Let Fall: Hysteria and the Psychoanalytic Act

Matthew W. Oyer

Graduate Center, City University of New York

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

Follow this and additional works at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds

Part of the Clinical Psychology Commons, Continental Philosophy Commons, Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy Commons, and the Theory and Philosophy Commons

Recommended Citation

Oyer, Matthew W., "Let Fall: Hysteria and the Psychoanalytic Act" (2016). CUNY Academic Works.
https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/761

This Dissertation is brought to you by CUNY Academic Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of CUNY Academic Works. For more information, please contact deposit@gc.cuny.edu.
LET FALL: HYSTERIA AND THE PSYCHOANALYTIC ACT

by

Matthew Oyer

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Clinical Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2016
ABSTRACT

Let Fall: Hysteria and the Psychoanalytic Act

Matthew Oyer

Advisor: Professor Lissa Weinstein

This text proposes to examine the contemporary crisis of psychoanalysis by taking seriously feminist critiques of the theory’s phallocentrism, but arguing that the phallus cannot be metaphorically or metonymically replaced by any substitutive term, as most revisionist theories of psychoanalysis have sought to do. Castration is the central psychoanalytic concept, though the theory always seeks to cover it over. In order to develop a psychoanalysis that can confront this castration that is always repressed and yet, in its persistent return, continuously disrupts the continuity of psychoanalytic theory, a detour is proposed, returning to the origins of psychoanalysis and taking hysteria and the hysteric as its guide, following her down and through her blind alleys and dark continents. The project will examine hysteria’s four thousand year history, its radical discontinuity and non-identity as well as its thematic continuities and its relation to the theory of transference and the ego. This will develop into a more comprehensive examination of the ego in psychoanalytic theory with the conclusion that where ego is, hysteria is not, and, where hysteria is, the ego is not. The project will then examine the relationship of Bataille’s work and hysteria, particularly his concept of dramatization. Next, the Greek conception of kairos, or the opportune moment, will be examined in its relation to hysteria and introducing the key Lacanian concept of the psychoanalytic act. This will culminate in an exploration of the close relationship – and the project’s central theoretical construction – of
hysteria and the psychoanalytic act. Against any phallic mastery, the cure of psychoanalysis is a facing up to the real of castration, and both the psychoanalyst and the hysteric must let themselves fall in order to begin (again). This letting fall of the psychoanalytic act is the central object of inquiry in the dissertation, and it will be examined in its temporality and in its relationship to transference, to free association, to evenly suspended attention, to knowledge, to violence, and to castration. This fall will be examined from several angles in this work in its relation to the psychoanalytic theory of cure and more specific theories of technique: the fall of the analyst’s knowledge, of her sense of mastery and control, the fall into the unconscious through evenly suspended attention (the unconscious of analysand and analyst alike), the fall of imaginary and symbolic crutches that have propped up both analysand and analyst and defended them against the real, and, finally, the analyst’s fall as subject supposed to know that marks the end of a psychoanalysis. The final section of the project will examine the consequences of this theorization to questions of psychoanalytic training.

*Keywords:* Hysteria, Psychoanalytic Act, Castration, Kairos, Formation
And she used to fall down a lot

That girl was always falling

Again and again

And I used to sometimes try to catch her

But never even caught her name

- The Cure, *The Catch*
# Contents

Introduction: Follow the Blood 1

Chapter 1: Hystory 17

Chapter 2: The Ego Concept in Psychoanalytic Theory 27

Chapter 3: Egos, Epistemologies, and Psychoanalytic Cures 50

Chapter 4: The Real of Ego Psychology 73

Chapter 5: Wounded Dramatization: Bataille, Hystera, Psychoanalysis 93

Chapter 6: Notes on *Kairos* and the Psychoanalytic Act 118

Chapter 7: Hystera and the Psychoanalytic Act 126

Chapter 8: The Hystericized Institute, Training, and the Psychoanalytic Act 135

References 154
Introduction: Follow the Blood

- This suppression moves us; this passivity is productive.

- The world in which I have lived until now idolizes power and force, muscle and health, vigor and lucidity. Syncope opens onto a universe of weakness and tricks; it leads to new rebellions.

Catherine Clement Syncope: The Philosophy of Rapture

Beginning in the 1980s, numerous books and a rash of articles in both scientific journals and the popular press began to trumpet the “crisis” or “death” of psychoanalysis. Any number of external sources have been cited as causes in psychoanalysis’s protracted death knell: the hegemony of cognitive behavioral psychotherapies and the evolution of research technologies that have elevated these and not psychoanalytic forms of treatment to the coveted status of “empirically supported treatments;” the massive budgets of Big Pharma and their influence on the FDA, the insurance companies, and psychiatry’s diagnostic manual, to say nothing of direct consumer marketing; the ascendance of “harder” biological and neurosciences; managed care and the capitalist system that demands the privatization and concern only for the bottom line in all sectors of the cultural sphere.

Forrester (1997) pointed out that the attacks on psychoanalysis have either been situated within a critique of psychoanalysis’s status as a source of “scientific authority and therapeutic promise” or within a feminist critique of Freud’s phallocentrism. Both types of critique go back to the very birth of the psychoanalytic movement. Schechter (2014) wrote of this situation:
The crisis of psychoanalysis… does not, in this view, describe the failure of a prior regime of success but is, rather, a phantasmatic placeholder, a frame through which psychoanalysts can render unbearable structural contradictions bearable through enactments around the very intelligibility of a cultural practice. Constrained by them as a natural effect of larger, external changes in the world, crisis is a systemic artifact: a par-ethnographic hermeneutic that functions performatively, reflexively, to mediate analysts relations with patients, with healthcare third parties, with themselves, and with one another. (p. 49)

Rendered external, the product of a changing cultural landscape, psychoanalysts have, more often than not, responded with attempts to adapt to the times, even while waxing nostalgically about the golden years. To redeem the scientific authority of psychoanalysis, researchers have joined with the reigning paradigms: building an evidence base for psychodynamic psychotherapy and hitching their wagon to the brain sciences with the development of “neuropsychoanalysis.”

In order to shore up the field’s therapeutic promise, there has been a consistent shift from an “imaginary of wishful fantasy and its interpretive resolution” to one of “objective need and its real satisfaction,” from analysis of the unconscious to the correction of deficit through the provision of “vital emotional supplies” (Schechter, 2014, p. 179, 185).

As we will see, psychoanalysts’ responses to feminist critiques of the phallocentrism of Freudian theory have also gone in the direction of adaptation: something is missing from the theory, and a correction, an adding-on is the solution. In order to unpack this, we will first have to look at Freud’s theories of sexual difference and development, and to the debates of the 1920s and again of the 1970s over the phallocentric biases inherent in psychoanalytic theory. There are important reasons to open up questions related to the crisis of psychoanalysis that are internal to
Hysteria and the Psychoanalytic Act

the psychoanalytic movement itself without falling back on the kinds of externalization discussed above. The feeling of deadness is no illusion, the theory has stagnated, the literature is bloodless. It is the wager of this work that this deadness is intimately related to these questions of phallocentrism, sexual difference, and feminine desire.

Psychoanalysis’s Phallocentrism

As early as 1905, in his Three Essays, Freud presented a radically constructionist perspective on sex with his proclamation that the drive had no natural object. This contradicted his writings on the Oedipus complex of that time, which treated as natural and universal the child’s taking the parent of the opposite biological sex as the object of desire. It would be another twenty years before Freud would begin to confront the consequences of his radical insights, and this spurred on by Jung’s notion of an Electra complex and Horney’s and Jones’s “feminist” contestations of an inevitable penis envy.

When Freud (1925, 1931, 1933) finally returned to that “dark continent” of sexuation and feminine sexuality, he still maintained that there was only one libido which was masculine (phallic), but he recognized the full significance of his early recognition that this libido had no natural object. Rather, for both boys and girls, maternal seduction is inevitable, and the mother is nearly always the drive’s first object. This is Freud’s in Anlehnung an, or “leaning-on” concept rediscovered and properly situated by Laplanche (1999), in which the sexual drive and the function of self-preservation begin from the same source and activity (e.g., feeding at the breast) but that the two gradually split based on the inevitable introduction of enigmatic (sexual) signifiers that come from the mother’s own unconscious. The female Oedipus complex is inherently more complicated than is the male’s: in terms of a normative heterosexuality, she must abandon the initial object of the mother and replace it with the father and his substitutes,
and she must also, therefore, replace an active-phallic (clitoral) sexuality with a passive-feminine (vaginal) one. Against Horney and Jones, Freud maintained the centrality of the role of castration, but he now recognized its differing role for boys and girls:

In girls the Oedipus complex is a secondary formation. The operations of the castration complex precede it and prepare for it. As regards the relation between the Oedipus and castration complexes there is a fundamental contrast between the sexes. *Whereas in boys the Oedipus complex is destroyed by the castration complex, in girls it is made possible and led up to by the castration complex.* The contradiction is cleared up if we reflect that the castration complex always operates in the sense implied in its subject matter: it inhibits and limits masculinity and encourages femininity. (Freud, 1925, p. 256)

Although Freud praised Abraham’s (1922) account of the feminine castration complex, in reality, their respective accounts diverged on one essential point: while for Abraham, the experience of castration in girls emerged solely from the experience of discovering the penis in her male counterpart, for Freud this anatomical difference was a necessary but not sufficient explanation for the castration complex for either girls or boys. Rather, a prohibiting father, a “paternal agency” (Freud, 1931, p. 229) was an essential aspect of the castration complex, thereby introducing the symbolico-imaginary coordinates that overlaid anatomical reality and determined the child’s placement within the Oedipal grid of sexual identification and desire.

Freud emphasized the role of the father’s prohibition in instantiating the castration complex despite acknowledging that, when such threats did occur in actuality, they came far more often from the mother. The reason for this counterintuitive emphasis was his increasing appreciation for the role of the preoedipal hidden beneath Oedipal structuration like “the Minoan-Mycenean civilization behind the civilization of Greece” (Freud, 1931, p. 226). This
forgotten mother-land, mother-tongue, mother-time of two into one oceanic paradise (and terror) required a third term to interrupt it. But for the young girl, castration had already had its effect and does not hold the same terror as it does for the boy, and this mysterious and powerful preoedipal period is of a longer duration and with much more significant effects. These effects, nevertheless, remained quite mysterious to Freud, and he is reported to have said to Marie Bonaparte, “The great question that has never been answered and which I have not yet been able to give an answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul is, ‘What does a woman want?’” (cited in Jones, 1955, p. 468).

While Freud (1925) acknowledged, and Strachey among many others emphasized, that some part of the explanation for this inability to comprehend women and their desire was a result of his particular transference relation with women, it is surely the case that, not only is this explanation in itself unsatisfactory, but Freud’s perplexed response to femininity was in large measure evidence of the profundity of his vision rather than of his myopia. Freud always seemed to recognize some impossibility when it came to the feminine, a groundlessness, and also a perpetual pulling the rug out from under. As early as 1897, Freud wrote to Fliess, “It is to be suspected that what is essentially repressed is always what is feminine” (Freud, 1886-1899, p. 251). This repressed femininity, Atlantis of the preoedipal, was the nucleus, navel, or mycelium of primary repression, some real\(^1\) that refused any psychic elaboration, and which Freud

\[^1\text{Lacan conceptualized three registers: the imaginary, symbolic, and real. The imaginary is structured in the mirror stage in which the child experiences his image (and Imaginary cohesion) in the objectifying gaze of the other. It is because of the ego’s formation through identification with the specular image that Lacan views it as a site of radical alienation, and he says that “alienation is constitutive of the imaginary order” (Lacan, 1955-56/1993, p. 146). The imaginary is based on deceptive surface appearances of wholeness, synthesis, autonomy, duality, and similarity. The symbolic is the order of language and culture. The subject is born into the symbolic order (even before language acquisition) by taking a family name and entering into a world determined by distinct cultural practices. The real is that which resists symbolization and imaginization: the traumatic kernel. It should be noted that the Lacanian conception of the real has nothing to do with any concept of an external, consensually validated reality, nor is it commensurate with the Kantian conception of the noumenon, which is essentially unchanging. The\}
struggled in vain to name, never coming up with any signifier more serviceable than “passivity,” the unsatisfactoriness of which he continuously lamented (Verhaeghe, 1999).

For Jones and Horney, in the debates of the 1920s, it was far from clear what Freud was on about. There simply were men and there were women. It was natural, given. Jones (1927) quoted the Bible, “He created them Man and Woman” (p. 484). The same was, more or less, true for Freud’s supporters, such as Helene Deutsch or Karl Abraham: men and women, boys and girls were a biological fact. Becoming one or the other required no explanation. The castration complex and penis envy were just artifacts of Freud’s prejudices. Why should women envy the penis? Why shouldn’t there be some essential femininity that had nothing to do with a comparison to men? Mitchell summarized this position:

The opposition to Freud saw the concept of the castration complex as derogatory to women. In repudiating its terms they hoped to elevate women and to explain what women consisted of – a task Freud ruled as psychoanalytically out-of-bounds. But from now on analysts who came in on Freud’s side also saw their work in this way. Women, so to speak, had to have something of their own. (Mitchell & Rose, 1985, p. 20)

While more sophisticated than these early dissenters, the feminist critiques of the phallocentricty of Freudian theory that emerged in the 1970s often repeated this movement of elevating women by granting them something of their own. Against the phallocentricity of Freud’s theory of the sexual development based on the phallus, the castration complex, and penis envy, these theorists sought to ground femininity on the neglected (repressed) preoedipal and the body of the mother. In a brilliant reanalysis of Freud’s (1899) screen memory of dandelions and defloration, Jacobus (1995) invoked not Oedipus, that founding myth of psychoanalysis, but

Lacanian real is very much changing, as it is dependent on subjectivity and a rupture in symbolic or imaginary representation.
instead the myth of the rape of Kore and her kidnapping by Hades and stealing away from her mother, Demeter. Of Freud’s substitution of Oedipus for Kore, she wrote, “Where mother was, there psychoanalysis shall be” (p. 7). Nevertheless, Jacobus wryly continued:

Mothers and myths of origin have the same function, which may in the end be to remind us that something is always lost in stories of the constitution of the subject, whether we call it the body or the undivided self… In the writing of both, the feminist restoration of sanity and strength would come by way of a form of memory remarkably like the fantasy which Freud calls ‘the phallic mother,’ the figure of a woman who (still) possesses the phallus. (p. 16)

It was not just any father who stole Kore, or Persephone, from the bosom of the earth goddess, Demeter, and her fields of narcissus and hyacinths. She was not one of the thousands of girls carried off by Zeus, as a bull, a snake, any of the other endless metamorphoses, chases, rapes, and abandonments. Not even one of the lesser known mistresses of Poseidon. Kore was the only young girl to be carried away by Hades, god of death.

When Persephone took her place on Hades’ throne and her scented face peeped out from behind the spiky beard of her partner, when Persephone bit into the pomegranate that grew in the shadow gardens, death underwent a transformation every bit as radical as that which life had undergone when it had been deprived of the girl. The two kingdoms were thrown off balance, each opening up to the other. Hades imposed an absence on earth, imposed a situation where every presence was now enveloped in a far greater cloak of absence.
Father Hades introduces the *da* of death, the space of the signifier, into the earth-bread-body-bounty of mother Demeter. The delicious black bread of Freud’s peasant woman cut by the long knife (Freud, 1899).

This cut, the place of castration cannot be filled in with a feminine having, but that is not to say that this loss and violent opening is without its own “universe of weakness and tricks,” of new rebellions. The phallus is a stopper. Castrate Uranus, and from his blood come the Meliae and Erinyes. Blood and honey and fury. No, Hades did not only impose absence on earth:

Persephone imposed blood on the dead: not, as in the past, the dark blood of sacrifice, not the blood the dead used to drink so thirstily, but the invisible blood that went on pulsing in white arms, the blood of someone who is still entirely alive, even in the place of death.

(Calasso, 1993, p. 212)

Against the solidity of phallic stopper, one thinks of Irigaray’s (1977/1985) reflections on the mechanics of fluids: “Milk, luminous flow, acoustic waves…. not to mention the gasses inhaled, emitted, variously perfumed, of urine, blood, even plasma, and so on” (p. 113). She questioned:

… will feces – variously disguised – have the privilege of serving as the paradigm for the object *a*? … *The object of desire itself*, and for psychoanalysts, *would be the transformation of fluid to solid*? … Solid mechanics and rationality have maintained a relationship of very long standing, one against which fluids have never stopped arguing.

(p. 113)

Remove the solid ground beneath our feet and things become slippery indeed. We turn away, we recoil from the sight of castration and blood. We lose our way as the solid landmarks

---

2 Object *a* is a remainder produced from the falling away of the unity of mother and child. It is the always already lost wholeness the subject always seeks to get back to. It is a bit of the real that sustains the subject as a desiring being, the object-cause of desire.
we have always used to orient ourselves soften, liquefy, and begin to run. We freeze to restore some solidity to the world. How can we take a step? Kore does not only mean “girl” in Greek. It also means “pupil.” This work proposes, however, to make of her a guide and to be, ourselves, the pupils. We will not be the first. Both Dionysus and Demeter repeated Kore’s itinerary, venturing into the underworld, and both had to pay the same toll as Kore had before them:

To find out more about death, the gods had to turn to men, death being the one thing men knew rather more about than they did. And, to get help from men, both Dionysus and Demeter had to prostitute themselves. (Calasso, 1993, p. 214)

The lesson came not from men, not from the phallus, from women and the making oneself a woman, from woman and “the nonsuture of her lips” (Irigaray, 1977/1985, p. 30).

Program

I wish to take seriously feminist critiques of psychoanalysis, like those of Irigaray (1977/1985) that acknowledge that psychoanalysis has spoken the truth about feminine sexuality, the centrality of the phallus and the reality of Penisneid, while refusing to interpret the historical determinants of that truth and, thereby, making the phallocentrism it describes a universal principle. She wrote, “The model, a phallic one, shares the values promulgated by patriarchal society and culture, values inscribed in the philosophical corpus: property, production, order, form, unity, visibility… and erection” (p. 86). There can be no doubt that the reliance on such a phallic model has contributed to the very crisis and impending death of psychoanalysis discussed earlier, though it is also true that a passage through death, or psychoanalytically, a passage through castration is hardly to be avoided, and that efforts to do so have the most deadening effects of all. To that end, nothing can be put in the place of this empty space: no phallus, no feminine essence, no re-membering of the mother’s body. I don’t doubt that efforts
to keep open this void are destined to failure. An appropriately impossible effort at recasting the impossible profession. As Leclaire (2012) noted:

I imagine that this position or this non-position of the analyst might give vertigo to the logician, the one whose passion is for the truth. For it is indeed what testifies in his action to this radical difference between a sutured desiring and one that refuses to suture, a non-saturing, a desiring-not-to-suture. I know very well that in a certain sense this position is intolerable. (p. 105)

But against Leclaire, and with Irigaray\(^3\), I hope to expose what might be a feminine, non-phallic logic: of expenditure, matter, plurality, non-identity, incompleteness, fluidity and metamorphosis, of abjection and poverty. A logic of castration. As Irigaray posed, psychoanalysis as a negative theology or the negative of theology (p. 89). Not a psychoanalysis of phallic knowledge, adaptation, and mastery, but a feminine, mystical psychoanalysis of apophatic unsaying (Webb & Sells, 1995). No more the closed circuit of phallic-identity-suture-constancy, but the emptying of self into perpetual transformation and setting free.

If Freud was ever-dissatisfied with the word “passivity,” it was because it only told one side of the story. The story’s truth is the very mycelium at its center for which no signifier will

---

\(^3\) It must be stated that Irigaray would not approve of the uses to which I am putting her work. She was deeply critical of the Freudian and Lacanian emphasis on the phallus and castration, arguing that the inevitable sliding between penis and phallus always weakened female claims to positions of power and that the emphasis on castration and lack was unavoidably disempowering and risked reducing feminist projects to quietism. Irigaray argued that feminists must create a feminine imaginary and symbolic, based on female morphology (openness and fluidity) that would completely eliminate the emphasis on wholeness and lack. Rather than viewing the real with castration, Irigaray associated it with possibility, pleasure, and natality. She went so far as to argue for the necessity of constructing a pantheon of new divine female figures that women pass through belief in and eventually deconstruct (see Hollywood, 2002 for a comprehensive review of Irigaray’s critique of Freud, Lacan, and Bataille as well as her arguments for the necessity of constructing a feminine imaginary and symbolic). While I find Irigaray’s critiques of Freud and Lacan frequently illuminating and cogent, the wish to construct an entirely new imaginary and symbolic strikes me as naïve in that it imagines a subject who is somehow in no way subjected to the symbolic into which she is born. In addition to a utopic dubiousness, these positions strike me as rather dangerous in that, as Hollywood (2002) points out, they are “in danger of disavowing the reality of loss as both constitutive and destructive of human embodied subjects” (p. 234).
suffice, the traumatic real which defies all signification even as it produces and induces the endless production and proliferation of knowledge and the spiraling of history. So, while our journey may begin with Kore, that perfect image of feminine passivity, the figure of ravishment, we must yet look beyond her. “How can we be sure? The variants tell us. They keep the mythical blood in circulation” (Calasso, 1993, p. 280-281). Follow the blood. And for the more active variant – act, acting, acting out, passage à l’acte – we might turn to Blanche, to Augustine, to Anna O., to Dora… to those “marvelous hysterics of yesteryear” (Lacan, 1977), banished from the contemporary psychiatric nosography they fund and ever defy, that they might still seduce us in and with their stories that never were and always will be.

But why the hysteric? Because it was in listening to her for the first time in the history of civilization that Freud gave birth to psychoanalysis. And why was this? As Lacan (1969-70/2007) put it:

But as soon as you ask the question, ‘What does a woman want?’ you locate the question at the level of desire, and everyone knows that, for woman, to locate the question at the level of desire is to question the hysteric. (p. 129)

Perhaps we might, like Charcot, point to the equivalence of these hysterics and the mystics we just alluded to, but, unlike Charcot, in order to elevate the former rather than to dismiss the latter. For hysteria is an ethics of deprivation, of dispossession (Palomera, 1996). And while all subjects, whether they accept this or not, are subject to castration, desiring subjects, for the hysteric, “it is her badge of honor that she lives castration at the surface of her life and discourse” (Ragland, 2006, p. 85). And if it is a logic of castration that we seek, it is the hysteric in all her dizzying and terrifying rigor that we must follow.

Apologia
Strange terms: logic of castration, hysterical rigor. Isn’t the very ground on which the hysteric has always been dismissed (or worse) her lack of rigor, the absence of logic in her incessant acting out, the weakness of her ego and laxness of her superego, her constant recourse to repression and failure to ever be where she is from one moment to the next? Is this strange pairing of terms paradox, nonsense, nothing more than hysterical provocation?

But there is, in fact, a logic and rigor to hysteria, and it was Freud’s hysterical patients who revealed to him the logic at work in the symptom. As Benvenuto (2015) wrote, “Insofar as we bet on the ‘logical’ character of certain symptoms, we are and continue to be psychoanalysts. I would say that an analyst presupposes the hysterical symptom” (section 2, paragraph 8).

Benvenuto continue that the logic at work in hysteria is based in metonymy, whereas traditional (systematic, masculine, phallic) logic is based in metaphor. Naturally, it is metaphoric logic that has always been prized in our culture.

Metonymy… expresses a different logic compared to metaphorical signification: a functioning I would term dissemination… Metaphor, insofar as it suggests a fundamentally univocal figurative meaning, is centripetal, it puts us through the funnel of meaning. Metonymy, on the other hand, insofar as it lets signifieds escape further and further away, always postpones sense to ‘another time’. (Benvenuto, 2015, section 6, paragraph 4)

Metonymy, with its centrifugal dispersion, is an apt mechanism for the subject who lives castration at the surface of her life and discourse, the constant endless deferral of a restless and productive nothing. Unlike the systematicity of metaphor, metonymy is anecdotal, historical, perpetually incomplete. It stutters, it stammers, it forgets… and, it “begins again.” “The hysteric is a never-ending beginning” (Webster, 2015, section 1, paragraph 8).
And so I must excuse myself and beg forbearance when it comes to matters of form and style. For, if ever there were a site that called for systematic discourse, fixed meanings, critical clarification and discrimination, it is that of the dissertation. And if it is not obvious already, this will not be that. As Wajeman (1988) noted, “As subject, the hysterics poses the riddle which causes speech; as object she is what knowledge must, but cannot articulate” (p. 18). If we are to follow the hysteric and to investigate, without simply filling in with a metaphoric replacement, the gaping opening that is castration, it seems that a systematic, phallic logic will not be permitted. The task demands a different approach. Hystericized, I will speak and produce a knowledge that fails, but that might hopefully, in that failure, stagger (metonymically) towards the truth.

Preview

In tribute to the metonymical drift of hysterical narrative, Chapter One traces out a very brief synoptic history of hysteria itself, from its earliest theorization in Ancient Egypt and Greece through modernity and the birth of psychoanalysis. This chapter attends particularly to the role of hypnosis in the theorization of hysteria and in its evolution through the cathartic to the free associative method where it continued to exert its influence in the form of the transference. Long after Freud abandoned the hypnotic method, he continued to view hypnosis as emblematic of unconscious psychic activity not subject to the control of the ego. This fall into the unconscious is where psychoanalysis leads (to? through?), and it is the hysteric who lends her being to this fall.

It might perhaps seem as if our hysteric falls away (as she is wont to do) in the second and third chapters, focused on the ego concept in Freudian theory, ego psychology, and Lacanian psychoanalysis as well as the epistemologies that undergird the concept in these schools. Her
presence, perhaps her very being, fades as the ego reaches its zenith. But if she can never be captured directly (“… if hysteria is a set of statements about the hysterical, then the hysteric is what eludes those statements, escapes this knowledge” [Wajeman, 1988, p. 3]), perhaps we may progress more by studying this site (object? system of functions? apparatus?) which eclipses her and where she ever is not. The wager of this work is that the metonymic, askance pathway is our only means to encircle her nothing. For the first time in Chapter Three, we turn our attention to the enigma of psychoanalytic cure. It is argued that the ego psychological strengthening of the ego and the improved adaptation of the organism to its environment is an obsessionalizing cure. Lacanian psychoanalysis, tragic rather than adaptational, with its aim of disrupting the inertia of the ego that desire might be articulated, instead, provides cure via hystericization.

Fort-da. Here and gone. The syncopation of hysteric and ego. In hysteria, the ego weakens and falls away, and, contrariwise, the hysteric fades as the “influence of the ego is brought to a maximum” (Lacan, 1954-55/1991, p. 268). Chapter Four examines the hysteric’s fate, her banishment from psychiatric and psychoanalytic theory and nosology with the proliferation of diagnostic categories and the creation of other differential concepts such as analyzability and levels of personality organization (borderline pathology) were generated as theories centered on the ego reached their acme. Hysteria became the real (the untheorizable and the untreatable, that which resisted any symbolic praxis) of ego psychology. This chapter identifies a number of ego psychological strategies for affixing the real that hysteria presented and traces a historical-anecdotal lineage for these strategies within the Western history of ideas: the matter-form binary and the privileging of form and abasement of matter, the distrust and opprobrium of theater (representation, deception, seduction), and the often violent intrication of hysteric and master that characterizes hysterical politics. Gathering these diffuse indications, the
Pharmakon is invoked to illustrate hysteria’s paradoxical and unruly nature (anti-nature?), as that which incites the master discourse’s endless production of knowledge through her refusal to ever be captured by and identified with that knowledge.

With the transition from Chapter Four to Chapter Five, a thread slips, falls… I have extracted what I am able to from this productive contrasting of hysteric and ego, and, following the hysteric, we must begin again. From the violence of the hysteric’s domestication and exclusion, we move to the violence of hysteria itself and a perhaps unlikely guide in Georges Bataille. Bataille wrote nothing about hysteria (and was ridiculed as “obsessive” and “excrement philosopher” by Andre Breton), nor was sexual difference theorized in his corpus. And yet in the negative movement of Bataille’s eroticism and violence, his constant engagement with and subversion of his masters (Hegel, Nietzsche, Sartre, Breton), and his glorification of a transgressive dramatization, always in excess, through which one might live up to one’s desire, Bataille offers something remarkably close to the hysterical program. Bataille’s hysterical violence can be brought into generative communication with Lacan’s ethics of psychoanalysis, whereby we catch our first glimpses of that other center of our inquisition: the act.

We are closing in now, with the hysteric as our guide, on the elusive psychoanalytic act, and Chapter Six is an examination of that act’s temporality through the mythological figure and rhetorical trope of kairos, the critical or opportune moment. This brief chapter with scant reference to hysteria relies perhaps more than any other on a metonymic logic and the young girl’s leap (Clement, 1994), as we dart from the consulting room, to Olympus and Mount Cithaeron, to the triad philosopher-sophist-psychoanalyst with their epistemologies grounded in recollection-invention-repetition to locate the psychoanalytic act in a cut that can only occur within repetition and that might allow the new to be born.
With Chapter Seven, we have reached the mycelium, that restless nothing around which the hyphae of my thoughts interweave themselves: the kairotic violence and hysterical fall of the psychoanalytic act. The relationship of the act to the transference is explored, and it is argued that the very same act, steeped in risk and achieved via an hysterical fall through the unconscious and into the real, serves both to induce the analysand into transference as well as to engender, nachträglich, the dissolution of the transference in the fall of the subject supposed to know.

Finally, Chapter Eight examines the consequences of this theorization of hysteria and the psychoanalytic act, and of the central place of castration in the psychoanalytic cure (already grasped by Freud), for an understanding of psychoanalytic training. Freud’s scant references to training as well as the formation of the I.P.A. and the Berlin model are briefly discussed before Lacan’s theorization and the actualization and failure to actualize that theory in the Ecole Freudienne de Paris are examined in closer detail. Although no answer is arrived at, the question is posed as to what must be wagered in a coming-to-speak that might make of one a psychoanalyst.

Let us begin…
Chapter 1: Hystory

- Hysteria is a more or less irreducible mental state characterized by a subversion of the relations between the subject and the ethical universe in which he believes himself a practical participant, outside of any systematic delirium. The mental state is based on the need for a reciprocal seduction, which explains the hastily accepted miracle of medical suggestion (or counter-suggestion). Hysteria is not a pathological phenomenon and can in every respect be considered a supreme vehicle of expression.

André Breton and Louis Aragon The Invention of Hysteria

The history of hysteria spans nearly four thousand years: four thousand years of the wilderness of women’s bodies and of manifest destiny, or the attempts of men to push ever further the boundaries of the frontier, four thousand years of shame, of defiance, four thousand years of theater, of desire’s sting and the infection of the Idea⁴. Hysteria, from the Greek hystérâ, womb, hysterikós, of the womb. Hysteria: the wandering womb. The oldest existing medical document, the Egyptian Kahun Papyrus, dating to 1900 B.C., described numerous morbid states including loss of vision, inability to open the mouth, and pains in the neck, teeth, limbs, and the vulva, all of which were attributed to the desirous sojourns of the feral womb (Veith, 1965). According to the Hippocratic corpus, “the womb is the origin of all diseases⁵” (cited in Gherovici, 2010, p.54). In the Timaeus, Plato (Plato, 1963/1973, p. 1210) wrote, “The

---

⁴ Badiou (2013) wrote that theater existed at the frontier of philosophy and psychoanalysis and was the infection of the Idea with desire.

⁵ King (1993) critiqued Veith’s (1965) and the generally accepted psychoanalytic four thousand year history of hysteria, stating that 19th and 20th century interpreters translated hysteria, in its noun form, into the Hippocratic corpus and other ancient texts, which only speak of symptoms that originate from the womb. For my purposes, this adjective/noun distinction seems to matter little, as I seek to demonstrate that one constant in the four thousand year history of hysteria is precisely this expression of the Real of sexual difference and sexual desire.
uterus was rebellious and masterful, like an animal disobedient to reason, and maddened with the sting of lust.” Bodies within bodies. Creaturely matter. A crocodile’s mouth. Verhaeghe (1999) wrote, “Hysteria is the name of the age-old relationship between man and woman” (p. 245).

Plato’s and Hippocrates’s treatment recommendations for hysteria were practical: ideally, hysteria would be cured through marriage and motherhood; when this was not possible, sweet smelling fumigants might be used below the vagina to coax the uterus back into its rightful place or foul-tasting purgatives might be ingested to push it back downward. The treatment plan might call for the physician’s application of genital massage and the induction of orgasm. Hysteria was the womb’s longing for the phallus or for child, which since Freud is a suspect distinction, a disease caused by sexual abstinence. Galen of Pergamon, in the 2nd century A.D., argued that hysteria could affect both sexes, but he, too, viewed the disorder as resulting, in both sexes, from sexual abstinence and the retention of seminal substances. The treatment was the same.

The rise of Christianity in the medieval period brought with it the shift from viewing hysteria primarily as a medical condition that resulted from sexual abstinence and/or failure to bear children to one in which the porous bodies (corrupt matter) of women were invaded from outside by supernatural forces. The Malleus Maleficarum, or the “Witches’ Hammer,” a religious manual for finding, “diagnosing,” and “treating” witches written by agents of the church in 1494 fairly shrieked, “What else is woman but a foe to friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted with fair colours!” (Veith, 1965, p. 63). The consistencies with the ancients are clear if exaggerated. As Gherovici (2010) wrote, “The cause of demonic hysteria was femininity – women were witches in potential” (p. 44). Witches and
sexual commerce with the devil and demons was part of the fallenness of woman and went back to the first woman, Eve, and the banishment from the garden. The medieval conception of hysteria added to the classical mistrust of feminine wanting matter, also her capacity for the induction of desire in men: her deception and theatricality, her “fine colours” and “delectable detriment”. And the church better recognized the subversive power of women and their bodies than did the confident Greeks. Not on their watch would treatment consist of a diddle in the back of a physician’s wagon amidst the prattle of the agora and the braying of mules. It was left to the fathers of the church to determine whether the possessed hysteric experienced mystical intercourse with God or penetration by demons. The first led to canonization, the second to the stake.

The Enlightenment ushered in modernity in the late 17th century and obliterated the hold of religious orthodoxy on philosophy, ethics, law, and especially science, which came to be the apotheosis of rational method and the free engagement of the autonomous ego with external reality. Gone the myth of Dionysus and his maenads with their unruly wombs, gone Christ crucified and his handmaidens the female mystics and saints, gone incubi and witches copulating in the night: the guiding myth of modernity was the technological man of infinite progress, Freud’s (1930) man become “prosthetic God” with his “auxiliary organs” in all their magnificence (p. 91-92).

In 1603, Edward Jorden wrote the magnificently titled, *A Breife Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother, Written Upon Occasion Which Hath Beene of Late Taken Thereby, to Suspect Possession of an Evil Spirit, or Some such Supernatural Power. Wherein Is Declared That Divers Strange Actions and Passions of the Body of Man, Which in the Common Opinion, Are Imputed to the Divell, Have Their True Natural Causes and Do Accompany This*
Disease. The site of the hysterical drama was, as it had always been, the female body, but it was a body changed, no longer just matter or plaything of the devil, but a body turned object: object under the gaze and attempted mastery of the physician, that priest, or perhaps deacon, of the new religion fabricated in growing numbers from that other invention of the Enlightenment, the bourgeoisie. Hysteria was now conceptualized as a neurological disorder. Although neurologists sought in vain to find a brain lesion responsible for hysteria, the shift from uterus to brain seemed to have little effect on how hysteria was thought of and treated. It remained a woman’s disease, and the physician’s advice typically consisted of marriage, rest cures, or electrotherapy. However, the rapid advancement of medical technology in the 19th century also brought with it invasive treatments of hysteria that included hysterectomies and clitoridectomy.

Science provided more efficient and radical means of intervention on the unstable and unruly feminine matter than those available to the Greek physicians and medieval priests.

Despite what would appear to be limited success at the advancement in the conceptualization and treatment of hysteria, the 17th century physician Thomas Sydenham was the first to recognize that hysterical symptoms seemed to imitate the culture in which they were produced. And his follower, Georgio Baglivi was the first to note the curative power of suggestibility in working with hysterics. He wrote:

I can scarce express what Influence the Physician’s Words have upon the Patient’s Life, and how much they sway the Fancy; for a Physician that has his Tongue well hung, and is a Master of the Art of persuading, fastens, by the mere Force of Words, such a virtue upon his Remedies. (cited in Gherovici, 2010, p. 46)

---

6 Electrotherapy was a medical panacea for neurological disorders, paralyses, and epilepsy that was in common use from the late 18th century until the Flexner report was published in 1910. Electricity was applied to the affected part of the body, unlike electroconvulsive therapy, which applies electricity directly to the brain and was not introduced until 1934 (Wright, 1990).
The early humanizers of psychiatry and neurology in the 18th century, Benjamin Rush and Phillipe Pinel, who freed the insane from their shackles in America and in Europe respectively, developed the first “moral” therapies for hysteria that would emphasize the force of the spoken word as the primary curative principle, the first talking cures. Like most psychotherapies today, Foucault (1976/2006) demonstrated how the goal of these psychotherapies was normalization, the enforcement of bourgeois morality, and the repression of difference. The model (Baglivi’s well hung tongue) was the phallus.

These figures set the stage for the (re)discovery of hypnosis in fin-de-siècle Europe and the emergence of the master, Jean-Martin Charcot at the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris, who would make of the disorderly and oft-disparaged disorder, “the great neurosis” of the 19th century. Charcot was a great observer of symptoms, an artist with a keen eye for distinguishing physical features, and a strict adherent of the “anatomo-clinical” method: a systematizer of the “pandemonium of infirmities.” Charcot began to experiment with hypnotism in 1878, and he concluded that it was an induced neurosis that was only possible with hysterics. Following Sydenham and Baglivi, for Charcot hypnotizability or suggestibility, itself, was diagnostic of hysteria. Using hypnosis, Charcot was able to induce hysterical attacks and classify their stages and characteristic features. Hypnosis, and Charcot’s eye for the visual, also made his weekly case presentations great dramatic events attended by physicians from around the world, by artists, and by intellectuals, and they were said to cause Paris traffic jams. Charcot was the stage director of the fin de siècle hysterical theater.

Charcot only used hypnosis for purposes of diagnosis and observation, and he didn’t believe that it was itself a treatment method. The Salpêtrière was a “city within a city,” and its residents weren’t expected to get better, but rather to produce more florid symptoms. A
subculture which produced the great divas of the hysterical stage: Blanche, the first star, Augustine, posthumous surrealist pin up girl, and Geneviève, hysterical saint.

Hippolyte Bernheim, and the Nancy school, were Charcot’s and the Salpêtrière’s great rivals. Bernheim criticized Charcot’s methods, noting that all of his patients had very Charcotian hysterias, with florid symptomatology that matched his dramatic methods of presentation. He was also critical of Charcot’s theory of hysterical brain lesions, arguing instead that hysteria was a response to trauma. Finally, Bernheim believed in the therapeutic efficacy of hypnotic suggestion for the removal of hysterical symptoms. In 1885, Freud spent several months in France studying with Charcot and with Bernheim. Borch-Jacobsen (1989) wrote of Bernheim’s method and its impact on Freud:

Briefly, here is what hypnosis consisted of. A verbal suggestion was given ("You are now in a deep sleep," and so on), followed by a further suggestion, still verbal, that the symptom or its immediate cause should disappear. This method, based on the deliberate use of the "suggestibility" of the subjects and at the same time on what Freud was already calling the "magical power of words," is described favorably and at length in a series of articles written by Freud around 1890, mainly in his review of August Forel's Hypnotism, in the article "Hypnosis" in Anton Bum's dictionary, and in "Psychical Treatment." (p. 96)

The cathartic method, created by Josef Breuer and expanded on by Freud, began from this method of hypnotic suggestion but evolved in important ways. In this method, hypnosis was used to induce the hypnoid state the patient had been in when an original trauma had occurred and had lodged itself in the psyche like a disruptive “foreign body.” In the artificial hypnoid state, the patient was encouraged to remember and re-experience the event and “abreact,” or
Hysteria and the Psychoanalytic Act

purge, the foreign body. Eventually, Freud would abandon hypnosis altogether. The reasons he gave for this were varied: hypnosis provided only temporary symptom relief, it was unable to overcome the resistance of certain subjects (who could not be hypnotized), it didn’t allow analysis of this resistance by artificially suppressing it, it didn’t lead to the anticipated recollection of scenes in the past but rather their repetition in the present, and, implicitly, the use of suggestion impinged on the subject’s freedom and created a massive dependence on the hypnotist.

Psychoanalysis was born of Freud’s abandonment of the cathartic method and all remnants of hypnotic suggestion. Borch-Jacobsen (1989) wrote:

What was at stake around 1895, when Freud decided to abandon all hypnosuggestive practices in favor of the method known as ‘free association,’ was thus nothing other and nothing less than the very identity of psychoanalysis, in its supposedly total difference from all psychotherapy and indeed from all thaumaturgy. (p. 92)

That psychoanalysis emerged from Freud’s abandonment of the hypnotic method and all forms of suggestion is more or less platitude. However, the purpose of Borch-Jacobsen’s paper is to complicate this and highlight the persistent mysteries of the relationship of hypnosis, suggestion, and psychoanalysis. He argued that, in Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, Freud (1921) first attempted to illuminate the fundamental social link, or Gefühlsbindung, as well as that of hypnosis, via libido theory and the bond of love/Eros, but that he was unsatisfied with this and reversed his equation completely: the basic social link, what Borch-Jacobsen called “rapport-sans-rapport” is nothing other than hypnosis. Furthermore, Borsch-Jacobsen argued, this rapport-sans-rapport did not disappear from psychoanalysis with the abandonment of hypnosis; it was, of course, the transference and was the object of psychoanalysis par excellence.
In transference, as in hypnosis, history is repeated in the present rather than recollected in the past, and the patient’s diegetic narration is interrupted, which is why Freud first of all conceptualized transference as a resistance. With this in mind, Freud argued that the analyst, unlike the hypnotist, does not respond to the patient’s transferential demand or manipulate the patient through the use of the transference; the analyst recognizes that he is not the recipient of the address. The analyst remains neutral, frustrates the demand, and this leads the patient to symbolize and put into speech his desire. But, for as long as there is transference, the enigma of suggestion remains, and, he concluded, the transference must be dissolved. Freud (1916-1917) wrote:

It is this last characteristic which is the fundamental distinction between analytic and purely suggestive therapy and which frees the results of analysis from the suspicion of being successes due to suggestion. In every other kind of suggestive treatment the transference is carefully preserved and left untouched; in analysis it is itself subjected to treatment and is dissected in all the shapes in which it appears. At the end of an analytic treatment the transference itself must be cleaned away; and if success is then obtained or continues, it rests, not on suggestion but on the achievement by its means of an overcoming of internal resistance. (p. 452)

Borch-Jacobsen (1989) argued that the question still cannot be answered as to whether the dissolution of the transference is possible because the more fundamental question of what this transference, suggestibility, rapport-sans-rapport, or Gefühlsbildung is in the first place, that this remained enigmatic for Freud and has maintained its shroud of impenetrability for the analysts after him. He summarized Freud’s ideas that transference constantly escapes the diegetic free associative method because it is affectively re-experienced in the present tense, is
repeated rather than remembered. Borch-Jacobsen (1989) further pointed to Freud’s late references to the pre-Oedipal, even pre-linguistic nature of this tie:

"Identification," Freud says in Group Psychology, "is the original form of emotional tie with an object," and this means that the Ego forms itself or is born in this devouring identification with the other. Thus there is no Ego, no subject to form an idea of the object and/or of the identificatory model, since it is precisely in the singular "event" of the appropriation (of this Ereignis, we could say with Heidegger) that the Ego as such emerges. (p. 108)

In other words, the transference, the primordial social relation, exists prior to the separation of subject and object, before the ego and its I, and before the unconscious, and it is the source of all of these. Early in his paper, Borch-Jacobsen noted, “Hypnosis, that slumbering of consciousness during which a subject paradoxically remains ‘awake,’ always seemed to Freud particularly revealing of an unconscious psychic activity, not subject to the monitoring and control of the ego” (p. 93). And it is into this syncope⁷, this swoon and blackout of the ego, that psychoanalysis leads its subject. Borch-Jacobsen enigmatically concluded, “In the end, in this strange rite of passage that today we call ‘psychoanalysis,’ perhaps the only stake is this: repeating, repeating the other in oneself, dying to oneself – to be reborn, perhaps, other” (p. 110).

And it is the hysteric, as Charcot well knew, who can be hypnotized. The hysteric: that terrifying being whose matter can be, must be incarnated by form, whose body can play host to demons or speak the language of 19th century medicine, the one who can be hypnotized, she who tempted Freud making herself the muse of a new science. The hysteric is that being whose ego is always elsewhere, wandering like a feral womb. In the upcoming chapters, I will examine the

---

⁷ Throughout this work and often more implicitly than explicitly, I am deeply indebted to Catherine Clément’s work, particularly Syncope: The philosophy of rapture (Clément, 1994).
corollary concept of the ego across philosophical and psychoanalytic traditions. Just as I argued that hysteria is where the ego is not, I will also argue that hysteria emerges as the symptomatic real of modernist ego-centered theories, constantly incarnating and escaping them.
Chapter 2: The Ego Concept in Psychoanalytic Theory

- What Freud introduced from 1920 on, are additional notions which were at that time necessary to maintain the principle of decentering the subject. But far from being understood as it should have been, there was a general rush, exactly like kids getting out of school – Ah! Our nice little ego is back again! It all makes sense now! We’re back on the well-beaten paths of general psychology.

Jaques Lacan Seminar Two: The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis

While some conception of the “I”, the self, or the ego seems so immediate, at hand, and beyond question to modern consciousness (though perhaps somewhat less so to post-modern consciousness), it is a relatively recent concept, at least in its various contemporary (secular, empirical, punctual) visages, dating back to the Enlightenment Weltanschauung (Danziger, 1997). The Greeks, it would seem, had no commensurate conception of subject-object dichotimization (Heidegger, 2001). Freud’s division of human subjectivity, first into unconscious, preconscious, and conscious and later into id, ego, and superego, served to decenter Enlightenment conceptions of autonomous reason and a unified, self-reflective consciousness while at the same time developing from within a Kantian representational epistemology with commitments to a naturalistic-scientific paradigm (Tauber, 2013). Whatever the validity of this “regulative fiction”, nearly all schools of psychoanalytic thought have found

---

8 Freud, himself, did not use the latinate ego in his writing, opting instead for the everyday German word ich (the same “I” Nietzsche used in the quotation above). His use of the everyday I rather than the latinate ego is suggestive of his decentering agenda.
the postulation of an ego\textsuperscript{9} to be essential to clinical praxis. However, the way that the ego, as object of psychoanalytic intervention, is conceptualized and operated upon is radically different, even at times diametrically opposed, across schools, reflecting the fundamental epistemological ground upon which these theories are built and organizing and centering the cure they provide.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the hysteric might be understood as she who allows her ego to fall into syncope, and, for this reason, a thorough review of the stalwart ego concept will undoubtedly shed light on the elusive figure of the hysteric with her weakness and tricks. The chapter will begin its study of the psychoanalytic ego with a direct examination of Freud’s seminal texts that marked his transition from the topographical to the structural model of the psychic apparatus, focusing on *Group psychology and the analysis of the ego* (Freud, 1921), *The ego and the id* (Freud, 1923), and *Inhibitions, symptoms, and anxiety* (Freud, 1926). After examining the evolution of the ego in Freud’s work, I will endeavor to assess the bipolar readings of Freud’s structural model and ego concept conducted by the ego psychological and Lacanian schools of psychoanalysis\textsuperscript{10}. The chapter will develop the aspects of both theories that emerge from a fidelity to the Freudian theoretical edifice as well as the ways both transform Freud’s original vision.

*The Ego in Freud’s Work*

It is not obvious what led Freud to augment his topographical model of unconscious, preconscious, conscious with its structural variant of id, ego, superego. Numerous commentators

\textsuperscript{9} While the term *ego* may not be explicitly used in various forms of object relations, interpersonal, relational, and self-psychological schools, this is usually the sign of a break with Freud and a return to a pre-Freudian conception of I-ness or selfhood that is, at least potentially, undivided, whole, authentic, true, or in some other way redeemable.

\textsuperscript{10} The paper limits itself to the ego psychological and Lacanian schools for two reasons. First and foremost, these two schools are the only two of the major theoretical schools (Adlerian, Jungian, culturalist, interpersonal, self-psychological, Kleinian object relations, Independent object relations, relational) to develop a rigorous metapsychology of the ego that went beyond Freud’s original conception. In addition, these two schools are interesting to look at in relation to one another, as stated above, because they have a completely antithetical view on what role the ego plays in psychoanalysis and the way the analyst should orient herself towards the analysand’s ego.
from different theoretical schools have noted shifts in Freud’s position beginning between 1910 and 1914 (Strachey, 1923; Verhaeghe, 1999), which he attempted to work through in the metapsychology papers\textsuperscript{11}, and which resulted in a significant dialecticization of his theory of the drive (Freud, 1920) and the development of the structural model of the psychic apparatus (Freud, 1923). During this period, Freud appeared to undergo a collapse of clinical optimism, which he attempted to plug up with his most sustained abstract and metaphysical theorization since the 

*Project for a scientific psychology* (Freud, 1895), which he similarly regarded ambivalently and sought to destroy. Freud no longer held out hope for prophylactic psychoanalytic models and intervention into the realm of education and public policy (Freud, 1907, 1910, 1937). The specter of the negative therapeutic reaction gloomily haunts his writings of the early 1920s (Freud, 1923, 1924). Verhaeghe (1999) wrote:

> The failure of the theory in the very place where it should have received confirmation, in the treatment, urged Freud on to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. There is something beyond the pleasure principle, beyond his theory of the pleasure principle, something that is responsible for the resistance of transference, for transference neurosis, and for negative therapeutic reactions. (p. 149)

Hartmann (1956b/1964) painted a somewhat different picture, focusing less on the collapse than on the result, Freud’s structural hypothesis, which he described as “more operational, more workable, and also, if we may say so, more elegant than Freud’s earlier attempts to cover the same, or partly the same, subjects” (p. 298). Nevertheless, several of the technical reasons that Hartmann listed as leading to Freud’s development of the structural model (increased emphasis on resistance and defense, discovery of ego-superego conflict, discovery of

\textsuperscript{11} Under the superstitious fear of death, Freud wrote twelve papers on metapsychology, seven of which he deemed failures and destroyed (Verhaeghe, 1999).
an unconscious sense of guilt) point toward the role of the negative therapeutic reaction and the recognition of therapeutic difficulties. Verhaeghe and Hartmann agreed that Freud’s early discovery of the psychoanalytic technique for studying the formations of the unconscious (dreams, parapraxes, jokes, and symptoms) in his work with hysterical patients led to an incredibly generative period at the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, which was beginning to meet unexpected resistance just as a community of practitioners and a body of knowledge were coming into existence, and that his major revision of drive theory and his development of the structural model emerged as a response to these problems. Makari (2008) noted that after the hard-fought battles within the fledgling analytic community that resulted in the splits of Jung, Adler, and Stekel and the first establishment of a psychoanalytic orthodoxy and the formation of an organization whose function was to police that orthodoxy, the International Psychoanalytic Association (I.P.A.), that it was remarkably at this precise moment that Freud undertook a massive revision of his theory.

*Group psychology and the analysis of the ego* was published in 1921, two years before Freud unveiled the new structural model, and for that reason as well as it neither being an explicitly clinical nor metapsychological paper, it is often ignored in relation to the soon-to-emerge structural theory. However, one can see in it the germinal form of the ideas and conflicts that would develop into and out of the structural model. So, *Group Psychology* was an exercise in applied psychoanalysis, examining and expanding upon the works of the sociologists Le Bon and McDougall into processes of group psychology and the group mind. Freud took Le Bon’s and McDougall’s concepts of “group mind” and “crowd psychology” that described the way in which the group functioned at a more disorganized, chaotic, and primitive level of mental functioning than would the individual minds’ of the people making up the group and attempted
to explain how psychoanalysis might provide models whereby such regressive group phenomena could be explained. He proposed that groups vary in their level of structuration and the division and assignation of functions, and that increased structuration results in higher mental functioning.

Freud discussed the concept of the *ego ideal*, which was the precursor to the concept of the superego. Like the person in love or the person under hypnosis, whose object has come to take the place of his ego ideal, group formation consists of a similar process whereby a leader comes to fill the place of the ego ideal of the group’s members, lending it a rudimentary level of structure. Freud (1921) wrote, “A primary group of this kind is a number of individuals who have put one and the same object in the place of their ego ideal and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego” (p. 116).

While the ego psychologists did not generally reference *Group Psychology* in their discussion of Freud’s shift to the structural model, it must be noted that the direct translations between the divided/structurated psyche and the group composed of individuals set the stage for a particular evolution and reading of Freud’s thought. Freud’s conception of structuration as the condition for raising the mental life of groups was translated directly into the concept of psychic structure, which would become fundamental for theorists like Hartmann and Rapaport. Similarly, the concept of the strong leader fulfilling a necessary first step in the process of structuration and a differentiating and harmonic function between inside and outside would come to set the agenda for a psychoanalysis whose aim was to strengthen the ego. It may be that Freud’s reflections on the primitiveness of unstructured groups, which he compared to “children and savages,” prompted the difficult to reconcile shift from his initial conception of the unconscious based on a *logic* of repression and the return of the repressed as found in dreams,
slips of the tongue, bungled actions, and jokes to that of an id, which was a cauldron of biological drives pressing indifferently for discharge seemingly without any intrinsic logic.

Against the ego psychologists, Lacan made frequent reference to *Group Psychology*, and claimed that *The Ego and the Id* (Freud, 1923) was virtually unreadable without reference to it. The reason Lacan focused so much on this piece, as will become clearer in discussions of his conception of the ego, was Freud’s emphasis in this paper on the emergence of the ego through processes of identification, which he developed in his own theory of the mirror stage (Lacan, 1949/2002). Indeed, Lacan (1953-1954/1988) said:

It is in connection with collective psychology ("Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego"), that is to say, relations to the other, that the ego, in so far as it is an autonomous function is brought into Freud’s work for the first time – a simple point, perhaps, but worth making because it justifies the particular manner in which I myself am introducing it to you. (p. 56)

Against the ego psychologists’ autonomous structurated ego engaged in various active functions, the Lacanian ego emerges through identification and alienation and is itself more object than subject. Both of these conceptions can be found in Freud, indeed both exist side by side in this very paper as well as in the paper that followed and inaugurated the structural model.

*The ego and the id*, published in 1923, explicitly articulated the new theory. The structural model consists of three agencies: the id, the ego, and the superego. It is interesting to note that, although Freud went to pains to define and redefine the superego and, especially, the ego, he provides no explicit definition of the id, and certainly nothing like that of the cauldron of the drives or the biological referent it was to become. Instead, Freud seems to take the id as that to which psychoanalysis has thus far been the study of, the unconscious, the term which he
Hysteria and the Psychoanalytic Act 33

proposed was leading to confusion in its dual sense as phenomenological/descriptive and/or topographical. He nodded to the work of Georg Groddeck (1923) in his use of the new term, the id, or the “it” in the everyday German both Freud and Groddeck used. Although Freud did not explicitly refer to the id as lacking any organization, he did seem to be contrasting to it the ego, as that which has differentiated from it and become a “coherent organization,” thus creating the tension with his earlier conceptions of unconscious processes that follow a logic of their own.

Freud defined the superego, referred to as the ego ideal in Group Psychology, as the heir to the Oedipus complex, a further differentiation within the ego based upon the most primary identifications with the first others and the internalization of the paternal prohibition of the incest taboo. Freud noted the surprising proximity of the superego to the id, pointing to an entirely unconscious agency of command and prohibition that functions largely against the centering and reality-based ego and is closer to the dark sexuality and aggression of the id, thus bringing it into correspondence with his related investigations into the negative therapeutic reaction, masochism, the vagaries of the Oedipus complex, and his later investigations into the dark continent of femininity.

Freud provided multiple fragmented definitions of the ego in this paper, none of which seemed to satisfy him. He noted that the ego was, “first and foremost a bodily ego… the projection of a surface” (p. 26). He held to his earlier statements that the ego was the product of identifications and abandoned id cathexes (p. 48). However, he argued that it emerged from the Pcpt.-Cs. System and was that part of the id that was differentiated by contact with the external world. In his most comprehensive and broad definition of the ego, Freud wrote:

12 The ego ideal and the superego are not strictly speaking the same concept. Many of the functions of self-observation that would later be attributed to the ego, Freud initially attributed to the ego ideal. Lacan would further differentiate Freud’s use of ego ideal versus that of ideal ego, but a discussion of this distinction is beyond the scope of this paper.
We have formed the idea that in each individual there is a coherent organization of mental processes; and we call this his ego. It is to the ego that consciousness is attached; the ego controls the approaches to motility – that is, to the discharge of excitations into the external world; it is the mental agency which supervises all its own constituent processes, and which goes to sleep at night, though even then it exercises the censorship on dreams. From this ego proceed the repressions, too, by means of which it is sought to exclude certain trends in the mind not merely from consciousness but also from other forms of effectiveness and activity. In analysis these trends which have been shut out stand in opposition to the ego, and the analysis is faced with the task of removing the resistances which the ego displays against concerning itself with the repressed. (p. 17)

*The ego and the id* was the presentation of a new theory that would very quickly take the psychoanalytic world by storm and become a nearly hegemonic model of the psychic apparatus even during Freud’s own lifetime, but it also shows a highly ambivalent creator, who criticized Groddeck and most psychoanalysts for one-sidedly perpetuating the picture of a passive, weak ego at the whims of the powerful id, while at the same time employing the metaphor of the ego as a rider on horseback who is obliged to guide the horse (id) where it wants to go (p. 25).

Indeed, the ego psychologists, especially Rapaport (1956/1967, 1958/1967) observed that Freud had not yet realized the full import of his discovery, which could be anticipated three years later with the publication of *Inhibitions, symptoms, and anxiety* but which would not reach its zenith until Hartmann (1939a, 1950/1964) would develop the concept of the autonomous ego.

Nevertheless, it is beyond doubt that *The ego and the id* gave birth to psychoanalytic ego psychology with its emphasis on the active functions of the ego, its role in motoric inhibition and delay, and the increased emphasis on the role of external reality. The ramifications of this new
theory for conceptions of the analytic cure, which would be taken up by the ego psychologists seem relatively clear in this statement late in the paper:

The ego develops from perceiving instincts to controlling them, from obeying instincts to inhibiting them. In this achievement a large share is taken by the ego ideal\(^1\), which indeed is partly a reaction-formation against the instinctual processes of the id. Psychoanalysis is an instrument to enable the ego to achieve a progressive conquest of the id. (p. 55-56)

A more modernist conception could not be asked for, with resonances of rational enlightenment and benign colonialism.

_Inhibitions, symptoms, and anxiety_, published in 1926 marked a significant revision of Freud’s earlier conception of anxiety as a by-product of repression. According to his new model, anxiety is not caused by repression, but, rather, the opposite is true: anxiety is a danger signal generated by the ego that leads to repression of the dangerous psychic content. Freud (1926) explained:

The whole matter can be clarified, I think, if we commit ourselves to the definite statement that as a result of repression the intended course of the excitatory process in the id does not occur at all; the ego succeeds in inhibiting or deflecting it. If this is so the problem of ‘transformation of affect’ under repression disappears. At the same time this view implies a concession to the ego that it can exert a very extensive influence over processes in the id, and we shall have to find out in what way it is able to develop such surprising powers. (p. 92)

---

\(^1\) Here again, Freud’s continued use of the term _ego ideal_, after his creation of the superego concept, is indicative that he did not, at this time anyway, see the two concepts as simply synonymous.
Relatedly, Freud differentiated between a symptom and an inhibition. A symptom, as it had always been defined by Freud, was formed as a result of repression and is a sign of and substitution for the satisfaction of a drive (p. 91). An inhibition, however, is a restriction of the functions of the ego, which results either as a measure of precaution and avoidance or as an impoverishment of drive energy (which was sapped by maintaining the constant anticathexis necessary for repression). With the dual concepts of symptom and inhibition and the revised concept of signal anxiety, a model began to form of circular malevolent processes in which repression used and depleted cathetic energy, which led to inhibition of ego functions, which, in turn, led to more frequent and less successful repression (or other forms of defense, as Freud’s notions of defense were also expanding in this paper\textsuperscript{14}).

While Freud remained ambivalent about the precise role of the ego and its place as a target and site for analytic intervention (it was both the source of repression and the potential means of its undoing), with the concept of signal anxiety and the ego’s capacity to initiate defenses, a vision of the ego as more autonomous in the face of id and external reality alike emerged for the first time. The ego was, simultaneously the source of repressions and the agency through which repressions might be overcome. Freud wrote:

> When, in analysis, we have given the ego assistance which is able to put it in a position to lift its repressions, it recovers its power over the repressed id and can allow the instinctual

\textsuperscript{14} Freud (1926) wrote:

> In the course of discussing the problem of anxiety I have revived a concept or, to put it more modestly, a term, of which I made exclusive use thirty years ago when I first began to study the subject but which I later abandoned. I refer to the term ‘defensive process,’ afterwards replaced by the word ‘repression,’ but the relation between the two remained uncertain. (p. 163)

Freud’s return to the concept of defense and expansion beyond the concept of repression paved the way for Anna Freud’s (1936/1992) systematic classification and hierarchization of defensive processes. Similarly, his references alongside this same discussion of the pre-Oedipal and less organized forms of defense (p. 164) set the stage as well for the Kleinian elaboration.
impulses to run their course as though the old situation of danger no longer existed. (p. 154)

And with this conception of analysis as ego assistance and the revised concepts of anxiety and defense, a new technique began to emerge as well. No longer was it sufficient to analyze the meandering pathways of unconscious desire as they manifested in dreams, slips of the tongue, bungled actions, and jokes. Rather, it became necessary to analyze the unconscious defenses that the ego erected to isolate the id desires in the first place. Freud wrote:

If the resistance is itself unconscious, as so often happens owing to its connection with the repressed material, we make it conscious. If it is conscious, or when it has become conscious, we bring forward logical arguments against it; we promise the ego rewards and advantages if it will give up its resistance. (p. 159)

*The Ego Psychological Reading of Freud’s Structural Model*

In a historical survey of ego psychology, written at the zenith of its ascent to hegemony within American psychiatry and psychology, Rapaport (1958/1967) divided the history of psychoanalysis into four phases: Freud’s prepsychoanalytic writings (through 1897), early psychoanalysis (1897-1923), Freud’s ego psychology (1923-1937), and the post-Freudian era. Writing of the impact of *Inhibitions, symptoms, and anxiety* on the psychoanalytic field and its shift to the third phase, Rapaport wrote:

In this conception Freud finally achieved what he had previously attempted (1911, pp. 13 f.): namely, external reality is brought into the center of the theory (1926, pp. 62, 101, 116), as it was in the first phase, but the central rôles of instinctual drives (p. 87), first established in the second phase, is retained. For the first time a conception
of adaptation is implied: this theory of the ego provides a unitary solution for the
ego’s relationship to reality and to instinctual drives. (p. 749)

This quotation provides many indications of the central commitments of the ego psychological
school of psychoanalysis. In ego psychology, the structural model was the apotheosis of the
Freudian metapsychological edifice, and it came to largely supplant Freud’s earlier topography.
There was a centralization, as Rapaport indicated, that came with the ego’s administrative role
between the id’s drives, the imperatives of the superego, and the demands and constraints of
external reality. In their study of the ego in its central position and centering role, the ego
psychologists began a systematic study of the ego’s functions, beginning with Anna Freud’s
(1936/1992) taxonomy of the mechanisms of defense and Nunberg’s (1931) elaboration of the
synthetic function, and culminating in Hartmann’s conception of autonomous ego functions and
Rapaport’s accounting of the development of all forms of thought from the complex interplay of
drives, reality, and developing ego structuration.

No doubt, the central figure of ego psychology was Heinz Hartmann, who could trace his
analytic lineage back to Freud, as the master’s final training case. Hartmann was a physician
who had worked in Wagner Jauregg’s psychiatric clinic. He had been deeply involved in
academic psychology and had worked with the Vienna Circle of logical positivist philosophers.
He had conducted both experimental studies of twins and research on the psychoanalytic theory
of symbolism before leaving Austria to escape the Nazis in 1938 and settling in New York in
1941 (Hale, 1995). Hartmann shared Freud’s commitment to a scientific Weltanschauung rooted
in empirical positivism, but his was a more consistent mind than the master’s. Against Freud’s
wariness of systematization, Hartmann (1956b/1964) wrote of the “dignity which
systematization confers on a concept” (p. 291) and sought to bring Freud’s diverse
metapsychological speculations into a coherent theoretical body that would be subject to
investigation via the scientific method, and, in the process, to develop psychoanalysis into a
general psychology. Freud’s last developed structural theory, and especially the emphasis on a
central, active, synthesizing ego, were the foundation for this articulation.

Freud’s ambivalence about the precise role and power of the ego disappeared with the
early ego psychologists. In order to support this conception of the ego, Hartmann (Hartmann,
Kris, & Loewenstein, 1946) went against Freud’s theory that the ego was originally a part of the
id that differentiated itself via its contact with the external world, postulating instead an
undifferentiated stage of biological development from which both the ego and the id
differentiated themselves. Further, unlike Freud’s hypothesis that the ego utilized only cathectic
energy withdrawn from the drives (Hartmann referred to this process as neutralization),
Hartmann (1950/1964) speculated that the ego had its own independent energy source, further
assuring its relative autonomy from the id\textsuperscript{15}. The ego, according to Hartmann’s (1939a)
conception, and unlike that of Freud’s, does not develop solely from conflict, but, rather, has a
conflict-free sphere with autonomous functions (e.g., perception, memory, motility, etc.) that
unfold in a biologically predetermined way without the impetus of conflict (though conflict can
interfere with this natural development). And further still, ego functions that initially emerged
from conflict could develop secondary autonomy\textsuperscript{16} (e.g., intellectualization, which may develop
as a defense against the drive of childhood sexuality, may also become autonomous and continue
to develop and function independently of the attempt to avoid psychic conflict and anxiety).

\textsuperscript{15} Rapaport (1960) did not agree with this particular Hartmann elaboration of a source of energy independent of the
drives, but he postulated that ego structuration did provide for more efficient use of psychic energy.

\textsuperscript{16} Just as ego functions developed from conflict can develop secondary autonomy, autonomous ego functions can
also become co-opted into conflict, (re)sexualized, or (re)aggressivized, at any time.
Hartmann’s ego psychology, thus, was a biological developmental model of adaptation. Hartmann (1939a) wrote:

No instinctual drive in man guarantees adaptation in and of itself, yet on the average the whole ensemble of instinctual drives, ego functions, ego apparatuses, and the principles of regulation, as they meet the average expectable environmental conditions, do have survival value. (p. 48)

While typically conceived of, not inaccurately, as a conflict model, ego psychology might more precisely be described as a harmonization model. Hartmann (1956/1964) explicitly contrasted this position with Freud’s dialectical models:

The recognition of the synthetic function... made the ego, which had always been an organization, now also an organizer of the three systems of personality. This has rightly been compared with Cannon’s concept of homeostasis, or described as one level of it. Here a harmonizing factor is added to Freud's predilection, justly emphasized by Jones, for basing theories on two opposing forces. There is no longer only ‘compromise’ as a result of opposing forces but intended harmonization by the ego. (p. 291)

Hartmann and Rapaport developed a metapsychology of drives and ego structures that, along with external reality, served as mutually limiting principles with an ideal range within which the organism seeks to function and which provides the definition of mental health (Hartmann, 1939b/1964). Rapaport (1951/1967) described this harmonizing mode, the center of which is the increasingly structurated ego:

These structures need nutriment for their development, maintenance, and effectiveness, and their ultimate nutriments are drive stimuli on the one hand and external stimuli on the
other. But such nutriment is also provided by other ego structures and by the motivations arising from them, and the more autonomous the ego, the more nutriment is provided from these internal sources. But this ‘proportionality’ obtains only within an optimal range, since ego autonomy from the id and ego autonomy from the environment mutually guarantee each other only within an optimal range. Maximization or minimization of either disrupts their balance. (p. 740-741)

This concept of the ego was significantly broadened in terms of its capacity to explain the entire panoply of psychological phenomena as well as the power that it held within the psychic apparatus compared to Freud’s preliminary speculations, but it ignored other aspects of Freud’s articulation, namely the ego’s basis in and emergence from identification, and thus its fundamentally alienated quality that, as we will see, Lacan made the center of his formulation.

Despite the manifest ways in which Hartmann’s ego psychological reading diverged from those aspects of Freud’s teaching that Lacan emphasized in his reading, the two are not without significant aspects of overlap. According to Rapaport (1951/1967), ego structuration provided continuity of character and behavior and was a source of resistance that slowed the dynamic rate of change of the organism (p. 728). Hartmann (1950/1964) conceptualized the ego as the source of detour activities (p. 115) and Rapaport (1958/1967) wrote, “In contrast to the id, which refers to peremptory aspects of behavior, the ego refers to aspects of behavior which are delayable, bring about delay or are themselves products of delay” (p. 745). For all the activity and power of the ego psychological ego, it remained a source of delay and detour, of resistance, a point of inertia against the drive and flux of the unconscious (Nietzsche’s world of becoming). This, too, was Lacan’s ego.

The Lacanian Reading of Freud’s Structural Model
Lacan’s earliest psychoanalytic formulations were devoted to the ego concept via his reading of Freud, alongside ethologists like Henri Wallon and his attendance at Kojève’s (1969) seminar on Hegel, resulting in his concept of the mirror stage in the 1930s and his first two seminars in the early 1950s, which were deeply concerned with the role of the ego as well as with a critique of the ego psychological reading of Freud. According to Lacan’s (1949/2006) conception, the mirror stage was a logical moment in the history of the human being, whereby the infant identifies with its specular image as an integrated gestalt, in contrast to the uncoordinated, fragmented reality of its bodily existence. This identification leads to a narcissistic sense of mastery as well as to alienation (the self is constituted as whole only insofar as it becomes an object). More broadly, the mirror stage establishes the register of the Imaginary, the realm of dual relations (of self and other as well as of self as subject and object), identification, alienation, and aggressivity\(^\text{17}\). It is evident from these preliminary statements that what was essential in Lacan’s reading of Freud, and what he saw as elided in the ego psychological reading, was the birth of the ego from identification. Lacan (1954-55/1991) stated:

The entire dialectic which I have given to you as an example under the name of the

*mirror stage* is based on the relation between, on the one hand, a certain level of tendencies which are experienced – let us say, for the moment, at a certain point in life – as disconnected, discordant, in pieces – and there’s always something of that that remains – and on the other hand, a unity with which it is merged and paired. It is in this unity that

\(^{17}\) “Aggressivity” is a neologism Lacan coined in his early work to describe the dual relation between ego and counterpart. Lacan used “aggressivity” rather than “aggression” because he argued it was just as apparent in erotic and loving acts as it was in violent ones, and instead speaks only to the fundamental ambivalence of the identifications of the dual relation.
the subject for the first time knows himself as a unity, but as an alienated virtual unity.

(p. 50)

As Freud (1923) had proposed, this ego is first and foremost a body ego, the projection of a surface, but, going beyond Freud, the ego, as heir of the mirror stage, demonstrated a double movement in which it is objectified and, further, all objects the human being goes on to encounter will be structured “around the wandering shadow of his own ego” (Lacan, 1954-55/1991, p. 166). Like human beings inevitably confront one another in a battle for pure prestige, a fight unto death: the subject and the object (Kojeve, 1967).

Lacan went further in his negative characterization of the ego; it was not only alienated and made into an object. Rather, it was itself a symptom. Lacan (1953-54/1988) stated:

On the other hand, in contrast, every advance made by this ego psychology can be summed up as follows – the ego is structured exactly like a symptom. At the heart of the subject, it is only a privileged symptom, the human symptom *par excellence*, the mental illness of man. (p. 16)

The ego is a symptom because it is a *mêconnaissance*, a “systematic refusal to acknowledge reality” (Lacan, 1953, p. 12), the “seat of illusions” (Lacan, 1953-54/1988, p. 62).

As may be clear, however, while Lacan’s emphasis was altogether different and even incompatible with that of the ego psychologists, his notion of the ego was not radically different from ego psychological conceptions of it as the source of defense and resistance, the foundation and cause of delay, detour, and education/alienation. First and foremost for Lacan, the ego and the Imaginary function are concerned with inertia, with the grinding up and bringing to a halt the
unconscious play of signifiers. These areas of overlap between the ego psychological and Lacanian conceptualization are important and rarely acknowledged by members of either school, but they don’t change the radically different ways that the ego is taken up as an object of intervention by analysts from these schools.

Consistent with our earlier speculations with Verhaeghe (1999) and Hartmann (1956b/1964) regarding the reasons that led to Freud’s development of the structural model, Lacan suggested that Freud developed his new model in order to account for clinical failures that were the result of a settling and sedimentation of psychoanalytic theory and technique into an educative endeavor in contrast to its earlier decentering function and argued forcefully that the ego psychological development of Freud’s thought was a consistent regression from or repression of this decentering movement. Just as the individual’s ego always seeks to impose an illusory unity onto the subject in pieces, so Lacan argued that the ego psychological reading sought to impose such a unity back into the subject by conflating the ego and the I. He suggested that the ego psychologists viewed the ego as an incomplete, erroneous I, and made of analysis the task of strengthening this depleted ego. Lacan said that this missed the point of Freud’s

---

18 In many ways, Lacan’s conception of the unconscious or id (a term Lacan rarely employed) diverged more radically from the ego psychologists’ conception than did his understanding of the ego. The ego psychologists’ id was the source of the drives, which Rapaport (1960) referred to as the “biological referents” of Freud’s theory. While Freud (1923) did refer to the ego as that part of the psyche that was coherent and organized, thus, implying that the id had no organization, it is difficult to bring this view into accord with his early work on unconscious formations, such as dreams, slips of the tongue, and parapraxes, which do follow an inherent logic. Barratt (1983) wrote of this seeming contradiction, “Given the foregoing renovations, the plurivocal contradictions of symptoms, dream images, and parapraxes come to be apprehended merely as evidence of inadequacies in ‘the ego’s’ structuration or regulative control of its biological substrate” (p. 502). Meanwhile, for Lacan, Freud’s early work on these unconscious formations was what led him to declare that the unconscious was structured like a language. Lacan’s was not a depth psychology in any sense. The unconscious was, rather, right on the surface of things, a chain of signifiers. Nobus (2002) wrote that Lacan’s unconscious was “a discourse that continues to express itself in the absence of a conscious speaker” (p. 96). Applying Lacan’s three registers to an interpretation of Freud’s structural model demonstrates that the three structures serve radically different functions. As is clear, the ego serves an Imaginary function. Both the id/unconscious and the superego, however, are rooted in the Symbolic function. This explains the otherwise confusing but ingenious observation by Freud (1923, 1924) of the close interrelationship of the id and the superego, which made considerably less sense as rooting the connection between the biological id and the superego via phylogenetic heritage. Verhaeghe (1999) argued compellingly that the concept of phylogeny in Freud corresponded with the Symbolic realm that was the object of study for the structuralists.
discovery, which was that, whatever functions the ego may serve in a general psychology, in
psychoanalysis, which cannot ever be subsumed under general psychology, the ego is not the
incomplete, depleted I, but is, rather, that which blocks this I, which he defined as the parlêtre or
speaking-being, from coming into existence.

The ego psychologists took Freud’s (1933) famous statement, “Wo es war soll ich
warden,” in the straightforward manner of “Where id was there ego shall be,” which became the
ideal of the psychoanalytic cure. Lacan (1953-54/1988) argued, instead:

The question is indeed whether, in analysis, it is solely a matter of enlarging the
correlative objectivations of the ego, when considered as a centre that is completely
given, but which is more or less restricted – that is how Miss Anna Freud puts it. When
Freud writes – Where id was, there ego must be – must we take it to mean that the task is
to enlarge the field of consciousness? Or is it a matter of displacement? (p. 194)

Attending to Freud’s pronominal usage, Lacan (1957/2006) re-translated the famous dictum as
an ethical imperative, “I must come to the place where that was.” The ego’s sense of self is
based in the illusions of wholeness and coherence that are the product of the Imaginary function,
and it is the task of psychoanalysis, counter to psychology, to destabilize, decenter, displace such
conceptions, and, in that process, the subject must take responsibility for his unconscious
subjectivity.

It is becoming clear that Lacan was most fundamentally opposed to the harmonization
model that is sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit in ego psychological thinking. The late
Lacan (1969-70/2007) famously proclaimed, “There is no sexual rapport,” but his opposition to
any harmonic model is evident even in his earliest work, particularly in his critiques of “genital
oblativity” that dominated both ego psychology and object relations theories in France at mid-
Hysteria and the Psychoanalytic Act

The concept of genital oblativity was from Daniel Lagache (1947) and means something like “self-sacrificing genitality,” but, more broadly, Lacan interpreted the concept as the end result of any developmental and adaptational model which poses the progressive maturation of the sexual function of man along a predetermined pathway (oral, anal, phallic) that ultimately resulted in a mature genital relationship. Lacan (1953-54/1988) said:

In man, as we know, an eminent disorder characterizes the manifestations of the sexual function. Nothing in it adapts. This image, round which we, we psychoanalysts, revolve, presents, whether in the neuroses or in the perversions, a sort of fragmentation, of rupture, of breaking up, of lack of adaptation, of inadequation. (p. 138)

The ramifications of Lacan’s position are not exhausted in the sexual relationship (or lack thereof). Lacan is making a much more radical critique of ego psychology and object relations theory by suggesting that they are employing a naïve conception of reality as something more or less out there which, given proper development and maturation, can be grasped objectively.

Rapaport (1947/1967), in connecting psychoanalysis with Kantian epistemology, wrote of this relationship:

Finally, ‘the functional autonomy of the ego’ implies that we recognize a relatively independently functioning organization which, though having developed out of the id, once having come about has relative autonomy from the id; which, though unconsciously determined, still has regulative power over this determination; which, though it represents the impingements of the environment, integrates these impingements according to its own organizing principles and, vice versa, while it
integrates the environmental stimulation according to its own principles, still takes
cognizance of these stimulations and their constellations. (p. 297)
The task, then, for the ego psychologist is to assist the analysand in progressively dispelling
fantasy to develop an objective understanding of reality, so that he might adapt himself
accordingly. Lacan (1954-55/1991) pointed to the strangeness of this conception, given its
origin in Freud:
   The Freudian experience starts from an exactly contrary notion of the theoretical
   perspective. It starts by postulating a world of desire. It postulates it prior to any kind of
   experience, prior to any considerations concerning the world of appearances and the
   world of essences. (p. 221)
And, as ever, for Lacan, this world of desire was constituted by the human being’s speaking.
The speaking-being is ripped from the state of nature in being inhabited by language, which is
not a tool that can be used but an alien force that comes to occupy the subject and determine him
outside of the control of the ego.
   Furthermore, Lacan constantly heaped scorn on the moralistic normativity he argued was
inherent in any model of harmonization, adaptation, and a conception of objective reality.
Rapaport’s (1958/1967) highest praise for Freud’s structural model was its re-inclusion of
reality, which he felt was jettisoned with Freud’s abandonment of the seduction hypothesis.
Rapaport (1954/1967) addressed his colleagues:
   What is the aim of psychological treatment? Is it to liberate an individual from his
defenses? We all would agree that isolation from crippling defenses is the aim of
our work. In the meantime, however, there is also something we keep in the back of
our minds, and some of us may even keep it in the foreground: the patient needs to find his place in society and lead a useful, productive life. (p. 587)

Lacan argued that any theory that conceptualized an objective reality that was obscured by developmental failures placed the analyst *de facto* in a position of the one with superior access to this objective reality. The goal of training analyses was to correct the faulty egos of candidates so that they might serve as better guides for the correction of their analysand’s faulty egos.

Lacan (1953-54/1988) stated:

> In centring analytic intervention on the dissipation of patterns which hide this beyond, the analyst has no other guide than his own conception of the subject’s behavior. He attempts to normalize it – in accordance with a norm that is coherent with his own *ego*. So this will always be a modeling of one *ego* by another *ego*, hence by a superior *ego*...

(p. 285)

Lacan agreed that the ego psychologists’ technical innovation *par excellence*, the analysis of defense, was the technique proper for this goal of adaptation to reality as structured by the analyst’s ego. He argued that defense analysis was akin to suggestion, progressively shaping the analysand’s psychic reality in accordance with the analyst’s. Referring to Dora, Lacan (1953-54/1988) proclaimed:

> Here’s Freud, saying to Dora – *You love Herr K*. It so happens, what is more, that he says it clumsily enough for Dora to break off immediately. If he had at that time been initiated into what we call the analysis of resistances, he would have spoon-fed her slowly, he would have started by teaching her which things in her were defences, and, by dint of this, he would in fact have removed an entire set of minor defences. He would,
thus, strictly speaking, have employed an act of suggestion, that is to say he would have introduced into her *ego* a supplementary element, a supplementary motivation. (p. 184)

Against the aims of the ego psychologists, Lacanian psychoanalysis is a constant disruption of Imaginary inertia, a decentering of the ego, and the relentless attack on the world of semblance. However, these differences do not speak only to differences in technique in ego psychological and Lacanian psychoanalysis. They point towards fundamentally different conceptions of a psychoanalytic epistemology that structures the theory and praxis of the two schools. These epistemologies and their relationship to the conception of psychoanalytic cure will be the focus of the next chapter.
Hysteria and the Psychoanalytic Act 50

Chapter 3: Egos, Epistemologies, and Psychoanalytic Cures

- *I don’t concede that the ‘I’ is what thinks. Instead, I take the I itself to be a construction of thinking, of the same rank as ‘matter,’ ‘thing,’ ‘substance,’ ‘individual,’ ‘purpose,’ ‘number’: in other words to be only a regulative fiction with the help of which a kind of constancy and thus ‘knowability’ is inserted into, invented into, a world of becoming.*

_Friedrich Nietzsche Writings from the Late Notebooks_

In our glance towards history, we saw that it was in passing through hypnosis that Freud discovered the psychoanalytic method and that, in order to make this traversal, he took hysterics, those beings who would allow their egos to fall into syncope, as his guide. This led us, in the previous chapter, to an exploration of the ego concept in psychoanalytic theory and the surprising discovery that the ego is not characterized so differently in ego psychology and Lacanian theory, though these two schools come to antithetical positions about its value and role in psychoanalytic technique. I suggested that these differences illuminated fundamentally different epistemologies undergirding these theories. This chapter will explore these respective epistemologies, employing the philosophies of Kant and Heidegger, before analyzing the consequences of these epistemologies for the concept of psychoanalytic cure for ego psychology and Lacanian psychoanalysis.

_Kant and an Ego Psychological Epistemology_

Kant appears to have been one of the few philosophers Freud was relatively knowledgeable of as well as being the rare one he refers to with appreciation. This is not surprising; as we will see, it was Kantian epistemology that ushered in modernity and served as
the foundation for the modern scientific Weltanschauung. Kant’s transcendental idealism developed from the impasses of Leibniz’s rationalism and Hume’s realism/empiricism (Scruton, 2001). Rationalism derives all claims to knowledge from the exercise of reason and attempts to give an absolute description that is uncontaminated by the effects of the observer. Empiricism, in contrast, argues that knowledge comes from experience alone. Hume’s empiricism led to a radical skepticism that Kant wanted at all costs to reject, and it also deeply undermined Leibniz’s rationalism, and thus aroused Kant from “dogmatic slumbers” (Scruton, 2001, p. 25). Kant argued, instead, that neither experience nor reason alone is capable of generating knowledge. In order to demonstrate this, Kant took up the distinction between propositions that are \textit{a priori}, whose truth value is independent of experience, and those that are \textit{a posteriori}, whose truth value is dependent on empirical evidence, and he argued that this distinction was not equivalent to the distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions. Analytic propositions are true by virtue of their meaning (e.g., a bachelor is unmarried), while the truth of synthetic propositions is external to the concepts themselves and requires justification from some outside principle. Kant argued that there are such things as synthetic \textit{a priori} propositions, and that these propositions are exactly those that go unobserved as the grounding for empirical proofs. He proposed propositions, such as, “Every event has a cause,” are synthetic \textit{a priori} propositions, and he sought to explain how such propositions could be universally and necessarily true\textsuperscript{19}.

Kant answered this problem by proposing a division between the \textit{noumenon}, or the thing-in-itself, and the \textit{phenomenon}, or the thing as it presents itself to experience/perception. Kant granted that the \textit{noumenon} was completely inaccessible to the human being, but he argued that,

\textsuperscript{19} Much more recently, the Vienna Circle of logical positivists, who deeply influenced Hartmann, argued that synthetic \textit{a priori} statements were meaningless, leading to the complete rejection of all forms of metaphysics/ontology, which became only hollow forms of speculation.
nevertheless, objectivity was possible through the human’s endowment with transcendental categories by which experience does not become this or that content but through which humans have experience at all. The transcendental categories cannot be verified empirically (e.g., there is no way to prove empirically that causality exists), but they are universal and necessary for all forms of \textit{a posteriori} (empirical) judgment. Kant’s transcendental categories included quantity (unity, plurality, and totality), quality (reality, negation, and limitation), relation (inherence and subsistence, causality and dependence, and community), and modality (possibility-impossibility, existence, non-existence, and necessity-contingency). So, while the \textit{noumenon} was completely inaccessible, the \textit{phenomenon} still presented itself for objective knowing via its structuration by the transcendental categories of human consciousness.

The radical separation of subject and object is fundamental to Kantian transcendental idealism, as is the representational nature of human knowing that this separation implies. Tauber (2013) explained Kant’s epistemology as follows:

\begin{quote}
The entire enterprise rests on a fundamental separation of self from the world, and thus a representation or picture of the world is required to depict reality – what is known requires a re-presentation to a subject. Thus, the rational faculty, both autonomous and self-critical, serves as the linchpin of Kant’s epistemology. (p. 26)
\end{quote}

Representationalism and this strict subject-object dichotomization are fundamental to modern scientific thinking. Truth, according to representationalism and the scientific method that developed from it, is defined as correspondence between representation and reality. Heidegger
(2001), whose own views we will turn to shortly, summarized this Kantian-Cartesian mode of thought:

From then on, ‘subject’ progressively became the term for I. Object now became all that stands over against the I and its thinking, by being able to be determined through the principles and categories of this thinking. As long as you do not understand this connection, you do not understand what is occurring in modern science at all. (p. 118)

Firmly ensconced in a 19th century natural scientific Weltanschauung, Freud’s new science was a self-conscious application of Kantian epistemology. According to Freudian theory and made most explicit with his development of the structural model, the ego-subject represents both external and psychic reality, and psychoanalysis is the science that studies both the newly discerned psychic reality of the unconscious and the ways in which the ego-subject comes to represent the two intersecting forms of reality (external and psychic). Tauber (2013) wrote:

And here the psychic calculus becomes operative, one in which a Janus-like ego peering simultaneously inward and outward to satisfy its mandate, mediates reality in two senses: (1) the traditional facilitation of fulfilling psychic desire; and (2) mediation by defining that reality, which in the psychoanalytic universe is the world of possibilities – objects of desire, targets of fantasy, opportunities for gratification. Thus, the real is determined by the meeting of mind with its intentional object, or in terms of psychoanalysis, fantasy. (p. 29)

While based in Kantian epistemology, the Freudian theory offered a novel complication of Kant’s conception of reality (representation) by making of it an achievement (as opposed to a natural/universal endowment of consciousness) and by charting the many ways such an

---

20 Heidegger seems to be referring here more explicitly to the Cartesian cogito, but his description of subject-object thinking is equally applicable to Kant’s epistemology.
achievement can go wrong. In this way, and this is at the center of Tauber’s (2013) work, Freud was a liminal figure deeply committed to Enlightenment ideals at the same time as his theory undermined those commitments and heralded the post-modern turn that would throw into question the principles of representationalism, scientism, reason, and the autonomous ego. \(^{21}\)

The ego psychologists made psychoanalysis more coherently modernist (Kantian) with their amplification of Freud’s structural theory and their attempts to secure the ego as an “inviolate epistemological subject” (Barratt, 1983). Rapaport (1947/1967) argued directly that the autonomous ego fulfilled a transcendental function through which reality came to be represented accurately and adaptively, and he proclaimed Hartmann’s (1939a/1951) development of the “conflict-free ego-sphere” as his most important contribution, making possible as it did the natural ontogeny of the ego’s accurate representation of reality. Barratt (1983) described the Hartmann-Rapaport revisionism:

Placing an emphasis upon the ‘autonomous functions’ or ‘conflict-free sphere’ of ‘the ego’ as a substantive set of ‘psychic structures’ accords with a naturalistic epistemology which must posit a stationary and secure subject that can contemplate or manipulate the irrevocably distinct and separate domain of the object – whether this object be ‘the id’ or the ‘external world.’ (p. 501)

\(^{21}\) Clearly, I have found Tabuer’s basic thesis quite compelling and useful. His reading of Freud and Lacan, however, suffers from many misconceptions. This is not the place for an extended critique, but it should be stated that his view of Freud as a utopian thinker seems to me suspect, and his understanding of Freud’s psychoanalytic process as being biphasic, the first phase of which is “cognitivist” and involves the lifting of repression and the second phase of which is “affective” involving a mutative experience in the transference, is clearly misguided. His equation of the autonomous ego with reason is a faulty one, as Hartmann (1939a, 1939b) made clear in his work devoted to defining the domain of the ego, adaptation, and mental health. Finally, his overall romantic agenda of undermining the supremacy of reason and replacing it, or at least augmenting it, with some notion of the affective leads him to interpret Lacan’s concept of unconscious desire, itself, as an affect, which is inconsistent with Lacan’s linguistic conception of the unconscious. Lacan was always deeply critical of psychoanalytic theories of mid-century whose aim was “expression” and that viewed affects as a “special density” that escapes symbolic accounting.
These descriptions make clear the way in which the ego psychological position was more consistent than was Freud’s, and also why Freud’s early conception of the signifying unconscious finds a less hospitable home in the ego psychological theory, which is attempting to posit the unconscious/id as the biological underside\(^{22}\) of the autonomous ego, which progressively neutralizes id energy for more functional purposes in the transcendental adaptation of subject and object-world.

The latter half of the 20\(^{th}\) century brought with it the relentless critique of nearly all of the ideals of the Enlightenment: representationalism, progressivism, humanism, freedom, scientism, and the sovereignty of reason. Tauber (2013) invoked Adorno, Heidegger, Lacan, Deleuze and Guattarri, and Wittgenstein to illustrate this assault and concluded:

With autonomy compromised, freedom restricted, reason imperiled, Freud himself provided a portrait of agency in which the ego’s ambivalent standing proved a vulnerable site for attack. His critics argued, employing psychoanalysis as their own instrument, that (1) the Cartesian ego is an artifice; (2) a representational model of mind (the exercise of such an agent) falsifies experience, especially inner states (i.e., self-consciousness); and thus (3) predicate thinking based on a subject-object dichotomy misshapes our understanding of thought. (p. 192)

We will turn now to the specific form of this critique of Kant and modernity Heidegger launched in order to examine the ways in which Lacan took up Heidegger’s call in his own “return to Freud”.

**Heidegger and a Lacanian Epistemology**

---

\(^{22}\) This statement is controversial. Although Rapaport (1960) does refer to the drives as the “biological referents” in Freud’s model, Hartmann is adamant across many papers that the ego is equally biological. Whether or not the ego is biological, however, does not seem to dramatically alter the basic argument that the id and the drives are the force, without any inherent organization or logic of their own, which is directed and made coherent by the ego.
Heidegger was deeply engaged with Kant’s philosophy and was both openly admiring of Kant, returning to his work again and again throughout his career, as well as being deeply critical of Kant’s objectifying representationalism and its grounding of the modern scientific and technological worldview. Ever careful and utterly specific with his terminological choices, deeply sensitive to their etymological resonances, Heidegger (2001) described human comportment to the world as consisting of Vernehmen, which is translated as “receiving-perceiving” and implies “a phenomenologically immediate, nontheoretical, receptive perceiving” (Translator’s note, p. 4). This was opposed to Vorstellen, which means “to represent,” and which “objectifies and reifies.”

Kant’s imposition of transcendental categories in his interpretation of the thing-in-itself presupposed the sharp distinction of subject and object, with the subject as the being who represents (through the use of the transcendental categories) the object. Heidegger (2001) wrote:

In Greek and medieval thought, the concept of an object and of objectivity did not yet exist. This is a modern concept and is equivalent to being an object. Objectivity is a definite modification of the presence of things. A subject thereby understands the presencing of a thing from itself with regard to the representedness. Thereby, presence is no longer taken as what is given by itself, but only as how it is an object for me as the thinking subject, that is, how it is made an object over and against me. This kind of experience of being has existed only since Descartes, which is to say, only since the time when the emergence of the human being as a subject was put into effect. (p. 99)

In seeking to open up the basic question of being, Heidegger traced three stages in the history of being’s determination. For the Greeks, being was divided into things arriving on their own and things that were produced by human beings. It was the Greek view that Heidegger
favored in his emphasis on *presencing* and receptivity. In medieval thought, the being of beings was creatureliness, their creation by God and their fall into the natural world. In modern thought, in contrast and for the first time, being is determined as object by the I-subject (Heidegger, 2001, p. 118). Heidegger wrote of this evolution, “The fundamental difference lies in the fact that in the former experience, beings were understood as present in and of themselves. For modern experience, something is a being only insofar as I represent it” (p. 99).

Heidegger argued that such representationalism and objectivity not only modifies the presence of the represented object, but that it creates a very specific conception of subjectivity and selfhood, which he traced back to Descartes’ *cogito*. Descartes placed the being of the subject in thinking (representing), while Heidegger would grant, at most, the reversal of the *cogito*: “I am, therefore I think” (Steiner, 1978, p. 88). And representational thinking, for Heidegger, was but one mode of being-in-the-world\(^\text{23}\). Human subjectivity, being this capacity to capture the object-world in representational thought, soon turns this thought reflectively on itself, creating a “capsule-like psyche, subject, person, ego, or consciousness” (Heidegger, 2001, p. 4). Against the Descartes-Locke-Kant modern tradition of self-contained ego, Heidegger proposed the German word *Dasein*, literally “being-there.” He stated, “Rather, to exist as Da-sein means to hold open a domain through its capacity to receive-perceive the significance of the things that are given to it [Da-sein] and that address it [Da-sein] by virtue of its own ‘clearing’” (p. 4). Heidegger denied any notion of an autonomous ego, or “I-ness,” and the epistemology that emerged from such a conception. Tauber (2013) described the epistemology that emerged from Heidegger’s radical questioning of modernity’s most basic presuppositions:

\(^\text{23}\) Heidegger did not deny that representational predicate thinking was a possibility of the human being, though he did not privilege it, and, in fact, argued consistently that it fundamentally distorted the world it sought to represent.
Revising the subject-object epistemology that would define truth in terms of human knowledge, that is, the rightful correspondence between the ego’s representation and the world represented, Heidegger declared that truth was determined by Dasein’s authenticity. And authenticity is the faithful turn towards being. (p. 94)

Heidegger argued that representational epistemology and its extension through scientific-technological progress blinded modern man to this authentic relationship to being, lending itself instead to being’s distortion through the technological extension of the subject and its domination of the world of objects. Describing modern man’s scientific relationship to his world, Heidegger (2001) stated:

If nature is assessed regarding the calculability of spatiotemporal processes, then nature is understood within a projection which does not permit one to see it as what comes to presence by abiding in itself. On the contrary, nature is represented as an object upon which the questions of research intrude in the manner of precalculation and control. (p. 140)

Ultimately, according to Heidegger, modern man is mired in an acquisitive and dominating relationship to the world around him that is everywhere evident: in the rapid expansion of the scientific and technological realm, in the philosophic theories of the day, in the gross excesses of global capitalism, and even in vernacular speech and the evolution of natural languages.

Heidegger’s notion of Dasein aimed to (re)conjoin the I with the world and to rally, invite, and compel man towards a more authentic comportment towards being through the recognition and contemplation of its own finitude and nothingness (being-unto-death).

Given this critique, it is little wonder that Heidegger was censorious of psychoanalysis when he was exposed to it by Freud’s former analysand, the Swiss psychiatrist Medard Boss.
Boss described Heidegger as nearly becoming ill when he read Freud’s metapsychological papers, but he also described a very different and more sympathetic response as he engaged Freud’s papers on technique (Heidegger, 2001). Of the former, Heidegger (2001) stated, “Freud’s metapsychology is the application of Neo-Kantian philosophy to the human being. On the one hand he has the natural sciences, and on the other hand, the Kantian theory of objectivity” (p. 207). Heidegger was offended by Freud’s application of mechanical metaphors to describe subjectivity and the conceptualization of the encapsulated human being broken into constituent parts (conscious, preconscious, unconscious; id, ego, superego) fueled by the energy source of the drives. For Heidegger, the being wasn’t fueled from behind by a mysterious drive but, rather, was drawn into the world, of which he was always inherently conjoined, by authentic interest and engagement. Not based in a representational epistemology, Heidegger was unconcerned with a search for a series of psychic causes. Of the Freudian articulation, he stated:

> For conscious, human phenomena, he [Freud] also postulates an unbroken [chain] of explanation, that is, the continuity of causal connections. Since there is not such a thing ‘within consciousness,’ he has to invent ‘the unconscious’ in which there must be an unbroken [chain of] causal connections… This postulate is not derived from the psychical phenomena themselves but is a postulate of modern natural science.

(Heidegger, 2001, p. 207-208)

Boss would take up Heidegger’s outright rejection of Freud’s theory in his own development of Daseinanalysis. Lacan was more circumspect and his loyalties were, ultimately, with Freud, but Heidegger’s influence is, nevertheless, clearly evident in the early Lacan’s “return to Freud.”

So, how did Lacan take up the Heideggerian critique, and what is the epistemology that grounds Lacan’s metapsychology? Like Heidegger, Lacan was distinctly aware of
psychoanalysis’s emergence in the scientific-technological era of modernity. Lacan (1966/2006) wrote:

… it is unthinkable that psychoanalysis as a practice and the Freudian unconscious as a discovery could have taken on their roles before the birth – in the century that has been called the century of genius, that is, the seventeenth century – of science. (p. 727)

For Lacan, inspired by Koyré’s (1957) philosophy of science, the transition from medieval thought to modern scientific thought cannot but begin with the Judaeo-Christian conception of teleological creation. In the transition to modernity, God is effaced, but the concept of a logical and rule-bound cosmos remains, and from it is born the basic presuppositions of the scientific worldview:

That the signifier can be found in the world, a signifier which is organized and which responds to laws, but which is not linked with a subject who would express himself through it – this is an entirely modern and scientific idea. (Miller, 2002, p. 155)

Miller (2002) went on to point out how the mathematization of physics adheres to this requirement (i.e., a law-governed signifier operating in the real absent a grand/divine Other), as does the Freudian invention of the unconscious (the signifier follows consistent rules articulated by Freud in his descriptions of the primary process and the mechanisms of condensation [metaphor] and displacement [metonymy]). Although it is questionable whether Lacan and Heidegger would define science in the same way24, the two are in agreement that it can be traced back to the Enlightenment and both focus especially on the figure of Descartes. More

---

24 For Heidegger, the essence of the scientific stance is subject-object dichotimization and the measurability and calculability of spatiotemporal processes. Although to my knowledge, Lacan nowhere defined science, its essence, in line with structuralism, seems to have been a rigorous mathematical formalization, transmissibility, a tracing of the effects of the signifier in the Real, and the methodical (re)construction of an object in such a way that its rules of functioning become manifest (Hallward, 2012; Heidegger, 2001; Miller, 2002). Given their very different conceptualizations, it is clear why Heidegger was highly critical of the modern scientific turn while Lacan, who was also disparaging of positivist, empiricist science, still aimed for a scientific psychoanalysis (Evans, 2009).
importantly, for both Heidegger and Lacan, their primary interest in the transition from a medieval-theistic worldview to a modern-scientific one was with its effects on the human being and his relation to the world.

So, Lacan (1966/2006) declared that psychoanalysis always and only operates on the subject of science, the subject inaugurated by this shift that brings with it the modern notion of the signifier operating in the real outside of any being’s control. Richardson (2003) posed the question:

Well, if the Freudian unconscious is only the underside of a Cartesian conception of consciousness, conceived as an encapsulated ego-subject, what happens if this Cartesian model is scrapped? Does not the unconscious go too? Of course it does – and that is exactly Heidegger’s position. (p. 14)

Richardson was quick to point out, though, that whatever the subject may have been for Lacan, it certainly was not the encapsulated ego of consciousness (or unconsciousness) that Heidegger had so deftly dispatched. Lacan (1963-64/1978) defined the subject of the unconscious:

The unconscious is the sum of the effects of speech on a subject, at the level at which the subject constitutes himself out of the effects of the signifier. This makes it clear that, in the term, subject… I am not designating the living substratum needed by this phenomenon of the subject, nor any sort of substance, nor any being possessing knowledge in his pathos… nor even some incarnated Logos, but the Cartesian subject, who appears at the moment when doubt is recognized as certainty… (p. 126)

So, the subject constitutes himself out of the effects of the signifier. This is precisely what Miller (2002) was speaking of when he said that the Freudian unconscious fulfilled the
requirement of modern science through its incarnation in the signifier that functions without any grand Other whose teleological plan would subsume it.

Addressing the Heideggerian critique of the encapsulated subject and the metaphors of the surface and the depths that have dominated psychoanalysis since Freud, Lacan proposed the topological metaphor of the Möbius strip. The Möbius strip is a three-dimensional figure that can be formed by taking a ribbon and joining its ends after making a twist of 180 degrees. This results in a figure which seems to have two sides but in fact has only one continuous surface. See *Figure 1*. Miller (2002) explained Lacan’s use of the Möbius strip:

This is the first topological object which, among others, Lacan has utilized to explain that one should not be contented with the thought that things always have a front and a back, that the unconscious is at the bottom and language at the surface. (p. 151-152)

*Figure 1. The Möbius strip.*

Lacan’s subject has nothing to do with the encapsulated subject that was the target of Heidegger’s critique. There are, however, significant parallels between Heidegger’s critique and

When Dasein, tranquilized, and ‘understanding’ everything, thus compares itself with everything, it drifts along towards an alienation in which its own most potentiality-for-Being is hidden from it. Falling Being-in-the-world is not only tempting and tranquilizing; it is at the same time alienating. (p. 222)

Like Lacan’s ego, inauthenticity alienates Dasein while at the same time providing a sense of meaning/understanding, coherence, and tranquilization. Furthermore, Boothby (1991) noted, “Heidegger associates inauthenticity with an effect of ‘fascination’ that suggestively echoes the stress laid by Lacan on the visually captivating character of the imaginary” (p. 207-208). Recall, also, that among Lacan’s critiques of the ego was its status as an object and the various forms of méconnaissance and inertia this leads to, which parallels in many ways Heidegger’s more general critique of objectification as distortion of a more primary comportment towards being.

In contrast, the Lacanian subject is founded on the nothingness that grounds the signifier and which the ego always seeks to suture. The subject of the unconscious has no substance but is, instead, a process, a constant becoming other. Likewise, Boothby (1991) described Heideggerian authenticity, “As such, authenticity is not so much a state of being as it is the submission to a process of becoming” (p. 211). And Heidegger (1993): “Dasein means: being held out into nothing… Without the original revelation of the nothing, no selfhood and no freedom” (p. 103).

For both Lacan and Heidegger, the relationship to being is always mediated by language, and it is language, not any substantivized subject, that produces the effect of the human being’s
being-in-the-world (or in Lacan’s terminology, the divided subject). As Richardson (2003) pointed out, “For both, language speaks the human being” (p. 18). This points to another epistemological convergence between the two thinkers: for both, the notion of truth has nothing to do with a modern-scientific conception of truth as correspondence between a representation and an object in reality, but is, instead, manifested only in and through language and is essentially revelatory in nature. Heidegger refers to this conception of truth with the Greek Alétheia, which means the privation of concealment, unconcealedness, unclosedness, disclosure. For Lacan, this conception of truth points to the radical disjunction between knowledge and truth, yet another description of the division of the subject and the fundamental principle of a psychoanalytic epistemology. Nobus and Quinn (2005) summarized Lacan’s position thus, “In Lacanian epistemology, knowledge is systematically disaggregated, and its consistency as knowledge is consequently put at risk” (p. 111). Psychoanalysis aims at a subject’s truth, and this truth only reveals itself in the fall of knowledge.

And so, Heidegger’s epistemology based in an open, receptive Dasein held out into the nothing has many parallels with Lacan’s epistemology rooted in truth that bores a hole in knowledge, or, in psychoanalytic parlance, in castration. It is possible that the early Lacan’s reading of Heidegger and his critiques of Descartes, Kant, and the modern scientific-technological age influenced his own recasting of Freudian theory upon a new and radically different epistemological ground. Ultimately, however, the agendas of these two great thinkers were radically divergent. In Heidegger’s terms, his project was ontological while psychoanalysis

---

25 I don’t wish to argue that Heidegger was a primary influence in Lacan’s recasting of Freudian theory. Heidegger’s impact on the broad French intellectual scene in which Lacan was formed was profound (see Kleinberg, 2007), and Lacan’s philosophical and linguistic sources were myriad. Rather, Heidegger was chosen as exemplary of the post-modern critique of the epistemological ground of Freud’s entire project, a critique that influenced Lacan and also of which he formed a part. Such is the nature of the symbolic realm to which we are subjects even as we are subjected.
is an ontic\textsuperscript{26} procedure. Lacan conceptualized his task as anti-philosophic. He associated philosophy with the master discourse, which was the other side of psychoanalysis and always seeks to suture with knowledge the hole at the center of being that it is the task of psychoanalysis to expose. Nobus and Quinn (2005) wrote of the discourses:

The role of the ‘master’s discourse’ is to mark the beginning of a dynamic of concealment and subterfuge, which the analyst’s discourse exposes to scrutiny. Yet this same process of concealment, alienation, and dissimulation has created the analytic function itself. In the formulae of the four discourses, the discourse of the master and that of the analyst are two aspects of the state of knowledge within modernity. (p. 123)

We will turn our attention back fully now to those products of modernity, psychoanalysis and the ego, in order to continue to interrogate the ego’s fate and the nature of the psychoanalytic cure that emerges from these alternative psychoanalytic epistemologies.

\textit{The Psychoanalytic Cure}

Let us refresh. Ego psychology revised the Freudian project by making it more consistently and coherently Kantian in developing a conception of the conflict-free autonomous ego that could serve as an inviolate epistemological subject, accurately and adaptively representing the external world of reality as well as the psychic world cast and colored by the vicissitudes of the drives. Unlike Kant, however this ego’s transcendental functioning is a developmental achievement that allows for the effective adaptation of the organism within its environment. This is the paradigm of the natural sciences generally and of biological

\textsuperscript{26} Heidegger stated that the ontic refers to perceivable phenomena, or beings, whereas the ontological refers to the non-perceivable ground of beings, or being. He proposed that ontological phenomena have priority and are the ground for ontic phenomena, but they are secondary in our thinking and perception. Philosophy, at least Heidegger’s philosophy, is concerned with ontology, the question of being. Psychoanalysis is concerned with the one-by-one of individual beings.
psychology more specifically. Within an ego psychological epistemological framework, truth is
equivalent to knowledge and is defined by correspondence between the representation
constructed by the ego and the object as it is in (external or psychic) reality (or at least its
phenomenal appearance mediated by the universal transcendental categories).

How, if at all, does this epistemological grounding determine the nature of the
psychoanalytic cure? When discussing the psychoanalytic cure, ego psychological theorists
inevitably reference Nunberg’s (1928/1960) famous dictum: “The energies of the id become
more mobile, the super-ego more tolerant, the ego freer of anxiety and the synthetic function
of the ego is restored. Analysis is therefore actually a synthesis” (p. 119). In a review of the
literature on termination written in the early twilight of ego psychology’s hegemony in the
United States, Firestein (1974) summarized eleven termination criteria: insight, symptom
improvement, object relations freed of transference distortion, the achievement of full genitality,
sharper reality-fantasy differentiation, the elimination of acting out, increased anxiety tolerance,
the shift from autoplasic to alloplastic adaptation, the capacity to experience pleasure without
guilt, strengthened sublimations, and the improvement of the ability to work (p.875). More
concisely, Firestein wrote, “In sum, the analysand’s ego functions should attain a position of
maximum secondary autonomy” (p. 876)\textsuperscript{27}.

This position is absolutely consistent within the foundation of a Kantian natural-scientific
epistemology, the lynchpin of which is the autonomous ego, secured in its position of
independence from the objects it represents. For Hartmann, who did more than any other figure
to develop and defend the ego’s autonomy, defining and operationalizing ego autonomy and ego

\textsuperscript{27} Firestein’s (1974) summary and basic position were confirmed with some elaboration in a review roughly fifteen
years later. Blanck and Blanck (1988) wrote, “Termination is appropriate when the principle analytic objective, to
promote relative autonomy of the ego from the drives (and from the superego as it becomes more benign in the
course of analysis) has been attained” (p. 981).
strength was no simple task. His method was to outline a program of scientific objectification of the ego itself into various functions and structures/apparatuses and to attempt to delineate, not only the relations between ego, id, superego, and external world, but also the intrasystemic relations of these various functions. Hartmann (1956a/1964) wrote:

No definition of ego strength would I consider complete which does not refer to the intrasystemic structures, that is, which does not take into account the relative preponderance of certain ego functions over others; for instance, whether or not autonomous ego functions are interfered with by the defensive functions, and also the extent to which the energies the various functions use are neutralized. (p. 146)

Psychoanalysis, in this view, is both a research methodology whereby these various ego functions and structures can be delineated (hence, the need to make of psychoanalysis a general psychology) and a treatment method whose aim is to support the sharper differentiation of the ego from the id, superego, and external world and to strengthen this ego through the development of an ideal assemblage of functions. The ego’s autonomy is made possible by and increased through the secondary autonomy of its functions (which Hartmann [1952/1964, p. 177] stated was the best index of ego strength), its structuration, and the increasing capacity for neutralization of drive energy that occurs as a result of this structuration (Hartmann, 1952/1964; Rapaport, 1951/1967).

The result of the strengthened, increasingly autonomous ego is the improvement of the organism’s adaptation to its environment. For Hartmann (1939b), adaptation was the optimal definition that could be provided for health. He wrote, “By thus seeking to make adaptation, and especially synthesis, the basis of our concept of health, we seem to have arrived at an ‘evolutionary’ concept of health” (p. 17).
psychologists, consisted in maximizing the ego’s autonomy so that the ego could secure the organism’s adaptation to its environment. In a description steeped in Heideggerian overtones, Barratt (1983) wrote:

The psychotherapy of ‘ego psychology’ thus becomes equivalent to procedures whereby the world of nature is brought under the technological domination of the epistemological agent – perpetuating the static antinomy of the contemplative or manipulative activity of the agent against the mute passive nature of the external object, the ‘inner-drive forces’ of ‘the id’ are to be harnessed by the organizational activity of the ‘ego structure.’ (p. 505)

Early in their book on psychoanalytic epistemology, Nobus and Quinn (2005) made an evocative declaration about Freud’s commitment to a scientific paradigm. They wrote:

What most critics miss, however, is the fact that Freud is happy to align psychoanalysis with a science precisely because science is not a Weltanschauung, because it does not claim to solve all problems, because there exists a constitutive lack of knowledge at the heart of its intellectual body, because its knowledge is not all-encompassing but strictly limited in space and time. (p. 18)

This is a very different interpretation of science than Heidegger offered, but it also seems to create a portrait of an altogether different Freud than the Freud of ego psychology.

Lacan began his “return to Freud” with a critique of ego psychology, framing psychoanalysis and its cure as the exact opposite of this strengthening of the ego and the adaptation of the subject to his environment. Lacan (1954-55/1991) declared:

One trains analysts so that there are subjects in whom the ego is absent. That is the ideal of analysis, which, of course, remains virtual. There is never a subject without an ego, a
fully realized subject, but that in fact is what one must aim to obtain from the subject in analysis. (p. 246)

He associated the ego psychological drive to strengthen the ego as commensurate with the obsessionalization of psychoanalysis, the obsessional in whom he saw “the fatal influence of the ego brought to a maximum” (1954-55/1991, p. 268). It is noteworthy that Rapaport (1951, p. 732) recognized this problem at some level, pointing out that obsessive compulsive defenses maximized the ego’s autonomy from the id, but, according to his harmonic model, thereby made him a slave to stimuli of the external world. In other words, the maximization of the ego in relation to the id leads to alienation. As we have already discussed, Lacan was no less critical of the concept of adaptation, which he viewed as, at best, naïve and, at worst, violently normative. Lacan’s own view was distinctly more tragic. When questioned by an audience member at his second seminar about a comment he had made about Oedipus completing his analysis at Colonus, he responded:

    Why not? In Oedipus at Colonus, Oedipus says the following: Am I made man in the hour when I cease to be? That is the end of Oedipus’s psychoanalysis – the psychoanalysis of Oedipus is only completed at Colonus, when he tears his face apart. (p. 214)

So much for adaptation.

    As before, can Lacan’s epistemology help us to understand this tragic conception of psychoanalysis? Let us once again review. Lacan took up the post-modern, particularly the Heideggerian, critique of Kantian subject-object representational epistemology. Like Heidegger, he accepted that this epistemological stance defined our modern era and had profound effects
upon the subject position of those who sojourned\textsuperscript{28} in it. Also like Heidegger, he denied that the
being of the human being was defined by an encapsulated ego, but he did not deny that such an
ego was created by modernity’s epistemological stance and the practices that are its products.
Such an ego emerges from a \textit{méconnaissance} in the mirror stage in which the infant identifies
with itself as a whole and complete object, thereby experiencing a sense of mastery while at the
same time becoming alienated from its own subjectivity. This misrecognition leads to a constant
double movement in which it is objectified but also in which all objects are structured around the
image of the ego. The ego is a mirage that sutures the hole in existence. The subject, for Lacan,
is this hole, this nothing that the ego seeks to deny. Tauber (2013) wrote:

\begin{quote}
For Heidegger, and for Lacan, the process of facing the unknown, the \textit{nothing}, is
quintessentially human, and by adopting this metaphysical posture, Lacan organized his
revision of Freudian theory around the persistent search for the \textit{lack}, the absent, the
beyond, which orients the vectors of desire. He would thus transform psychoanalysis
into a Heideggerian quest for Being, albeit translated into the psychoanalytic lexicon. (p.
113-114)

What is accomplished by placing castration at the center of psychoanalysis, no longer
only as what is feared and against which psychoanalysis runs aground as Freud (1937) would
have it, but as its ultimate (tragic) aim? Desire, that which is born of the lack, becomes its (ever-
displaced and displacing) object. In his seminar devoted to the ethics of psychoanalysis, Lacan
(1959-60/1992) avowed:
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Sojourn} was a term frequently used by Heidegger (2001): “Furthermore, Dasein must always be understood as standing-
within the clearing, as sojourn with what it encounters, that is, as disclosure for what concerns it and what
is encountered” (p. 159).
\end{flushright}
If analysis has a meaning, desire is nothing other than that which supports an unconscious theme, the very articulation of which roots us in a particular destiny, and that destiny demands insistently that the debt be paid, and desire keeps coming back, keeps returning, and situates us once again in a given track, the track of something that is specifically our business. (p. 319)

The ego is that which alienates the subject from his desire, and psychoanalysis cures precisely by allowing the subject to name and, thus, bring into existence this desire. And what of truth? Truth is no longer equivalent to knowledge, to the correspondence of representation with reality. It is, rather, the opposite: truth is that which bores a hole in knowledge; it is the epistemological waste that upsets and insists, nothing other than desire itself.

Against the obsessionalization of ego psychology’s cure, Lacan unapologetically sponsored a program of hystericization. He explained:

To express myself in these large-scale, approximate terms, take the male principle for example – what effect does the incidence of (the analyst’s) discourse have on it? It is that, as a speaking being, he is summoned to give an explanation of his ‘essence’ – irony, inverted commas. It is very precisely and solely because of the affect that this discourse effect subjects him to – that is, insofar as he receives this feminizing effect of the small a – that he recognizes what makes him, that he recognizes the cause of his desire. (Lacan, 1969-70/2007, p. 160)

We will have to come back to this hystericizing effect as we begin to theorize the psychoanalytic act. But first we must conclude our examination of this syncopation of hysteric and ego. The next chapter will offer an examination of the fate of the hysteric in ego.
psychological theory, and it will be shown that the figure of the hysteric is the real horizon, not only of that theory, but of Western phallic-metaphoric-systematic thought more generally.
Chapter 4: The Real of Ego Psychology

As she laughed I was aware of becoming involved in her laughter and being part of it, until her teeth were only accidental stars with a talent for squad-drill. I was drawn in by short gasps, inhaled at each momentary recovery, lost finally in the dark caverns of her throat, bruised by the ripple of unseen muscles. An elderly waiter with trembling hands was hurriedly spreading a pink and white checked cloth over the rusty green iron table, saying: “If the lady and gentleman wish to take their tea in the garden, if the lady and gentleman wish to take their tea in the garden...” I decided that if the shaking of her breasts could be stopped, some of the fragments of the afternoon might be collected, and I concentrated my attention with careful subtlety to this end.

T.S. Eliot Hysteria

Psychoanalysis was born of Freud’s evental encounter with hysteria. His last work to deal primarily with hysteria, however, was published in 1910 (Freud, 1910), around the time that Strachey (1923) and Verhaeghe (1999) noted a crisis in his thought that led to his metapsychological revisions and the construction of the structural model of the psychic apparatus. It could be argued that hysteria as the Real of the structural model and the ego psychology it inaugurated began with the master himself. Perhaps an examination of how the ego and the psychic structure of the hysteric were conceptualized will provide some clues as to its enigmatic and traumatic disruption of ego psychological theory and technique. Krohn’s (1978) seminal text provides an unsurpassable synthesis of ego psychological research on “the elusive neurosis.”
With Hartmann’s press to make of psychoanalysis a general psychology and empirical science, American psychoanalysis has embraced a larger set of research methodologies than has been typical in other parts of the world where psychoanalysis has been more closely aligned with a *Geisteswissenschaft* than a *Naturwissenschaft*. In addition to the development of theory solely from clinical praxis and the study of cultural productions (mythology, literature, film, art, music, philosophy, etc.), ego psychologists were the first to employ systematic infant observation methods and to engage the then fledgling field of clinical psychology and the psychodiagnostic testing methodologies they brought to bear on theory and practice. Krohn’s (1978) study of the ego psychological theorization of the hysterical ego and broader psychic structure synthesized information gleaned from all of these methods as well as cross-cultural and ethnographic techniques and the vastly documented historical study of hysteria conducted by Veith (1965).

**Hysterical Character(s)**

According to the developmental psychosexual stage model proposed by Freud (1905, 1915) and emphasized by the ego psychologists in which the vicissitudes of the drive progress and regress through a series of fixed stages (oral, anal, phallic/Oedipal, latency, genital), hysteria is conceptualized as a fully genital organization of instinctual development, defined by primarily Oedipal conflict. Oedipal conflict is the crucial feature of all neurosis (as opposed to psychosis), and, indeed, Krohn (1978) wrote, “As the hysterical personality presents a relatively delimited conflict within a basically intact ego structure and uses repression and displacement as

---

29 This has tended to be true not only of ego psychology but across a variety of American schools of psychoanalysis. For example, see Clarkin, Yeomans, and Kernberg (2006) for an example of the adaptation of psychotherapy research methodologies to his treatment based primarily in object relations theory, Stern (1985) and Beebe and Lachmann (2005) for applications of infant observation to the development of self psychology theory, and Lerner (1991, 1998) for Rorschach and psychodiagnostic testing methodologies brought to bear on object relations theory (and vice versa), to name only a few.
primary defenses, neurosis within the hysterical personality (hysteria) is in many ways, in psychoanalytic terms, the basic neurosis” (p. 280-281).

Similar to the somewhat artificial, but productive, dichotomization and dialecticization of hysteria and obsessional neurosis I made recourse to earlier, discussions of the hysteric’s superego are typically made in contrast to the superego of the obsessional. Freud (1926) inaugurated this practice in pointing out the severity of the obsessional neurotic’s superego compared to the relative laxity of the hysteric’s, against which the obsessional ego utilized reaction formations, which consistently hardened into the rigid armor of character, which was further contrasted with the relative fluidity of the hysteric’s personality. Krohn (1978) elaborated this position:

The obsessional’s superego endures beyond the immediate interpersonal or cultural milieu, leading him to seem rigid and out of step with the morality of his world, to be living by harsh, idiosyncratic, often anachronistic, internal standards. Loyalty to his own standards, to his own prohibitions, and to his own will are the abiding drives of the obsessional. In contrast, the hysteric’s superego is far more negotiable, its demands mirroring what is current and fashionable, and its aim far more interpersonal. (p. 203)

In contrast to the deployment of reaction formations by the obsessional’s ego against the onslaught from its harsh superego, Freud (1926) observed that the hysteric’s ego, instead, tended to employ blanket repression of the drive, leaving it to unconsciously run its course in the form of a symptom or an act. Around this basic blueprint of structural functioning, ego psychology would develop its conceptualization of the hysterical ego, bringing to bear its novel ego psychological investigative methodologies.
Krohn (1978) introduced his study with a problem that had plagued the study of hysteria for the entirety of its history: hysteria had been defined primarily by bodily symptoms for the entirety of its four thousand year history, but that same history also portrayed an illness whose symptoms changed dramatically across time periods, geographical location, and even between more nested cultural milieus (e.g., boarding schools, hospital wards, etc.). Krohn noted that Freud was unable to solve this problem because he had difficulty conceptualizing hysteria as a type of character, noting the reasons above, that Freud observed that obsessional neurosis with its harsh superego and rigid reaction formations was more likely to become sedimented enough to span time and situations as a specific personality or character type. Krohn argued, contrary to Freud, that there was such a thing as hysterical character, and that the developments of ego psychology allowed such a character to be defined based on characteristic ego functions and the interrelationships of id, ego, and superego.

Krohn (1978) noted that Freud had recognized the functionality of hysterical symptoms in playing out important unconscious conflicts and in serving distinctly interpersonal aims. He wrote of Freud’s discovery, “He even warns that some hysterical people, when they do not express their fantasies as symptoms, may be inclined to bring them about in action, though he does not define such behavior as a specific symptom” (p. 26). Ego psychologists characterized the hysterical character as one reliant on massive repression with the concomitant tendencies towards unconscious fantasy and a predisposition to action and unconscious acting out at the expense of conscious thought. Krohn wrote, “The hysteric locates the source of his feelings, the triggers of them, in the situations through which he moves” (p. 37).

Psychodiagnostic testing confirmed this hysterical tendency and further isolated the various ego functions by which repression and fantasy/acting out were accomplished as well as
the general cognitive style that resulted. Citing the seminal texts by Rapaport, Gill, and Schafer (1968), Schafer (1954), and Shapiro (1965), Krohn (1978) highlighted a number of findings from psychodiagnostic testing that were central to the understanding of hysterical ego functioning. These included the following:

1) Hysterics tend not to take advantage of their native intellectual capacities due to the generalized use of repression.

2) Hysterics tend to score higher on visual-motor tests than on those that tap verbal thinking, thus highlighting this tendency towards action over thought.

3) Hysterics tend to struggle with abstract informational tasks but perform at a far superior level on tests that assess mastery of “facts embedded in relationships” (p. 76).

4) Hysterics tend to be highly reactive to and disturbed by affective and drive-related phenomena. This results in distortion of visual and cognitive functioning.

5) Hysterics tend towards intense affect “at the expense of delay and ideational productivity” (p. 77).

6) Hysterics utilize fairly transparent symbols of unconscious conflicts, though they themselves remain unaware of the obvious symbolic contents.

7) Hysterics make use of superficiality as well as what is popular and common in their current cultural milieu.

8) Hysterical fantasies tend to center around passive relationships to the phallus and phallic figures and a body that is split and conflicted between activity, excitement, and beauty, on one hand, and passivity/immobility, dirtiness, and weakness and vulnerability, on the other (adapted from Krohn, 1978, pp. 75-80).
Krohn (1978) summarized these findings as follows:

The hysterical ego, then, by its inclination to action, disdain for thought and planning, and tendency to repress superego contents, plays out conflicts in action, such as object choice, relationship pattern, phobic avoidance, or somatic symptoms, depending partly on the social context. The hysterical personality’s world of conscious and pre-conscious thought, ideas, and reflections tend to be shallow, whereas his world of unconscious fantasy is rich, and regularly expressed through action. (p. 229)

Using the rich psychodiagnostic testing material, Krohn painted a picture of the hysteric as one who is, more or less constantly, staging the contents of her unconscious, physically and viscerally enacting them through her body, in the form of richly overdetermined conversion symptoms, infected speech, and the acting out of primary process thought (with its reliance of condensation and displacement).

Krohn (1978) also emphasized a basic passivity and receptivity that is characteristic of hysteria. At first glance, this might seem paradoxical (and, perhaps, it is) that the hysteric tends always towards action and yet is conceived as passive. Krohn wrote of this paradox:

A hysteric’s symptom is expressed through the soma and the self feels passive in relation to it. This type of symptom choice reflects a characterological ego disposition to wishes: feeling an ego-syntonic passivity and helplessness in relation to disguised expression of such wishes. (p. 23)

In a shrewd observation that has often been overlooked in approaches to hysteria that have focused on its symptomatic presentation (and led often enough to a throwing up of hands and the announcement that no such thing as hysteria exists), Krohn pointed to one of the most basic features of hysteria, directly related to this basic passivity and receptivity: the hysteric is
Hysteria and the Psychoanalytic Act 79

captured by the external world, uniquely sensitive and receptive to it, and she tends to make extensive use of contemporaneous cultural and social forms. But the passivity that made the hysteric so receptive to these forms does not end there, according to Krohn:

The thesis to be argued here is that hysteria can be viably defined as a disorder which plays out dominant current cultural identities, often to a marginal but never a socially alienating extreme, in an attempt to promote a “myth of passivity”. (p. 160)

In addition to the creative and productive uses of cultural forms, this explains another feature of hysteria that has been consistently noted, and just as frequently disparaged, throughout its long history: its tendency towards masquerade, deception, subterfuge, inauthenticity. The psychoanalytic literature on hysteria is rife with signifiers of deceit: “pseudo-hyperemotionality,” (“pseudo” from the Greek ψευδής [psevdís] – false, sham, insincere, wearing masks), “pseudo-sexuality,” “pseudo-innocence,” “as-if personalities,” “so called good hysterics.”

Given Krohn’s (1978) perceptive and articulate synthesis of hysteria’s meandering and exasperating four thousand year history, what basis does my claim have that hysteria is the Real of ego psychology? Let us begin with an observation. Throughout its long history, hysteria has consistently demonstrated its capacity to proliferate. Krohn recognized this, and argued persuasively that such proliferation was the result of attempts to define hysteria on the basis of the presence of specific symptoms, such as conversion. Given the hysteric’s use of cultural forms, the evolution of symptoms is to be expected and, thus, cannot be the method by which hysteria is defined. Krohn’s answer to this problem was to define hysteria as a type of character constituted by characteristic structural relationships (id, ego, superego) and typical ego functions. This, however, did not solve the problem, for this approach was not able to stop hysteria’s constant refusal to be captured and fixed in place. For instance, Krohn noted two types of
hysterical character that seemed widely divergent dating back to the theories of character articulated by Reich (1933) and Wittels (1931):

He (Wittels) defined the hysterical personality as more fearful and passive than did Reich, who continually stressed the energy and liveliness of the hysterical personality… The hysterical personality depicted by Wittels is thus more primitive and impulse-ridden than the one described by Reich… These disparate views of the hysterical personality have appeared again and again in the literature since the time of Wittels and Reich. (p. 58)

The empirical research undertaken by Easser and Lesser (1965) supported this distinction, claiming the presence of two distinct character types that have both been referred to as hysterical, one of which is higher functioning and another, which is significantly more impaired. But this division does not mark the end of the story. The theoretical formulations of Zetzel (1965) created further subdivisions within the “so called good hysteric,” specifying four distinct categories. The concept of analyzability, which developed in the 1960s, was then applied to exclude the two lowest functioning groups from the psychoanalytic scene, and the remaining two groups were designated as “true good hysterics” and “potentially good hysterics.” In a distant but not unrelated context, Mary Douglas (1966) wrote:

… ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created. (p. 4)

Zetzel’s unapologetic use of the word “good” as well as the “so called” specification, alluding to the hysteric’s dissimulation, makes no attempt to conceal the exasperation that resulted from the
“elusive neurosis’s” refusal to be captured, its tendency to proliferate, the refusal of hysterics to be what they are as well as their refusal to get well, and the tendency of theorists and diagnosticians to continuously partition and exclude hysteria’s more unruly aspects.

Nowhere is Krohn’s (1978) vexation more evident than in his discussion of hysterical politics. He described the hysteric’s talent for developing “transient empathic ties” with a “cultural ambiance” that allows her to become a “spokesman” for the culture, “In living out the myths treasured by his reference group, the hysteric becomes a living advocate of the moral and stylistic positions of the culture, a ‘yes man’ for the social axioms of his milieu” (p. 208). He argued that hysterics were a natural conservative force contributing to cultural stability through their taking up of “marginal, but never completely alienating, modes of the particular culture” (p. 7). Krohn continued, “The hysteric advertises change without really participating in any fundamental social change, and the society, for better or worse, evolves that much more slowly” (p. 209). He argued specifically that hysterics were a disaster for the radical political movements of the then-recent 1960s, which had become fashionable and thereby attracted many hysterics, “The call to arms of the radical leaders was for them too severe a change, departing too precipitously from what was conventional, involving the threat of active participation and with it the danger of true responsibility” (p. 209).

In his attempt to tie down the hysterical character, Krohn (1978) argued that hysteria did have basic features and these basic features were a receptivity and sensitivity to cultural forms of identity that the hysteric would take up in order to live out a “myth of passivity.” But is this the end of the story? Why is such a myth of passivity basic and not itself a product of patriarchal culture, yet another cultural form the hysteric plays with? The answer to this question was in the Oedipus complex. For Krohn, as for most ego psychologists and for Freud himself, the Oedipus
complex was a biological bedrock of sorts: universal, timeless, and culturally invariant. Lacan’s development of his conception of the Symbolic from Levi-Strauss’s structuralist account of the incest taboo and his constant displacements of Freud’s Oedipus complex definitively challenged any notion of the Oedipus complex as biological bedrock. Myths of substance dissolved within the structuralist and, especially, poststructuralist anti-systems of the late twentieth century.

*Matter-Form*

It must be said that this is not the only ego psychological strategy for affixing the Real of hysteria that followed venerable traditions in the Western history of ideas. The myth of the “myth of passivity” seems to come directly from Freud’s conception of femininity. This, however, is a much older association going back to the prehistory of philosophy in the always gendered binary of *form* and *matter* (Summers, 1993). Aristotle most famously articulated the form/matter binary, speaking allegorically:

Nothing passes from the carpenter into the pieces of timber, which are his material, and there is no part of the art of carpentry present in the object which is being fashioned; it is the shape and the form [*morphe kai eidos*] which pass from the carpenter, and they come into being by means of the movement of the material [*hyle*]. It is his soul, wherein is the 'form,' and his knowledge, which causes his hands (or some other part of his body) to move in a particular way (different ways for different products, and always the same way for any one product); his hands move the tools and his tools move the material. In a similar way to this, Nature (*physis*) acting in the male of semen-emitting animals, uses the semen as a tool, as something that has movement in actuality; just as when objects are being produced by any art the tools are in movement, because the movement which belongs to art is, in a way, situated in them. (quoted in Summers, 1993, p. 255)
So, matter is the basic substance that is passively molded from the active principle of form. In fact, Plato’s earlier discussion of matter and form uses precisely this allegory of clay (matter) that is molded (form).

Even prior to Plato and Aristotle, and influencing both of them, Pythagoras proposed ten gendered, hierarchically opposed contraries at the root of all metaphysics. The superior male principle was associated with the series: "limited" (or definite), "oddness" (of numbers), "unity," "right," "rest," "straight," "light," "good," and "square". The inferior female principle was associated with the series: "unlimited" (or indefinite), "even" (as in two, four), "plurality," "left," "movement," "the curved," "dark," "bad," and "oblong" (Summers, 1993, p. 257-58). Plotinus, expanding and synthesizing the views of Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle, further speculated that the inferior matter also tended towards the corruption of form:

For matter masters what is imaged in it and corrupts and destroys it by applying its own nature which is contrary to form, not bringing cold to hot [that is, not simply bringing about change] but putting its own formlessness to the form of heat and its shapelessness to the shape and its excess and defect to that which is measured, till it has made the form belong to matter and no longer to itself" (E 8.8.19-25). (cited in Summers, 1993, p. 258)

It is a small step to see the way in which the form/matter binary was taken up in the post-Greek medieval Christian world with the figures of Adam and Eve and the fall into creatureliness.

Heidegger (1971) demonstrated how the matter/form duality has perpetuated in the modern period in the very subject-object duality discussed earlier. Form is, naturally associated with the subject, and more specifically with the Kantian categories by which the *noumenal* matter is imparted with *phenomenal* intelligibility. Summers (1993), amplifying our earlier discussion of Heidegger’s critique of modern epistemology, wrote:
Heidegger rejects the notion – which of course he believes to be an almost intractably deep, commonsense notion, or better, culturally specific assumed first principle – that things are formed matter because of the metaphor underlying this concept. The thing so conceived, he argues, is conceived as equipment, as something made for a purpose and defined by that purpose. To think of things as equipmental is to think of existence as equipmental, which of course points to one of Heidegger's major and persistent complaints about the Western tradition taken altogether. (p. 260)

Heidegger never discussed the formed matter concept of being in terms of its gendered associations and certainly made no use of medical-psychoanalytic concepts like hysteria and obsessional neurosis. By inserting his critiques of modernity into the Pythagorean series of contraries, it is clear to see, however, that his emphasis on receptivity against dominating objectification is on the side of the feminine (hysterical) principle.

*Theater*

Like the implicit hierarchical suppression of passivity, there is also a venerated tradition of Western philosophy’s banishment of theatricality, staging, artifice, and deception. The Greeks, themselves, seem to divide on this issue, with the Homeric Greeks celebrating Hermes as the trickster God who in his infancy stole Apollo’s cattle and Odysseus, “man of twists and turns,” as the last of the Greek heroes, while Plato, a much later Greek, banished theater from the republic. Badiou (2013) wrote of the troubled relationship of theater and philosophy:

From the origin, Plato objects to the theatre because of its use of role play, masks, and imitation. Theatre would be suspiciously polymorphous, vacillating in its relation to semblance. Theatre distances us from the solar stability of the Idea; it showcases the
sharing and the inverting of appearances, instead of the tenacity with which the
philosopher seeks to climb up toward the principle of what is. (p. 93)

Badiou went on to track this troubled relationship after Plato’s banishment, through Rousseau’s mistrust of theatre as representation, preferring instead the transparent presentation of civic festivity, and even through Nietzsche who, somewhat surprisingly given his anti-Platonism, saw in theater only “false thinking, a plebian simulacrum” (p. 94). Badiou further pointed out that many philosophers had championed a particular art form above all others: sculpture for Hegel and Deleuze, music for Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, poetry for Heidegger, Lacoue-Labarthe, and Nancy, or painting for Merleau-Ponty and Lyotard, but none, with the exception of himself, had “rhapsodized” for theater in a similar way. Badiou proposed that in theater, philosophy had always seen a rival. Sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly, Badiou associates theater with femininity against the phallic manipulation of truths and mastery of the Idea that is philosophy. This only troubles him sometimes. He trusts and loves the theater, but he is less certain about actors:

I want to confess a rather troubling and indefensible thing: I don’t love actors very much. I admire a few of them, but there is a huge difference between admiration and love. In order for an actor, in his subjective being, to stop provoking in me a feeling of doubt and unease, I must have the assurance that he is also, as if at a distance from himself, the intellectual of his art; I must sense, as the flip side of his agility, the latent solidity of the concept. (p. 52-53)

Theater approaches a Real that Badiou admits can be intolerable. It exists at the disputed periphery of philosophy and psychoanalysis, “But perhaps it is above all the case that philosophy sees in theatre, which always fascinates it and gets it all worked up, a mode of the Idea that is
infected, always, by desire” (p. 73). The worked up Badiou, the militant, the master, the fool, faced with the infected Idea, can only issue an absurd proclamation, “Here I propose my second reform, which is so wide-ranging that it is a pleasure to see. It can be summed up as follows: our presence in the theatre hall must become obligatory” (p. 81). From banishment to obligatory attendance, the infection of desire has never been one philosophers have known how to heal. This dangerous intersection is precisely where Webster (2011) placed Badiou, “He stands between the two impossible poles of desire and mastery” (p. 98).

Hysterical Politics

The question of a hysterical politics does not have the illustrious history that the form-matter binary does nor that of the philosophical banishment of the theatrical infection of the Idea. Rather, this seems to be a distinctly post-modern question. So, Krohn (1978) described the hysteric as a “spokesperson” and a “yes man” for the culture, who created the appearance of change and marginality while, in reality, being a conservative force that curbed radical and revolutionary forces. Meanwhile, more recently and, not surprisingly from Lacanian quarters, in a 2012 talk, Claude-Noële Pickman (2012) took up what seems to be the directly opposite perspective to that of Krohn:

Thus, in her own way, she (the hysteric) interrogates the structure at the point of its own failure, and takes on herself, incarnating sometimes even to the sacrifice of herself, to unveil this secret truth at any price. She wants to put truth at the place of knowledge. This is the value of hysteria for culture. She has a vocation to resist the dominant discourse and to make herself the symptom of a social malaise that she incarnates… She is a whistleblower for society.
Hysteria and the Psychoanalytic Act 87

From “yes man” to “whistleblower,” as ever, the hysteric refuses to be pinned down and seems to be in two places at once with two radically different and even opposed agendas.

It is fascinating to note that this imaginary debate between Krohn and Pickman30 is an eerily close repetition of an oral discussion that was recorded between the French Marxist-feminist philosophers Catherine Clément and Hélène Cixous. Cixous passionately proclaimed:

Yes, the hysteric, with her way of questioning others (because if she succeeds in bringing down the men who surround her, it is by questioning them, by ceaselessly reflecting to them the image that truly castrates them, to the extent that the power they have wished to impose is an illegitimate power of rape and violence), the hysteric is, to my eyes, the typical woman in all her force… The hysteric is not just someone who has her words cut off, someone for whom the body speaks. It all starts with her anguish as it relates to desire and to the immensity of her desire – therefore, from her demanding quality.

(Cixous & Clement, 1990, p. 285-86)

Shortly after, she continued:

There is also the fact that there is no place for the hysteric; she cannot be placed or take place. Hysteria is necessarily an element that disturbs arrangements; wherever it is, it shakes up all those who want to install themselves, who want to install something that is going to work, to repeat. It is very difficult to block out this type of person who doesn’t leave you in peace, who wages permanent war against you. (p. 287)

To which came Clément’s more circumspect reply:

Yes, it (hysteria) introduces dissension, but it doesn’t explode anything at all; it doesn’t disperse the bourgeois family, which also exists only through its dissension, which holds

---

30 In an odd coincidence, after writing this section, Krohn and Pickman did participate in a panel discussion together at the Psychoanalysis on Ice conference in Iceland in October 2014.
together only in the possibility or the reality of its own disturbance, always reclosable, always reclosed. (p. 287)

Displaced, displacing, creature of deceit and the seduction of appearances, the hysteric appears to be a force of structural change, but, in fact, she is conservatism in its most insidious form. Or is this too only appearance?

Clément’s position proves more complicated and ambivalent. In a later work (Clément, 1994), she contrasted the positions of Hegel and Hölderlin on the first great feminine figure of tragedy, Antigone, the figure of hysterical politics *par excellence*. She emphasized Hegel’s incapacity to recognize the active and disruptive side of Antigone, associating her as he did with the household gods of the family and the duties they impose. Hölderlin, Hegel’s friend from childhood, by contrast saw in her only this rebellion, to which he gave himself over completely, crossing over into syncope and madness. Clément emphasized that both aspects of hysteria/femininity exist in Antigone, “This side of Antigone the gravedigger partakes of the eternal feminine, made to maintain the flame of the unknown soldier. The other side of her titillates the city, battles against Creon” (p. 68). She noted how Hegel and the Western tradition of dialectical philosophy constantly seeks to write out, to cover over this unruly side, and she explicitly associated this unruly side with hysteria, seemingly against her earlier view, “To capture the taste of young girl’s rebellion, one must plunge into the universe of syncope: hysteria, coughing fits, little cries and sighs, and great rebellions cannot be evaded. One must be able to be in love” (p. 68). The ability to be in love speaks to the passiveness and receptivity that Krohn emphasized. It appears that a certain willingness to allow oneself to be penetrated, possessed, devastated is what is taken up in the tragedy of Antigone and is the paradoxical source of hysteria’s power.
A contemporary case of hysterical politics has emerged in the Tiqqun group in France. Tiqqun originally referred to a philosophic journal of that name that emerged in 1999 and dissolved in 2001, but the name has come to be the moniker for a network of radical left guerrilla political ideas and the anonymous group that produces them. The group developed significant notoriety first when a member, Julien Coupat, was arrested as a terrorist in 2008 and held in prison for six months despite the absence of any evidence before being released. Their infamy increased in the United States when Fox News’s Glenn Back began to focus on the group, which he described as “crazy” and “evil,” urging viewers to “know who the enemy is” (Beck, July 1, 2009; May 3, 2010; October 10, 2011). Describing their hysterical politics, Tiqqun (2011b) wrote:

We call this politics ecstatic. Its aim is not to rescue abstractly – through successive re/presentations – human presence from dissolution, but instead to create participable magic, techniques for inhabiting not a territory but a world. And this creation, this play between different forms-of-life, entails the subversion and the liquidation of all apparatuses.

Tiqqun (2011a) described this anonymous network, “The Imaginary Party is therefore nothing, specifically; it is everything that impedes, undermines, defies, ruins equivalence” (p. 38). And committing themselves to a radically hysterical brand of militant figure, they wrote:

Contrary to what THEY have told us, the warrior is not a figure of plenitude, and certainly not of virile plenitude. The warrior is a figure of amputation. The warrior is a being who feels he exists only through combat, through confrontation with the Other, a being who is unable to obtain for himself the feeling of existing. (p. 75)
Indeed, if Cixous’s political analysis is correct, hysteria’s power is more in line with terrorism, with the disruption and destruction of the existing order, than with a politics of increasing synthesis and incorporation and of the progressive realization of the Idea. Tiqqun (2011a) wrote, “Our acts of destruction, of sabotage: we have no reason to follow them up with an explanation duly guided by human Reason” (p. 61).

And yet, even here, we find the repetition, the same ambivalence and conflict of how and where to place the hysteric. For Tiqqun (2011c), it comes in the form of their theory of the Young-Girl. Tiqqun’s Young-Girl is the flittingly violent intrication of hysteria and commodity culture. On the side of Krohn and Clement, they wrote, “In reality, the Young-Girl is simply the model citizen as redefined by consumer society since World War I, in explicit response to the revolutionary menace” (p. 15). Or again, “The eternal return of the same styles in fashion is enough to convince: The Young-Girl does not play with appearances. It is appearances that play with her” (p. 35). At the same time, Tiqqun recognized with some apprehension and awe, the negative capacities inherent in her:

In certain extreme cases, one sees the Young-Girl turning the void within her against the world that made her what she is. The pure void of her form, her profound hostility to everything that is, will condense into explosive blocs of negativity. She will have to ravage everything that surrounds her. (p. 132-133)

Most notably, Tiqqun, like Clément, comprehended that the same quality that allowed the Young Girl, in Krohn’s words, to establish “transient empathic ties with a cultural ambiance,” that made of her the Spectacle’s plaything, was the very source of her disruptive power. They wrote, “This unquenchability is the central lever of consumption, and of its subversion” (p. 137). Her weakness is her strength, and strength is always a weakness.
Pharmakon

Hysteria is a pharmakon: neither and both active and/or passive, masquerading seduction and/or incessant truth-telling, conservative and/or revolutionary; it is a site of irreducible ambivalence and danger. Derrida (1972/1981) wrote of the pharmakon:

This charm, this spellbinding virtue, this power of fascination, can be – alternately or simultaneously – beneficent or maleficent. The pharmakon would be a substance – with all that that word can connote in terms of matter with occult virtues, cryptic depths refusing to submit their ambivalence to analysis, already paving the way for alchemy – if we didn’t have eventually to come to recognize it as antisubstance itself: that which resists any philosopheme, indefinitely exceeding its bounds as nonidentity, nonessence, nonsubstance; granting philosophy by that very fact the inexhaustible adversity of what funds it and the infinite absence of what founds it. (p. 70)

The hysterical pharmakon, from Eve to Augustine, Dora to Lady Gaga, endlessly seducing the master with her fruits of knowledge, luring him from the safe insularity of the garden into the wilderness. The hysteric’s desire infects the world. Hysteria spreads: boarding school epidemics of psychic pregnancy and paralyses, recovered memories, viral memes, ataque de nervios, an endless deferral, repetition, and transformation of mimetic desiring. The hysterical pharmakon comes as a stranger from without, from the dark continent, upsetting the orderly, bounded daylight world. “God has no allergies” (Derrida, 1972/1981, p. 101). With its proton pseudos, hysteria disrupts our ideals of immanent, identical being.

Embodied, the hysteric is this liminal figure who, at times, we fear, but mostly we make ridiculous and dismiss. Glenn Beck urged us not to dismiss these people. He should know; as
Stephen Colbert (March 31, 200931) has shown so marvelously, he is but another incarnation of the Young-Girl (the revolutionary menace is here!). It is distinctly possible that Krohn is correct in his assessment that hysterics are disastrous for politics. But this is because he speaks of hysterics rather than of hysteria, and that his metric is ego and intentions rather than the dramatic staging of unconscious desire. Glenn Beck, Fox News, the Tea Party, the Bible belt: these are actors, props, sets in an unfolding drama; as are Tiqqun, Cixous, Ophelia, as are we all. Without hysteria’s parodic performative proliferation, all would be stillness, a rust would cover being, everywhere the smell of stale air.

Chapter 5: Wounded Dramatization: Bataille, Hysteria, Psychoanalysis

- Not being birds, how do you propose to rest on an abyss?

*Friedrich Nietzsche Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

With the notable exception of Ruth Stein (1998a, 1998b, 2002, 2006, 2008), American psychoanalysts have had little to say about Georges Bataille’s thought. Stein was interested in Bataille’s theorization and enactment of the sexual as excessive and even monstrous in the face of object relational and self psychological theories that had seemed to efface the role of sexuality in psychoanalytic theory as well as its central position in psychic life. Stein (1998b) noted that French theorists had very often been more concerned with “lack, absence, passion and longing for the irrational and the impossible” (p. 257) than had their American and British counterparts. These are the very concepts that are at the center of this work. In addition to being influenced by structuralism and poststructuralism, the development of psychoanalysis in France was significantly more entwined with that of André Breton and surrealism, whose history was also entwined, if in nearly constant combat, with Bataille. Psychoanalysis was slow to take root in French soil, and, as psychoanalysis was born of Freud’s listening to the symptomatic speech of hysteries, a French psychoanalysis was also ushered in via a woman: the deviant, criminal woman, the wholly Other (Dean, 1992; Roudinesco, 1990). Roudinesco (1990) wrote (and Bataille could be included in this series along with Lacan, Breton, and Aragon):

The young Lacan was nourished on that vision as much as André Breton was. Both drew sustenance from an epistemic configuration which took concrete form with the forgetting of Charcot’s teaching and the transition from the clinical reality of ‘nervous diseases’ to
Hysteria and the Psychoanalytic Act 94

one, which was more psychiatric, of ‘mental disorders.’ That was why Breton and Aragon paid homage to the Augustine of the Salpêtrière, it was already Violette, Aimée, and Nadja whom they were addressing – that is, a rebellious, criminal, paranoid, or homosexual woman, who was no longer the impoverished laundry maid of former times, the slave of her symptoms, but the heroine of modernity. (p. 21)

Although Bataille’s pseudonymously written fiction is typically told in the first person with a male narrator, his heroes are invariably female: Simone, whose desire tilts the narrator from catastrophe to catastrophe ever closer to an annihilating jouissance (Bataille, 1928/2001), the triad of Lazare, Xénie, and Dirty who lead Troppman into the terror of a world about to plunge into total war (Bataille, 1934/2012), the prostitute Madame Edwarda who raises her foot above her head, opens her crack, and announces, “I’m GOD” (Bataille, 1956/2012), or Pierre’s mother whose “forest joy” initiates her son into the secrets of death’s kingdom (Bataille, 1966/2012). As Bataille’s biographer, Michel Surya (2002) wrote, “Bataillean narratives have a truth, an enraged truth: the truth of a void about which there is nothing to know” (p. 444).

Psychoanalysis would displace Surya’s enunciation: the void is the truth, the only truth about which we care to know anything. In Bataille, I found an anti-system, an obscene seduction, an open wound, a spiraling of thought at the center of which was a void.

Roudinesco (1990) wrote, “For the surrealists, hysteria was a language, a means of expression, a work of poetry whose subversive form ought to be championed against art itself, against literature” (p. 7). Against hysteria’s liberated expression, the obsessional, as its antipode, was mired in the “bestiality of all beings and all things” (Breton, 1929/1969). When Breton and Bataille met for the first time in 1925, Breton referred to Bataille as an obsessive, a summary form of excommunication from “the pope” (Surya, 2002). And yet, there is a negative
movement in all of Bataille’s work that runs precisely counter to obsessional systematic
enclosure, that undermines the dead master, the law, and all fixed meanings that anchor the
discourse of the obsessional. For Bataille, the question is always a question of desire, and in his
fiction, it is always and only a woman who initiates the narrator into desire’s arcane and often
terrifying realm of erotic violence and destruction.

_Bataille with Freud_

Bataille, himself, was well versed in Freud’s thought, and he underwent a relatively brief
and unorthodox analysis with Adrien Borel, one of the first generation of psychoanalysts in
France (Surya, 2002). With Borel’s support, Bataille completed his first novel, _The Story of the
Eye_, by capturing and being captured in the imaginary metamorphoses of his fantasies, and, in a
Postscript, he provided his own psychoanalytic interpretation of these images of excess and
violence. Despite this familiarity with Freudian theory, there was a difference of tongues
between Bataille and psychoanalysis. Whereas Hegel’s, Marx’s, even Heidegger’s and Sartre’s
signifiers invaded Bataille’s texts, if only to be subverted, he never adopted a recognizable
Freudian lexicon.

This is not to say that there aren’t significant areas of convergence in the languages and
thought of Bataille and Freud. Like Nietzsche – scrupulously avoided by Freud for fear of undue
influence and given over to fully by Bataille – central to both were the Greeks, and their realm of
myth, mysteries, and tragedy. Adorno (1951/2006) wrote, “In psychoanalysis nothing is true
except the exaggerations” (p. 90). Such is mythic truth. Such is Bataillean truth: monstrous,
headless or hydra-headed, from the bowels of the earth. Mythographer and essayist Roberto
Calasso (1993) wrote, “Only when we become aware of a sudden consistency between
incompatibles can we say we have crossed the threshold of myth” (p. 22). Or the threshold of
psychoanalysis. Or with Bataille, “… we enter the mythical when we enter the realm of risk, and myth is the enchantment we generate in ourselves at such moments” (Calasso, 1993, p. 278).

Beyond their grounding in the world of myths, in both Freud and Bataille, there is a constant subversion of metaphors of the heights. Freud (1915-1916) declared his discovery of the unconscious as the third great narcissistic injury to mankind after Copernicus and Darwin. And so, for Freud, the ego is not even master in its own house and the most elevated ideals of mankind, such as love, artistic and intellectual creation, all forms of heroism, even the entirety of the subject’s destiny are symptomatic and generated in infantile sexuality, the body, and the insistence and vicissitudes of the drive. The entire history of psychoanalytic civil war and factional battling can be figured by this Freudian subversion and constant attempts to reconstitute a masterful ego. Bataille rose to recognition in the shadow of Breton and the surrealists. Breton and Bataille disliked each other immediately. Breton (1929/1969) referred to Bataille as the “excrement philosopher,” and Bataille repeatedly hurled at Breton what was for him the worst epithet: “idealist.” Against the sur- of surrealism, Bataille (1985) wrote of “big toes,” “severed ears,” and “old moles,” proclaiming:

The earth is base, the world is world, human agitation is only vulgar and perhaps not acknowledgeable: this is the shame of Icarian despair. But to the loss of the head there is no other reply: a crass sneer, vile grimaces. For it is a human agitation, with all the vulgarity of needs small and great, with its flagrant disgust for the police who repress it, it is the agitation of all men… that alone determines revolutionary mental forms, in opposition to bourgeois mental forms. (p. 43)

Like Freud before him but exaggeratedly, monstrously, Bataille sought to subvert metaphors of the heights and to “rematerialize materialism” (Surya, 2002).
In addition to metaphors of the heights and the depths, both Freud and Bataille utilized energetic metaphors. Lacan (1954-55/1991) said, “Freud’s whole discussion revolves around that questions, what, in terms of energy, is the psyche?” (p. 75). Bataille focused on current, movement, perishability, and excess against substance, accumulation, and growth. Bataille (1954/1988) wrote:

Life is never situated at a particular point: it passes rapidly from one point to another (or from multiple points to other points), like a current or like a sort of streaming of electricity. Thus, there where you would like to grasp your timeless substance, you encounter only a slipping, only the poorly coordinated play of your perishable elements. (p. 94).

Both Bataille’s and Freud’s discourses begin with a subversion of the heights, the subject, the ego, and of all forms of idealism. They are material discourses rooted in the earth and the body. And they are monstrous discourses: myths of a hole that is gouged at the center of being around which the energy of desire circulates in a natural state of conflict and war. “Further on one’s head bursts: man is not contemplation (he only has peace by fleeing); he is supplication, war, anguish, madness” (Bataille, 1954/1988, p. 36-7).

_Bataille’s Heterology_

Bataille’s early writings were characterized by a series of interlocking dualisms, and, although he tended to line up on one side of these dualisms, their dialectical resistance to any clear-cut overcoming of one term by the other would structure and charge his thought from its beginning to its end. We have already seen one of these dualisms in base materialism against all forms of idealism, and it was primarily this duality, and his championing of base materialism, that fueled his critique of André Breton and the surrealists. Another dualism that structured
Bataille’s early thought, not unrelated to materialism/idealism and familiar to psychoanalysts, was excretion against appropriation. Bataille (1985) wrote:

The process of appropriation is thus characterized by a homogeneity (static equilibrium) of the author of the appropriation, and of objects as final result, whereas excretion presents itself as the result of an ever-greater heterogeneity, liberating impulses whose ambivalence is more and more pronounced. (p. 95)

He thereby introduced yet another dualism, more inclusive than the previous two and encompassing them both (materialism/idealism, excretion/appropriation): the heterogeneous against the homogeneous.

In a series of papers written in the late 1920s and early 1930s (centrally, “The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade,” “The Notion of Expenditure,” and “The Psychological Structure of Fascism”), and pulling from diverse fields such as Marxism, psychoanalysis, sociology, ethnology, economics, theology, and mythography, Bataille carved out a realm of human experience he called heterology. The heterogeneous included those elements that were designated in theology as the realm of the sacred – charged with a mysterious force (mana) and marked by prohibitions (taboo) – as well as everything resulting from unproductive expenditure – the erotic, body parts, waste products, dreams, neuroses, the unconscious in general, poets, warriors, leaders, madmen, violence, excess, delirium – and finally the realms of myth and tragedy (Bataille, 1985). Against this heterogeneous realm, the homogeneous was that of the utilitarian world of projects and production. Bataille (1985) wrote, “Production is the basis of social homogeneity. Homogeneous society is productive society, namely, useful society” (p. 138).
Hysteria was the field Bataille proposed for the study of heterogeneous phenomena, although the unassimilable nature of these elements was the source of the methodological problematics that would define his works from its beginning to its end. Bataille argued that the aim of science was to establish the homogeneity of phenomena by reducing them to essentialized, quantifiable elements. It is, therefore, incumbent upon science to exclude heterogeneous elements, of which it wants to know nothing. Heterology is also opposed to philosophic thinking and particularly any form of philosophic system. It is a form of anti-philosophy, as Badiou would say, and, indeed, Kendall (2011) wrote, “I would say Bataille philosophizes with a scalpel, but he does not philosophize” (p. xix). Bataille (1985) wrote of philosophy:

The interest of philosophy resides in the fact that, in opposition to science or common sense, it must positively envisage the waste products of intellectual appropriation. Nevertheless, it most often envisages the waste products only in abstract forms of totality (nothingness, infinity, the absolute), to which it itself cannot give a positive content… (p. 96)

Thus, Bataille (1985) argued that heterology was distinctively outside the fields of science and philosophy, which either excluded heterogeneous elements at the outset or appropriated heterogeneous elements into a totalizing (homogenizing) philosophic system.

In terms of method, heterology (and Bataille’s work more generally) was, thus, defined by negativity. Bataille (1985) wrote of heterology’s objects of study, “The specific character of fecal matter or of the specter, as well as of unlimited time or space, can only be the object of a series of negations, such as the absence of any possible common denominator, irrationality, etc.” (p. 98). So it was that Bataille was drawn to the greatest of systematizers, Hegel, at the same
time as Hegel would become the fall-guy, synonymous with the very word *system*. Bataille’s
great forefather, in this respect, was Nietzsche whose work was profoundly anti-systematic (and
anti-Hegelian) and whose method was aphoristic (*aphorism* – truth reduced to its minimum, a
broken, wounded truth). It was also this emphasis on negativity that led Bataille to the study of
the apophatic Christian mystics and negative theologians, such as Dionysius the Areopagite, St.
John of the Cross, and Angela of Foligno (Surya, 2002). Negative anti-systematicity defined
Bataille’s work and contributed to the often chaotic nature of his books and his frequent inability
to complete projects. His most disordered book, *Guilty* (Bataille, 1944/2011) consisted of his
war-time journals and ricocheted between the deeply personal and the speculative and, according
to Kendall (2011) was “a tragic text in which every discourse of personal or social legitimation
meets its end” (p. xxiii). Bataille (1945/1992) himself wrote:

> I can only make fun of myself as I write… It goes without saying that, for the task, I
> bring to bear whatever rigor I have within me. But the crumbling nature of thinking’s
> awareness of itself and especially the certainty of thinking reaching its end only in
> failure, hinders any rigorous disposition of things. Committed to the casual stance – *I
> think and express myself in the free play of hazard*. (p. 184).

As in psychoanalysis – the analysand’s free association and the analyst’s evenly suspended
attention with its requisite bracketing of all forms of knowledge – *the free play of hazard*.

Against the utilitarian homogeneous, Bataille’s focus was on forms of unproductive
expenditure. He argued that the scientific and humanistic discourses examined production,
conservation, and rational consumption, but failed to theorize unproductive forms of expenditure,
such as “luxury, mourning, war, cults, the construction of sumptuous monuments, games,
spectacles, arts, perverse sexual activity (i.e., deflected from genital finality)” (Bataille, 1985, p.
118). Using ethnographic and sociological findings, particularly the work of Marcel Mauss (1950/2000), Bataille argued that archaic or primitive economies were not structured on a notion of exchange, as in theories of barter, but on a notion of expenditure, which Mauss characterized as “the gift,” but which was typically agonistic, excessive, and violently destructive. Mauss’s work highlighted the *potlatch* ceremonies of the Tlingit, the Haida, the Tsimshian, and the Kwakiutl tribes of the Pacific Northwest, in which chiefs would compete in gifting their rivals, competitions that would sometimes end in the burning of entire villages or the sacrifice of dozens or even hundreds of slaves. Bataille (1985) wrote:

> The secondary character of production and acquisition in relation to expenditure appears most clearly in primitive economic institutions, since exchange is still treated as a sumptuary loss of ceded objects: thus at its base exchange presents itself as a process of expenditure, over which a process of acquisition has developed. (p. 121)

Bataille (1985, 1997) argued, not only that primitive societies developed their economies on a notion of expenditure rather than exchange, but that the bourgeoisie could be characterized by their refusal of this obligation, and that their abandonment of any concept of non-utilitarian expenditure (such as *potlatch* or sacrifice) created a destructive excess (*the accursed share*) that led to modern conditions of world war and the threat of nuclear annihilation. Much as in psychoanalysis, the repressed returns and is the source of our symptoms. According to Bataille, there is an excess and expenditure will occur either symptomatically or as a form of subjectivization.

> Formerly human beings attempted to obviate concern through loss (religious sacrifice).

> Now they attempt to obviate anguish with the help of useful action. The present attitude
is more sensible (the old one was puerile). A truly virile attitude would not grant a
greater share to loss, but a more conscious one. (Bataille, 1944/2011, p. 82)

So, for Bataille, excess is inherent to the human condition (as in Freud’s drive). It must be spent,
and it is this realm of violent expenditure (beyond the pleasure principle) that Bataille sought to
map out in his heterology.

_Inner Experience, Sacrifice, and the Acéphale_

Bataille would baptize these limit phenomena of heterogeneous excess and violent
expenditure _inner experience_. Against the realm of inner experience, Bataille posited the realm
of _project_. Contrary to the existentialist heroic notion of _project_ that was emerging in France
during the war years, largely in the work of Sartre\(^32\) (1943/1992), which emphasized the original
spontaneous choice of project in total freedom and responsibility and as that which is constitutive
of the subject’s authenticity, Bataille described project as the realm of rational decision making,
action, and the suppression of pain; or, psychoanalytically, as defensive, avoidant, a series of
compromise formations. Bataille (1954/1988) wrote, “Project is not only the mode of existence implied by action, necessary to action – it is a way of being in paradoxical time: _it is the putting off of existence to a later point_” (p. 46). The realm of project is defined by aims and ends, by thoughts of salvation and the morality that is the technology of salvation. It is the realm of
instrument, of the manufactured and the homogeneous. Against Sartre’s project freely chosen by

\(^{32}\) Sartre, in fact, wrote a rather scathing satirical review of _Inner Experience_ immediately after its release, referring to Bataille as a “new mystic.” Bataille’s relationship with Sartre was complex. It is interesting how often Bataille’s detractors would hurl epithets at him, which I can only imagine him vigorously approving of: “new mystic,” “excrement philosopher” (Breton), “sexual deviant” (Boris Souvarine), “sick man” (Simone Weil) (Surya, 2002).
Hysteria and the Psychoanalytic Act 103

an abandoned subject, Bataille’s subject was no longer sovereign, was enslaved by his project, no more than its means. Bataille (1954/1988) wrote of the subject of project and his methods:

Harmony is the means of ‘realizing’ project. Harmony (measure) leads project to a good end: passion, childish desire prevent one from waiting. Harmony is made manifest by the man engaged in project; he has found calm, has eliminated the impatience of desire. (p. 56)

This image of the harmonious subject was contrasted with the subject of desire, of excess and sacrifice. For Bataille, the subject is inevitably confronted with anguish, and flees from this anguish through project and action, but thereby abandons any chance at sovereignty and the “voyage to the end of the possible of man” (Bataille, 1954/1988, p. 7).

So, while Bataille (1954/1988) would directly oppose inner experience and action (“I came to this position: inner experience is the opposite of action. Nothing more” [p. 46]), it was not possible to say that project and inner experience were simple antitheses. Inner experience became an end itself: “Principle of inner experience: to emerge through project from the realm of project” (p. 46). But once again, evoking the negative, Bataille proposed that the end of inner experience was of a different order than the positive end of salvation: “Nevertheless inner experience is project, no matter what… But project is no longer in this case that, positive, of salvation, but that, negative, of abolishing the power of words, hence of project” (p. 22). Bataille was only interested in that which was its own undoing: poetry’s “perversion” of language, supplication before the absence of God, an “unfinished system of nonknowledge,” a subjectivity

---

Sovereignty was an important concept in Bataille’s thought and was utilized to highlight the loss of freedom that came with all utilitarian, goal-directed activity, any commitment to a cause, creed, morality, as well as to any form of specialization (and all action is a form of specialization) that limits the possible and the wholeness of the subject.
who “contests himself in his entirety” (p. 179). Bataille (1944/2011) neatly outlined these orders in his journal:

Different moments swimming in the waters of time

a1) real concern;

a2) action (expenditure of productive energy);

a3) relaxation

b1) anguish

b2) partial self-loss, explosive… (nonproductive expenditure, religious delirium, but the religious categories mix with action, eroticism is something else, laughter attains a divine innocence…);

b3) relaxation; etc. (p. 82)

Bataille had dozens of names for the movement of negativity: death, void, fissure, rupture, Night, Nothingness, decomposition, shit, laughter, laceration, war, revolt, enigma, nudity. He and Andre Masson, close friend and dissident surrealist painter, produced several images representing it as well: swirling forms with a void at their center, the labyrinth, images of dismemberment and violence, erotic and vaginal forms, and, finally, the Acéphale sacrificing his head, self, ego. Polling (2008) wrote:

Acéphale, as the labyrinthine man, is the monster who inhabits the maze and is a

---

34 Acéphale means “headless,” and it was the title of a relatively short-lived journal Bataille created, initially edited, and came to write in its entirety which produced five issues between 1936-1939. Masson drew its cover. See Figure 1. The Acéphale figure was headless, had a sacrificial knife in his right hand, his flaming heart in his left, a skull in place of his genitals, stars in place of nipples, exposed labyrinthine entrails, bared anus, and his feet rooted in the earth (Polling, 2008).
reflection of the human being, whose mind contains the convolutions and hidden places of the unconscious. Entering this realm involves the loss of the rational self and transformation into the monster of the irrational, instinctual self. (p. 101).

Liminal, at the threshold of excess and violent rupture, of anguish and ecstasy, for Bataille, the head must be sacrificed, as in castration, as in Oedipus tearing his face apart.
Figure 1. Acéphale Issue 1.
Bataillean Ethics

Bataille was, in fact, politically engaged, if idiosyncratically, in the years leading up to World War II, and his participation during this time is illuminating of the ethics that was at play throughout his works. His analysis of fascism was one of the first of its kind and was certainly one of the most sophisticated. Although Bataille would later call his attempt to become Marxist during this period “touching” (Surya, 2002), he did participate in the anti-fascist demonstrations in Paris leading up to the occupation, and he participated in Boris Souvarine’s work group, the Democratic Communist Circle, along with many prominent surrealists and Simone Weil, who, ultimately, decided not to join the Circle because of ineradicable differences she saw between Bataille’s position and her own. Weil wrote:

How can people belong to the same revolutionary organization when they understand revolution in two contradictory senses? … revolution is for him the triumph of the irrational, for me of the rational; for him a catastrophe, for me a methodical action in which one should try to limit the damage; for him the liberation of instincts, in particular those considered pathological, for me a higher morality? What is there in common? (quoted in Surya, 2002, p. 167-168)

With deft precision, Weil not only highlighted her political differences with Bataille, but she illuminated the essence of his position: the insurmountable problem of the state (of the head, of the ego), an utter lack of faith in revolution, and, instead, a permanent process of revolt.

Bataillean ethics have much in common with Lacan’s (1959-1960/1992) ethics of psychoanalysis. Although Bataille rarely articulated a theory of the law, its implicit presence is deeply important for both Lacan and Bataille as a threshold that protects against impossible self-dissolution and an unbearable jouissance, and, therefore, also as the portal or entranceway by
which such inner experiences might be achieved. Lacan, playing on St. Paul’s examination of the law and sin with his own conception of Das Ding\(^{35}\), which lays beyond and constantly impels the subject towards that threshold, wrote, “Is the Law the Thing? Certainly not. Yet I know of the Thing by means of the Law” (p. 82). It is no coincidence that Bataille’s vehicle for the ecstasy of self-dissolution was so often the erotic, that site of the Other’s inscription of the law and the beckoning of its beyond, which is the target of desire’s endless metonymy. Like Bataille, Lacan equated this movement of transgression with the tragic hero and with the Greek Até, “Beyond this Até, one can only spend a brief period of time, and that’s where Antigone wants to go” (p. 263). Calasso (1993) wrote of Até:

> What we consider infirmity they (the Greeks) saw as ‘divine infatuation’ (áte). They knew that this invisible incursion often brought ruin: so much so that the word áte would gradually come to mean ‘ruin.’ But they also knew, and it was Sophocles who said it, that ‘mortal life can never have anything great about it except through áte.’ (p. 94)

The good, for both Lacan and Bataille is impossible. For Bataille it is the good that is its own undoing, “to emerge through project from the realm of project.” For Lacan, it is Das Ding and an annihilating jouissance. And all of the subject’s structuration of the real in fantasy and various discourses is but a means of protecting the subject from losing himself in this good. So, for Lacan, the ego is the first symptom, that image of the self as whole and integrated that creates a point of inertia against the thrust of the drive beyond the limit that is the pleasure principle.

And analysis is the deconstruction of this ego. The ego, the head, the self must be sacrificed that

---

\(^{35}\) *Das Ding*, or the Thing, was a central concept for Lacan in his seminar on ethics and never appeared in his work again. However, its essential features were transferred to his conception of object a, which Lacan claimed was his one true innovation and which held a central place in his thought from the early 1960s through the remainder of his work. An analysis of the degree to which *Das Ding* and object a represent the same concept is beyond the scope of this paper. I will use *Das Ding*, or the Thing, in the context of discussions of the ethics seminar, but the reader should bear in mind that I don’t mean anything by the Thing that isn’t also implied of object a, and the two could be used interchangeably in my writing.
desire might circulate in the realm of metamorphosis and sublimation. “I propose then that, from an analytical point of view, the only thing of which one can be guilty is of having given ground relative to one’s desire” (Lacan, 1959/1960/1992, p. 319). Or as Bataille wrote in an erotic catechism addressed to his lover, Diane Kotchoubey de Beauharnois:

   Everything is vain, everything is delusion, God himself is the exasperation of a void if we follow the paths of desire. But desire remains in us like a challenge to the very world that infinitely conceals its object. Desire is in us like laughter: we mock the world when we take our clothes off, delivering ourselves to desire for desire without limit. (p. 134)

*Hysterical Bataille*

Lacan (1969/1970/2007) located the creation of the discourse of science with the hysteric’s relentless questioning of the master and his attempt to keep up through the endless production of knowledge. This relentless questioning was also Bataille’s (1944/2011) definition of subjectivity: “I am, man is, the interrogation of what is, of being wherever it is; limitless interrogation, or the interrogation of being by itself” (p. 79). And opposing interrogation to obsessional forms of doing and undoing, he wrote, “Action and interrogation are endlessly opposed: on one side, is acquisition for the benefit of a closed system and on the other is the rupture and disequilibrium of the system” (p. 125). Bataille, the hysteric, would always be on the side of rupture and disequilibrium, of castration. Of hysterics and masters, Verhaeghe (1999) wrote:

   Lacan (1969-1970/2007) further described the intrication of the hysteric and the master: She wants the other to be a master, and to know a lot of things, but at the same time she doesn’t want him to know so much that he does not believe she is the supreme price of all his knowledge. In other words, she wants a master she can reign over. (p. 129)
Masters hold an interesting space in Bataille’s work. His mature thought is characterized as athéology, but it is probably not surprising that the young Bataille went through a period of devout Catholic faith after abandoning his blind, syphilitic father to die alone during the first World War. Like a good hysteric, the young Bataille sought out a master, and like a good hysteric, he spent the rest of his life castrating him and abandoning himself further into the abyss of the unknown. It was only against Breton’s formidable surrealist machinery that Bataille was able to find his voice, and with it some fame and recognition of his own, in his pre-war writing. Bataille dedicated a book to Nietzsche, but he appropriated his tragic, destructive Dionysus while rejecting his overman (*sur*) and vitalist notions of fusion with nature. And by Sartre, that envoi of philosophy, discourse of the master, in mid-century France, Bataille was intimidated and took seriously his lampoon of *Inner Experience* (Surya, 2002), but in a rare cameo of the master in Bataille’s (1945/1992) work, he wrote:

> Happiness, remembering the night of drinking and dancing, dancing by myself like a peasant, a faun, with couples all around me.

> Alone? Actually: There we were dancing face to face in a potlatch of absurdity, the philosopher – Sartre – and me. (p. 75)

It is an odd passage, but one in which Bataille unequivocally positions himself as the hysteric, face to face with the master, and making him dance. Bataille made all of his masters dance – Heraclitus, Hegel, Sade, Nietzsche, Mauss, Breton, Sartre – pushing them beyond themselves in the production of knowledge that Bataille would sacrifice before the empty place of God:

> The sacrifice is madness, the renunciation of all knowledge, to fall into the void, and nothing, neither in the fall nor in the void, is revealed, for the revelation of the void is but a means of falling further into absence. (p. 52)
The sacrificed master, the alienated hysteric, “falling further into absence.” Bataille, the acéphalic subject, sacrificing master, head, self:

I hate
this life of instrument,
I search for a fissure
my fissure,
in order to be broken (Bataille, 1954/1988, p. 57)

Castration: for both Bataille and Lacan, the female being has access to surplus *jouissance* (excess) because she is not defined, captured, enslaved by phallic *jouissance*. And the hysteric is s/he who interrogates what this *jouissance* is beyond the limit of the phallic: “The abyss is the foundation of the possible” (Bataille, 1944/2011, p. 97).

Lacan (1969-1970/2007) defined analysis precisely by this movement, “What the analyst establishes as analytic experience can be put simply – it’s the hysterization of discourse” (p. 33). Bataille’s work turns discourse against itself, perverts its aims, destabilizes and desutures it, replaces system with chaos, knowledge with void. It hystericalizes all those discourses with which it communes without ever becoming: philosophy, theology, sociology, anthropology, psychoanalysis, economics. While Bataille raged against “sickening poetic sentimentality,” he was attracted to poetry (particularly the work of Rimbaud, Blake, and Lautréamont), which he viewed as the ultimate perversion of language from all utilitarian ends. Of Rimbaud, he wrote, “The greatness of Rimbaud is to have led poetry to the failure of poetry” (in Surya, 2002, p. 324).

*Dramatization*
Bataille (1945/1992) posed this question, “The void is tempting to me. But what do I do in the void?” (p. 101). Sparely, throughout the Summa Theologica, he suggested that what the subject does in the void is dramatize. Bataille (1954/1988) spoke of dramatization as part of that impossible effort to emerge through project from the realm of project, “In other words, one reaches the state of ecstasy or of rapture only by dramatizing existence in general” (p. 10). He continued, “If we didn’t know how to dramatize, we wouldn’t be able to leave ourselves. We would live isolated and turned in on ourselves” (p. 11). Contrasted with the action of project, dramatization was the means by which the subject might have a more conscious share in his expenditure, might consent to atē and self-undoing, to the tragic fall. Bataille (1997) wrote:

We can ignore or forget that the ground we live on is little other than a field of multiple destructions. Our ignorance only has this incontestable effect: It causes us to undergo what we could bring about in our own way, if we understood. It deprives us of the choice of an exudation that might suit us. (p. 185)

Bataille’s references to dramatization are sparse, and it is likely that, while he recognized the centrality of this concept in his thought and how it might connect the subject to the mythic and tragic realms he felt modern, utilitarian man had lost contact with, he feared defining the term might lead to prescription, ends, and only a new form of servitude. The four thousand year documented history of the intrication of master and hysterical has, however, produced a compendium of dramatization. And, if the magnificent drama of medieval witches and the grand hysterics of the Salpêtrière has given way, it is because the master and his desire have changed, and the hysterical’s dramatization with it.

If, as I have argued here, dramatization is the province of the hysterical, there can be no doubt that it is impossible. Lacan (1969-1970/2007) said as much when he included hysteria as a
discourse in Freud’s impossible series: to govern (master), to educate (university), and to analyze. What is it to dramatize? Bataille (1945/1992) answered elusively, “Deciding to make use of fictions, I dramatize being, I lacerate its solitude, and in this laceration I communicate” (p. 110). Dramatization, it would seem, has something to do with fiction or sublimation, with truth as opposed to knowledge, and it has something to do with communication and the Other. Let us take each of these aspects individually.

In his ethics seminar, Lacan (1959-1960/1992) defined sublimation, that most elusive and uncharacteristically successful Freudian mechanism, as that which “raises the object… to the dignity of the Thing” (p. 112), and he claimed that sublimation revealed something about the essence of the drive, that it was not of the same nature as the instinct with its direct link to a satisfying object, but rather pressed beyond the object towards the Thing, whose specter the subject chased via the object. Lacan continued by stipulating that, “the Thing is characterized by the fact that it is impossible for us to imagine it. The problem of sublimation is located on this level” (p. 125). For Lacan, art (to take the most obvious example of sublimated activity) imitates its object not with the purpose of representing it, but rather to create a relationship between the object and the Thing, which, unlike the object, is impossible to imagine or symbolize (because it is real). Dramatization, in its proximity to fiction and to sublimation, is a conscious living out of the drive as it orbits the Thing, drawing out that which lies behind desire’s objectal metonymy.

While truth is not a term Bataille makes use of, his reference to the use of fiction positions his idea of dramatization in the realm of truth rather than that of facts or knowledge. In Lacan’s (1969-1970/2007) discourse theory, for the hysteric, object a or the Thing, is situated in the place of truth, which propels the hysteric’s “symptomatic tearing apart” as well as her
dramatization, which is the sublimated, conscious form of her living “castration at the surface of her life and discourse” (Ragland, 2006, p. 85).

In the dramatic act of circumscribing object \( a \), it is revealed as that which fell away in the separation of the subject from the Other, a bit of the real that was always already lost in the subject’s installation in the symbolic order. The subject is installed in the symbolic order. Thus, in delineating the contours of object \( a \), the desire of the Other is revealed, and revealed as that which has determined the subject’s own desire, as that which gleams through the objects the subject chases one after another. This desire and the desire of the Other are implied in Bataille’s (1944/2011) concept of communication:

To the extent that beings seem perfect, they remain isolated, closed within themselves.

But the wound of incompletion opens them. Through that which we can call incompletion, animal nudity, wound, diverse separate beings communicate, take life by losing themselves in communication, one with another. (p. 22)

Communication requires a wounded, desiring Other, and it is through dramatization that the subject castrates the master (“lacerating its solitude”), for only a wounded Other can desire. In dramatization, perhaps the subject develops a know-how regarding the impossibility of all desire, “avid never to be satisfied” (Bataille, 1944/2011, p. 138), the desire for nothing more than desire itself.

But this is not the end of dramatization’s impossibility. As Webster (2011) wrote, “We suffer not from desire but from desire’s unarticulated specificity” (p. xxii). Dramatization is a means of articulating desire’s specificity, which is another way of describing the circumscription of object \( a \). But this, in itself, becomes an end, and we are immediately thrown back into the
realm of action and project. Bataille had no doubts about the impossibility of his task: to emerge through project from the realm of project.

There is a very similar impossible movement in Lacan’s (1962-1963/2014) distinction between acting out, the passage to the act, and the act. For Lacan, acting out (Freud’s Agieren) is an unconscious process whereby the subject repeats, rather than remembering or symbolizing, an unconscious theme, and this acting out is a direct response to a deaf Other who has failed to proffer the necessary interpretation that would allow for a fuller symbolization. Acting out is in direct relation to the Other and is thoroughly symbolic. The passage to the act, in contrast, is an exit from the scene of the Other altogether and is, thus, non-symbolic. It has the same impulsive character as does acting out, but there is no ciphered message therein, but, rather, the subject makes of herself an object. In contrast to these two, the act reinstates some conception of responsibility (albeit a psychoanalytic conception) similar to the conscious share Bataille’s subject might take in her expenditure via dramatization. The act is intentional albeit typically unconscious. So the most common acts spoken of in psychoanalysis are those acts Freud termed parapraxes, whose conscious intention is bungled but which are successful nonetheless because, in their failure, their unconscious aim is achieved. Neither acting out nor the passage to the act are true acts because the subject fails to take responsibility for his desire in these actions. This rather cryptic concept of responsibility undergirded Lacan’s (1957/2002) re-translation of Freud’s (1933), “Wo es war soll ich warden” as “I must come to the place where that was.”

So, for both Bataille and Lacan, there is first recognition of the problem posed by the symptom. In Lacan’s case, this is the symptom as it had existed since Freud broke with a medical conception of symptom as index and replaced it with the hysterical symptom, which was a ciphered message to the Other. For Bataille, the problem of the symptom was that there is an
excess inherent to subjectivity, and man has constructed a system which accounts for production, acquisition, and rational expenditure, but not for the expenditure necessary to rid himself of this excess; an accursed share remains. As a result, man is forced to spend himself in ways that are largely outside of his consciousness and control. For both Lacan and Bataille, the problem does not lie in the symptom itself, but in the systems that are constructed to defend the subject against the symptom: in the state, the head, the ego. It is precisely at this moment when the problem is effectively circumscribed that both Lacan and Bataille make recourse to notions traditionally associated with the very concepts they are trying to do away with: Bataille’s “choice of an exudation that might suit us” and Lacan’s subject responsible for his act. Do Bataille and Lacan simply sneak the ego in the back door after they ushered it out the front?

Dean (1992) wrote of the history of ideas in France that engendered Bataille’s and Lacan’s conceptions of the dissolution of the self and of the paradoxical nature of their conclusions:

Both Bataille and Lacan nevertheless participated in the self-renewal of the interwar years, but they did not rescue the self by bringing it out of hiding. Instead, they tried to save it by defining the other (true or real) self as a (now intolerable) other. In so doing, they conflated the dialectic implicit in analysts’ and surrealists’ efforts to discover and rehabilitate the self (the dialectic whereby the self’s rescue leads to its unraveling) with the very structure of subjectivity. (p. 249)

Dean’s statement is perplexing. She first identifies the efforts of Bataille and Lacan to do away with notions of selfhood with a historical process of self-renewal that was occurring in France during the interwar years. She then further identifies this strategy with the structure of subjectivity itself, implying that the self is, in its fundamental structure, an inevitable doing away
with itself. But Dean’s assessment is accurate, as can be seen from Lacan’s conception of hysteria as the basic structure of subjectivity and of analysis as the artificial hysterization of discourse: the pathology is the cure. The traumatic collapse of identifications and semblants that leads a subject to seek analysis is also the very structure of the psychoanalytic cure. Bataille’s solution, as we have seen, is no different: dramatization is the answer to the impossible project of escaping project.

Since Freud, we have known that psychoanalysis is impossible. There is a real that is insurmountable, and a trick is required. Bataille (1944/2011) understood this, and he answered it, “Is this burden too much for me? Or does my life play with every burden? Or again, both: I can’t escape and I will play” (p. 54).
Chapter 6: Notes on Kairos and the Psychoanalytic Act

- *I believe Freud’s Unheimlich also has its remote roots here: in the idea of a destiny that looks at us from afar, pushing us to find, beyond any idol or fetish, the measure of our kairos, our due time.*

  *Giacomo Marramo* *Kairos: Towards an Ontology of Due Time*

We draw nearer to the act. I will begin again with an anecdote, of the generic sort, familiar to every clinician, and probably closest to home for others, like me, who are still in training, or however we wish to designate this phase when formation feels most raw, and who may be made anxious by my poking at a staple of supervisory wisdom that often comes as a source of much-appreciated reassurance. I am sitting with my supervisor, clutching the ambivalently regarded prostheses of my process notes, recounting what I can of, “… and then she said…, and I said…” My supervisor intervenes: “I think x is reflective of y,” pulling some unconscious motif from the web of the patient’s words. I lament having missed this, to which she replies, “Don’t worry, it will come back. Anything that is important will come back. You will get many more chances.”

So, that is my anecdote, well-worn with repetition: the patient’s Real returning to its place again and again and again, the repetition of the session in its being written and recounted to another subject-supposed-to-know, or at least a subject-supposed-to-know-more, the repetition of an experience I have had with many supervisors, and that my supervisor has likely repeated dozens of times with other supervisees and with her own supervisors. And there is no doubt truth in these words. But, as tends to be the case with reassuring truths, something escapes, and it is to that which escapes that these notes are aimed.
Caerus

The Greek god Caerus was, indeed, a god who escaped. Aesop (2002) described Caerus, or Tempus, in Latin:

Running swiftly, balancing on the razor’s edge, bald but with a lock of hair on his forehead, he wears no clothes; if you grasp him from the front, you might be able to hold him, but once he has moved on not even Jupiter himself can pull him back: this is a symbol of Tempus, the brief moment in which things are possible. (Fable 536)

At its most simplistic, Caerus was the personification of the opportune or critical moment. Caerus, whose mother is not known, is the youngest son of Zeus… the youngest of the gods. The ancients recognized well the close connection of Caerus and the new. He is an ephebic god, typically depicted with winged feet like Hermes, holding either scales or a razor. And as Hermes is the protector of thieves, so Caerus is their maker. Swift of foot and smooth of cheek these two gods, they are linked, variants in mythic repetition: Caerus brandishing his razor and Hermes, god of interpretation, keeper of the dice and bones.

Callistratus (1931), writing his *Ekphráseis*, compared Caerus not only to Hermes, but also to Dionysus, “for his forehead glistened with graces and his cheeks, reddening to youthful bloom, were radiantly beautiful, conveying to the beholder’s eye a delicate blush” (*Descriptions* 6). Dionysus, that other psychoanalytic god, god of the drive, the god of jouissance and the beyond of the pleasure principle. As Roberto Calasso (1993) wrote:

Dionysus is not a useful god who helps weave or knots things together, but a god who loosens and unties… Dionysus is the river we hear flowing by in the distance, an incessant booming from far away; then one day it rises and floods everything, as if the
normal above-water state of things, the sober delimitation of our existence, were but a brief parenthesis overwhelmed in an instant. (p. 45)

Dionysus, the god of epiphanies, the Liberator, eleutheros, twice-born, the immortal in closest proximity to the world of women and of death, sparagmos, the body in pieces, torn to shreds with bare hands.

Let us hail the Bacchae of Thebes! / A victory song, then a slow lament! / To hold your beloved only son, / in arms drenched with his blood! (Euripedes, 2014, p. 60).

Mount Cithaeron, where the Bacchante Agave tore the head from her arrogant son, Pentheus, who was hystericized and sent to his doom by Dionysus, is also where the infant Oedipus was left hanging by his feet, and where, self-blinded, he returned in exile. Six degrees of Oedipus, “the myth thanks to which psychoanalysts put in place the limits of their operation” (Lacan, 1967-1968), the cure that takes its form from the illness.

The young Caerus seems to have fallen in with a bad crowd: thieves, and wild women, and other travelers in death. For his own part, Caerus was called by some a daimon and was reported to drink the blood of men.

Recollection-Invention-Repetition

All of these resonances persist in the etymology of the term kairos as well. Sipiora and Baumlin (2002) noted:

As far as has been determined, kairos first appeared in the Iliad, where it denotes a vital or lethal place in the body, one that is particularly susceptible to injury and therefore necessitates special protection… (p. 2)

They continued:

In his 1923 treatment of kairos in classical Greek literature […] Doro Levi points out the
term’s etymological connections to ‘death,’ ‘ruin,’ ‘breast,’ ‘the seat of spiritual life,’ ‘to worry,’ ‘to care for,’ ‘to cut,’ ‘to kill,’ ‘to destroy.’ (p. 5).

As the archaic period gave way to the classical, the emphasis of *kairos* shifted from a truncation of life to a truncation of doubt and the right time of action. As a concept, *kairos* was taken up by the sophist rhetoricians, particularly Giorgas. The sophists: philosophy’s bogeymen, mercenaries of *Logos*, sellers of skeptical speech and traders in relative truths, ancient precursors of post-structuralist permanent flux. The sophists tended to be hostile towards concepts of essential being and any metaphysics of presence. Gorgias inverted Plato’s and Aristotle’s dialectical *recollection* of truth in its eternal form or substance: instead, external reality is the revealer of *Logos* (mind, speech, language, human discourse), which contains the power to mold external reality according to its desire. And truth, according to Gorgias, is an *invention* contingent upon a particular *kairos*, a particular synchronic structure as it appears and disappears in the diachronic “ocean of histories” (Lacan, 1962-63/2014). “Suggest a subject,” Gorgias would challenge, “This tongue’s for hire.” Like a modern M.C. stepping up to the mic to spit it: “I bomb atomically, Socrates’ philosophies / and hypotheses can’t define how I be dropping these / mockeries” (Inspectah Deck, Wu-Tang Clan, *Triumph*).

Eric Charles White (1987) wrote:

For Gorgias, *Kairos* stands for a radical principle of occasionality which implies a conception of the production of meaning in language as a process of continuous adjustment to and creation of the present occasion, or a process of continuous *interpretation* in which the speaker seeks to inflect the given ‘text’ to his own ends at the same time that the speaker’s text is ‘interpreted’ in turn by the context surrounding it. (p. 14-15)
If the fundamental concept of the philosopher’s epistemology is *recollection*, and that of the sophists *invention*, the fundamental concept of a psychoanalytic epistemology is *repetition*. At first blush, repetition would seem to have a much closer association with recollection that with invention. And, indeed, Freud demonstrated the dialectical intrication of remembering and repeating. He also tended towards metaphors of uncovering and discovery far more than to metaphors of creation. Freud was deterministic and even overdeterministic. The unconscious is timeless. And yet, returning to “Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through” (Freud, 1914) Lichtenstein (2008) wrote:

The “through” in “working through” introduces the idea of a passage to a new place or situation. It suggests a new subjective position occurring within the analytic frame… The concept of *working through* is Freud’s acknowledgement that through the gradual and necessarily repetitive process of analysis something may take place that can constitute a beginning. (p. 2202)

The paradox of repetition is that it inevitably generates variants, invariably spawns the new. The paradox of repetition is that it is only from the old that the new can emerge.

Lichtenstein continued:

Lacan represented the neurotic form of repetitive circular movement through his topological models. This permitted him to present the analytic act as a cut in this circularity and therefore as an act made possible by circularity. The last point is crucial. Until there is a circular path there is no possibility of a transformative cut. (p. 2234)

And so we have returned to my opening anecdote that illustrates this circularity, its inevitability and essentiality, as well as to the tale’s escaping opposite: Caerus with his razor. We have come to the question of the psychoanalytic act.
The Act

Of the act, Lacan (1967-1968) stated, “This is what characterizes the act, its signifying point, and its efficiency as act has nothing to do with its efficacy as a doing” (January 10, 1968). As a doing – an ego-elaborated, intentional action – the act is destined for failure. Permitted neither the confidence of the philosopher-hero recollecting and acting in fidelity to a truth and wisdom purified of pathological creatureliness, as beautiful as a mathematical equation, nor the swagger of Gorgiastic free-style invention and novelty, the humility of the psychoanalyst is he acts only in, on, and with castration. Lacan (1967-1968) stated:

What I would like to point out, is that what is at stake, in specifying what a psychoanalyst is, is to take note that he has no right to articulate at any level whatsoever this dialectic between knowledge and truth in order to make of it a sum, an evaluation, a totality, by recording some failure or other. Because this is not what is at stake. No one is in a position to master what is at stake, which is nothing other than the interference of the function of the subject in this act. (March 27, 1968)

For Lacan, truth and knowledge cannot be totalized because they are of radically different orders. When he developed his discourse theory two years after his seminar on the psychoanalytic act, knowledge appears as a term, $S_2$, the battery of signifiers (Lacan, 1969-70/2007). The truth, on the other hand, is not a term in the structure of discourse, but a position, a space, that can be occupied by any of the four terms. The truth is what produces but is barred from the awareness of the agent. Here again, the unconscious is an agency, one determined by a truth in the Real that is the destiny of the subject-agent, either as his tragic fall or that which he finds some impossible way to live up to. There will be no mastery for analysand or for the psychoanalyst.
In psychoanalysis, there is only one rule for the analysand, free association, and its complement for the analyst, evenly-suspended attention, both impossible. In a remarkable litotes, Freud (1912) declared:

The technique, however, is a very simple one… It consists simply in not directing one’s notice to anything in particular and in maintaining the same ‘evenly-suspended attention’ (as I have called it) in the face of all that one hears… The rule for the doctor may be expressed: ‘He should withhold all conscious influences from his capacity to attend and give himself over completely to his ‘unconscious memory.’ Or, to put it purely in terms of technique: ‘He should simply listen, and not bother about whether he is keeping anything in mind.’ (p. 111-112)

The abyss of judgment: between the passage to the act of wild analysis and the false mastery of the silent mirror of interminable analysis. No body of knowledge can lay hold of Caerus’s lock, can direct his razor. But evenly-suspended attention is not only the already-impossible epoché of metapsychological, technical, and biographical/historical knowledge. For what is Freud referring to when he encourages the analyst to “give himself over completely to his ‘unconscious memory’”? Why memory?

Webster (in press) recently commented on Lacan’s (1955/2006) Variations on the Standard Treatment and found something she hadn’t expected that speaks precisely to Freud’s “unconscious memory” and its relation to the true speech of the analytic act. She wrote:

True speech must be true for both parties. They are united in the interpretation. This is a quite radical point and one not often seen in the literature on technique. It puts at the center the necessity of the analyst’s analysis being a certain kind of experience of unconscious truth, as well as, the re-discovery of the co-ordinates of this truth in the
coming-to-say of interpretation. ‘Speech reveals an unconscious subject’ (p. 359). This is true not only for the patient, for the analyst must speak at some point as well. For Lacan, we can only listen to and speak through the unique signifiers at play in a case if we silence our conscious knowledge and give not only the patient’s unconscious voice, but also our own. (Webster, in press, p. 31)

Naturally, I long for the laissez-faire of supervisory wisdom (“it will come back”) or at least some sort of casuistics of kairos and the act. Abandon all hope, ye who enter here. The phantasy of an-analyst-is-being-trained cannot be sustained (Tardits, 2010). No knowledge will save you, and yet you must act, in failure, always too-early and already-too-late. Finding the kairotic time to act in failure is the particular savoire-faire of the psychoanalyst.

Psychoanalytic detractors are not wrong when they claim that psychoanalytic training is more of the order of initiation, or “a basic change in existential position” as Eliade would have it, than that of the transmission and progressive acquisition and mastery of a body of knowledge as is seen in the academy and in the market. I speak from deep within it rather than from the far shore of its traversal, from the hyphen that connects and separates working and through. I speak that I might too find my way with failure. This is my hymn to Caerus.
Chapter 7: Hysteria and the Psychoanalytic Act

- When I find the goddess’s hiding place, I will no doubt be changed into a stag, and you can devour me.

Lacan Seminar 11 The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis

The hysteric is that terrifying being whose matter can be, must be incarnated by form, whose womb is stung with lust and whose body can play host to demons or speak the language of 19th century medicine, allergic and allergenic, the one who can be hypnotized. Psychoanalysis was born of Freud’s evental encounter with hysteria. And his creation of psychoanalysis from the blah-blah of hysterics and their loquacious bodies must be repeated in each and every psychoanalysis, or, to put it somewhat differently, it is only with a hysterical question that a psychoanalysis can begin. Where there is no discourse of the hysteric, there can be no discourse of the analyst. Lacan (1967-1968) stated:

Questions are posed starting from the fact that there is somewhere this function, call it what you will, here it appears in all its aspects, obvious because mythical, that there is somewhere something which plays this function of the subject supposed to know. (November 29, 1967)

And this beginning – this question addressed to a subject supposed to know – is not necessarily there at the beginning, and so it must come later. This is the psychoanalytic act, the hystericization of the analysand and the induction to the transference. Nearer and nearer, frightened and ashamed – am I falling? – we edge closer to the navel of this, my dream of scholarship.
Staging

The first effect of the psychoanalytic act is the intrication of the analyst with the analysand’s symptom: the analysand must exchange his neurosis for a transference neurosis and the analyst must allow herself to be taken up as partner-symptom. A stage is set. With hysterical question addressed to subject supposed to know, the analysand’s symptom is split and rendered analyzable, and in this ciphering and deciphering, the unconscious, as Other, is created each time anew. The unconscious is not some hidden depth, a reservoir or cauldron of the drives; it is created in the analytic session as an Other that produces a message that has a specific addressee, the subject supposed to know. The symptom of the speaking-being consists of a symbolico-imaginary message and a real core of jouissance, a signifier supported by a letter (a). In the act, the analyst lends her being to the real of the analysand’s transference-symptom, and the analysand dickers an unsatisfactory jouissance for the “harebrained lucubrations” of this Other knowledge (Lacan, 1972-1973/1998). This act establishes a scission within the symptom, liberating the signifier from the fixation of its jouissante core and allowing it to unfold as a chain. This is the first effect of the act.

But let us go back before the beginning. With the hysteric as guide, psychoanalysis had to pass through the field of hypnosis in order to be born. Hysteric is the basic neurosis, the discourse of magisterial complaint, of symptom, of division and non-identity. It is the hysteric that allows her ego to fade into syncope and lends her body to hypnosis. Lacan (1967-1968) proclaimed, “The hysteric reaches the goal immediately. The Freud she is kissing is the object a. Everyone knows that this is what a hysteric needs especially coming out of hypnosis” (February 21, 1968). Four years earlier, he had proposed this formula, “To define hypnosis as the confusion, at one point of the ideal signifier in which the subject is mapped with the a, is the
most assured structural definition that has been advanced” (Lacan, 1963-64/1978, p. 273).

Hypnosis collapses this point of the real fixated with jouissance around which the drive circulates with, or into, a symbolico-imaginary representation that captures while simultaneously alienating the subject from the real of the drives.

The apotheosis of hypnosis is a clearing away that allows the transference-symptom – the master signifier fixated with jouissance – to emerge in pristine form. Freud’s genius was to be the first to recognize that simply replacing one symptom with another led only to an interminable or infinite process. The transference cannot be ignored nor can it simply be manipulated; it must be “cleaned away” (Freud 1916-1917).

The desire of the analyst, an enigmatic desire for absolute difference, must work against the collapse of the unconscious in the petrifying identification of master signifier and a. Lacan would characterize psychoanalysis as an “upside-down hypnosis”: it is the analyst, as a, who must fall into syncope.

What does it mean that the analyst must fall? The most obvious meaning, a formulation of the direction of the treatment and its principle of cure, is that the analyst must fall as subject supposed to know, that the analysand might separate from this alienating master. Freud and Lacan were clear: whatever act it is that the psychoanalyst is engaged in, it is not of the order of ego-intentional action duly guided by knowledge, but is, rather, a hysterical fall into unconsciousness. Lacan (1967-1968) described this movement:

An act of faith, I said, in the subject supposed to know and precisely by a subject who has just learned what is involved in the subject supposed to know, at least in an exemplary operation, which is that of psychoanalysis. (February 21, 1968)
In this strange figure of a subject of knowledge acting in faith, Lacan points towards the analyst’s coming to be through her own analysis (or, rather, her coming to (un)be as function). The analyst authorizes herself through her analysis, her own experience of the fall of the subject supposed to know. What faith remains? And what endures of the hysterical act if there is no master that might be its addressee?

Lacan (1967-1968) described the psychoanalytic act as an “enlightened passage to the act” (March 13, 1968). The sense here is double. In the act, the psychoanalyst lets herself fall away as the subject supposed to know. But earlier still, she has already allowed herself to be taken up as the supposed subject of knowing when she has experienced firsthand and in its purest form that no such subject exists. As Lacan (1975-1976) learned in his later study of Joyce and the *sinthome*, there can be no subject without a symptom, and the symptom persists even without the Other to whom it would be a response. In *l’Etourdit*, Lacan explained that the hysterical symptom is not all response to the Other; it is also a response to the real (Brousse, 1997). The psychoanalytic act, this fall into the real, might also be called the psychoanalyst’s symptom.

In Seminar 24, Lacan (1976-1977) referred to himself as a “perfect hysteric.” Here, as elsewhere, he alluded to an hysteria without symptoms. He meant symptoms in the common nosological sense, for as we just said, with or without an Other it might be a message to or from, there can be no subject without a symptom. In analysis, the Other is deconstructed and nothing is left of the symptom as ciphering-deciphering. But the symptom, as that which doesn’t stop not being written, persists in its absence as real. Lacan (1967-1968) described the act both as an “act of faith” and as an “enlightened passage to the act,” remarkably evoking simultaneously Kierkegaard’s leap and the enlightenment collapse of the Other of theistic thought. This is the hysteria of the psychoanalyst’s act: a repetitive setting the stage and living out of her destiny to
fall from it again and again. A play in two acts. Begin again, hysteria (see Webster, this issue). Let fall.

*Psychoanalysis in Two Acts*

We have come to recognize, even to define the psychoanalytic act based on its effects: the induction to the transference and its dissolution in the fall of the subject supposed to know. Lacan (1967-1968) was characteristically oblique in his formulations of the psychoanalytic act, especially related to the two times of the act I am proposing here. So, confirming the act’s relation to the beginning of the psychoanalysis, he stated, “We posit the psychoanalytic act as consisting in the fact of supporting the transference” (January 17, 1968). He described this support as an *acting* and as a *feint*, and he claimed of the analysis of the transference, “If it means anything, it can only be the following: the elimination of this subject supposed to know” (November 29, 1967). Although it is not necessarily the case from this statement that Lacan believed that the analysis of transference, as he was defining it here, is a necessary part of the act, he did make clear that the psychoanalytic act is properly aimed at the truth, which he defined as an experience of the subject’s incapacity to master knowledge. The act would seem from these statements to comprise both this supporting via a feint and its analysis, unloosening, letting fall.

How are we to understand these two radically opposed moments that frame a psychoanalysis? Are there multiple (at least two) types of act or, perhaps, a single act has multiple (at least two) effects? Mieli (2011) elegantly proposed the concept of steps in the act, which are the logical punctuations that make a cut in the circularity of repetition and open a new space in the treatment, while the act itself refers to the entire unfolding of the cure.
A related strain of questions arises regarding the nature of the psychoanalytic act in relation to other fundamental psychoanalytic concepts. Is the psychoanalytic act of the order of interpretation or is it more of the order of those reference points we have already made recourse to here, the desire of the analyst and evenly-suspended attention? It is tempting, and quite possibly accurate to make a similar movement in responding to this latter question as that of Mieli. There might be a similar broadening as we move from the specific tactic of interpretation (a mutative interpretation would be a step in the act), to the more general positioning of evenly-suspended attention and the desire of the analyst, to the most general or global concept of the psychoanalytic act, the entire unfolding of the cure.

I suppose this is, in large measure, a terminological question, a matter of defining terms. It does raise the question, though, of why Lacan felt compelled, with the psychoanalytic act, to introduce a new term at all. I fear that this broadening of the act to make of it the entire unfolding of the cure risks purging the act of its activity, stripping it of its hysterical thrust. The resonances of the signifier *act* are marvelous: its connection in Latin (*agere*) to drive, its theatricality and suggestion of a truth that must pass through falsity via desire, and its association with those most active and hysterical symptomatic productions – acting out, the passage to the act, and bungled actions. And with this neglect of the activity of the act and its suggestion of a passage through falsity and error to arrive at truth, it seems to me, we also lose the distinct elements of danger and risk so fundamental to the act and its hysterical psychopomp.

In trying to think through the idea that the psychoanalytic act might have these two radically opposed effects – first the creation and support of an illusion and then that illusion’s collapse, and that this traversal to the far ends of error is the very structure of psychoanalytic truth and cure – I was reminded of a dream from early in my analysis. In the dream, I had
stuffed a cat into a burlap sack. Inside the bag, I was attempting to strangle the cat. The experience was visceral: I was squeezing hard and the cat was scratching, frenziedly trying to escape. At the end of the dream, the cat did manage to tear through the bottom of the bag and free herself. But it was the experience of aggression and murderous violence that I was disturbed by and focused on when I recounted the dream to my analyst. I associated to a day residue of a television program I had watched in which a detective, after interviewing a serial killer, strangled a stray cat, of the danger of giving myself over to something. I associated to sex with cat = pussy as well as its opposite, cat as a male figure as in *hepcat, cool cat*; and of the closure and strangulation of the bag versus the openness of the cat’s final escape. But mostly I was unnerved by the violence of the dream and the feeling it left me with upon awakening.

Breaking his silence, which had lasted most of the session, my analyst stated simply, “The cat got out of the bag.” I was completely surprised, and afterwards, surprised by my surprise, perhaps even slightly ashamed by it. The shame of egoic failure, anything but master in its own house. But more than this, I was excited by the interpretation. I appreciated my artisanal unconscious, and, particularly, I admired that my analyst had heard this message despite my associative focus guiding us elsewhere. Here, indeed, was a subject who knew.

And to add yet another oscillation, I didn’t actually feel a resonance with the idea of a secret coming out that the idiom implies. Had any secret come out? What was its content? Half fearing that it was prophetic and half feeling disappointedly that there is always one more mystery, that this was the trouble with psychoanalysis, its endless proliferation of meaning. Perhaps the dream was pure form without content. All that had come out was the structure of the dream itself. Its secret was that it contained a secret and could surprise, nothing else.
The question of phallic stopper and obsessional enclosure against hystericalization and
violent opening that had emerged in my associations to the dreams was not exactly a secret, but
it, obviously, has remained at the center of my theoretical work and the unfolding of my analysis.
Looking back at this unfolding, as encapsulated in kernel form within the dream: an initial
disturbance and feeling of uncanny unease and of shame, a second moment of transference love
and libidinized lucubrations of ciphering and deciphering, and a second reversal and third
moment of disappointed, “is this it? is that all?” Such is the fate of secrets when they are
exposed to the light of day. It is not only that a cat emerging from a bag is not the pig that was
promised, but that this etymology is so patently absurd. Psychoanalysis is a swindle (Lacan,
1977). Hysterical disappointment is inevitable. Is that what all the fuss has been about? And
what now?

All to bring me to this moment, to this question, this what now that might presage a
passage to *sinthomatic* creation. A great many things must fall.

There are inevitable risks and impossible contingency in the two acts of psychoanalysis.
Just as Freud took his bearings from his hysterical patients and invented a new science, so too
must every practitioner re-invent psychoanalysis anew with each and every analysand. And the
ludicrous wager of psychoanalysis, fraught with risk, is that the cure takes its form from the
illness. So, Lacan (1967-1968) would claim that the hysterical is cured of everything except her
hysteria. And such a hysterical might come to authorize herself as a psychoanalyst, to lend herself
to this beginning again, and to this letting fall. This is also the two times of *Nachträglichkeit*, in

---

36 A commonly espoused etymology of the idiom, “the cat got out of the bag,” asserts that it refers to a practice of
agricultural chicanery in which a pig would be purchased but replaced in the big with a cat of the same size. The
secret is discovered when the bag is opened and the cat gets out.
an act that refuses any mastery and whose effects may not be felt until long after when it meets up with those signifiers that have mapped the destiny and truth for analysand and analyst alike.
Chapter 8: The Hystericized Institute, Training, and the Psychoanalytic Act

- We often have the impression that with the wish for a penis and the masculine protest we have penetrated through all the psychological strata and have reached bedrock, and that thus our activities are at an end. This is probably true, since, for the psychical field, the biological field does in fact play the part of the underlying bedrock. The repudiation of femininity can be nothing else than a biological fact, a part of the great riddle of sex. It would be hard to say whether and when we have succeeded in mastering this factor in an analytic treatment. We can only console ourselves with the certainty that we have given the person analysed every possible encouragement to re-examine and alter his attitude to it.

  Sigmund Freud *Analysis Terminable and Interminable*

- Let the psychoanalysts not grieve over what I am alleviating them of. As for the experience, I am not abandoning it. As for the act, I am giving them the chance to face up to it.

  Jacques Lacan *Television*

The hysteric straddles the real of castration around which the cure of psychoanalysis orbits: the subject of pure division, of the unconscious, and symptom, but believing still in some fullness, some essence of Woman, some identification that might still and shore up the open ground beneath her. The analyst, perpetually hystericized, must confront this castration,
renounce this identification and fullness: abject, in poverty, using the nothing, that another might use her to also approach nothing. Psychoanalysis, the swindle, the hoax.

It was the Franciscans that taught us that use is the contrary of identification (Agamben, 2013), and we can say that it is, instead, on the side of desire. Lacan said that, in analysis, the hysterical is cured of everything except her hysteria. But as there are two hysterias, perhaps this is only half-right, like any truth only a half-truth. For the cure of the hysterical does confront her with the real of castration, unmitigated by identifications which themselves must be mourned if desire is to be accessed, pursued, and not given way on. The myth of fullness is analyzed, unloosened, undone. No doubt new identifications will come. The super- or complete analysis imagined optimistically by Ferenczi (1927), more skeptically by Freud (1937), and with a grasping, stumbling formalization by Lacan (1964/1987, 1967/1995) cannot put an end to identification or completely obliterate the ego (were such a thing actually desirable), but it can perhaps teach a savoir faire of use without identification and a certain elasticity in relation to letting fall, so that desire might begin again in a newly discovered capacity to mourn.

It is remarkable that, in all his prolificity, Freud said almost nothing about training analysis or the institutions that would administer such training, leaving these matters instead to his ring-bearers. “The secret of this Committee is that it has taken from me my most burdensome care for the future, so that I can calmly follow my path to the end” (Freud to Eitingon, cited in Jones, 1955, volume 2, p. 154). But as Bernfeld (1962) pointed out, his silence was not necessarily an indication of his agreement with “the authorities,” as he ironically referred to them. Freud’s relative silence, rather, was in the same spirit as his refusal to write a comprehensive textbook on technique, his rejection of a psychoanalytic Weltanschauung, and his recognition of the paranoiac nature of systems. Contrary to popular Kronos-like representations
of Freud the despot, he knew perfectly well his destiny to be eaten by his sons and even willed that it might be so. As Nobus and Quinn (2005) wrote:

… if the psychoanalytic community wants to preserve and guarantee its epistemological basis, as a knowledge in failure, it can do so only by avoiding the installation of a knowledge universe and by maintaining the existence of a knowledge ‘multi-verse,’ yet the latter task is likely to imperil the subsistence of community life as such. (p. 102-103)

The very same real of castration so endlessly shuffled about in psychoanalytic theories, here again disrupting the analytic community and the training of psychoanalysts.

That both Freud’s and Lacan’s solution failed to face up to this real is undoubtedly so. Freud’s abdication and self-sacrifice resulted, just as his myth had augured, “the dead father became stronger than the living one had been” (Freud, 1913, p. 143), the band of brothers continuously tightened their now distributed and bureaucratized grip and law-based policing and control (the I.P.A., the Berlin training model, the American Psychoanalytic Association [APsaA], the Board of Professional Standards [BOPS], the Psychoanalytic Consortium, etc.) until there was no life left in psychoanalysis. It died again and again. The institutes could find no candidates, and they cast about desperately for any possible life raft: neuropsychoanalysis and fMRIs, psychotherapy integration, desperate and begrudging courting of those former rejects, clinical psychology and social work, and everywhere a sham liberalism and false open-mindedness that fooled no one.

As keenly aware as Freud seemed to have been that psychoanalysis did not consist in a masterable body of knowledge and the impossibility of it as a vocation, he did not seem to theorize the effects of this real on training analysis and institutionalization, despite his incredibly prescient theorization of group psychology (Freud, 1921). Or perhaps it was for this very reason,
perhaps it was this foresight about impossibility and the perils of mastery that led him to approach training analysis in the way he did: “You know more than he does. Show him as much as you can” (Bernfeld, 1962). Or as Balint (1948) noted of both Freud and Ferenczi and their reluctance to involve themselves in the formalization of training: “Somehow they seemed to be satisfied with analysis only” (p. 171).

Unlike Freud, Lacan did find a school, if reluctantly, though he too was satisfied only with analysis as that which produces a psychoanalyst. Lacan (1967/1995) did not, however, shy away from the theorization and formalization of training analysis and of placing at the center of this theory and of the institute itself the real Freud was the first to grasp: “But there is a real at stake in the very training of psychoanalysts. We hold that existing societies be founded on this real” (p. 15). And to face up to and give some response to this real, Lacan invented and put at the center of his school the cartel and the pass.

*The Cartel*

Lacan introduced the apparatus of the cartel in his *Founding Act* (1964/1987), by which he created the *Ecole Freudienne de Paris* in 1964, following his excommunication from the *Société Francaise de Psychanalyse* in a deal brokered for legitimacy and recognition in the eyes of the I.P.A. The cartel is an apparatus whose purpose is to combat group psychology, its hunger for a leader, hierarchical organization, the regurgitation and passing down of pre-digested knowledge, and the passivity and “slacking off of work” that these structures foment. Lacan explained the cartel concept:

For the execution of the work, we shall adopt the principle of an elaboration sustained in a small group. Each of them (we have a name for designating the groups) will be composed of at least three individuals, five at most, four being the proper measure.
PLUS ONE charged with selection, discussion, and the outcome to be accorded the efforts of each.

After a certain period of functioning, the elements of a group will be invited to shift to a different group. (Lacan, 1964/1987, p. 96)

In a radical leveling of hierarchical structures, as well as a harkening back to Freud’s only rule for the Wednesday Society, that each member must speak, Lacan proposed that membership in the school entailed only presenting oneself in a cartel. Although for Lacan, as for Ferenczi and Freud, the analyst is formed in the *après coup* of her experience as a psychoanalysand, the work of formation does not end with the experience of analysis or even with the subject’s self-authorization and coming to the place of analyst, but is, rather, an ongoing and interminable process. A shift must, therefore, occur from “the work of transference” to “the transference of work,” and the site of this shift is the cartel. From the transference and hierarchical structure of the treatment and of most institutes, the cartel initiates a circular organization.

The cartel, further, demands that its members pay attention to and take stock of the place of the Other and the way in which one positions oneself in relation to this Other. Tardits (2010) concisely summarized, “To identify the function of the ‘plus-one’ in a random but real person tends rather to maintain active for each the question of the mode of identification with the collective” (p. 129-130). In group psychology, the presence of the plus-one and the relation of the subject to the Other and to its manifestation of the group occurs at the unconscious level through identifications and idealizations steeped in a violent imaginary (Freud, 1921; Safouan, 1983/2000). This is very evident in psychoanalytic institutions, and it is the source of the style of teaching in which a master passes down predigested knowledge (typically with a not-quite-yet-master assisting in nearly total silence) to the open beaks jostling one another below in a
fight to the death for the wisdom and favors of the master. There is no space in this imaginary arrangement for the production of new knowledge. The father must be killed, but Freud (1913) showed how little is gained in this maneuver. The cartel is different. In addition to forcing the members to take account of what she would rather unconsciously enact in a typical group setting, the individual acting as the plus-one is forced to reckon with the impossibility of identifying with his (temporary) position.

The cartel further evokes Lacan’s (1946/2006) early formulations of the prisoner’s dilemma and logical time. In this famous sophism, a prison warden must release a prisoner, and, in order to determine which prisoner will be released, proposes to three prisoners a challenge. He tells them that there are five discs, three of which are white and two of which are black, and that he is going to affix a disc to each of their backs, so that they cannot see their own disc but each can see the discs of the other two. They are not allowed to speak to one another, and all reflective surfaces are removed. The first to correctly deduce his disc color through the use of logic rather than probabilistic thinking will win his release. The warden then affixes to the back of each prisoner a white disc.

Let’s begin by examining the simpler permutations of the game. If the warden had affixed two black and one white disc, one of the prisoners would see two black discs and know instantaneously that he was white. In a more complicated permutation, one black and two white discs, the prisoner will see one black and one white disc, which does not provide him with the information he needs to reach a conclusion about himself. However, as soon as the other prisoner with the white disc hesitates in the same manner as he does, he knows he must be white or the other prisoner would have no need to hesitate, as in the first scenario, and he heads to the door with the knowledge that he, too, is white. There is, in this scenario, a single moment of
hesitation. In the most complicated and actual configuration in which all three prisoners are affixed with white discs, the prisoner sees two white discs. He then must arbitrarily assign himself a color and try to make conclusions from this assignation. If he were black, the other two prisoners could use the logic just described involving a single hesitation. Two moments of hesitation are involved in this scenario: a first hesitation resulting from the testing of the two hypothetical possibilities as to his color, and a second hesitation necessitated by the recapitulation of the reasoning process of the second scenario. An intersubjective logic is introduced in which none of the prisoners can deduce his color without one of the prisoner’s making the erroneous hypothesis of being black. Against the eternality and all-at-once of classical logic, Lacan proposed that the sophism suggested a temporal logic, which had significant consequences for psychoanalysis.

From this sophism, Lacan wrested three temporal structures: the instant of the glance, the time for comprehending, and the moment of concluding, that correspond to the three scenarios described. The delay of comprehension of the second scenario involves the imaginary assumption of the other’s (mirror image, alter-ego) place. For Lacan, the urgent moment of concluding is the precipitation of subjectivity from within the gaze and symbolic framework of the Other (the warden and his game) and over and against the series of rivalrous others. Fink (1996) wrote of the sophism, “Temporal tension is here thus in some sense a leftover, carry-over, or spill-over from the prisoners’ imaginary level rivalry, and forces symbolization (to wit, subjectification) to take place” (p. 377). This logic of temporal tension and subjectification is the theoretical foundation for Lacan’s experiments in technique that scandalized the I.P.A. and led to his excommunication in 1963: punctuation, the cut, or the variable length (short) session. It is

---

37 Lacan’s actual logic in this sophism has been criticized, for instance by Fink (1996), but the theorization he elaborated from the sophism was undoubtedly original and incredibly generative.
this same logic at work in the cartel. As Tardits (2010) explained, “Because of the limit on both the number of participants and the duration of the work, a cartel allows the dimension of haste to operate that is constitutive of a subject in relation to the object and the Other” (p. 129).

Although Lacan’s work on the prisoner’s sophism dates back at least to 1946, it is no coincidence that in 1964, he places at the very center of his school the same theorization for which the technical innovation that was its consequence led to his banishment from the psychoanalytic establishment both in France and internationally. When the I.P.A. condemned Lacan’s technical innovations, they did so on the basis of the impact these innovations were having on the training analyses Lacan was conducting (training analyses that were happening on an all-too-immense scale for the I.P.A. due to the popularity of Lacan’s teaching even during this period before he had achieved international fame, as well as to his capacity to see more analysands than his colleagues because of shortened sessions and his similar refusal to submit questions of frequency to doxa and standardization rather than theoretical concerns and the individual characteristics of each analysand). Roudinesco (1990) described the paradoxical position of the I.P.A.:

The refusal of the notion of an intellectual master and its masking by that of a ‘charisma’ judged to be nefarious allowed the IPA to embrace in its ranks all doctrinal divergences on the condition that the technical norms for training were accepted. The respect for divergent doctrines took place against a background of loyalty to a common system. From which it followed that any doctrine calling into question the accepted training principles was considered suspect. One was thus faced with the following unacceptable paradox: The more innovative the doctrine, the more it was obliged to forgo any new theory of training. But since it was apparent that any innovative doctrine would affect
training, it meant that sooner or later it would be rejected by the empire. For that reason, the internal conflicts of the analytic movement always have problems related to the training analysis as their manifest subject and questions of doctrine as their latent core.

(p. 330)

In 1964, in an act of defiance, but also of rigorous consistency and recognition that the real of the psychoanalytic cure that Freud had recognized in 1937 could not but have its effects on a theory of technique and of training, whatever the efforts of the Berlin model and the I.P.A. to contain and police this real, Lacan built his school around this real and of the theorization of it that he had created and that had led to his being cast out.

Against a perceived ego-strengthening, a fantasy of an-analyst-is-being-trained (Tardits, 2010), and the identity policing of the I.P.A., what he would call an effet de colle – a pun on the words ‘school’ and ‘glue’ – Lacan would say, “I’m counting on the tourbillon (“whirlwind,” the mechanism in a watch that counteracts the effects of gravity)” (in Badiou & Roudinesco, 2014, p. xiv-xv): a transmission of psychoanalytic knowledge and effects, that like the cure itself, came from constant dissolution and a making space for the new.

*The Pass*

In 1927, Ferenczi wrote a seminal paper on the proper ends and the nature of the cure in psychoanalysis. Ten years later and well after Ferenczi’s death, Freud struggled to respond to the challenges his most brilliant and wounded pupil had posed in his late paper, *Psychoanalysis Terminable and Interminable*. Ferenczi recognized that the very concept of a training analysis begged the question of what psychoanalysis is (a therapeutics? something else?) and the nature of its cure. He wrote:
I have often stated on previous occasions that in principle I can admit no difference between a therapeutic and a training analysis, and I now wish to supplement this by suggesting that, while every case undertaken for therapeutic purposes need not be carried to the depth we mean when we talk of a complete ending of the analysis, the analyst himself, on whom the fate of so many other people depends, must know and be in control of even the most recondite weaknesses of his own character, and this is impossible without a fully completed analysis. (p. 84)

Ferenczi clearly understood that an analysis need not be carried through to its proper end in order to have therapeutic effects, and that, therefore, whatever this proper end was, it involved something other than therapeutics (although Ferenczi still used normative terms like “weakness” and “control”). Although, once again, relying on a lexicon of normativity, Ferenczi also appreciated that this proper end, the complete analysis was intricately connected to the subject’s relationship to castration:

Every male patient must attain a feeling of equality in relation to the physician as a sign that he has overcome his fear of castration; every female patient, if her neurosis is to be regarded as fully disposed of, must have got rid of her masculinity complex and must emotionally accept without a trace of resentment the implication of her female role. (p. 84)

When Freud returned to Ferenczi’s contribution in 1937, although he disputed many of its claims, he seemed disappointed to admit that he could find no rebuttal to this conclusion (see the quotation at the beginning of this chapter).

In 1954, Ferenczi’s analysand Michael Balint wrote his second paper examining the nature of psychoanalytic training and the training analysis, which he likened to religious
initiation. He referred to Ferenczi’s idea of training analysis, which he said had become the prevailing conceptualization in the time since, as “supertherapy.” Balint pointed out, however, that the supertherapy training analysis, with its tendency to spill over into a post-training analysis, simultaneously marked and cloaked a fundamental crisis in analytic training. Balint wrote:

The post-training analysis is either a continuation of the training analysis, i.e. a public affair, or the newly graduated analyst is still in need of analytic help in which case both the original selection procedure and the recent graduation come under suspicion of not having been quite adequate. Although a full knowledge of the facts would be of very great importance for checking some faults in our training system, a veil of secrecy and privacy is carefully kept over all these happenings. (p. 158)

On an interesting note of speculation, Balint noted that a transition seemed to be underway at that time from the phase of supertherapy to a phase of “research.”

Lacan made frequent reference to both of Balint’s (1948, 1954) papers on analytic training, and when he founded his own school in 1964, he took very seriously these questions of what psychoanalysis is, what a complete analysis might be, what was the nature of its cure, and what it meant that no analyst had yet been able to convincingly theorize what constituted a training analysis. In his *Founding Act*, Lacan (1964/1987) proposed three sections for the school: a section for “pure” psychoanalysis, one for “applied” psychoanalysis, and a section for “taking inventory of the Freudian field,” which was principally concerned with publications.\(^\text{38}\) The signifier “applied” psychoanalysis has been a fraught one from its emergence. It has

---

\(^{38}\) As an aside, it is interesting to note and worth contemplating further, that both Freud and Lacan put as among their highest priorities in their visions of psychoanalytic training the development of organs for publications, and this despite Lacan’s frequent epithet of *poubellication*, combining publication with “trash can,” as well as radical abstinence from the written word after his break with the I.P.A.
generally been used, as it still primarily is, to refer to applications of psychoanalytic theory and method to other fields such as literature, anthropology, and sociology, but Freud (1926) noted that a distinction between “medical” and “applied” psychoanalysis was a purely practical and not logical distinction, “The true line of division is between scientific analysis and its applications alike in medical and non-medical fields” (p. 257). It was this distinction that Lacan adopted and radicalized. By “applied,” he meant primarily medical. While Ferenczi maintained some normative idea about the aim of psychoanalysis even if he viewed it as something perhaps more than a therapeutics or a super-therapeutics, Lacan’s position was far more extreme. He wrote that viewing psychoanalysis as a therapeutics was a “relaxing of its rigour,” and he continued, “I shall observe in effect that there is no possible definition of the therapeutic other than it is the restitution of an earlier state – a definition that is precisely impossible to give in psychoanalysis” (Lacan, 1967/1995). Whatever the cure of psychoanalysis was, it was something new, not the restitution of functioning to a subjectivity that had ceased to be fully functional.

So, what then might this “pure” psychoanalysis be? Lacan (1964/1987) was clear, “Section for Pure Psychoanalysis, or praxis and doctrine of psychoanalysis properly speaking, which is and is nothing but – something to be established in its place – the training psychoanalysis” (p. 97). But what did he mean by this clause, “something to be established in its place”? While customarily syntactically oblique, this seems to be a reference to this real failure to theorize what the training analysis is, and, with this failure, the recognition of the impossibility of comprehending what psychoanalysis is in its specificity (beyond its medical/therapeutic applications) and of what its cure consists. And with his invention of the pass, he took to its logical conclusion Balint’s proposition of a “period of research,” and put the question of the end of analysis at the very center of the school’s activity and functioning (Safouan, 1983/2000).
The pass was an apparatus of the school the aim of which was the posing of the question of the end of psychoanalysis and the pass or passage from psychoanalysand to psychoanalyst. Lacan’s *Proposition* almost immediately made the claim that has since become notorious: “First, a principle: the psychoanalyst derives his authorization only from himself” (p. 14). The pass was not to operate in the manner of a graduation, certification, or license; it did not serve as a verification of competency to outside parties. It was also not supposed to involve itself with status and prestige, that which “training analysis aims to dissolve” (p. 17). To this end, Lacan attempted to distinguish a hierarchy and a gradus. Tardits (2010) argued that, in his selection and differentiation of the two terms, Lacan was playing off their etymological resonances. Hierarchy, with its ecclesiastical connections both to organization and the sacred, referred to the initiatic transmission Balint had referenced from analyst and supervisor to trainee that defined most institutions. Lacan proposed two titles for his school. The A.M.E. (Analyst Member of the École/School) was “constituted simply by the fact that the school recognizes him as a psychoanalyst who has proved himself” (p. 15). The title was hierarchical and social in nature. The second title, A.E. (Analyst of the École/School), which was conferred by a successful pass, was non-hierarchical and connected to the gradus, a nautical term which, similar to the pass itself, implies a passage at the entrance to a port, the meeting point in an estuary of a river and the sea. Of the A.E., Lacan wrote that she “is characterized as being among those who are able to testify to crucial problems, and the vital point they have come to, for analysis, especially in so far as they themselves are working on them or at least working towards resolving them” (p. 15). Referring to Lacan’s satire of psychoanalytic institutions written in 1956 with its “sufficiencies,” “beatitudes,” and “little shoes,” and reflecting on the impossibility of *being* a psychoanalyst, Tardits (2010) wrote, “The fact that there were two titles, which were not related hierarchically,
referring to two different orders, meant that neither one was enough in itself to determine a
‘being an analyst’ which could be ‘sufficient’ (to itself)” (p. 142).

Participation in the pass was a completely optional endeavor, and it was available to all
members of the school, clinicians and non-clinicians alike (while the latter may not have decided
to become analysts themselves, they may still wish to testify to an experience of a complete
analysis; Roudinesco, 1990). For the passant, whose desire led her to pass from the privacy of
the couch and consulting room to the “common good” of psychoanalytic discourse and
knowledge, she would be connected with two passeurs nominated by the institution to give her
testimony of her experience of the end of analysis. These passeurs were individuals still in
analysis and themselves approaching this point of passage. Of the position of the passeurs,
Lacan stated:

From where then could an accurate testimony on whoever crosses this path be expected if
not from an other who, like him, is still this pass, namely in whom at this moment is
present the désêtre where his psychoanalyst harbours the essence of what has passed on
to him like a bereavement, knowing thereby, like any other in the function of training,
that it will pass onto them, too. (p. 26)
The passeurs were not, however, part of the jury that would judge the testimony. Rather, they,
and not the passant herself, would enlighten the jury with what they had gleaned of her passage.
The jury, also constituted by the school, consisted of seven A.E.’s, who would ultimately make a
ruling, not on the experience itself, but on the testimony of it, the ability to testify to crucial
problems of analysis and their potential resolution.

There was a running joke in the Lacanian community during Lacan’s lifetime, which has
likely been replaced in his absence with a posturing of knowledge, that went, “Will we ever
know what the psychoanalyst’s desire is?” (Roudinesco, 1990, p. 394), referring to the elusive concept of the desire of the analyst, frequently evoked and used for explanation without ever being defined or very clearly mapped out. Safouan (1983/2000) said of the pass:

Taken together, the innovations made by Lacan were intended not, as insinuated, to satisfy idle curiosity. Rather their purpose was to make it possible to come up with, if not a definition, at least some clarity about the desire of the analyst in the essential function which falls to this desire in every analysis. (p. 117)

And not only might it shed light on the enigmatic desire of the analyst, which had been an important concept in the Lacanian edifice since the late 1950s. It is worth noting that Lacan made his Proposition in the same year as his Seminar on the psychoanalytic act, which was, perhaps not completely coincidentally, cut short by the evental incursion of May 68. Tardits (2010), perhaps connecting the elusive Lacanian concepts of the desire of the analyst and the psychoanalytic act, wrote of the pass, “This (the indirect transmission from passant to passeur to jury) permits the ‘passing’ analyst to use, not the act, which is still beyond him, but his ‘relation to the act’” (p. 146). Something of the desire of the analyst was to be found in this relation to the act and this putting to use of this relation. As Safouan noted, the use, its elaboration and extrapolation into other new institutional forms, would have been the happy outcome. But everyone involved, including Lacan himself, concluded that the pass and the school were failures. What went wrong?

While for many, the apparatus of the pass was a misguided attempt from the beginning (many of Lacan’s oldest and most loyal students and followers resigned from the EFP in response to the establishment of the pass, and a group of these formed a rival school, that, unlike the EFP, is still in existence today), for those theorists and historians who were sympathetic to it,
there seems to be some consensus as to places it went wrong. Safouan (1983/2000), wishing to demonstrate that the failure of the school and the pass were not necessarily caused by flaws inherent to the pass itself, wrote:

At the point when Lacan was on the verge of bestowing on the School its institutions, what did the School represent in his eyes? Obviously what it could not avoid being as long as the practical experience of its functioning remained inconclusive: an organism (the unavoidable metaphor) designed to carry out certain tasks and which, in order to do so, needed various administrative organs at its disposal. That is the problem. Lacan believed that organization equals administration. (p. 121)

He referenced Weber’s equation of administration and domination and went on to point out that, despite the emphasis on self-dissolution in Lacan’s conceptions of analytic technique and cure as well as in the apparatuses of the school (the cartel and the pass), no such dissolution and shuffling occurred within the administrative organs of the school, culminating in the person of Lacan himself, who, as Rose put it, rushed in “to fill the vacuum of an institutional authority naively trying to liquidate itself” (in Safouan, 1983/200, p. 32).

Roudinesco (1990) regularly pointed to this self-contradiction between Lacan the man and his ideas and the role this played in the institutionalization of those ideas. She noted it in his chronic fears that his ideas were being stolen even as he developed those very ideas based upon the premise that the ego is not master in its own house, that it was the aim of psychoanalysis to further dissolve that ego, and that the battles for prestige that plagued analytic institutions were evidence of a “backsliding” from what the training analysis seeks to disrupt and destroy. Commenting on Lacan’s membership on every single jury of the pass, she noted, “In brief, he condemned himself to pretending not to decide anything even as he maintained without limit the
permanence of a purview that was decisive. With such a situation, *la passe* could not function as a psychoanalytic process” (p. 454).

There had, in fact, been a group within the EFP, led by Robert Lander that was enthusiastic about the pass but also recognized the contradictions inherent in Lacan’s position and proposed an even more radical implementation of the apparatus. The proposal by the Lander group suggested that the *passeurs*, like the *passant*, should be self-appointed and guided by their desire rather than selected by the administrative arm of the school and that the jury ought to be formed by the *passant*, again favoring subjectivity and desire over institutional authority.

Roudinesco (1990) described the political trickery Lacan undertook to ensure that it was his version of the pass, and not that of the Lander group, that was put into effect in the EFP (pp. 455-460).

It seems inevitable and uncharacteristically naïve on the part of its creator, that any procedure which is judged by a committee (of elders) and holds out the prospect of a title\(^39\), and a title, no less, that had previously been bestowed on Lacan’s most loyal supporters who had followed him in the founding of the EFP, choosing loyalty to their master over recognition by the I.P.A., that the pass would degenerate into the very kinds of “narcissistic potency and competitive cunning” Lacan had created it, in part, to preclude. As Roudinesco stated, it could not function psychoanalytically, and no more accurate or comprehensive theorization of the psychoanalytic cure and the nature of training analysis emerged from it. So, why this title? This brings us back yet again to a certain impossibility, a bedrock upon which psychoanalysis and its training always runs aground: for something must be at stake; a coming-to-speak (both as act and

\(^{39}\) I only say holds out the prospect because in the thirteen years of the pass’s functioning within the EFP in which approximately two hundred passes were undertaken, only seventeen were granted the title of A.E. (Roudinesco, 1990, p. 462-463).
as a reading of that act) that is without risk, without wager, has nothing to teach us about the end of analysis, is just masturbation, research of the most vacuous variety. Bloodless. As Freud would say, “It becomes as shallow and empty as, let us say, an American flirtation” (Freud, 1915, p. 290).

Empty American flirt. Young-Girl: appearance’s plaything, slave of the Spectacle. Is that you peeking out coyly, Kore, plucking your flowers to be plucked yourself, Indian summer skirt-hem flitting before burying us beneath fifteen feet of snow, Persephone of the pome-seed? Glimpses of Dora before being trampled beneath carriage wheels? Your last breath, thought, wish, whim before being suffocated in the blubber and footfalls of frenzied shoppers in front of the American Girl shop at first light Black Friday? What visions do you still have for me, Hysteria?

*The Two Times of Hysteria and [Un]Becoming a Psychoanalyst*

From the moment Lacan allowed his person to fill the vacuum of the institutional authority trying to liquidate itself, he ceased to hold to that position as perfect hyster, instead incarnating the position of the master. And as he taught us, the master’s discourse does not produce knowledge. It rather produces the a of wild transference (Lacan, 1969-70/2007). The hindsight of Roudinesco, Safouan, and Tardits and the foresight of Lander have much to teach us. The institution itself, and not just those subjected to it, must maintain its hysterical positioning: an acephalic organization with built-in mechanisms of self-dissolution and shuffling in its apparatuses (such as the cartel and the pass), but also in its executive positions and functions – the *tourbillon*. And to Lander’s critique, this must be an organization that allows space for the subject to speak her own desires in relation to her formation. As Safouan (1983/2000) wrote:
What is needed for the training of analysts is not an organization dissolving the
distinctions between the various functions and responsibilities (were such a thing
conceivable). What is required is an organization not, I would say, ‘where it speaks’, but
*where the subject, deemed to have reached where it was, is able to speak.* In brief, there
can be no possible psychoanalytic training which does not allow anyone to speak who
wants to – anyone desiring to tell how they came to be born out of what they were
without knowing it. (p. 131)

And if coming-to-speak and desire to give testimony to one’s subjectivization is to be a
passage to the act, a letting fall of the subject supposed to know that one might begin again as
analyst oneself, something must be wagered. Whatever this is that is wagered, it cannot be, or at
least cannot only be, the narcissistic ante of ego-image-identity. With or without the pass, such
bereavement is already the lot of the analysand who follows her analysis to its end. This wager
of the pass, it must be something else.

It is my hope that this project may have something of that wager in it. Speaking and
speaking and moving towards I know not what. For whose ears? To what end? At what cost?
It has been years now that I have been scratching and scrawling in these books, saying and
unsaying and saying slightly otherwise on that same sofa. What have I made? What have all
these words made of me? For me, too, a title is now at stake. And I can feel the wincing and
freezing and proliferating reflections each time these pages leave my hands destined for the eyes
of another. And a wish to know when I will know even while knowing (is this knowing?) I will
never know gnaws at me endlessly. An endlessnevering of blah-blah-blah, and ‘is that all?’s.
Coming-to-speak: to let myself fall in letting my words stand.
References


New York: Routledge.


Breton, A. & Aragon, L. (1928). The invention of hysteria. *La revolution surréaliste, 11.*


Hysteria and the Psychoanalytic Act 159

& Trans.), The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud

(Ed. & Trans.), The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund

Freud, S. (1913). Totem and taboo. In J. Strachey (Ed. & Trans.), The standard edition of the
Press.

Freud, S. (1914). Remembering, repeating, and working through. In J. Strachey (Ed. & Trans.).
The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud (Vol. 12, pp.

Freud, S. (1915). Instincts and their vicissitudes. In J. Strachey (Ed. & Trans.), The standard
London: Hogarth Press.

Freud, S. (1915-16). Introductory lectures on psycho-analysis (Parts I-II). In J. Strachey (Ed. &
Trans.), The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud

Freud, S. (1920). Beyond the pleasure principle. In J. Strachey (Ed. & Trans.). The standard
dition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud (Vol. 18, pp. 7-64).
London: Hogarth Press.

Freud, S. (1921). Group psychology and the analysis of the ego. In J. Strachey (Ed. & Trans.).
The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud (Vol. 18, pp.
Hysteria and the Psychoanalytic Act 160


Hysteria and the Psychoanalytic Act

The first complete edition in English (pp. 269-302). New York: W.W. Norton & Company.


Marshall, K. (2000). Termination of an “infinite conversation”: Reflections on the last days of
Hysteria and the Psychoanalytic Act 166


Webster, J. (in press). Reading “Variations on a standard treatment”.

