as a Universal Grammar. Yet, subject and object require different logical organizations, thus making Chomsky's innate hypothesis very suspect, if not downright false, since speech and the brain cannot be put on the same plane. But, in addition, what about grammatically incorrect locutions, in the broadest sense of the word, from experimental poetry to patients fumbling and stumbling to find words for their suffering? They surely are produced, are they not? And they need a cause, too, for the simple reason that such expressions (and their failures) are produced all the time, making the sole fact of their existence require an explanation. But Chomsky

explains them away by not taking them into account: “[b]y evoking a Platonic notion of an ideal speaker-listener in a homogeneous speech-community, Chomsky and other cognitionists in his wake have relied on hypothesized perfect language conditions to account for the imperfect body of language” (Ragland, 193). Lacan would say that Chomskyans have already showed us their cards, yet they Imaginarily misrecognize that they have done so. The grammatically incorrect locutions have a cause, *object a*, but since Chomsky has assumed it was safe to expel them *a priori* by dismissing the moment when speaking agents fail or create, he is barred from seeing that one cannot generate a definite answer to the riddle of the Other, where the Other comes from and what the Other wants. The reductionism involved seems to be a mistake, too: the fact that there is a ‘jump,’ a boundary between the materiality of the flesh and the forming, reforming, deforming efficacy of the word, remains entirely unexplained. But explanation is impossible, because to *ex-plain* is to find a cause and the norm in the applied sciences is to exclude that which does not fit the norm, that is, explanation is foreclosed when one does not raise the question of the cause of (the deviation of) the norm. No wonder that Lacan claims that the modern sciences are increasingly unable to think the category of Cause: all properly scientific answers are indefinite, because all questions are determined by their question mark, showing their essentially indeterminate character. To inscribe language into biology is tantamount to foolishly trying to domesticate or tame that which will not be domesticated or tamed: the Other.¹⁸

Modern philosophy since Descartes takes the allegedly coherent and consistent subject as its object and its ontological fundament, which has been important historically but erroneous theoretically. Yet, this error was necessary for the truth of the subject to emerge:

¹⁸ For the sake of clarity, I do not claim that all theorists from the Anglophone world get it backwards. Bertrand Russell, for example, concurs with the thesis that it is impossible to merge or collapse the subject and object. For Russell, the poles of the subject-object dichotomy are heterogeneous to one another, not because they would differ in their ‘stuff,’ that is, in the rudimentary building blocks of which they are made but, rather, because they are differently organized. See Russell’s *The Analysis of Mind* (1921). Even though Lacan is critical of Russell’s theory of mind as having been formed with “radically mechanistic inspiration” (Lacan 1966 [1945], 149), Lacan would nonetheless concur with Russell’s assertion that subject and object *must* be heterogeneous to one another, for the reason that, as Russell claims, this is sufficiently shown to be true in the work of Freud, William James, Albert Einstein and others.

either one is coherent and inconsistent, or one is consistent and incoherent. And, as I have stated above, the speaking subject cannot ever be taken as the subject spoken of; they must be logically unequal and thus there must be difference, both between their respective systems of organization and as the difference between these differing systems, that is, difference as such. To cut a long story short, Descartes loses himself in the geometricity of the Imaginary which he assumes to be balanced, calibrated and symmetrical. Lacan has clearly observed Descartes' error, yet he is nonetheless happy to converse with Descartes, not least because the Cartesian moment in philosophy has been necessary for psychoanalysis; it constituted the intellectual background in which psychoanalysis could emerge and from which, simultaneously, psychoanalysis had to segregate itself.

But the reductionist variants of the neurosciences take a truly silly view: if we are our brain, or reducible to our brain, then it must be explained at what level of atomization neuroscientists stop reducing, at what level their ontological minimum is reached. And neuroscientists cannot get away with saying that they do not indulge in such things as ontology, for the reason that they demonstrably inscribe positive substance into the subject, even if on a minimal level, thus opening the door to questions concerning the being of the human being, or human being's being. Moreover, the neurosciences pretend to find atomicity of the subject – the subject's minimum – exactly there where they do not wish to further their atomization. They take, that is, complex systems such as neuronal circuitry as the subject's minimum, which is by definition no minimum since compound. And even if they would continue to atomize, then they would always necessarily create a left-over, however virtual, meaning a cause of their desire to go even further in their atomization, which by definition cannot ever reach its final destination. In addition – and perhaps most importantly – their reasoning displays a linear determinist causality, which entirely overlooks the symbolically framed images and imaginarily 'filled' signifiers as having become cause for the body's (de)formation, as they will continue to be as they have pressed onto the body and will keep pressing into it as they contain it.

Thus, if linguistics, philosophy and the neurosciences claim to justifiably make reductionist statements regarding the ontology of the subject whilst offering no *atomic* minimum, then, at best, they count a complex as a simplex which is tantamount to virtual alienation in the Imaginary. The belief that the subject is reflected in the partiality of grammar, thought or brain means to be lost in the partiality of the Imaginary. Lacan would say that these theorists and scientists – most certainly when they are firm in their message, often appearing quite loudly in newspapers, mass-media and, of course, as writers of their popular science books – disseminate a fantasy, not in the least because they all dismiss and overlook – repress, that is – the Other's desire, the Real but atomic opening in the Other, which tells us that body and mind have only been made possible by alienation by and in the Other. In short, that is: the Forms of the signifier. And Lacan insists on yet another issue: the Other precedes, succeeds and supersedes whatever individual body, brain and being. Even if it were true that the subject is innately determined to say, do and be what it is – if 'to be' can be defined at all – then, still, we would have come to know this because of language, because of the signifier making it possible to contain knowledge, generate knowledge and transmit knowledge amongst the members of a scientific community. No language, no society; and no society, no science; obvious as that is, there seems to be a massive denial on the side of the applied sciences to admit to this. As is often the case, psychoanalysis points to that which perhaps we already knew, yet were not ready to recognize, let alone willing to acknowledge; already cognized, that is, yet not recognized and thus not subjectified. In other words: unconscious. Lacan taught that science and Truth need to be distinguished, because if not, one becomes unreasonable, literally: those who do not see that the Truth of the sciences is that they cannot be totalized – and thus cannot ever give us more than tentative and partial answers – will end up denying what cannot be denied: one is a being of and in language and to deny this is tantamount to being utterly *illogical*. And to be illogical is to be cut out of logic – outside the space of Logos – and this is veritably an *ill-conceived* idea, not in the least for the simple fact that such an idea could not exist, at best solely subsist; it would be a signified without

there being a signifier; it would be something formed without there being anything forming and formative, without there being anything of its formal support. Indeed, an idea which is senseless, having neither rhyme nor Reason.

Lacan's brilliance lies in his ability to think the subject devoid of Imaginary virtuality and Symbolic semblance. Its contradictory nature resists the attribution of any positive substance or relationality. The Lacanian subject, that is to say, is a container in which there is nothing contained, an expression without it containing a conception, an inscription without there being anything inscribed; or, in Lacan's terminology: a signifier without a signified. *The Lacanian subject, in other words, is purely formal in the sense of a pure Form.* Little wonder that Lacan was an avid reader of the German Transcendental Idealists. Kant says that life as life, that is to say, life as such, life understood on a minimal level is something about which no one knows anything, scientist's even less than anyone else, for the object as such (*Das Ding an Sich*) is beyond the mental capacities of the human being. And this makes sense: why do scientists – again, not all yet far too many – simply assume that they can unravel 'the mystery of life' by looking well enough through a microscope that is powerful enough? Is the endlessly increasing atomization as witnessed in the applied sciences – and worse than those who look through their microscope are those who look into their DSM manual – not tantamount to admitting that they have no idea what it is they are looking for? In a sense – and Lacan was no stranger to irony – by infinitely dividing and subdividing, cutting and filleting, hoping to encounter the 'enigma of life' by ever-increasing labelling and categorizing, scientists may very well discover it or, even better, may very well have already discovered it: they do not *know* what it is they are *looking* for, because they cannot bear to *experience* it. That is, they cannot Imaginarily conceive what they already Symbolically know as it comes out in the puzzlingly contorted contradiction of the pleasure of doing science and the pain of not finding what you thought you would find, in short: *jouissance*. They are looking to fill up the Void of the unpredictable yet unavoidable, thus trying to avoid the predictable, which is Really impossible: Death.

For Lacan, the psychoanalytic subject can only momentarily irrupt in the *space* of a ruptured Imaginary screen and *is placed* as a rupturing Symbolic thought which then *shows* to refer to the immediate and unmediated Real Void in the guise of impossible *jouissance*. Where gaps, cracks, holes, inconsistencies, aporias, contradictions, ambivalences and doubts show up in language, identity, perception and (self-)consciousness there is discontinuity; a Real opening, an abyss in thought, imagination and articulation, is thus palpable. Ranging from insecurities, regrets and disappointments to violent conflict and war, the Real of *jouissance* will manifest itself, unpredictably yet unavoidably. These very discontinuities or openings – which Lacan deems to be intra-Symbolic openings in slitted Imaginary specular geometricity, in effect, the rims of the Symbolic – embody unintended and non-automatic irruptions of alterity, of Otherness. Thus, the psychoanalytic subject is the subject manifested in discontinuity, rupturing the smooth surface of identity and one's congruity to standards, ideals, norms, aspiration and so forth, making the I cognitively stumble and showing it to not be what it thinks it is: an individual (Latin, *in-dividere*: not + to divide; not to divide, the indivisible). What is truly indivisible, though, is the fact that I can never disentangle pain and pleasure, hate and love, sex and death; subjugation to *jouissance* is exactly that which *fore-closes* individuality, exactly that which makes my thought split, producing an image of my identity which, in turn, I struggle to accept. One's identity remains hazy and ramshackle, yet most are quick to deny this. But the I cannot speak or write the subject, for it escapes symbolization and imaginization. Yet, it cannot be communicated to others either, because the I can only irregularly and unpredictably and only purely privately experience it. In this sense, the classic British Empiricists may have been right when they famously claimed that '*All* knowledge comes from *ex-perience*,' yet they were then quick to contort this into talk of sense-data reality, observation and testing. And this is fair enough, but only as it is acknowledged that empirical research solely applies to that which lends itself to objectification. And this does not include the subject. Knowledge comes from the experience of the non-All, from the fact that I never know what the Other wants,

expects and desires, let alone of whether I am included in such virtual ideals, that is, whether I am worthy of being loved and thus desired. Indeed, Lacan would say that All knowledge *seems* to come from experience, because we need to cover up – that is, Imaginarily veil – that the All is hampered and battered, thus a non-All after all. Castration rules.

One may, though, *witness* the subject, witness its *jouissance*. If a dog, for example, displays hypersexual behavior, you have to take it for what it is, that is, the dog is spreading its genetic material to maximally increase the chance of producing offspring and thus maintaining the species. Yet, this is not the case for the human being: if a human being displays hypersexual behavior, he or she might very well be traumatized, endlessly repeating the traumatization, in the hope of it subsiding or vanishing all together. Or, there may be the hope that in making others believe that it did not hurt as much as it did, one may convince oneself of it being so; it may also mean that help is not needed or simply that one is ‘emancipated.’ It may be possible that one is emancipated indeed, but it may very well be a bit more insidious. Thus, by segregating the bi-univocal connection between signifier and signified in “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious” already mentioned above, Lacan segregates the efficacy of knowledge – the slashing and cutting of the signifier – from the capacity to envisage and contain its meaning(s), its potential signifieds. To have knowledge is one thing but to know the meaning of this very knowledge is yet another; there is no obvious, immediate and one-to-one connection between what one experiences and what such experiences mean, between one’s suffering and one’s incapacity of jettisoning such suffering, between one’s pain and one’s inclination to continue to cling to the pain, despite the best of intentions. Only in proceeding ‘case by case’ there might emerge something of meaning, yet this will be some-Thing of meaning: knowledge of a cause that makes one suffer whilst, at the same time, one does everything to rationalize it away so as to avoid having to admit that one might covertly enjoy it.

But there may be an escape: Art. This very Void at the heart of being, thrusting *jouissance* into our thoughts, ideas, speech and behavior, is the stuff, so to speak, of art and artistic

creation. In fact, works of art can be viewed as coagulations of *jouissance*. By way of analogy: music. A symphony by, say, Beethoven is completely insubstantive, completely non-representative and vanishes right after it has been brought to life by the instrumentalists of an orchestra. It only momentarily exists, it dies out almost as soon as it has flared up, and it is without signified (that is, meaning as signifier + signified), yet it is very much imbued by affect. But we can go a step further. The moment one of the instrumentalists plays out of tune – however short-lived in real time – we would have something more or less similar to the Lacanian subject: our picture of sense data reality built up to that very moment – that is, all the chords and melodies played prior to the tones that do not ‘fit’ the music – would be fused into one single auditory picture right up to the moment before that picture was ‘torn’, that is, suddenly ruptured. We would hear something that ‘sticks out’ and we would noticeably be affected/effectuated by it; we would cringe or laugh or have goosebumps and so forth. Only retroactively, however, this auditory picture would be turned into an Imaginary signifier which would now be ‘spilling over’ – emitting, that is – that which in the Imaginary signifier could not be contained.

Yet, there would have been a cause for the instrumentalist to have played out of tune – he or she might have had a sudden intrusive thought of a traumatic incident, or the music would have made the instrumentalist so emotional that he or she lost control of the instrument and so forth. Yet, the cause for being out of tune as it relates solely to the music as structure is the fact that the music allows for certain (combinations of) tones and prohibited yet others. In other words, an inner determination ‘inside’ the music would have ‘decided’ what is and what is not deviating from the *norm*, meaning that we would have a transgression of a standard or law. Moreover, the instrumentalist’s failure as the cause of the ‘out-of-tuneness’ also exists just momentarily, dying out almost as soon as having flared up, and without signified yet very much imbued by affect. Albeit a simple example, it is evocative in its simplicity: *contingently* the instrumentalist failed, thus *necessarily* the law-like determination of the music was violated; and as the music was *contingently* given the law-like determination it had, the tones

necessarily did not fit and so forth. Now, where is the Lacanian Real? The Lacanian Real – the *objet a*, that is, the hole in the Other – is nowhere but in the sheer logical fact that this process of contingent necessities and necessary contingencies may proliferate forever. And this is a logical truth; it is the necessary openness of whatever contingent Symbolic matrix. The example of the failing instrumentalist illustrates Lacan’s postulate of a Void right at the heart of Being, thus making Being only ‘being -1’; that is, our ontological minimum must be sheer negativity, or just -1. In other words: castration.

Art, and in particular modern art, stresses the necessary openness of the contingent world of language, that is the world of aesthetic organization. Virginia Woolf, to take an example, writes in an essay on Henry James in 1918: “Merely as the writer who could make words follow his bidding, take his inflection, say what he wished them to say until the limit of what can be expressed seems to be surpassed, [James] is a source of perpetual wonder and delight” (Woolf, 1918, “The Method of Henry James”).¹⁹ For Woolf, what matters most for an author of genius such as James is not so much what words mean or what they might come to mean when organized in a novel. What matters is that due to the fact that language necessarily displays an open structure, meaning that there is a Hole within every Whole, creative writers may know how to erect imaginary worlds which point to something beyond themselves, ideally reaching a point “until the limit of what can be expressed seems to be surpassed.” And, in so doing, they express so much that they will always fascinate, “a source of perpetual wonder and delight.” The emphasis is on what resides beyond what is said and what is meant, that is, what resides beyond words yet still is an effect of those words, analogous to the rims and openings of the Lacanian Symbolic. Their emptiness is a contained emptiness – a nothingness encapsulated by somethingness, if you will – or a Void. So, whether it is the abstract language of Beethoven’s symphonies or the concrete language

¹⁹ See for an article-length comparative analysis of Lacan and Woolf’s subject theory, the latter as it emerges from her essays, Venetis (2018) “The Crack in the Image: Virginia Woolf and Jacques Lacan on the Limits of Personality and the Emergence of Subjectivity.”

of James' novels, most value resides in the meaninglessness of the former and the holes produced by the text of the latter, that is, the places where *jouissance* is most prevalent. Hence, whether we *think* the Void in a Lacanian way, or whether we *feel* the Void through art, the principle remains the same: we need the Void to come into being yet this being is 'out of joint,' making life painful up to the point of it becoming unbearable – our lives thus display something truly devastating. Yet, it also gives us the ideals, possibilities, and capacities we happily cling to, such as love, friendship, sex, and art. And this may make life enjoyable, perhaps so much so that to envision the day when it will come to an end becomes just that: unbearable.