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**SILENT INVOCATIONS:
Music, Sublimation, and Social Transformation**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
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ABSTRACT

On the premise that human subjectivity and social bonds are formed through language, Lacanian psychoanalysis is utilised in contemporary cultural and social-political theory as an analytic tool to explore human relationality, identity formation and to ascertain the dynamics of social life in the hope that the worst manifestations of violence and exploitation might be averted. The Lacanian wager suggests that any significant and lasting transformation of human relationality requires the reconfiguration of the unconscious co-ordinates of subjectivity through a particular practice of speech and speaking. In this assertion, however, Lacanian theory appears to present a point of impasse around the inability for the kernel of the human condition (the Lacanian Real) to be negotiated by purely symbolic means. Given that music and musical practices are closely allied to the structure of language and its temporal articulation as speech, but have remained outside psychoanalytic theorisation, this thesis approaches the Lacanian opus from the perspective of artistic musical practices to reassess the mechanisms that forge and reshape human relations and social formations. If cultural practices are the fulcrum upon which the entwining of the social-political realm and singular instances of subjectivity emerge, then artistic practices and processes – especially musical improvisation and composition – offer a particularly felicitous model to explore and explicate the mechanisms and conditions of contingent possibility through which reconfigurations of social-political life might occur. Applying a wide range of theoretical and practical musical knowledge to the close reading of the English translations of Jacques Lacan’s Seminars and writings, this thesis makes the case that ‘music’ (understood as a performative and creative trans-subjective act of structuring sound) constitutes an alternative form of artistic ‘writing practice’, and a viewpoint from which a productive analysis and creative expansion of psychoanalytic theory can justifiably be envisaged. To this end, it also identifies the need to reconsider the prevailing emphasis on unconscious fantasy and its traversal in post-Marxist debates, in favour of a rearticulation of the efficacy of artistic practices that Lacan considered to be a privileged form of sublimation capable of social transformation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- E* Lacan, J. (2006). *Écrits* (B. Fink, Trans.). New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company. (Original French text published 1966)
- SIII Lacan, J. (1993). *Seminar III: The psychoses (1955-1956)* (J-A. Miller, Ed. and R. Grigg, Trans.). New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company.
- SVII Lacan, J. (1992). *Seminar VII: The ethics of psychoanalysis (1959-1960)* (J-A. Miller, Ed. and D. Porter, Trans.). New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company.
- SVIII Lacan, J. (n.d.) *Seminar VIII: Transference (1960-1961)* (C. Gallagher, Trans.). Unpublished transcription.
- SX Lacan, J. (n.d.) *Seminar X: Anxiety (1962-1963)* (C. Gallagher, Trans.). Unpublished transcription.
- SXI Lacan, J. (1981). *Seminar XI: The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis* (J-A. Miller, Ed. and A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company.
- SXX Lacan, J. (1998). *Seminar XX: The limits of love and knowledge (1972-1973)* (J-A. Miller, Ed. and B. Fink, Trans.). New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company.
- SE Freud, S. (1955). *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (J. Strachey, Ed. and Trans.). 24 vols. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Lacanian psychoanalytic theory is currently upheld as a unique academic tool with which to analyse social bonds, cultural and political identity, and a vast spectrum of discursive formations, institutions and practices including literary texts and artistic productions. More specifically, the Lacanian reconfiguration of the Freudian opus has gained extensive utilisation in social-political theory for its illumination of the primacy of language and the resultant paradox that language both facilitates and impedes human subjectivity. Irrevocably dependent upon speech and language but constrained by its effects, Lacan posits a divided and decentred model of subjectivity that is dependent upon social relationality, but inherently marked by an impasse that precludes discursive negotiation. In its specifically social-political aspiration, the Lacanian edifice is currently employed to identify the conditions of possibility for social transformation. Moreover, such theoretical ambitions seek not only to describe, analyse and explain, but also hold the practical aim to construct and actively deploy concrete strategies such that the worst symptomatic manifestations of oppression, aggression and degradation of social life might be alleviated.

Rather than the classical Marxist emphasis on the primacy and determinism of economic relations and their dialectical modes of interaction and contradiction, a number of contemporary social-political theorists – most notably Alain Badiou, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Yannis Stavrakakis, and Slavoj Žižek – have sought to combine Marxism and psychoanalysis in a post-Marxist field. Post-Marxism not only seeks to accommodate the thorny issue of human subjectivity that is arguably expunged from classical Marxism, but also attempts to address the plurality and complexity of contemporary social life within the context of late capitalism. Such a theoretical shift is deemed necessary to accommodate an exponential expansion of new technologies of production, consumption and reproduction, and to account for the dynamics of a multiplicity of competing subjective social-political identity positions and their diverse and incommensurate claims. This thesis does not engage with the specific detail of contemporary post-Marxist debates within the field of political philosophy *per se*. It is, however, located within this body of work to the extent that it seeks to address the

impasse upon which much post-Marxist thought that relies on Lacanian psychoanalysis appears to founder.

The Marxist maxim that underpins much scholarly work in the social sciences and political philosophy advocates theoretical endeavour that stretches beyond analysis towards the practical aim of social transformation. As Marx (1845) noted, '[p]hilosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to change it' (p.3). The manner in which this transformational change might be achieved in practice, however, remains highly problematic. The concrete strategies of human agency through which social transformation might take place are far from clear given the complex and paradoxical status of human subjectivity, and the failure, in the twentieth century, of many political variants of Marxist-inspired revolutionary action towards envisaged utopian goals. Moreover, the ground upon which such concrete strategies might be employed raises profound questions with respect to the issues of power relations, ideological normativity, and the status of social-political ethics.

Although located within the frame of post-Marxist debates, this thesis will engage with this pivotal problematic as it resides within Lacanian theory itself. If transformation on a clinical level is possible, the question remains as to its specific status, how it might be achieved, and the extent to which it has relevance at the collective level of social life. The theoretical engagement with Lacanian psychoanalysis that will constitute the body of the discussion will be undertaken in relation to the hitherto unexplored vista of musical practices.¹ From this perspective, the Lacanian opus will be articulated and interrogated with an Althusserian emphasis upon the salience of practices in the complex formation of human subjectivity. This emphasis will be combined with a methodological approach that follows clinical practitioners Dany Nobus's (2002) and Serge André's (2006) suggestion that psychoanalytic praxis

¹ The term 'musical practices' refers here to processes of structuring sounds in musical form, with or without text. Although the thesis considers performance in the Western classical tradition (the focus of musicological scholarship), it also acknowledges the efficacy of a range of cultural-performative practices typically encompassed by the fields of ethnomusicology and popular music studies. Rather than being genre-specific, the term, 'musical practices' encompasses any process that generates new sound combinations and forms through active improvisational and compositional practices. Far from being the preserve of an elitist group, such practices are prevalent in (and accessible to) a wide range of social and cultural groups, and do not necessarily require formal musical training. In this respect, music is often learnt in the same way as spoken language, progressing through stages of imitation and repetition toward the ability to generate novel combinations that may or may not be combined with language.

reaches its limit point when confronted with alternative modalities of writing and signifying practice. The current study will make the case that musical practices also constitute an alternative form of artistic ‘writing practice’, and a vista outside current psychoanalytic thought from which a productive interrogation and critique can be justifiably conducted.

Through the analytic strategy of bringing together the domains of psychoanalysis and musical processes and practices, this thesis mobilises a reversal in the usual polarity that engages the application of Lacanian theory to illuminate a range of cultural, literary, and social-political issues. Contrary to this approach, this thesis views psychoanalysis through the lens of musical practices as they present a limit point to psychoanalytic thought and praxis. Following Freud, Lacan engaged with a formidable range of literary and artistic examples in the exposition of psychoanalysis; however, the diverse field of musical practice represents a significant exclusion. As an exemplar, musical processes and practices of signification offer a particularly felicitous model to explore and explicate the mechanisms and conditions of contingent possibility through which reconfigurations of social-political life might occur. However, before this introductory discussion progresses to explain and justify the salience of what appears to be an obscure and tangential approach, a general survey of the post-Marxist theoretical field is necessary both to locate and specify the central problematic at stake, and to further circumscribe the gap within the Lacanian opus discussed in the following chapters. In light of this broader purpose, the following section offers a general summary of the most significant contributions to literature in the post-Marxist field, rather than an exhaustive and detailed study of their internal adversarial debates.

Post-Marxism

Confronted with the failure of a range of Marxist-inspired revolutionary initiatives in the twentieth century – and the subsequent recognition that classical Marxism requires substantial reconfiguration in the face of contemporary concerns – a number of theorists have divergently employed psychoanalysis to widen the scope of social-political analysis and critique. Collectively, they aim to reconfigure and modify the traditional

interpretation of Marx that places primary emphasis upon class stratification and struggle, predicated upon the primacy of economics and historical materialism. The post-Marxist field aims better to account for the expansion and complexity evident with the rise of identity politics and the concomitant emergence of a plurality of social formations over the past five decades. The domains of social-political theory and psychoanalysis, however, do not present an unproblematic alliance. Ernesto Laclau (1987) specifically acknowledges the difficulty of combining the fields of Marxism and psychoanalysis given that their ‘forms of mutual reference do not merge into any obvious system of translation’ (p.330). Moreover, the challenge remains to ensure that neither field is relegated to a subsidiary role, or any simplistic application of one field to the other that produces a reductionist analysis:

No simple model of supplement or articulation is of the slightest use. The problem is rather that of finding an *index of comparison* between two different theoretical fields, but that, in turn, implies a construction of a new field, within which the comparison would make sense. This new field is one which may be characterized as “post-Marxist”. (p.330)

This is an important point, and one to which the discussion will at various points return. The legitimacy and relevance of what might be described a ‘post-clinical’ theoretical utilisation of psychoanalysis remains a point of contention with many Lacanian clinicians, who question any correspondence between the singularity of the clinical encounter and the collective context of social life.² Given Laclau’s acknowledgement of the difficulties involved in such an alliance, his work in conjunction with Chantal Mouffe provides a salient starting point in this general review of the divergent field of post-Marxism and its reliance upon Lacanian psychoanalysis.

² I am indebted to Dr Warwick Tie for the suggestion of the term ‘post-clinical psychoanalysis’ to denote the specific use of psychoanalysis within social-cultural and political theory (outside the bounds of clinical practice).

Discourse theory: Laclau, Mouffe and Stavrakakis.

The influential work of Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and socialist strategy* (1985), was prompted by the general diagnosis of a ‘crisis of left-wing thought’ and the attempt to reconfigure Marxism towards a new form of ‘radical democratic politics’ (back cover). In their conjoint deployment of Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Laclau and Mouffe emphasize irreconcilable *antagonism* as the constitutive factor around which a plurality of social formations, identity positions and modes of relationality coalesce. As a detailed exegesis of the Lacanian edifice will later make clear, this emphasis is heavily indebted to Lacan’s conception of subjectivity. Laclau’s and Mouffe’s work focuses primarily on the analysis of discursive formations that surround social antagonisms, and the discursive strategies that might productively be employed towards the aspiration for social transformation. In general, the impact of their work lies within the field of discourse analysis, with an emphasis upon the Lacanian concept of the signifier.

Drawing upon Lacan’s early period of work, Laclau develops the concepts of the *empty signifier* in relation to *chains of difference* and *chains of equivalence* to identify the mechanisms of cultural hegemony (Laclau, 1996, pp.36-46). In this respect, he utilises Lacan to develop a conceptual repertoire of discourse analysis that builds upon the work of Antonio Gramsci. Laclau’s and Mouffe’s analysis posits that irreconcilable *antagonism* constitutes the nucleus of multiple modalities of social life, and their hope for transformation resides in the potential for the dislocation of a type of dialectical politics of consensus that allows for, yet contains the negative effects of difference. Considered thus, their discursive strategies aim to mobilise difference and antagonism for productive ends. Although their definition of discourse includes the widest possible spectrum of human expression, Laclau and Mouffe’s mode of analysis and subsequent strategies for transformation nevertheless reside in Lacan’s early work which places emphasis on the primacy of signification; the entwined constellation of the Imaginary and Symbolic registers of human experience. Given that Lacan insists that the central antagonism involved in human relationality (the Real) precludes any Symbolic intervention, and that the process of signification is coextensively implicated as the

progenitor of this central impasse, any discursive strategy would appear to provide nothing beyond a conservative reconfiguration around various identified antagonisms.

Although providing a powerful intellectual critique to the past failures of Marxism, Laclau and Mouffe arguably provide only the first steps towards identification of the mechanisms through which a lasting transformation of social life might occur. From an orthodox Marxist perspective, however, their approach represents a significant distancing from the primacy of economic relations and their role in generating class stratifications of inequality and struggle, and their consequent ongoing reproduction. Moreover, despite the insightful analysis of the discursive mechanisms that underpin identity and social formation around sites of antagonism, their work appears to fall short of any concrete strategies to bring about the genuine liberation of social life to which orthodox Marxist strategy is unswervingly dedicated. This impasse is, however, one that this thesis argues is inherent to Lacanian psychoanalysis and emerges in various forms (as further examples in this survey of the post-Marxist field will illustrate). The work of Yannis Stavrakakis represents a more recent commentary and extension to Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxist/Lacanian approach to discourse analysis.

The work of Stavrakakis (1999; 2007) echoes Laclau's and Mouffe's deployment of psychoanalysis in conjunction with the field of politics in the quest for a coherent post-Marxist articulation and rejuvenation of Leftist political strategy. Within the post-Marxist field published in English, Stavrakakis' contribution is notable for its lucid exposition of the Lacanian oeuvre and for the justification it offers to support the relevance and legitimacy of the utilization of psychoanalysis beyond the clinic. It is for these particular insights that his contribution to the literature in the field warrants inclusion in this survey. Lacan's opus is renowned for its baroque expression and difficulty for the reader; however, Stavrakakis explains and substantiates the claim that Lacan's arcane, baroque style is a deliberate strategy to incite his audience to the particular work of interpretation, critique, and the reconfiguration and creation of meaning rather than charlatanism or obfuscation employed to deflect critical appraisal (Stavrakakis, 1999, pp.4-5). In addition, Stavrakakis persuasively substantiates the case for the relevance and legitimacy of the 'confluence' of psychoanalysis with theoretical

approaches to social-cultural and political life using evidence internal to the work of both Freud and Lacan:

As Lacan points out in “The Freudian Thing” (1955), Freud regarded the study of languages and institutions, literature and art, that is to say, of the social world, as a necessary prerequisite for the understanding of the analytic experience itself: he derived his inspiration, his ways of thinking and his technical weapons from such a study. But he also regarded it as a necessary condition in any teaching of psychoanalysis. (Stavrakakis, 1999, p.2)

Stavrakakis thus makes the point that both Freud and Lacan made their respective cases in conjunction with social fields such as philosophy, art and literature as well as the inherently social formation of subjectivity through transference relationality. In regard to the latter, Stavrakakis clearly elucidates Lacan’s reformulation of the subject/object relation such that any mutually exclusive conception of individual and collective identity that adheres to *a priori* essentialist or transcendental status is expunged. In his political aims, Stavrakakis makes a solid case for the necessary renewal of Leftist political analysis and strategy through post-Marxist critique. He reinforces the legitimacy of the utilisation of psychoanalytic theory to provide a more nuanced theoretical intervention that allows for the inclusion of subjectivity and identity as integral to the field of the political. Furthermore, in his most recent work, *The Lacanian Left* (2007), Stavrakakis extends the confluence of Lacan and politics to elucidate that, like subjectivity and identity, the political field is also formed around an irreducible and un-representable antagonism. He thus theoretically circumscribes a potential locus for transformative action that engages this central antagonism.

Noting the heterogeneity of the field seeking to utilise Lacanian theory, Stavrakakis proposes the designation ‘Lacanian Left’ for a diverse range of ‘theoretico-political projects’. As a field that is marked by discontinuities, Stavrakakis (2007) suggests that:

“Lacanian Left” is a signifier continuously sliding over its potential signifieds. In that sense, talking about it partly entails constructing it, in the same way in which the emergence of something – any object of discourse – cannot be ontologically untied from the performative process of its naming. (p.4)

In opposition to any ‘immodest and politically naive’ assertion that proposes a totalising or definitive revolutionary approach that synthesises and eclipses other perspectives, Stavrakakis further suggests that:

“Lacanian Left” can only be the signifier of its own division, a division which is not to be repressed or disavowed but, instead, highlighted and negotiated again and again as a locus of immense productivity, as the encounter – within theoretical discourse – of the constitutive gap between the symbolic and the real, knowledge and truth, the social and the political. (Stavrakakis, 2007, pp.3-4)

Given the emphasis upon identity politics in the work of Laclau and Mouffe – and Stavrakakis’s extension of post-Marxism to a wider vista he terms the ‘Lacanian Left’ – it is relevant to discuss the significant work that has arisen within the spectrum of cultural studies. Such contributions have created a wider field of interdisciplinary scope that has arguably created an impact upon the post-Marxist field of endeavour. The most salient example is the work of Judith Butler which began in the specific field of gender studies. Butler has mobilised psychoanalysis to emphasise the significance of social construction through discursive strategies of performativity, and the consequent opportunity for political action towards social change.

Performativity: Butler.

Butler’s contribution to gender studies encapsulates a distinctly political dimension that draws upon an eclectic range of theoretical perspectives that includes psychoanalysis. In her quest to unmask and challenge essentialist understandings of human sexuality and heterosexual normativity, Butler utilises the work of J.L. Austin, Althusser, Foucault, Derrida, Freud and Lacan to formulate her thesis that gender

identities are socially prescribed and constructed not only through language, but also through *performativity*. In this way, her work is allied with those post-Marxist theorists, such as Laclau and Mouffe, who seek to address the burgeoning of identity politics in the latter half of the twentieth century. While not strictly categorised ‘post-Marxist’, Butler has, nevertheless, had an extensive dialogue with Laclau and Žižek – *Contingency, hegemony and universality: Contemporary dialogues on the Left*, (2000) – that debates the theorisation of subjectivity and the conditions of possibility for transformation within a psychoanalytic frame. She adheres to the Lacanian view of an opaque and decentred subject, but also asserts that through iterative performativity there is the possibility for transformation to occur. As Sara Salih (2004) summarises:

[In Butler’s conceptualisation], the subject is both subjected to the norm and to the agency of its use, so that if subject-formation is the repeated inculcation of a norm, it will be possible to repeat and re-repeat that norm in unexpected, unsanctioned ways. Performative identity norms resemble the sign as it is characterized by Derrida, and they are vulnerable to precisely the same “grafting”, recitation and semantic excess. (p.9)

Performativity thus functions as a modality of transformation within signification; however, the status of the Real – the register that Lacan’s later work privileges as the libidinal suture that governs any transformation of the Symbolic/Imaginary constellation – remains unclear. Following criticism that her innovative approach in the field of gender identity, *Gender trouble* (1990), remained firmly within the realms of signification and identification without recourse to the body as Real, Butler attempted to further clarify her thought in *Bodies that matter* (1993). As Pluth (2007, pp.145-46) points out, however, the status of the Lacanian notion of the Real in her work remains problematic. While she contends that the materiality of the body represents the limit point of identification and signification (the Lacanian Real) – and that this is ‘something experienced *within* language’ (Pluth, 2007, p.145) – she nonetheless systematically defines the Real as being exterior to language. As with the schools of post-Marxist thought that focus on discourse theory, identity politics, and the primacy of the

Symbolic, there appears to be an inherent problem. If the Real is impervious to human action through the auspices of signification, then the mechanisms for strategies of ‘performativity’ to subvert socially constructed normativity appear to be neutralized. Although Butler attempts to introduce the notion of the Real through the materiality of the body experienced within language, her solution to the possibilities for transformation of identity through performative iteration and difference still remain within the constraints of the Symbolic. More importantly, such performative acts constitute a demand for recognition and inclusion within the existing social order (the Symbolic) for any newly emergent identity position. As the following exegesis of Lacanian theory will substantiate, such a demand may well expand the existing social order into a myriad of identity positions, but will fall short of any lasting transformation.

Without further engagement with the intricacies and differences of debates between Laclau and Butler, the significance that Butler’s work places on the performance of identity and its promise for transformational activity can be generally aligned with discourse theory that utilizes Lacan.³ Both engage extensively with formation of identity and advocate political strategies for transformation that demand recognition from the Other, and subsequent inclusion within the Other. For Lacan, however, the psychoanalytic act of transformation is a signifying act that makes no demand upon the Other for recognition (Pluth, 2007, p.139). In contrast to what can be broadly termed discursive and social constructivist approaches that emphasise identity politics, the work of post-Marxist philosophers Žižek and Badiou places primary emphasis on the register of the Lacanian Real as the crucial factor to be taken into account in any transformational act that might reconfigure the economy of human desire. Rather than an emphasis upon identity, both seek to address the manner in which human subjectivity has become enmeshed in the modes of late capitalist production, consumption and reproduction.

³ See J. Butler, E. Laclau, & S. Žižek (2000) for a detailed account of these differences.

Political philosophy: Žižek and Badiou.

Amongst the most visible and influential protagonists in contemporary post-Marxist debates are continental philosophers Žižek and Badiou. In addition to analysis, explanation and critique, both attempt to address the crucial aspect of the conditions of possibility for concrete action that might bring the Marxist aspiration for social transformation to fruition. Both rely extensively upon Lacanian theory – in particular, the category of the Real – to make their distinct theoretical claims.

Badiou's recent publication, *The Communist hypothesis* (2010a) rearticulates his commitment to the possibilities for a reinvigoration of 'the idea of communism'. The following quote, from an earlier essay of the same name, demonstrates Badiou's search to elevate 'communism' and reinvigorate it towards a goal of social transformation that, according to his portrayal, has insisted in many forms across time:

What is the communist hypothesis? In its generic sense, given in its canonic *Manifesto*, "communist" means, first, that the logic of class – the fundamental subordination of labour to a dominant class, the arrangement that has persisted since Antiquity – is not inevitable; it can be overcome. The communist hypothesis is that a different collective organization is practicable, one that will eliminate the inequality of wealth and even the division of labour. (Badiou, 2008, p.34)

Badiou asserts that the *idea* of communism is eternal and can therefore become manifest in a new form. Moreover, he envisages that the communist hypothesis survives through its many incarnations, permutations and failures. In Lacanian terms, 'communism' is a signifier, and can thus be reconfigured and given new life. For Badiou – who has a predominant Maoist allegiance – the signifier 'communism' gestures beyond a specifically Marxist horizon, and is described as an invariant pure Idea:

As a pure Idea of equality, the communist hypothesis has no doubt existed since the beginnings of the state. As soon as mass action opposes state coercion in the name of egalitarian justice, rudiments or fragments of the hypothesis start to

appear. Popular revolts – the slaves led by Spartacus, the peasants led by Müntzer – might be identified as practical examples of this “communist invariant”. With the French Revolution, the communist hypothesis then inaugurates the epoch of political modernity. (Badiou, 2010a, p.35)

In theoretical terminology, Badiou anticipates that the conditions of possibility for social transformation arise within four fields that he terms *truth procedures*. The four domains he privileges are *art, love, politics, and science*. Within these four domains, truth is an invariant that is inaccessible, but can become evident on fleeting occasions that he terms an *event*:

I call an event a rupture in the normal order of bodies and languages as it exists for any particular situation. What is important to note here is that an event is not the realization of a possibility that resides within the situation or that is dependent on the transcendental laws of the world. An event is the creation of new possibilities. It is located not merely at the level of objective possibilities but at the level of the possibility of possibilities. (Badiou, 2010a, pp.242-43)

Thus portrayed, truths exist outside ontology and cannot be known, and in this aspect of his philosophy, Badiou relies heavily upon Lacan’s radical distinction between truth and knowledge, and his conceptual formulations of the register of the Real and *objet a* in relation to the registers of the Symbolic and the Imaginary.⁴

An event paves the way for the possibility of what ... is strictly impossible. If we keep in mind here that, for Lacan, the real = the impossible, the intrinsically real aspect of the event will be readily seen. We might also say that an event is the

⁴ The Imaginary is the register of mirrored sense reflections that become dynamically entwined within the Symbolic as a language system. This process of signification, however, always generates an excess that cannot be symbolically integrated. This is the domain of the Lacanian Real, which is excluded from the Imaginary/Symbolic constellation. *Objet a* is the Lacanian concept of a zero point of negativity that remains as a spectral kernel around which the sense modalities of human interaction with the exterior world form. Finally, the term ‘Other’ refers to both language as a system, and the societal norm that is operative within any social configuration.

occurrence of the real as its own future possibility. (Badiou, 2010a, p.243)

The conditions of possibility for the occurrence of an event, however, remain an enigmatic factor around which Badiou's work circulates. As ontological impossibilities, the register of the Real and its attendant formulation *objet a* are central to Lacanian theory. An acknowledgment of the difficulties their conceptualisation presents is vital insofar as any impasse within Lacanian psychoanalysis itself will be imported directly into its confluence with other fields such as post-Marxism.

It is likewise pertinent to note that Badiou places particular emphasis on art as one of the designated domains of truth procedure that constitute an event. In addition to the forms of art more commonly associated with psychoanalysis – painting, poetry, literature and theatre (in both comedic and tragic forms) – Badiou also has an enthusiastic interest in the work of the composer Richard Wagner. Wagner is primarily known for his monumental operatic repertoire that represents the height of German Romanticism in a combination of theatrical narrative and musical form. Entwined with this epic artistic accomplishment, however, are Wagner's controversial political writings and the debate over their status in relation to German nationalism, anti-Semitism, and Nazism (Žižek, in Badiou, 2010b, pp.161-225). Badiou's recent publication, *Five lessons on Wagner* (2010b), represents an engagement with these issues. In his preface, Badiou credits French composer and critic François Nicolas for bringing to his attention the observation that despite his lifelong interest in Wagner, music has never warranted a place within his philosophical or political thought. Badiou not only recognises the originality of Nicolas's compositions and his theoretical expertise, but further emphasises that he 'is particularly knowledgeable about the borders of thought, especially those that both separate and join music, mathematics, politics and philosophy' and that such a confluence 'has made him one of [his] preferred interlocutors for many years now' (Badiou, 2010b, p.xi). This represents a significant example where contemporary musical praxis has ventured beyond its traditional disciplinary bounds and relative autonomy within the aesthetic arts, towards a productive engagement with social-political theory and philosophy. Although a seemingly disparate publication in relation to Badiou's opus, *Five lessons on Wagner* also represents the fledgling

consideration of music and musical practices which, as the passage above attests, Badiou has occluded from the horizon of his philosophical and political thought. It also marks an alliance with Badiou's closest philosophical interlocutor, Slovenian philosopher Žižek, and revives the controversial debate about the confluence of epic tragedy, musical forms and politics begun in earlier writings by Theodor Adorno.⁵ As the substantial afterword that Žižek contributes to this volume suggests,⁶ Žižek shares Badiou's passion for Wagnerian opera despite its construal as politically inappropriate through historicist interpretations that associate the work with anti-Semitism and Nazism.⁷ Although he routinely uses psychoanalysis as a theoretical tool to interpret a raft of cultural forms (such as opera) – and is particularly noted for his engagement with contemporary pop culture through mediums such as film and cyberspace – Žižek's commitment is staunchly political and activist.

Of all the aforementioned post-Marxist theorists, Žižek most closely adheres to the classical Marxist emphasis on the categories of 'capital' and 'class', and, in Lacanian terms, holds that capitalism is the central Real of contemporary social-political life that remains irresolutely immutable. In so doing, however, he opposes the emphasis on identity politics in a bid to reformulate Marxism, without compromise, in relation to the primacy of economic relations. The diffusion of identity politics, for Žižek, merely serves to mask the primacy of economic relations of production and consumption, and the reproduction of such relations. 'Today's postmodern politics of multiple subjectivities', he maintains, 'is precisely not political enough, insofar as it silently presupposes a non-thematized, "naturalized" framework of economic relations' (Butler, Laclau & Žižek, 2000, p.108). In this respect, Žižek's views can be placed in sharp contrast to the emphasis of discourse theorists such as Laclau. He does, however, artfully employ Lacanian psychoanalysis to make the claim that capitalism has made an unholy alliance with the mechanisms of human desire through *commodity fetishism* and the constitutive power of *ideological fantasy* within the social-political framework.

⁵ On Adorno's spectrum of writing on music in relation to politics and culture, see Adorno (2002).

⁶ In his afterword to *Five lessons on Wagner* (2010b), Žižek contributes a further sixty-four pages that expound his detailed knowledge and perspective upon Wagnerian opera (an explanation that represents more than a third of the central body of the volume).

⁷ Due to its association with Nazism and the Holocaust, the performance of Wagner is informally prohibited in Israel. For a musical interpretation of this point, see D. Barenboim & E.W. Said (2004), pp.175-84.

Žižek is well renowned for his lucid, entertaining, and often risqué explanations of difficult Lacanian concepts and formulations through his analyses that range across the most diverse spectrum. As Sarah Kay summarises:

Reading Žižek is like taking an exhilarating ride on a roller-coaster through anecdote, Kant, popular film, science, religion, Marx, opera, smut, current affairs, modern art, Derrida, political correctness, canonical literature, cyberspace etc. etc., being constantly buffeted as you do so in the twists and turns of Hegelian dialectic and Lacanian theory. (2003, p.1)

Žižek's work has arguably made the greatest impact in the fields of political philosophy and cultural studies in Continental Europe in recent decades through a prodigious output of publications on a vast interdisciplinary thematic spectrum. His influence has been such that the dissemination of Lacan in the Anglo-American academic arena has occurred, to a large extent, through his interdisciplinary work. The well known inaccessibility of Lacan's work, particularly in English translation, has meant that much of the understanding and appropriation of Lacan in the English-speaking academy (and beyond) has occurred through Žižek's particular reading and interpretation. Of major significance in this respect is his innovative re-reading of Hegel in confluence with Lacanian psychoanalysis. Žižek's interpretation of Lacan pays greater attention to Hegel than to Freud, and marks a major distinction between his appropriation of Lacan, in a post-clinical theoretical framework, and the understanding and deployment of Lacan by clinical practitioners. The fine detail and legitimacy of Žižek's undoubtedly ingenious and influential strategy is not the focus of this discussion. It is pertinent, nevertheless, to bear in mind that Žižek's particular rendition of Lacan through a re-reading of Hegel, which has emerged with such verve, flamboyance and influence since his first English publication in 1989, remains one of a number of secondary appropriations and interpretations.

The Lacanian category of the Real, mentioned in brief several times above, is pivotal to Žižek's oeuvre, and it is around this enigmatic register that the various strands of his philosophical, political and cultural thought are woven (Kay, 2003, p.3). A

preliminary explanation is thus warranted at this point. As Kay rightly suggests, ‘there is no snappy definition’. However, there is perhaps no more succinct and accessible description than that offered by Kay in her introductory text:

The [R]eal can be thought of as the limit of language, and thus as everything we lose by becoming speaking beings. This limitation is just that: a cut-off point so absolute as to be invisible to us as language-users. If we attempt to trace it, it wraps back into the heart of language, just as the hole in the middle of a doughnut is the continuation of space that surrounds it. Thanks to the hole, the doughnut is a doughnut, even though, in a sense, the hole is precisely what is not in it; analogously, the [R]eal is what shapes our sense of reality, even though it is excluded from it. Conversely, the [R]eal may be represented as something unremittingly resistant, a “hard kernel” that our thoughts keep glancing off and that no mental light can illumine. The words most commonly used by Žižek to gesture towards the [R]eal include “antagonism”, “traumatic”, “impossible”, “kernel”, “deadlock”. (2003, p.4)

Put simply, Žižek contends that any transformative ‘act’ necessarily involves an encounter with the enigmatic Real which frames reality, and in this respect he follows the trajectory that Lacan’s work was to take and maintain more thoroughly towards the end. Following what is commonly termed ‘the later Lacan’ as his guide, Žižek maintains that any transformative act requires the implication of the Real as that which frames and permeates the discursive field within which theorists such as Laclau propose the opportunity for social transformation may be possible.

Žižek’s work thus challenges other theorists – including Laclau, Mouffe, and Butler – to ‘tarry with negativity’ and take greater account of the Real in their theoretical engagements (Boucher, Glynos & Sharpe, 2005, p.xiv). A wide range of criticism has been levelled at Žižek’s work: this criticism has focused mainly on the validity of his interpretations of Hegel and Lacan; the incommensurability of his style of argumentation

with accepted Western standards of academic rigour⁸; and his radical exemplifications of the transformative Lacanian Act⁹ (which lack any discernable or viable strategy for practical action that is commensurate with Marxism). Such calls for political strategies fall short of the understanding that conscious strategic intentionality cannot escape the capture of the existing Symbolic realm. Such programmes for revolutionary action, therefore, fail to court an encounter with the Real as the condition of possibility that Žižek portrays as necessary for the act of transformation. ‘The act’, Žižek observes:

differs from an active intervention (action) in that it radically transforms its bearer (agent): the act is not simply something I “accomplish” – after an act, I’m literally “not the same as before”. In this sense, we could say that the subject “undergoes” the act (“passes through” it) rather than “accomplishes” it: in it, the subject is annihilated and subsequently reborn (or not), i.e., the act involves a kind of temporary eclipse, *aphanisis*, of the subject. (1992, p.44)

The act to which Žižek adheres is one that breaks the hold of the Symbolic configuration within which the individual is located and fixed as subject. By this definition, no purchase can be brought to bear upon the subjective fixation of the individual from within the *status quo* of the prevailing Symbolic/social configuration, but requires the ‘traversal of fantasy’ at the level of the unconscious (the domain of *jouissance*).

Heavily reliant upon his interpretation of Lacan, Žižek’s notion of the transformative act is anchored by the central importance of unconscious fantasy, rather than any conscious active Symbolic intervention.¹⁰ Žižek is notable not only for his engagement with aspects of social life not usually subject to political theorisation and critique, but also for the distinctly alternative manner in which he writes. In oscillation between a manically neurotic hysterical questioning (the domain of the analysand’s

⁸ It is beyond the parameters of this introductory sketch to elaborate all such criticisms in detail. For further discussion of this point, see R. Butler (2005); Boucher, Glynos, & Sharpe (2005); I. Parker (2004); and G.G. Harpham (2003).

⁹ For a specific critique of Žižek’s exemplification of the act through Sophocles’ *Antigone*, see R. Grigg (2008), pp.119-31.

¹⁰ This point is discussed further in Chapter 3 (on sublimation and the status of artistic processes that constitute a distinctly alternative form of signifying act).

demand) and the position of the inscrutable analyst who provides no easy answers or viable prescriptive plan of action, Žižek's work appears to evoke the style of Lacan through his writing practice as an *agent provocateur par excellence*. Indeed, his work abounds with proclamations that appear to be 'answers', but in Marxist terms do not solve the problem of practical action. Considered in this light, it is not so much that Žižek aims to disseminate knowledge and prescribe a programme of transformative political action, but to enact the process of the analytic encounter in order to set the reader to work through the reception of his writing. Moreover, his writing is aimed beyond the small readership of the academy to a wider audience on both political and cultural axes. Unlike his excursions into popular culture through mediums such as film, cyber-culture and humour, however, Žižek's engagement with music is incongruously conservative with a predilection for the analysis of opera, albeit in a Lacanian frame. Indeed, as a significant departure from his political writing, Žižek has undertaken a joint study with colleague Mladen Dolar, *Opera's second death* (2002), which marks a rare conjunction of Lacanian theory with the musical arts. Before we move to consider these contributions to the literature, however, it is pertinent to consider an earlier attempt by French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser (1918-90) to address Marxism through the prism of the social-political practices and institutions.

Social-political practices: Althusser.

The work of Marxist philosopher, Louis Althusser, anticipates contemporary post-Marxist critique in some important respects. His seminal essay *Ideology and ideological state apparatuses* presents an outline for an investigative study that seeks to ascertain how the 'reproduction of the relations of production are secured' through both repressive and ideological means (Althusser, 1971, p.148). On a second axis of thought, Althusser attempts to discern the mechanisms through which individuals are interpellated as subjects of ideology through a variety of cultural, religious and social practices. In his analysis of the relations of production, Althusser makes the distinction between two modalities of state apparatus and their interaction; *repressive state apparatuses* (RSA) and *ideological state apparatuses* (ISA). The repressive state apparatus 'consists

essentially in securing by force (physical or otherwise) the political conditions of the reproduction of relations of production which are in the last resort relations of exploitation' (Althusser, 1971, pp.149-50). Moreover, he qualifies that:

[A]bove all, the State apparatus secures by repression (from the most brutal physical force, via mere administrative commands and interdictions, to open and tacit censorship) the political conditions for the action of the Ideological State Apparatuses. In fact it is the latter which largely secure the reproduction specifically of the relations of production, behind a "shield" provided by the repressive State apparatus. It is here that the role of ruling ideology is heavily concentrated It is the intermediation of the ruling ideology that ensures a (sometimes teeth-gritting) "harmony" between the repressive state apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatuses, and between the different State Ideological Apparatuses. (Althusser, 1971, p.150)

Althusser proceeds to enumerate various examples of ISA in the modalities of education, religion, family, politics, trade-unionism, media communications and 'cultural' forms. Indeed, he claims that in Western capitalist societies characterized by class stratification, the educational modality of the ISA, in concert with the family, has replaced the role of religion as the dominant ideology. In their ability to take the role of dominant ideology, he posits that both religion and education function in a conjoint duality with the ISA of the family. Any elaboration on the pivotal implication of the family ISA in this hegemonic process is, however, absent. Similarly, Althusser includes amongst his list of ISAs the unspecified category of 'cultural forms', but there is no specific elaboration of such institutions and practices and certainly no direct mention of music and musical practices as a 'cultural form'. It is pertinent to note, however, that in his description of the hegemonic process through which education is able to assert itself as the dominant ISA, Althusser writes with uncharacteristic grandeur that utilises a powerful musical allegory to depict the process of the reproduction of the relations of production (i.e. of capitalist relations of exploitation):

This concert is dominated by a single score, occasionally disturbed by contradictions (those of the remnants of former ruling classes, those of the proletarians and their organisations): the score of the Ideology of the current ruling class which integrates into its music the great themes of the Humanism of the great Forefathers, who produced the Greek Miracle even before Christianity, and afterwards the Glory of Rome, the Eternal city, and the themes of Interest, particular and general, etc. nationalism, moralism and economism. Nevertheless, in this concert, one Ideological State Apparatus certainly has the dominant role, although hardly anyone lends an ear to its music: it is so silent! This is the School. (Althusser, 1971, pp.154-55)

As the dominant ISA, education is portrayed by Althusser as a process that integrates the multiple strands of ideological interpellation into a coherent singular musical score. Moreover, the ideological operation of education is described as a ‘silent music’ that underpins the formation of the subject in all other modalities due to its influence on children through their most formative years. Within this explanation of the operation of both the ideological and repressive state apparatuses, a particular theory of subjectivity emerges in Althusser’s reformulation of the concept of ideology. Most significantly, Althusser observes an inherent ambiguity in the notion of subjectivity. On one hand, the ordinary use of the term denotes ‘a free subjectivity, a centre of initiatives, an author of and responsible for its actions’ (Althusser, 1971, p.182). On the other hand, it denotes ‘a subjected being who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission’ (ibid.).

In his structuralist approach, Althusser refutes the humanistic notion of a fully transparent subject that is merely deprived of the agency to act due to the effects of ideology as a false consciousness that can be overcome. Instead, he posits that individuals are interpellated by a compelling invocation into ideology through the process of ‘hailing’, with the consequence that the actions of the individual are inserted into a range of material practices. Moreover, he claims that through the exercise of such ritual practices the structural place as subject within ideology, that *always already* existed, becomes ratified and operative for the individual. In this way, Althusser (1971)

asserts that ideology has a material existence: ‘an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material’ (p.166). Put simply, Althusser posits that the unknowing individual, who is *always already a subject*, is appealed to and responds to ideological invocation through a paradoxical form of (mis)recognition to take up their position as subject within ideology. ‘*All ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*, by the functioning of the category of the subject’ (Althusser, 1971, p.173). No matter which modality, Althusser asserts that the general mechanism of ideological interpellation involves the transformation of individuals as subjects, and, furthermore, that *material practices* play an integral part in this process. Moreover, he notes that the constitutive process of subjectivization within the process of ideological interpellation (through material practices) confounds the notion of history as the unfolding of a singular linear temporality:

For the convenience and clarity for my little theoretical theatre I have had to present things in the form of a sequence, with a before and an after, and thus in the form of a temporal succession But in reality these things happen without any succession. The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing. (Althusser, 1971, pp.174-75)

Although not explicitly acknowledged, the psychoanalytic tenor of Althusser’s work is readily apprehended in these speculative ruminations. Firstly, Althusser borrows from Freud the notion of overdetermination; the subject is overdetermined by a complex multiplicity and underpinned by an unconscious framework (ideology) that bestows order. Secondly, in the vein of Lacan, he asserts the Imaginary duplicate mirror-structure of ideology that simultaneously assures:

1. The interpellation of “individuals” as subjects;
2. Their subjection to the Subject;
3. The mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects’ recognition of each other, and finally the subject’s recognition of himself;

4. The absolute guarantee that everything is really so, and that on condition that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be all right. (Althusser, 1971, p.181)

Finally, Althusser asserts that ideology is eternal insofar as it resides as an omnipresent unconscious framework (the dominance of a silent musical score) that masquerades as the ‘natural’ order of a given societal configuration. The differential temporality to which Althusser alludes is aligned with Lacan’s conceptualisation of the unconscious and ‘logical time’, a point that the following chapters will clarify in detail. To assert that Althusser’s thought is entirely congruent with psychoanalysis would be to overstate the case. Nevertheless the influence of psychoanalysis is readily apparent at the level of several conceptual parallelisms (Macey, 1994, p.144).¹¹

If the essay *Ideology and ideological state apparatuses* is taken as the sole reference, Althusser’s rather pessimistic depiction of subjectivity eschews any humanistic notion of subjective agency and freedom and appears to confirm an overwhelming asymmetry towards unavoidable structuralist subjection. Although not explicitly articulated as such, the implication appears to be that possibilities for social transformation reside within the mechanisms that constitute the process of interpellation as subjects of ideology through material practices. It is pertinent to note that there is a subscript to the title of this essay that qualifies it as ‘notes to an investigation’. Considered thus, it is offered as a set of fertile conjectural insights rather than a complete conceptual theory or definitive programme of social transformation. This was not, however, the end of Althusser’s opus.

Over a decade later, following immense personal crisis, Althusser intermittently continued to work and rework many hypotheses. In the wake of the controversial events surrounding his personal circumstances – the instability of his mental health that resulted in the death of his wife by his own hand (1980) and subsequent periods of hospitalization – it is unsurprising that Althusser’s final decade of seemingly disparate

¹¹ Macey also points out that Althusser’s use of a number of conceptual terms is not congruent with Lacan. For example: his use of the term ‘imaginary’ is in the vein of imagination rather than Lacan’s register of reflective images. Similarly, his use of the term ‘real’ pertains to that which is perceived, rather than the Lacanian Real that lies beyond signification and Symbolic negotiation. For further discussion of points of continuity and discontinuity between Althusser and Lacan, see Macey (1994), pp.142-58.

thought remained unpublished and received little subsequent recognition. In discussions with Fernanda Navarro during this period Althusser outlined further advancements to his earlier theories that appeared to overwhelmingly enslave subjectivity to an immutable structural determinism. Although he stood by the theory of subjective formation in conjunction with ideological interpellation through material practices, Althusser admitted the shortcomings of his earlier philosophical work on Marx (Navarro, 1998, p.94). In a further qualification of what had been, by his description, a predominantly structuralist approach ‘of Bachelardian inspiration’, he proposed the additional notion of ‘aleatory materialism’ to denote a process without a subject (ibid., pp.94-5). Through this assertion, Althusser extended his theory to include the possibility that it is precisely because of the necessity to formulate determinate laws, and the process of subjective formation and ideological interpellation through material practices, that the possibility for contingent transformation can occur. Navarro (1998) describes Althusser’s conception of aleatory materialism thus:

Aleatory materialism is thus a materialism of chance, of contingency, *not* in the sense of an absence of necessity but in the sense of necessity conceived as *devenir*, a becoming necessary of contingent encounters ... [A]leatory materialism gives primacy to matter, to materiality. But, for him, this could refer to sheer matter or to matter quite different from that of the physicist, being perhaps the matter of an experimental device. He went further to say that matter could be the simple trace, the mark left by a trace and, to assert the universal primacy of materiality, he invoked Derrida’s demonstration of the priority of scripture, of writing, found even in the phoneme produced by the voice. For Althusser, aleatory materialism represented the highest point of materialism because of a compelling impulse it has to open the world to “the event”, to all living practices, including politics. He stressed the *événement*, always unpredictable and changing all fixed premises and data. (p.95)

Rather than any revisionism, this notion can be seen to be an extension and refinement of his earlier work, and the importance of taking the materiality of ideology

and the process of interpellation through material practices seriously. Indeed, it is in his 1969 essay on ideology that Althusser first makes the assertion that the existence of ideology is material, and that ‘matter is discussed in many senses, or rather that it exists in different modalities, all rooted in the last instance in ‘physical’ matter’ (Althusser, 1971, p.166). While Althusser contended that the actions of individuals inserted into material practices are structurally constitutive of both ideology and subjectivity, his added conceptualisation of the necessity of contingency (‘aleatory materialism’) opens towards the transformative act/event, albeit an asymmetric and complex possibility. Given that he also asserted that ideology governs as an omnipresent structure, any classical notion of the subject or humanist voluntarist subjective agency is nullified. Like his notion of history, Althusser proposes ideology as a process without a subject. As Pluth (2007) further suggests, it is this particular notion of subjectivity that is congruent with Lacan: ‘only the Lacanian view would add that such a “process without [classical] subject” is just what should be called “subject”, and that such a process is found not only in history but in the biography of the individual as well’ (p.4).

Although seldom directly acknowledged as such, the aforementioned aspects of Althusser’s work can be seen to maintain significant relevance to the preceding outline of the contemporary post-Marxist project. Like Laclau and Mouffe, Althusser relies on both Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic conceptualisations of subjectivity, and he actively seeks to insert such considerations into the Marxist project as a practice that aims towards social transformation. Resonance of the emphasis he places on the actions of individuals that become inserted into material practices that constitute subjects of ideology, and the contingency that resides within such processes, can arguably be located in Butler’s conceptualisation of performativity, Badiou’s conceptualisation of the event, and Žižek’s notion of act. Moreover, as the body of this thesis will further contend, many of Althusser’s fragmentary insights, which admittedly fall short of any coherent theoretical formulation, can be located within Lacan’s opus and his conception of the transformative psychoanalytic act.

The foregoing discussion not only legitimately establishes the salience of Althusser’s thought to the contemporary post-Marxist project of the confluence of psychoanalysis and Marx, but his notion of *aleatory materialism* provides the opening to

further theorise the enigmatic opportunities and mechanisms through which transformation might occur. In accordance with Althusser's emphasis upon the actions of the individual inserted into material practices of ideological interpellation that confer subjectivization, and the differential temporality and contingency that the process entails, this thesis contends that musical practices offer insight into the central deadlock that surrounds the transformative act in the post-Marxist utilisation of Lacanian psychoanalysis. It contends that the impasse at stake within post-Marxism is a result of the emphasis placed upon unconscious fantasy (and its inaccessibility to Symbolic intervention), and that it occludes the possibilities offered by artistic sublimation as an alternative conscious modality of signification within which the conditions of possibility for transformation may reside. As a process of structuring sound that is isomorphic to speech and language¹² – but differential in its complex engagement of cognitive, affective and physical dimensions (the Lacanian registers of the Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real) – musical processes and practices provide a modality through which Lacanian categories can be innovatively interrogated and extended in contemporary social-cultural and political domains. To further justify this claim, this introductory discussion now moves to the consideration of musical practices and a review of the extant literature that constitutes the small field of academic endeavour that attempts to integrate the fields of music and psychoanalysis.

¹² In this context, the term 'isomorphic' is used to denote the formal and functional properties that language and music have in common. Rather than any claim to literal equality, it refers to the intersection between the two at the level of structural form (the level of the enunciated), and performative expression (the level of enunciation). At the level of form, Lacan points out that the unconscious is structured like a language on both diachronic (metonymic) and synchronic (metaphoric) axes, and uses the example of the arrangement of an orchestral score to exemplify these structural similarities (*E*, p. 419). Moreover, in Seminar XI, he states that the invocatory drive (that which incites expression of sound in both linguistic and musical forms) is closest to the unconscious (SXI, p.104). At the level of performative enunciation, contemporary neuroscientific research is revealing the complexities of the relation between language and music. Although research is in its comparative infancy, various similarities and differences have been observed. See, in particular, M. Besson and D. Schön (2005). At the most fundamental level, however, speech and music both articulate sound across time in discrete intervals with variations of pitch, and can be written in structured forms. Moreover, they are human activities found in multifarious forms of expression across cultures. These common structural and functional properties are such that language and music are easily combined and entwined, although evolving neuroscientific research suggests that each modality activates a complex dynamic array of functions and structures in the human brain. For a general overview of current research into the relationship between language and music, see I. Peretz and R. Zatorre (2005). See also E. Mannes (2011).

Music and Psychoanalysis

The structuring and performance of sound, in both linguistic and musical forms, is ubiquitous to human culture. Although manifest both historically and culturally in a myriad of particular forms, music, like language, has been recognised as a powerful constitutive force in the flux of human social-political relations and identifications. Historically, philosophical ruminations – from Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle through to the post-Enlightenment thought of Rousseau, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche – have positioned music in a central but paradoxical role of oscillation between the antinomies of sacred and profane, sublime and abject, vice and virtue, mind and body, phenomenal and noumenal, good and evil, the borderlands that constitute the contested ground of ethics and the status of the human condition within the social-political matrix. In the period that marked the transition from the Renaissance into the age of Enlightenment, however, music-making underwent a metamorphosis that transformed what had formerly been a social practice of ritual, educative and ethical import, towards the advent of secular instrumental forms, the emergence of the individual virtuoso performer, the conductor, and concert performance that dispersed and divided musical experience (Bowman, 1998). Such a move eventually elevated and fragmented Western ‘art music’ into the aspects of composition, performance, and the critical reception of an informed listening audience. As a consequence, ‘music’ became increasingly defined as an autonomous aesthetic domain under the general academic umbrella of ‘the arts’, and the emphasis of musicological scholarship predominantly shifted towards the critical analysis of the composition, performance and reception of music as ‘art object’. Although music as performance practice also resides within the academy, there remains a significant divide between the field of musicological scholarship and what might be termed vocational and ‘lay’ practices of the broad spectrum of the musical arts.

Restricted to the narrow definition of Western ‘art music’, academic music scholarship has, for the most part, remained an autonomous field confined within its own textual musicological terms, and reluctant to acknowledge the relevance of any investigation from alternative perspectives. Moreover, until comparatively recently, both traditional and popular forms of music-making have been occluded from serious

consideration. As expatriate New Zealand composer and music educator Christopher Small (1998, pp.3-4) suggests, it is only those of ‘brave spirit’ who risk the wrath of the musicological establishment and dare to disturb the highly valorised view of music as autonomous art. Recent scholarship – across domains as diverse as sociology, psychology, anthropology, ethnomusicology, evolutionary biology, neuroscience and economics – suggests, however, that music-making is an intriguing medium through which we might grasp a kaleidoscope of alternative perspectives regarding human identity and subjectivity (constituted through the flux of social relationships).

Any attempt to create a theoretical amalgam across such an eclectic spectrum of disparate perspectives inevitably risks a collapse into a banal and impotent synthesis that masks the complexity of the domain. However, if ‘music’ is understood as a performative and creative trans-subjective act of structuring sound – both within and beyond the strictures of linguistic meaning – then enquiry may be extended beyond the mainstream musicological emphasis on music as aesthetic ‘art object’. Moreover, its temporal unfolding in the present moment of performance bears a greater affinity with poetry and speech rather than artistic practices that focus on the production of a material art object. As Jacques Attali (1985) aptly summarises: ‘Music is more than an object of study: it is a way of perceiving the world’ (p.4). Attali further contends that music shapes and speaks of social identities: ‘More than colours and forms, it is sounds and their arrangements that fashion societies All music, any organization of sounds is then a tool for the creation or consolidation of a community’ (p. 6). Moreover, its uses and meanings are inescapably political. Music is ‘an attribute of religious and political power [which] ... signifie[s] order, *but also ... prefigure[s] subversion* [italics added]’ (p.4).

Insofar as musical performance may be conceived as a modality of communicative expression through which social identities are formed and consolidated, Attali also asserts that it possesses the paradoxical capacity to create and transform. Rather than perceiving music as an autonomous ‘art object’ to be analysed in terms of its production, performance and reception, this thesis seeks to investigate the dynamic motivating force that underlies the human compulsion to incessantly represent and signify through the process of the performance of sound, a drive that is common to both

music and language. The performance of sound, structured in the modalities of music and speech, represents a complex matrix of cognitive, affective, and physical activity that is implicated in the formation of the human psyche. Perceived in this manner, the corporeal and embodied aspects of sound and the semiotic and prosodic dimensions of language cannot be annexed from structural theories of communication. There remains a compelling invocation that incites humans into expression through sound, and the metamorphosis of this force into a ‘communicative’ act that seeks meaning underpins what may broadly be termed the spectrum of social-political discursive practices.

Musical practices are ubiquitous within social-cultural life and can be demonstrated to share elements that are structurally isomorphic with those of speech and language in addition to a shared temporal articulation. Moreover, in many cases they are combined with each domain serving to enhance the other in terms of their respective Symbolic and Imaginary components. Aspects of psychoanalytic clinical practice such as the transference relation, repetition, free association and interpretation are also aspects of musical practice. The musical modes of repetition, interpretation, improvisation and composition offer a unique grasp of the Lacanian *modus operandi*. Given this affinity, and that psychoanalysis has been increasingly utilised as an analytic tool to interrogate and elucidate the complex configurations of social interaction through institutions and practices, it is surprising that it has not been brought into confluence with the field of musical performance to any significant degree. Thus considered, musical practices offer a uniquely salient temporal model through which Lacanian psychoanalysis might be further interrogated. Before the discussion moves to the specific detail of the confluence of Lacanian theory and musical practices that this thesis will pursue, a general discussion about the absence of music in psychoanalytic thought, and a survey of the small body of extant literature that applies psychoanalysis to the field of music will serve to further circumscribe the gap in psychoanalytic theory that this thesis will address.

Freud and music.

Sigmund Freud founded psychoanalytic theory upon the nuanced dynamics of clinical practice conducted and conveyed through the spoken word, but he also steadfastly claimed to be devoid of musical sensibility (Abrams, 1993, p.281). This disposition appears to have occluded – or at least subordinated – the consideration and understanding of the auditory dimension in relation to the performance of music and instigated a visual bias within psychoanalytic thought from its inception. Although Freud engaged with both visual art and literature, the musical arts remained singularly absent from his formulation of psychoanalytic praxis. The extant literature pertaining to the relationship between music and psychoanalysis is comparatively sparse and has been largely confined to the domain of *applied psychoanalysis* within a Freudian frame. In accord with this contextual bias, the few studies that have attempted to apply Freudian theory to music have followed the model of Freud’s analyses of art and literature, and the questionable genres of so-called ‘psycho-biography’ in the vein of Freud’s analysis of Leonardo da Vinci. A comprehensive bibliography and two edited collections of the most pivotal papers on the subject have been published by the *Music and mind project* in America, under the editorship of Stuart Feder, Richard Karmel and George Pollock (1993). This literature falls broadly into three analytic categories: (i) musicological analyses of musical texts that attempt to correlate linguistic structure to musical structure; (ii) analysis of narrative texts combined with music such as opera and art song; and (iii) following the trend of ego psychology, the relationship between a musical work and the life history of the composer. These volumes remain largely within the constraints of musicological analysis of textuality, historicist and reductionist psychological readings that make no use of Continental philosophy or the Lacanian psychoanalytic orientation. Moreover, they are entirely restricted to the analysis of Western art music with little consideration given to contemporary or ethnic forms, the performer or performance as a process.

Lacan and music.

Seizing upon Freud's particular insights into language and the structuralist linguistic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson (discussed further in Chapter 1), Lacan formulated a re-articulation of the Freudian paradigm. As the foregoing discussion of post-Marxist thought demonstrates, Lacanian theory has moved beyond the clinic and opened up an exploration of the social relational matrix that emphasises the operation of language as the nexus between nature and culture. Located within such a complex and variable relational configuration, Lacanian psychoanalytic theory offers a richly articulated and extended conceptual repertoire that has the potential to aid an investigation of the dynamic dimensions of the performance of sound in musical form(s). Although adding to the Freudian repertoire with the concept of *objet a* – in both the scopic (visual) and invocatory (auditory) dimensions of *gaze* and *voice* – the utilisation and application of Lacanian theory in the visual arts, film studies and social theory appears to have perpetuated an emphasis on the visual, seemingly in denial of the extra-linguistic and 'acousmatic' dimensions that are an inescapable facet of language, be it spoken or written. As Jacques-Alain Miller (2007), observes:

[W]e do not use the voice; the voice inhabits language, it haunts it. It is sufficient to speak for the menace to emerge, for what cannot be said to come to light. If we speak that much, if we organise symposiums, if we chat, if we sing and listen to singers, if we make music and listen to it, Lacan's thesis entails that it is in order to silence what deserves to be called the voice as object little *a*. (p.145)

Miller's interpretation of Lacan's concept of the object *voice* as the anxiety-provoking kernel of the invocative drive represents a rare acknowledgement within Lacanian scholarship of the musical domain. In alliance with this insight, a small body of literature around the concept of the object *voice* and the application of Lacanian theoretical themes and concepts to music has recently emerged.

Recent contributions by Schwarz (1997; 2006), Žižek and Dolar (2002), and Dolar (2006), combine the field of music and Lacanian theory in varied ways. As such,

they represent a small body of innovative work that ranges across the diverse fields of musicology, music history and philosophy, social-cultural and political analysis. Although representing a significant attempt to advance upon the former Freudian inspired examples, the use of Lacan across this body of work predominantly serves to exemplify a variety of psychoanalytic concepts: oedipal themes in relation to gendered identity formation, love, sexuality and death; the association of musical motifs and textuality with lyrics in contemporary song and opera libretti; and to aid the analysis of musical compositions through textuality rather than the consideration of performance practices. The emphasis remains largely upon the application of psychoanalytic concepts to illuminate the dramatic narrative presented in musical form, with the musical aspect relegated to the aesthetic modality through which it is expressed. In psychoanalytic terms, aesthetic effect is variously associated with illusion; notions of the sublime and unconscious fantasy as the ‘phantasmatic envelope’ (Žižek, 2007, p.203) through which the narrative text and action is presented and received by a viewing and listening audience.

Schwarz.

In the final chapter of *Listening Subjects: music, psychoanalysis, culture* (Schwarz, 1997, pp.133-63), David Schwarz provides a phenomenological account of a performance presented by Greek singer, Diamanda Galás, and describes the manner in which Galás produces a paradoxical heightened visceral effect in her listening audience. This effect, he asserts, is produced through the combination of a highly theatrical presentation of narrative text, extremes of vocalised sound, and an array of fragmentary visual effects. In his analysis of the performance, Schwarz employs an eclectic array of theoretical frameworks that include Kant, Kristeva, Barthes, and a Žižekian interpretation of Lacan’s notion of *objet a*. Through an amalgam of the concepts of lamentation, the abject, and the sublime, Schwarz attempts to explain the phenomenological experience of the listening audience in the conceptual terms of Lacan’s *objet a*. Rather than an oscillation between the abject and the sublime as mutually exclusive affects, Schwarz utilises the psychoanalytic concept of *objet a* to

denote a paradoxical impasse and the simultaneous amalgamation of the two affects. This short chapter briefly invokes Lacanian theory in relation to musical performance, but from the perspective of reception. Although Schwarz engages with psychoanalytic notions of subjectivity that include isolated references to Lacanian concepts, his work is largely concerned with the process of subjectivization through *listening*, rather than the act of musical performance practice. Indeed, the example is equally concerned with visual aspects of the performance and heavily reliant not only upon a ‘listening’ audience, but also a ‘viewing’ audience. The work is clearly located within a music-theoretical rather than psychoanalytic frame, and does not engage comprehensively or directly with the Lacanian opus as a primary source. Nevertheless, Schwarz’s innovative contribution in the field of music theory establishes a rare and justifiable case for the potential productivity of the confluence of musical practice and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Schwarz’s work both advances music-theoretical enquiry beyond the conservatism alleged by Christopher Small, and affirms the validity of Small’s approach to music as a dynamic material practice (rather than an aesthetic art object).

In the preface to his most recent work, *Listening awry: Music and alterity in German culture* (2006), Schwarz acknowledges the theoretical limitations of his earlier work and the lack of ‘large-scale unity to the argument’ (p.x) of his first book, *Listening subjects* (1997). This second volume, however, follows the same prismatic format as the first volume, and presents separate chapters that constitute a varied collection of music-theoretical essays informed by the selective application of psychoanalytic concepts that Schwarz describes as post-Lacanian. Although he utilises the detail of Lacan’s notions of the Real and *objet a*, Schwarz continues to rely on a Žižekian interpretation of Lacan, and – as the title of his study suggests – a methodological approach based upon Žižek’s notion of ‘looking awry’ (Schwarz, 2006, p.xi; Žižek, 1992). Through a symptomatic reading of German music, Schwarz identifies and exemplifies a raft of historical and ideological elements ranging from German idealism, the birth and impact of psychoanalysis, National Socialism and anti-Semitism. In doing so, he emphasises music as a cultural textual object that reflects and refracts historically located social-political ideologies. Having reviewed these key contributions to the music-theoretical literature,

let us turn now to consider the most salient work in the domain of psychoanalytically informed philosophy and cultural critique.

Žižek on opera.

Žižek's writing on opera inventively applies Lacanian theory to a psychoanalytically informed reading of Wagnerian musical-dramatic themes. His most comprehensive offering, co-authored with Slovenian colleague Mladen Dolar (2002), illuminates these themes with a dazzling array of Lacanian concepts that provide a creative set of new interpretations to an audience of opera aficionados. Like his work on film, this volume takes Lacanian theory beyond the confines of academia, and exemplifies its relevance to a wider audience. Žižek's analyses offer an inventive set of interpretations that extend beyond the specific musicological and historical contexts within which academic approaches to opera have traditionally been located. As is often the case, the same themes appear in multiple volumes of Žižek's work and unexpectedly jump from exemplification in one modality (such as opera) to another (such as film or humour). On the occasions where the musical element in opera or film is specifically discussed, Žižek relegates it to the role of the 'phantasmatic envelope' (2007, p.203) that aids and abets the process of subjective interpellation within the theatrical narrative action.

In this respect, Žižek aligns the musical aspect of opera to the musical score of a film where non-diegetic sound acts as a powerfully seductive distortion. 'We (wrongly) think', he observes, 'that the music merely follows the visual movement, whereas it strongly colours, even distorts, our visual perception, giving an exaggerated comical twist to gestures on the stage or (screen)' (2002, p.212). He insightfully observes that this power is most obviously manifest in the immediate reduction of emotional effect that accompanies the silencing of the soundtrack. Rather than any direct rendering of the Hegelian 'night of the world' (as the truth of the subject prefigured by Rousseau and Schopenhauer), Žižek insists on a reversal that portrays music as formally deceptive 'in its very "passionate" rendering of emotions' (Žižek, 2009, p.230). In this way, Žižek places music within the deceptive sphere of fantasy and emotion, without reference to

any possible relation between music and anxiety (the singular affect distinct from emotion that Lacan specifically distinguishes in Seminar X as that which signals the potential encounter with the Real). He does, however, invoke Walter Benjamin in the assertion that:

old artistic forms often push against their own boundaries and use the procedures that, at least from the standpoint of the present, seem to point toward a technology that will be able to serve as a more natural and appropriate objective correlative to the life experience that the old forms endeavoured to render by means of their excessive experimentations. (Žižek, 2002, p.197)

He goes on to posit a threshold ‘ where new life experience hangs in the air, a perception of life that explodes the linear-centred narrative and renders existence as a multiform flow’, and that such ideas are evident in ‘the hard sciences’ with notions of multiple realities, parallel-universe scenarios and ‘utter contingency’(p.189). As is often the case with his fast-flowing association of ideas, Žižek moves from a discussion of opera and its situation within the wider sphere of art, through a discussion of quantum physics (exemplified by several film scenarios) to the following observation:

This perception of our reality as merely one of the possible – often even not the most probable – outcomes of an open situation, this notion that other possible outcomes are not simply cancelled out but continue to haunt us as a specter [sic] of what might have happened, conferring on our reality the status of extreme fragility and contingency, implicitly clashes with the predominant narrative forms of our literature and cinema – it seems to call for a new artistic medium in which this paradigm would not be an eccentric excess but its proper mode of functioning. (2002, p.198)

Despite this productive insight – and perhaps because Žižek does not consider a broader spectrum of contemporary musical practices across multiple genres, or music beyond its fantasmatic function in confluence with narrative action and images in opera and film – the significance of music as a dynamic and constructive practice (through which the

excessive fantasmatic element he convincingly depicts may be actively engaged and productively utilised) remains undeveloped. It is this latent possibility that this thesis will address with the argument that as a signifying process in a modality that engages contingency, spontaneity and material practices that involve the physical body, musical practices provide a model to further theorise the conditions of possibility that surround the occurrence of subjective transformation.

As co-author of *Opera's second death* (2002), Mladen Dolar combines an extensive grasp of historical and philosophical understandings of music together with the Lacanian conceptual repertoire in an erudite and creative analysis of Mozart's contribution to the operatic form. Of greatest significance to the present study, however, is his landmark theorisation of the Lacanian *objet voice*; the excessive element that disturbs the consistency of the Symbolic register.

Dolar.

Although identified by Lacan as his most important innovation into psychoanalytic theory, the concept of *objet a* in the modality of *voice* appears to have lacked sufficient theoretical explanation; or, at least, has become subordinated as the direct correlate or complement to the concept of *gaze*. This anomaly has only received serious theoretical attention comparatively recently through the work of Slovenian philosopher Mladen Dolar. In *A voice and nothing more* (2006), Dolar brings together a comprehensive spectrum of influential philosophical perspectives on music, from Plato, St. Augustine, Hildegard of Bingen through to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, to substantiate the assertion that music has been interpreted across time as a powerful and paradoxical social-political force. Dolar artfully elaborates that the effect of an enigmatic spectral disturbance that inhabits both language and music is the Lacanian notion of *voice* 'as the paramount "embodiment" of *objet a*', the object-cause of desire. He defines it thus:

I will try to argue that apart from ... the voice as the vehicle of meaning; the voice as the source of aesthetic admiration – there is a third level; an object voice which

does not go up in smoke in the conveyance of meaning, and does not solidify in an object of fetish reverence, but an object which functions as a blind spot in the call and as a disturbance of aesthetic appreciation. (Dolar, 2006, p.4)

The Lacanian *voice*, according to Dolar, functions as ‘the lever of thought’ (2006, back cover), and a perpetual incitement to signify. In an undoubtedly rigorous examination and virtuoso explication of the spectral, fantasmatic dimensions of the narrative and musical connotations of voice, Dolar’s analysis doesn’t encompass the perspective of active musical performance as a practice that engages Symbolic, Imaginary and Real dimensions. If music is considered as a social practice – through which the shaping of forms is governed as much by the silences that delineate the ordering of acoustic sounds as the sounds themselves, as well as the contingency at play in each and every performance – then music can be understood beyond its figuration as the ‘envelope’ (Žižek, 2007, p.203) that contains and sutures the unconscious fundamental fantasy, or as an object of aesthetic reverence (Dolar, 2006, p.4).

Although music may be theorised in terms of its ability to aid and abet the fixation of a defensive and repressive unconscious fantasy structure, the efficacy that both Freud and Lacan attribute to sublimation through artistic endeavour, combined with Althusser’s assertion of the importance of social practices and the concept of aleatory materialism, suggest that musical processes and practices may demonstrate the conditions of possibility for a creative and transformative capacity. As Schwarz perceptively suggests, sound structured in musical forms may not simply function as a sublime fetish object of aesthetic beauty. Indeed, his analysis suggests that through her performance, Diamanda Galás engages and exposes the disturbing kernel that is paradoxically experienced as simultaneously abject and sublime. From the perspective of the post-Marxist endeavour that seeks to identify the conditions of possibility through which the Real might be brought to bear upon the Symbolic, the performance of music in a modality of composition that remains open to contingency through improvisation presents a novel approach that shifts the emphasis from fantasy to sublimation.

Without denying the considerable merits and innovation of the aforementioned approaches, they do not consider in any detail the efficacy of artistic practices as a

privileged mode of sublimation that both Freud and Lacan considered to be a positive strategy to counter the deleterious, repressive effects imposed by language. Rather than a further consolidation of the emphasis upon the deadlock of repression and unconscious fantasy, this thesis seeks an alternative avenue of investigation to elucidate the underlying mechanisms that incite and activate human individuals into social interaction through sound, and the dynamic manner in which musical processes and practices might function in both the *formation and transformation* of subjectivity. Undoubtedly grounded in the primary processes of verbal interactions which precede language acquisition, sound emerges from a primal foundation of interactive sensory perception that begins before birth. The conversion and diversion of sound through the process of linguistic symbolization, however, generates a spectral dimension of excess that Lacan theorised as *voix*, the *objet a*, *par excellence*. It is the contention of this thesis that the performance of sound in musical form is a not merely a regressive, repressive illusory response, but can also be a signifying strategy that engages with and employs the (silent) excess of *objet a* in a modality of deconstruction that possesses a generative transformative capacity.

The paucity of literature that combines the domains of music and Lacanian theory – and the discernable gap outlined in the small body of literature reviewed above – suggests that there is a point of impasse between the fields of music and psychoanalysis. A question arises, therefore, about whether ‘music’ is an autonomous field of processes and practices that remains impervious to a psychoanalytic approach, or, conversely, whether musical practices present a limit point to psychoanalytic thought as it has been theorised thus far. Post-Marxist approaches, in particular, rely heavily upon the Lacanian conceptualisation of subjectivity in relation to unconscious fantasy, a structure that underpins conscious thought, but remains impervious to any discursive negotiation.

Artistic endeavour has predominantly been theorised by Freud and Lacan within the frame of sublimation, a category of psychoanalytic theory that accommodates a conscious aspect. As Laplanche and Pontalis (1973, pp.432-33) point out, however, Freud’s theorisation of sublimation has remained problematic and insufficient. Similarly, Lacan’s extended examination and attempted reconfiguration of sublimation in Seminar

VII (1959-60) – *The ethics of psychoanalysis* – remains opaque and unresolved. It is in light of this anomaly that a rearticulation of the concept is warranted. Accordingly, this thesis contends that artistic endeavour (as a conscious modality that embraces contingency) holds the capacity to create the conditions of possibility through which the deadlock of unconscious fantasy may be breached. Rather than a compensatory strategy that inevitably fails and thus further aids the consolidation of unconscious fantasy, the following discussions will contend that sublimation also contains the possibility for a reconfiguration of the relation of the subject with the enigmatic kernel of the human psyche (the Lacanian Real). As a temporal signifying artistic endeavour that engages a modality of contingency, musical performance offers a model of sublimation that contains the capacity to disengage the grip of language (Lacan’s Symbolic order) and thus allow the Real as the unborn kernel of the unconscious to bear upon the Symbolic.

Although located within the framework of social-political philosophy and theory, the body of this thesis engages directly with the complexity of Lacanian psychoanalysis. As noted previously, it will address an apparent impasse within contemporary post-Marxism that surrounds the conditions of possibility for social transformation. Given that post-Marxist thought is theoretically reliant upon various interpretations and applications of Lacanian theory, this thesis will focus on the central problematic as it resides within the Lacanian opus. More specifically, the central argument relates the emphasis on the role of unconscious fantasy – and its traversal to ameliorate symptomatic consequences that are deemed detrimental – to the relative exclusion (and insufficient theorisation) of sublimation as a positive and potentially transformative response to the human condition. That condition, for Lacan, is one that is irrevocably both subject to, and split by language.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 1 (‘The Graph of Desire’) charts the Lacanian conceptual repertoire and its dynamic relationality through an explanation of the graph of desire presented by Lacan in *The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious* (1960). As a condensed visual summary of the first decade of his seminar,

Lacan's graph depicts the dynamic genesis of a divided and decentred subjectivity, emergent from the process of the individual's imbrications within language. The chapter considers the central concepts of *need* and *demand* in relation to the *other*; the *ego* as a construction of the *Imaginary* register entwined with the *Symbolic Order (the Other)*; the *split subject* as that which emerges through the processes of *alienation* and *separation*; the formation of *the unconscious*; and the genesis of *desire* and *drive* through the constitutive function of the *fundamental fantasy* (the relation between the irrevocably divided subject and *objet a*). The discussion exemplifies the graph with a specific (and innovative) emphasis on the temporal and aural-invocative dimensions that give birth to the subject within the process of signification, as a counterbalance to the dominance of the visual-spatial representation that the graph engenders. It also highlights the dynamic nature of the process of the production of subjectivity through signification, and raises an important question about the emergence of *anxiety* (the hallmark of the unconscious subject of desire) and its relationship to the product of the signifying process, Lacan's notion of *voice*.

Chapter 2 ('Anxiety and the Enigmatic *Objet a*') examines the unpublished transcript of Seminar X (1962-63) – *Anxiety* – to ascertain the privileged status accorded to the affect of anxiety in Lacanian praxis. The discussion delineates a psychoanalytic understanding of anxiety from its popular meanings, and explains its specific definition in relation to the formation of the subject/object relation. From its genesis in the Freudian notion of *the uncanny*, the chapter traces and explains Lacan's development of anxiety as a pivotal affect that arises within human interactions in relation to a radically different kind of 'object' that sustains the subject at the level of unconscious fantasy. Figured as a generalised matheme on the graph of desire ($\$ \diamond a$), *the fundamental fantasy* is explained as the unique, highly charged affective and unconscious relational blueprint that governs the individual in his or her social identifications as a subject. The discussion outlines Lacan's distinctive formulation of *objet a* – in contradistinction to philosophical and post-Freudian conceptualisations of the object – with particular reference to its manifestation in the modalities of *gaze*, *voice*, *the phoneme* and *the nothing* in Seminar X. Although Lacan formulates *objet a* in various modalities, the chapter notes the disappearance of *the phoneme* and *the nothing*, and the occlusion of *voice* in relation to

gaze which takes a prominent place in Lacan's opus from Seminar XI onwards. The consequence of this perceptible shift is discussed in terms of the dominant emphasis Lacan accords to the visual register through the notions *gaze* and *fantasy*, and the subjugation of the notions of *voice* and *sublimation*.

Finally, Chapter 3 ('Musical Practices: Sublimation, *Sinthome*, or Transformative Signifying Act?') considers Lacanian theory through the lens of musical practices. In opposition to the prevalent emphasis placed upon the pathological consequences of unconscious fantasy, the chapter argues that Lacan's redevelopment of the Freudian concept of sublimation offers a positive, non-repressive response to the human condition through artistic practices. The discussion returns to Seminar VII (1959-60) – *The ethics of psychoanalysis* – to elucidate Lacan's earliest conceptualisation of the Real in the Freudian figure of *das Ding*, and his concomitant discussion on artistic modes of *sublimation*. Following de Kesel's (2009) recent reevaluation of the seminar from the original French stenographs, the discussion presents a musically-oriented reading of Lacan's privileged examples of the medieval tradition of courtly love, and Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone*, to demonstrate the diverse but unacknowledged musical elements upon which these examples rely. In a discussion that bridges the early Lacan of the *signifier* to the late Lacan from Seminar XX – and the extended conceptual repertoire that includes the concept of *lalangue*, *the formulas of sexuation*, and the notion of the *sinthome* – the chapter contends that artistic musical practices that extend beyond repetition and interpretation towards composition (within the contingent temporal conditions of improvisation) constitute a concrete example of the function of analysis within a practice at the level of culture. As a cultural practice in the Imaginary – which is not only isomorphic to speech and language, but also directly engages the physical body – artistic musical practices offer an opportunity for a productive reassessment of sublimation as a transformative signifying act. This strategy, I suggest, offers a more nuanced, practical and accessible clarification of the conditions of possibility that surround transformative change, and avoids the apparent deadlock of the inaccessibility of unconscious fantasy.

CHAPTER 1

THE GRAPH OF DESIRE

Introduction

First presented in Seminar V (1957-58), and later published in *Écrits* (1966), Lacan's graph of desire summarises the early theoretical work that was both the foundation and a catalyst for many of his later ideas. Following Lacan's lead, this chapter will discuss the graph in four stages. The main body of the chapter presents a reading of the graph with exemplifications that not only demonstrate the significance of sound and silence as they prefigure the entry of the individual into the Symbolic world, but also highlight music as a temporal signifying practice that is isomorphic to the performative aspect of speech and the structure of language. Musical practices, it is suggested, offer a unique framework for understanding the structure and temporal function of speech and language, and their consequent effects. To aid the understanding of the complex detail to be presented, the following exegesis is necessarily prefaced and punctuated with departures that contextualise Lacanian theory in relation to its Freudian antecedent. This explanatory strategy is employed to highlight the pivotal importance of structural linguistics to Lacan's reconfiguration of Freud, and the significant consequences for his reformulation of a variety of Freudian conceptual terms and categories that have opened psychoanalytic theory up to utilisations beyond the clinic.

The Graph of Desire: Synopsis

The extraordinary capacity of the 'human animal' to manipulate sound in the service of verbal communication constitutes the pivotal marker of language as a universal feature of the human condition. Sound becomes the word, speech and language, and is the bearer of a complex relational network that establishes systems of memory and an apparent linear narrative of past, present and future that strives incessantly towards the goal of securing definitive meaning through the acquisition of

knowledge. It is a striving that can never be satiated; in a word, it is *desire*. More specifically, for Lacan, human desire is the paradoxically deceptive ‘desire (not) to know’ and involves the difficult terrain between knowledge and truth, and the status of the speaking subject (*parlêtre*). Language, according to Lacan, is a relational network of *signifiers* that pre-exists the individual. Rather than acquiring language for its own autonomous use and mastery, Lacan suggests that the prematurely born neonate is assimilated into language as a pre-existent relational structure; or, to describe the process in more radical terms, language is a parasitical mechanism that calibrates the human organism into a semblance of coherence that allows it to survive, thrive, function and flourish in a world now rendered social as a consequence of the organism’s capacity for language. However, as Freud pointed out in *Civilization and its discontents* (1929), the human condition is marked by a paradoxically persistent dissatisfaction that, when beyond certain parameters, impedes the human quest for flourishing. In this respect, Freud echoes the iconic statement that opens Book I, Chapter 1 of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *The social contract*: ‘*L’homme est né libre, et partout il est dans les fers*’ – ‘man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains’ (Rousseau, 1993, p.181). From a Lacanian perspective, the chains are those of signification and language; they occupy a primal position with respect to the advent of the speaking subject, but hinder subjectivity in an irredeemable way. Subjectivity is thus formulated as a complex phenomenon that translucently emerges through the human organism’s enmeshment with representation and symbolization (Lacan’s Imaginary and Symbolic registers of experience). It is this process that Lacan’s graph of desire – presented as a summary of the first decade of his seminar (1953-63), the early period devoted to his ‘return to Freud’ – depicts in dynamic representational form.

Lacan’s reformulation of psychoanalysis began with the view that Freud’s insights into language constituted the most important aspect of psychoanalysis. Language thus became the lens through which Lacan re-read Freud. From the outset, it must be stressed that Lacan’s linguistic approach does not follow an inevitable linear biological developmental process, but a perpetual dynamic interplay that (although creating the illusion of linear temporality and unity) is underpinned by a radical disjuncture of temporality; a fault line that reveals itself through the Freudian discovery

of the unconscious and the salience of symptoms such as dream narrative, slips of the tongue, pen and action (parapraxes), jokes, anxieties and phobias (Thurschwell, 2000, pp.114-17; Homer, 2005, p.12). Of pivotal significance to the process of imbrication within language (the entwining of the Imaginary and Symbolic registers) is the formation of the unconscious, which acts as the operating system that subtends conscious thought. It is at this disjuncture that Lacan positions the emergent subject as the subject of unconscious desire that never ceases to inveigle its presence upon the stage of consciousness.

The temporal hiatus figured on the graph constitutes a reinterpretation of the Freudian term *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred action), and gestures towards a disjuncture in the fabric of linear temporality and the teleological unfolding of cause and effect. Unlike many post-Freudian interpretations that either discard the term or inflect it with a progressive temporality that implies the assignment of meaning to a present experience from an unconscious repressed memory or echo of the past, Lacan highlighted an additional (retroactive) movement of temporality which he termed *après coup*. While ‘*Nachträglichkeit* provides the memory, not the event, with traumatic significance and signifies a circular complementarity of both directions of time’ (Eickhoff, 2006, p.1453), the term *après coup* places emphasis on the notion that meaning and affect are combined ‘after the fact’, such that the memory of an experience is inscribed with a meaning forged and solidified by affect in a temporal gap that is perceived as a paradoxical mixture of past and present. This paradoxical movement gives rise to the Freudian effect of the ‘uncanny’, an anxiety that irrupts from a perception of something that is simultaneously strange and familiar (Thurschwell, 2000, p.117).¹³ For Lacan, however, there is not so much a ‘complementary circularity’, as asymmetry and disjuncture.

The temporal disjuncture that Lacan highlights finds its genesis within the Freudian opus; however, as a (structural-linguistic) reconfiguration of Freud, it posits an alternative perspective on the development of the subject through the auspices of language. Lacan contended that Freud was unable to sufficiently unpack and subsequently theorise his insights about the structure, function and effects of language

¹³ The relationship between the Freudian ‘uncanny’ and Lacan’s specific conceptualisation of the vicissitudes of anxiety will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

because it chronologically preceded the advances made in the study of structural linguistics during the mid-twentieth century. In specific terms, structural linguistics identified the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes of metaphor and metonymy, the synchronic and diachronic axes of discourse that Lacan was able to utilise in his reinterpretation of the significance of substitution and combination in the primary process outlined by Freud (*E*, pp.676-77). It is from this linguistic shift that the oft-quoted aphorism that ‘the unconscious is structured like language’ emanates. Such a move enabled Lacan to depart from the linear biological developmental model evident in Freud and subsequently instantiated in post-Freudian psychoanalytic and psychological theories, and to conceive subjectivity in linguistic terms. A brief excursion into structural linguistics, therefore, will assist to further clarify the distinctions to be made in the following discussion on the unconscious that will preface the detailed explanation of the graph.

Linguistics and structuralism: Saussure, Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss.

Lacan’s insistence upon the pre-eminence of the operation and effects of language as the primary insight of Freud’s psychoanalytic opus resulted in a ‘return to Freud’ during the 1950s with a practice of close-reading Freud’s texts. To achieve his reconfiguration, Lacan employed two influential, contemporaneous analytical tools; structuralism and linguistic theory. The two had been brought together and utilised as an analytic strategy by structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss in his analyses of cultural systems of marriage and kinship. Much of this structural approach was based upon the work of Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure. As a contemporary interlocutor, it was Lévi-Strauss who brought Lacan’s attention to Saussure’s linguistic theory and its potential analytic efficacy (*E*, p.676).

During the late-nineteenth century, the work of Saussure not only laid the foundation for the establishment of linguistics as a scientific discipline, but also facilitated much of what was to develop in later twentieth-century linguistic theory and structural analysis. To outline his theoretical innovations as succinctly as possible, Saussure formulated a distinction between three aspects of language: *langage*, language

in the broadest sense ‘as a universal human phenomenon of communication’; *la langue*, a particular language system - such as French or German; and *parole*, language use in performative practice as particular speech acts, which encompasses both speech and writing (Homer, 2005, p.37). Saussure’s primary concern lay with *la langue*, language as a particular system, understood as a matrix of associated differential signs that at any particular time (the synchronic dimension) constitutes a set of rules and conventions that underpin what can and cannot be enunciated. Thus construed, language is a juxtaposition of differential elements that form a foundational ‘operating system’. Without such a structured foundation, any utterance that is spoken or written is unable to cohere or function as meaningful. Saussure proposed that such a system was made up of a set of relational signs. Each sign, however, did not refer directly to any specific object in reality. Rather than a direct referent, he asserted that the sign was an arbitrary assignment of a particular sound pattern or written image that was inextricably linked to a particular concept. He defined the two entwined aspects of the sign as the *signified* (concept) and the *signifier* (sound pattern or word image) (Figure 1).

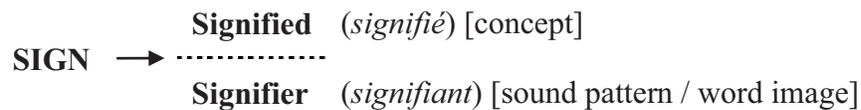


Figure 1: Saussure’s sign

Note. Adapted from Homer, S. (2005). *Jacques Lacan*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, p.38.

The signified (*signifié*) constitutes the ideational component, or concept, that the signifier conjures up in the mind as a category. As such, it is to be distinguished from the referent of a sign, which is the specific real object in the world to which the sign refers. The signifier (*signifiant*) encompasses the auditory and visual components of a sign; the soundscape of a word as it is uttered as a series of phonemic elements, and the visual

‘shape’ of a word composed of written or printed characters. Saussure (as Figure 1 illustrates) gave precedence to the signified, the idea or category of object, over the phonemic utterance or visual image that represents it in speech or writing. The relation between the two, he asserted, was purely arbitrary but ‘intimately’ linked like the opposite sides of a piece of paper. The sign, in itself, however, did not harbour any particular meaning. For Saussure, the sign became imbued with meaning through its relational juxtaposition within the structure of any particular language as a total system: ‘Language creates a differential system whereby any given sign acquires its meaning by virtue of its difference from other signs’ (Homer, 2005, p.38). This differential juxtaposition functioned upon two axes; the *paradigmatic* axis and the *syntagmatic* axis.

The *paradigmatic* axis is one of choice where a particular sign is selected from a range of possibilities. For example: in a phrase such as ‘he walked down the street’, the word ‘street’ is selected from a list of possibilities such as ‘track’, ‘road’, ‘avenue’, ‘cul-de-sac’ or ‘boulevard’. All possibilities imply a roadway of some variety, but each has a particular contextual meaning. Conversely, the selected word could be substituted with any of the other choices, thus establishing that the paradigmatic axis, on a conceptual level, is one of substitution.

The *syntagmatic* axis is one of combination where the words are ordered and chained together according to a system of syntax and grammar. If the words are not combined in the correct manner – ‘the walked street he down’ – the phrase or sentence no longer makes sense as a whole. Not only do individual words or signs have to be selected (the paradigmatic axis that subtends the symbolic chain), they have to be combined into a correctly ordered relational chain (the syntagmatic axis of the symbolic chain). Thus, for language to function, both axes are employed: ‘what a person says depends not only upon the words they use and those they exclude but also upon the place of those words within an overall structure’ (Homer, 2005, p.39).

The mechanics of this linguistic structuring of language were advanced further through the work of Lacan’s colleague, Russian linguist Roman Jakobson. For Jakobson, the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes of language became synonymous with the rhetorical devices of metaphor and metonymy, a discovery made when he was investigating the particular language deficiencies evident in cases of *aphasia* (Murphy,

2001, pp.16-18). Metaphor, as an associative substitution, correlates with the paradigmatic synchronic axis. Metonymy, on the other hand, correlates to the syntagmatic axis of contiguity, combination and displacement of the signifying chain. In turn, Lacan utilised metaphor and metonymy as the linguistic devices that structure the unconscious as demonstrated by Freud through the mechanisms of condensation and displacement evident in his analysis of dreams. The unconscious can thus be seen to operate like linguistic structure through the primary processes of condensation and displacement, which underpin the secondary processes of conscious thought (Homer, 2005, pp.42-3).

The pertinence of linguistic theory to psychoanalysis can thus readily be identified with Saussure's notion that there is an underlying structure that dictates and frames what can and cannot be said. That structure, however, is something we are largely unaware of, and, for Lacan, this corresponds to the unconscious. As a simple example: we learn how to speak our 'mother tongue' much like a musician learns 'by ear', but in general, we remain unaware of the structures and rules that dictate what can be said and how it can be said. Indeed, it is often not until we attempt to learn a second language with divergent rules and structures that we gain an appreciation of the grammatical and syntactical rules and conventions that shape the use of our 'mother tongue'. Similarly, for a musician, it is only when a shift occurs from performing particular compositions either by ear or from a written score – as a repetition or replication – to the modes of improvisation and composition that a greater apprehension of the structures and conventions that underpin musical endeavour, irrespective of genre, become more apparent. Indeed, it is in the performative modes of improvisation and composition in any language system – be it linguistic or musical – that restrictions and constraints, as well as the indeterminacy and parameters of malleability can be apprehended and approached. The aspects of linguistic theory outlined and discussed above, are pertinent to the discussion to follow, however, there are two aspects of Saussure's theory that Lacan took issue with, and it is important to keep them in mind.

Firstly, Lacan did not adhere to the notion of a system as a whole. Although it might be construed that the Lacanian register of the Symbolic and the concomitant formation of the unconscious represents Saussure's conceptualisation as a particular

language system, *la langue*, Lacan insists that it is not a hermetically sealed and structured whole. Secondly, Lacan inverts the relationship between the signified and the signifier. Not only does he elevate the Signifier (the sound pattern/written image designated by Lacan with a capitalised ‘S’) to a position of primary importance as that which creates the signified (concept), but he also rejects Saussure’s claim that signifier and signified are inextricably joined. In this respect, it can be appreciated how Lacan’s theoretical move begins to displace the teleological notion of cause and effect. The signified (concept) is not only a linguistic substitution for an object in reality, but it is created through the relational juxtaposition of the Signifier. Rather than the inextricable entwining of the two aspects of the sign, Lacan proposed that the bar between them constitutes a barrier (Figure 2).

Signifier (*signifiant*) [sound pattern / word image]

signified (*signifié*) [concept]

Figure 2: Lacan’s signifier

Note. Adapted from Homer, S. (2005). *Jacques Lacan*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, p.41.

For Lacan, the bar between Signifier and signified creates a barrier such that any consistent or ‘natural’ one-to-one correspondence between signifier and signified is precluded. Instead, a chain of signification is set in motion where each signifier can only be related to another signifier. To illustrate this point, the oft-quoted analogy of looking up the meaning of a word in a dictionary cannot be bettered. The dictionary can only specify the meaning of any given word or signifier in relation to other words or signifiers. Although Lacan maintained the fluidity of language and meaning with his reconceptualisation of the linguistic sign, he proposed that there were points of fixation or suture – *points de capiton* – where signifying elements knot together to enable the

system to function. As the discussion will shortly demonstrate, Lacan represents this process of suturing on the first graph of the elementary cell.

Lacan's reconfiguration of the psychoanalytic understanding of language in the terminology of structural linguistics not only highlights a disjuncture in the traditional notion of cause and effect relation, but also subverts any simple dialectic and resolution of binary oppositions. Moreover, as we shall come to understand through reading the graph of desire, this departure does not vanquish the biological, but seeks to apprehend it as a process of effects and traces that map the diversion of the human organism through the defiles of the signifier. Accordingly, the conundrum of the body/mind duality of philosophical rumination takes a radical and complex reconfiguration. The most pivotal concept involved in the psychoanalytic hypothesis described above, is the notion of the unconscious.

The unconscious.

Seminar XI (1963-64) marked a significant transitional stage between Lacan's initial focus on language and the *Imaginary* and *Symbolic* registers, and the work which was to follow which moved analysis towards a focus on *jouissance*, *objet a*, and the central role of *the Real* as a third register of psychical structure. At this juncture, Lacan offered a pivotal summary of his reconfiguration of Freudian psychoanalysis undertaken over the previous decade, and, in particular, an explanation of the concept of *the unconscious*, situating it as one of *the four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis* (SXI, pp.17-28). He rightly points out that the adjectival form of the term 'unconscious' was in usage before Freud deployed it and has continued in multiple forms in contemporaneous psychological accounts of the functioning of the human psyche. The adjectival form of unconscious refers to mental or psychic phenomena that are non-conscious insofar as they are not the subject of conscious awareness. As a simple example, there are many aspects of human functioning that are not within the purview of direct consciousness; the regulation of bodily states such as blood pressure, temperature and respiration, as well as sensations and perceptions that are registered but remain below the threshold or outside the narrow focus of conscious awareness, attention, and

scrutiny. As Lacan points out, these non-conscious physiological phenomena *do not* correlate to the psychoanalytic notion of *the unconscious* and it was this distinction that was fundamental to Freud's conceptualisation of 'the unconscious' as a noun rather than the adjectival form through which it appears, in pre-Freudian thought, as a kind of primordial 'will' with inevitable essentialist biological connotations.

In Freudian theory, the unconscious is a psychic system that operates on a different plane to conscious awareness. Freud first attempted its conceptualisation through the topological model of three systems; the conscious (Cs), the pre-conscious (Pcs), and the unconscious (Ucs); the latter being material that was expunged from consciousness through the action of repression. This topological model of mutually exclusive realms was replaced by the structural model of id, ego and superego that posed a more complex position for the unconscious, spread across all three structural agencies although largely beneath the threshold of conscious awareness. The salient features of the Freudian unconscious were defined by Lacan thus: 'what happens there is inaccessible to contradiction, to spatio-temporal location and also to the function of time' (SXI, p.31). Lacan further elaborated and modified the Freudian concept by positing that the unconscious was not simply placed in mutually exclusive opposition as the Janus-face of consciousness as some kind of submerged static edifice. Nor did Lacan contend that the unconscious is solely 'that which is repressed', because such a view implies that the unconscious arises from excommunicated elements of consciousness. He also criticised, as a gross misunderstanding, the post-Freudian emphasis that the unconscious was the locus of biological instinct; citing James Strachey's inaccurate English translation of the German *Trieb* (drive) as 'instinct' as the locus of misinterpretation (SXI, p.49).

Contrary to this view, Lacan insisted that the unconscious comes into being as a consequence of signification and is, therefore, a facet of the Symbolic register. Not only does it exhibit a relational structure like language – hence the maxim that 'the unconscious is structured like a language' (SIII, p.167; SXI, p.20; SXX, p.48) – but it is also dynamically entwined with the Symbolic and consciousness on a synchronic level, which Lacan describes as being subject to *logical time* rather than chronological time. For Lacan, logical time is not objectively measured in chronometric units, but is the

dialectical interplay of an inter-subjective logic (Evans, 2003, p.206), a topic to which we will return below. As such, the Lacanian subject is ‘the subject of the unconscious’ that can never be located in the diachronic temporality of language. The only evidence of the subject’s paradoxical ‘ex-sistence’¹⁴ – created by entry into the Symbolic, but excluded from conscious thought and speech – is the dynamic ‘opening and closing’ that can be discerned through phenomena such as symptoms, dreams, witticisms, and parapraxes. It cannot be directly apprehended, but its manifestation can be heard as a gap or disjuncture in speech where it appears and disappears in a ‘temporal pulsation’ (SXI, p.143), a ‘rhythmic structure of ... pulsation’ (ibid., p.32) within the Symbolic. This understanding of the unconscious as part of the Symbolic realm denotes, for Lacan, a first category of *lack*; the lack encountered in the signifying chain.

Lacan resolutely affirms that the unconscious emanates from the Symbolic order because ‘it signifies’. It is not identifiable by any specific symbolic content, but is discernable by its impingement within the signifying chains of the Symbolic order as a temporal disjuncture within speech. Like the operating system of a computer, the unconscious is installed upon entry into the Symbolic realm but cannot be apprehended from the content that can be directly seen on the computer screen. It is the contextual frame of signifiers and their networked configuration in a multiplicity of potential relational associations that makes symbolization possible and, in this sense, Lacan also stated that ‘*the unconscious is the Other’s discourse*’ (E, p.10). Without the installation of the already existent ‘operating system’ of language – the network of associations that are imposed from the ‘treasure trove of signifiers’ from the Other (the Symbolic order) – the birth of the speaking subject is impossible. Thus, the unconscious and subjectivity are inextricably linked insofar as the subject is bound to take up a structural position in relation to the discourse of the Other. Moreover, for Lacan, the subject of the unconscious is not reducible to the individual, nor is it a unified Jungian reservoir of universal archetypes. Rather, the speaking subject (*parlêtre*) comes into being through a dynamic process of division or splitting. Conscious knowledge, in the form of what can be spoken, reveals the unmistakable synchronic echoes of the subject of the unconscious

¹⁴ Lacan coined the term ‘ex-sist’ to denote the locus of an excluded element that is paradoxically internal to the system. The subject ‘ex-sists’ insofar as it is excluded from the positivity of signification, but is necessary for its functioning at the level of the unconscious. See Fink (1995), p.122.

as a disguised parallel subtext that functions as a counterpoint to conscious knowledge. It is the subject of the latter realm that constitutes the subject of psychoanalysis.

As Homer (2005) points out, however, ‘language, for Lacan, designates not just verbal speech or written text, but any signifying system that is based upon differential relations’ (p.69). From a musical perspective, the unconscious can be understood as being structured like a score. Indeed, in his discussion of Saussure in *The instance of the letter in the unconscious*, Lacan relates poetry to music in this way: ‘[I]t suffices to listen to poetry ... for a polyphony to be heard and for it to become clear that all discourse is aligned along the several staves of a musical score’ (E, p.419). The signifying chain – the sentences we speak and write – can thus be compared to a linear melody, constructed out of discrete differential signifying elements (the various individual notes that denote sounds of a particular pitch, duration, timbre, volume and frequency). The melody is constructed and gains coherence through the choice of one note in preference to a number of categorical possibilities, and the placement of one note in relation to the next. Through this process, a synchronic relational (harmonic) dimension of possibilities – both consonant and dissonant – can be implied and deduced. This underlying structure can, in turn, be revealed to constitute the polyphony of simultaneous diachronic melodic lines. In *The instance of the letter in the unconscious*, Lacan further pursues this musical analogy:

But it suffices to listen to poetry, which Saussure was certainly in the habit of doing, for a polyphony to be heard and for it to become clear that all discourse is aligned along the several staves of a musical score.

Indeed, there is no signifying chain that does not sustain – as if attached to the punctuation of each of its units – all attested contexts that are, so to speak, “vertically” linked to that point’. (E. p.419)

The unconscious can thus be understood as a synchronic orchestral score of possibilities that necessarily subtends the linear diachronic axis of differential associations and relations. As such, it reveals a complex juxtaposition of associated elements that reverberate, reflect and refract temporally within the apparent linearity of a single

melodic line that can be aligned with speech narrative. The practice of free association – the clinical technique employed to trace the associative pathways of the unconscious – also bears an intriguing musical parallel.

The clinical practice of free association follows a performative method akin to that employed in musical improvisation. In the mode of improvisation, the practising musician becomes aware of the underlying structures from which the choice of notes may be taken. Similarly, when a musician plays or composes an unaccompanied solo melody line, an imagined harmonic structure (for which there may be several possible orchestrations) determines the colouring, intonation and juxtaposition of the notes included in the melody, whether the player/composer is consciously aware of the influence of the surrounding structures or not. In this way, an accomplished musician becomes highly attuned to the matrix of possibilities involved in their practice, and the contingent possibility of introducing new elements into the system that create the genesis of novel interpretations and compositions. Not only do the methods of improvisation and composition trace the network of associations, they can also expand them. In this respect, the claim that musical structure is isomorphic to the structures of speech and language can, without doubt, be demonstrated. Like practices of musical improvisation and composition, free association can not only trace the combination of signifiers that underpin the speech of the analysand, but it can also reveal the paradoxical contingency of meaning and its affective dimensions. Like the process of clicking on endless internet hyperlinks, meaning is revealed to have no definitive source or point of origin, but rather to be a network of contingent differential relations that have multifarious reference points (created and secured in the trans-subjective domain).

For Lacan, ‘the unconscious is the effect – the impact – upon the subject of the trans-individual symbolic order’ (Homer, 2005, p.69). In the latter stages of his career, however, Freud acknowledged that the clinical practice of analysis came up against an impenetrable kernel, ‘the navel of the dream’, around which the unconscious as a network of associations is structured and sutured (SXI, p.23). Both Freud and Lacan attest that at this limit point any definitive anchor or origin of meaning founders, and it is from this point that Lacan theorised a ‘beyond to the Symbolic’ – the register of the Real which is to be distinguished from the unconscious. The register of the Real, which will

be more fully explained at a later point in the discussion, involves a further lack beyond that which is evident in the signifying chain.

For Lacan, the unconscious is not anything we can consciously know, but it is something that can be traced and deduced from its various manifestations within speech and language. It is a function of trans-subjective representation and symbolisation that operates in the gap between perception and consciousness, between signifier and signified. Rather than possessing a biological or instinctual origin or character, Lacan insisted that the unconscious is a linguistic phenomenon that becomes incarnated and operative through the signifiers of the discourse of the Other; hence Lacan's maxim that the signifier is that which represents the subject for another signifier, and that signification is grounded and calibrated in the Other. Although the unconscious has structure, like language, it functions on the synchronic axis of 'logical time' (discussed further below). Rather than being a static subterranean and excluded edifice, Lacan favours a description that posits the unconscious as a kind of limbo, as something of the order of the unrealised that exists 'between perception and consciousness':

The primary process ... in the form of the unconscious, must ... be apprehended in its experience of rupture, between perception and consciousness, in that non-temporal locus ... which forces us to posit what Freud calls, in homage to Fechner, *die Idee einer anderer Lokalität*, the idea of another locality, another space, another scene. (SXI, p.56)

Lacan, however, was not satisfied to consign subjectivity to the status of an epiphenomenal effect of symbolisation. Although he acknowledged the fragility of the ontological status of the unconscious, he sought to theorise a more substantive subject in terms of the impenetrable kernel around which the unconscious as an associative web of signifiers is structured. It is, therefore, analytically significant to understand that Lacanian terms and concepts have multiple modalities that are dependent not only upon their situation and points of fixation in the cycles of emergence of the speaking subject, but within the forever shifting sands of the open-ended Lacanian opus as it was continually modified over time. Complexity arises because each additional connotation

provides an added dimension without nullifying existing formulations. Lacan explains how the subject is split not only between the realms of Imaginary identification and Symbolic identification – that is, between the Imaginary ‘mirror stage’ ego (*moi*) and the ‘I’ (*je*) of the Symbolic – but also between the subject of the enunciated (symbolic statement) and the performative act of enunciation. That complexity took diagrammatic form in the graph of desire, through which Lacan attempted to map the cycles and cross-cutting processes that facilitate the perpetually dynamic genesis of the speaking subject, the subject of unconscious desire. The following exegesis will substantiate the assertions of the foregoing general overview with reference to Lacan’s paper on the subversion of the subject.

An emblematic conceptualisation of the genesis of the speaking subject is contained in the schema known as the graph of desire, outlined in full in *The subversion of the subject in the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious* (*E*, pp.671-702). This chapter in Lacan’s writings is a review of a paper originally presented to a non-clinical audience at an international philosophical colloquium on “La Dialectique”, held in September 1960 (*E*, p.671). As such, it was designed to present a synthesis of multiple theoretical developments, refinements and transformations formulated over the preceding seven years of his seminar.¹⁵ Lacan presents the schema in four stages as a pedagogical strategy that allows each successive graph to build upon the former until the completed graph emerges. The schema is not only a visual representation of the relational constellation of conceptual elements developed previously in various modules of his thought, but, most importantly, it attempts to model the cycles of emergence and consequent transit of the speaking subject in a *temporal* dimension; albeit, as we shall come to understand, a distinctly different form of temporality. As Bernard Penot (2005) succinctly expresses it, the graph ‘represents the “logical moments” of the birth of the speaking subject’ (para.1). It is to the exegesis of the graph that the discussion now moves, beginning with the first stage of ‘the elementary cell’.

¹⁵ This presentation was made at the conclusion of Seminar VII: *The ethics of psychoanalysis* (1959-60), which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Commentary on the First Graph: The Elementary Cell

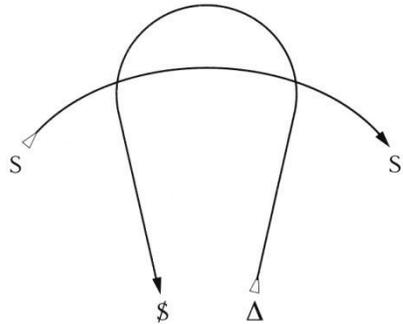


Figure 3: The elementary cell

Note. From Lacan, J. (2006). *Écrits* (B. Fink, Trans.). New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, p.681.

The first graph (Figure 3), *the elementary cell*, depicts Lacan's concept of *point de capiton*; commonly translated in English as the 'quilting point' or 'anchoring point' (Evans, 2003, p.149) or, literally, as a 'button tie' (E, p.681). The literal translation conveys the dynamic process that captures, secures and backstitches the nascent subject at various nodal points within the chain of signification. These 'quilting points', 'knots' or 'nodal points' in discursive formations – and it must be noted that the term 'discourse' maintains a very broad definition at this juncture – capture and secure the nascent subject and prevent the endless sliding and deferral along the chain of signifiers $S \rightarrow S'$. As noted previously, Lacan appropriated the theoretical link between the signified and the signifier as components of the linguistic sign, but with an inversion that gave pre-eminence to the signifier over the signified. The *point de capiton* conceptualises the conditions of possibility that frame the arbitrary link that becomes contingently secured between the two elements (signifier to signified), and through which meaning is established. The metaphor of 'quilting' or 'anchoring' for this

operation is encapsulated in the term *point de capiton* (button tie), which invokes the temporal process involved in the buttoning of a sofa with a loop of thread that secures and backstitches the stuffing in a redoubled chaining effect between the two outer surfaces of upholstery. The process, when successfully completed, ensures that both fabric and filling are secured to the desired structural stability, but results in an inevitably less flexible and malleable form. Rather than establishing what might be termed ‘inter-subjectivity’ between subject and o(O)ther – as a transparent and infinitely flexible reciprocal exchange between two mutually exclusive entities – Lacan illustrates through this concept the existence of a complex trans-subjective asymmetric temporal enmeshment that moves in both directions simultaneously. This operation is represented by the *retrograde* transit of the vector that denotes the need of the nascent subject in its movement from right to left from the delta (Δ) on the bottom right of the graph – looping through two intersections with the signifying chain, $S \rightarrow S'$ that moves in the opposing direction from left to right - ending with the divided subject at the lower left of the diagram. In a temporal sense, the nascent subject is never able to unequivocally or unambiguously occupy a ‘place’ in the chain of signification. Meaning is not only contingent upon the differential relation between signifiers, but also established retroactively to the act of the subject taking a place within that chain; a place that is determined by the punctuation of the o(O)ther. In this assertion, Lacan utilises the linguistic theory of Roman Jakobson to further demonstrate that the meaning of a word in a sentence is anticipated but dependent on context; by virtue of the words that follow. The subjective position of ‘I’, as a shifter, functions as a marker in the sentence that is only determined by the subsequent elements that appear later:

The diachronic function of this button tie can be found in a sentence, insofar as a sentence closes its signification only with its last term, each term being anticipated in the construction constituted by the other terms, and, inversely, sealing its meaning by their retroactive effect. (*E*, p.682)

Because of the mechanisms of anticipation and retroaction within the diachronic signifying chain, meaning is always established retroactively from the matrix of

linguistic possibilities (*après coup*, the French equivalent of the Freudian term - *Nachträglichkeit*). The emergence of meaning depends on, and is determined by, the message that arrives *après coup*, later ('too late') through the auspices of the Other. The second stage of the graph further consolidates the idea that the biological need of the nascent subject is transposed and translated through the defiles of the signifier in an act of interpretation by the other. The message that is translated and interpreted is entirely reliant upon the linguistic possibilities of the Symbolic, the system of language known as the Other that subtends all human communication. Lacan contends that such an operation irrevocably splits the nascent subject. The passage from human organism to subject of language (and hence, for Lacan, the subject of the unconscious) occurs as a consequence of the necessity for meaning to be passed in a redoubled circuit through the Other. The subject is thus divided and unable to temporally coincide within itself. The outcome of this process of division or 'splitting' (*Spaltung*), however, is variable, and three broad psychic structures – with subsequent subsets – can result. The following section provides an initial introduction to these resultant structures.

Clinical structures: Psychosis, neurosis and perversion.

In general, psychoanalytic theory proposes three broad clinical structures or subject positions: *psychosis*, *neurosis* and *perversion*. For Lacan, these three structures emerge from the process through which the human organism is configured and calibrated by the passage into language, the process Lacan termed symbolic castration in a reconfiguration of the Freudian Oedipus Complex.

Psychosis, the first structure (identified by *foreclosure*) is a failure in the process that secures the subject in the signifying chain – outlined in the first graph – where the subject is captured but the suturing does not take place. In Lacanian terms, the primordial signifier (Name-of-the-Father) is not integrated (Evans, 2003, p.155). Although the psychotic subject is able to use language, the *points de capiton* do not adequately form to secure the relational differential matrix, leaving the psychotic subject adrift in a sea of words that do not cohere into a set of organised thought structures that establish meaning.

Neurosis, the most prevalent clinical structure (identified by *repression*), turns upon two main sub-categories of *hysteria* and *obsession* with the addition of *phobia* (an extreme case within neurotic structure). In neurosis, subjection to the signifier (symbolic castration or the Oedipus complex in Freudian terms) is accepted; however, the sub-categories of hysteria and obsession signal that each attains stability in different modes with a characteristic doubting and questioning relation with respect to the desire of the o(O)ther (Evans, 2003, p.123). For hysteria the question oscillates around sexual difference: ‘Am I man or woman?’ For obsession the question is: ‘To be or not to be - Am I alive or dead?’ It is these two existential questions concerning sexuality and death that mark out neurosis as the structure that cannot find an answer in the Symbolic.¹⁶

The third clinical structure, *perversion*, is identified by *disavowal*. Although acceding to symbolic castration, castration is in turn denied. This ensues through a reversal of the neurotic position insofar as the relation with the o(O)ther is inverted with the utilisation of various *modus operandi* that ensure that castration is veiled, often through the appropriation of a particular fetish object. Rather than the neurotic position that relates to the o(O)ther through an oscillating inquisition plagued by doubt, the perverse subject seeks and derives vicarious satisfaction in servitude to the Law by exacting it as the agent of the Other. Although sadistic in appearance, it is an inverted form of masochistic subjection (Evans, 2003, pp.138-39).

It is crucial, however, to acknowledge that Lacan did not seek to adjudicate towards any subjective structure that could be designated normal: all structures – to a lesser or greater degree – represent a symptomatic relation that is individually constituted within a particular social milieu. Thus, any supposed norm is revealed to be an adjudication that takes place within a given social-political context, rather than an *a priori* ‘natural’ or essentialist quality that is determinative. In contradistinction to other forms of psychotherapy, it is *not* the objective of clinical psychoanalytic practice in the Lacanian orientation to sanction any particular social-political adjudication. Lacan’s account of the subject is one of irrevocable division (Evans, 2003, p.196): through the process of splitting and the disjuncture created, however, the conditions of possibility for change emerge. Put simply, the dichotomous nature-nurture debate is subverted. With

¹⁶ For a more detailed discussion of these clinical categories, see Fink (1997) pp.112-64.

these points in mind, let us return to discuss the processes of identification and subjectivation, and their figuration on the graph of desire.

As the nascent subject appears fleetingly within the signifying chain – in the manner of Freudian ‘deferred action’ – it slides along the chain of signifiers towards an *anticipated* but never attained unequivocal meaning. The subject does, however, attain stability at various junctures – illustrated by the *point de capiton* – which arrest movement along the chain by securing signifier to signified. This exemplifies Lacan’s maxim that the subject is represented in a minimal and vicarious way by one signifier for another as it disappears under the signifier. Like a flame poised to ignite, the Lacanian subject only sparks fleetingly between signifiers (Fink, 1997). To take the liberty of extending Fink’s metaphor, the subject might be also understood as the moth that oscillates and hovers incessantly around a flame, simultaneously attracted and repelled by the nodal points of capture – the *points de captio*n – in the chains of signifiers of the o(O)ther. It is both necessary and timely at this point to digress to a brief explanation of the use of both upper and lower case letters in the term o(O)ther.

The term o(O)ther, at this stage, implies two levels of reference.¹⁷ The Other – or ‘big Other’ – represents the Symbolic order as a defined relational set of discursive social institutions and practices that result from language as a system. The lower case form – ‘the other’ – refers to the ‘individual’ level of the other; ‘the other’ as conduit for the social matrix at the level of the particular. However, as the following discussion will make clear, the particular other is by no means transparent, reciprocal or mutually exclusive. This becomes evident when the graph is approached at the level of ‘the (particular) other’.

From the perspective of particular infant/other relations, the vector beginning at the delta (Δ) on the lower right corner of the first graph maps the *pressure of need*; the neonate’s biological necessity for sustenance and its transformation as it encounters the signifying chain of the Other through the relation which it forms with the other as

¹⁷ Further inflections and development of this term occur in Lacan’s later work; however, for the purpose of clarity at this point, the definition has been restricted to the two axes predominant at the time of the formulation of the graph of desire.

primary caregiver.¹⁸ For Lacan, need becomes transformed into *demand* as a consequence of the necessity for need to be processed through language in order for it to be registered and understood by the other. Put simply, because the infant's needs must be registered by the other and interpreted within the preordained possibilities within the symbolic constellation of language, the condition of demand that ensues extends beyond the initial state of need. Demand entails not only the satisfaction of the infant's biological needs, but an additional demand for recognition, or request for love, from the other which is in excess of any purely biological need. The gap between need and its articulation as demand is the wellspring of *desire*.

The resultant split subject – the subject of the signifier – becomes the desiring subject; desire being the difference or subtraction of need from demand. In *The subversion of the subject in the dialectic of desire* Lacan observes that:

Desire begins to take shape in the margin in which demand rips away from need, this margin being the one that demand - whose appeal can be unconditional only with respect to the Other - opens up in the guise of the possible gap need may give rise to here, because it has no universal satisfaction (this is called “anxiety”). (*E*, p.689)

Once need is transformed into demand through the ‘defiles of the signifier’, there is always ‘something more’ that is sought beyond need that can never be fully satisfied. Desire, therefore, flows as a consequence of symbolic castration as need becomes enmeshed within the Symbolic order, and is founded upon the installation of an irresolvable gap or lack that emerges between need and demand. This lack, as we shall later discover, is intimately connected to ‘the one true affect’ – *anxiety* – as gestured to

¹⁸ This position is most often assigned to the real mother, and the term m(O)ther has traditionally been adopted. This term is, however, regarded as an anachronistic way of presenting this aspect of theory as both men and women undertake the primary caregiver role. It is likewise a simplification to assign the signifying function to the intervention of the real father. As Kaja Silverman (1988,) insightfully points out, the installation of language is linked to the primary caregiver (as the agent of the Other), whether that person is biologically male or female. Alternatively, Paul Verhaeghe (2009) criticizes the erasure of references to the mother as a politically correct move that obscures the importance of the real mother and father, and the manner in which their roles are ascribed in the process he describes as ‘social cunning’.

by Lacan in the quotation above that has the characteristic of turning upon two different planes or levels.

The multiple and diverse explanations above illustrate the complexity that belies the apparent simplicity of the first graph. Although such detail may seem to over-determine its meaning at this juncture, it will become clearer as this exegesis progresses that Lacan's concepts and terms are multi-layered and polyvalent. The various meanings ascribed to each term/concept do not supplant each other in a temporally diachronic fashion, but expand on multiple levels.

Commentary on the Second Graph

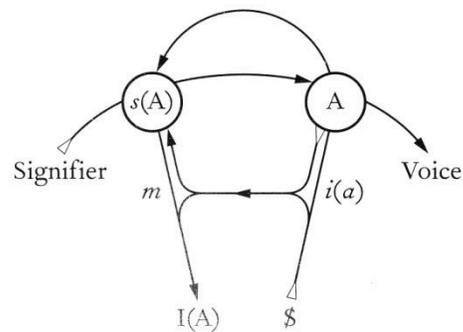


Figure 4: The second graph

Note. From Lacan, J. (2006). *Écrits* (B. Fink, Trans.). New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, p.684.

The second graph (Figure 4) is derived from the elementary cell of the *point de caption*, but with some important additions. Firstly, the points of intersection through the diachronic axis of the signifying chain ($S \rightarrow S'$) are labelled A and $s(A)$, respectively. The transit of the vector representing the nascent subject intersects with the signifying chain, firstly, on the right at intersection A (*Autre*, 'the Other'); 'the treasure trove of

signifiers' in the locus of the o(O)ther (*E*, p.682). This is the initial 'place' of insertion into the Symbolic order. The potentially emergent subject is compelled into assimilation (*alienation*); compelled to conform to the terms prescribed in the matrix of signification (the Other as Symbolic order), and to identify with the signification as presented by the other. In general social terms, this can be considered the entire repertoire of forms and practices of the specific cultural milieu into which the 'individual' human organism (the body of the neonate) is born, bearing in mind that 'culture' – as an umbrella term for the organisation of groups around social, economic and political formations – is diverse and by no means universal. What could be considered universal, however, is the dynamic process of *alienation* through which this interpellation through the particular other occurs and the resultant relational structure that, through repetition, ossifies. What appears to be a diachronic developmental process over chronological time – through the auspices of language, consciousness and memory – involves the synchronic disjuncture that Lacan called 'logical time', the pivotal feature of the unconscious. For the present, however, the discussion turns back to the appearance of the treasure trove of signifiers (A) as it first appears on the graph of desire and, more specifically, the level of the relational process with 'the particular other', through which the Other becomes incarnate.

In a state of complete helplessness and dependency, due to the extreme prematurity of the human infant at birth, the neonate receives the message from the other at the level of the body through the opaque sensations of touch and movement, smell, taste, sound, and sight. These are the primal 'mirror stage' signifying elements or specular images – *i(a)* – of the Imaginary register that not only ground and pave the way for language in its linguistic form, but also are reciprocally implicated in the calibration of the body of the neonate through the asymmetric reflections and refractions with the o(O)ther. The Symbolic and Imaginary registers are irrevocably destined to be entwined. It is an asymmetric relation, however, because there is no choice: if the neonate is to survive, the only path is through alienation and a compulsory identification into the signifying chain of the o(O)ther. This not only radically alters perceptions of cause and effect, but also reconfigures apparent notions of what is 'natural' or instinctual with reference to the body. Because the 'treasure trove of signifiers' pre-exists the entry point

of the subject, the subject is unaware of the framing of the ‘reality’ into which it is drawn. It is necessarily grounded on hidden assumptions outside any possible knowledge to be attained in the Symbolic order.

The second point of intersection – $s(A)$ – denotes the ‘moment’ where meaning is produced by the Other. It designates ‘the punctuation, in which signification ends as a finished product’ (E, p.682). Although the vector $s(A) \rightarrow A$ represents the diachronic dimension of signification, it is important to grasp that the looping of the vector representing the entry of the nascent subject institutes a circuit of ‘two way traffic’: the right to left movement of the pressure of need or biological impulses $A \rightarrow s(A)$, and the signifying chain of the Other’s discourse from left to right, $s(A) \rightarrow A$. More specifically, for Lacan, it is necessary to observe ‘the dissymmetry between the one [A], which is a locus (a place, rather than a space), and the other [$s(A)$], which is moment (a scansion, rather than a duration) ... one as a hollow for concealment, the other as a drilling toward a way out’ (E, p.682). These contrary oscillating movements constitute the first “logical moments” in the formation of the speaking subject (Penot, 2005, para.1). In addition, there is a delta originating from A that returns via the upper portion of an inner circuit that is added to the inside of the elementary cell on the second graph. This vector, after passing through the *Imaginary* ‘mirror stage’ vector $i(a) \rightarrow m$, doubles the circuit through its return along the signifying chain (from left to right). The mirroring process, prefigured above, is elaborated by the lower portion of the inner circuit. These are the synchronic dimensions that are secreted and entwined within the more obvious diachronic ordering of the signifying chain.

The inner circuit circumscribed by the elementary cell can best be understood in two phases: (i) as a short circuit; and (ii) as an additional doubling where subject formation has a second synchronous circuit that intersects and returns across the signifying chain $s(A) \rightarrow A$ (from left to right). As such, it elaborates the formation of the embryonic ‘mirror stage’ ego – m (*moi*) – in the Imaginary, and its implication as it intersects with the Symbolic and the resultant relation to the *ego Ideal* – $I(A)$ – the *anticipated* outcome at the terminal point of the trajectory from the original delta (now labelled $\$$ on the lower right of the schema). The mirror stage occurs on the trajectory of the pressure of need where the primal sense ‘images’ $i(a)$ – *specular image(s)* – are first

registered and calibrated by the particular other, *a (autre)*. These ‘specular image[s]’, which Penot (2005) designates as occurring in the register of ‘spatial-corporeal representation’ (para.6), are grafted onto the pressure of need and constitute the Imaginary relation that forms the embryonic ego – *m*.

At the level of the short circuit (the vector that travels between $i(a) \rightarrow m$), the embryonic ego is an amorphous collection of ‘mirror stage’ reflections and refractions that remain fragmented. A fixation at this point – before any secure suture within the Symbolic chain of the *o(O)ther* is established – can result in the schizophrenic effect of bodily fragmentation, a symptom associated with psychotic structure. It is only with the doubling that occurs (with the vector that travels from $A \rightarrow i(a) \rightarrow m \rightarrow$ and its return through the signifying chain) that the *point de capiton* manages to secure together the embryonic and fragmented sense images with the signifying chain $s(A) \rightarrow A$. At this juncture, the subject is alienated into the signifying chain of the *o(O)ther* and the consequent promise of cohesion and completion in relation to the *ego Ideal* – $I(A)$ – is established as a goal towards which it strives. It is pertinent to note, for future reference, that Lacanian psychoanalysis – as opposed to other post-Freudian psychoanalytic and psychological theories and clinical therapeutic practice(s) – questions the efficacy of strengthening this inner circuit of ego formation in the Imaginary which confines the subject in a terminal alienation within the *o(O)ther*. For Lacan, at this stage in his theoretical development (his later work moves towards the register of the Real), the efficacy of treatment lies in the Symbolic where separation from the symbiotic and puppet-like duality of the Imaginary can be enacted. Any reinforcement of the Imaginary ego is simply a matter of further alienation into the illusory anticipation of wholeness of the *ego Ideal* which represents a closed circuit of conformity.

The vital temporal aspect to be understood from the second circuit inside the elementary cell is the effect of *anticipation*. The neonate’s emergence into the embryonic formation of the ego in the Imaginary is founded upon an Ideal that is necessarily reflected in relation with the *o(O)ther*. Although the infant/other relationship appears to adhere to a linear biological form of development, the Lacanian reference to ‘moments’ does not refer exclusively to moments in a linear notion of chronological time. Before further discussing the process of the emergence of the speaking subject, it

is pertinent and necessary to digress to a more detailed discussion of Lacan's utilisation of retroaction and anticipation, and his concept of 'logical time' (a significant feature of the unconscious).

Retroaction, anticipation and 'logical time'.

As has been argued and emphasised in the explanation offered so far, the graph of desire is Lacan's attempt to model a radically alternative perspective of temporality in the formation of the human subject. Indeed, it could be argued that Lacan's reconfiguration of Freud gains its revolutionary force from its distinctive grasp of time. It is precisely this aspect that facilitates an escape from the restrictions and exclusions required of linear developmental theories, because it apprehends the import of both diachronic and synchronic axes of temporality. Lacan's well-worn aphorism posits that 'the unconscious is structured like a language' (SXI, p.20). In this statement, he gestures towards the forces of retroaction and anticipation as the mechanisms of 'logical time', a temporal modality distinct from linear chronological time. In this respect, he directly references Freud's assertions about the temporality of dreams and the unconscious; however, he adds an important aspect of motility. Rather than the unconscious being a static subterranean reserve of repressed elements that is amenable to total retrieval into consciousness through analysis, Lacan referred to the unconscious as a process. He characterises this process as 'a temporal pulsation' (SXI, p.143), an evanescent present moment where narrative chronologies are disturbed and an internal disjuncture is registered in consciousness through parapraxes (of both word and action). To better understand Lacan's concept of the unconscious, however, it is necessary to discuss the force of retroaction more specifically.

Retroaction refers to the idea that the past is destined to be interpreted in terms of the frameworks of the present. Put simply, experience is cognitively realised (understood) in hindsight, once it can be matched (through simplification and exclusion) with already existing templates of cognitive understanding. In this respect, trauma is best understood as the distance between experiencing an event, and the point where that event is assimilated into a framework of cognitive understanding that operates

retroactively. It is pertinent to note at this point that Lacan raised a flag of extreme caution with regard to *understanding*, particularly understanding that occurs too easily and by means of simplification (SX, 21.11.62, pp.1-6). Due to the manner in which memory functions, the past – as it is formed and recollected through narrative (discourse) – is always a cognitive construction that is accessed through the frameworks of the present. To take a musical example: when one hears a well known melody or piece of music, not only does it appear to bring affectively charged memories of the past into the present, but the position of the subject in the present irredeemably shapes those memories and the two become intermingled. As such, the memory of a past experience that is resurrected is charged with the affective atmosphere of the present and both become entwined and re-shaped. In a tautological twist, the affective conditions of the present are projected onto the memory of the past event and retroactively recognised as familiar. As Michel Foucault effectively gestured with his conception of the ‘history of the present’, the writing of history can also be understood as a process of memory work that is both partial and positioned, and necessarily implicates the synchronic frameworks of the present (Baert, 1998, pp.114-33). For Lacan, these frameworks are the necessary fundamental fantasies that subtend and subvert conscious thought. Such a viewpoint asserts that there is no access to the past except through the framework of the present, and that meaning is established from the vista(s) of the present in a performative process that retroactively mediates and constructs the past through the punctuation of the Other. In a purely linguistic sense, Lacan demonstrated that the meaning of a sentence – and, more specifically, the meaning of a word and the position of the subject (‘I’) within a sentence – is only locked into place as the last words are uttered and the entire context becomes apparent (*E*, p.682). Meaning is thus postulated as a retroactive function, punctuated by the differential relations between linguistic elements in the matrix of signification. Retroaction, however, is intimately connected with the concept of anticipation.

Anticipation refers to the way in which meaning is projected ahead on a calculation framed in the present, and aimed at establishing an ideal frame for (or certainty about) what is essentially a set of contingent possibilities in the future. Indeed, the efficacy of jokes demonstrates this quite readily when the punch line subverts the

anticipated projection of the scenario presented. Humour is not only particularly adept at subverting frameworks of anticipation, but may also provide protection against the invasion of anxiety that the reality of radical contingency evokes. An understanding of this idealised projection into the future illustrates how established frameworks of thought reinforce actions in the present that determine future possibilities and outcomes. Rather than the common-sense notion that the formulation of a set of possible future outcomes expands the horizon of choice, such calculation is always aimed at closure; the reduction of complexity to simplicity, so that a decision for action can emerge and the anxiety about the contingency of the future can be curtailed. Alternatively, the longer indeterminacy is held open, and the wider the choice of options on offer, the more anxiety will prevail.

Both retroaction and anticipation, therefore, can be demonstrated to be effects of cognitive processes that function through language in the service of closure, and seek to eliminate contingency and anxiety. It is this complex relation of backstitching and chaining together through retroaction and anticipation – and their temporal disjuncture – which the second stage of the graph of desire (above) demonstrates. It cannot be conceived within the framework of linear chronological time; hence, Lacan's formulation that retroaction and anticipation are the mechanisms of 'logical time', a temporal process that operates on the plane of the unconscious. Psychoanalytic listening orients itself towards locating these 'moments' of knotting and disjuncture. With these important points in mind, let us return to a fuller explanation of Lacan's concept of logical time.

Lacan exemplified the concept of 'logical time' in his early paper, *Logical time and the assertion of anticipated certainty: A new sophism* (1945) which he later included in *Écrits* (pp.161-75). The pivotal aspect of the paper lies in its attempt to demonstrate the interactive performative aspect that subtends any apparently conscious or rational logical linear deduction that may govern human action. The conscious construction of a plan of action to secure an anticipated outcome is shown to be permeated by a complex matrix of reflective and refractive 'moments' that demonstrate that human behaviour cannot be predicted on a purely conscious and rational level. Although an early paper, it is positioned out of chronological order in its publication in *Écrits* with a preface that

performatively demonstrates the concept of ‘logical time’ that Lacan is attempting to explain: ‘May it resound with the right note here where I am placing it, between the before and the after, even if it demonstrates that the after was kept waiting so that the before could assume its own place’ (*E*, p.161). As this seemingly tautological statement demonstrates, the temporal aspects of anticipation and retroaction are already at work in what is to follow in Lacan’s complex and detailed example of the concept of logical time.

The body of the paper presents a logical problem involving three prisoners who must try to deduce their individual status – and their consequent fate – from the actions of the collective of three. They are told that one of them may go free, but only if they participate in the decision-making process by way of a practical experiment of logical deduction and observation. They are shown five discs; three white and two black. Each prisoner has one of the discs placed between their shoulder blades so that they cannot ascertain by any visual means the colour of the disc on their own back (the sign designating their individual identity). They are, however, free to observe the discs on the backs of their fellow prisoners. At the conclusion of their individual deliberation (this excludes any form of communication with each other about those deliberations), they are instructed to move through a door to the next room and explain how they had made their logical deduction (*E*, pp.161-75).¹⁹

Lacan proceeds to outline the ‘perfect solution’ via abstract rational logic, and subsequently demonstrates how the process of deduction is played out in practice. It is not only the abstract mathematical probabilities involved that are significant, but also the way the individuals’ calculations are enmeshed both (i) with inferences about the other prisoners’ thought processes, and (ii) with the motives, movements, hesitations and subsequent cycles of recalculation that ensue from those projected assumptions. Lacan summarises the deduction (not mathematical calculation) in three logical moments:

the instant of seeing;
 the time for understanding;
 the moment of concluding. (Evans, 2003, p.206)

¹⁹ See *E*, pp.161-75 for a detailed explanation of this necessarily shortened summary.

‘Logical time’, is thus posited as distinct from linear chronological time because of its reliance on an inter-subjective logic. When put to the practical test, the three prisoner scenario ably demonstrates that abstract symbolic logic is shot through with internalisations and projections based upon assumptions and inferences regarding the actions, thought processes, motivations and intentionality of the o(O)ther. The instant of seeing is posited as impersonal, the time for understanding as a reciprocal dualistic reflective deduction and inference, and the moment of concluding as a performative leap where the ‘I’ as subject is finally positioned and instantiated through declaration. The sophism demonstrated through the ‘three prisoner problem’ highlights the gap between theory – as a generalised abstraction – and its application in practice. Indeed, Lacan urges that the example of the three prisoner problem is best understood through performance so that the import of logical time – and its ‘moments’ of arrest, anticipation and retroaction – can be experienced as ‘the intersubjective time that structures human action’ (Evans, 2003, p.206).²⁰

This digression on the concepts of retroaction and anticipation – and of the logical time which they constitute – gestures towards the next phase of development of the graph of desire. Before moving forward to the explanation of the third graph, however, it is necessary to refer back one final time to the second stage of the graph and the unexplained outcome of the signifying process that Lacan designates as *voice*.

The final addition to the second graph – one that is of central significance to this thesis – is the appearance of *voice* as the outcome of the vector of the signifying chain, $S \rightarrow S1$ that transits through intersections $s(A)$ and A , to the far right of the graph. Encapsulated in this enigmatic reference, which receives little in the way of further elaboration by Lacan in his explanation at this point, is the manifestation of an excessive element that designates that the logical ‘moments’ in the birth of the speaking subject produce a remainder that cannot be inscribed within the signifying chain of the Symbolic, or the inner short circuit of the Imaginary. The temporal processes, described above, that map the nascent subject’s initiation into a ‘place’ (or position in the Other – $A -$) and the moment of ‘punctuation’ – $s(A)$ – where meaning through the o(O)ther is

²⁰ As previously mentioned, however, Lacan later dispensed with the term ‘inter-subjective’ as his theoretical developments further eroded any transparent reciprocity in human relations.

sutured or arrested, do not neatly coincide: there is a glitch in the process. This incommensurability is the effect of disjuncture or lack in the signifying chain, which sets 'cause' in motion. As he suggests in Seminar XI, the notion of cause is evoked only when 'there is something wrong' (p.22); where the summation of positively identifiable features is an insufficient calculation. Thus, the teleological notion of cause preceding effect is inverted. It is effect that sets the search for cause in motion. For Lacan, the emergence of lack as an effect of symbolic castration precipitates the search for cause, and is the marker of desire as the ever present promise and lure towards the 'holy grail' that will grant completion.

For Freud, desire was linked to a search for origins and the enigmas of sexuality. For Lacan, desire is a rather more complicated and paradoxical affair that emerges through the process of symbolisation and its consequent effects of fragmentation upon the human organism. It is only with the successful intervention of the paternal metaphor (the *Name-of-the-Father*) – the installation of the unary trait – that impinges on the symbiotic duality of the Imaginary, that a gap or lack is installed and differential relations that enable meaning to be established come into being in the Symbolic. It is through the installation of lack, with its necessary restrictions, exclusions, inhibitions and impasses that desire is set in motion by the emergence of cause in relation to the circuit of the drives. The excessive element that Lacan designates as *voise* on the graph of desire is the first emblematic, but elusive and unexplained reference to the concept that was to develop in multifarious manifestations as *objet a*, Lacan's theoretical conceptualisation of an excessive element, the 'scrap of the Real', the object of anxiety *par excellence* around which the partial drives incessantly oscillate. Rather than the object towards which desire strives, *objet a* (or *voise* as it appears on the graph) is the object *cause* of desire that maintains the gap or lack through which the desiring subject of the unconscious precariously 'ex-sists'. At this point, the commonly expressed criticism of Lacanian theory as an esoteric abstraction that renders itself unintelligible can perhaps be easily apprehended. The terminology of 'lack' is prevalent in secondary appropriations and applications of Lacanian theory, often without the necessary exemplification of its central importance. A practical and simple example may help us to avoid such a pitfall.

The salience of the installation of lack is aptly described by Paul Verhaeghe (2001, p.77, n.36) with the analogy with the familiar children's sliding puzzle. The matrix of tiles can be reconfigured into new patterns on condition that there is an empty square that allows movement of the tiles within the structure of the puzzle. Although described in spatial rather than temporal terms, without the lack or empty 'place', the tiles are unable to move and reconfigure. Similarly, the Rubik cube puzzle offers a more complex three-dimensional model that demonstrates that only through the auspices of the gaps between the matrices of coloured squares, and a minimal number of suturing points in the middle of the cube that facilitate the cycling of movement through different phases or moments, that the patterns can be reconfigured within the flexibility of the structure of the cube. The dynamic aspect is represented by the gaps in the structure, and the minimal Lacanian subject could be described as the perpetual torsion that is set in play as a decentred movement or oscillation within those gaps. Put in Lacanian terms: through subjection to the signifier, the nascent subject becomes subject to the demand of the $o(O)$ ther, a message that inverts to the question of the desire of the $o(O)$ ther. The 'subject of desire' is the subject of lack which is represented not so much as a spatial gap or 'space' at this stage of the graph, but as a temporal displacement on the diachronic horizontal axis of the signifying chain. Lacan specifies this displacement as a locus or temporal 'place' that is apprehended only in the evanescent movement of an opening and closing detectable in speech as it is deferred.

The asymmetry of the power relation described in the first two graphs remains heavily in favour of the $o(O)$ ther as the structure in which the nascent subject is enmeshed; reflected in the Imaginary register of ego formation and represented as a temporally displaced disjuncture in the chain of signification in the Symbolic. Although the possibility for movement and change within a given structure is introduced, the conditions of possibility for that change appear difficult to attain. Lacan – unlike Freud who remained increasingly pessimistic about any realistic prospect for change – suggests a possibility for lasting change, albeit a difficult and risky enterprise to enact (SXI, p.23).

The embryonic and enigmatic reference to *voice* on the second graph, is the precursor to the concept of *objet a* – *the object cause of desire* – that becomes the central

feature in Lacan's later theory as the agent for the possibility for lasting change. The preceding digression anticipates this move. For now, however, we shall return to the third stage in Lacan's exegesis of the graph of desire, and the next 'moment' in the birth of the speaking subject.

Commentary on the Third Graph

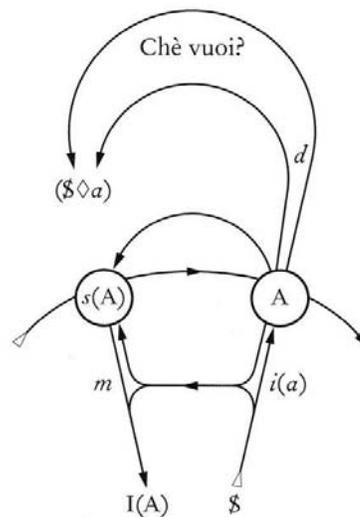


Figure 5: The third graph

Note. From Lacan, J. (2006). *Écrits* (B. Fink, Trans.). New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, p.690.

The third rendition of the schema (Figure 5) is instructive in its graphic form with the appearance of double vectors springing upward from A – the treasure trove of signifiers – with the transformation of need by demand into desire (*d*). Desire emerges in the gap that separates the additional upward vectors that form the shape of a double question mark with the emergent split subject positioned in relation to the demand/desire of the other; $§\diamond a$. In concordance with the effects of narcissistic mirroring and trans-subjective doubling, the nascent subject questions beyond the 'subject of the statement'

evident in the discourse of the Other to a second guessing of the intentionality of the ‘subject of the enunciation’. The emergent question: ‘What do you want?’ (*Chè vuoi?*), which is inscribed in the upper arc of the diagram, becomes transposed and received as a message in inverted form for the nascent subject as the question ‘What does s/he want from me?’ Possessing the unmistakable inflection of the Freudian superego, the question ‘*Chè vuoi?*’ is registered and provokes the first appearance and experience of anxiety – *Hilflosigkeit* – the torsion that subtends the transformation of demand into the question about desire and the opening up of a gap (or lack) as the consequence of the splitting (*Spaltung*) effect of ‘subordination to the signifier’ (*E*, p.691). Anxiety, at this primal stage, is the impingement of demand that is registered as emanating from the o(O)ther. It marks the first glimmer of *separation* where the nascent subject emerges in the process of registering the inability to have any choice other than *alienation* within the o(O)ther. It can thus be apprehended that the apparently simple addition of the curved vectors to the second graph represents a vital and complex development. An examination and explanation of the specific terms and details added to the graph in its third stage of development will further clarify and unpack the process through which Lacan postulates the first emergence and perception of undifferentiated anxiety.

At the third transitional moment in the birth of the speaking subject depicted above, Lacan’s development of the graph of desire represents the outcome of the processes of temporal disjuncture and doubling exemplified in the preceding discussion of the first and second graphs. To recapitulate the process thus far: the human organism/neonate becomes enmeshed within an enclosed symbiotic duality by the Imaginary capture of reflected specular images – $i(a)$ – which in turn become grafted onto the Symbolic representations and signification of the o(O)ther. Thus, a relation, albeit asymmetric, is established between the Imaginary ego – m – and the *ego Ideal*, I (A). Through the joint operations of capture – intersection A – and suture via the punctuation of the o(O)ther – intersection $s(A)$ – the nascent subject attains a liminal status of *alienation* within the signifying chain. Rather than the emergence of an oscillating feeling of omnipotence in the neonate - the position proffered by the Kleinian and post-Kleinian schools of object relations theory - Lacan suggests in the third stage of the graph that the apparent capacity to provoke the manifestations in the parental other is

inverted. To this end, it is pertinent to recall a previous quotation from *The subversion of the subject in the dialectic of desire* in its extended context:

Desire begins to take shape in the margin in which demand rips away from need, this margin being the one that demand – whose appeal can be unconditional only with respect to the Other – opens up in the guise of the possible gap need may give rise to here, because it has no universal satisfaction (this is called “anxiety”). A margin, which, as linear as it may be, allows its vertiginous character to appear, provided it is not trampled by the elephantine feet of the Other’s whimsy. Nevertheless, it is this whimsy that introduces the phantom of Omnipotence – not of the subject, but of the Other in which the subject’s demand is instated ... and with this phantom, the necessity that the other be bridled by the Law. (*E*, p.689)

As the quotation above suggests, the first pangs of anxiety radiate from the primal registration of the ‘phantom of Omnipotence’ perceived as emanating from the o(O)ther. The ‘vertiginous character’ of anxiety arises from its paradoxical emergence on the cusp of *alienation* and *separation*, the two planes that Lacan posits as extensions of the structural linguistic concepts of metonymy and metaphor. *Alienation* into the symbolic chain is one of perpetual metonymic displacement along the diachronic axis of the chain of signification, resulting in the assumption of identification(s) with the *ego Ideal* at various points of capture (*points de capiton*) dictated by the o(O)ther. *Separation* corresponds to the synchronic axis where metaphor allows a limited scope of choice in the adoption of a structural position in relation to the o(O)ther. The birth of the speaking subject is signalled by the emergence of anxiety as the pivotal marker of the oscillation between the planes of alienation and separation. Registered as a terrifying limbo of unbearable anxiety, the paradoxical oscillating transition between the two planes precipitates the requirement for the emergent subject to assume a position in relation to the o(O)ther as a defence against the unbridled force of demand/desire perceived as emanating from the external o(O)ther.

The most prevalent structural position that the emergent subject assumes, neurosis, is depicted by Lacan on the third graph with the algorithm for *fantasy* ($\$ \diamond a$).

Located at the endpoint of the split vectors, the algorithm is to be read – the ‘split’ or ‘barred’ subject in relation to the desire of the other. Alongside what appears to be a transparent and direct symbolic statement or request received from ‘the other’, lurks the ‘paranoid’ second-guessing of the thought processes and motivation that we infer from a reading of not only speech and writing – as the spoken and written conveyance of language as a systematic symbolic structure of differential elements – but also the performative dimension of language in combination with non-linguistic prosodic elements, actions and non-verbal cues that are inescapably entwined with language. All of the aforementioned elements are utilised in the attempt to clinch meaning that, when taken to the limit point, always escapes our grasp. An everyday example of such a limit point is the circumstance of the relentless curiosity of a small child who continually questions a parent or adult with what might be described as the most childish yet penetrating question, ‘why’? After furnishing an initial response, the child reiterates the same question – ‘but why?’ – over and over again until a limit point is reached when the adult replies: ‘because I said so’, an instance where the enunciated is grounded in nothing other than the performative act of enunciation. In addition to the truth of the meaning of the enunciated statement, the child’s questioning might be understood as directed in the manner of an hysterical question: ‘I know you are telling me this but why are you telling me this, what is your purpose; what is it that you require of me by telling me this?’

As the previous discussion suggests, the Symbolic and Imaginary registers intermingle and the results are far from reliable in any so-called ‘objective’ or ‘rational’ respect. As a consequence of this inevitable entwinement, what is experienced and symbolically perceived as the most intimate and internal sense of self-identity, cannot be separated from the o(O)ther; hence, Lacan’s dictum that desire is the discourse of the o(O)ther. Moreover (in an appropriation from Kojève), desire is not simply *for* the other, or even for the desire *of* the other, but ‘desire *is* the desire of the Other’ (Evans, 2003, p.38).

It is impossible to determine the wellspring of desire insofar as what appears to be the most intimate and ‘natural’ internally produced and felt desire is that which has been internalised or calibrated from the external o(O)ther. Similarly, what appears as

external in the o(O)ther (again, with the apparent stability of a naturally endowed characteristic) is projected and externalised from a paradoxical internal locus. This complicated relation of misrecognition is, in turn, doubled from two partial and positioned perspectives that are inevitably asymmetric and incommensurate. This paradoxical locus, which is impossible to conceptualise in spatial logic (internal or external) or chronological temporality (past, present or future) is what Lacan terms *extimate*, the domain of the unconscious and ‘logical time’. Although generated from within the Symbolic, the unconscious resides as an ‘extimate’ unknown knowledge: specifically, it is knowledge about desire and the domain of affect that frames conscious knowledge. Within the linear temporality of the signifying chains of the Symbolic order, its effects can be deduced and felt as a temporal disjuncture that occurs around the *point(s) de capiton*. At such moments, the functioning and efficacy of the fundamental fantasy falters. To clarify the position and function of the fundamental fantasy, we now return again to its figuration and the final commentary on the third graph.

The split subject has acceded to symbolic castration – subjection to the signifier and the consequent alienation in the o(O)ther – and assumed a structural position in relation to the ‘little other’ ($\$ \diamond a$), where the lower-case *a* denotes *autre*. It is pertinent to note, however, that in his commentary at this point, Lacan also imbues the lower-case *a* with a superimposed status of a *partial object* that is the first instantiation of a detachment from the o(O)ther. Lacan makes a rare, albeit typically oblique, acknowledgement of the work of object relations practitioner, Donald Winnicott, and his formulation of the function of the ‘transitional object’ (*E*, p.689). However, in opposition to the view that the transitional object partially and directly represents the other as a comfort that mitigates against the anxiety of separation from the (m)other, Lacan asserts that the object in question is that which is installed between the subject and the other: it functions as a vital guarantor by sustaining the gap through which the nascent subject can emerge from a stultifying immersion in the o(O)ther. For Lacan, the solution to the anxiety of unbridled demand is a “detachment” or a distancing that is attained through desire. To make the point clearly, it is useful to quote the passage in full:

[D]esire reverses the unconditionality of the demand for love, in which the subject remains subjected to the Other, in order to raise it to the power of an absolute condition (in which “absolute” also implies “detachment”).

Given the advantage won over anxiety by need, this detachment is successful right from its humblest mode - that in which it was glimpsed by a certain psychoanalyst in his work with children, which he called the “transitional object”, in other words, the shred of blanket or beloved shard the child’s lips and hands never stop touching. This is, frankly, no more than an emblem; *representation’s representative* [italics added] in the absolute condition is in its proper place in the unconscious, where it causes desire in accordance with the structure of fantasy I will extract from it. For it is clear here that man’s continued nescience of his desire is not so much nescience of what he demands, which may after all be isolated, as nescience of whence he desires. (*E*, p.689)

This reference to an object – described as ‘representation’s representative’ – is significant because it marks an important stage in the development of Lacan’s concept of *objet a*. For now, however, let us return to the algorithm for fantasy.

Read as the fixation of the subject at the point in the cycle where subjective emergence and the assumption of a structural position is impending on the cusp of alienation and separation, the algorithm represents the formula for neurotic structure with the characteristic questioning relation and indecision that results in a ‘paranoid tendency to interpret the intentionality’ of manifestations and signs in the o(O)ther when they appear (Penot, 2005, para.8). The neurotic subject is transfixed by an irresolvable question (either the impasse of sexuality or death/being) and proceeds, by way of fantasy, to mollify, if not resolve, the impossible dilemma of the unanswerable demand (desire) perceived as emanating from the other. It is this inter-subjective logic of fantasy – the internalised and projected assumptions of intentionality and motivation – that Lacan illustrates in his discussion on logical time.

To recall the previous discussion regarding logical time: the ‘three prisoner problem’ readily exemplifies how the human relation is fraught with distortion and impasse, not only as a result of the ‘mirror stage’ Imaginary register with its narcissistic

ego identification, but also within the Symbolic as the two registers intersect with the consequence that the nascent subject is riven from within. When put to the practical performative test, the three prisoner scenario ably demonstrates that abstract symbolic logic is shot through with internalisations and projections based upon assumptions and inferences regarding the actions, thought processes, motivations and intentionality of the o(O)ther. It is the aspect of practical performativity that distinguishes Lacan's praxis from *rational choice theory*, which remains at the abstract level of conscious symbolic logic. The Lacanian perspective would refute the contention that human behaviour can reliably be predicted by any abstract rational calculation of autonomous choice. In an asymmetric position of dependency, however, the subject is forced to adopt a position towards the Other. For Lacan, at this stage of his theoretical construction, the nascent subject is not only obliged to conform to the Symbolic Order, but begins to register and experience the relation with the first pangs of anxiety.

Although the process of identification with, and consequent alienation into the o(O)ther still holds out the promise of symbiotic completion through misrecognition in the Imaginary at the level of the ego, there is a paradoxical registration of anxiety as a consequence of the intersection with the Symbolic. Rather than the 'separation anxiety' that Freud postulates with the infant's symbolic mastery of the (m)other's absence – exemplified in Freud's *fort-da* scenario and Winnicott's concept of the 'transitional object' – Lacan insists that anxiety is located in the threat of stultifying immersion in the o(O)ther that becomes registered at the first initiation into the Symbolic.²¹ What starts out as demand (the request for love beyond the provision of need) becomes inverted and interpreted as a demand from the o(O)ther, and it is this that opens up the first gap, and the consequent first pangs of anxiety that signal the emergence of the subject in its minimal form. In a kind of defence, demand is transformed by desire – the locus of Law – and the possibility for Law emerges to mediate the unbridled demand from the

²¹ Verhaeghe (2009) makes the point that Freud and Lacan appear to attribute (castration) anxiety to a threat that emanates from the real father or mother; an observation that has given rise to criticism of their theories as anachronistic and 'phallogocentric'. Without doubt, their contextual location influenced the manner in which they expressed their theories. But, as Verhaeghe suggests, if one can 'get over' this aspect, there is more to be understood. There is no denying that there are real fathers and real mothers who are overbearing and smothering; however, the point that Lacan seems to be making is that it is the manifestation of the Other as it is socially projected onto the social roles ascribed to the 'mother' and 'father' that constitutes a sleight of hand Verhaeghe terms 'social cunning'.

o(O)ther. The Law, therefore, is not the cause of desire, but that which protects the subject and is a subset of desire that enables desire to be maintained. Lacan, at this point, formulates the status of desire as that which:

presents itself as independent of the Law's mediation, because Law originates in desire - owing to the fact that, by an odd symmetry, desire reverses the unconditionality of the demand for love, in which the subject remains subjected to the Other. (*E*, p.689)

To summarise and clarify the concept of the fundamental fantasy: the algorithm $\$ \diamond a$ at the end of the double curve vector, is Lacan's designation of the position of the nascent split subject in relation to the demand/desire of the other (*a – autre*) and represents the relational structure of fantasy in neurosis. As previously discussed, the hallmark of neurotic structure is the insatiable questioning with respect to the desire of the o(O)ther that goes hand-in-glove with the experience of anxiety as it arises from the lack in the signifying chain. Put simply, there is no answer or unequivocal meaning to be garnered from the Symbolic with respect to the question of the sexual relation (the quest of hysteria) and the existential question of death/being (the quest of obsession). The resultant neurotic symptom forms around one or other of these impasses or points of fixation. Each position, hysteria or obsession, aims at the amelioration of anxiety with a particular fantasy scenario, which functions to protect the nascent subject from the unbridled demand of the o(O)ther with the quest to discern the desire of the o(O)ther. At its apogee, this can result in the most extreme symptomatic manifestations. For example: acting out, conversion symptoms, hypochondria, phobia and restrictive cycles of ritualistic repetition, which variously represent the attempt to tame the annihilating force of generalised anxiety by providing a positive target that deflects and minimises the impact of Symbolic lack. The answer that cannot be found in the Symbolic is now projected as residing in the other; hence, the insatiable neurotic position of questioning that is represented by the algorithm for fantasy and its position on the third stage of the third graph.

The transitional third stage of the graph is intended to aid the understanding of the completed graph rather than illustrate a chronological developmental stage. It attempts to illustrate the ongoing synchronic cycles of the birth of the speaking subject on the alternating cusp of the planes of alienation and separation that mark the dynamic oscillation and transformation of demand into desire. As such, the third graph depicts the process of the emergence of the subject through *separation* as incomplete or held in abeyance. The other – designated a – is still perceived as demand and experienced as all encompassing (guaranteed by the Other) but paradoxically anticipated as offering the symbiotic attraction of identification that guarantees or promises completion or wholeness; hence, the first pangs of anxiety on the plane of alienation into the o(O)ther. The neurotic position within structure is such that the o(O)ther is not perceived to be subject to the absence created by symbolic castration and, therefore, has all the force of the Freudian superego demand without limitation. In technical terms, ‘the Other ... is still not “barred” by the symbolization of its possible absence and not yet marked by the incompleteness of its sexual identity’ (Penot, 2005, para.10).

Although the preceding conceptualisations of misrecognition, doubling, inverse transposition and incommensurability may be difficult to grasp in theoretical Lacanian jargon, they are the very stuff of the ‘I’ and the unpredictability and indeterminacy of everyday human relational dynamics mediated by language. The complex processes of identity construction, consolidation and subject formation are temporally dynamic and ongoing on the diachronic and synchronic axes and their entwinement on the planes of *alienation* and *separation*. It is within this oscillating flux of asymmetric power relations that anxiety is experienced and becomes a pivotal affect for Lacan: ‘For analysis, anxiety is a crucial term of reference, because in effect anxiety is that which does not deceive. But anxiety may be lacking’ (SXI, p.41). The latter condition refers to the perverse structural position where the matheme for the fundamental fantasy is reversed ($a \diamond \mathcal{S}$). The perverse structural position aligns itself on the side of the Other in a disavowal of symbolic castration. As such, the perverse subject takes up the function of the agent of the Law and can be identified by a characteristic absence of anxiety, to which the preceding quotation about anxiety from Seminar XI refers.

The use of the algorithm for the fundamental fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$) is not intended to exemplify a universal formula or meta-language that subtends all human relations. Quite the reverse. Lacan's intention is to demonstrate that every relation constructed in fantasy has its own particularity, and this is where the double inflection of *a* as the 'little other' (*autre*) and *a* as an object that enables separation from the other through a particular fantasy scenario comes into play. Again, to substantiate this reading, an extended quote from the primary source is warranted:

For if we are to rediscover the pertinence of all this, a sufficiently sophisticated study, that can only be situated in the context of analytic experience, must enable us to complete the structure of fantasy by essentially linking here ... the moment of fading or eclipse of the subject - which is closely tied to the *Spaltung* or splitting he undergoes due to his subordination to the signifier - to the condition of an object (whose privilege I have done no more than touch on above in reference to diachrony).

This is what is symbolized by the abbreviation ($\$ \diamond a$), which I have introduced as an algorithm; and it is no accident that it breaks the phonemic element constituted by the signifying unit right down to its literal atom. For it is designed to allow for a hundred and one different readings, a multiplicity that is acceptable as long as what is said about it remains grounded in its algebra. This algorithm and the analogs of it used in the graph in no way contradict what I said earlier about the impossibility of a metalanguage. (*E*, p.691)

Rather than a meta-language, what Lacan (aided by the abstraction of quasi-mathematical algorithms and their diagrammatic depiction on the graph of desire) asserts is the universality of the dynamic processes involved in symbolic castration. In particular, he emphasises the temporal disjuncture of 'logical time', the salience of anxiety on the planes of alienation and separation, and the three resultant psychic structures, *psychosis*, *neurosis*, and *perversion* (which represent 'moments' in the birth of the speaking subject where movement through the cycles of emergence becomes halted, and a position within structure assumed).

In the circumstances of any particular (power) relation, which is always asymmetric to a lesser or greater degree, a structural position will be assumed. Identity and subjectivity can thus be distinguished as temporal movements that oscillate on the planes of alienation and separation, similarity and difference, metonymy and metaphor. Any trans-subjective relation involves the assumption of a structural position in relation to the o(O)ther and repetition is of utmost importance in its formation and continuing consolidation. It is important to recognize, however, that repetition on the plane of alienation is a conservative move to quell the unrestrained annihilating force of anxiety by assuming a position that employs fantasy. Most often, the fantasy is aimed at a state of perfect co-ordination with the ego-Ideal that can never be attained; hence, the ongoing restrictive cycles. The impossibility of being able to replicate an Imaginary fantasmatic ideal provides the perpetual motion of repetitive cycles of human relationality at the level of narcissistic ego identifications. An example from musical performance is instructive on this point.

No matter how many times a piece of music is performed, even under the strictest conditions of adherence to a musical score or other prescribed institutional practices, it will never be the same as any other performance. Moreover, the ideal to which any performance is aimed (a politically and aesthetically adjudicated norm) is, indeed, a fantasy; a figuring of the *ego Ideal*. This idea can be expanded to the performative function as an aspect of identity formation and consolidation in any domain. The more tightly a performance on the plane of alienation attempts to adhere to an ideal, or internalised norm, the less flexible and more repetitive it becomes as the split subject is unable to coincide across the disjuncture of imaginary misrecognition, symbolic identification and consequent castration. Once locked into cycles of repetition, the more difficult any flexibility and change becomes. From such a vantage point, change – whether construed (somewhat erroneously) as residing at an individual, or a collective level – appears no simple matter. Central to this difficulty is the fundamental *misrecognition* that occurs; not only in the Imaginary, but (as the third graph demonstrates) with its intersection with the Symbolic and the subsequent emergence of the split between the ‘subject of the statement’ and the ‘subject of the enunciation’ (which Lacan seeks to demonstrate with the upper level of the completed graph). The

critical question that arises from the example given above relates to the conditions of possibility for a performative mode on the plane of separation that may incite movement and expansion rather than the stasis, doubt, and restrictive cycles of repetition that stymie desire in the structural positions of neurosis and perversion. Accordingly, the discussion is now poised to proceed to an explanation of the completed graph, and the relation between the upper and lower levels it depicts.

Commentary on the Complete Graph of Desire

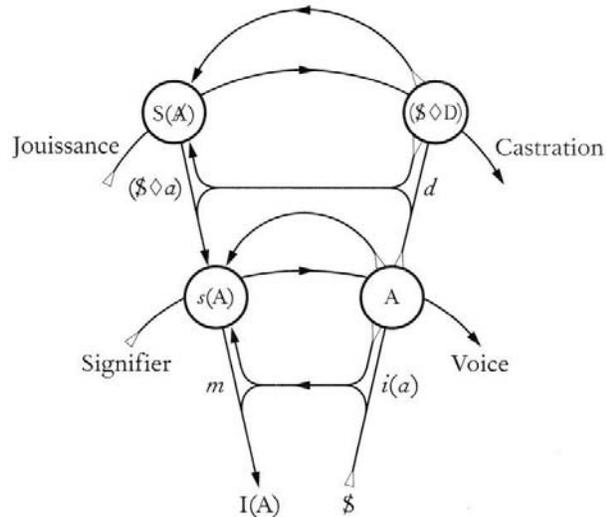


Figure 6: The complete graph

Note. From Lacan, J. (2006). *Écrits* (B. Fink, Trans.). New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, p.692.

The completed version of the graph of desire (Figure 6) reveals distinct upper and lower levels. It depicts the precarious status of the subject of desire – beyond the automatic narcissistic mimicry of the Imaginary (the domain of the ego) and the evanescent temporal disjuncture of the Symbolic – as a perpetual refugee within the dynamic cycles and cross-cutting between representation and affect, language and

jouissance. As Bruce Fink (2004) deftly puts it, ‘if language is what makes us different from animals, *jouissance* is what makes us different from machines’ (p.124). The lower level of the graph, organised around the left to right vector (*Signifier* → *Voice*) refers to language and signification while the upper level, organised around the vector (*Jouissance* → *Castration*) refers to affective ‘enjoyment’, or the term Lacan coined and preferred, *jouissance*. Although most frequently translated as ‘enjoyment’, there is no adequate translation that renders *jouissance* accurately in English (Evans, 1999, p.1). Due to its pivotal place in Lacan’s oeuvre, a short departure is warranted to broadly introduce the various inflections that the term *jouissance* implies.

Jouissance.

In conjunction with the concept of pleasure, the French term *jouissance* encompasses both sexual and legal connotations that the translation as ‘enjoyment’ in English does not adequately convey. Initially, Lacan’s use of the term denoted no more than the English term ‘pleasure’, however, during the seminars of the 1950s, he extended it in several directions (Evans, 1999, p.1).

In the field of sexuality, *jouissance* refers to *le petit mort*; ‘the little death’ of orgasm that functions as the brake that bounds and marks a limit point of physical excitation. Undoubtedly, on occasions, Lacan uses the qualified term *phallic jouissance* in this way to distinguish a diminished form of *jouissance* that remains accessible to the speaking being as a consequence of symbolic castration. In many respects, this qualified term is closer to the connotation of ‘pleasure’. However, the term is by no means confined to this specific connotation. In general, the use of the term *jouissance* encompasses a broader spectrum beyond the physical aspects of sexual pleasure (Evans, 1999, p.22).

In legal terms, *jouissance* denotes the concept of usufruct: ‘The right of temporary possession, use, or enjoyment of the advantages of property belonging to another, so far as may be had without causing damage or prejudice to this’ (OED). In general, Lacan employed this inflection in reference to the Hegelian master/slave dialectic, where the master retains the right to the enjoyment derived from the products

of the slave's labour. By 1960, however, the term expanded, yet again, to a realm of 'enjoyment' beyond the limiting action of the pleasure principle, and it is to this that the term on the graph of desire refers (Evans, 1999, p.3).

The upper level of the graph of desire is organised around the reflexive arc as it emerges from the lower level of the graph and intersects with the left to right vector (*Jouissance* → *Castration*). The subject of desire that emerges from the process of symbolization is seemingly bounded by a prohibition (lack) that delimits *jouissance*, a category of unbearable 'enjoyment' that is posited to 'ex-sist' beyond or outside the pleasure attainable within the Symbolic realm to which the subject, as a speaking being, is indentured. There is, for example, a perceptible paradoxical point of reversal where pleasurable laughter, as a release that diminishes tension, spills over into an uncontrollable condition that operates in the opposite direction; a crescendo of excitation that becomes intolerable and painful. Paradoxically, however, the unbearable quality of the reversal retains a 'pleasurable' aspect. In such circumstances it is possible to apprehend the simultaneous existence of opposing forces of pleasure and pain, and the possibility of the transgression of the boundary that seemingly divides the two. The effects that are symbolically perceived as unbearable or unpalatable nevertheless retain a horrifying or disavowed attraction that is irresistible. The paradoxical nature of *jouissance* implies that beyond mere pleasure that serves to limit excitation, a devastating 'enjoyment' is gained but consciously registered as displeasure, pain or suffering.

In clinical terms, Freud first noted this category of paradoxical pleasure when describing cases where his patients were inextricably attached to their negative symptoms. The well documented case of the Rat Man provides a pertinent example of such discernable effects (SE, 10, pp.151-318). While describing the persistent horror that plagued him, Freud noticed that the Rat Man's narrative was accompanied with a concomitant paradoxical look of satisfaction on his face; an enjoyment that, in Freudian terms, signalled the fulfilment of a repressed element outside conscious awareness. Although both disturbing and unpalatable at the level of the Imaginary and Symbolic, the symptom appeared to gratify and provide a different kind of satisfaction beyond the pleasure principle. *Jouissance*, in this context, is the paradoxical 'enjoyment' that is

derived from a seemingly negative symptom, and it is this satisfaction that Lacan proposes to be the libidinal glue that sutures the symptom and anchors subjectivity to a particular structural relation within the dialectic of desire. The peculiarity of the symptom is that it masks the satisfaction of an element that presents itself to the ego as something that it does not want. The symptom, thus portrayed, functions on two levels and serves the purpose of securing or suturing the subject at the level of *jouissance* that subtends representation and language, as figured on the two levels of the graph. The insufficiency of translation of the French term into English must always be kept in mind, because even terms such as ‘enjoyment’ and the implication that there is a kind of ‘satisfaction’ involved can be misleading. The realm of *jouissance* is only partially compatible with the usual understanding of such terms.²²

Within the specific context of the graph, *jouissance* is to be understood as that which is prohibited by the structure of subjectivity as it is circumscribed and dictated by the automatic functioning of signification which is depicted in the lower graph. Symbolic castration involves the subjection of the human organism, understood in its primordial status as living flesh in a state of radical prematurity and lack of coordination, to the signifier. While bestowing coherence to the organism by transforming it into an Imaginary body, the speaking subject emerges at the cost of an apparent prohibition; direct access to *jouissance*. *Jouissance* is thus posited as a prohibited paradoxical ‘enjoyment’ that involves the dissolution of difference, and is marked by the seemingly impossible (and intolerable) co-existence of contradictory elements of both pleasure and pain beyond any rational calculation or utility, an inflection to the term that is more clearly articulated later in Seminar XX. All that can be apprehended from the graph of desire at the time it was advanced in the paper on *The subversion of the subject* (1960), however, is the first indications of a pivotal expansion that occurred in Lacan’s work from an initial emphasis on the Symbolic and language towards the realm of *jouissance* and the register of the Real. It is important to bear in mind that the initial

²² Rather than a comprehensive synopsis, the foregoing explanations constitute a general introduction to the meaning(s) of the term *jouissance* as it appears within the Lacanian oeuvre. It must, however, be explicitly noted that, in his later teachings, Lacan conceptually develops and defines several modes of *jouissance*.

For a complete overview of Lacan’s use of the term see Evans (1999), pp.1-28; and Miller (2000), pp.7-27.

indications of these concepts and algorithms on the graph of desire became overlaid with multiple inflections as their central importance evolved in Lacan's later work. For the purposes of the present discussion, however, an introduction to the terms and algorithms as they appeared on the complete graph – particularly the relationship between the terms figured on the lower and upper portions of the graph – presents the most accessible path towards an explanation of the contours of that expansionary shift.

Briefly to recapitulate and summarise: the lower graph demonstrates the capture of the human organism within the signifying chain of the o(O)ther through the process of mimetic identification(s), capture and *alienation* into the pre-ordained system of language. This secures an 'ex-sistence' for the nascent subject that is both decentred and external. Secured at this point in the cycle of the birth of the speaking subject, the human organism is transformed through the defiles of the signifier into a pre-destined mechanistic *automaton* as the 'subject of the statement (enunciated)'. The status of the subject is subordinated to the matrix of differential relations of the diachronic and synchronic dimensions of language. The nascent subject is minimally designated by the shifter 'I', and subjugated to the dictates of the signifying relations and retroactive meaning imposed by the Other. The Other, in this instance, is to be understood as the differential relational system of language into which the nascent subject is inserted. The subject of the statement, therefore, has the liminal status of that which is represented by one signifier for another in a web of associations, an opaque designation that falls short of any direct signification. Representation in language proves insufficient insofar as the nascent subject is perpetually displaced (the metonymic diachronic axis) and subjugated (the metaphoric synchronic axis) as it is fleetingly represented by one signifier after another, without any anchor other than the contingent *point(s) de capiton* that are retroactively imposed by the o(O)ther. According to Lacan, however, the process of signification produces an excessive element that cannot be contained within signification. The excessive element that precludes the closure of the circuit of alienation in the o(O)ther is designated by the appearance of *voice* as the outcome of the signifying chain represented by the left to right vector *Signifier* → *Voice* on the lower level of the graph.

The production of an excluded remainder introduces a gap or lack that is paradoxical. The process of signification is never complete, and the remainder that escapes the symbolic chain is a gap that assumes the retroactive effect of loss; a hypothesised loss of direct access to the enjoyment of the animal body that ensues as the necessary consequence of the human organism's capture by, and complete dependence upon, language for survival. Consequently, the remainder produced by the process of symbolic castration is a loss that, necessarily, has no representable symbolic content. As the explanation of the lower level of the graph has already elucidated, the gap concerned cannot be apprehended in spatial terms as a static empty space. It is a temporal disjuncture that is registered as a negative presence that can be discerned only through the effects it produces. It is important to note that the only gestures that Lacan makes with respect to the figuration of *voice* as the excessive remainder on the graph of desire may be observed in the algorithms for drive ($\$ \diamond D$) and fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$). To interrogate this observation further, we will now proceed to Lacan's figuration and explanation of the upper level of the graph.

Rather than representing any progressive stage, the upper level of the graph is to be apprehended as the synchronic lining that corresponds to unconscious desire. Unconscious desire is coextensive with the process of signification; the dual operation and entwinement of the Imaginary and Symbolic which is apprehendable at the level of both specular images and words represented by the lower level. Put simply, the lower level depicts conscious knowledge derived from specular images; their (mis)perception, translation, interpretation and punctuation through the conduit of the other in the linguistic structure of language as the symbolic Other. The upper level depicts unconscious desire as the concomitant realm of a different dimension of knowledge at the level of enunciation; the 'knowledge' of unconscious desire that subtends conscious symbolic knowledge.

Reading from the reflexive upward arc on the right of the graph, the nascent split subject of desire (d) encounters the left to right vector *jouissance* \rightarrow *castration* at the intersection $\$ \diamond D$ (the algorithm for *drive*). The nascent subject of desire (d) is positioned at the cusp of the transformation of *need* (as figured as the original delta (Δ) of the reflexive arc on the first graph) into *demand* (D). Demand and desire thus emerge

as a condition of human trans-subjective interaction at the most fundamental level. Most commonly construed as the demand placed upon the infant by the o(O)ther to conform to the requirements of the social-cultural order, demand can also be located on the side of the infant. From the outset, the infant's cry requires interpretation and thus establishes a 'primordial discursive circuit' with the mother/primary caregiver that marks the subjection of human beings to the trans-subjective domain of language and the transferential relation of the unconscious (Rodriguez, 2001, p.57). As the most fundamental form of verbal demand, the cry that subsequently evolves into the lalling between mother/primary caregiver and child marks a departure from any natural or instinctual domain. Even at this primal level, need is diverted and modified by demand, and a condition of contingency in the relation between drive and desire is set in motion.

As the third stage of the graph succinctly demonstrates, the genesis of desire (*d*) is located on the upper level of the graph in the trans-subjective domain that emerges between need and demand: 'Desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first term from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting (*Spaltung*)' (*E*, p.580). It is at this junction that Lacan locates the genesis of drive, designating it with the algorithm $\$ \diamond D$. Before we examine the specific elaboration of Lacan's conceptualisation of drive, however, it is apposite to give a brief outline of the concept as it was appropriated and developed from the Freudian opus. As Lacan pointed out, Strachey's *Standard edition* translation of both *Treib* (drive) and *Instinkt* (instinct), as 'instinct', obscured the crucial distinction to be made between the two terms; that distinction being the contention that drive does not emanate from an uncomplicated biological origin or determination and, therefore, is not to be understood as an innate instinctual constituent for human beings. The domain of human sexuality is thus removed from any simplistic biological reductionism that is analogous to animal life.

Drive.

Indicating the existence of a cusp between soma and psyche, the concept of drive (*Trieb*) is the quintessential marker of Sigmund Freud's theory of human sexuality.

Unlike animal life where instinct is understood as a relatively invariable innate relation to an object, Freud maintained that human sexuality was governed by the highly variable vicissitudes of drive. Due to the prematurity of the human infant at birth, instinctual need becomes malleable and contingent upon the context of the family scenario, and the consequent influence and *demand* of social-cultural calibration (Evans, 2003, p.46). Put simply, instinct – understood as a primal need such as hunger and thirst – can be satisfied. For human beings, however, instinct is not fully operational and, as a consequence, instinct is transformed into the constant force of drive that can never be satiated.

Freud attributed drive with four distinctive characteristics; the aforementioned constant pressure (*Drang*), its source (*Quelle*), the object around which it is oriented (*Objekt*), and its aim (*Ziel*). For Freud, the polymorphous perversity of the infant's drive impulses emanated from developmental prematurity; however, he proposed that the oral, anal and phallic phases of drive became unified under the auspices of a singular genital drive with the successful negotiation of the Oedipus complex. Thus, the term 'drive' (in the singular form) signals the maturation and cohesion of the oral, anal and phallic phases represented as partial stages on the pathway to the integration of a singular human drive outcome.

After discussing these concepts in Seminar XI, Lacan made two important diversions from the Freudian theory of drive. First, he asserted that the phases of the drive (as presented by Freud) never achieve any unity and remain heterogeneous elements that he nominated as partial drives. Second, 'the partial drives' (plural) depicted by Lacan are not partial insofar as they constitute parts of a potentially integrated and unified singular drive; they are partial because each drive is the torsion that remains around the remnant that is produced by the process of symbolic castration. These remnants accumulate around the rims, surfaces and orifices of the body that the signifier designates as points of exchange or loss. The drives are thus removed from any biologically determined source, as Freud appeared to suggest, and are instead located at the juncture of 'the cut' (\diamond) of symbolic castration upon the human organism. The agent of 'the cut' is the signifier through the auspices of the demand of the Other, but the process, as witnessed by the lower level of the graph, produces a negative remainder that

marks the genesis of desire. It is around this excessive negative remainder that the partial drives are oriented. As Brousse (1995) succinctly summarises this dynamic:

The signifier bars need and produces the drive. The drive is the result of the operation of the signifier on need, which produces a remainder. Something escapes, and that is desire. The drive is defined by Lacan as the result of the functioning of the signifier, that is, of demand: the Other's demand. (p.106)

The formation of partial drives can now be more clearly understood as a linguistic phenomenon that emanates contingently and concurrently with the process of signification (as depicted on the lower level of the graph). With these important ideas in mind, the discussion now returns to the elaboration of drive as a heterogeneous set of partial drives that are figured on the upper level of the graph of desire.

Like the parallel intersection A on the lower level of the graph, Lacan describes drive as 'the treasure trove of signifiers' of the diachronic structure of the upper level (the left-to-right vector through which the nascent subject passes and is retroactively determined). He asserts that drive – as a heterogeneous set of partial drives – constitutes the lexicon of unconscious desire. As the partial drives arise, however, Lacan asserts that both the subject ($\$$) and demand (D) disappear. The partial drives are thus occluded from any direct signification within the trans-subjective discursive circuit. These ideas are expounded in a particularly obscure passage in *The subversion of the subject* (E, p.692), where Lacan defines the algorithm for drive ($\$ \diamond D$) as the fading or disappearance of the split subject in the face of demand: 'the drive is what becomes of demand when the subject vanishes.' Moreover, he adds that as the subject disappears, so does demand, leaving 'the cut' of castration, the dynamic that is depicted by the lozenge:

It goes without saying that demand also disappears, except that the cut remains, for the latter remains present in what distinguishes the drive from the organic function it inhabits: namely, its grammatical artifice, so manifest in the reversals of its articulation with respect to both source and object. (E, p.692)

The transformation of need into demand occurs through the process of signification and constitutes the birth of the subject as a speaking being. As the previous discussion has attested, the subject cannot be directly signified, but ‘ex-sists’ as the subject of unconscious desire that fleetingly impinges upon the discursive utterings of the Symbolic through gaps, parapraxes, jokes and dreams. As soon as the subject appears in speech, it simultaneously disappears under the signifier that carries with it the demand of the o(O)ther. Demand is thus transposed into the activity of the partial drives, the agents of an unconscious that then subtends and intrudes within conscious thought and speech. All that remains as both subject and demand disappear is the torsion of drive-related activity, accumulated around the cut that delineates the ‘margins and borders’ of the body; the erogenous zones that are marked by the loss of the object Lacan describes as the excessive remainder of the process of signification.

‘The cut’ of symbolic castration and the transformation of need by demand becomes the genesis of the partial drives. Just as signifiers are the component elements of the signifying chain, the partial drives comprise the lexicon of unconscious desire. Rather than any instinctual force of biological origin (such as Strachey’s translation of Freud’s *trieb* into English as ‘instinct’ might suggest), for Lacan, the drives are an artifice of language. The irrevocable impact of symbolic castration upon the human organism is registered by the perpetual, partial and variable contours of drive activity. In the text of *The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire*, Lacan proceeds to enumerate the lost objects around which the partial drives are oriented:

The very delimitation of the “erogenous zone” that the drive isolates from the function’s metabolism ... is the result of a cut that takes advantage of the anatomical characteristic of a margin or a border.... Let us note that this characteristic of the cut is no less obviously prevalent in the object described by analytic theory: the mamilla, the feces, the phallus (as an imaginary object), and the urinary flow. (An unthinkable list, unless we add, as I do, the *phoneme*, the *gaze*, the *voice* ... and the *nothing* [italics added].) For isn’t it plain to see that the characteristic of being partial, rightly emphasized in objects, is applicable not because these objects are part of a total object, which the body is assumed to be,

but because they only partially represent the function that produces them? (*E*, pp.692-93)

Lacan thus extended the Freudian list of lost objects to include the *phoneme*, the *gaze*, the *voice*, and the *nothing*. This reference marks the genesis of Lacan's conceptualisation of *objet a*, a pivotal development in Lacanian praxis.²³

As remnants of the process of signification figured in the lower portion of the graph, the objects around which the partial drives are oriented cannot be captured by the specular relation of the Imaginary, or the Symbolic function (language). As exclusions, they nonetheless exert their 'uncanny' (*jouissance*) effects as elements that are lost, thus inciting the perpetual motion of the partial drives that ceaselessly attempt to recover them. Lacan describes them as objects that:

have no specular image, in other words, no alterity. This is what allows them to be the "stuff" or, better put, the lining – without, nevertheless, being the flip side – of the very subject people take to be the subject of the unconscious. For this subject, who thinks he can accede to himself by designating himself in the statement, is nothing but such an object.

It is to this object that cannot be grasped in the mirror that the specular image lends its clothes. A substance caught in the net of the shadow, and which, robbed of its shadow-swelling volume, holds out once again the tired lure of the shadow as if it were substance.²⁴ (*E*, p.693)

Thus, Lacan clearly maps out the contours of the kernel of the subject as distinct from the ego formation of the Imaginary. Indeed, the Imaginary and Symbolic realms can now be apprehended as the progenitors of an enigmatic absence that forms the nucleus of drive-related activity around which the conscious ego forms as a deceptive appearance

²³ Chapter 2 will address and examine this subject in further detail.

²⁴ In *Écrits* (1966), Lacan adds a footnote to the first sentence in this passage that indicates that it was added to the original paper (1960) in 1962. This coincides with the further theorisation of *objet a* that took place in Seminar X: Anxiety (1962-63). This retrospective adjustment adds more coherence to the explanation of the graph than was originally presented; a point that Lacan specifically acknowledges with respect to several additions to the original paper.

of unambiguous self-recognition, coherence and substance. With the foregoing discussion and explanations in mind, we can now return to the reflexive arc on the upper level of the graph; to consider the fate of the nascent subject in relation to the vicissitudes of the partial drives with the encounter with the signifier of lack $S(\mathcal{A})$.

The partial drives that lure and propel the transit of the nascent subject at the upper level of unconscious enunciation, unlike the signifiers (A) in the lower level, remain disparate elements that do not cohere. As heterogeneous elements that only partially represent the function that produces them, they are unable to constitute any coherent unity; hence, the subject ‘fades’ at the upper level.²⁵ The second intersection at the level of unconscious enunciation – designated by the formula for the signifier of a lack in the Other $S(\mathcal{A})$ – has no foundational guarantee other than the force of its enunciation. This manifestation of lack is one of radical contingency, as opposed to any foundation of unequivocal meaning or truth. Various described as the paternal metaphor – the Name-of-the-Father, the phallus, the signifier of lack – this algorithm is perhaps the most over-determined aspect of the graph. In the text of *The subversion of the subject*, Lacan states that ‘there is no Other of the Other’ (E, p.693). The signifier of lack $S(\mathcal{A})$ bears witness to a second dimension of lack. Put simply, there is no guarantee underpinning human subjectivity at the level of the Other. Not only is the subject lacking, but the Other is also lacking. It is this second lack that paradoxically offers the subject freedom from total determination and affords (albeit a narrow and difficult opportunity) a breathing space where the subject can gain a further *separation* from *alienation* in the Other. Lacan portrays it thus:

What the graph now offers us is situated at the point at which every signifying chain takes pride in closing its signification. If we are to expect such an effect from unconscious enunciation, it is here in $S(\mathcal{A})$ and read as: signifier of a lack in the Other, a lack inherent in the Other’s very function as the treasure trove of

²⁵ The notion of ‘fading’ (*aphanisis*) is a redefinition of the term coined by Ernest Jones to denote the disappearance of sexual desire. For Jones, fear of *aphanisis* gives rise to the castration complex. For Lacan, however, *aphanisis* designates the fading or disappearance of the subject that constitutes the neurotic subject position which tries to shield and protect the subject from desire. See Evans, 2003, p.12 for an overview of this redefinition.

signifiers. And this is so insofar as the Other is called upon (*chè vuoi*) to answer for the value of this treasure, that is, to answer for its place in the lower chain certainly, but with the signifiers constitutive of the upper chain – in other words, in terms of the drive. The lack at stake is one I have already formulated: that there is no Other of the Other. (*E*, p.693)

The signifier of a lack in the Other, $S(\mathcal{A})$, is a pure signifier without any referent. It is founded simply upon the assertion of its enunciation *creatio ex nihilo*: ‘It is, as such, unpronounceable, but its operation is not, for the latter is what occurs whenever a proper name is pronounced. Its statement is equal to its signification’ (*E*, p.694). The junction $S(\mathcal{A})$ is thus accorded a founding function as a ‘pure signifier’ that inserts the speaking subject into the Symbolic world and social order through nothing other than the force of nomination. It is the originary signifier of primal repression to which all other signifiers refer. Without this, all other signifiers lose their power of representation and meaning. If the signifier of lack is lacking, signification, division and the formation of the unconscious as a matrix of associative differential elements dissolves. For Lacan, this is *foreclosure*, the realm of psychosis. It is pertinent, however, to recall that at the time of its formulation, the graph of desire was primarily oriented towards the figuration of the birth of the speaking subject and the function of fantasy ($\mathcal{S} \diamond a$) as the pillar of the structural position of *neurosis*.

Within the context of Lacan’s clinical practice, neurosis was not merely one of three possible subjective positions, but the most prevalent position that typified most human beings (whether the fantasy fixation produced symptoms that could be deemed pathological or not). Accordingly, it is to the figuration of fantasy $\mathcal{S} \diamond a$ as a fixture in the life of the vast majority of speaking subjects that the reflexive arc now descends from the signifier of lack in the Other $S(\mathcal{A})$ on the left hand side of the graph. If the reflexive arc is traced beyond its apogee in the upper vector, it descends to the algorithm for fantasy ($\mathcal{S} \diamond a$). Here again, a fledgling reference to *objet a* can be seen. If we recall the commentary on the third graph with reference to the algorithm for fantasy, Lacan refers to:

the moment of a fading or eclipse of the subject – which is closely tied to the *Spaltung* or splitting he undergoes due to his subordination to the signifier – to the condition of an object (whose privilege I have done no more than touch on above in reference to diachrony) ... it is no accident that it breaks the phonemic element constituted by the signifying unit right down to its literal atom'. (*E*, p.691)

The structural position of neurosis is such that the subject, although split by the process of signification, is caught in a constant equivocation and quest with respect to the desire of the Other that is felt as unremitting demand. The fantasy scenario – utilised in both hysterical and obsessional modalities – employs the object (the excessive object as remainder that forms the nucleus of partial drive activity) in a paradoxical way. The spectral object (*objet a*) is utilised to maintain the gap through which the split subject emerges, but also to veil the lack in the Other; a conservative measure that turns back towards the quest for completion in the Other.

The subject located in the structural position of neurosis employs fantasy as a paradoxical mechanism of defence against exposure to the lack in the Other. In so doing, it does not fully accede to the position of the subject of desire and its necessary condition of lack. As the commentary on the third graph (above) has outlined, the neurotic defence takes the form of a question in either hysterical or obsessive modalities. For the hysteric, the question equivocates around sexuality – ‘Am I man or woman?’ – and becomes manifest in symptomatic formations that elicit the desire of the Other in order to identify it, followed by repudiation and refusal to assent to the position as object of the o(O)ther’s desire. For the obsessional, the more fundamental existential question – ‘Am I alive or dead?’ – predominates, and becomes manifest in a constant warding off and distancing from the desire/lack in the Other through repetitive cycles, ritualistic behaviours and scenarios of disappearance. The neurotic question with respect to desire thus remains suspended in the trans-subjective existential questioning oriented towards the demand of the o(O)ther. By perpetually warding off the lack in the o(O)ther, the neurotic subject maintains his or her desire at the level of the Other from whom an answer is perpetually sought. The mechanism for this defence is *repression*. It is necessary, however, to distinguish between two facets of repression.

At the lower level of the signifying chain, repression is the metaphoric action of substitution of one signifier for another. This constitutes secondary repression: *Verdrängung*. It is these repressed signifiers (as ideational representatives of the partial drives) that return in the guise of jokes, dreams, and parapraxes, that can be mapped in free association. At the upper level of unconscious enunciation, primal repression – *Urverdrängung* – takes the form of a lack designated by the signifier of lack in the Other $S(A)$. The instigation of this ‘pure signifier’ is a structural necessity for signification itself to function. To recapitulate Verhaeghe’s analogy of the children’s sliding puzzle, it is necessary for one position in the matrix to remain blank to enable the matrix of tiles to move and reconfigure in relation to each other. It is the structural lack created through primal repression – the signifier of a lack in the Other – that the neurotic masks by the employment of fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$).

In the structure of neurosis portrayed by Lacan, fantasy acts as the support for desire, but through a fixation that remains anchored to the demand of the Other that can become increasingly restrictive and inhibiting. The agent of fixation in the structure of fantasy is the object denoted a . As the reflexive arc descends from the algorithm for fantasy and feeds back into the signifying chain at the lower level of the graph at the junction of punctuation $s(A)$, its importance as the libidinal glue that underpins meaning in the Symbolic can be observed. There is an oblique connection between *voice* (the remainder of *jouissance* that is the product of the signifying process); the object which facilitates separation from the other; the object around which drive activity oscillates; and the object utilised in fantasy (in both the preservation of and defence against desire). The relationship between desire and drive remains similarly equivocal. As much as the graph illustrates, it also remains open-ended with many questions and relationships left adrift. There is, however, one last comparison to be drawn between the upper and lower levels of the graph as we summarise the complete graph.

The upper level of the graph signals the birth of the subject of desire as the cleavage that emerges between need and demand. Desire is oriented towards an enigmatic questioning relation with the $o(O)$ ther, and the formation of the fundamental fantasy $\$ \diamond a$ – taking different structural positions for the sub-categories of neurosis (hysteria, obsession and phobia). As such, fantasy is an ingenious compromise that

allows the lack of symbolic castration to remain open, but veils it through the operation of a particular object. Stability is gained, but at the expense of flexibility. The upper level of the graph thus depicts a synchronic realm of unconscious desire where *separation* from the dictates of the o(O)ther is theoretically figured as a *possibility* at the level of the ‘subject of the enunciation’. The upper level of unconscious desire can be described as an evanescent performative dimension where the encounter with the lack in the o(O)ther – an encounter that has the potential to precipitate a crisis – offers the *possibility* of a subsequent discovery about the status of truth. However, the prevalent position of *neurosis* suggests that, for the majority of speaking beings, separation from the dictates of the o(O)ther remains incomplete. For Lacan, this crisis is seldom confronted other than in the course of analysis or an extraordinary life event (Fink, 2004, p.123). Such circumstances, he believed, perforate the efficacy of the fundamental fantasy that acts as a defence against both the force of demand and the enigma of the desire of the o(O)ther, a defence required because the lack in the o(O)ther is constantly repressed. As Chapter 2 will explain in detail, anxiety (the hinge between desire and *jouissance*) is the affect that Lacan designates with a privileged status as the analyst’s guide in the analytic process.

According to this reading, the graph of desire depicts the structure of neurosis, and the position of the neurotic subject as insufficiently exposed to the lack in the o(O)ther. Separation occurs only in the rare and difficult circumstances that force the recognition that there is no guarantee in the o(O)ther; whether construed as God, the rational, the scientific, the judicial or familial other. Not only does the subject not know what they desire, but the process of separation reveals that the o(O)ther is also marked by lack. In Lacanian terms, ‘there is no Other of the Other’. On both sides of the relational juxtaposition, what can be enunciated about desire not only falls short because it is indelibly inscribed by lack, but it becomes evident that what is expressed at the level of performative enunciation entails an inversion that precipitates a fundamental deception and misrecognition to cover over or compensate for the lack in the o(O)ther. This is witnessed by the opposing inner synchronic circuits at each level of the graph: the vector $m \rightarrow i(a)$ at the lower level, and vector $d \rightarrow S \diamond a$ at the upper level.

Misrecognition is superimposed and entwined on both levels of the completed graph. The second level of misrecognition receives its full contextual inclusion as the inner circuit of the upper level. Again, a quote from Lacan's *The subversion of the subject* substantiates and clarifies this point:

It should be noted that a clue may be found in the clear alienation that leaves it up to the subject to butt up against the question of his essence, in that he may not misrecognize that what he desires presents itself to him as what he does not want - a form assumed by negation in which misrecognition is inserted in a very odd way, the misrecognition, of which he himself is unaware, by which he transfers the permanence of his desire to an ego that is nevertheless obviously intermittent, and, inversely, protects himself from his desire by attributing to it these very intermittences. (*E*, p.691)

The misrecognition in the upper level of the graph is figured on the inner synchronic circuit that runs across the vector $d \rightarrow \mathcal{S} \diamond a$, although it is pertinent to note that the misrecognition is inverted when compared to the parallel vector $i(a) \rightarrow m$ on the lower level of the graph. In this way, desire (the domain of the upper level of the graph) presents itself to the ego (the domain of the lower level of the graph) as something that the ego must reject. The complex inversion and double misrecognition is given enigmatic form in Lacan's final assertion that 'castration means that jouissance has to be refused in order to be attained on the inverse scale of the Law of Desire' (*E*, p.700).

Conclusion

The subject of unconscious desire is thus depicted on the graph as a perpetual refugee, suspended between language and *jouissance* and split by temporal disjuncture that eclipses the subject at the level of consciousness. Adrift in the 'neverland' of the betwixt and between, the desiring subject – the subject of lack – inhabits the zone Lacan so aptly named *extimacy* (neither internal nor external) which arises with the formation of the unconscious upon imbrication within the trans-subjective Symbolic world of

human social bonds. Dependent on the solution of fantasy for a liminal 'ex-sistence', the subject portrayed on the graph of desire is destined to pursue a succession of real objects in the world in anticipation of satisfaction or completion; a paradoxical quest that must always fail in order to sustain the subject at a necessary distance from the o(O)ther. There are two significant points that should be made at this juncture to pave the way for the discussion of Lacan's subsequent developments of psychoanalytic theory.

First, for Lacan, the unconscious – as it forms concomitantly with entry into the Symbolic order – is not simply an inaccessible network of repressed signifiers, but is of the order of the '*non-realised*' or the '*unborn*' (SXI, pp.22-3). It is unable to take its place on the stage of consciousness because of the formations and subsequent impasses that are a pre-requisite for Symbolic representation and consciousness to emerge in the first place. Repression is to be understood within this framework not merely as the expulsion of material from consciousness, but as the action of negation which bars some possibilities from emerging into being in order to facilitate others. As a performative practice akin to musical improvisation, the free association of words identifies metonymic associations and metaphoric substitutions, gaps and parapraxes. In so doing, it locates the nodal points (*points de capiton*) evident in speech in the attempt to reveal and transform the 'operating system' that subtends conscious knowledge and action. Thus, a degree of insight into the structuring of conscious action can be partially revealed at the first level where signifiers repressed from consciousness can be recovered and reinscribed. For Freud and Lacan, however, this deconstructive-reconstructive process was ultimately insufficient. In their vast clinical experience, there always remained a kernel that could not be analysed or reached by symbolic means. If the free association of words, dream narrative, jokes and parapraxes reveal the structure of the unconscious that underpins speech and language, then the unconscious is in turn revealed to be an 'operating system' or network of associations woven around an inassimilable core, that Moncayo (2008, p.24) describes as the absence within the stone around which the flesh of a peach is formed. For Lacan, the conditions of possibility for the psychoanalytic act reside with the fundamental fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$), the particular relation the split subject has to this spectral kernel (*objet a*), in terms of *jouissance*. Unconscious

fantasy is tethered to an element beyond the grasp of signification and thus beyond any easy reconciliation or harmony to be achieved by symbolic means.

This brings us to a second point, of pivotal importance to this thesis. The scope of human relationality and social bonds are not to be understood to remain within the bounds of linguistic communication, the Habermasian notion of communicative rationality. For Lacan, the formation and ex-sistence of human subjectivity is the result of the effects of symbolic representation on the human organism. The subject produced is, however, paradoxically excluded from the domain of its genesis. As we shall see, the conceptualisation of the domain of the *Real* and its primary representative *objet a* became the focus of Lacan's later theorisation. As the preceding discussion attests, the embryonic indications of this expansion are evident on the graph of desire with the figuration of *voiced*, the references to the object around which the partial drives are oriented, and the place this object assumes in fantasy. As is often the case, Lacan builds upon and expands the theoretical foundations laid in his earlier work without eclipsing any of the multiple inflections and facets that his terms and concepts inevitably reflect and refract. His theorising is always left open-ended. Contrary to the expectation that a theory should provide a hermetically sealed, cohesive linear rational logic, Lacan's theory exemplifies his practice and vice versa. Rather than being a weakness, the unexplained and open-ended represent the opportunity to construct, and it is in this respect that Lacanian psychoanalytic praxis can be distinguished from deconstruction. While it provides a condensed visual summary of the complex formulations of his early theory, Lacan's graph of desire also gestures towards the 'unborn'. As noted previously, it is by no means complete, and leaves adrift many questions; in particular about the role of anxiety and the enigmatic object *a*.

CHAPTER 2

ANXIETY AND THE ENIGMATIC *OBJET A*

The problem of anxiety is a nodal point at which the most various and important questions converge, a riddle whose solution would be bound to throw a flood of light on our whole mental existence.

(Freud, *Introductory Lectures*, SE, 16, p.393)

Introduction

The chimerical operation of anxiety constituted a pivotal issue for Freud and proved to be a thirty-year conundrum positioned at the heart of psychoanalysis; a ‘riddle’ that defied resolution. In his return to Freud, Lacan similarly identified anxiety as a crucial nodal point for psychoanalysis; not only at an abstract theoretical level, but also in the practice of clinical analysis. ‘Anxiety’, he affirmed, ‘is always connected with a loss ... with a two-sided relation on the point of fading away to be superseded by something else, something the patient cannot face without vertigo’ (Lacan, as cited in Evans, 2003, pp.10 -11). For Lacan, anxiety emerges at the pivotal point of the genesis of the subject within the trans-relational structure of the Symbolic world. The structural position of neurosis that constitutes the primary focus of the graph of desire (discussed in detail in Chapter 1) depicts the clinical circumstance where: (i) separation from the o(O)ther is incomplete; and (ii) the symptoms of the analysand testify to the necessary maintenance of the distance required for the subject to ‘ex-sist’, even if those symptoms are negative and disturbing to the perception of the conscious ego. The symptom at this point in Lacan’s opus has the status of a signifier that reduces the force of anxiety. Through the function of unconscious fundamental fantasy, the neurotic seeks an answer by way of a demand from the Other, and maintains the Other without lack. However, a distance must be maintained. The agent of this paradoxical trans-subjective torsion is the particular object that Lacan formulated as *objet a*, the object of anxiety *par excellence*. The structural position of neurosis can thus be understood as an asymmetric relation,

suspended between the enigma of the desire of the Other and the demand from the Other around which the neurotic equivocates. The dual components of attraction and repulsion are in force. Although the structural positions of psychosis and perversion are acknowledged, Lacan appears to suggest that the majority of human beings fall into the structural category of neurosis, and are consequently subject to the necessity of unconscious fantasy. However, as we shall later see, not all individuals manifest disturbing symptoms.

Lacan's clinical experience and observations were focused on cases where the analysand experienced ongoing symptomatic difficulties that disrupted the course of their daily life. Moreover, his therapeutic practice was firmly anchored to the historical and cultural realities of life in post-War Europe. Both Freud and Lacan asserted that anxiety could be distinguished as a pivotal affect that is foundational to the human condition. Lacan further suggests, however, that anxiety is the affective guide through which the position of the individual analysand can be mapped within the structure of the social bond emulated through the transference relation of the psychoanalytic clinic.

For Lacan, the characteristic doubt and defence strategies of hysterical and obsessional neurosis represent an equivocal relational position where the lack in the o(O)ther needs to be simultaneously maintained and covered over (the paradoxical anchoring function of the fundamental fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$) that subtends conscious awareness in support of desire). The subject is first lured towards the Other, and then repelled and diverted to maintain a minimal distance. Anxiety arises in the transit between the oscillating planes of alienation and separation according to the relational position assumed in the trans-subjective circuit. Rather than the notion that separation causes anxiety, Lacan proposes that a lack of separation – the minimal distance required for the subject to form within the constraints of the o(O)ther – is the hallmark of the appearance of anxiety. The Lacanian aphorism that anxiety is the registration of the 'lack of lack' can thus be understood.²⁶

The purpose of this chapter is to trace the relationship between these understandings of anxiety, and to elucidate the specific theoretical and clinical nuances

²⁶ This represents an apparent opposition to canonical accounts and derivative common understandings of Freud that emphasise separation as the source of anxiety.

of Lacan's re-conceptualisation of Freud. In doing so, it pays particular attention to the introduction of the concept of *objet a*, outlined in Seminar X: *Anxiety* (1962-63). Given the orientation of this thesis towards a post-clinical utilisation of psychoanalysis within social theory (and its application(s) in post-Marxist discourse), it is useful first to discuss popular understandings of anxiety. An analysis of post-Freudian interpretations and subsequent psychological accounts of anxiety likewise facilitates an understanding of its place and function in Lacanian theory.

Anxiety: The Social and the Personal

The perception and assertion that we live in an age of heightened anxiety is hardly an innovative idea. The concept of anxiety – like the notion of trauma to which it is related – has entered everyday speech to the extent of banality, and has acquired a multiplicity of popular meanings that range from the threat of unspeakable traumatic devastation to a vague feeling of discomfort or unease that becomes manifest in an equally diverse set of symptomatic phenomena. At the personal level, Renata Salecl (2004) aptly suggests that the emergence of new categories of psychological disorder – such as ‘sudden wealth syndrome’ (affluenza), ‘adventure deficit disorder’, and an array of ‘body dysmorphic disorders’ – gives credence to the proposition that ‘anxiety arises from the changed perception the subject has of him or herself as well as from changes to their position in society at large’ (p.4). In this assertion, Salecl confirms the Lacanian view that any disturbance to the position of the subject within structure may give rise to the affect of anxiety.

On a broader sociological scale, the legacy of modernity is often related to the emergence of various manifestations of anxiety as reactions to a myriad of hypothesised causal factors, such as the accelerated pace of social change and related social crises. These changes and crises have included: the social and economic consequences of industrial capitalism, nationalist imperialism and colonisation; the death of God; the horrors of the World Wars (the Holocaust and Hiroshima); the economic and environmental effects of globalisation (encapsulated in issues such as climate change); and the demise of family life, stable interpersonal relationships and identity. The list of

possible causal factors is endless. Psychoanalytic theory suggests, however, that the common thread is *the incitement of the anticipation of a state of helplessness* which is experienced as anxiety. Anxiety can therefore be defined as a distinctive universal affect that emerges in the vicissitudes of the trans-subjective domain of human relationality. Even in times of economic prosperity, with unparalleled choice and technological advancement – and with the emergence of the post-modern notion that we inhabit a virtual ‘information age’ of simulacra where subjectivity is portrayed as a matter of individual autonomy and self-creation with the capacity to overcome structural constraints – anxiety, rather than disappearing, appears to emerge in a myriad of new forms. A question arises, however, about the extent to which these apparent advances might constitute the post-modern illusion of individual freedom and choice when, in fact, the reverse operation (of increasingly less autonomy and choice) is in force.

Salecl (2004) suggests that the sobering events of the first decade of the twenty-first century have burst the post-modern bubble of virtual self-creation and autonomy. Random terrorist attacks and the outbreak of novel viruses have brought together two of the most powerful images of contemporary anxiety: the external threat of the terrorist and the internal threat of the virus (Salecl, 2004, p.7). The contingent nature of these threats incites the most powerful force of anxiety, where the anticipation of unpredictable devastation in no way contributes to any positive action that effectively guarantees the safety or immunity of the individual/community. The high security measures employed against both terrorism and pandemic contagion serve a dual rationale. Not only do they index the impossible attempt to predict and outsmart the unpredictable, but perhaps more significantly, these measures function to alleviate the anxiety levels of the general population, making them more governable. The further implication to be drawn from this is that anxiety levels are open to manipulation within specific group dynamics. With the security measures imposed against terrorism and infection, the general effect is one of restriction and inhibition that paradoxically serves both to attenuate and reignite anxiety in a perpetual cycle. Ideologies – political, social, religious or personal – can thus be seen to influence the population at large through an apparent reduction of anxiety. As the following discussion will attest, however, this is an

inherently conservative move that tends to enslave subjectivity and radically reduce the opportunity for transformative change.

Salecl's example of the dual threat of the terrorist and the virus is particularly apposite to Lacanian theory insofar as it gestures towards the paradoxical realm where 'the cut' of the signifier (the division between internal and external) becomes suspended, and a state of generalised anxiety where the anticipation of annihilation by an unpredictable event that cannot in any way be forestalled is unleashed. At the social level, the security measures employed to combat terrorism facilitate the reduction of anxiety to the extent that there is a general acceptance of such measures as necessary to mitigate the possibility of an unpredictable attack with little critical interrogation of their effectiveness. These restrictions affect not only those under suspicion of terrorism, but every law-abiding individual as their daily lives are constantly subjected to surveillance and verification procedures. The paradox is apparent when the measures that initially reduce anxiety also raise a heightened awareness of the possibility of terrorism that incites anxiety anew. Similarly, the 2009 'swine flu' pandemic that precipitated the call for mass immunisation programmes and treatments (such as Tamiflu in New Zealand) illustrates that the anxiety induced by the anticipation of an unpredictable threat is such that any solution to reduce its brute force is likely to be accepted with a limited recognition of its safety or effectiveness. Once anxiety is incited at these potentially paranoid levels, populations and individuals become extremely malleable to the dominant discourse (which inevitably involves restrictions), a salient point that will be illustrated further in the discussion of Lacan's analysis of anxiety (below).

At the clinical level, the reduction of an individual's anxiety is increasingly pursued biologically through pharmacological treatment, or psychological therapies and interventions (such as cognitive behaviour therapy and systematic desensitization therapy) that aim to reinforce the ego, and to control and subdue anxiety levels. As Salecl (2004, p.69) suggests, the dominant discourse promoted in the popular media largely classifies anxiety as a symptom to be eliminated. The paradoxical result, however, is one where the cycle of anxiety appears to be reproduced and transmogrified with increased vigour, often through ever tightening regimes of repressive control, depressive states of extreme apathy, or acts of violence against the o(O)ther in its

externalised or internalised locus. The following appraisal from a recent general survey of anxiety from within the paradigm of contemporary psychology states:

Anxiety disorders are among the most common types of psychopathology (Achenbach, Howell, McConaughy, & Stanger, 1995), and they generally maintain a chronic course when untreated, resulting in substantial impairment across the lifespan (Feldner, Zvolensky and Schmidt, 2004). A large scale survey conducted in the United States has concluded that anxiety disorders constitute the single largest mental health problem in the United States (Barlow, 2002) and the most common category of diagnoses in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV, 1994). More people visit doctors for anxiety than for colds, and anxiety is now more common in the population than depression (Barlow, 1973). Indeed, anxiety is a predisposing factor to major depression (Bagby, Joffe, Parker, Kalembe, & Harkess, 1995) and to suicide attempts (Coryell, Noyes & House, 1986). (Zeidner & Matthew, 2011, p.178)

Anxiety is thus revealed as a mechanism that serves to maintain subjective formations with a chameleon-like ability to adapt to new circumstances with a variety of strategies in order to maintain the status quo. Any significant change, be it social or individual (if, indeed, it is valid to make such a distinction) cannot be negotiated without an encounter with the complex operation of anxiety. Moreover, what differentiates between anxiety as a realistic or a neurotic response (as Freud's account of anxiety below will illustrate) is often difficult to determine. Rather than maintaining a benign balance, psychoanalytic theory suggests that anxiety is a torsion that surrounds a fundamental state of incommensurability that denotes the kernel of the human condition. It is the primary indicator of structural constraint; the deadlock that bounds subjectivity on the *extimate* cusp of sensory excitations and mental phenomena, and activates the chain of identifications that seek to stabilise the subject through the structure of fantasy. To what extent this enables and/or inhibits human action is an equally paradoxical and complex question.

From this brief introductory commentary, it is clear that anxiety exists as a fundamental aspect of everyday human experience. As previously noted, this chapter aims to explore Freudian psychoanalytic concepts of anxiety and their reconfiguration and extension in the work of Jacques Lacan. More specifically, it will explain and illustrate Lacanian theory's contention that anxiety is not a symptom to be treated like any other, but rather that it functions as a pivotal guide in clinical practice. As such, it concerns the structural position of the subject of the unconscious in relation to *objet a*. Rather than any empirical material object, Lacan formulates *objet a* in multiple modalities to demonstrate his theory of unconscious fantasy in relation to subjectivity. Seminar X: *Anxiety* (1962-63) is pivotal to the explanation of anxiety, the relation between subject and object, and the evolution of Lacan's development of *objet a* in relation to the register of the Real. To better understand these trajectories, let us first consider the two apparently opposed theories about anxiety that mainstream interpretations of Freudian psychoanalysis propose.

Freud on anxiety.

Freud figured among the foremost neurologists of his time, and his theoretical psychoanalytic formulations were always informed and modified in accordance with his medical knowledge and practice. Rather than physiological symptoms, however, it was Freud's observations about the function and peculiarities of his patients' speech that led to the discovery of the unconscious and his subsequent formulation of psychoanalytic practice. Freudian psychoanalysis was not only circumscribed by the historical context of its genesis, but has also been subject to subsequent translations and (mis)interpretations. Lacan's so-called 'return to Freud' during the 1950s was primarily aimed at the correction of what he perceived to be a gross misinterpretation of the central concept of Freudian theory; the significance of language and its effects on the human organism. Rather than providing abstract and conjectural evidence, Freud's theories regarding anxiety were the result of his dialectical ethos that theory ought to be

formulated from clinical observation and modified in light of practice.²⁷ Analyses that divide Freud's work on anxiety into two distinctly opposing theories may constitute a simplification. Before we consider this point further, however, it is useful to outline these theoretical positions and their relationship to/influence on Lacan's thinking.

In Freudian theory, anxiety is inextricably entwined with the concept of repression and its pivotal function in the formation of the unconscious. In Freud's first formulation, anxiety was theorised as the product of repression. In concordance with a 'hydraulic' biological premise, this first hypothesis proposed that anxiety neurosis was incited when the adequate discharge of libidinal energies was impeded (Kahn, 2001, p.106; Salecl, 2004, p.18). Anxiety was thus theorised as a secondary symptomatic formation that occurred as the result of repression. But there remained an intractable difficulty with this hypothesis and it became apparent that a logical inconsistency underpinned this first theory. Freud was unable to reconcile 'how an anxious reaction towards an outside problem is related to an inner anxiety that the subject experiences' (Salecl, 2004, p.19). If repression was the cause of anxiety, then the question arose as to what constituted the cause of repression (Kahn, 2001, p.107). Thirty years later, with the publication of *Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety* (1936), Freud revoked his original hypothesis and reversed its terms with the notion that anxiety had a fundamental constitutional role in the formation of the psyche.

As the consequence of the emergence and apperception of an internal state of anxiety, Freud's second theory proposed that repression is activated in order to allay its worst manifestations. Anxiety was thus posited as a fundamental necessity to provide the motive power for action. Without it the human organism would not be able to react to situations of danger. Put simply, anxiety was posited as a signal; the necessary early warning system that protects us from danger and automatically activates a heightened state of physiological arousal in order to act. The question for Freud, however, was how to differentiate between pathological anxiety and realistic anxiety. 'Why', he asked, 'are not all reactions of anxiety neurotic – why do we accept so many of them as normal?' (Freud, 1936, p.158)

²⁷ It is pertinent to note that both Freud and Lacan remained adamant that psychoanalysis was a scientific endeavour, albeit a distinctly alternative science of the unconscious subject (Homer, 2005, p.66).

In psychodynamic terms, anxiety ‘can be provisionally defined as a set of familiar, unpleasant physiological events ... that may or may not be accompanied by a cognitive explanation’ (Kahn, 2001, p.195). In addition to bodily symptoms such as breathlessness, palpitations, muscle tension, fatigue, dizziness, sweating, and tremor, anxiety is characterised by nebulous mental phenomena of apprehension (Evans, 2003, p.10). In his most rudimentary understanding, Freud appeared to make a clear differentiation between anxiety and fear. Thus construed, anxiety (automatic anxiety) constitutes the emergence of physiological events without any clear object cause, while fear (signal anxiety) is activated in response to a specifically identifiable object. The assumption of a definite object of anxiety, he suggested, transforms the unbearable nature of generalised anxiety into a fear that can be withstood more easily. The symptom, therefore, becomes a necessary strategy for the negotiation of anxiety and the diminishment of its force.

Clearly, without an optimal activation of automatic anxiety the human organism would be unable to act in the face of physical danger. But Freud’s clinical observations suggested that there was a component to anxiety that could not be explained by his original (biological) model. Anxiety was not merely the product of undischarged libidinal energy in the system, but extended to become ‘the response to helplessness in the face of danger’ (Kahn, 2001, p.108). This state of helplessness was posited by Freud as a ‘traumatic situation’ where the excessive excitations, as in the libidinal model, could not be sufficiently discharged. The template for anxiety for Freud was thus located in situations of danger such as ‘birth, loss of the mother as object, loss of the object’s love, and above all castration’ (Evans, 2003, p.10). Beyond the automatically activated state of emergency in the face of realistic imminent danger, however, Freud’s clinical observations suggested that by far the most prevalent occurrence of anxiety was located in the *anticipation* of helplessness in the face of danger. The anticipation of a state of helplessness is located in (and reliant upon) the advent of the human infant’s ability to represent an object, and thereby posit its disappearance or loss. As famously elaborated in Freud’s experience of observing his grandson playing a *fort/da* game with a wooden top, the ability to represent an object when it is not present becomes both the moment of the loss of the object and the advent of the representation of the object in symbolic form.

Symbolic representation is therefore predicated upon absence, and marks the beginnings of language acquisition and accession into the Symbolic world. As Shepherdson suggests in his foreword to Harari's introduction to Seminar X (2001), anxiety arises as a distinctly human phenomenon on the cusp of language acquisition where the subject emerges in its most primal form.

Language acquisition – Symbolic castration.

As outlined above, many mainstream interpretations of Freud posit birth as the foundational 'traumatic moment' that sets the blueprint for future activations of anxiety (Kahn, 2002, p.110). At birth, the infant experiences a sudden and immediate state of distress; however, Freud asserts that it is not until the infant is capable of signification – with the establishment of modalities of linguistic memory, and the *anticipation* of a state of helplessness (typically around six or seven months) – that anxiety emerges. For Lacan, this transition marks a significant point of entry into the Symbolic order which impinges upon the *mirror stage* of the *Imaginary* order. If, as Freud suggested, the process of language acquisition marks a transformation and the emergence of anxiety, the notion of birth trauma poses a logical discrepancy. The point of symbolization where anxiety emerges (rather than birth) becomes the pivotal 'foundational moment', and the status of the intervening pre-Symbolic domain becomes problematic *if considered in diachronic temporality*. Clearly the neonate, born in an extreme state of prematurity, registers organic discomfort from the moment of birth. Lacanian theory suggests that this registration of discomfort and primal cry activates the discursive circuit between infant and other (mother or primary caregiver) as the conduit for the Symbolic order of language. This, in turn, calibrates and transforms *need* into the trans-subjective dynamic of *demand*. The undifferentiated 'noise' that has constituted direct sensory excitation to the body as organism is responded to primarily through vocalisation in sound (lallation), in dynamic combination with other sensory modalities (in varying combinations to variable degrees).²⁸ Sound is thus gradually adapted and associated with the system of

²⁸ Physiological audition, however, circumscribes human vocalisation and speech as a refined and reduced modality of movement through which the apperception of sound is facilitated. The sense of

signification; phonemes and individual signifiers that not only represent, but also constitute the objects to which the infant is vicariously attached through the mediation of language. Once symbolic representation is in force, the infant acquires the ability to *anticipate* separation from particular objects; the foundational Freudian concept of separation anxiety (Kahn, 2002, p.108).

The process of language acquisition is reliant on the minimum social bond, and, primarily, the ability to hear, from which the lure to vocalise and listen in a mirroring process that establishes the initial discursive circuit emerges. This constitutes the first instigation of the Symbolic and consequent alienation into language from which the ego of cognitive thought and the subject of unconscious desire form in a complex juxtaposition; the operation Lacan maps on the graph of desire. Failure in the instigation of this circuit constitutes one of the approaches to the mystery of infant autism and psychosis. According to Lacan, in such cases there is no separation: ‘the object a does not fall from the field of the Other’ (Rodriguez, 2001, p.25).²⁹ Although language can be acquired through the modality of vision – as cases of deaf infants and the efficacy of sign language demonstrates – the invocatory domain of audition and vocalisation is the dominant medium for language acquisition. The primary emphasis on the visual that prevails in Freud (and in secondary interpretations and utilisations of Lacanian theory) appears paradoxical, given that the primary method of psychoanalysis is one that acts upon speech and language. Contemporary psychoanalytic studies of early infant/caregiver interaction suggest that any clear delineation or linear transition from pre-symbolic to symbolic representation, particularly where sound is concerned, cannot be readily assumed (Stern, 1995). The relationships between sound, music and speech, speech and writing, and language structures and meaning form a highly complex and fascinating process that is constantly ongoing (Stern, 1985; 2001; 2004). In addition,

audition is a refinement of motion that is converted into sound and perceived in a specifically channelled and reduced spectrum by the auditory system. As the exceptional case of deaf percussionist Evelyn Glennie demonstrates, those without the facility of auditory perception can possess an acutely refined apperception of the vibration of sounds through the body. Rather than an auditory hearing of sound, Glennie not only asserts but also demonstrates that she can feel sound through her body, and that this constitutes an important dimension of listening to which musicians become attuned. See TED Conferences LLC (Producer). (2003, February), Evelyn Glennie shows how to listen. Podcast retrieved from http://www.ted.com/talks/evelyn_glennie_shows_how_to_listen.html

²⁹ See L.S. Rodriguez (2001) pp.19-31 for a more detailed (Lacanian) explanation of infant autism.

phonology has established that the human voice is capable of approximately 200 phonemic sounds, all of which are, somewhat surprisingly, present in the ‘non-sense’ lalling or babbling of the infant (Willingham, 2004, p.460). Once domesticated into language, however, this number is radically reduced; in the case of English, to 46 phonemic units. This evidence suggests that if language is central to unifying sensory excitations through perception into consciousness, it is a reductive process, and culturally specific. Moreover, it can only be established in a trans-subjective exchange as a minimal social bond. It is through this contextually contingent process that Lacan proposes that need is transformed into demand, and a transformation occurs on the cusp of the somatic and psychic levels of human experience. As the graph of desire demonstrates, this point of transformation constitutes the advent of the subject of unconscious desire and its concomitant affect, anxiety.

As previously outlined, Lacanian theory asserts that *need* can be satisfied, but its transformation through language into *demand* extends beyond satisfaction to an additional request for love and recognition that results in the trans-subjective dynamic of *desire* (as a distancing defence against unbridled demand) that perpetually craves satisfaction. As the discussion above on language acquisition suggests, however, the delineation of any complete progressive transition from pre-verbal to verbal or pre-symbolic to symbolic stages, where the previous stage is completely supplanted, is problematic. The two levels have the potential to continue to co-exist with variable oscillation and disjuncture between the two. It is this very point of incommensurability that Lacan locates as the locus of the advent of the unconscious, and the birth of subjectivity in juxtaposition with the individual ego that is sustained at the level of consciousness. The birth of the subject is thus distinct from the birth of the human organism.

Anxiety emerges as a material affect at the point of incitement into the Symbolic world, a juncture where the infant’s primal verbalisation of sound begins to develop from crying and ‘lalling’ into the formation of speech and language. As noted previously, communication through symbolisation emerges through the chaotic juxtaposition of excitations and perceptions of touch, taste, smell, audition and vision. Their imbrication into the Symbolic order of language – which appears to be the unique

mechanism through which the human infant precariously co-ordinates and stages a life-world – constitutes the genesis of what is called the ‘human condition’ through trans-subjective relational exchange. It is inherently social, and requires language, albeit in a profusion of forms. The graph of desire succinctly outlines this process on the lower level of the entwinement of the Imaginary ‘mirror stage’ with alienation into the Symbolic register. Keeping these issues in mind for the detailed discussion of the Lacanian conceptualisation of anxiety below, the discussion now returns to the Freudian narrative.

Freudian theory asserts that the emergence of anxiety – which typically arises in the infant at around the age of six to seven months – is alleviated by the development of the ability to avoid, through repression and inhibition, any action that would precipitate the disappearance of the object (primary caregiver/mother). For Freud, this advance mode of anticipation (rather than the actual occurrence of the disappearance of the caregiver in reality) activates anxiety and a range of consequent effects, not only at an automatic physiological level but also at a psychic level. Indeed, the example of this stage is clearly visible when an infant begins to cry when it anticipates the departure of a caregiver through an action, such as picking up an item (e.g. a set of car keys) that is associated by the infant with their departure. As any parent/primary caregiver soon learns, the infant’s distress diminishes very quickly after their departure, and is thus associated with the ability to anticipate through symbolisation. At a psychic level, Freud’s second theory proposes that anxiety activates the repression of any impulse that might precipitate such a loss. Similarly, at an older age and stage, any impulse that is likely to activate the pain and guilt exacted by the superego will result in repression, and these repressed elements retain the capacity to return in a disguised symptomatic form. As a survival mechanism in the face of real physical danger, Freud posits anxiety as essential: considered at the level of psychic functioning, however, the ability to *anticipate* helplessness in the face of danger is triggered well in advance of any danger occurring and can become manifest in a far more complicated ‘symptomatic’ and pathological formations. Accordingly, Freud divided anxiety into three categories: real, moral and neurotic (Kahn, 2002, p.112).

Kahn's canonical interpretation of Freud's second formulation asserts that Freud defined anxiety as 'a function of the ego' (2002, p.112). As such, it has three distinct forces with which it is required to contend: the external world, the id and the superego. Realistic anxiety is anxiety that is activated by a danger in the external world, moral anxiety is the result of the activation of the superego, and neurotic anxiety is associated with an impulse that is repressed. The treatment of neurotic anxiety in Freudian psychodynamic therapy thus relies on the ability to bring the repressed elements forth into consciousness, in order to relieve the troublesome repetitive cycle of symptoms through interpretation. In current Freudian clinical practice, it is contended that 'cognitive behavioural therapy' (CBT) and 'systematic desensitization therapy' (SDT), while demonstrating efficacy in the alleviation of conscious symptomatic effects, do not effectively alleviate the repressed unconscious elements that underpin and configure the symptom. The mainstream post-Freudian psychodynamic approach contends that, in addition to the conscious aspects of the symptom, there exists an associative link between the symptom and repressed material (as an unconscious phenomenon). Moreover, they maintain that once the repressed material is brought into consciousness and analysed, the symptom will not only be alleviated but eradicated (Kahn, 2002, pp.117-20). Such canonical accounts, however, neglect Freud's observation that (despite this analytic work) many patients remain intractably attached to and reliant upon their painful negative symptoms; an observation that gave rise to his controversial proposal of the death drive that lay beyond the pleasure principle.

This controversial thesis, articulated by Freud in *Beyond the pleasure principle* (1920), suggests that the pleasure principle, in itself, constitutes a limit imposed against the invasion of a more lethal element – the death drive (the concept from which Lacan derived the substance of *jouissance*) – that ostensibly acts as the opposite pole of desire and its satisfaction. The symptom is assigned a necessary place as a defence against the death drive and its *jouissance*, and (in the case of neurotic structure) defends the subject from annihilation. No matter how detrimental the symptom may appear, it is a signifying element that contains a *jouissance* of its own that defends against the incursion of the death drive (Braunstein, 2003, pp.102-13). Put simply, the symptom constitutes a

necessary defence that is required to defend against a force that impinges and lures ‘beyond the pleasure principle’, and thus provides a paradoxical ‘satisfaction’.

For Freud, the end of analysis became an intractable difficulty because he acknowledged that interpretation reached a limit-point where a kernel or residue that resisted analysis always remained. Despite its negative effects (the suffering from which the analysand seeks relief), the symptom occupies a pivotal point of attachment that the analysand cannot relinquish without encountering the most extreme disturbance and experience of anxiety. Anxiety is thus distinct from the symptom: as an affective signal, it verifies the existence of a perpetual disparity. In Lacanian terms, this disparity lies not only between the conscious ego and its Imaginary and Symbolic attachments at the level of the enunciated (the lower level of the graph of desire), and the subject of desire that subtends anxiety at the level of enunciation (the upper level of the graph of desire), but points towards another realm beyond the pleasure principle, the domain that Lacan later developed as the domain of *jouissance* and the register of the Real. The discussion will elaborate on these specific points later; however, for the present, let us return to consider their antecedents in Freud’s account of anxiety.

Anxiety finally emerged in Freudian theory as a pivotal constitutional factor in the organisation of the psyche. As the previous discussion attests, however, several points of debate remain; not least, the contention by many post-Freudian theorists and ego psychology practitioners that the symptom can be cured. As Salecl (2004) suggests, this contention seems to have been conflated with the contemporary social definition of anxiety as a symptom, and the therapeutic aim to eliminate it altogether. As the following discussion will make clear, it is necessary: (i) to distinguish between the symptom and anxiety; (ii) to recognise that the symptom is instigated as a defence against anxiety; and (iii) to recognise that anxiety takes many pathways, both physical and psychic (Shepherdson, in Harari, 2001, pp.xiv-xvii). The failure to make these distinctions is indicative of the influence of post-Freudian psychological discourse that has endeavoured to construct the human individual as a self-sufficient biologically based structure that simply requires adjustment and realignment with ‘normality’. As noted previously, that readjustment most often takes the form of therapeutic regimes that aim to strengthen the ego as a defence against anxiety, or pharmaceutical interventions that

directly alter the chemistry of the brain to eliminate physiological effects that are deemed adverse. As a consequence, anxiety appears to have become just another symptom to be treated, and eliminated. Although manifest in a multitude of contextual circumstances, a practical example from the field of musical performance is both instructive and insightful with respect to this point.

Contrary to the common perception of music as a soothing, rhythmic, hypnotic lullaby that calms and co-ordinates, one of the most significant issues in the art of musical performance (from the perspective of the performer) is the regulation of anxiety. The performer negotiates what might be described as the knife edge between the euphoric aesthetic effects of beauty, and the impingement of anxiety. Under the pressure and contingency of live performance, musicians can experience the gamut of bodily phenomena listed above: breathlessness, palpitations, muscle tension, fatigue, dizziness, sweating, and tremor, as well as more generalised psychic phenomena ranging from apprehension to intense embarrassment, if not sheer terror that is apparently disproportionate to the reality of the context. In their worst physical manifestations, musicians can develop symptoms of pain, paralysis and repetitive strain injury (RSI) that can result in permanent physical damage categorised as *focal dystonia* (Altenmüller & Jabusch, 2010). Typically, the movement of a finger or an arm is inhibited. In psychoanalytic terms, the first instance of this inhibition constitutes a conversion symptom, an hysterical response to anxiety where there is no correlation between the paralysis and physiological function. In the instance of RSI and focal dystonia, the injury is sustained through incessant repetitive rehearsal, which correlates to an obsessional response. In both instances, the symptomatic manifestations can be interpreted as mechanisms aimed at avoiding the anxiety that is encountered with the contingency of live performance.

It is pertinent to note that these symptomatic manifestations occur most frequently in contexts with high levels of evaluation, where training towards an ideal template is meticulously adhered to and little opportunity for any deviation from politically-adjudicated and accepted aesthetic norms is allowed. The advent of digital recording technologies – with their capacity to reshape a performance, and to edit and erase inconsistency and imperfection – has enabled the creation of a static, virtual, ideal

musical object as a commodity for mass consumption that cannot be replicated in any live performance. The gap between the reality of live musical performance (as a unique, trans-subjective ‘real time’ process) and the virtual musical object (created for consumption on demand by a mass, passive listening audience) has widened immeasurably.³⁰ Performing musicians are increasingly subject not only to the critical evaluation of audiences that are intellectually informed with respect to a diverse range of genre rules, but also to the expectation that live performance will replicate the ideal musical object produced by modern recording technologies. In Lacanian terms, the symptomatic responses that can develop to meet both external and internal demands from the o(O)ther can be readily understood. Current techniques used by musicians to alleviate performance anxiety include: behaviour modification (CBT) and desensitisation therapies (SDT); body awareness, movement and relaxation regimes (yoga, Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais Method); and pharmacological intervention (typically, the use of beta blocker agents) that annul the worst physical manifestations of anxiety. (Informally, it is no surprise that musical contexts are often closely related to the use and abuse of drugs and alcohol.) These methods – effective to varying degrees for an equally varied group of individuals and contextual circumstances – do not effectively engage with finer distinctions to be made about the function of anxiety and its many vicissitudes and pathways.

The distinctions that need to be established, however, are the three elements that Freud outlined: inhibition, symptom and anxiety. If anxiety is regarded as a constitutional agent in the formation of the human psyche – not merely a symptom – its effects can be understood as essential elements in performance. Anxiety’s erasure as a pathological response to the over-activation of the ‘flight or fright’ mechanisms of the autonomic nervous system ultimately explains little about the psychic dimension of musical subjectivity, and the structural positions that are formed and function in a range of performative contexts. The mainstream psychological approach – focused as it is on

³⁰ Although receptive listening to music can be considered to be an active process with demonstrable effects, the use of the term ‘passive’ in this context denotes that the listening audience is not engaged in the work of performing the music. They may, however, be participating by dancing and singing in an imitative (Imaginary) mode.

phenomenological observation and experimental research methodologies – is inadequate insofar as it excludes the dynamic complexity and particularity of human subjectivity.

If excessive or pathological manifestations of anxiety can impede the ability to act or, conversely, precipitate actions that are detrimental, it follows that attempts to eliminate anxiety may have equally detrimental consequences. From a psychoanalytic perspective, a phenomenological concept of anxiety – as one symptom among others in the ever-extending taxonomy of psychological discourse – appears naïve (Verhaeghe, 2004, pp.30-2). Salecl's exposition on the theme of anxiety – which compares contexts as seemingly disparate as the trauma of war and the trauma of love – clearly demonstrates anxiety's pivotal function, and its fundamental constitutive role in the mediation of subjectivity between desire and *jouissance*. In his comprehensive foreword to Harari's introduction on Seminar X (2001), Shepherdson suggests that Lacan rearticulates Freud in a way that questions the canonical interpretation of his work (which posits two diametrically opposed theories on anxiety), and reveals a more nuanced account that cannot be grasped through a taxonomy of phenomenological pathological symptoms. Utilising Freud's text *Inhibition, symptom and anxiety*, Lacan suggests that the three elements require clear differentiation in order to elucidate their relational status. Symptomatic formations are constructed in order to allay the worst manifestations of anxiety, and are inextricably bound to the emergence of the subject (the subject of lack that subtends the ego as an Imaginary formation). The locus and regulation of anxiety thus appears dependent upon the position of the subject in relation to the object(s) to which it is inextricably bound. Unlike Freud, however, Lacan proposed that rather than lacking a specific identifiable object, anxiety is related to a particular kind of object (Evans, 2003, pp.11-12). To explore Lacan's theoretical formulations on anxiety, the discussion now proceeds to consider Lacan's pivotal teaching on anxiety in Seminar X.

Lacan on anxiety.

As the exegesis of the graph of desire in Chapter 1 attests, Lacan gave pre-eminent significance to anxiety as the affect intimately related to the status of the

speaking subject in the cycles of its emergence, subversion and enmeshment within the dialectic of unconscious desire. As the primal signal that heralds the emergence of the nascent subject, anxiety irrupts as a fault line within the weft and warp of language, and constitutes the vital hinge between desire and *jouissance* within the trans-subjective planes of alienation and separation that the two levels of the graph depicts: ‘Anxiety is this point where the subject is suspended between a moment where he no longer knows where he is and a future where he will never again be able to refind himself’ (Evans, 2003, p.11). Although given a pivotal place in Lacan’s theoretical edifice, there is little in the way of specific discussion about anxiety to be found in the explanation of neurotic structure on the graph of desire at the time of its formulation (1957-60). Lacan subsequently amended this omission and devoted an entire year of his seminar to the topic (SX, 1962-63). In his introductory lecture, he made the following observation:

I think anxiety is very precisely the meeting point where you will find waiting everything that was involved in my previous discourse and where, together, there await a certain number of terms which may appear *not* [italics added] to have been sufficiently connected up for you up to the present. (SX, 14.11.62, p.1)

Anxiety was thus positioned centre-stage by Lacan, as the affect to which many of his prior and seemingly disparate formulations could be related. As noted in Chapter 1, the status of *voix* (as the product of symbolic castration), its relation with *jouissance*, and the function of the object (*a*) and its implication in drive-related activity, fantasy and desire, were left adrift in Lacan’s early work. Seminar X: *Anxiety* (quoted above) is a pivotal text with respect to the elaboration and relational juxtaposition of these terms, and augurs the immanent expansion of Lacan’s oeuvre. The regrettable circumstance that Seminar X has remained unpublished in English translation has undoubtedly impeded the reception of this central facet of Lacan’s work in the Anglophone world (Harari, 2001, p.xvii). Moreover, events at the time of the Seminar’s delivery (1962-63) irrevocably altered the reception of this aspect of Lacan’s development of psychoanalytic theory (Brousse, 1995, pp.99-101). The lasting significance of these

circumstances will be discussed later in the chapter. For now, however, let us consider Seminar X in more detail.

Seminar X (1962-63): Anxiety

Lacan's year-long seminar on the subject of anxiety is predicated on knowledge of his previous work (summarised by the graph of desire), and the specific terms and formulations made with respect to the birth of the speaking subject. Anxiety became the pivotal affective element that Lacan theoretically conceptualised as the 'hinge between desire and jouissance' (SX, 14.11.62, p.3), and thus drew all the other elements into relational juxtaposition. From the first lecture in the seminar series, however, Lacan's approach was oriented towards anxiety as a pivotal material guide and reference point in clinical practice. This observation is a timely reminder that, for Lacan, psychoanalysis constituted a praxis delineated from either philosophy or psychology. Rather than a disciplinary knowledge constructed as a quasi-metaphysical salve or the adjustment of the human condition to an ideal of normality based in biology, the clinical practice of Lacanian psychoanalysis aims to ameliorate the worst manifestations of human psychic suffering; a suffering that may well manifest physiological effects/symptoms. It is a praxis that combines the practical art and theoretical science of *the restructuring of subjectivity*, rather than the psychological strengthening of the ego, or any physiological cure that could be correlated with physical medicine. Indeed, Lacan is quite explicit in the articulation of the latter point in Seminar X. He cited the indignation that his discourse had provoked among the psychoanalytic community when he asserted that:

[I]n analysis a cure only came in a way as a bonus It is quite certain that our justification as well as our duty is to ameliorate the position of the subject. And I claim that nothing is more uncertain in the field that we are in than the concept of a cure. (SX, 12.12.62, p.2)

Although highly abstract in his theoretical approach, psychoanalysis for Lacan was equally practical, and it was on this terrain that he chose to approach the topic of

anxiety in Seminar X. Anxiety was introduced as a material affect that functioned as Ariadne's thread; the 'one true affect' that the analyst needed not only to recognise and withstand, but above all to utilise as a reference point and guide through the labyrinth of the analytic experience, governed by the trans-subjective transference relationship. Far from being a symptomatic response to be eliminated, Lacan, like Freud, understood anxiety to be a crucial element in the birth of the speaking subject and a pivotal constitutional factor in the organisation of the psyche. His reading, however, deviated significantly from canonical accounts of Freud with respect to the function of the object in relation to anxiety.

Rather than a representational support that allows mastery over absence, Lacan privileges the object as being that which initiates a gap that breaks the symbiosis of the Imaginary relation, and, in addition, prevents any complete alienation of the subject within the Symbolic register of experience. Without the instigation of this gap (or lack, as it is most often termed), subjectivity is stymied. In terms of infant/other relations, Lacan asserts that the nascent subject can only emerge at the point where a gap is instigated between the symbiotic engagement of the infant and the other, and that this moment occurs through the function of a particular kind of object. To recall the figuration of this in his paper on *The subversion of the subject*, Lacan credits Donald Winnicott's insight into the 'transitional object' as the progenitor of this formulation. However, rather than being a material object, as conceptualised by the object relations school, Lacan proposes *objet a* as what might now, in the cybernetic age, be called a virtual object, which falls away from the body and delineates a loss that allows the infant to become immersed within the differential signifying relations of language. Entry into the Symbolic order can only be achieved by virtue of a loss; a loss that bars direct access to objects in the world, including the body as organism. It is through the consequent disjuncture (or gap) that the barred subject ($\$$) forges a liminal presence. And it is this barred or divided subject that stages psychic reality for the ego through the medium of the fundamental fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$).

As the algorithm for fantasy suggests, *objet a* (as cause of desire) is an essential element in the process of maintaining subjectivity in the interstice between desire and *jouissance*, and it is the gap that *objet a* sustains that is staunchly defended by the affect

of anxiety. Anxiety not only emerges at a point of transformation, but constitutes a signal that warns of any incursion upon the gap that has facilitated the emergence of the nascent subject. It continues to act as protective affective shield against any disturbance to the position that the subject of desire has assumed in relation to the object within neurotic structure. In its primal manifestation (as the marker of the trans-subjective relation), anxiety is a signal that marks a paradoxical point of transformation and is removed from any essentialist biological origin. Anxiety thus becomes the marker of the human condition of divided subjectivity. For Lacan, the activation of anxiety occurs when the gap that is simultaneously facilitated and disguised by *objet a* is disturbed or occupied and differentiation is threatened. In opposition to Freud, Lacan asserts that it is the impending threat to the gap of separation from the o(O)ther that incites anxiety. To consolidate this key departure from the Freudian notion of separation anxiety, we shall return to a short recapitulation of the graph of desire.

The graph of desire demonstrates that as subjects of language, human beings are caught in the temporal disjuncture of the unconscious and 'logical time'. The unconscious emerges from the trans-subjective relations imposed by language and the cut of the signifier. It involves an irrevocable aspect of contingency which develops through the temporal disjuncture between anticipation and retroaction that language instigates. It is within this disjunction of equivocation that subjectivity is born, and anxiety is the one true affect that bears witness to the impossible ex-sistence of the subject in the interstice between desire and *jouissance*. The speaking subject is compelled from the outset to assume a position in structure and a particular modus operandi for the maintenance of desire through the operation of the fundamental fantasy which stages reality for the subject. Upon admittance to the Symbolic order, the nascent subject (as the subject of desire/lack) emerges at the junction of the upper and lower levels of the graph. Anxiety also emerges at this point. The formation of the fundamental fantasy is a necessary defence against the vacillations of the demand and desire of the o(O)ther. As a virtual evanescent object with which the metonymy of desire is sustained, *objet a* maintains a distance from the overwhelming annihilation that proximity to the o(O)ther threatens. Any threat to the distance or gap maintained by *objet a*, unleashes the signal of anxiety as the precursor to subjective destitution. As Lacan suggests, the

primary difficulty involves delineating anxiety from the pathways that represent the matrix of defences employed to attenuate its brute force.

The vicissitudes of anxiety.

In Seminar X, Lacan sets out to examine the vicissitudes of anxiety, and the various modes of attenuation that the subject employs to maintain and defend its existence between the contradictory forces with which it is inevitably forced to contend. As noted in Chapter 1, Lacan succinctly defines the paradoxical peculiarity of the relation between the subject and the ego thus:

What he desires presents itself to him as what he does not want – a form assumed by negation in which misrecognition is inserted in a very odd way, the misrecognition, of which he himself is unaware, by which he transfers the permanence of his desire to an ego that is nevertheless obviously intermittent, and, inversely, protects himself from his desire by attributing to it these very intermittences. (*E*, p.691)

The torsion between the subject of unconscious desire and the narcissistic identification of the ego is precisely the point of internal division and disjuncture where anxiety irrupts. In the first lecture of Seminar X, Lacan reiterates the importance of the torsion of anxiety that irrupts between the two levels of the graph of desire (between the inner circuit of the upper level, $\$ \diamond a \rightarrow d$, and the lower level, $m \rightarrow i(a)$):

It is in the operation of the dialectic which links these two levels so closely that we are going to see there being introduced the function of anxiety, not that it is in itself the mainspring of it, but that it is by the phases of its appearance what allows us to orientate ourselves in it. (SX, 14.11.62, p.3)

If, as previously asserted, analysis in the Lacanian orientation involves the restructuring of subjectivity, then anxiety is the ‘one true affect’ because it serves as a reliable guide

to the movement of the subject within structure insofar as it designates moments of knotting and unknotting. These moments, incidentally, can be associated with the two alternating movements Freud nominated as Eros (founded upon the pleasure principle and a lessening of tension towards homeostasis) and Thanatos (the death drive that is distinguished by the increase of tension towards *jouissance*).

The ego is involved in the movement of knotting together and coherence. In order to achieve synthesis, however, the ego relies upon repression to eliminate contradiction, and utilises the repertoire of Imaginary and Symbolic substitutions (founded on the stage of the fundamental fantasy) to fill in the gaps thus created. For Lacan, the ego is an Imaginary construction; a montage of sensory reflections and spectral images that are cohered by the anchoring *points de capiton* provided by the Symbolic. However, as the graph of desire illustrates, there is always a remainder produced in the process of signification that escapes capture in the Imaginary and Symbolic registers of experience:

The specular relationship is precisely linked to the relationship with the big Other This cathexis of the specular image is a fundamental moment of the imaginary relationship, fundamental in the fact that there is a limit and the fact that the whole of libidinal cathexis does not pass through the specular image. There is a remainder. (SX, 28.11.62, p.9)

It is this remainder that paradoxically underpins the suturing of the *points de capiton*, identified in the discourse of the analysand through parapraxes, jokes and free association. As knots that facilitate the matrix of elements that constitute meaning, the *points de capiton* are buttressed by the fundamental fantasy and the operation of *objet a*. Anxiety arises when the suturing points are disturbed, and it is the residue or remainder – nominated by Lacan as *objet a* – that provides the lever for the process of unknotting as it subtends the Symbolic at the level of enunciation (the upper level of the graph). For Lacan, the various phases of anxiety provide a reliable material guide towards the productive moments in analysis, where the technique of punctuation and interpretation will disturb the stability of the underpinning fantasy structure.

The vicissitudes of anxiety, and the various symptomatic defences mounted against it, thus provide the guiding thread that the analyst follows through the maze of the transference relationship; and as Lacan is at pains to point out in the first session of Seminar X, anxiety is the crucial affect with which the analyst needs to attain expertise and must handle with great care (SX, 14.11.62, pp.1-11). Not only does the analyst need to be aware of the limits that the analysand can bear, but the analyst must also be attuned to his or her own anxiety. This last point refers to the ethic of maintaining ‘the desire of the analyst’ which Lacan, from the mid-1960s, equates with the assumption (or ‘semblance’) of the position of *objet a*. After establishing the transference relationship – where the analyst masquerades as ‘the subject supposed to know’ – the analyst proceeds from the position of what Lacan later formulates as the *discourse of the master* to the *discourse of the analyst*.³¹ As a semblance of *objet a*, the analyst acts as a ‘silent’ provocateur who lures the analysand into an encounter with their unconscious desire, and the deconstructive and reconstructive analytic work of unknotting and re-knotting the signifiers that secure the analysand’s subjective position. It involves a *savoir faire* through which the analyst effects a subversion of the position of the subject, an unmooring of the anchors that stabilise the subject within the structure of the social bond of discourse in which the analysand is enmeshed through the auspices of the fundamental fantasy (Nobus, 2000, pp.136-40).

The experience of Lacanian analysis is one where the analysand encounters a state of subjective destitution; an encounter with (A), the lack in the Other. The anchoring points (*points de capiton*) that secure the analysand’s subject position are loosened to the extent that a recalibration becomes possible. In this respect, analysis is a creative process that operates with signifying material through the trans-subjective medium of speech, and purposefully induces and subverts the double effects of *voice* and *gaze*; a point to which we shall will return in detail. At no point does this analytic process employ the master discourse that provides unequivocal responses and solutions for the analysand. Nor does Lacan make claims that analysis guarantees any kind of

³¹ In Seminar XVII – *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* – Lacan reconceptualises the social bond along the axes of the four discourses: the discourse of the master, the discourse university, the discourse of the hysteric and the discourse of the analyst. For further explanation see Fink (2000, pp.29-47); and Verhaeghe (2001, pp.17-34).

‘cure’, other than its efficacy as a process that brings about change due to a shift in orientation towards the structure of subjectivity in which all speaking beings are necessarily and irrevocably embedded. For Lacan, the analytic task is to set the analysand to work in the process of restructuring; a reconstructive process that necessarily involves an encounter with uncertainty and anxiety, and which might best be described as the encounter with drive and the various modalities of its orientations and operation. There is no possibility of the type of transformation of subjectivity that augurs lasting change without the encounter with anxiety and contingency. As such, anxiety is not of the order of either the Imaginary or Symbolic registers, but belongs to an encounter with the register of the Real (Harari, 2001).

The preceding portrayal of the practice of Lacanian analysis – as it is outlined in the first session of Seminar X – is a process that is both contingent and without guaranteed outcomes; a far cry from any psychotherapy or ego psychology that protects and reinforces the ego to the point of ‘self’ affirmation, coherence and harmonious certainty. According to Lacan, these strategies merely reinforce the narcissistic illusions and cohesion that the pleasure principle facilitates, working in the opposite direction of separation and transformative change. For Lacan, anxiety is an exemplary and pivotal affect that is distinct from the deceptive emotions characteristic of imaginary ego relations (Evans, 2003, p.11).

Anxiety – ‘that which does not deceive’ (SXI, p.41) – thus serves as a guide through the perilous analytic journey, a journey that Lacan asserts must not be undertaken lightly. In Seminar XI (1963-64), Lacan summarises the necessary caution thus:

It is always dangerous to disturb anything in that zone of shades, and perhaps it is part of the analyst’s role, if the analyst is performing it properly, to be besieged – I mean *really* – by those in whom he has invoked this world of shades, without always being able to bring them up to the light of day. One can never be sure that one says on this matter will have no harmful effect – even what I have been able to say about it over the last ten years owes some of its impact to this fact. It is not without effect that, even in public speech, one directs one’s attention at subjects,

touching them at what Freud calls the navel – *the navel of dreams* – ... to designate their untimely unknown centre ... the gap of which I have already spoken Believe me, I myself never re-open it without great care. (p.23)

After establishing the pivotal importance of anxiety – and it is important to note that he attributes it as having an effect on the collective level of public speech – Lacan sets out over the following sessions to enumerate its vicissitudes with precision. To do this, he locates it on a matricial diagram on the dual co-ordinates of *movement* and *difficulty*. Although it is beyond the scope of the present chapter to examine this in detail, the following summary will serve to demonstrate Lacan's formulation on the basis of Freud's text, *Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety*.

The anxiety matrix.

The first apposite reflection that Lacan makes with respect to Freud's text, *Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety*, is that although Freud writes at length about inhibition and the symptom, his analysis of anxiety is not fully developed. In a somewhat obscure passage, Lacan proclaims that anxiety is not to be located in any positive way, but emerges at the point where there is a void, a discernable gap:

Today I am not going to go into the text of *Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety*. Because as you have seen from the beginning I have decided today to work without a net, and there is no subject where the net of the Freudian discourse is closer, in short, to giving us a false sense of security; because, precisely, when we go into this text, you will see what is to be seen in connection with anxiety, that there is no net, because precisely as regards anxiety, each mesh, as I might appropriately put it, has no meaning except precisely by leaving the void in which anxiety is. (SX, 14.11.62, p.6)

Lacan proceeds to address this apparent omission with a detailed delineation of anxiety in relation to inhibition and symptom. To do this, he depicts the three Freudian elements

– inhibition, symptom and anxiety – as three different levels on a matrix governed by two co-ordinate vectors: the horizontal axis [→] which he labels as *difficulty*, and the vertical axis [↓] which he labels as *movement* (Figure 7).

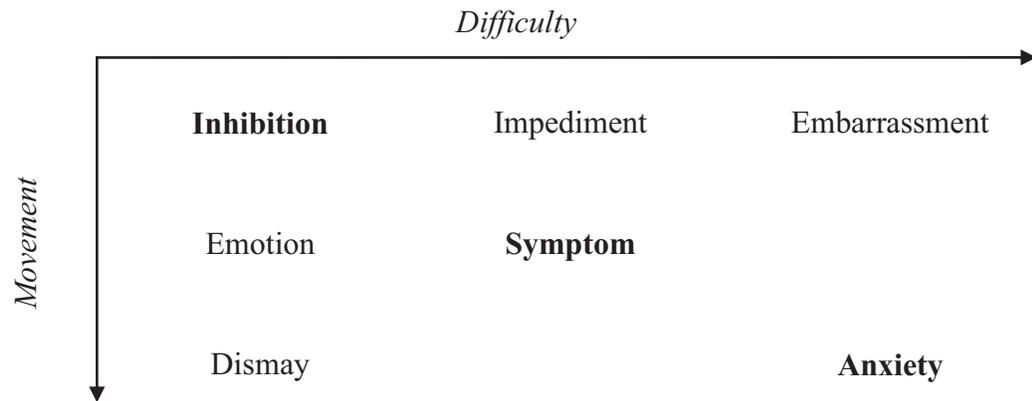


Figure 7: The anxiety matrix (I)

Note. From Lacan, J. SX, 14.11.61, p.8.

On the horizontal axis of difficulty, Lacan extrapolates inhibition towards *impediment* and *embarrassment*. He likens this to being caught in the trap of narcissistic capture. On the vertical axis of movement, Lacan extrapolates that *inhibition* – which is movement in its most difficult dimension as ‘the stopping of movement’ – progresses towards *emotion* and finally *dismay*, where *dismay* is the movement of emotion to the level of a profound disturbance. On this account, Lacan’s matrix clearly articulates that anxiety is an affect that is quite distinct from emotion:

What is anxiety? We have ruled out its being an emotion. And to introduce it, I would say it is an affect On occasion I have tried to say what affect is not: it is not Being given in its immediacy, nor is it the subject in some sort of raw formWhat on the contrary I did say about affect, is that it is not repressed; and that is

something Freud says just like me. It is unmoored, it goes with the driftWhat is repressed are the signifiers that moor it. (SX, 14.11.62, p.10)

Lacan achieves this matrix of associations through an ingenious virtuoso performance of linguistic references to the complexities of the etymology of each term.³² When considered in Lacan's native French, the homophony evident demonstrates the elusive slippage and ambiguity involved in the process of constructing meaning from sound images; an important point which the discussion of Freud's Uncanny (*Das Unheimliche*), below, will return to. The difficulty Lacan is attempting to resolve is the clear differentiation and clarification of anxiety and its function from a range of other emotions, affects, inhibitions, impediments, symptoms and actions. To this end, he posits the question: 'after all ... what is not related to anxiety? It is a matter of precisely knowing when it really is anxiety' (SX,14.11.62, p.8) (Figure 8).

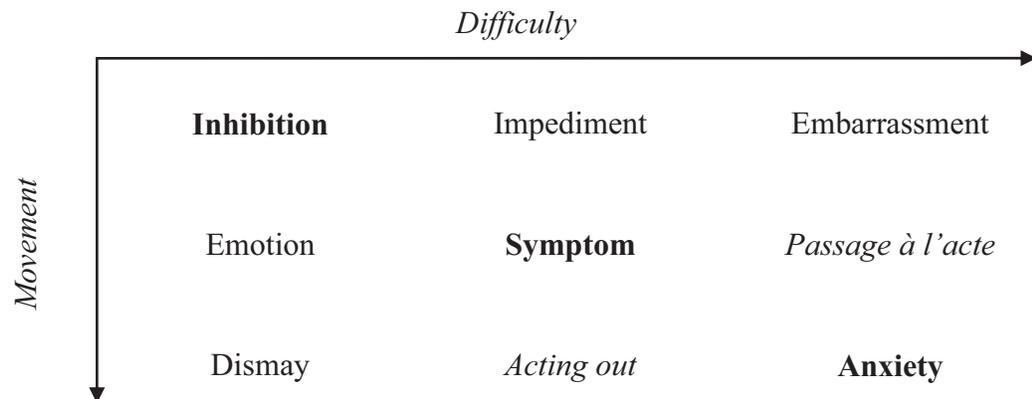


Figure 8: The anxiety matrix (II)

Note. From Lacan, J. SX, 26.6.63,p.1.

The remaining gaps in the matrix (left open here) are discussed further in the penultimate session of the seminar series (SX, 26.6.63), where *acting out* and *passage à*

³² See Seminar X (14.11.62) for a more detailed discussion of this point.

l'acte are revealed as the last two defences mounted against anxiety on each axis. The most salient point to be made, however, is that the various dimensions through which anxiety is attenuated constitute a highly nuanced repertoire of defence mechanisms; hence Lacan's assertion that the vicissitudes of anxiety can take many possible pathways. Lacan's notion of the psychoanalytic act is something delineated from the defences of *acting out* and *passage à l'acte*, which both remain within the purview of the fundamental fantasy. Such a traversal cannot be conceived without a close examination of the vicissitudes of anxiety and its object cause that sustains the fundamental fantasy.

As the foregoing summary suggests, the attempt to clearly define anxiety as one symptom among others with a universal definition – particularly one grounded in phenomenological observation – is destined to miss the complexities involved. Similarly, the bio-medical treatment of anxiety disorders with pharmacological interventions that alleviate symptomatic responses represents a particularly blunt instrument that serves to mask the underlying intricacies and particularities of the transformations that occur between psyche and soma. According to Lacan, the locus of these points of fixity and their transformation are delineated by the affect of anxiety in its various vicissitudes. The psychoanalytic act that facilitates the restructuring of subjectivity relies not only upon an understanding of the theoretical importance of anxiety, but also on a *savoir faire* with respect to its utilisation as a guide in the analytic process. Even if Freud failed to resolve the conundrum of anxiety, what Lacan emphasises is that the distinction between the symptom and anxiety was clearly made. Despite the discomfort provided by the symptom for which his patients sought relief, Freud recognised that they remained paradoxically reliant on the kernel of the symptom that both Freud and Lacan agreed remained resistant to analytic treatment.

Contrary to the expectation that Freud's text, *Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety* reveals the nuances of anxiety, Lacan claims that it is in another text, *Das Unheimliche* (Freud's essay on the phenomenon of the uncanny), that the finer distinctions that delineate anxiety can be discerned. Lacan is ever at pains to compel his audience to return to the Freudian text and read it in conjunction with his seminar. It is only with a careful reading and reappraisal of Freudian texts, that Lacan's 'return to Freud' can fully

be understood. Indeed, any understanding of Lacan's work may be rendered superficial if not grounded in the texts that he implored his audience to read as preparation for his seminar. It is therefore not only appropriate, but entirely necessary to summarise Freud's essay on *Das Unheimliche* if the complexity and veracity of Lacan's assertions, variations and departures from Freud in Seminar X on anxiety are to be understood.

The Uncanny – Das Unheimliche

Freud's essay on the uncanny – *Das Unheimliche* (1919) – was, by his own admission, an unusual psychoanalytic foray into the domain of aesthetics to address an issue that he believed to have been overlooked. At the time of its writing, Freud asserted that the domain of aesthetics had largely concerned itself with positive notions of beauty and the sublime to the exclusion of the category of experience that he dubbed *the uncanny*; a paradoxical affective response that simultaneously combines the apparently opposing sensibilities of the familiar and the strange. The question that underpinned Freud's curiosity was the inadequacy of the conceptualisation of this category of disquieting experience that was clearly of a different quality to the general affect of fear. The subject of the 'uncanny', he maintained:

is a province of this kind. It is undoubtedly related to what is frightening – to what arouses dread and horror; equally certainly, too, the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with what excites fear in general. Yet we may expect that a special core of feeling is present which justifies the use of a special conceptual term. One is curious to know what this common core is which allows us to distinguish as “uncanny” certain things which lie within the field of what is frightening. (SE, 17, p.219)

In his essay, Freud proceeds to sketch two paths of investigation. First, he pursues the etymology and linguistic usage of the German term *heimlich* (familiar, homely) and its relation to *heimisch* (native) and *unheimlich* (uncanny, eerie). Second, he analyses specific instances of the uncanny which entail the comparison between those

occurrences in actual experience and those that are invoked by literary or artistic means. Although presented in this sequence in the essay, Freud discloses that his research was conducted in reverse order. He first examined ‘all those properties of persons, things, sense-impressions, experiences and situations which arouse in us the feeling of uncanniness’ with the view to then inferring ‘the unknown nature of the uncanny from what all these examples have in common’(SE, 17, p.220). The result, in both cases, became his initial definition of the uncanny as ‘that class of frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar’ (SE, 17, p.220). A problem remained, however:

The German word “*unheimlich*” is obviously the opposite of “*heimlich*” [‘homely’], “*heimisch*” [‘native’] – the opposite of what is familiar; and we are tempted to conclude that what is “uncanny” is frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar. Naturally not everything that is new and unfamiliar is frightening, however; the relation is not capable of inversion.

We can only say that what is novel can easily become frightening and uncanny; some new things are frightening but not by any means all. Something has to be added to what is novel and unfamiliar in order to make it uncanny. (SE, 17, p.220-21)

In order to resolve this conundrum, Freud elected to undertake research into the etymological origins of the term and its common linguistic usage.

In his etymological search for the origin of the term *unheimlich*, Freud consulted dictionary entries in a number of languages, all of which gave a general inference of an eerie and disquieting paradoxical affect. To further advance his research, he investigated the specific instances of linguistic usage of the term in the German language through consultation with the most authoritative dictionaries of the day. He began with entries under the term *heimlich* from which the compound form, *unheimlich*, is derived. According to the dictionary definitions he consulted, Freud ascertained that the term *heimlich* appeared to possess two distinct axes of meaning. The first axis (I) is related to that which belongs to the house or family; that which is intimate, friendly and

comfortable. With respect to the weather, its connotation is cheerful; and when involving animals, *heimlich* denotes the ‘friendly’ domesticated aspect of an animal’s interaction with humans. The second, apparently different, axis of meaning (II) refers to that which is ‘concealed, kept from sight ... withheld from others’ (SE, 17, p.223), and involves an aspect of subterfuge. There are many examples such as ‘to behave *heimlich*, as though there was something to conceal; a ‘*heimlich* love-affair ... *heimlich* places (which good manners oblige us to conceal) ... and “The *heimlich* art” (magic)’ (SE, 17, p.223-24). There is, however, a connection to the first axis of meaning insofar as what is kept in the home is private and secluded from public gaze and scrutiny. Such a connotation of the first axis of meaning can be understood as developing towards the second axis of meaning of purposeful concealment.

The compound form, *unheimlich*, is thus posed in opposition to the *first* meaning of homely and familiar, not the second meaning of surreptitious concealment. Nevertheless, Freud draws attention to a reference to the first axis of meaning (of something familiar) that combines aspects of the second axis of meaning, thus illuminating a potential confusion. It is pertinent to quote in full the passage taken from Daniel Sanders’s *Wörterbuch der Deutschen sprache* (1860). The emphasis in italics is an addition made by Freud to highlight his point of argument:

‘The sentinel’s horn sounds so *heimelig* from the tower, and his voice invites so hospitably.’ ‘You go to sleep there so soft and warm, so wonderfully *heim’lig*.’ – *This form of the word deserves to become general in order to protect this perfectly good sense of the word from becoming obsolete through an easy confusion with II [see below]. Cf: “The Zecks [a family name] are all ‘heimlich’.” (in sense II) “‘Heimlich’? ... What do you understand by ‘heimlich’?” “Well, ... they are like a buried spring or a dried-up pond. One cannot walk over it without always having the feeling that water might come up there again.” “Oh, we call it ‘unheimlich’ you call it ‘heimlich’. Well, what makes you think that there is something secret and untrustworthy about this family?” (Gutzkow) (SE, 17, p.223)*

After the entries delineating the two axes of meaning, Freud quotes, in full, the following reference to the negative compound form that bears a specific relation to the entry above. Again, to emphasize his point, Freud italicizes the pertinent definition attributed to Schelling:

Note especially the negative ‘*un-*’: eerie, weird, arousing gruesome fear: ‘Seeming quite *unheimlich* and ghostly to him.’ ‘The *unheimlich*, fearful hours of night.’ ‘I had already long since felt an *unheimlich*, even gruesome feeling.’ ‘Now I am beginning to have an *unheimlich* feeling.’ ‘Feels an *unheimlich* horror.’ ‘*Unheimlich* and motionless like a stone image.’ ‘The *unheimlich* mist called hill-fog.’ ‘These pale youths are *unheimlich* and are brewing heaven knows what mischief.’ ‘“*Unheimlich*” is the name for everything that ought to have remained ... secret and hidden but has come to light’ (Schelling). – ‘To veil the divine, to surround it with a certain *Unheimlichkeit*.’ – *Unheimlich* is not often used as opposite to meaning II. (SE, 17, p.224)

Freud thus reveals the convoluted trajectories and apparent inconsistencies that the linguistic meaning and common usage of the terms involved. Schelling’s definition – ‘*Unheimlich* is the name for everything that ought to have remained ... secret and hidden but has come to light’ – clearly affirms that although ‘*unheimlich* is not often used as opposite to meaning II’, the notion of something concealed, there are instances when it is used in this context.

Without labouring any further over the details of the dictionary references that Freud quotes, let us briefly consider his conclusions:

Thus *heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *heimlich*. Let us bear this discovery in mind, though we cannot yet rightly understand it, alongside of Schelling’s definition of the *Unheimlich*. If we go on to examine individual instances of uncanniness, these hints will become intelligible to us. (SE, 17, p.226)

After setting the scene with his investigations into the etymology of the term *unheimlich*, Freud proceeds in his essay to enumerate a variety of instances of the uncanny. Drawing upon the work of Jentsch (1906), and his general proposition that the uncanny arises from situations of ‘intellectual uncertainty’, the first example concerns the uncanny effect of doubt about whether an apparently animate object is alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not in fact be animate. Allied to this are the uncanny automaton-like effects that accompany the witnessing of an epileptic fit or mental illness, where the affected individual appears to be at the mercy of unseen forces at work behind the appearances of normative mental and physical function (SE, 17, p.226). In this instance, Freud – like Jentsch before him – refers extensively to the work of the novelist E.T.A. Hoffmann, and the ability that he displays as a writer to elicit the particular uncanny effect in his ‘fantastic narratives’. Freud differs, however, with respect to the elements that contribute to the emergence of the effect.

Hoffmann’s story of *The Sandman* is analysed in detail, with particular attention paid to ‘the theme of the Sand-Man who tears out children’s eyes’ (SE, 17, p.227). In such an instance of the incitement of the uncanny, Freud deduces that there is no connection with the notion of ‘intellectual uncertainty’ whatsoever:

There is no question therefore, of any intellectual uncertainty here: we know now that we are not supposed to be looking on at the product of a madman’s imagination, behind which we, with the superiority of rational minds, are able to detect the sober truth; and yet this knowledge does not lessen the impression of uncanniness in the least degree. The theory of intellectual uncertainty is thus incapable of explaining that impression. (SE, 17, pp.230-31)

From a psychoanalytic perspective, Freud asserts that the uncanny aspect of Hoffmann’s fictional narrative is explained by the remnants of infantile anxiety. ‘We know from psychoanalytic experience, however, that the fear of damaging or losing one’s eyes is a terrible one in children. Many adults retain their apprehensiveness in this respect’ (SE, 17, p.231). Freud interprets this central theme in the Sandman – as well as the Oedipus myth, phantasies and dreams – as a manifestation of the infantile castration complex.

Jentsch's theory of intellectual uncertainty thus appears insufficient as an explanation in this instance of the uncanny.

Freud considered Hoffmann to be 'the unrivalled master of the uncanny in literature' (SE, 17, p.233) and suggests that his novel *Die elixire des Teufels* (*The Devil's elixir*) provides a plethora of additional instances of the incitement of the uncanny, including the prominent theme of the phenomenon of 'the double'. In this literary example, Hoffmann elicits the effect of the uncanny through the development of characters who look alike and possess an apparent telepathic capacity (of mental processes such as emotions, knowledge and experiences). The transitivity between characters, where the subjects concerned form identifications so strong that 'the subject ... is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own ... [where] there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self' (SE, 17, p.234), illustrates Freud's point. In addition to these examples, Freud also observes the uncanny effect of 'constant recurrence' in Hoffmann's novel; the repetition of names, crimes, character traits and vicissitudes across several consecutive generations, an aspect to which the present discussion will return below.

With respect to the analysis of the phenomenon of the double, Freud draws upon and credits the work of Otto Rank (1914), and provides the following psychoanalytic explanation which is of particular pertinence to Lacan's reformulation of the Freudian opus and the development of his theory of the mirror stage and divided subjectivity:

The "double" was originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an "energetic denial of the power of death", as Rank says; and probably the "immortal" soul was the first "double" of the body. This invention of doubling as a preservation against extinction has its counterpart in the language of dreams Such ideas, however, have sprung from the soil of unbounded self-love, from the primary narcissism which dominates the mind of the child and of primitive man. But when this stage has been surmounted, the "double" reverses its aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death.

The idea of the “double” does not necessarily disappear with the passing of primary narcissism, for it can receive fresh meaning from the later stages of the ego’s development. A special agency is slowly formed there, which is able to stand over against the rest of the ego, which has the function of observing and criticizing the self and of exercising a censorship within the mind, and which we become aware of as our “conscience”. In the pathological case of delusions of observation, this mental agency becomes isolated, dissociated from the ego, and discernible to the physician’s eye. The fact that an agency of this kind exists, which is able to treat the rest of the ego like an object – the fact, that is, that man is capable of self-observation – renders it possible to invest the old idea of a “double” with a new meaning and to ascribe a number of things to it – above all, those things which seem to self-criticism to belong to the old surmounted narcissism of earliest times. (SE, 17, p.235)

For Freud, the phenomenon of the double is thus related to the formation of the ego and the agency of the superego (although it is not explicitly named as such) within his theory of developmental stages. ‘When all is said and done’, he maintains, ‘the quality of uncanniness can only come from the fact of the “double” being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since surmounted – a stage, incidentally, at which it wore a more friendly aspect’ (SE, 17, p.236). Not only does Freud ascribe the uncanny to the resurfacing of ‘an earlier mental stage’, but he also asserts that the double can be invested with ‘the unfulfilled but possible futures to which we still like to cling in phantasy, all the strivings of the ego which adverse external circumstances have crushed, and all our suppressed acts of volition which nourish in us the illusion of Free Will’ (SE, 17, p.236).

From the literary example of ‘the double’ – which proved to be an exemplary case for psychoanalytic theory – Freud progressed to the effect of ‘constant recurrence’; an additional exemplar intimately related to the emergence of the experience of the uncanny and (in psychoanalytic terms) allied to the ‘repetition compulsion’ as a defining characteristic of obsessional neurosis:

If we take another class of things, it is easy to see that there, too, it is only this factor of involuntary repetition which surrounds what would otherwise be innocent enough with an uncanny atmosphere, and forces upon us the idea of something fateful and inescapable when otherwise we should have spoken only of “chance”. (SE, 17, p.237)

In his clinical experience, Freud noted that the individual dogged by obsessive neurosis is prone to the experience of the uncanny effect of the same number or name occurring in their daily lives. The obsessive neurotic often ascribes such instances with unwarranted significance, bordering on superstition. Similarly, in Freud’s view, obsessive neurotics often assert that the mere thought of someone is often shortly followed by a communication of some kind from the person involved; all construed as being beyond the probability of chance with a proclivity towards what Freud termed ‘the omnipotence of thought’ (SE, 17, p.240). Freud also made reference to the psychoanalytically significant factor of involuntary repetition, in both actual experience and dream states. In such instances, no matter what action is undertaken, the individual relentlessly finds him/herself back in the same context from which escape was sought, and thus experiences the unsettling and uncanny return of the familiar that has assumed the negative aspect of entrapment. Freud notes that a pervasive sense of helplessness (*Hilflosigkeit*) accompanies this uncanny phenomenon of involuntary repetition, beyond any pleasurable reassurance that the familiar might otherwise bring (Kahn, 2002, pp.110-11). In addition to the elements of *familiarity* and *danger*, the dual elements of *repetition* and *helplessness* provide an indication that the conditions for the emergence of the uncanny must also encompass a reverberation from the earliest stages of development; the repressed infantile complexes.

Located in the netherworld of early infancy, Freud associates the repressed infantile complexes with ‘silence, solitude, and darkness’; elements that are akin to the subject of death, and remain as traces that retain a distinct archaic tenor of horror and danger (SE, 17, p.252). Freud thus concludes that the elements of *repetition* and *helplessness* constitute pivotal conditions for the transformation of something which is simply frightening into the paradoxical experience of the uncanny:

For it is possible to recognize the dominance in the unconscious mind of a “compulsion to repeat” proceeding from the instinctual impulses and probably inherent in the very nature of the instincts – a compulsion powerful enough to overrule the pleasure principle, lending to certain aspects of the mind their daemonic character, and still very clearly expressed in the impulses of small children; a compulsion, too, which is responsible for a part of the course taken by the analyses of neurotic patients. All these considerations prepare us for the discovery that whatever reminds us of this inner “compulsion to repeat” is perceived as uncanny. (SE, 17, p.238)

Through his analysis of various instances of the uncanny, Freud offers insight into the peculiarity of the emergence of the phenomenon and the conditions under which the effect tends to occur. His analysis of specific examples draws a comparison between instances that constitute real experience and those that are induced by literary or artistic means. He reaches the conclusion that the instances that are experienced in reality are far fewer than those induced by literary means, and that they arise in the situation of ‘intellectual uncertainty’ and ‘can be traced back without exception to something familiar that has been repressed’ (SE, 17, p.247).

To further define the categories involved, Freud goes on to assert that instances of ‘the uncanny associated with omnipotence of thoughts, with the prompt fulfilment of wishes, with secret injurious powers and with the return of the dead’ (SE, 17, p.247) are instances of belief systems that have been *surmounted*. In the instance of intellectual uncertainty, however, these surmounted systems of thought are waiting in the wings ready to re-emerge ‘as soon as something *actually happens* in our lives which seems to confirm the old, discarded beliefs (SE, 17, pp.247-48). In the case of a literary narrative, however, Freud affirms that it is only in the case where the writer stages a narrative that appears to be reality rather than fiction, that the affect of the uncanny is unleashed. For example, he asserts that although instances of potentially uncanny elements exist in fairytales, they are clearly written on the stage of fiction and the affective response of the uncanny fails to emerge. Alternatively, where a fictional narrative is written on the

stage of reality, it is far more likely that the affect is produced. At the end of this section of the essay, Freud reaches the provisional conclusion that:

if psycho-analytic theory is correct in maintaining that every affect belonging to an emotional impulse, whatever its kind, is transformed, if it is repressed, into anxiety, then among instances of frightening things there must be one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which *recurs*. This class of frightening things would then constitute the uncanny; and it must be a matter of indifference whether what is uncanny was itself originally frightening or whether it carried some *other* affect. In the second place, if this is indeed the secret nature of the uncanny, we can understand why linguistic usage has extended *das Heimliche* [‘homely’] into its opposite, *das Unheimliche*; for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression. This reference to the factor of repression enables us, furthermore, to understand Schelling’s definition of the uncanny as something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light. (SE, 17, p.241)

In summary, Freud’s reflections on the phenomenon of the uncanny maintain an important distinction between the occurrence of an actual experience of the uncanny and ‘the uncanny as it is depicted in literature, in stories and imaginative productions’: the latter, he asserts, ‘merits in truth a separate discussion’ (SE, 17, p.249). In terms of the actual experience of the uncanny, however, he states that:

What is *experienced* as uncanny is much more simply conditioned but comprises far fewer instances ... and can be traced back without exception to something familiar that has been repressed. But here, too, we must make a certain and important and psychologically significant differentiation in our material (SE, 17, p.247)

Freud then establishes the distinction between those instances where former belief systems have been surmounted and re-emerge in the case of intellectual uncertainty, and those instances arising from repressed infantile complexes:

The state of affairs is different when the uncanny proceeds from repressed infantile complexes, from the castration complex, womb phantasies, etc.; but experiences which arouse this kind of uncanny feeling are not of very frequent occurrence in real life. The uncanny which proceeds from actual experience belongs for the most part to the first group Nevertheless the distinction between the two is theoretically very important. Where the uncanny comes from infantile complexes the question of material reality does not arise; its place is taken by psychical reality. What is involved is an actual repression of some content of thought and a return of this repressed content, not a cessation of *belief in the reality* of such content. We might say that in the one case what had been repressed is a particular ideational content, and in the other the belief in its (material) reality. (SE, 17, pp.248-49)

Freud then acknowledges that this assertion extends the meaning of repression beyond legitimate limits. '[A]n uncanny experience', he concludes:

occurs either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed. Finally, we must not let our predilection for smooth solutions and lucid exposition blind us to the fact that these two classes of uncanny experience are not always sharply distinguishable. When we consider that primitive beliefs are most intimately connected with infantile complexes, and are, in fact, based upon them, we shall not be greatly astonished to find that the distinction is often a hazy one. (SE, 17, p.249)

Literary examples, however, still proved to be fertile ground for Freud's consideration of the uncanny because the distinction between elements that are suppressed and those that

are surmounted cannot be used in fiction ‘without profound modification; for the realm of phantasy depends for its effect on the fact that its content is not submitted to reality-testing’ (SE, 17, p.249). He thus contends that there is a paradoxical result insofar as much that is not uncanny in fiction would be so in real life, and that fiction provides greater means for inducing the effects of the uncanny than actual experience (ibid.). The class of uncanny experience ‘which proceeds from repressed complexes’, however, ‘is more resistant and remains as powerful in fiction as in real experience, subject to one exception’ (SE, 17, p.251). The effect of the uncanny produced from the resurfacing of surmounted beliefs, can only operate within fiction if the setting provided by the author is one of material reality. In this context, Freud notes that ‘the storyteller has a *peculiarly* directive power over us; by means of the moods he can put us into, he is able to guide the current of our emotions, to damn it up in one direction and make it flow in another’ (ibid.).

After a complex, if not obsessive, consideration of the conundrum of the conditions upon which the phenomenon of the uncanny emerges, Freud reached the provisional conclusions summarised above. What is left unresolved and unspoken, however, is any substantive discussion of the significant status of repressed infantile complexes. Although he privileges their resistance and power, he gives no further explanation other than to conclude his essay with the following opaque observation:

Concerning the factors of silence, solitude and darkness, we can say only that they are actually elements in the production of the infantile anxiety from which the majority of human beings have never become quite free. This problem has been discussed from a psycho-analytic point of view elsewhere. (SE, 17, p.252)

Nicholas Royle (2003) suggests that in this last enigmatic clue, Freud is referring to a discussion on the ‘fear of the dark’ to be found in the *Three essays on sexuality* (1905):

Anxiety in children is originally nothing other than an expression of the fact that they are feeling the loss of the person they love. It is for this reason that they are frightened of every stranger. They are afraid in the dark because in the dark they

cannot see the person they love; and their fear is soothed if they can take hold of that person's hand. (pp.109-10)

The visual emphasis in Freud's account of the uncanny is unmistakable, particularly in references to fear of the dark, fear of being buried alive, and the fear of losing one's eyes; the latter pair being the prominent points in Freud's analysis of the emergence of the uncanny in Hoffmann's *The Sandman*. However, as Royle insightfully points out, Freud attributes 'the indebtedness of his theory (theory in and of the dark) to the voice of a three-year-old boy':

For this explanation of the origin of infantile anxiety I have to thank a three-year-old boy whom I once heard calling out of a dark room: "Auntie, speak to me! I'm frightened because it's so dark". His aunt answered him: "What good would that do? You can't see me". "That doesn't matter", replied the child, "if anyone speaks, it gets light". Thus what he was afraid of was not the dark, but the absence of someone he loved. (Royle, 2003, p.110)

In the absence of the positive presence and guarantee of the other, granted through vision, it is the spoken voice that assuages the traumatic elements of silence, solitude and darkness. In this way, Freud privileges the efficacy of the spoken or acoustic voice as a defence against the invasion of the unbearable tension. In the absence of vision, the sound of the spoken voice (a refined modality of movement/touch) marks the last bastion against the impingement of anxiety. Signifying practices can thus be construed as a defence against the invasion of an abyssal, undifferentiated and potentially psychotic state that Freud describes as the infantile complexes. The uncanny serves as an early warning system of the approach of danger to the integrity of the subject/object relation, understood in Freudian terms as a constructed set of defence systems and strategies that preserve the status quo.

The aspects that are perhaps the most striking about Freud's account of *Das Unheimliche* are those that he alludes to, but fails to address directly. There is something uncanny at work in the writing itself; an obsessive repetition around the central issues of

the uncanny and anxiety. Although quite clearly obsessed with these affects, Freud inserts a disclaimer about his own susceptibility to such phenomena, perhaps as an attempt to portray his own superior ability to transcend former systems of belief:

In his study of the “uncanny”; Jentsch quite rightly lays stress on the obstacle presented by the fact that people vary so very greatly in their sensitivity to this quality of feeling. The writer of the present contribution, indeed, must himself plead guilty to a special obtuseness in the matter, where extreme delicacy of perception would be more in place. It is long since he has experienced or heard of anything which has given him an uncanny impression, and he must start by translating himself into that state of feeling, by awakening in himself the possibility of experiencing it. (SE, 17, p.220)

In addition to the explicit denial of any sensitivity to the phenomenon of the uncanny, there remain the unspoken gaps in Freud’s text.³³

As already pointed out in the discussion about the psychoanalytic relevance of the double, Freud articulates a clear outline of the birth and function of the superego from a process of splitting, but refrains from naming it as such. He alludes to the repressed infantile complexes as being the most resistant and determining element in both actual experience and fictional staging of the uncanny. But again, Freud fails to offer any explanation for what appears to be an archaic repression that is excluded from any conscious ideation that has been repressed or surmounted. He does, however, intimate that the distinction between the two is difficult to discern because surmounted belief systems are likely to be underpinned by repressed infantile complexes. Even when the secondary repressions are lifted through analysis (the process of exposing a hidden matrix of belief/constructed meaning) there remains a kernel that is resistant to any further symbolic intervention. In Lacanian terms, the intersection and incommensurability of the Symbolic (secondary repression) and the Real (primal repression) can be discerned, and they appear in the form of the unspoken in Freud’s

³³ It is pertinent to note that Freud claimed to have a similar insensitivity to the effects of music (SE, 13, p.211).

text. Moreover, in Royle's (2003) analysis, the most striking omission is the concept of the death drive with respect to 'unintended recurrence' and 'repetition'. He notes that the essay on *Das Unheimliche* (1919) was being written simultaneously with *Beyond the pleasure principle* (1920), where the death drive received its first controversial articulation. Freud's notion of the death drive can thus be understood as the incessant return to this most resistant kernel of primal repression that (in turn) animates desire as an interminable quest for knowledge that expunges its deathly proximity and creates a modicum of distance.

In Seminar X: *Anxiety*, Lacan observes a parallel example. Despite naming his work *Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety*, the discussion on anxiety is absent from Freud's text. Alternatively, he suggests that it is in the essay *Das Unheimliche* that the most fertile exposition of anxiety can be found. As the affect that surrounds 'moments' of transformation, Lacan maintains, anxiety signals a palpable but paradoxical dimension, and is the indication of proximity to a point of impasse where meaning-making through symbolic representation stalls (the point of primal repression). As an impossible 'locus' from which subjectivity emerges, it produces an unsymbolisable trace that perpetually recurs under certain circumstances; the preconditions Freud is exploring in his investigations in 'The Uncanny'. Again, as Royle (2003) asserts, despite Freud's consideration of resistant and powerful infantile complexes – and the final assertion that it is, indeed, 'the factors of silence, solitude and darkness' that mark the incessant return to an inaccessible point of origin from which most human beings can never escape – the concept of the death drive is conspicuously absent. He states that:

The most uncanny example of the uncanniness is eerily *not in* [italics added] "The Uncanny". "Eerie" or "uncanny"? What is the difference? The death drive seems to prompt a clarification of these two terms. Gordon Bearn has suggested the following helpful formulation: "The absence of what ought to be present is eerie", whereas "*the presence of what ought to be absent* [italics added] is uncanny". But the death drive seems to confound this distinction: it is eerie and uncanny, eerily uncanny and uncannily eerie. It ought to be present in "The Uncanny", it ought to be absent; it is neither present nor absent. (Royle, 2003, p.88)

Royle's approach to re-reading Freud is oriented towards the unspoken (the palpable omissions of that which is avoided, deferred or unable to be directly articulated) and reveals not only Freud's anxiety about his conceptualisation of the death drive, but also the manifestation of the death drive through the text as an uncanny silence. The text weaves itself around this palpable inexpressible limit. The death drive thus becomes manifest with the unintended repetition that suspends the subject in a purgatorial state of equivocation that oscillates around a 'blind spot' or 'silence' that is experienced as uncanny. Such metaphors suggest that the kernel of subjectivity is a paradoxical 'present absence' or 'absent presence'; something that is displaced and evades any identifiable 'place' within signifying practices. As Royle suggests, however, to portray the enigmatic kernel as an *exclusion* from the Imaginary and Symbolic registers is to imply a subtraction of something that was present in the past and repressed, and could re-emerge in the future given the right preconditions. Linear notions of temporality are as problematic as spatial metaphors of presence and absence, and the logic of cause and effect. In this instance, it is helpful to recall Lacan's concept of 'logical time' as a characteristic of the unconscious.

As noted previously, Lacan conceptualised 'logical time' as a zone of suspended temporality and radical contingency. Rather than a lack or exclusion, logical time indicates an impasse that occurs in the process of representation and symbolisation around which the unconscious forms. This inherent impasse (created by the instigation of the process of symbolisation itself), Lacan suggested, is a spectral manifestation that haunts the subject with uncanny paradoxical effects that both attract and repel. By extension of Freud's thinking on the uncanny and the associated problem of repressed infantile complexes, Lacan proposed that anxiety is not without an object. In so doing, he proceeded to formulate the term *objet a* to provide a minimal conceptualisation of the traumatic element that underpins the Imaginary and Symbolic registers of human experience. This enigmatic and traumatic impasse, to which the emergence of the uncanny is wedded, constitutes the pivotal conceptual addition that Lacan made to psychoanalytic theory, and it is in Seminar X on anxiety that its expression emerges in detail.

The Uncanny *Objet a*

On the diverse spectrum of contemporary psychoanalytic theory in the Freudian and post-Freudian fields, the Lacanian orientation has acquired a formidable and controversial reputation for obscurity. Within Jacques Lacan's opus of teaching, *objet a* can be considered one of the most difficult and enigmatic formulations to apprehend because of its polyvalent complexity. Rather than a linear progression where the formulation gained greater clarity and specific conceptual definition, *objet a* continued to expand throughout Lacan's oeuvre, gaining multiple facets and attendant nuances of modification without nullifying any of its previous theoretical incarnations. Indeed, considered in a linear mode of development, the nuances that emerge in Lacan's later work inevitably reflect and refract in a retroactive effect upon many of the earlier formulations providing a kaleidoscope of partial and positioned perspectives:

Few concepts have so many avatars in Lacan's work: the other, *agalma*, the golden number, the Freudian Thing, the real, the anomaly, the cause of desire, surplus *jouissance*, the materiality of language, the analyst's desire, logical consistency, the Other's desire, semblance/sham, the lost object, and so on and so forth. (Fink, 1995, p.83)

Nevertheless, in the later stages of his career Lacan contended that *objet a* constituted the most important innovation and intervention that he had introduced into psychoanalytic praxis (Fink, 1995, p.83). As the quotation above suggests, however, the status of the formulation evolved in multiple manifestations across nearly three decades of Lacan's seminar teaching and clinical practice. Conceived in the light of clinical practice, the descriptors of 'innovation' and 'intervention' signal that rather than a purely abstract theoretical construct, Lacan was gesturing towards the primary experience of the clinic and the practical import of *objet a*. Indeed, Seminar X on the clinical salience of anxiety is testament to this orientation. The theorisation of this aspect of the psychoanalytic encounter, however, proved to be an arduous if not impossible task that Lacan was to pursue throughout his entire opus, forever opening out to further

topological forms and quasi-mathematical formulas and algorithms of the core element that, by definition, cannot be grasped within the linearity of language and its attendant retroactive effects of meaning.

During the first decade of Lacan's seminar teaching (1953- 63), 'the object' of traditional philosophical rumination and psychoanalytic investigation underwent a transformation that led to the emergence of the opaque formulation he termed *objet a*. This transformation coincides with the ascendance of Lacan's conceptualisation of the register of the Real in relation to the Imaginary and Symbolic registers; the two planes of human relationality that the graph of desire attempts to depict in dynamic interaction. Indeed, as Chapter 1 concludes, it is the fledgling manifestations of *objet a* that appear on the graph of desire that not only mark the limit of Lacan's theoretical formulation of the analytic process at the end of the first decade of his teaching, but gesture towards the further development and importance of the register of the Real in the Lacanian oeuvre.

Briefly to recapitulate the point from the graph of desire: the process of symbolisation – the entwining of both the Imaginary and Symbolic registers – leaves a remainder that Lacan labels *voiced*, the outcome of the signifying chain on the lower right vector of the graph. Similarly, the matheme for fantasy in the upper portion of the graph ($\$ \diamond a$) places the emergent split subject of desire in relation to *a*. Most obviously at this point in Lacan's opus, the lower case italicised *a* is an abbreviation for *autre* (the other), and furthermore, the enigmatic question that emerges for the neurotic subject, mired between demand and the equivocal desire of the o(O)ther. As Dolar (2006, pp.35-6) points out, however, the outcome of the lower vector as *voiced*, is an elusive reference to an element that emerges as a product of the signifying operation, but remains outside the knot of meaning. These indications remain open-ended and appear to extend beyond any direct explanation provided at the time the graph was presented. Both instances, however, signal the direction in which Lacan's thought was to expand with the ascendance of the register of the Real and its discernable but elusive representative, *objet a*. As a surplus kernel of *jouissance* around which the fabric of the Symbolic/Imaginary constellation circulates, Lacan formulates *objet a* as a radically different kind of 'object' that resists all representation and signification.

Reconfigured on the intersecting yet incommensurate planes of the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real, Lacan's extension of 'the object' eclipses any former philosophical or psychoanalytic conceptualisations, and arguably transforms it beyond recognition (Fink, 1995, p.93). The resultant reconfiguration of the object as *objet a* nevertheless owes its genesis to those numerous philosophical traditions and psychoanalytic conceptualisations. In this respect, Lacan routinely engaged with a formidable array of sources in his seminar teaching and theoretical endeavour, and his formulations were brought forward in contradistinction to these numerous references. In the case of *objet a*, this is especially pertinent because the only available option to theorise the clinical encounter with *objet a* (an object that, by definition, cannot be described in words) is to offer an account of a radically different 'object' to the object of traditional philosophical and psychoanalytic interest. Put simply, much of Lacan's elaboration is, necessarily, a negative delineation that circumscribes precisely what *objet a* is not. Although notorious for neither providing adequate references nor ascribing credit to his various interlocutors, Lacan directly acknowledged the significant psychoanalytic conceptualisation of the 'part object' by Karl Abraham and Melanie Klein, and the further development of the 'transitional object' by Donald Winnicott as important predecessors to his formulation of *objet a* (SX, 26.6.63, p.4; Fink, 1995, p.93).³⁴ As Fink suggests, however, it is to Freud's concept of the 'lost object' (that activates the compulsion to repeat, with its accompanying uncanny effects) that Lacan is most indebted.

Although it is beyond the parameters of the present discussion to attempt a detailed explication of every facet of *objet a* offered in Lacan's oeuvre, Lacan's attempt to render minimal form to *objet a* can be approached from both theoretical and clinical perspectives. In terms of psychoanalytic theory, Lacan delineates *objet a* from Freudian and post-Freudian conceptualisations of the subject/object relation, and offers a more

³⁴ Although Lacan's oeuvre has a reputation for obscurity and often lacks direct references, the inaccessibility of much of his work in the English speaking academy – combined with the editorial licence assumed by Jacques-Alain Miller in the presentation of the seminars that have been published in English to date – sounds a warning against the assumption that Lacan did not give credit or clear references to the work of others. As Marc de Kesel points out in his close reading of Seminar VII, Miller has chosen to omit many of the references that Lacan gave to the students of his seminar, thus enlarging the perception of Gallic arrogance with which Lacan's work is often characterized in the secondary literature. See de Kesel (2009).

nuanced concept of the object that emerges from the circumstance of trans-subjective exchange through language.³⁵ The particular orientation of the divided or barred subject in relation to this radically different ‘object’ is theorised as the fundamental fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$), and, for Lacan, becomes the central pivot of the psychoanalytic encounter. In practice, Lacan’s pedagogical and clinical modes of engagement emphasise the incitement of tangible anxiety, the primal influence that *objet a* imposes on the human condition. His linguistic reconfiguration and theoretical extension of Freudian psychoanalysis always refers to the context of the practical experience of the clinical encounter. To begin, therefore, the discussion returns to Seminar X on anxiety, and Lacan’s analysis of Freud’s essay on the Uncanny. From this basis, the discussion will then turn to consider the status of *objet a* in the structure of fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$ on the graph of desire) and the significance it assumes as a pivotal lever in Lacan’s clinical and pedagogical practice.

The uncanny in Seminar X.

In his analysis of Freud’s essay, *Das Unheimliche* (SX, 5.12.62, pp.1-11), Lacan first affirms and accentuates Freud’s ingenuity in a linguistic analysis of the etymological trajectories of the term *Unheimliche*. Through the notion that there is something strangely familiar about ‘the uncanny’ – a paradoxical ‘heim’ that is ‘unheim’ – Lacan extrapolates that this is precisely the fate of the human condition as one that is irrevocably subordinated to the signifier. At the locus where the most familiar and intimate point of subjective identity is sought and expected to be, there resides an uncanny and unfathomable enigma: ‘Man finds his home in a point situated in the Other beyond the image of which we are made, this place represents the absence where we are’ (SX, 5.12.62, p.5). Lacan also acclaims Freud’s astute perception of the various ways in which the experience of the uncanny can be induced and demonstrated in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s writing. In particular, Lacan highlights Freud’s perception of the juxtaposition of fiction and reality, and the manner in which the incitement of the

³⁵ Although Lacan dealt extensively with both philosophical and psychoanalytic notions of the object, this discussion is confined to the psychoanalytic axis. Chapter 3 (on sublimation) will address the broader philosophical field.

uncanny in a fictional narrative occurs most commonly when staged within a context that the reader perceives to be reality. Lacan links this effect with the function and effect of fantasy (the unconscious mechanism that stages and frames ‘reality’ for the conscious ego) with the observation that any disturbance to the fixity of this frame incites anxiety. The Freudian notion of the uncanny that emerges from the structure of Hoffmann’s fictional writing process is thus related by Lacan (in the context of the clinical encounter) to the emergence of anxiety as a sign of disturbance to the fixation of the subject at the level of unconscious fantasy.

In Seminar X, Lacan’s clinical and theoretical focus rests upon his theorisation of the centrality of fantasy, and the amelioration of neurosis through the ‘traversal’ of this unconscious structure. Moreover, he suggests that at the centre of the function of unconscious fantasy is a particular ‘objet’ that acts as a silent and invisible placeholder that sustains the subject/o(O)ther relation in both neurotic and perverse structures: ‘Anxiety ... is linked to everything that can appear at that place This phenomenon, is *Unheimlichkeit*’ (SX, 5.12.62, p.4). As such, Lacan argues that proximity to *objet a* can be perceived through the affect of anxiety that emerges when anything impinges upon its virtual jurisdiction as the ‘object’ that maintains the gap of the subject/object division. In his analysis of Freud’s essay, Lacan places particular weight on Hoffmann’s stories, *The Devil’s elixir* and *The Sandman*, with an emphasis upon Hoffmann’s portrayal of the uncanny aspect of vision and the eye. The eye sees, the subject looks, but in the process an uncanny sense of ‘being seen’ emanates from a hidden source that cannot be identified. Notions such as ‘the third eye’ and ‘the evil eye’ encapsulate this spectral dimension that can possess the twofold aspects of the familiar and the unfamiliar, reassurance and menace. It is this uncanny aspect that emanates from the side of the object that Lacan develops as *gaze*; the manifestation of *objet a* in the visual domain. In these visual terms, Lacan figures fantasy (in the structural positions of neurosis and perversion) as a fixation in relation to *objet a*. As a spectral presence that results from the process of signification, *objet a* disturbs and distorts the trans-subjective circuit. In any relational duality that might be termed inter-subjective, Lacan theorises the fundamental fantasy as an intervening structure that frames the subject’s conscious

perceptions of reality. In so doing, it involves the distortion of the fantasmatic element, *objet a*.

Rather than any universal myth, however, Lacan posits fantasy as the unique configuration that is formed according to the subject's individual history, and the manner in which the frame of 'reality' is provided with an anchor. The principle focus of Seminar X revolves around the clinical salience of anxiety as 'the one true affect' that signals the analysand's subjective proximity to *objet a* in the structure of fantasy. In analysis, it is the specificity of this juxtaposition that is mapped and simulated in the transference relation, with a view to the incitement of the conditions of possibility for the subject to construct a different kind of orientation. Clinical analysis, for Lacan, is aimed at the dissolution of the neurotic subject's static and repetitive fixation at the level of unconscious fantasy, and is guided by the oscillations of anxiety as an essential affective element; 'the median function of anxiety between *jouissance* and desire', that can be discerned within the transference relation (SX, 13.3.63, p.5). Lacan is emphatic that anxiety does not fulfil a 'mediating' function, but is the signal of the fault line between *jouissance* and desire that guides the analytic process; a process that incites the conditions of possibility for the traversal of the subject/objet relation established and fixed at the level of unconscious fantasy. Moreover, in his reference to *jouissance*, Lacan describes this fundamental relation and attachment as a thoroughly libidinal one. A return to the graph of desire and the structural relation of neurosis through the *matheme* for fantasy ($S \diamond a$) will further clarify the pivotal significance of *objet a* and anxiety in the analytic process.

The matheme for fantasy: $S \diamond a$.

The graph of desire depicts the divided and decentred subject that emerges from the process of signification. On the upper level of the graph, the structure of neurosis is figured as a conservative strategy where the neurotic position is one of fixation and stabilisation provided by fantasy around the enigma of the desire of the o(O)ther (*Chè vuoi?*) and the repression of the inherent lack in the o(O)ther (figured, A , on the

retroactive vector between castration \rightarrow *Jouissance*). The disparate partial drives (represented as the relation of the divided subject to demand, $S \diamond D$) oscillate around a range of ‘lost objects’ that partially represent the body, and cannot attain any amalgamation other than the punctuation of a primordial signifier $S(A)$ that instigates an anchoring point (known variously as the Name-of-the-Father, the paternal metaphor, the phallus, the master signifier, S_1).³⁶ The lack in the o(O)ther, A , constitutes a point of primal repression that is covered over by the instatement of this key signifier that becomes representation’s anchoring point; a point to which all configurations of representation and signification retroactively refer. It is around this key signifier, without referent, that the signifying chains form as conscious knowledge (S_2) in the matrix of the Imaginary/Symbolic constellation (the lower level of the graph). As representation’s representative, $S(A)$ is a signifier (such as a proper name) that represents the subject, and stands in as a placeholder for the lack of any ultimately definitive determination (the lack in the Other). The subject thus becomes suspended as that which is represented by one signifier to another in the chain(s) of signification. In order for an individual to enter into the trans-subjective circuit provided by language and to attain the status of subject, the instatement of $S(A)$ is crucial.

Lacan asserts that the insertion of the individual into a preordained position in the Symbolic order is established through the performative act of ‘naming’ (hence the term Name-of-the-Father). The instantiation of a name constitutes the mechanism that anchors the subject within the existent social matrix and the successful establishment of the trans-subjective circuit in the field of the Other. In so doing, it instates the Symbolic law as a finite boundary, a prohibition to the endless sliding of the metonymic chains of signifiers. To recall Althusser’s theory of ideological interpellation, this is the process of ‘hailing’ and the assumption of a place already circumscribed within the socio-symbolic order. The individual becomes a subject through the cut of the signifier, is carried along the chains of signifying elements, and ‘sparks’ briefly between the diachronic and

³⁶ This aspect of the graph is subject to multiple interpretations across Lacan’s oeuvre. Although these terms are not entirely equivalent, for the purposes of this discussion it is useful to signal the various terms that refer broadly to this aspect of the graph to maintain some sense of continuity and consistency between the different terminological vocabularies that emerge.

synchronic axes of language at junctions of metaphoric substitution; the junctions where meaning is created through successive repressions and associations (condensations and displacements). Leonard Bernstein (1967) poetically describes the fate of the subject within a musical framework:

With music we are trapped in time. Each note is gone as soon as it has sounded, and it never can be recontemplated or heard again at the particular instant of rightness. It is always too late for a second look. (p.149)

The subject sparks only momentarily as the mobile thread that weaves the diachronic and synchronic axes together in the search for meaning that is always anticipated. By the time meaning forms retroactively, the subject is displaced, forever striving ahead of a determination with which s/he can never coincide. For Lacan, the mobilisation of subjectivity within language in the first instance entails ‘the falling away’ of what he termed *objet a*.

Produced in the inevitably incomplete process of symbolisation, Lacan posits *objet a* as a fragment of libidinal *jouissance* that cannot be symbolised. The idea is illustrated by the notion that the individual, conceived of as a three dimensional body, can only be represented on the two dimensions of language, and a loss is generated in the process. It is this excessive remainder that Lacan figures as *objet a*. It is the last piece of the jigsaw puzzle of complete identity that can never be signified. Rather than being a lost piece that can be recuperated to complete the picture, however, it is an extra piece, and a disturbance to the picture of Symbolic/Imaginary reality that cannot be integrated. As a product of the process of symbolisation, *objet a* enters the circuit of the social bond as the *ur-lining* of signification. Because it results from an impasse within the process of signification itself, *objet a* lingers with the effect of a temporal ‘missing link’ that sets the metonymy of desire in motion on an incessant quest that remains irresolvable. Indeed, if the subject is understood as the paradoxical torsion of desire, a temporal impasse within the process of symbolisation, the continuation of desire is the only ground upon which the subject can be sustained.

Due to the retroactive function of language, the excessive element produced is experienced as a temporal loss that animates desire towards its recovery and the recuperation of an imagined state of pre-symbolic plenitude; a totalised *jouissance* that has been lost. The word ‘recover’ is apposite in the context of neurosis, because *objet a* serves a paradoxical function that maintains the gap of subject/object differentiation, but simultaneously ‘re-covers’ this gap in a faux tableau of completion (the unconscious fundamental fantasy upon which the guarantee of signification rests with varying degrees of ‘success’). Thus construed, both neurotic and perverse structures maintain the Other without lack through the guarantee of the fantasy structure in its many manifestations. In Seminar X, Lacan reiterates the high level of abstraction and heterogeneity that the formula for fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$) represents:

The phantasy is $\$$ [divided subject] in a certain relationship of opposition to \underline{a} [*a*], a relationship whose polyvalence and multiplicity are sufficiently defined by the composite character of this diamond shape, \diamond , which is just as much a disjunction, \cup , as conjunction, \cap , which is just as much greater, $>$, and lesser, $<$, $\$$ qua term of this operation has the form of division, since \underline{a} [*a*] is irreducible. (SX, 13.3.63, p.5)

In the libidinal economy that arises in the transformation of need (through demand) to desire, the production of an excessive object is not simply an object of desire, but an enigmatic *object cause* of desire. Rather than a material object of phenomenological experience, *objet a* is a virtual object that forms as the result of the effects of the signifier that transmogrifies the brute materiality and disarray of the body into the trans-subjective circuit of representation and signification. ‘The dimension of *a* ... always connotes the body under the label “partial object”. The *a* is a fragment of the body, fallen away and unstuck, but body nonetheless and, as such, the cause of desire’ (Harari, 2001, p.153). The individual’s suturing within the Symbolic world of social bonds is thus figured by Lacan as a libidinal one through the operation of the drives that continually circulate in a paradoxical vacillation between attraction and repulsion, Eros and Thanatos in relation to *objet a*. *Objet a*, thus becomes Lacan’s reconfiguration of the

Freudian ‘lost object’ as an absent cause that nonetheless insistently remains the paradoxical torsion of desire. Lacan further states:

[*a*] symbolises what in the sphere of the signifier is always what presents itself as lost, as what is lost to signification. Now it is precisely the residue, this fall, what resists signification, that comes to find itself constituting the foundation as such of the desiring subject, no longer the subject of *jouissance*, but the subject in so far as on the path of his search, in so far as he enjoys (*il jouit*), which is not the search for his *jouissance*, but it is to want to make this *jouissance* enter the locus of the Other, as locus of the signifier, it is there on this path that the subject precipitates himself, anticipates himself as desiring. (SX, 13.3.63, pp.5-6)

To further circumscribe the theoretical significance of *objet a*, it is helpful to consider the clinical instances of autism and psychosis. In both circumstances, psychoanalytic theory suggests that there is an apparent failure around the point of primal repression (the cut of the signifier \diamond) and the instigation of a ‘master signifier’ (S_1) that facilitates the formation of subjectivity within signification. As previously cited, Rodriguez (2001) associates the instance of infant autism with the circumstance where ‘the object *a* does not fall from the field of the Other’ (p.25), and the trans-subjective circuit fails to form at the most fundamental level of primal repression. Miller describes the dilemma of infant autism in slightly different terms as a failure to incorporate the signifiers in the field of the Other:

Meaning (or signification) is only possible when there are two signifiers in question, one signifying a subject – no matter how devoid of being he may be – for the other. Meaning is only produced in that part of the Other’s circle or “field” where we find S_2 . The autistic child’s blockage at S_1 means that neither subject nor the Other can come into existence, each requiring as it does the other’s existence. (as cited in Ragland, 1995, p.228)

According to Lacan, the structure of psychosis is one where the instigation of the signifier of lack in the Other $S(A)$ is foreclosed and the necessary entwinement of the matrix of signification between the diachronic and synchronic axes of language is insufficiently secured. By consequence, the linguistic symptoms of pathology in psychotic structure can reflect a string of displaced signifiers that fail to form the associative web with the unconscious that bestows a matrix of meaning effects. Although individuals within psychotic structure utilise language, Lacan suggests that there is no effective anchoring point through which separation and differentiation can be reliably established through the substitutive operation of repression. In a psychotic break, speech can thus be reduced to a sliding metonymy of ‘word salad’ that fails to create meaning through metaphor. Unlike the structural position of neurosis (characterised by doubt that can attain pathological proportions), psychotic structure is marked by a distinctive certainty. Moreover, there can be a corresponding confusion between internal and external with symptom formations, such as visual and auditory hallucinations that fail to differentiate the subject/object relation (Ragland, 1995, pp.74-5). The uncanny *gaze* and *voice* become indistinguishable from Symbolic reality.

Although there remains considerable conjecture about the relationship between autism and psychosis, as Rodriguez (2001) concedes, both are hypothesised in psychoanalytic theory as instances where the necessary gap of subjective division and the formation of the fundamental fantasy fails at either the point of primary or secondary repression. From this perspective, Lacan’s notion of *objet a* can be more accurately defined as an excess that is produced in the process of symbolic castration and becomes a pivotal term in the formation of the fundamental fantasy in its many variations. Considered thus, the fundamental fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$) is the structure that underpins and stages the ‘I’ within the narratives of socio-symbolic exchange (narrative fictions/ ideologies) in which the individual becomes enmeshed as subject. The hold of socio-symbolic narrative is thus predicated upon the fixity of the underpinning fundamental fantasy structure (Žižek, 2005, p.116).³⁷

³⁷ Žižek uses the term ‘fantasy 1’ to denote a symbolic fiction or narrative fantasy, and ‘fantasy 2’ to refer to the fundamental fantasy. According to Lacanian theory, social-cultural and political ‘symbolic fictions’/ narratives/ideologies are predicated upon the radically unconscious fundamental fantasy that is unique to each life history.

To summarise the discussion so far: rather than any material object of phenomenological experience, *objet a* is figured by Lacan as spectral object that ‘falls from the body’ and maintains the gap in the circuit between subject and o(O)ther – whether construed as the other of the mirror image ($a \rightarrow a'$) or the further differentiation of ‘the little other’ ($a - autre$) through which ‘the big Other’ (A - the socio-symbolic order) becomes operative. In every imaginary and symbolic representation, there is something perceived as ‘lacking’. A typical example is the manner in which positive propositions can be articulated to describe an individual: he is middle-aged, tall, an avid fisherman, a husband, a father, an engineer. Such a catalogue provides an endless string of identifications, but cannot grasp the unique singularity that each individual construes themselves to be. The elusive ‘x factor’ that one perceives to be the core of identity cannot be described, but forms the kernel around which the subject in neurotic structure pursues the quest for knowledge; a knowledge that is both sought and anticipated in the o(O)ther. Moreover, what is perceived and reflected by the o(O)ther to be the ‘x factor’ may well be in conflict with the individual’s own perception at the level of the ego. This impasse is precisely the conundrum that Lacan figures as *objet a*; the elusive element that supports and causes desire in the redoubled circuit of trans-subjective exchange.

In contrast to autism and psychosis, the status of neurosis – deemed by Freud and Lacan to be the structural position for most speaking beings – is one where separation occurs; the S(A) is successfully instigated, and the subject/object relation comes into being through the instantiation of a distance. The separation granted by *objet a*, however, is stalled in equivocation around a continual lure towards the restoration of a perceived loss (desire) and the threat of annihilation (demand) that arises in relation to the o(O)ther. It is within this constant equivocation that Lacan elaborates *objet a* as the spectral object that separates internal from external (the body as organism from its image) and the subject in relation to the o(O)ther. As such, *objet a* forms as a remnant of libidinal *jouissance* in the trans-subjective circuit and becomes the kernel of the unconscious fundamental fantasy upon which the conscious ego is staged.

In Seminar VIII (1961-62), Lacan articulates the notion of *agalma* from Plato’s *Symposium* to illustrate ‘the object of desire which we seek in the other’ (SVIII, 1.2.61, p.1-13; Evans, 2003, p.125). Renata Salecl and Žižek (1996) aptly describe this aspect of

objet a in its function as a ‘love object’ through Lacan’s notions of *voice* and *gaze*; the lure of a particular ‘tone of voice’ or ‘look’ that fascinates, garners attention, and fosters transference effects. While having the fascination of a certain *je ne sais quoi*, there is also an inherent *frisson* of danger involved. What attracts from a suitable distance can also repel when in close proximity. The equivocation between attraction and repulsion aptly describes the dilemma of neurosis (in its various modalities), and the action of the partial drives that elliptically oscillate around *objet a* as it incarnates objects of phenomenological experience to which individuals are attracted in the metonymy of desire. The latest fashion item, technological gadget, or romantic infatuation that incarnates the lure and promise of plenitude, identification and recognition, inevitably collapses into dissatisfaction upon its attainment. The subject of desire only exists in the torsion that is sustained by *objet a*: any positive realisation must ultimately remain unattainable. It is this paradoxical *jouissance* of dissatisfaction that satisfies that is emblematic in neurosis. The point that Lacan reiterates relentlessly throughout Seminar X is that anxiety is the palpable measure of this oscillation, and the key to mapping the position of the subject in relation to *objet a* in the economy of desire. Žižek (2009) succinctly describes the relation thus:

Anxiety emerges not when this object is lost, but when we get too close to it. The same goes for anxiety and (free) act. On a first approach, anxiety emerges when we are totally determined, objectivised, forced to assume that there is no freedom, that we are just neuronal puppets, self-deluded zombies; at a more radical level, however, anxiety arises when we are compelled to confront our freedom. (p.198)

In this way, Lacan clearly differentiates the operation of anxiety from the Freudian notion of castration anxiety.

In Seminar X, Lacan asserts that, in neurosis, the emergence of anxiety is the guiding thread within the oscillating trans-subjective circuit; however, he refutes Freud’s analysis that conceptualises this ‘uncanny’ effect as ‘castration anxiety’:

What the neurotic retreats from, is not castration, it is from making of his own castration what is lacking to the Other ... it is from making of his castration something positive which is the guarantee of this function of the Other. This Other which slips away in the indefinite putting off of significations, this Other which the subject no longer sees as anything but destiny. (SX, 5.12.62, p.3)

For Lacan, neurotic structure (defined in the categories of hysteria, obsession and phobia) defends against the lack in the Other through the construction and utilisation of a fundamental fantasy that represses the lack in the Other. The fundamental fantasy is a compromise formation that is both uniquely and contingently constructed as a defence strategy that stabilises the subject; a tableau that stages reality for the ego. In Seminar X, Lacan associates fantasy with *objet a* in the visual dimension of *gaze*:

This character of elision is nowhere more manifest than at the level of the function of the eye. And this is why the most satisfying support of the function of desire, *the phantasy, is always marked by a relationship with the visual models in which it functions commonly* [italics added] ... in which it gives the tone of our desiring life. (SX, 22.5.63, p.10)

Construed as a static vista, the fundamental fantasy provides a foundational stability and consistency, and *objet a* is Lacan's minimal depiction of the libidinal 'object' that fixes it in place: 'The object that the neurotic puts into his phantasy, suits him ... it succeeds in protecting him against anxiety precisely in the measure that it is a false o[object]' (SX, 5.12.62, p.7). As a relational blueprint that is indexed on the desire of the o(O)ther, the object at the centre of the fundamental fantasy can also become manifest in the form of a demand:

The true object the neurotic seeks is a demand: he wants a demand to be made of him ... the only thing he does not want is to pay the price What the neurotic must be taught to give is this thing that he does not imagine, it is nothing, it is precisely his anxiety. (SX, 5.12.62, p.8)

In Seminar X, Lacan proceeds to outline the clinical technique of mapping the analysand's relational position, stalled between demand and desire indexed upon the o(O)ther, and affirms that 'anxiety is not the signal of a lack but of something that you must manage to conceive of at this doubled level as being the absence of this support of the lack'. Rather than the Freudian notion of anxiety as the 'signal-reaction to the loss of an object' (SX, 5.12.62, p.10), what is most anxiety provoking is *the loss of the gap* that inaugurates the subject/object relation. In response to the question 'What provokes anxiety?' Lacan explains:

It is not, contrary to what is said, [n]either the rhythm nor the alternation of the presence-absence of the mother. And what proves it, is that the infant takes pleasure in repeating this game of presence absence: this possibility of absence is what gives presence its security. What is most anxiety-provoking for the child, is that precisely this relation of lack on which he establishes himself, which makes him desire, this relation is all the more disturbed when there is no possibility of lack. (SX, 5.12.62, p.10)

For Lacan, 'the lack' or gap concerned is maintained by *objet a*, in relation to which each individual constructs a unique fantasmatic scenario manifest at various 'levels' in relation to the body. As the paper on *the subversion of the subject* clearly articulates, *objet a* is conceived of as a range of spectral objects that fall away and are 'lost' with 'the cut' (◇) of the primordial signifier:

The cut takes advantage of the anatomical characteristic of a margin or a border ... Let us note that this characteristic of the cut is no less obviously prevalent in the object described by analytic theory: the mamilla, the feces, the phallus (as an imaginary object), and the urinary flow. (An unthinkable list, unless we add, as I do, the phoneme, the gaze, the voice ... and the nothing.) (*E*, pp.692-93)

Lacan asserts that in addition to being separable from the body, these objects are deemed partial because they cannot be integrated into any totality. Moreover, they remain

exterior to symbolisation due to the common characteristic that they have ‘no specular image ... no alterity’ (*E*, p.693). *Objet a* appears as a spectral object that cannot be grasped by the Imaginary and is thus excluded from any symbolic articulation. It is around these various remnants that form in the process of symbolisation that the drives oscillate in an incessant elliptical circuit of attraction and repulsion from which a paradoxical libidinal *jouissance* arises. As the quote above confirms, Lacan added to the Freudian list of ‘lost objects’ *the phoneme, the gaze, the voice and the nothing*, and it is to a discussion of these modalities that the discussion will briefly turn.

The phoneme, the gaze, the voice, and the nothing.

In *The subversion of the subject* (1960), the notation of *voice* appears for the first time as the product of signification on the lower portion of the graph of desire. Within the same paper, Lacan extends the Freudian list of psychoanalytic objects with his own additions: *the phoneme, the gaze, the voice, and the nothing*. These innovations receive no further explanation other than an extremely abstract reference to their emergence as a consequence of the cut of the primordial signifier. It was not until some three years later, in Seminar X (1962-63), that Lacan provided a further explanation that anxiety is related to the function of *objet a* within unconscious fantasy. Although originally adding four new object causes of desire, in Seminar X Lacan focuses largely on the scopic object (*gaze*) and the invocatory object (*voice*). As Geoff Boucher (2005, p.8) suggests, the phallus (ϕ) is construed as the common quotient of the four remaining modalities: the oral, anal, scopic and invocatory domains ($\frac{a}{\phi}$). Similarly, ‘the nothing’ can perhaps be considered a generic term for all modalities of *objet a*. In Seminar X, Lacan is unequivocal that *objet a* is a non-representable *nothing* that is positivised into a ‘part object’ by the neurotic: ‘the partial object is an invention of the neurotic, it is a phantasy. It is he who makes a partial object of it’ (SX, 6.3.63, p.12). The depiction of the phoneme as a modality of *objet a* also disappears in Seminar X because it can be represented within symbolisation. Although devoid of any meaning, phonemes can be arranged into a set of differential elements that nevertheless contribute to the process of

meaning-making. From this perspective, any positive sonority can be delineated and signified in its intricate aspects of pitch, duration, timbre and intonation, and, moreover, can be demonstrated to contribute to the meaning of language (Dolar, 2006, pp.14-23). The two remaining modalities of *objet a* – *gaze* and *voice* – took precedence for Lacan in Seminar X. By Seminar XI, however, the emphasis shifts almost exclusively to the concept of *gaze*, which as Dolar (2006) points out, leaves the object *voice* without sufficient theorisation. Unlike the illustration and development of the object *gaze* (briefly summarised above) which had its genesis in his earliest theory of the mirror stage, Lacan's attempts to elaborate *voice* are far more difficult to grasp. The only explanation of *voice* emerges briefly in Seminar X, and it is both complex and elusive.

The voice of the shofar.

In Seminar X (22.5.63), Lacan utilises a catalogue of religious references, from both the Judaic and Christian traditions, to illustrate the formation of the social pact and his conceptualisation of symbolic castration. In doing so, he draws a parallel between the installation of God's Law and the installation of the Symbolic law through the function of the signifier. He extends his analogy with various examples of ritual sacrifice (the most obvious being circumcision and the rituals that involve the slaughter of an animal) and the significance of the quintessential tumult of thunder and lightning as God's Law is delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai. In some of the few tangential musical references to be found in his seminar, Lacan cites biblical allusions to the sounding of trumpets and their likely origin in the call of the shofar (a 'soundmark' (Schafer, 1994, p.274) of Jewish ritual that represents the foundation of the religious social pact through the double function of sacrifice and prohibition). As with his affirmation of Freud's analysis of Hoffmann's stories (in reference to the uncanny aspect of the eye and vision) in his illustration of *voice* Lacan commends Theodor Reik's (1946) description and analysis of the function of the shofar in Judaism (SX, 22.5.63, p.2). Although Lacan warns that Reik's analysis is a source of confusion, he utilises it as a channel through which to understand the relation of the ear and audition with the emergence of the uncanny effect of the object *voice*.

The shofar is an instrument fashioned from a natural animal horn (traditionally a ram's horn) that is used to sound a variety of calls in Jewish ritual practices. Akin to a bugle call, the various shofar calls are based upon two notes that constitute the musical interval of a 'perfect fifth' rising to the fundamental note sounded at the octave (a further interval of a perfect fourth).³⁸ Like the use of bells in Christian religion, the sound of the shofar functions as a message that calls the faithful to worship on various holy days and festivals. Lacan argues, however, that Reik's analysis reveals a double level of operation. Not only does the shofar constitute a sign, it reminds the faithful of the original ritual sacrifice and prohibition instated by God's Law. Moreover, its performance constitutes an enunciative declaration and a renewal of the original social pact.

By highlighting the sheer power of its enunciative force, Lacan suggests that Reik unwittingly reveals the distinction between the shofar as a symbolic metaphor, and the sounding of the shofar as an enunciative act. By the sheer power of its enunciation, he maintains, 'this shofar ... is well and truly – and nothing other, Reik tells us – than the voice of God, of Yawhe, I mean the voice of God himself' (SX, 22.5.63, p.6). Lacan goes on to suggest that the object *voice* that emerges from this enunciative dimension is 'detached from phonemization as such' (ibid., p.7), and, consequently, is not an element that is within the structure of language and the matrix of metaphor and metonymy. Considered thus, Lacan argues that the shofar (re-)enacts the founding enunciative naming and subsequent division which makes all other utterances possible. In so doing, it also produces an uncanny and disturbing remainder. Indeed, Lacan invites his seminar audience to seek out a Jewish synagogue to experience the shofar, not simply in terms of its sonority, but, more particularly, its uncanny anxiety-provoking affect:

Those ... who have treated themselves ... to this experience will bear witness ... to the character ... not at all lyrical, to the profoundly moving, stirring character, to

³⁸ See J. Montague (n.d.). Shofar. In *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Retrieved 14 May 2011 from <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/subscriber/article/grove/music/25658>
The following links provide excellent audible examples of the shofar call: Retrieved 15 March 2011 from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHcwTeIrP-4&feature=related>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jR20-0sy1Y&feature=related>

the arousal of an emotion whose resonance present themselves independently of the atmosphere of recollection of faith, indeed of repentance in which it manifests itself, which resonates along the mysterious paths of properly auricular affect which cannot fail to touch to a really unusual, inhabitual degree all of those who come within range of hearing its sound. (SX, 22.5.63, p.3)

The sounding of the shofar is described by Lacan as the re-enactment of the social pact, a necessary repetition that also produces an uncanny affect that has a ‘binding function’. Lacan further suggests that the uncanny resonance of this founding sound has a status that is neither internal nor external, but manifests as a spectral residue that can be understood as the separable object *voice*: ‘in its waste scraps, the dead leaves, in the form of voices, the stray voices of psychosis, and its parasitic character in the form of interrupted imperatives of the super-ego’ (SX, 22.5.63, p.9). From this reference, there is a clear inference that *voice* in this spectral dimension is one of power and an overbearing authoritarian super-ego demand. From Reik’s highly detailed analysis, Lacan infers that the shofar marks both sacrifice and prohibition, and that it is the call of the shofar that, by the force of its enunciation, solidifies the social pact by the instatement of Symbolic law over the impossibility of desire. In addition to the binding function, however, Lacan points out that the call of the shofar is also used to signal when a member of the religious community is excommunicated.³⁹ In this sense, it marks a paradoxical pivot point of symbolic entry and exit.

Lacan invokes these religious metaphors and analogies collectively to illustrate the advent of social community through the cut of the signifier and the installation of the master signifier, which is likened to the clap of thunder that occludes the silence of the lack in the Other. The instatement of ‘silence’ (Freud’s infantile complexes of silence, solitude and darkness) allows the signifier to be installed as a point from which differentiation and splitting along the dual axes of the structure of language can occur. Lacan’s analysis of the shofar, and its call structured around the musical interval of the

³⁹ As always, Lacan’s discourse contains multiple threads of possible meaning and significance. His reference to excommunication in Seminar X coincides with the furore raging within the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) about his controversial teaching and clinical methods at that time. As is well documented, the impasse led to Lacan’s departure from the IPA some six months later.

perfect fifth are emblematic of this division. It is only with the success of this operation of the Symbolic that the subject comes to ex-sist in a relation of disjuncture to a non-structural element in the retroactive loop of meaning. Understood in this way, *objet a* might be heard as an echo of the meaningless noise of the Real that permeates the signifying process. Rather than a consonant harmonic, however, it has a dissonant and disruptive quality that haunts signification from within.

To further illustrate the nullity of primal repression and the installation of the master signifier, Lacan returns to the spatial example of the void that is at the centre of both the anatomy of the ear, the flute, and the pipes of an organ (SX, 5.6.63, pp.7-8). His inference in these instances is that it is only the creation of a void (the central hollow of the tube) that allows sound to resonate and divide into a range of differential frequencies to be played and heard. Although Lacan explicitly warns that these musical references are merely analogies, and that audible sound does not equate to his notion of *voice*, the analogy serves to delineate the cusp between the Symbolic and the Real, and the resonance of *voice* in the void of the Other. Lacan asserts that *voice* functions at a different level that distinguishes it from *gaze*. The distinguishing feature of the object *voice* is not simply at the level of *identification* or *assimilation*, but at the level of *incorporation*:

A voice therefore is not assimilated but it is incorporated, this is what can give it a function in modelling our void. And we rediscover here my instrument of the other day, the shofar of the synagogue. ... for an instant it can be entirely musical – is this elementary fifth even music, this deviation of a fifth in it? – ... it can be a substitute for the word by powerfully wrenching our ear away from all its customary harmonies. It models the locus of our anxiety, but let us note, only after the desire of the Other has taken the form of a commandment. (SX, 5.6.63, pp.9-10)

Lacan's discussion of *voice* represents some of the most opaque and arcane material in Seminar X. In many instances, he oscillates back towards the notion of *gaze* and spatial examples (such as the tube that delineates a void) that reiterate the examples of the vase

and the pot. Nevertheless, he asserts that *voice* operates at a different level to *gaze*, which is located in the scopic domain that he affirms as the exemplary form of fantasy. At no point in Seminar X is there any easy resolution to this juxtaposition; however, one might perhaps infer that the object *voice* is the locus of the incorporation of fantasy and, as such, the lever with which the neurotic subject's position within the fixation of fantasy can be challenged.

Conclusion

Lacan's conceptualisation of anxiety is firmly tied to the notion of fantasy. More specifically, it is linked to the spectral remainder of the process of signification, *objet a*, that the subject in neurotic structure retroactively posits as a loss that can be recuperated to restore an imaginary state of plenitude. Positioned between demand and desire, neurotic structure is poised between the plane of alienation (with the threat of annihilation in submission to the demand of the Other), and the plane of separation, where the 'abyss of freedom' yawns as an equally horrifying threat with no guarantee. As a conservative compromise, Lacan suggests that the fundamental fantasy is a radically unconscious structure that functions as a unique relational blueprint indexed upon the o(O)ther, and regulates proximity to the enigmatic desire of the other. Although an initial separation from the dictates of the o(O)ther has occurred, at the level of unconscious fantasy, *objet a* represents Lacan's minimal conceptualisation of a spectral object to which the neurotic subject maintains a fixed relation. The fundamental fantasy – understood as this relational juxtaposition with *objet a* – masks the circumstance that the Other is lacking and, as a result, the neurotic remains tethered to endless equivocations and repetitions around the desire of the o(O)ther in a paradoxical satisfaction in dissatisfaction. Although disturbing at the level of the conscious ego, the symptom, for Lacan, becomes a mode of *jouissance* that constitutes the libidinal attachment of the subject at the locus of the fundamental fantasy. *Objet a* fantasmatically maintains the gap of separation but veils it at the same time in its paradoxical capacity to both lure and repel. As a fantasmatic object, *objet a* is quite literally non-existent and outside any form of representation and signification, but because of that status it

functions as the counterweight to the Symbolic/Imaginary constellation and the conscious ego.

The Lacanian clinical approach to neurotic symptoms is one that seeks to go beyond the recovery of repressed signifiers at the level of the subject's matrix of unconscious associations, parapraxes, dream narratives and jokes, to the mapping of the neurotic analysand's subjective position in relation to *objet a*; the spectral object that binds the subject within neurotic structure in an ever-decreasing spiral of restriction and inhibition. To put this radical confrontation with the desire into effect, the ethos within the Lacanian clinic is one that advocates that the analyst should assume the role of a semblance of *objet a*, and thus constitutes the performative enactment of the formulation's theoretical implications. As an excessive element that not only attracts but disrupts the smooth flow of meaning, *objet a* becomes the lever with which the analyst attempts to provoke the analysand into a reconstruction of the relational position assumed through the auspices of the fundamental fantasy. Once the transference relation is established through the lure of the master discourse (the analyst as the subject 'supposed to know'), the analyst switches mode and assumes the semblance of *objet a*. Through this process – which requires a particular sensitivity to the operation of anxiety – the analysand's position in structure is mapped according to the locus at which anxiety emerges. As a semblance of *objet a* (the libidinal remainder of *jouissance* that sutures the analysand's subjective position and symptom), the analyst disrupts the repetition that strengthens the narrative through the technique of punctuation, interpretation and the incitement of different meanings, if not meaninglessness (*non-sens*). The Lacanian wager is that within the transference relation, the analytic process disinvests the fundamental fantasy at the level of the libidinal attachment of *objet a*; a point of subjective destitution from which the analysand has the possibility to embark upon a new orientation to the lack in the Other. With the recognition that the Other is also lacking, and a 'knowledge' of desire as the double inscription of this lack, the door opens towards the possibility of a different modality of trans-subjective relation. Indeed, rather than formulating solutions and creating imaginary identification between analyst and analysand (the master discourse that Lacan vociferously criticised as prevalent in

many post-Freudian therapies and ego psychology) Lacan's clinical orientation aims at the converse operation.

As a clinical practitioner, Dany Nobus likens the process to the folding, unfolding and refolding that a sheet of paper undergoes in the practice of Japanese origami (private communication, August 2005). If one considers the two sides of the sheet as analogous to subject and object, the psychoanalytic encounter (through the process of speech, its incitement, interruption and (re-)interpretation) is a process that in the Freudian sense, seeks to 'work through' the configuration of fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$) at the level of its unconscious libidinal attachment. Put simply, the process aims to loosen the libidinal chains that bind the neurotic subject too rigidly within a given social-cultural milieu (the Other) at a fixation that is trapped between demand and desire. Only through the destitution of this fixation can the analysand attain the possibility to embark upon the creation of a different relation; one that will circumvent the perpetual trap of 'being' or 'having' the object of desire that will grant completion sought in the trans-subjective circuit with the o(O)ther.

The status of this new relation, however, is one that has vexed psychoanalysis in the form of the question about 'the end of analysis'. For Freud, it became the impasse of analysis 'terminable and interminable'; for Lacan, it became manifest in the notion of 'the pass' where the analysand is able to bear witness to a change of discourse to the position of the analyst. This change of discourse was the final definition he gave of 'love' (Evans, 2003, pp.103-4). Anxiety and love can thus be opposed in the context of the analytic clinic. It seems apparent that there is no end goal to be achieved through analysis: its efficacy resides in an ongoing process of signification that expands rather than contracts meaning. In doing so, the process of analysis acknowledges the lack in the Other, and, moreover, takes advantage of the coincidence of a double lack – the lack in the subject and the lack in the Other – to enable something novel to emerge. The central hypothesis of this thesis, to which Chapter 3 will turn, contends that the conditions of possibility for the psychoanalytic act, the traversal of fantasy and question of 'the end of analysis' can be approached from the perspective of artistic sublimation and the troubadour's art of courtly love, which provides one of the few tangential references to the musical arts in the Lacanian oeuvre.

CHAPTER 3

MUSICAL PRACTICES: SUBLIMATION, *SINTHOM* OR TRANSFORMATIVE SIGNIFYING ACT?

Introduction

Despite close affinity with the spoken word, music and musical practices receive little consideration in Freudian and Lacanian accounts of psychoanalysis. While Freud overtly declared his insensitivity to music, Lacan makes only fleeting allusions and a few analogous references to music and musical instruments across twenty seven years of his seminar. The most accessible analogy is the instance of a musical score that he mobilises to demonstrate the structure and operation of language on both synchronic and diachronic axes (*E*, p.419).⁴⁰ In Seminar X on anxiety, Lacan employs a number of tangential references to music and musical instruments in his explanation of the object *voix*. The strongest of these references is his analysis of Theodor Reik's discussion of the Jewish shofar, introduced in his account of primal repression and the instigation of the Symbolic law (SX, 22.5.63, pp.1-13). Lacan describes the uncanny affect produced by the sound of the shofar as analogous to the experience of anxiety, the reliable signal of the relational proximity of the subject to the object *voix* at the level of unconscious fantasy. The most prominent feature of this account is the 'silent voice' of the superego command as a manifestation of the desire of the o(O)ther. In its minimal form, the superego command assumes the hue of the voice of conscience that can become pathologically manifest as an unbearable demand in obsessional neurosis and, at its most extreme, as 'audible' hallucinogenic voices in psychosis. Lacan explicitly dismisses the

⁴⁰ It is highly probable that this analogy stemmed from structural anthropology and the work of Lacan's contemporary colleague, Claude Levi-Strauss, who utilised the structure of a musical score in his analysis of myth. The distinction to be made, however, is that Levi-Strauss used the idea to reduce the heterogeneity of the content of multiple myths to a reduced set of common elements. For his part, Lacan maintained heterogeneity at the level of content (individual life history), but affirmed an underpinning set of relational subject positions that could be discerned within the structure of language.

notion that the objet *voice* has any relation to music and audible musical sonorities. Miller's interpretation (2007, p.145) appears to amplify this inference with the claim that musical activity – like symbolic speech to which it is intimately related – is constructed to mask the disruptive intrusion of the objet *voice*. Considered in this light, music and musical practices may be constructed as a defence against the void of *objet a* in the invocatory domain. As noted previously, Lacan also uses the spatial analogy of the hollow of the anatomy of the ear, wind instruments, and the organ pipe, to depict the central void of the subject in which the objet *voice* is incorporated and fantasmatically resonates as anxiety. He again reiterates that the dimension of *voice* bears no correlation with acoustic sounds associated with music.

In a subsequent discussion about psychoanalytic technique in Seminar XI, Lacan also summarily dismisses the inference of a potential parallel between psychoanalytic listening and the sonorous aspects of audition that contribute to meaning. In a quip about the title of Theodor Reik's seminal work, *Listening with the third ear* (1975), Lacan makes the wry comment: 'as if two were not enough to be deaf with' (SXI, p.258). In his dismissal of 'hearing', Lacan refers to a pivotal distinction between hearing and analytic listening. Hearing, for Lacan, concerns itself with the symbolic content of a narrative, subject to inevitable imaginary distortion and misrecognition that guarantees its cohesion in meaning at the level of the ego. Sonorous inflections, intonation and what Roland Barthes (1977) describes as the 'grain of the voice' (pp.179-89) are of no consequence to analytic listening. In a distinctly different register, analytic listening is primarily concerned with the structural form in which a narrative is presented. This concerns the juxtaposition of linguistic elements, the detection of condensations, displacements, hesitations and disturbances that interrupt the smooth flow of the articulation of speech. Put simply, analytic listening is not concerned with hearing what is said in terms of meaning at the level of the conscious ego, but with the intrusion of unconscious desire, the return of repressed elements evident in slips (such as double meanings presented in witticisms and puns), repetitions, omissions and negations. Analytic listening aims to distinguish the structural position of the analysand at the level of unconscious desire (the desire of the Other), secured by the libidinal attachment of the fundamental fantasy in relation to *objet a*. Lacan's apparent dismissal of music in

Seminar X (amplified by Miller's interpretation), appears to relegate music to the status of Imaginary hearing; a deceptive misrecognition in the field of aesthetic sonority that has no relation to *objet a* as *voice*, analytic 'listening', or the process of Lacanian analysis. In Seminar VII, however, Lacan utilises a powerful example of artistic sublimation (the medieval practice of courtly love) that is predicated on the poetic-musical and performative art of the troubadour tradition. The significance of this shift in Lacan's orientation towards sublimation through artistic means lies, for us, with the post-Marxist theoretical context.

As the introductory review of post-Marxist literature (pp.10-33 above) has outlined, each of the major theorists envisages a process through which social transformation might be achieved utilising a Lacanian psychoanalytic frame. For Laclau and Mouffe social transformation is a discursive process. Without the implication of the register of the Real, however, the type of transformation that Lacan's clinical encounter strives to achieve remains outside Laclau's and Mouffe's theoretical grasp. For Butler, the dimension of iterative performativity is paramount and embraces the contingency that each successive performative act necessarily courts. As Pluth (2007) points out, however, there is a difficulty with Butler's conceptualisation of the Real, and the requirement for recognition to sanction newly emergent or transformed identity positions. From a Lacanian perspective, such a requirement necessarily remains within the status quo of the Symbolic Other. An encounter with the Real is central to both Badiou's and Žižek's theorisation of the conditions of possibility for social transformation. The truth procedures of art, love, politics, and science are foremost in Badiou's theory; however, the manner in which these *events* attain the goal of social transformation, in practical terms, is far from clear. Žižek's notion of *the act* through the traversal of fantasy similarly fulfils the deconstructive impetus of Lacanian theory, but there appears to be no constructive phase to follow, and, like Badiou, a difficulty remains with regard to the manner in which the singular *act* transposes to the level of collective social life in any enduring transformative capacity. Finally, Althusser's emphasis upon cultural practices and aleatory materialism gestures towards not only how subjectivity might be formed in relation to discursive ideologies, but also how subjectivity might also be open to reconfiguration. Again, the process through which this

might occur is only outlined by Althusser as an opaque gesture; however, the notion of cultural practice as a possible site that operates between social identity and the singular fixation of subjectivity within the social world has distinct possibilities that may overcome the difficulty encountered in the transposition of the singularity of the psychoanalytic clinic to the collective level of social life.

As the following discussion will outline in detail, many of the elements to be found in the above summary of post-Marxist thought (discursive negotiation, iterative performativity, the *act/event* of art as a truth procedure, and the formal structure and performative function of cultural processes and practices) raise the possibility that Lacan's conceptualisation of sublimation through artistic practices warrants further investigation. The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to establish a *prima facie* case for the consideration of the transformative possibilities of artistic sublimation – in the modality of poetic-musical practices – through a reading of Lacan's privileged example of courtly love. As we shall see, however, the shift emerging in conjunction with such practices may be of a more subtle character than is commonly implied by use of the word 'transformation', coming to occur not only across multiple registers of human action, but also across time.

Although sparse and tangential, the musical examples cited in Lacan's seminars writings are important because they mark fundamental assumptions about music as a signifying practice. First, as Lacan's utilisation of the analogy of a musical score rightly attests, musical practice not only deals with the aesthetics of musical sounds, but also with the manner in which they are structured, with and without the word. Musical structure is isomorphic to the structure of language, not only in its formal expression on both diachronic and synchronic axes, but also in its temporal articulation. Musical polyphony is an exemplary model of the complexity of both musical and linguistic structure along multiple interweaving threads.⁴¹ The expansion of musical practices from the most elementary imitative and repetitive forms, to the art of interpretation and its further extension towards improvisation and composition requires an extensive understanding of structure. Moreover, in addition to an awareness of the contingent

⁴¹ A tacit reference to this parallel with musical polyphony can be found on the dustcover of Bruce Fink's *Fundamentals of psychoanalytic technique* (2007) that features J.S. Bach's Fugue in A flat Major (No. XVII from Book Two of the Forty-Eight Preludes and Fugues).

combination and substitution of signifying elements (notes/‘letters’) within the matrix of structure (the score/text), musicians become acutely attuned to repetition, inversion, augmentation, diminution, and transposition, along with the displacements, disturbances and the silences that frame musical articulations, irrespective of genre. Like poetry, musical practice heightens awareness of the contingent construction of meaning, as well as the paradoxical affective dimensions that underpin the dominance of meaning-making and logical rationality. Practising musicians become highly adept at analytic listening at the level of structure, which is precisely the aspect of psychoanalytic listening that Lacan is at pains to differentiate from sonorous audition. Musicians also become highly attuned to the emergence of anxiety within the various relational contexts and registers of musical practice.⁴²

An associated assumption arises with the notion that musical articulations are confined to the domain of aesthetics predicated upon normative and historically located Western ideals of beauty and harmony. Miller’s (2007) interpretation of Lacan suggests that musical articulations and activities are constructed as a fantasmatic defence to negate the disturbance of the object *voix* (p.145). The highly constructed nature of Western tonality and the artificially ‘equal-tempered’ chromatic scale that seeks to eradicate spurious harmonic resonances, is an excellent practical musical analogy of this rationale, and reinforces the point that Lacan unwittingly makes with the sound of the shofar.⁴³ To the ear attuned to Western harmony, the shofar creates an uncanny disturbance that Lacan metaphorically relates to the anxiety provoking presence and desire of the Other. In Seminar X, however, Lacan was undoubtedly referring to the effect of the instantiation of the Symbolic law and the fantasmatic *voix* that is produced by the sheer force of enunciation of the word that breaks the symbiotic duality of the

⁴² Musicians interact on a relational basis with an audience (present or imagined, formal and informal, active and passive), and with other musicians within a wide variety of groupings with an equally varied set of relational hierarchies. They range from the highly regulated and formal orchestra or choir under the direction of a single conductor, to the less regulated context of a chamber ensemble, jazz combo or rock band that strives for a more egalitarian relation. In addition, there is also the pedagogical relation between teacher and student. In their variety, these contexts are all subject to the operation of power relations, transference, and the emergence of a gamut of emotion and affect. At their most fundamental level, musical practices entail the relation established between musician, instrument, written score or musical ‘idea’ that is brought into practical effect through performance using the physical body.

⁴³ Western harmony evolved over time to produce the division of the octave into twelve equal semitones. When a modern piano is tuned, it involves a system of compromise and adjustment (equal temperament) which allows compatibility across twelve major and minor keys.

Imaginary. Music may constitute a paradoxical fantasmatic reinforcement of, or defence against, the intrusion of the object *voice* construed as the dominant symbolic superego command; however, as an artistic practice structured in poetic and purely instrumental forms – detached from definitive meaning – music appears to confront psychoanalytic theory with an apparent limit point to its explanatory power.

As a signifying practice isomorphic to the structure of language and the temporal articulation of speech, instrumental musical forms do not aim at linguistic meaning.⁴⁴ This aspect of signification without linguistic meaning can also be considered a facet of the object *voice*. As Žižek (2008, p.115) suggests, the residue of the signifying chain, *voice* represents a remainder of ‘*non-sens*’ that persists after all meaning is exhausted from the circuit of signification. It is an element produced within the process of signification that in no way contributes to meaning but insists as the ‘*ur*-lining’ of the articulate word that has its origins in the earliest infant/other verbalisations. This ‘*non-sens*’ facet of *voice* – as opposed to the symbolic superego command of *voice* – also has a distinctive uncanny affect; one that I suggest oscillates between the most familiar and comforting proximity of the other within the symbiotic Imaginary duality, and the anxiety provoking proximity to the desire of the o(O)ther on the cusp of symbolic castration. As Lacan suggests, this generalised affect of anxiety is located at the most primal emergence of the nascent subject, on the cusp between undifferentiated noise (the Real), affective sound (the Imaginary) and its division into discrete phonemic units from which speech, signification and the anticipation of resolution in meaning stem (the Symbolic). Outside the fixation of any master signifier – S1 or S(A) – *voice* can be understood as the locus of the cut of the signifier and the point of primal repression; the ‘ground zero’ (A) that forms the kernel of the Symbolic. It represents the most intimate but unknowable kernel of our symbolically constructed life-world. Although this ‘meaningless’ aspect of *voice* appears to be occluded in Lacan’s earlier work – where emphasis is placed upon the primacy of the signifier and structural relations of the spoken word – his extensive use of punning, the conceptualisation of *lalangue* and

⁴⁴ This observation excludes those programmatic forms in the Romantic tradition (‘programme music’) where musical sounds are employed as a direct imitation of nature (e.g. birdsong, thunder and lightning, the flow of water) to conjure up an imaginary picture through the aural domain that coincides with reality as it is formed through the Symbolic/Imaginary constellation.

various modes of *jouissance* in his later work suggest that Lacan's apparent negation of music in Seminars X and XI is not the final conclusion to be made.

In this chapter, I will argue that a restrictive characterization of music that confines it to the status of a fantasmatic reinforcement of the superego *voice*, or as an aesthetic object in support of identification and social recognition, falls short of understanding the complexity and particular efficacy of music as an artistic practice. Conceived, however, as a signifying process that stretches beyond repetition towards interpretation, improvisation and composition unveils the striking parallels to be understood between psychoanalysis and musical practice as signifying processes that have the potential to be transformative. Moreover, unlike analysis that almost inevitably returns to the creation of a reconfigured narrative – reliant on the word and meaning that entails further repression and the inevitable regeneration of a further cycle – music can produce a modification to the trajectory of human desire. This modification is one that offers the conditions of possibility for a refurbishment of the co-ordinates of the Symbolic.

Beyond the ritualistic symbolic functions of tribal chant, the call of the shofar, the bugle call, the religious hymn, the military march, the national anthem, and the profusion of musical genres that create and reinforce social identity and political ideology, I argue that music as an improvisational and compositional artistic practice incites the generation and invention of the novel.⁴⁵ By virtue of an expansion of signification through an engagement with the contingency of temporal performance, artistic musical practice is not simply an automatic hypnotic mode of repetition, nor can it be entirely contained as a conscious intentional act of conformity and/or transgression of symbolic boundaries. Although artistic practice operates from the ground of existing musical structures and technical expertise learnt through repetition, its contingent temporal articulation courts the manifestation of novel formations that are occluded by

⁴⁵ Louis Althusser's (1971) emphasis upon practices that interpellate individuals as subjects of ideology can be readily apprehended through ritual musical practices that primarily involve physical movement and affect rather than any conscious decision or understanding about the content and meaning of the ideological discourse they serve. We find ourselves unwittingly singing, marching, or dancing along to the music irrespective of the ideology for which it serves as a vehicle of interpellation.

conscious deliberation and rehearsed routine.⁴⁶ In this sense, improvisational/compositional musical practice is not simply analogous to the automatic functioning of the repressed unconscious, but is more akin to the unconscious that Lacan stressed as the ‘unborn’ as it becomes manifest in the gaps and failings of the structural system that underpins any particular combination of elements. More importantly, however, I will contend that the crucial transformation occurs at the level of affect where the process itself engenders a different mode of satisfaction that incites the process to continue as a dynamic practice of ongoing creative regeneration. Additionally, I will argue that the conditions of possibility for musical practices to operate in this productive modality are not the singular preserve of elite musicians who have the benefit of formal training and professional status in the Western aesthetic tradition; they are also manifest in the lay practices of music-making in the diverse textures of social-cultural life. In this sense, artistic practice can be seen to operate in a similar fashion to analysis at the level of the individual, but within the collective sphere of a cultural practice. In psychoanalytic terms, this posits musical practice as a form of artistic *sublimation*.

Considered in terms of this wider conceptualisation of artistic practice, music-making can provide a positive signifying strategy with the capacity to counter the deleterious effects of the human condition. Not only can musical practices counter pathological neurotic symptoms (stalled in the fixation of unconscious fantasy between desire and demand), they also represent a mode of ongoing signifying practice that courts contingency, and productively employs the lack of definitive meaning that resides at the heart of the Symbolic (the lack in the Other - \bar{A}). Isomorphic with the structure of language and the temporal articulation of speech, I argue that artistic musical practice provides an exemplary model of sublimation with the capacity to restructure the dynamics of human relationality at the level of culture. Musical practices undoubtedly have the capacity to interpellate individuals as subjects through a powerful blend of

⁴⁶ Corroboration of this assertion comes from the unlikely source of recent neuroscientific research. fMRI scans of experienced jazz musicians have shown significant differences in brain function when improvising, as opposed to playing prescribed musical forms and scale patterns. Although in its infancy and far from conclusive, the evidence thus far suggests that the ability to improvise and produce novel combinations involves a significant reduction in self-monitoring. See Limb and Braun (2008). In Lacanian terms, the ability to loosen the dominance of the big Other appears to be a factor in producing novel combinations of musical elements in improvisation.

corporal practice, signification and affect. Through this same matrix, however, music can reposition the subject at the point of primal repression (A). From this locus, the discursive circuit (social link) has the capacity to regenerate and mobilise subjectivity away from an asymmetric tendency towards repression and its restrictive and stalled pathological consequences. I will also argue that the clinical problem of the end of analysis and the conundrum of the psychoanalytic act that traverses fantasy – utilised extensively in post-Marxist theory – find their co-ordinates in the further theorisation of sublimation. Considered in this light, artistic musical practice can serve as an exemplary model of an ongoing signifying practice of cultural renewal from which both the individual and collective domains derive and negotiate their complex entwinement. Rather than being entirely absent from Lacan’s opus, I will demonstrate in this final chapter that the productive seeds for the further theorisation of sublimation emerge in the conceptual developments of Lacan’s later work (from Seminar XX) in combination with elements to be found as early as Seminar VII: *The ethics of psychoanalysis* (1959-60). It is from the initial vantage point of Seminar VII, Lacan’s discussion of ethics, and the art of courtly love as a privileged form of sublimation that the discussion will embark.

Seminar VII (1959-60): The Ethics of Psychoanalysis

Understood in the broadest terms, the domain of ethics can be defined as ‘the human attempt to realize “the good”’ (de Kesel, 2009, p.34). For Lacan, however, the paradoxical complexities of human relationality revealed by Freudian psychoanalysis pose a critical dilemma for the ethical field. Rather than an orientation towards ‘the good’ as an innate or natural potentiality that human striving can actualize, it is the subversive structure of *desire* that drives the human psyche. Moreover, for Lacan, desire results from the primacy and materiality of the signifier and its paradoxical and irreversible effects/affects. As a consequence of the necessary mediation of language for survival, human relationality is deprived of any direct or guaranteed ground in nature. Accordingly, the problematic question of the basis upon which an ethics of psychoanalysis could be grounded is the specific focus of Lacan’s seventh seminar.

Lacan's reconfiguration of Freudian psychoanalysis through structural anthropology and linguistics provides a fundamentally alternative perspective on both the human condition, and the practice of psychoanalysis. Predicated upon the effects of language, it reveals the subversive character of human desire and remains highly controversial because it radically questions the status of knowledge and its relation to truth. In doing so, Lacanian epistemology undermines the foundation of traditional ethics and any comforting guarantee to be found in moral codes based upon notions of 'the good', grounded in either metaphysics or nature. In practical terms, clinical analysis conducted in the Lacanian orientation eschews the position of the master discourse that presumes to operate from a position of knowledge that equates to truth, and abstains from the endorsement of any particular perspective (de Kesel, 2009, p.5). In opposition to numerous diverse models of post-Freudian psychoanalytic practice and psychotherapy, the Lacanian analyst does not seek to strengthen the ego or provide a recalibration towards any normative ideology, philosophy or belief. Alternatively, through the transference relation, the Lacanian clinician aspires to stage an encounter through which the analysand can tangentially experience and distinguish the subversive structure of their unconscious desire. 'To have carried an analysis through to its end', Lacan maintained, 'is no less than to have encountered that limit in which the problematic of desire is raised' (SVII, p.300).

Lacan's primary emphasis rests upon the relational character of subjectivity, and the process of a recalibration of the trans-subjective co-ordinates of demand and desire. It does so with the conviction that the confrontation with the subversive truth of unconscious desire provides the conditions of possibility for change through an alteration to the libidinal attachment that sutures the symptoms for which the analysand seeks alleviation. Ultimately, the outcome is highly contingent; and as Lacan reiterated on several occasions, there is nothing less sure than the guarantee of 'a cure'. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the intention of the Lacanian clinic is one that hopes to prompt a beneficial change for the analysand who has sought treatment for his or her problematic symptoms (de Kesel, 2009, p.1). The analytic process, however, will not provide an outcome that is easily or quickly achieved. Nor will it necessarily provide the restoration of any harmonious comfort or natural state of happiness for the ego that

stubbornly resists the assumption of responsibility for the duplicitous character of desire. Given these preconditions, the notion of any envisaged outcome that conforms to an externally imposed ethical or moral template of ‘the good’ (instantiations of the Other) goes against the Lacanian grain. With an understanding of this difficult and uncertain clinical scenario, Lacan engages (in Seminar VII) with the topic of ethics to interrogate not only the grounds upon which the Lacanian clinic might be conducted, but, more broadly, to re-evaluate the status of ethics for the subject of modernity.

To evaluate the parameters of the ethical dilemma faced by both the analysand and the analyst in the clinical setting, Lacan makes a deviation into the traditional philosophical domain of ethics in the work of Aristotle, Kant, and Bentham. Moreover, in his introductory lecture (18 November 1959) he also emphasizes that the selection of the topic of ethics is the continuation of the theoretical trajectory set in the final lectures of the previous seminar (Seminar VI, 1958-59) where the term *objet a* had arisen (without clear definition) for the first time. In this way, Lacan’s deliberations on ethics in Seminar VII encompass a broader agenda than any specific ethical orientation or moral imperative in clinical practice. They also aim towards the expansion, correction and juxtaposition of many of his previous theoretical categories:

Given all that is implied by the phrase, the ethics of psychoanalysis will allow me, far more than anything else, to test the categories that I believe enable me, through my teaching, to give you the most suitable instruments for understanding what is new in both Freud’s work and in the experience of psychoanalysis that derives from it. (SVII, p.1)

Lacan’s seminar on ethics, like the majority of his seminar teaching across nearly thirty years, is an example of his theoretical work in progress. It demonstrates the process of his ongoing attempt to theoretically (re)formulate the experience of the psychoanalytic encounter, without attaining any specific or definitive resolution. With due consideration of the expansive scope of Seminar VII, its profusion of concepts, examples and typically Lacanian lack of definitive conclusions, the following summary is necessarily confined to a general overview of the ethical field to which Lacan relates his specific discussion

on sublimation. After the ethical stage has been set, the discussion will be poised to re-examine Lacan's privileged examples of sublimation – the art of courtly love and Greek Tragedy – through the conceptual lens of the later Lacan.

The interval between Aristotle and Freud.

The object of traditional philosophical reflection – ‘the good’ in its various guises – is central to Lacan's deliberation on ethics. As his major point of reference, he selects Aristotle's analysis of ethics, *The Nicomachean ethics*, as ‘the most exemplary and certainly the most valid’ treatise within the traditional philosophical field (SVII, p.22). From this Aristotelian foundation, Lacan brings his psychoanalytic perspective into ‘sharp relief’ (ibid., p.5) through a painstaking delineation of an historically located reversal that occurs through the advent of the Enlightenment subject and Freud's subversive psychoanalytic perspective that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century. It is only in reference to these vastly different historical contexts – the sweeping vista which he termed ‘the interval between Aristotle and Freud’ (SVII, p.11) – that Lacan believed that the import of psychoanalysis and its break with traditional ethics could be grasped.

Aristotelian ethics portrays the human condition as the natural human potential to achieve ‘the good’. Through suitable training and guidance that involves both rational judgment and practical action, Aristotelian virtue ethics is a dynamic process that moves towards the actualization of an innate potentiality, the attainment of its objective being: ‘the good’. De Kesel (2009) succinctly summarizes this dynamic process:

For Aristotle, “nature” is a dynamic and energetic process. Realizing myself and my world equals succeeding in putting my *possibility of being* (“*dunamis*”) into energy (“*energeia*”), and in this way fulfilling the teleological destination that lies hidden in me. This positive increase in “*dunamis*” activated in “*energeia*” gives man a feeling of well-being, of happiness or pleasure”. (pp.66-7)

For Aristotle, the teleological goal of ‘the good’ is an achievable goal towards which human striving is naturally aimed. ‘The good’ is the true, unmediated essence of humankind and, moreover, ‘happiness’ is the energetic signal that one is on the correct path towards its attainment. From this initial starting point, Lacan suggests that a complete reversal occurs through the Enlightenment and the subsequent advent of modernity.

Following Alexandre Koyré (a contemporary philosopher of science), Lacan cites the seventeenth-century scientific reconfigurations of Galileo and Newton as examples of the ‘mathematization’ of Aristotle’s real world. Rather than any direct and unmediated access to reality or nature – which, for Newton, remains the province of God – human capacities are restricted to appearances that are described through ‘an autonomously operating “logical” – in this case, mathematical – system’ (de Kesel, 2009, p.59). As an extension to this idea, inaugurated in the scientific domain during the seventeenth century, Lacan (somewhat surprisingly) singles out Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarian ethics of the late-nineteenth century as a distinctive marker. However, rather than the well known aphorism that encapsulates Bentham’s utilitarianism with the goal of ‘the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people’ (de Kesel, 2009, p.60) – that would appear to be aligned with the Aristotelian emphasis on happiness – Lacan refers to a lesser known work, *Theory of fictions*, to illustrate the discursive nature of ethical categories.

While for Aristotle ‘the good’ was an achievable reality – the ontological actualization of a natural human potentiality – Bentham asserts that ethics is framed and mediated by language. In this respect, Bentham’s view appears to coincide with Lacan’s view of the primacy of the signifier. Like Koyré’s notion of the scientific ‘mathematization of the real’, language is an autonomous signifying system through which the human life-world is perceived and interpreted. For Bentham, the objects of philosophical rumination – such as ‘the good’, ‘happiness’, ‘the soul’, and ‘duty’ – are linguistic abstractions. They emerge from language itself and can thus be considered discursive ‘fictions’ that remain open to *conscious* mediation (de Kesel, 2009, p.60). Bentham’s fictional ethical entities remain entirely open to transparent negotiation through the Symbolic, with the result that theoretical rational choice coincides with

practical ethical action without difficulty (ibid., pp.61-2). Bentham's case does not extend to the extreme claim that all reality is discursively constructed, and his *Theory of fictions* does not account for the unconscious. This last point marks the pivotal distinction of psychoanalysis from Bentham's utilitarianism that portrays an uncomplicated humanist voluntarism. Although Lacan affirms the significance that Bentham accords the productive function of language, he remains opposed to Bentham's straightforward assertion of transparent conscious judgment aligned with ethical action. From a psychoanalytic standpoint, the relation between the two is neither transparent, nor harmonious. In accord with Freud, Lacan reasserts that conscious thought and action are modulated by the unconscious, an autonomous 'operating system' that lies 'between perception and consciousness, between the glove and the hand' (SVII, p.61). Our Symbolic world is thus rendered in Freudian terms as a reaction formation to something excluded from transparent conscious negotiation (de Kesel, 2009, p.70).

For Lacan, the Freudian reaction formation is the Imaginary/Symbolic constellation within which the nascent subject emerges, but remains constantly repressed and deferred. The focus for Lacan's reconfiguration and extension of Freud focuses upon the unknowable kernel around which the unconscious forms, and marks the ascendance of the register of the Real in Lacan's oeuvre. In contrast to any natural or unmediated access to Aristotle's real world, Lacan pursues a distinctly modernist definition of the Real that is portrayed in relation to the fictional status of language through which the human life-world is created. Lacan affirms Bentham's insight into the operation of language, its production of abstract 'fictional' categories, and the consequent impact on ethics. Rather than locating ethics within the domain of consciousness open to direct discursive negotiation, Lacan locates ethics in the dialectical relation *between* language and *das Ding* (the Real), which he elaborates extensively in Seminar VII through the concept of *sublimation*.⁴⁷ Most important for the

⁴⁷ In this assertion, I am following an important distinction made by Marc de Kesel in his recently published close reading of Seminar VII. De Kesel (2009, p.61) makes the pivotal point that Miller's interpretation and translation of the relevant passage regarding Bentham in Seminar VII (p.12) places the weight of ethical endeavour on the 'side of the Real', when in fact 'pirate transcriptions' of the Seminar favour the more nuanced distinction of psychoanalysis as an ethical endeavour positioned 'between language and the Real'. It marks an alternative to the misleading notion of an 'ethics of the Real', most notably suggested by the Slovenian school, and Slavoj Žižek's protégée, Alenka Zupančič (2000). De Kesel's argument is a salient one with respect to the post-Marxist use of Lacan which emphasises the

present discussion, however, is the delineation of the reversal that occurs between the Aristotelian ‘good’ (grounded in nature) and the Freudian view that affirms *desire* as the distinctive characteristic of the human condition, removed from any natural ground. To distinguish the two perspectives, Lacan considers the divergent conceptualisations of nature, desire and energy.

Aristotelian ethics is grounded in a particular view of ‘nature’. As Lacan points out in the first lesson of Seminar VII, carnal desire is simply negated from the human domain. Aristotelian ethics is oriented towards the actualization of ‘the good’ as the highest expression of human nature, and carnal desire is simply not considered human. Consigned to the category of ‘bestial desire’, the desire that is at the centre of psychoanalysis is not admitted to Aristotle’s definition of nature. As Lacan notes:

Where a certain category of desires is involved, there is, in effect, no ethical problem for Aristotle. Yet, these very desires are nothing less than those notions that are situated in the forefront of our experience. A whole large field of what constitutes for us the sphere of sexual desires is simply classed by Aristotle in the realm of monstrous anomalies – he uses the term “bestialities” with reference to them. What occurs at this level has nothing to do with moral evaluation. (SVII, p.5)

Lacan emphasizes that in the interval between Aristotle and Freud there is a reversal of this position. The Freudian psychoanalytic view places *desire* as the central facet of the human condition; moreover, it is the factor that separates the human subject (as a speaking animal) from any ground in nature. In this assertion, Lacan again places primary emphasis upon the effects of language, and the necessary reliance upon signification for human survival and its consequent production of subjectivity (split between language and the subversive torsion of unconscious desire). Lacan also identifies a reversal between Aristotle and Freud with respect to the notion of energy.

primacy of unconscious fantasy and the inability to negotiate the Real. For further discussion of this point, see de Kesel’s unpublished conference paper *There is no ethics of the Real: About a common misreading of Lacan’s seminar on “The ethics of psychoanalysis”* delivered at the International Conference ‘Rhetoric, Politics, Ethics’, Ghent University: Belgium (April 21-23, 2005), accessible from: http://www.rpe.ugent.be/de_Kesel_paper.doc

The accumulation of *energeia* is concomitant with the practice of Aristotelian virtue ethics – the striving towards the possible mastery of ‘the good’ – and the endowment of the side-effect of happiness or pleasure along the way. An *increase* in energy is aligned with the effect of happiness. This notion of energy in relation to human affairs is contrasted by the Freudian conception of the *pleasure principle*. Derived from his training as a neurologist and the scientific psycho-physical stimulus-response theory of his era, Freud asserted that the human psyche is organized around the pleasure principle which aims at the *reduction* of energy with which the human organism is bombarded in its severely premature condition at birth. This is precisely the opposite movement that Aristotle asserts. Lacan takes an early Freudian scientific work, the *Entwurf* (1895) – *A project for a scientific psychology* (SE, 1, pp.283-387) – as his point of reference, and it is from this neurological context that he extracts and utilizes the figure Freud terms *das Ding* (the Freudian thing).

The Freudian thing (das Ding).

Within the Freudian context of the *Entwurf*, *das Ding* is analogously depicted as the overwhelming stimuli from which the human neonate must defend itself with the reaction formation of the psychic apparatus. For Freud, the unconscious functions as an intricate network of facilitations that constitute a protection mechanism that assimilates stimuli through the primary process of the pleasure principle (Kahn, 2002, pp.23-5). This was an initial attempt by Freud to theorise the unconscious mechanisms that underpin human judgement processes and the complex entwinement of the pleasure principle and the reality principle (need). Any judgement of incoming stimuli is predicated upon already established criteria in unconscious memory, based on the pleasure principle. Although the reality principle of need (such as hunger) counters the hallucinatory satisfaction of the pleasure principle, it is nevertheless framed within its influence. From this complicated ‘double intersection’, human desire emerges (de Kesel, 2009, p.76-82). As a consequence, ‘the subject of judgement, the “thing” that is judged, is never known or named *as such*’ (ibid., p.84). Symbolic propositions encapsulate and approximate *das Ding*, but *das Ding* can never be fully bound to pre-existing criteria in

memory, filtered by the pleasure principle operative in the unconscious. *Das Ding* ultimately escapes all predicate judgements and lures the subject of unconscious desire towards a point beyond signification and the pleasure principle.

The term *das Ding* represents a very specific and minor role within the Freudian opus as a whole; however, Lacan, in typical style, re-reads Freud in a radical manner that expands the term beyond the parameters to be found in the original Freudian context of the *Entwurf* (de Kesel, 2009, p.83). From the sphere of judgments and the psycho-physical tenor of Freud's depiction, Lacan transports the concept into the trans-subjective subject/object relation through language. Unconscious desire not only emerges as the desire of the o(O)ther, but is subversively oriented beyond the signifier (which operates on the pleasure principle) in a deathly dialectic between the Symbolic law and *das Ding*. As de Kesel (2009) suggests, the emphasis Lacan maintains on the scientific aspect of Freud's concept might best be understood as an attempt to distance the notion from any natural or metaphysical ground (pp.83-4). Framed also by Koyré's notion of the 'mathematization' of the human life-world, Lacan's initial structuralist approach is increasingly inflected with a mathematical idiom that mirrors the dominant approach in the mid-twentieth century. Rather than Freud's bio-neurological frame, Lacan pursues the primacy of the signifier through structuralism and various stages of quasi-mathematical schemas (graphs, mathemes, formulas, and topological figures) in an attempt to encompass the unrepresentable impasse of the Symbolic, and the inherently subversive structure of human desire.⁴⁸

The psycho-physical tenor of Freud's description of *das Ding* infers the unstructured chaos and cacophony of stimuli that are a threat to the premature neonate. Through this frame, however, Freud was primarily attempting to define and ascertain the contours of the judgment processes of the psyche. For Lacan, Freud's insight into the necessity for the human animal to mediate and attenuate this 'natural' chaotic state through language discounts the Aristotelian potential for the attainment of 'the good' as an *a priori* endowment of nature or true essence. The requirement for a symbolic frame (which Lacan equates to a form of mathematization) renders the human condition

⁴⁸ For an extensive discussion of the mathematical dimension of Lacan's work, see A. Cutrofello (2002), pp.141-70.

distinctly unnatural, and interminably caught within the disjuncture between language and *das Ding* (an unknowable ‘thing’). Given this reversal, ethics cannot be located in the Aristotelian notion of ‘the good’ as a natural *a priori* given. Neither can ethics be negotiated as a pure abstraction of language open to a fully transparent conscious discursive negotiation, as Bentham suggests.

From a Lacanian perspective, the ethical domain is conceived as the negotiation of the human dilemma, positioned between language and the Real; the realm of unconscious desire and the vicissitudes of the partial drives severed from any natural or empirical point of resolution. The drives have no ‘natural’ object: they simply ‘drive away’ in the interstice of unconscious desire between language and *das Ding*. For Lacan, *das Ding* is a ‘mythical point’ at the heart of the signifying process towards which the energy that is siphoned over in the play of signifying substitutions is oriented. The satisfaction of the drives, therefore, resides in their continual movement around *das Ding*, as an impossible destination (SVII, p.90; de Kesel, 2009, p.169). *Das Ding* is transformed from the psycho-physical context of Freud’s explanation to a new conceptualization of the object relation that lies at the centre of Lacan’s structuralist depiction of subjectivity, decentred from nature and split by the cut of the signifier. It is by means of this theoretical manoeuvre that Lacan’s modernist Real emerges in distinction to Aristotle’s unmediated natural ‘good’ through the Freudian figure of *das Ding*.

The Aristotelian real is posited as ‘the good’, endowed *a priori* by nature, and can be ontologically attained by human beings through the exercise of virtue ethics. ‘The good’ is thus the real ontological destiny of humankind, a real that is *possible*. Conversely, the minimal subject that Lacan portrays is emergent as the speaking subject in the act of enunciation; mediated by language (the big Other), but simultaneously suspended and repressed within the network of the unconscious as the torsion of desire. As the graph of desire depicts, the subject of enunciation and the subject of the enunciated are entwined but can never fully coincide in the temporal alternation of anticipation and retroaction through which meaning is constructed within language. Put simply, this impasse becomes manifest as an internal exclusion that has no direct means of representation in the Symbolic. It is a nucleus of *pas de sens* around which language

and the human psyche are constructed, an internal impasse that is projected externally into the trans-subjective spectrum of social relationality. It is the hypothesis of Lacanian psychoanalysis that this impasse is universal to the human condition. From the reconceptualisation of the Freudian *das Ding* – first brought to the fore in Seminar VII – *objet a* and the Lacanian Real emerge not so much as an exterior *a priori* domain that is excluded by language, but as “an impasse in formalization” within the process of signification itself (Pluth, 2007, p.145).

Although Lacan’s emphasis in Seminar VII rests upon the *a priori* status of the distinctly unnatural signifier and language, he depicts the divided subject structurally positioned in relation to an inaccessible point ‘beyond the signifier’. At the finitude of signification – the cusp where knowledge and meaning reach an ultimate impasse – Lacan employs Freud’s notion of *das Ding* as an intimation of a register from which the speaking subject is barred. Within the Freudian psycho-physical frame, exposure to the full force of *das Ding* would constitute annihilation for the human animal. For Lacan, this annihilation equates to the collapse of the symbolic universe and the fictional structure upon which the human psyche (and access to ‘reality’) necessarily relies. It is only through the attenuation of the overwhelming force of *das Ding* – through the combined operation of Imaginary misrecognition and Symbolic repression and deferral – that an illusory sense of cohesion and psychic stability can be attained. Lacan suggests, however, that the human condition is irrevocably marked by the relentless torsion of *das Ding*, which forever lures from beyond the limit of any notional Symbolic ‘good’ and gives rise to the interminable impasse of desire within the dialectic of the subject/object relation. Paradoxically *das Ding* provides the Symbolic/Imaginary universe with a necessary nucleus of resistance that acts as a counterweight to signification and meaning.

Through the figure of *das Ding* in Seminar VII, we find the genesis of the Lacanian Real, portrayed as *impossible* (the antithesis of the Aristotelian real), and beyond any possibility of any transparent or naturally endowed ethics of ‘the good’. Accordingly, Lacan suggests that the ethical domain lies between language and *das Ding*, where the subject emerges as an object relation caught in the dynamic dialectic of unconscious desire (the impasse that is created by signification and played out within the

trans-subjective domain). Lacan's decentred and internally divided subject represents the torsion of desire between two irreconcilable poles. Pivotal to Lacan's discussion on ethics, however, is the manner in which the relentless dialectic of desire between the Symbolic law and its transgression(s) can be successfully mediated through various cultural practices of *sublimation*. Although inadequately theorized by Freud, Lacan revisits the concept in Seminar VII in an effort to elucidate the conditions of possibility that sustain sublimation with the capacity to avert the worst pathological responses of repression and *jouissance* at the level of unconscious fantasy.

Sublimation

In Seminar VII, Lacan significantly extends and intensifies his emphasis on the primacy of the signifier. Through the Freudian notion of *das Ding*, he proposes that the subject not only emerges from the interstice between the entwined Symbolic and Imaginary registers, but is simultaneously suspended in the vicissitudes of the drives between the Symbolic law and *das Ding*, a null anchoring point that presses against the Symbolic. This theoretical expansion marks the elevation of the register of the Real in Lacan's opus. Although not fully expressed as a third register of the human condition until Seminar XI, Lacan's engagement with the notion of 'the Freudian thing' – *das Ding* – in Seminar VII is pivotal insofar as it marks a substantial reevaluation of the role of the Imaginary with respect to Freud's theory of sublimation.

Rather than the emblematic misrecognition figured in the mirror stage, in sublimation the Imaginary offers the potential to uphold a range of cultural practices that function as largely positive and non-repressive responses to the impasse of desire. It is within this context that Lacan's reconfiguration of sublimation became a pivotal aspect of his consideration of the ethics of psychoanalysis, and the clinical problematic of the desire of the analyst. Unlike the repression hypothesis (and its associated pathological structures of neurotic symptoms anchored in unconscious fantasy), Lacan contends that sublimation offers not only a positive strategy, but an ethical intervention into the dilemma of the split subject (de Kesel, 2009, p.168). Situated beyond any Symbolic 'good', Lacan's view of ethics is radically distinct from any moral code that might be

proffered and given sanction by the analyst. Before we consider specific examples of sublimation, it is helpful to reiterate that the figure of *das Ding* in Seminar VII foreshadows and overlaps with the notions of *objet a* (discussed extensively in Chapter 2) and the register of the Real as they were to fully emerge from Seminars X and XI.

Unlike ‘reality’ – the discourse of the ego which is confined to the Symbolic/Imaginary constellation – the Real/*das Ding* is that which is internally excluded from Symbolic negotiation, and cannot in any way be imagined or apprehended. Like an unseen gravitational force that distorts the circular orbit of a planet around the sun into an ellipse, Lacan’s notion of the Real is an unknowable register that distorts the smooth operation of human relationality which is irreparably reliant upon signification. Formed through the process of signification itself, but without any direct mediation through language, the Real incites the unremitting torsion of human desire towards a point beyond the signifier. In Seminar II, the Real is posited as ‘the essential object which isn’t an object any longer, but this something with which all words cease and all categories fail, the object of anxiety *par excellence*’ (p.164), and by Seminar XI it is rendered as ‘the impossible’ (p.167). As Evans (2003, p.160) also points out, Lacan’s later work also ascribes a material connotation to the Real as the brute reality of the body as an organism, beyond the bounds of that which can be perceived through the senses as the Imaginary body and understood and integrated through language as the Symbolic body. In this sense, it is also the Real body as radically Other, in addition to the socio-symbolic frame (the big Other) in which the subject is inscribed. As portrayed by the subject positions of hysteria and obsession in neurosis, the corporeal enigmas of sexuality and death haunt the field of representation and the dual axes of the drives, rent between the paradoxical entwining of Eros and Thanatos.

Although Lacan portrays the split subject anchored in the impossible Real beyond any direct mediation through language, in Seminar VII he considers the possibility that sublimation may offer the subject a positive relation to the subversive structure of desire. Instead of the transgressive impulse that strives beyond the finitude imposed by the Symbolic law (with the rebound effect that unconscious *jouissance* confirms the status quo), sublimation maintains the subject of desire in a distinctly

different and potentially transformative modality. That modality is in the domain of drive:

We are now getting to the most profound things Freud has to say about the nature of the *Triebe*, and especially insofar as they may give satisfaction to the subject in more than one way, notably, in leaving open a door, a way or a career, of sublimation. (SVII, p.90)

Sublimation and ethics thus become closely interrelated, and Lacan asserts that they both belong to a domain situated between language (the Symbolic law) and *das Ding* (the Real) where the subject of desire is able to negotiate a breathing space in an Imaginary way through cultural practices. Indeed, Lacan proposes that – along with art, religion and science – Freudian psychoanalysis is a form of sublimation and an ethical practice because it aims to keep the space of desire open (de Kesel, 2009, p.175).

The terms upon which psychoanalysis might be grounded as an ethical practice is the central focus of Seminar VII in which six sessions are specifically devoted to sublimation. In broad terms, Lacan suggests that sublimation operates through a window of opportunity within the Imaginary/Symbolic constellation through cultural practices that enable a conscious staging and particular negotiation of desire. In this respect, Lacan makes a pivotal distinction between sublimation and repression as a correction to the diverse attempts that Freud made to conceptualise the two terms. It is beyond the scope of this study to examine in specific detail the numerous anomalies and impasses in Freud's theories;⁴⁹ however, the following discussion (which charts the additions and alterations that Lacan made to the Freudian concept of sublimation) provides a summary of the most salient points.

Freud's various attempts to theorise the concept of sublimation remained unsatisfactory and contradictory, even for those adherents (such as Jean Laplanche) who vigorously sought to defend the Freudian hypothesis (Roustang, 1996, p.26). In summary, however, mainstream accounts of the Freudian concept suggest that through

⁴⁹ See Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), pp.431-33 for a detailed outline of the many anomalies in Freud's opus with regard to sublimation.

sublimation the unstable drive economy can be diverted into cultural productions that function as compensation for the privations imposed by the necessary collective social law of the incest taboo. Accordingly, Laplanche and Pontalis (1973) defined sublimation as:

[the] process postulated by Freud to account for human activities which have no apparent connection with sexuality but which are assumed to be motivated by the force of the sexual instinct. The main types of activity described by Freud as sublimated are artistic creation and intellectual inquiry. The instinct is said to be sublimated insofar as it is diverted towards a new, non-sexual aim and insofar as its objects are socially valued ones. (p.431)

Laplanche and Pontalis proceed to discuss various contradictory anomalies in Freud's theory, and observe the dearth of any 'comprehensive theory of sublimation', with the following conclusion:

In the psychoanalytic literature the concept of sublimation is frequently called upon; the idea indeed answers a basic need of the Freudian doctrine and it is hard to see how it could be dispensed with. The lack of a coherent theory of sublimation remains one of the lacunae in psycho-analytic thought. (1973, pp.432-33)

De Kesel (2009, pp.167-75) offers a more specific summary of the difficulties involved. Put simply, Freud's theory tends to conflate the concepts of repression and sublimation to the extent that sublimation falls back into a form of repression, albeit one that appears to stabilise the subject within the *status quo* of social norms. As Laplanche and Pontalis note, within the Freudian frame sublimation constitutes a non-sexual *aim* for the drive economy but its efficacy is located in, and dependent upon, the substitute satisfaction derived from *social valuation* accorded to the objects of sublimation. A problematic circularity is thus revealed. Freud suggests that sublimation offers respite from the repressive privation inflicted by the requirements of social life, but its efficacy is simultaneously reliant upon recognition from within precisely the same set of social restrictions.

Lacan's view differs from Freud on two related key points. First, rather than a change of *aim* of the drive towards a non-sexual object, Lacan asserts that sublimation involves a change with respect to the *object*. As we have already ascertained, however, Lacan radically alters the status of the object, and insists on the plasticity of the drives that are linguistic rather than biological forces. The object can, therefore, be sexual in nature. Second, the issue of social valuation is problematic. Given that the subject comes into being through the social matrix in the first instance, any satisfaction is already located within the social sphere. Moreover, given that the social sphere is also lacking, de Kesel (2009) highlights that Lacan cannot agree that social valuation is a plausible factor:

What the community can give the artist or celebrity is, in the last resort, nothing but lack. It is not by chance that fame is extremely fleeting or that the most harrowing libidinal dramas are reserved for the most successful *megastars*. The social recognition of their "sublimation" doesn't necessarily deliver greater pleasure. (p.171)

Unlike Freud, Lacan suggests that the object involved in sublimation is not necessarily an object of social value, but 'a narcissistic object' from within the microcosm of the subject's libidinal economy (de Kesel, 2009, p.172). In Lacanian terms, sublimation occurs on the 'slope' between the *ideal ego* and the *ego Ideal*, where any 'object' can be invested as an ideal object of narcissistic reflection due to the plasticity of the drives. The process of sublimation involves the elevation of an object to the status of an *object* of the drive (*objet a*), and the alteration that can take place through the shift of the relational juxtaposition of subject and object through the matrix of signification that both creates and sutures meaning. This portrayal asserts Lacan's point of difference that insists on the primacy of the signifier: 'To construct a science of the human, what is called nature must be approached as a universe of signifiers' (de Kesel, 2009, p.168). For Lacan, the subject comes into being as an object relation through the operation of language – the signifier – and it is on this plane that he insists that the topic of sublimation (as an alteration of the subject/object relation) must be pursued.

At first blush, Lacan's solution, like Freud's, appears to be located entirely within the purview of the Other, which is already socially ratified and framed by unconscious fantasy. Lacan's formulation is, however, more nuanced because he relocates the subject/object relation and the operation of sublimation into the dialectic of desire *between* language (the Symbolic) and *das Ding* (the Real). He claims that desire is unrelated to any object, but is relentlessly lured beyond the boundary of the Symbolic law, and ultimately can choose the destruction of *das Ding – the nothing* (de Kesel, 2009, p.101):

Right at its intimate kernel, the entire pleasure economy is taunted by what can destroy it. It is kept going thanks to the distance it maintains from “the thing” while nonetheless always being pushed in the very direction of the “thing”. (p.99)

The process of sublimation allows us to maintain the required distance from this point of annihilation (the death drive towards *das Ding*) and to keep desire (and thus the subject) in motion. Unlike unconscious fantasy, Lacan suggests that where sublimation is concerned, the ability to gauge and maintain this crucial distance is open to an oblique but *conscious* negotiation. Given the widespread assertion that the Real/*das Ding* is immune to negotiation through language, this last point is crucial.

In his close reading of the original stenograph of Seminar VII, de Kesel (2009) identifies a critical distinction to be made about the status of sublimation:

The impasse we reach through the dialectical tension between law and desire does not have to weigh on us as an unshakable blind fate, Lacan argues. Although this impasse structures our desire, a certain stance *toward* it is nevertheless possible. At the unconscious level, there is the *jouissance* that enables our phantasm to escape it (albeit in a purely symbolic, and thus “fake” manner). At the conscious level, too – that is at the level of understanding, of *νοῦς* (*nous*), as Lacan indicates with a Greek term – one can take a certain stance in relation to the impasse without being crushed by it. Eroticism, religion and certain other forms, Lacan assures us here, offer a way for desiring that deals with the transgression it aims at. These are

forms our νόος (nous), our rational faculty, has developed to enable us to consciously manage the transgressive link that binds us to the moral law.⁵⁰ (p.164)

In Seminar VII, Lacan redevelops sublimation as a set of cultural practices that obliquely engage with the inscrutable kernel that incessantly impinges upon the stability of the Symbolic. A pivotal question remains, however, about *how* any cultural practice (necessarily located within the Symbolic/Imaginary constellation) might be able to have an effect upon that which is excluded from signification. Because cultural forms are dependent upon signification and the operation of the unconscious, the distinction is a difficult one. Nevertheless, Lacan suggests that the process of sublimation, as cultural practice, can alter the economy of desire. In the early sessions of the ethics seminar, he introduces the topic of sublimation to ‘explain how an “ethics of desire” is not just limited to the space of the psychoanalytic cure, but can also offer a contribution to the wider domain of a universal, cultural *Bildung*’ (de Kesel, 2009, p.165).⁵¹ Lacan clearly suggests that the efficacy of psychoanalysis (as an ethical practice) can also be located in other cultural practices beyond the clinic, and it is in this multi-faceted sense of cultural forms that he advances his theory of sublimation through the categories of art, religion and science.

Art, religion and science.

Following Freud, Lacan nominates three domains of sublimation: art, religion, and science. Each, in turn, is related to the pathological structures of hysteria, obsession and paranoia, but contained within a positive cultural form that modifies the impossible torsion of desire in relation to *das Ding*. In this context, Lacan describes *das Ding* as an ‘emptiness’ around which the Symbolic/Imaginary constellation forms. Art, religion and ‘the discourse of science’ are differing modes of organisation around this emptiness

⁵⁰ In his review of the original stenograph, de Kesel (2009) brings attention to another important issue with Miller’s editing and translation of Seminar VII. With respect to sublimation, de Kesel emphasises that Lacan uses the Greek term νόος (*nous*); however, Miller’s edition omits this term and thus any reference to sublimation as a conscious strategy. For further discussion of this point, see pp.164-65.

⁵¹The German term *Bildung* incorporates several aspects of meaning; formation, education and creation (Oxford-Duden German Dictionary, 1995, p.159).

(SVII, p.130). In religion and science, the *modus operandi* is one of exclusion. In religion (as in obsession), the lack in the Other is internalised, confined and controlled through repetitive rituals of reverence that become increasingly restrictive. In the discourse of science (aligned with paranoia), the lack is located in knowledge, but repudiated from the frame of the present and relocated to a future date when science will achieve absolute knowledge (de Kesel, 2009, p.183). Art, however, is undoubtedly Lacan's privileged mode of sublimation: he considers that it includes and recognises the emptiness around which representation forms. Rather than being excluded, the emptiness provides an opportunity for a strategy that maintains the distance from annihilation in *das Ding*, through the creative signifying activity that provides a direct form of satisfaction to the drives. Rather than visual artistic practices, however, Lacan cites the medieval practice of courtly love as the paradigmatic example of sublimation:

Courtly love is, in effect, an exemplary form, a paradigm, of sublimation. We only have essentially the documentary testimony of art, but we still feel today the ethical ramifications. If on the subject of courtly love, apart from the lively archaeological interest in the matter, we still only have the documentary testimony of art in a form that is almost dead, it is obvious that its ethical ramifications are still felt in the relations between the sexes. The long lasting influence of the effects of a phenomenon that one might think is little more than an issue of aesthetics is thus a kind to make us aware of the importance of sublimation – something that psychoanalysis has specifically foregrounded. (SVII, p.128)

For Lacan, the practice of courtly love – as a mode of eroticism – is an 'exemplary form' of the structure and operation of sublimation through an aesthetic practice that functions beyond the particularity of unconscious fantasy, repression and symptomatic *jouissance*. Lacan's reference to an historical ethic that took place between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries (within geographically specific pockets in Northern Europe) seems to be a tenuous and obscure example with little relevance to modernity, let alone late modernity. Moreover, the art of courtly love is open to interpretation by feminist critique as an example of the objectification of women in the most derogatory 'phallogocentric'

terms. Such a reading, however, constitutes a misunderstanding of Lacan's example that placed Lacanian theory in an extremely controversial light as it coincided with second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s. Lacan's illustration of courtly love, however, offers a far more nuanced structural account.

Fin'Amour: *The art of courtly love.*

For Lacan, the practice of courtly love is the paradigmatic example of 'artistic' sublimation, which he privileges over 'religious' and 'scientific' modes. Indeed, he suggests in Seminar VII that the analyst follows in the wake of the artist, because the analyst occupies the position of *objet a*. Theoretically, Lacan is implying that both the artist and the analyst utilise *objet a* in a way that can provide the conditions of possibility for a reconfiguration of the Symbolic. Lacan privileged artistic processes of sublimation over what he (following Freud) termed 'religious' and 'scientific' modalities, because the artistic mode includes *objet a* within its process as a means by which the existing matrix of Symbolic meaning/structural form might be expanded. An explicit description of this process, as Lacan conceives it through the example of courtly love, is detailed below. Through this particular example, Lacan suggests how an individual, or a small group of individuals, can reconfigure meaning through poetic-musical practices.

The term 'courtly love' was coined in the mid-nineteenth century by French philologist, Gaston Paris (de Kesel, 2009, p.312). The term retrospectively refers to a cultural custom within the feudal court that came to be recognised by medievalists as a pivotal facet in the development of Western culture. Studies of courtly love have focused on a highly influential tradition of 'poet-composer-performers'⁵² that has inspired a growing body of scholarship on a diverse spectrum of linguistic, literary, historical, musicological, and social-political academic subjects, viewed from an equally diverse spectrum of theoretical perspectives (Gaunt & Kay, 1999, pp.1-3). In Seminar

⁵² The *troubadours* were, however, 'neither poets nor composers in exactly the sense we give to those terms. They sang, played, and danced to songs composed by others or taken from the common domain of popular music, no doubt altering them or making up their own versions as they went along' (Grout and Palisca, 1980, pp.65-66).

VII, Lacan also seizes upon this historical cultural practice as an exemplary model to illustrate his reconfiguration of the Freudian concept of sublimation.

According to the many versions of the practice, the courtly lover (knight/troubadour) pledged abiding fealty to a noblewoman already within an established marriage agreement. Usually the 'Lady' concerned was of an equal or higher social standing, and the courtly lover might also be situated within a formal marriage contract. The convention was an artificially constructed game of transgression strictly regulated by a set of rules. The courtly lover assumed a role subjugated to the capricious demands and whims of the 'Lady' who, in a deliberate gesture of non-reciprocity, deferred the lover's entreaties with indifference. Despite the courtly lover's acquiescence to her every request through which she persistently demanded proof of his unswerving allegiance, the 'Lady' (as the object of desire) remained firmly out of reach. The 'Lady', for her part, portrayed an aloof, inhumane partner who rejected every advance and supplication from the courtly lover (de Kesel, 2009, pp.175-78). Although it is easy to hear the echoes of Freud's enigmatic question about what it is that a woman desires – or to interpret the 'Lady' as an instantiation of the superego demand engaged in a perverse scenario – Lacan's focus is on the artificially constructed, creative form within which the enigma of desire is framed in the practice of courtly love.

Although a variety of practices are evident in the literature, Lacan specifically singles out the art of the troubadour, who made his passionate declarations and entreaties through the artistic form of original poetic song. Although amorous in nature, the troubadour is judged upon the originality of the artistry of his poetic song (Zumthor, 1995, p.13). In this sense, Lacan considered sublimation to be an artistic practice rather than an amorous sensibility. Despite the formal constraints of the 'rules of the game' and the sanctioned poetic form, originality marked the ability to transgress those formal features by the skilful rearrangement and articulation of the linguistic and musical elements involved. Lacan privileges courtly love not simply because of its obvious deferral of satisfaction or, conversely, as a covert form of adulterous transgression (that may or may not have occurred in actuality), but because it demonstrates: (i) the structure of human desire in relation to an impossible object; and (ii) the manner in which sublimation reconfigures the subject/object relation at the level of culture. Moreover, the

art of courtly love stages the experience of desire and its flux of impossibility, prohibition and transgression as an affective experience through which the object of desire is transformed into the object cause of desire, and the drive is diverted into a productive artistic signifying practice that expands the existing Symbolic framework (de Kesel, 2009, pp.181-82).

As an aesthetic mode of sublimation, the erotic game of courtly love stages the inherent *impossibility* of the fulfilment of human desire. It achieves this through the modification of impossibility into a *prohibition* through an imaginary form (poetic song) and its set of symbolic rules. Moreover, it is the artful and playful but highly contingent game that becomes the process which best fulfils the requirements of desire to remain unsatisfied. Considered in the context of his discussion of ethics and courtly love, Lacan's gnomic assertion in Seminar X that 'only love can make *jouissance* condescend to desire' (13.3.63, pp.10-11) can readily be understood. Lacan's example of courtly love demonstrates the mechanism through which sublimation exploits the window of opportunity to create something out of nothing – *creatio ex nihilo*. This brings the discussion to Lacan's enigmatic definition of sublimation:

The most general formula that I can give you of sublimation is the following: it raises the object – and I don't mind the suggestion of a play on words in the term I use – to the dignity of the thing. (SVII, p.112)

In his reference to 'dignity', Lacan was quite explicitly making a pun linking the French word *dignité* – *Ding-nité* with the German *Dingität* and *das Ding*, the inscrutable Freudian 'thing' (de Kesel, 2009, p.174). We might also understand the pun to mean 'dignity' in the sense that the process of sublimation is one that Lacan considers to be ethical. As is typical with Lacan, multiple meaning effects are set in play.

With this play on words – and his approach to the object through the primacy of the signifier – Lacan signals his point of departure from Freud. For Lacan, all objects come into being through signification. They gain their status as objects according to the network of signifiers in which they are sutured. The process of sublimation involves the displacement of the object – an object of narcissistic reflection which is to be

considered, first and foremost, a signifier – to a locus beyond the prevailing Symbolic configuration. According to Lacan, the object that is placed in the position of *das Ding* is a semblance and need not be of any particular social value. As an example to pave the way for his exegesis of courtly love, Lacan makes reference to the manner in which any object can be elevated to become the centre of artistic improvisation, creation and play. He recounts the example of his friend, the poet Jacques Prévert, who transformed a collection of empty matchboxes into an artful sculpture (SVII, p.114). The artistic procedure raised a utilitarian object (the matchbox) into the position of an empty ‘thing’, with the effect that its meaning was called into question. Unhooked from its symbolic co-ordinates, the matchbox became the ‘extimate’ centre around which a new configuration of signification and meaning began to form. The artistic procedure enabled the conditions of possibility for the reconfiguration of the existing symbolic network in which the matchbox was located. Lacan’s practice of punning on a single word – to the extent that it is fragmented into multiple connotations that confound any univocal meaning – precisely demonstrates the same procedure. Like the process of analysis, Lacan considers aesthetic sublimation to be a productive form of deconstructive fragmentation that creates the conditions of possibility for the reconfiguration and expansion of the co-ordinates of the Symbolic. The pivotal element is the creative and productive phase that is set in motion after the deconstructive act is accomplished. Put simply, the process of artistic sublimation converts an object of narcissistic desire, into an object cause of desire from which a different satisfaction is gained. Rather than any form of social recognition or value attached to the art object produced according to the demand/desire of the o(O)ther, it is the ongoing process that gives satisfaction in sublimation: ‘If it is a satisfaction, it is in this case one that doesn’t ask anything of anyone’ (SVII, p.114). For Lacan, this was most clearly evident in the example of aesthetic sublimation captured within medieval custom of courtly love.

When Lacan engages with the topic of courtly love, it is from the perspective of the ‘Lady’ as a signifier, and the structural relation of subject and object through signification. The ‘Lady’ in question is an abstract signifier that is lifted beyond the co-ordinates of the existing Symbolic configuration and has no inherent value/meaning. Detached from the existing framework of meaning, the ‘Lady’ is impervious to all

symbolic gestures made by the courtly lover (as poet-musician), and becomes the extimate centre around which the signifying network reconfigures in the game of courtly love. In the irresolvable distance and ‘emptiness’ that is experienced, however, the troubadour is set to work with his artful, poetic juggling of signifiers to produce ‘something out of nothing’. In this way, Lacan suggests that the courtly love tradition was able to graft a new dimension onto the existing relation of a formal marriage contract between a man and a woman (which pertained largely to property inheritance and patriarchal rights). Most importantly, the signifier ‘Lady’ is taken from a position incarcerated in the meaning of the feudal discourse, to become the ‘extimate’ centre that forces an active mode of reconfiguration. The enigma created with the ‘elevation’ of the signifier ‘Lady’ to the equivocal and contingent locus beyond the configuration of the Symbolic animates desire towards the reconfiguration of the signifying constellation. In addition to her position as an object of exchange that guaranteed patriarchal property rights and procreation through a marriage agreement, the ‘Lady’ also became a mobile and enigmatic object cause of desire that stabilised a new Symbolic status for women (SVII, p.112; de Kesel, 2009, p.179).

In psychoanalytic terms, the courtly lover/troubadour encounters the impasse of desire (the lack that is its ultimate destination), and is incited towards the creation of a new relation through the modality of his unique poetic song. Although an aesthetic signifying game, Lacan asserts that the action of a small ‘literary circle’, and the manner in which they ‘juggled’ with the signifier, created a concrete transformation of the position of women in the marriage relation. Moreover, he claims that the effect of this practice is still evident in contemporary social life (SVII, p.148). In his analysis, de Kesel (2009) laments that Lacan fails to enumerate these effects with any specificity. However, Lacan’s suggestion that the art of courtly love – whether practised in reality or merely as a literary or historical narrative fiction retroactively imposed on the past – created a new symbolic dimension that altered the position between women and men within European culture is clearly implied. For de Kesel, this change appears to be a positive one for women. Whether or not we agree with de Kesel’s interpretation is, however, not the focus of our task. The theoretical task is rather to ascertain the conditions of possibility that surround the type of signifying transformation that Lacan

privileges in his example of courtly love, and the role of musical practices as a vehicle for the enactment of artistic sublimation.

As an artificially constructed and regulated game, courtly love is a practice in the Imaginary that stages desire through the erotic play of demand and refusal that paradoxically serves to inflame and brake its inertia. In the process, desire is creatively diverted between the Symbolic and *das Ding* (the Real). From a structural perspective, a plausible parallel with the psychoanalytic encounter may be observed. The courtly lover (in the position of the analysand) seeks to ascertain the desire of the ‘Lady’ (the analyst as a semblance of *objet a*), only to be foiled at every turn despite his inquisition and acquiescence to what he perceives as her demand. Rather than annul his desire, the enigma of what it is that she desires animates the trans-subjective dialectical dynamic of desire as an opportunity for transformation of the subject/object relation to occur. Put simply, the domain of desire in which the subject flourishes, requires the torsion between need and demand to remain open, and this is perhaps the best justification for Lacan’s choice of the courtly love example. In addition to the primacy of the signifier, it acknowledges the determinative part that desire (as an affective register) plays in the process, and the necessity to include the playful erotic transgression through an Imaginary frame.

The Imaginary game that stages desire is, however, not simply an illusory satisfaction: it stages the experience of desire in all of its Imaginary, Symbolic and Real dimensions. In doing so, it allows the dynamics of desire to be consciously apprehended. As medievalist Sarah Kay (1999, pp.212-27) points out in her psychoanalytically informed analysis, although there is an apparent gendered relation between ‘man’ and ‘woman’ played out in courtly love, the central emphasis rests upon the dynamic of desire and its trans-subjective dynamic oriented towards an object that is radically and uncompromisingly Other. The spectre of *das Ding* results from subjection to the signifier, and in courtly love the dimensions of this dynamic are exposed in their complex oscillation between inhuman subjection (the effect of symbolic castration), and the conversion of this enforced servitude into a form that can become not only bearable (through Imaginary illusion), but allows the disjuncture or lack at the heart of the Symbolic to remain open. Indeed, Kay argues not only that the gender relation involved

remains highly ambiguous, but also that the practice could equally involve the dynamic of fidelity and friendship as amorous love (Kay, 1999, pp.223-24).

The ambiguity and duplicitous nature of desire is the central theme that is staged through the game of courtly love, but most importantly for the central argument of this thesis, it is performed through the combination of poetic *song* where the nullity of *das Ding* is not excluded. Aesthetic sublimation not only includes the lack of the Other within its structure; the lack in the Other opens the way towards the refurbishment of the configuration of the Imaginary/Symbolic constellation.

The musical structure upon which the voiding of the object of desire and the juggling of signifiers occurs thus appears as a pivotal and unique (but hitherto unrecognised) aspect of Lacan's theory, and one which gestures towards the specific ways musical form may assist recalibrations of meaning at the level of the social. Lacan's use of the courtly love example, I contend, provides insight into the mechanisms at work when musical sounds not only heighten transference affects, but also loosen the ties between the sound of the signifier and the matrix of meaning in which it is embedded.

The paramount figure of the medieval courtly love tradition, for Lacan, was the troubadour/*jongleur* who combined original poetic verse with harmonized melody as the vehicle by which he expressed his amorous declarations. As a literary practice, the troubadour poet literally 'juggled' with the signifier to reveal and create new associations. Clearly, Lacan privileges this linguistic aspect, but he makes no specific mention of its musical frame. From a musical perspective, the signifiers involved are not simply the words, but the fragmentary sounds employed and manipulated by poetic-musical means. When words are associated through homonymy, melodic tonality, harmony, rhythm, and timbre, the jointly reflective and affective dimension of the Imaginary is greatly enhanced along with equivocation with respect to meaning. Like the practice of analysis in the Lacanian clinic, a dimension of transference is established through the play of sound/silence, and it is through this affective Imaginary register that meaning is then rendered opaque by various technical interventions into the flow of the analysand's speech. Lacan's extensive use of homonymy (through punning) and the emergence of the concept of *lalangue* in the last seminars (discussed further below) can

be seen as correlative to the poetic-musical ground of courtly love. It is, however, also plausible to suggest that the dangers inherent in this process of linguistic deconstruction are offset and supported by the structure of musical form. Unlike the clinical scenario – where much depends upon the ability of the analyst to handle and interpret the transference through an acute perception of the emergence of anxiety – the courtly love procedure allows the deconstruction of meaning to take place upon the safety net of musical structure which (as noted previously) is isomorphic to the structure of language. However, an elaboration of the active and original musical component that is integral to the troubadour's art – and upon which the reconstruction of meaning takes place – remains absent from Lacan's analysis.

Through the enactment of the game of courtly love as an artistic practice in the Imaginary, Lacan asserts that the object/signifier of narcissistic reflection can be detached from the existing symbolic configuration. Lacan also states that 'the Thing ... [is] that which in the real suffers from the signifier' (SVII, pp.124-25) and, in this light, he suggests that by creating a new dimension to a signifier, the annihilating force of *das Ding*/the Real may be diminished. In terms of the attainment of the object of desire, courtly love is formally structured to fail. Through such an intentionally constructed failure, however, sublimation raises the *impossible* to the status of a *prohibition*. The consciously imposed rules and prohibition of the game not only create a breathing space for the subject (between the Symbolic and *das Ding*), but the play of the game incites the creation of something new as an ongoing practice. The lure of desire towards the destruction of *das Ding* is deflected into the creative expansion of the Symbolic and a different form of satisfaction that Lacan asserts is a direct but unknowable satisfaction of the drive. In this respect, it is the ongoing aesthetic process (rather than the attainment of an end-goal) that appears most important. The practice of courtly love appears to work in a non-repressive manner by loosening the grip of the Symbolic configuration through the poetic-musical manipulation of the affective/transference bonds. In clinical terms, this work is done through the establishment of the transference relation which is gradually worked through. I suggest that in the courtly love example, this work is carried out – alternatively – through an externalised cultural form where combinations of poetic and musical elements play a determinative role. While the musical aspect can be

understood as heightening the Imaginary affective dimension, it also potentially plays a pivotal role in maintaining the structural integrity of the Symbolic during the deconstructive phase where meaning is fragmented. The disarming nature of the aesthetic affects and effects involved, however, go beyond mere pleasure. In the courtly love example, the erotic dimension enables the torsion of desire towards *das Ding* to transform into a more bearable diversion of creative endeavour. It is a process which is never without the *frisson* of disquiet: the tension towards *das Ding* intermittently increases as the circuit of the drive around the object (*objet a*) maps its elliptical circuit. In Seminar VII, Lacan also considers ‘the function of the beautiful’ through an analysis of Sophocles’ tragedy *Antigone* and, as we shall shortly see, there is a strong musical subtext to be found within this example as well.

Briefly to summarise, Lacan’s example of courtly love can be seen to open up the possibility that artistic forms of sublimation have the potential not only to invoke change within an individual, but also to engender effects at the level of the social. The poetic practice of ‘juggling’ signifiers, Lacan suggests, elevates a particular signifier (in the case of courtly love, ‘lady’) and calls the matrix of meaning around that key signifier into question. This practice opens up the possibility of grafting new aspects of meaning onto a signifier. The affective poetic-musical dimensions of sound within speech function in a manner that augurs the Lacanian concept of *lalangue*. Although meaning is evacuated from a key signifier, however, the operation takes place upon the bedrock of the frame of musical form and structure (similar to the structure of language) that potentially acts as a placeholder upon which the reconstruction of meaning can occur. The discussion of Seminar XX (pp.220-27 below) points out that the further theorization of this example of artistic sublimation through the conceptual innovations of Lacan’s later work (*lalangue*, feminine structure and *jouissance*) may offer a different approach to effecting social transformation through an understanding of musical practices that might evade the worst symptomatic excesses of repression. This approach, it is pertinent to note, differs markedly to the post-Marxist emphasis upon the inevitability of repression and the requirement for *the act/event* as some kind of cataclysmic occurrence that modifies the Symbolic by the ‘traversal of unconscious fantasy’.

Antigone and 'the function of the beautiful'.

In Seminar VII, Lacan discusses Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone* as an example of the ambiguous 'function of the beautiful'. As in the example of courtly love (discussed above), Lacan affirms the ethical status of aesthetic sublimation (situated between the Symbolic and *das Ding*/the Real), and signals that poetic-musical elements play a significant role in effecting catharsis. Through the association of the notion of sublimation with an experience of 'the beautiful', Lacan evokes an aesthetic domain that has a distinctly disturbing, anxiety- provoking dimension: 'One finds at this frontier another crossing-point, which enables us to locate precisely an element of the field of the beyond-the good-principle. That element ... is the beautiful' (SVII, p.237). The 'beautiful' – as an ethical boundary situated beyond the limit of the pleasure principle (bounded by the Symbolic law) – also has a musical dimension.

In the session dated 25 May 1960, Lacan addresses the function of the beautiful and its strange and ambiguous relation to desire. In reference to Freud, he comments:

On the nature of the creation that is manifested in the beautiful, the analyst has by his own admission, nothing to say. In the sphere that calculates the value of the work of art, we find ourselves reduced to a position that isn't even that of schoolchildren, but of pickers up of crumbs. Moreover ... Freud's text is very weak on this point One must recognize that the summary Freud gives of the artist's career is practically grotesque. (SVII, p.238)

Here, Lacan points out the deficiency of Freud's claim that the artist's creative work functions as a successful means of sublimation through the satisfaction derived from social recognition. In particular, he observes that Freud simply considers the final phase of the creative process where art objects gain the status of a commodity upon their return to the 'field of goods'. For Lacan, however, the satisfaction of aesthetic sublimation (as a cultural practice) resides in its capacity to directly satisfy the drive. In doing so, it confounds the Symbolic by venturing beyond the signifier (the boundary of 'the good'

and the field of goods’) to a further ‘frontier’ from which it is possible to gain knowledge of the subversive structure of desire:

The beautiful in its strange function with relation to desire doesn’t take us in, as opposed to the function of the good. It keeps us awake and perhaps helps us to adjust insofar as it is itself linked to the structure of a lure. (SVII, p.239)

‘The beautiful’ emerges at this final frontier and holds us at a distance from *das Ding*, but simultaneously allows us to experience the extremes of the death drive that strives beyond the pleasure principle. The function of the beautiful directly satisfies the drive, and provides a form of catharsis (SVII, p.238).

In reference to catharsis, Lacan cites Aristotle’s *Poetics* and Book VIII of the *Politics*, where the term is inflected with a Dionysian musical dimension that abreacts the emotions of pity and fear:

In this text catharsis has to do with the calming effect associated with a certain kind of music, from which Aristotle doesn’t expect a given ethical effect, nor even a practical effect, but one that is related to excitement. The music concerned is the most disturbing kind, the kind that turned their stomachs over, that made them forget themselves, in the same way that hot jazz (*le hot*) or rock’n’roll does for us; it was the kind of music that in classical antiquity gave rise to the question whether or not it should be prohibited.

Well now, says Aristotle, once they have experienced the state of exaltation, the Dionysian frenzy stimulated by such music, they become calm. That’s what catharsis means as it is evoked in Book VIII of the *Politics*. (SVII, p.245)

Unlike Aristotle, however, the cathartic effect that Lacan associates with ‘the function of the beautiful’ does not act as a Dionysian frenzy that restores a natural state of equilibrium. Alternatively, he suggests that the function of the beautiful acts in a partial way that allows the transgressive trajectory of desire towards *das Ding* to be recognised, but diverted: ‘The beautiful has the effect ... of suspending, lowering and disarming

desire. The appearance of beauty intimidates and stops desire' (SVII, p.238). To illustrate the point, Lacan contends that in analytic experience the emergence of certain elements in an analysand's speech distinguish a point where an aggressive impulse (that threatens 'outrage') is diverted. Although Lacan does not overtly express the point, he implies that these seemingly tangential references are evidence of the cultural modes of sublimation operative for an analysand, and the manner in which they disengage an aggressive thought:

With the precision of a Geiger counter, you can pick it up by means of references to the aesthetic register that the subject will give you in his associations, in his broken, disconnected monologue They are correlative of something that ... belongs to the register of a destructive drive. It is at the moment when a thought is clearly about to appear in a subject ... depending on his nationality, he will make some reference to a passage from the Bible, to an author, whether classic or not, or to some piece of music. (SVII, p.239)

Although there are multiple points to make about Lacan's analysis of *Antigone* – and his extraordinary improvisations that contain a plethora of selective philosophical, psychoanalytic and linguistic associations (of which the preceding discussion offers an equally selective and incomplete outline) – my purpose is again to highlight references to musical practices within the framework of sublimation. In addition to the example of courtly love, in Seminar VII Lacan brings together ethics, sublimation, and 'the function of the beautiful' through the aesthetic form and experience of Sophocles' Greek tragedy, *Antigone*. Within his analysis, a strong musical subtext can be revealed. To fully understand this point, a very brief synopsis of the plot, as Lacan presents it, is required.

Unable to acquiesce to the law, Antigone pursues her autonomy beyond the boundary of the law to the limit of the 'second death' (a position outside social recognition/civil rights) prior to her final physical death. As punishment for her defiance and insistence that her brother Polynices (an enemy of the state) be given burial rites under the law of the city, Creon (the defender of the law that safeguards 'the good') displays no mercy, and condemns Antigone to be entombed alive. In doing so, he

displays the Janus face of the law in an unspeakable criminal, perverse act. Like the 'Lady' in courtly love, both Creon and Antigone are portrayed as totally uncompromising, without pity or fear (although Lacan asserts that Creon finally succumbs to fear at the end of the play) (SVII, pp.243-87). As she assumes her tragic demise, Lacan's idiosyncratic interpretation claims that Antigone radiates a sublime *beauty* that is conveyed through the *song* of the Chorus:

The articulation of the tragic action is illuminating of the subject. It has to do with Antigone's beauty. And this is not something I invented; I will show you the passage in the song of the Chorus where that beauty is evoked, and I will prove that it is the pivotal passage. (SVII, p.248)

De Kesel (2009) makes the point that Lacan fails to deliver on this promise, but locates the passage to which Lacan refers and substantiates the nature of the abrupt change. From the horror of the dramatic plot, the Chorus bursts forth with a seemingly incongruous ode to erotic love. Without entering comprehensively into the intricacies of de Kesel's analysis, it is relevant briefly to discuss the function of the Chorus in Greek tragedy.⁵³ To understand this, it is necessary to move beyond the content of the drama and its meaning effects to consider the structural way in which it is presented and the affects produced (outside meaning effects) that provide the conditions of possibility for catharsis to occur.

The Chorus played a pivotal role in Greek tragedy. As a collective form of what in modern drama would be described as a 'narrator', the Chorus was made up from marginal groups such as women, slaves, foreigners and old men who provided a conduit between the protagonists within the play, and between the actors and the audience (Foley, 2003, p.1). Presented in poetic-musical form, the Chorus served its purpose 'with body (*somati*) and voice (*phonei*)' and engaged in poetic dialogue through the use of voice, costume, dance, and music (pp.7-21). As Stanford (1981) points out, there was no clear distinction between poetry and music: the same Greek term was used for both (p.133). Poetry was written 'for the ear and not for the eye'; it was 'social rather than

⁵³ For de Kesel's (2009) comprehensive analysis, please see pp. 205-48.

private ... usually sung, recited, or performed at religious ceremonies, festivals, feasts, or entertainments', and recited aloud even when in private solitude (p.127). Moreover, the Greeks firmly believed that certain sound effects evoked emotional responses in the hearer, and that the way music was used 'affected the *psyche* emotionally and ethically' (p.133). As Montgomery (1942) claims: 'There is no doubt that the great choruses of tragedies like ... *Antigone* were sung to the grandest music then composed' (p.149). Beyond the diminished role of the Chorus in modern opera, the Chorus in Greek tragedy served the multiple purposes of narration, interpretation and dialogue. These registers combined the spoken word not only with explanation, but critique and a pivotal emotional dimension to convey various aspects of the drama: 'The Chorus served as a buffer to scenes and action in tragedy that would otherwise be overpowering to the spectator' (Montgomery, 1942, p.151). It is in this sense that we can better understand Lacan's point about the 'function of the beautiful'.

Over and above Lacan's dense interpretation of the content of *Antigone*, his analysis obliquely addresses the structural form of Sophocles' tragedy. The juxtaposition of Imaginary and Symbolic elements (literary, theatrical and musical) position the participants (actors, chorus and audience) in such a way that they obliquely experience the paradox of human desire and its tragic kernel. Lacan mentions the Chorus at several points, but in distinctly different registers. First, he explains that the function of the Chorus is an emotional one, and defines it as a representative group of 'people who are moved', and stand in for the emotions of the audience: 'Your emotions are taken charge of by the healthy order displayed on the stage. The Chorus takes care of them. The emotional commentary is done for you' (SVII, p.252). Second, he fleetingly contends that the Chorus serves the function of explanation; a 'technical' point about the meaning of *Atè*, the limit *Antigone* transgresses (ibid., pp.263-64). Finally, however, in the cathartic moment of the drama, he suggests:

the image of *Antigone* appears before us as something that causes the Chorus to lose its head, as it tells us itself, makes the just appear unjust, and makes the Chorus transgress all limits, including casting aside any respect it might have for

the edicts of the city. Nothing is more moving than ... the desire that visibly emanates from the eyelids of this admirable girl. (SVII, p.281)

These three examples, I suggest, demonstrate that the Chorus functions in three distinctive registers that may be equated to the Imaginary, the Symbolic and ‘the beautiful’ as a semblance of *das Ding*/the Real. Like the example of courtly love, all instances are articulated in musical/poetic form. For Lacan, the function of the beautiful is a paradoxical experience of the traumatic and tragic dimension of desire drawn beyond the limits of the Symbolic. At the specific point in the tragic drama where Antigone incarnates desire at its extreme, Lacan suggests that the aura of radiant beauty acts as a last barrier of protection that disarms desire with an accompanying cathartic effect. For the audience and the Chorus, ‘the beautiful’ is a vantage point on the outer limits of the Symbolic/Imaginary constellation that affords enough distance from the horror, but also provides a conscious experience of the tragic dimension of human desire. To offer a more accessible analogy: the witnessing of a catastrophic natural event – such as the eruption of a volcano, or the turbulence of a destructive, wild storm – is perceived as a disarming, but arresting spectacle. It has an uncanny magnificence when viewed from a safe vantage point. But through the spectacle we also perceive the cataclysmic devastation that resides at close proximity to the event. It is this paradoxical affect that Lacan evokes in his example of ‘the beautiful’. Paradoxically, this spectacle – which we might expect to take a visual form – is conveyed through the *song* of the Chorus.

For Lacan, the incomprehensible tragedy experienced as sublime beauty, allows the distance with which the unspeakable trauma of the nucleus of desire can be consciously glimpsed by the subject without stepping into the perverse realm of *das Ding*. However, the visual notion of a glimpse is somewhat misleading, given that he describes the function of the beautiful as a ‘blinding’:

In effect, *Antigone* reveals to us the line of sight that defines desire. This line of sight focuses on an image that possesses a mystery which up till now has never

been articulated, since it forces you to lose your eyes at the very moment you look at it. (SVII, p.247)

In a scene that is so horrific that an audience might flinch and shut their eyes, the paradoxical effect of a disturbing beauty is heard. Although Lacan obliquely points to this ironic juxtaposition, he fails to explain it in any comprehensive way. It is plausible to suggest, however, that at the extreme point where the visual can no longer contain the tragic dimension of Antigone's fate, the musical framework is the constant feature that allows the Chorus and audience to briefly journey beyond the Symbolic. Crucially, it is the musical framework that not only conveys the collision of the abject and the sublime, but it also provides a last bastion of the structure of language that sustains the subject. Moreover, it allows a return to the Symbolic with a conscious imprint of the truth of desire taken to its most destructive and tragic extreme.

Rather than an illusory fantasmatic deflection that provides unambiguous understanding (the pleasure principle attained through the production of meaning and the dissipation of tension), the experience of the beautiful has a paradoxical, anxiety-provoking dimension (Ronen, 2009, pp.1-12). Closely aligned to anxiety, the sublime beauty to which Lacan refers occurs beyond the signifier (outside the frame where tragedy can be interpreted and given symbolic meaning) at a limit point where meaning refuses to fully form. Indeed, this point is demonstrated by the ongoing debate over interpretations of *Antigone*; over the ethical status of the protagonists, and the moral dilemmas and resolutions that always remain out of reach. At this point, desire is revealed to be a ceaseless striving to piece together the various affective and dramatic fragments of the play, as the tragedy of the protagonists unfolds. The structure and presentation of the drama lures its participants into an experience beyond-the-good, but within the safe haven of the outer limit of 'the beautiful' that renders the trauma palpable rather than comprehensible. The Imaginary fragments are no longer held together by the efficacy of the Symbolic, except for a 'blinding' moment when the fragments coalesce like an image in anamorphosis. Indeed, Lacan utilises this visual example to paradoxically illustrate the 'blinding' moment of 'the beautiful' that is conveyed to the audience in a musical form. 'The function of the beautiful' appears to offer a measure of

protection, but also leaves an affective imprint that keeps the wound of tragedy open (SVII, p.227).

The poetic-musical aspect of Sophocles' tragedy resides in the pivotal function of the Chorus. Positioned between the dramatic action and the audience, the Chorus provides a multi-faceted commentary that is presented in musical form. As Lacan describes it, however, the Chorus appears to function in different registers at various stages within the drama. When he first mentions the Chorus, he suggests that it bears the emotional weight of the drama on behalf of the audience. This implies an Imaginary function. In another reference, he suggests that it functions in a technical way by providing the audience with an explanation of the action. This implies a Symbolic function. Finally, the Chorus enters into an ecstatic mode that extols the radiant beauty of Antigone as she goes towards her catastrophic fate. This paradoxical ecstatic outburst bears the hallmark of the Dionysian cathartic function that engages the drive in a direct way, and diverts the path of desire. It is beyond the scope of the present discussion to offer any definitive conclusions about the significance of these disparate passages in Lacan's seminar: my purpose is rather to emphasise that Greek tragedy – like the poetic art of courtly love – rests upon a pivotal musical element that appears to be implicated in the cathartic function that Lacan associates with sublimation. Music is inextricably implicated in all of these examples, and appears to occupy a pivotal anchoring point that remains unacknowledged by Lacan.

Seminar XX (1972-73): The Limits of Love and Knowledge

The notions of feminine structure and *lalangue* – first introduced by Lacan in SXX – may function as useful concepts to further theorise artistic sublimation in the mode of poetic-musical practices. In contrast to masculine structure, which relies on repression and the function of unconscious fantasy to conceal the lack in the Other, feminine structure employs the lack in the Other in an ongoing creative process. Pivotal to this process in poetic-musical forms, is the highly charged affective use of sounds outside of linguistic meaning that Lacan conceptualised as *lalangue*. The following discussion, therefore, introduces these concepts in Lacan's later work to demonstrate

their significance for our understanding of the relationship between sublimation, musical practices, and the potential for reconfiguration of Symbolic meanings at the level of the social.

Like Seminars VII and XI, Seminar XX is regarded as a turning point in Lacan's thought. The notion of a turning point, however, is misleading insofar as Lacan's praxis is best understood as the intensification of ideas through a continual process of repetition, modification and expansion that never settles into definitive end results. Many of the concepts that emerge in his later work are present in his earlier work in different forms. For this reason, I suggest that it is useful to revisit and re-read some of his earlier examples in light of later developments, and to move away from a strictly linear and chronological progressive approach. Pivotal to this exercise, however, is an appreciation for Lacan's theoretical and pedagogical style. Like the troubadour of the courtly love example, Lacan juggles not only with words, but with an increasing array of concepts, formulas and aphorisms that defy any simple resolution. Like an artwork, his practice (atrophied in its various written forms and translations) remains open to multiple interpretations that incite a transgression of the limits of the Symbolic imposed by the dominant discourse within which we are located as subjects. Indeed, Lacan's theoretical pursuits might easily be described as his 'career in sublimation'. Despite his insistence upon a 'scientific' approach – with its mathematical formalization and topographical rendering of the structure of subjectivity – Lacan also privileged an artistic modality that made the void at the centre of conscious, logical thought palpable. As any reader of Lacan will soon attest, the text is highly allusive with multiple trajectories of possible meaning, but is disarmingly elusive when any attempt is made to weave the various threads into a cohesive whole. In musical terms, it reads like a four-part fugue condensed into a single melodic line. From the perspective of logical thought, paradox appears to reign supreme, and every apparently coherent resolution morphs into a new enigmatic question.

The dichotomous structure of language and the retroactive construction of meaning jointly project us into a logical linear mode that attempts to backstitch all the elements together. This is especially so when we *read* the written transcript of Lacan's seminar in search of meaning, rather than *listen* to the spoken word in the highly

performative and improvisational style of delivery that he undoubtedly preferred. As any active musician understands, performance is a mode that courts contingency and failure, but it can also be highly productive. The spectrum of the unexpected that performance invites, including ‘mistakes’, proves to be the opening towards new pathways of improvisational and compositional invention. Although Lacan’s intention was to demonstrate technique to his audience of analysts, he revelled in his baroque delivery and performative style. The written text – especially when read in (English) translation – deprives us of much of the playful punning style that his seminar audience received in the French language. Indeed, an appreciation of Lacan’s oeuvre is radically diminished if we cannot ‘hear’ the multiple ways in which he seeks to not only bring unconscious signifiers into play, but also to demonstrate the complex way in which signification and affect jointly constitute subjectivity. The juxtaposition of these two axes of language becomes more explicit in Seminar XX, where Lacan formalises the effects of language into masculine and feminine structures, as two distinct (but non-reciprocal) modalities of ‘being’ within the constraint of signification. In addition, he introduces the notion of *lalangue* as an enunciative thread that underpins the propositional and semantic logic of language. These later developments, I suggest, allow the example of artistic sublimation in Seminar VII to be revisited and theoretically extended.

The formulas of sexuation: Masculine and feminine structure.

In Seminar XX, Lacan introduces the formulas of sexuation to demonstrate the non-reciprocal juxtaposition of what he terms masculine and feminine structure. As Lacan conceptualises them, masculine and feminine structures do not correspond to biological or gendered notions of male and female; they characterise different modalities of subjection to the signifier. Put in another way, they are different strategies for coping with the impasse of signification. Although Lacan always maintained a disjuncture within subjectivity (that emerged within trans-subjective relationality), it was not until Seminar XX – through the formulas of sexuation – that he introduced feminine structure, and theorised the nature of the disjuncture between masculine and feminine structure as two modalities of subjectivity within language. While it is beyond the scope of this

discussion to present the formulas in intricate detail, some general observations can be made.⁵⁴

Masculine structure occludes the impasse at the heart of signification and the trans-subjective (non-)relation through the mediation of *objet a*. Through the function of fantasy and *objet a*, masculine structure involves *exclusion* to maintain the integrity of the Symbolic, and is reliant upon the maintenance of a master signifier to mask the lack in the Other. Feminine structure, on the other hand, has a more complex relation that (put simply) does not exclude lack in the same way. It has more than one strategy at its disposal. As Barnard (2002) explains:

While man is coupled to the Other via object *a*, woman is twice related to the Other – coupled via the phallus and “tripled” via $S(A)$, the signifier of the lack in the Other. The feminine subject’s “other” relation to the Other correlates with a *jouissance* “beyond” the phallus, a *jouissance* that belongs to that part of the Other that is not covered by the fantasy of the “One” – that is, the fantasy sustained by the positing of the phallic exception. As such, this form of *jouissance* is inscribed not in the repetitive circuit of drive but in what Lacan calls the *en-corps*, an “enjoying substance” which insists in the body beyond its sexual being. (p.172)

From this explanation it is clear that Lacan’s construal of feminine structure and artistic modes of sublimation have close affinity. Through a different relation to lack, both artistic sublimation and feminine structure utilise the inevitability of symbolic castration (to which both male and female individuals are subjected) in a manner that is not necessarily reliant upon exclusion, and can utilise lack in a creative and productive way. Moreover, this creative process correlates to a different form of *jouissance* (Barnard, 2002, p.176). In light of this development, Lacan’s emphasis on the centrality of fantasy and *objet a* diminishes.

Lacan’s work up until Seminar XX is dominated by the notions of unconscious fantasy and its ability to maintain lack by exclusion, through the efficacy of *objet a*. Predominant in his conceptualisation of unconscious fantasy is *objet a* in the modality of

⁵⁴ For a detailed explanation of the structures of sexuation, see E. Ragland-Sullivan (2004).

gaze, and a profusion of visual examples. These examples range from Lacan's earliest theory of the mirror stage through to spatial analogies and illustrations – such as visual art and anamorphosis – and the plethora of schemas, graphs and topological figures which continued after Seminar XX with Borromean knot theory. With the introduction of feminine structure in Seminar XX, however, it can be clearly recognised that Lacan's theory prior to that point had almost exclusively entailed the investigation of masculine structure. In conjunction with the introduction of feminine structure, Lacan formulates and acknowledges the affective facet of language he terms *lalangue*, and its inextricable association with the semantic axis of speech and language. The emergence of this concept promotes a further understanding of his example of courtly love as a paradigmatic mode of sublimation. Moreover, the concept elucidates the baroque style of performative language with which Lacan attempted to breach not only the fixity of his analysands' symptoms, but the dominant discourse and epistemological fixations of his era. Like a musical text, Lacan's discourse provokes a plethora of individual interpretations and reconfigurations, and the impetus to theorise and compose anew.

Lalangue: The mother tongue.

Lalangue is Lacan's play upon the French word for language – *la langue* – and it is a paradigmatic example of his artful deconstruction of meaning through a kind of poetic polyphony that Dany Nobus aptly describes as 'the punning of reason' (Nobus, 2004, pp.189-201). As Malcolm Bowie (1987) explains, Lacan's word-play turns language upon itself:

By writing "*la langue*" as "*lalangue*" (*Télévision*, 21, 72; xx, 126), [Lacan] inserts several facts of language into the name language bears: it is repetitious; it is an affair of the tongue (*langue* – our tongues beat our palates as we say it); it has a musical tendency (*la* is a note in the tonic sol-fa): it has a capacity to shock or surprise ('Oh là là') (cf. Gk, λαλαγέω, 'to prattle, to babble'). Wherever words collide and fuse in this way an atmosphere of play prevails. But an insistent doctrinal point may be heard in the background on each occasion: if the signifier

plays and the signifier “slips beneath”, then the unconscious is speaking in its native tongue. (p.126)

As Bowie suggests, language has an *ur*-lining of sounds that have their origin in the lallation and babble of infancy. The diversity of these sounds is far broader than the phonemic sounds of any specific language, and they remain within language not only as a hidden counterpoint, but are evident in the mutations of words that Lacan utilises in his punning style. Moreover, these sounds feature prominently within the cultural forms of music and poetry. They are highly malleable, and have an obvious affective dimension outside any linguistic meaning that evokes the earliest stages of infancy from which language and signification develop. As the symbolic structures of meaning become superimposed upon these affectively charged interactions, they appear to correspondingly diminish. Psychoanalytic theory, however, would support the notion that the structural relation that is established at the Imaginary level remains and underpins the Symbolic and our conscious, rational life-world. Rather than being overwritten, the pre-symbolic sounds of *lalangue* inhabit the Symbolic word in its enunciative form and become embedded in the tapestry of trans-subjective relationality through language.

In both poetry and music, the dimension of *lalangue* is greatly enhanced, and if Lacan’s hypothesis is correct, it enables access to the foundations of language and the potential encounter with the lack of the Other. Although there is no going back from symbolic castration, poetry and music – like Lacanian analysis – offer a cultural practice through which this dimension can resurface in a conscious way and be reinvested. The musical-poetic practice itself appears to counter the worst effects of repression by allowing repressed elements to freely circulate within a structure that grafts on to the Symbolic. Given that *lalangue* is outside meaning-making, there is no object as such involved, just the process in motion that brings with it a distinctly different mode of *jouissance*. Although beyond the Symbolic, the structure of language still remains, and it is perhaps this combination that allows the lack in the Other (A) to be approached and appropriated in a positive rather than a repressive mode.

If we relate these considerations back to Lacan's theorisation of sublimation in Seminar VII, we can better understand his preference for artistic sublimation through the poetic art of courtly love. If dreams constituted the 'royal road to the unconscious' (Kahn, 2002, p.169) for Freud, then Lacan's royal road was the troubadour's poetic art of courtly love. As I have already suggested, Lacan privileges the poetic aspect of the troubadour's art, but is silent with respect to the musical structure and web of non-linguistic sounds (*lalangue*) upon which the signifying game was played out. Although Lacan chose the overtly erotic theme of love, the troubadour literature encompasses a far wider range of social, political and even economic topics. This is verified by the diversity of scholarship in the field, and the significance and influence that many scholars, like Lacan, ascribe to the manner in which the practice shaped the development of Western culture. Lacan's emphasis, however, suggests that at the centre of all these themes – entwined with subject/object juxtapositions and negotiations – is the impasse of subjective desire that springs from within the process of language itself. The efficacy of artistic sublimation appears to occur upon the slope between the *ideal ego* and the *ego Ideal*, through the combined axes of *signification* and *affect* and their externalisation within an *active cultural practice*. I suggest that it is the particular conjunction of elements involved in artistic practices that appears to provide the conditions of possibility for the mobilisation of unconscious signifiers, and the modification of unconscious *jouissance*. Through the diversion of desire towards the direct satisfaction of the invocative drive (through contingent musical-poetic practices), Lacan infers that a positive form of renewal of the Symbolic occurs at the level of culture. Unlike the sublimations of religion and science that rely upon an excluded object, artistic sublimation, according to Lacan, configures its creative activity around the inclusion of an empty 'space'.

Lacan's visual analogy of the pot (SX, 5.6.63, p.8) offers an accessible illustration of this idea. The potter's art that crafts a pot around the void at its centre produces a different object each time, but the void it encapsulates remains the common and necessary aspect of each vase, albeit contained in different ways. Similarly, artistic musical and poetic practices circle around the impasse inherent to language and knowledge, but allow its inclusion in an externalised aesthetic form of signification. The

musical example, however, offers the advantage of congruence between the structure and temporal articulation of language that engages a heightened level of primal affect that not only satisfies the invocatory drive, but also creates the conditions of possibility for the regeneration of the Symbolic. The question that arises – and one that is beyond the scope of this thesis to develop in any detail – is how an understanding of musical practices that combine signification, affect and active corporeal practice might relate to Lacan's notion of masculine and feminine structure. One tentative suggestion may, however, be made.

In Seminar XI, Lacan formulates the myth of the lamella to represent a common loss; the loss of eternal life that is a consequence of *meiosis*, the process of sexed reproduction. This notion proposes a corporeal lack that is common to all human beings, irrespective of biological sex or masculine and feminine structures of subjectivity within language. This loss is not one associated with the loss of the mother, but one that returns to the combined entwining of sexuality and death. Sexed reproduction not only brings the continuation of life to the species, but the death of the individual. It is a loss that cannot be reclaimed, but reflects into the heart of our signified world as an irresolvable impasse that inflects every trans-subjective relation (Barnard, 2002, p.175). Lacan's depiction of feminine structure encompasses a dual relation between corporeal loss and Symbolic lack, and it is plausible to suggest that musical and poetic practices represent a mode of signifying practice that mourns this inaccessible but ever-present primal corporeal loss. In this way, the courtly love example (discussed above) might be understood to contain a further dimension of mourning.

The *ego Ideal* – which can be represented by any object of narcissistic reflection elevated to the impossible position of the unattainable 'thing' (the 'Lady' in art of courtly love) – is gradually sacrificed and mourned. As a positive side effect, the death drive that strives towards the impossible is diverted into creative activity, and a modicum of freedom within the strictures imposed by signification. As early as Seminar VII, Lacan suggests that in artistic modes of sublimation, the trans-subjective awareness of the structure of desire and its negotiation becomes obliquely palpable. For the musician-poet – as for the writer and artist – the ongoing practice becomes a richly creative one that is not so much to do with the object produced as the process of the

‘writing’ and ‘re-writing’ of subjectivity that occurs through an enduring, active cultural practice. For Lacan, the paradigm of this strategy for negotiating desire within culture is the art of courtly love.

The heightened affect established by the transference relation and the play and pathos of *lalangue* and language, brings forth the associative juggling of signifiers within a musical framework that maintains the stability of structure. As speaking subjects, our only path is signification, and the destruction of the structure itself spells psychic, if not physical annihilation. Although meaning is radically called into question, the support of musical temporality and structure (that is isomorphic to language) not only enables the deconstructive process, but prevents the fall into psychosis. Moreover, the deconstructive act that might be aligned with a mourning of the *ego Ideal*/lost object, is redirected into a constructive creative phase where the Symbolic is refurbished with an extended palette and repertoire of signification and modified satisfaction. As my explanations of music and musical practices have suggested, the troubadour’s art is one where the narcissistic object relation and its impossibility is recognised, but can be diverted into a creative path that not only maintains a distance from the annihilation of *das Ding*, but can also expand the repertoire of signification.

Sublimation, Sinthome or Transformative Signifying Act?

Like Freud, Lacan is drawn to the conclusion that sublimation is apt to fail. Unlike Freud, however, Lacan does not privilege the condition of social recognition. Alternatively, Lacan privileges the unique signifying process involved in aesthetic forms of sublimation and their potential capacity (as practices that take place within culture), to regenerate and expand the Symbolic. Lacan’s prime example, the art of courtly love, not only emphasises the primacy of the signifier, but the centrality of affect. Moreover, in opposition to social conformity, Lacan accentuates an element of transgression outside the bounds of the Symbolic ‘good’ and ‘circuit of goods’, and it is on this last point that sublimation is deemed most likely to fail:

Sublimation as such is an *active* process whose satisfying effect is owed to this aspect. Once established, it loses much of its sublimating power and its chances of operating neurotically increase. Sublimations only provide satisfaction to the extent that they are perceived in their transgressive dimensions. (de Kesel, 2009, p.188)

Given all the necessary conditions, the propensity for sublimation to stall and revert to repression can be more easily understood. Accordingly, the development of Lacan's clinically-oriented theory focuses almost exclusively on pathological neurotic structures and the dominance of fantasy which, in Seminar X, he firmly links to the scopic domain and *objet a* in the modality of *gaze*. His theory and examples bear witness to a significant dominance of the visual, and the development of the notion of *gaze* occluded that of *voice* (despite the prominent place of *voice* on the graph of desire, and in his most comprehensive explanation of *objet a* in Seminar X) (Dolar, 2006). I suggest, however, that a theory of *voice* is integral to Lacan's practice: he continually positions himself as *objet a* in the modality of *voice*.

Lacan's pedagogical and clinical technique relies upon the active employment of the excessive remainder of the signifying chain – *voice* – with the purposive aim of shattering the cohesion of the existing symbolic matrix. Understood in this way, *objet a* (in the modality of the invocatory drive) becomes the privileged instrument of Lacan's psychoanalytic technique. As Pluth (2007) suggests, the transformative act for Lacan is, above all, a signifying act; one that 'entails the demolition of the Other ... the Other as a support of identification, capable of providing that treasure of treasures, recognition' (p.157). As the example of courtly love demonstrates, however, the process is an ongoing one that involves a creative expansion of the Symbolic configuration. If the psychoanalytic encounter operates as a form of sublimation, the process must continue as an active ongoing practice. From this point of view, it is hardly surprising that the end of analysis appears problematic.

From Seminar XX, however, the dominance of the visual fades as Lacan accords greater emphasis to the *jouissance* attached to the invocatory drive, which derives direct satisfaction through the ongoing play of signifying activity without the need for a

guarantee in the Other. With Lacan's analysis of James Joyce in Seminar XXIII, the new notion of the *sinthome* emerges in place of the former emphasis upon fantasy and the symptom. In contrast to the latter, the *sinthome* is defined as a *savoir faire* with the symptom, a 'know-how' with the symptom/signifier. Following Miller, Pluth (2007) suggests that the *sinthome* is a 'kernel of enjoyed meaning' that sustains the subject even when the psychoanalytic act severs the fundamental fantasy that holds the Symbolic Other in place: 'What is at stake in the *sinthome*' according to this view, is 'the union of a signifying articulation and a libidinal investment in signifiers' that Miller promotes as a practice of *bien dire* (p.161). From this perspective, the process is an ongoing one that provides the conditions of possibility for an act to occur. As Pluth further suggests, Lacan portrays the act as a chance affair. The subject has no control over its emergence, but is configured by its emergence:

While an act is signifying, and very much an affair of signifiers, it is not the result of a decision or an act of will or any conscious deliberation but should be seen as a production of the unconscious, a production whose conditions of emergence can be enhanced by certain things. (Pluth, 2007, p.161)

Citing Miller again, Pluth further argues:

In the *sinthome* one forms a partnership with something of the Other at the level of enjoyment – one enjoys the Other through one's *sinthome*, and this enjoyed Other, which seems to occur in the form of an "enjoyed meaning" of *sens jouis* [italics added], is contrasted to the Other as a site that guarantees meaning and confers recognition. What happens after the voiding of the Other is that rather than an investment in fantasy, which is mediated by the Other, there is a direct investment in signifiers as such; and it is on this basis that a partnership with the Other, on the level of enjoyment, is forged. (p.163)

In the light of these observations, the examples in Seminar VII can be re-read in a way that brings the contingent, improvisational musical aspect of poetic practices into focus. Moreover, I contend that such practices are evident within the fabric of

contemporary culture. Rather than being the preserve of an elite group, the troubadour's art remains widespread among contemporary forms of musical endeavour (in an equally broad spectrum of lay practice across numerous genres). Unlike visual art and literature, musical practices take place collectively, within an affectively enhanced mode of active signifying practice. Unlike cinema (arguably the modern equivalent of Greek theatre and opera), which privileges the visual, musical practice dominates the visual and elevates the aural/vocative domain in an active practice that is closely aligned with language and our most primal experience of sound and movement. As Lois Oppenheim (2005) suggests, music and dance share this temporal register in conjunction with the physical movement of the body:

[D]ance, like music, takes place (and thereby articulates) real time. Whereas the literary text and the plastic arts transport reader and viewer into virtual worlds, both dance and music are based in the actuality of performance. As such, they differ ontologically from the non-performance based arts As inherently temporal arts ... they signify through motion. (p.123)

In this respect, musical practices may offer a significant addition to psychoanalytic thought.⁵⁵ Considered as a cultural practice, music offers a possible means by which to locate (and transform) the singular, individual experience of the psychoanalytic clinic in a broader social-cultural context. Musical practices, I suggest, not only offer a salient theoretical model of sublimation, but also an accessible (and concrete) avenue through which to further understand how human subjectivity is constructed and reconstructed through signifying practices. Moreover, a cognitive, affective and physical understanding of musical practice may offer social theory (especially post-Marxist approaches) a new way to understand how the singular life-history of the individual is entwined with the ideological and institutional constraints that commonly impede the efficacy of artistic sublimation. Rather than invoke an emphasis on the pathological manifestations and symptoms of unconscious fantasy –

⁵⁵ This difference harks back to Louis Althusser's (1971) emphasis upon the physical practices that potentially constitute a pivotal aspect in the process of subjective interpellation within ideology.

that remain impervious to Symbolic intervention – the reconsideration of artistic sublimation within a musical paradigm may facilitate an understanding of the conditions of possibility that modify the individual’s economy of desire. Moreover, as Lacan suggests, its exercise within a collective/cultural frame may bring change to bear upon the social matrix as well.

CONCLUSION

Music is more than an object of study: it is a way of perceiving the world. A tool of understanding. Today, no theorizing accomplished through language or mathematics can suffice any longer; it is incapable of accounting for what is essential in time – the qualitative and the fluid

It is thus necessary to imagine radically new theoretical forms, in order to speak to new realities. Music ... is one such form. It reflects the manufacture of society; it constitutes the audible waveband of the vibrations and signs that make up society. *An instrument of understanding, it prompts us to decipher a sound form of knowledge.*

(Attali, 1985, p.4).

Music has long occupied an ambiguous and capricious place in philosophical thought, and the evidence presented in the foregoing chapters suggests that music and musical practices present psychoanalysis with some intriguing conundrums. One of the pivotal skills of psychoanalytic technique is its idiosyncratic art of ‘listening’. Beyond the content of speech that strives for meaning, the analyst listens for the structural elements of speech; their juxtaposition, associations, mutations, interruptions, substitutions, and – perhaps most importantly – the silences. In the spirit of psychoanalytic listening, this thesis lends a musician’s ear to the silent invocations within the Lacanian text. An apparent silence with respect to music and musical practices emerges as the greatest paradox. Far from being unrelated, I have argued that artistic musical practices and psychoanalysis have striking similarities. Indeed, so close, that they remain largely unidentified in any overt expression within Lacan’s opus. Parallel to the temporal articulation of speech and the structure of language, the trajectory of musical practice from imitation and interpretation, to improvisation and composition charts the registers of subjectivity with an awareness of the flux of human desire. It not only models the dynamic structure of the unconscious, but also the blend of signification and affect at the level of *lalangue*, the fabric of *non-sens* upon which the Symbolic/Imaginary constellation is constructed and the point of nullity around which it turns. Like analysis, it can be a process that never concludes. Lacan is never backward in expressing his opinions, especially when the topic is one with which he disagrees. If he regarded music to be a deceptive web of affect and Imaginary misrecognition that aided

and abetted the fixation of fantasy, one would expect him to have made the point. It is a point that could readily be made. It is not.

Locating any direct reference to music within Lacan's work is like searching for a very small needle in a very large and chaotic haystack. Despite Lacan's admission in Seminar XX that music is a topic that he has not addressed – '*I should sometime – I don't know if I'll ever have the time – speak of music, in the margins* [italics added]' (p.116) – the aim of this thesis has been to circumscribe a gap in Lacan's opus, and to establish a *prima facie* case for the relevance of a musically-informed approach that may provide a fruitful and creative avenue for the further development of Lacanian thought. In particular, it seeks to explore how Lacanian theory may legitimately be applied within the social sciences. The strength of the thesis lies in the close reading of a selection of Lacan's seminars and writings, not only to provide scholars in the social sciences with a detailed yet accessible grounding in the finer detail of Lacan's work, but also to establish the salience and viability of a further theorisation of Lacan's concept of sublimation (as outlined in Seminar VII). The establishment of a *prima facie* case for the further theorisation of sublimation (in the modality of poetic-musical practices) provides a point of leverage for the utilisation of Lacanian theory in the social sciences that may overcome the difficulty of the singularity of the clinic, and its often difficult and inappropriate transposition to the collective level of social life. While this hypothesis is yet to be fully realised, the evidence I have presented – drawn from a comprehensive but not exhaustive reading of Lacan's writings in combination with a practical and theoretical knowledge of musical practice – establishes a plausible approach by which to rethink the relationship between music, language and subjectivity, and to acknowledge the centrality of musical practices within the fabric of our cultural lives. A detailed exemplification of the empirical implications of the argument made here, however, remains the task of future scholarship. Specific points that scholars might usefully investigate in the future include: (i) how neuroscientific research into the entwining of music and language may better reveal the relationship between rational and affective registers, and the manner in which they may contribute to change; and (ii) how empirical research may elucidate the extent to which the environment of late capitalism – with its emphasis on the artistic product and its economic value – may impede the efficacy of

artistic practices in the mode of sublimation as a flexible and ongoing approach to negotiating social life (the Lacanian shift from desire to drive). The model of musical practices also promises to shed light upon some of the central difficulties within Lacanian theory and its utilisation in post-Marxist thought. Before further addressing this latter point, however, it is useful briefly to summarise the conceptual and theoretical ground we have travelled.

Chapter 1 ('The Graph of Desire') outlines the fundamental conceptual repertoire of Lacan's early work and provides the basis for the discussion that follows in Chapters 2 and 3. The explanation places emphasis upon the temporal and aural-invocative dimensions that give birth to the subject within the process of signification, as a counterbalance to the dominance of the visual-spatial representation that the graph engenders. It highlights the dynamic nature of subjectivity's production through signification, and raises a question about the relationship between the emergence of *anxiety* (the hallmark of the unconscious subject of desire) and its relation to the product of the signifying process (Lacan's notion of *voice*).

Chapter 2 ('Anxiety and the Enigmatic *Objet a*') examines the relationship between anxiety and *objet a* in the unpublished transcript of Seminar X, which contains Lacan's most substantial account of the object *voice*. The chapter highlights the emphasis placed upon *gaze* in relation to unconscious fantasy, and Lacan's inference that the object *voice* operates in a different mode. Although Lacan specifically negates any link between music and the anxiety associated with the object *voice* that emerges from the instantiation of the signifier, the chapter highlights the absence of any account of non-linguistic sound, and the musical structuring of sound as a form of signifying practice akin to the temporal articulation of speech and the structure of language.

Chapter 3 ('Musical Practices: Sublimation, *Sinthome* or Transformative Signifying Act?') returns to Seminar VII, and examines Lacan's discussion about artistic endeavour and its status as a privileged (and ethical) form of sublimation. For Lacan, artistic forms of sublimation are a productive process of deconstructive fragmentation that can create the conditions of possibility for the reconfiguration and expansion of the coordinates of the Symbolic. The chapter argues that artistic musical practices are similar to the process of analysis. Moreover, Lacan's key examples (the art of courtly

love and Greek tragedy) contain a fundamental – but previously unacknowledged – reliance upon musical structure and its active cultural expression as a creative signifying practice that extends beyond the boundaries of Symbolic understanding. The chapter further suggests that the theoretical shift of Lacan’s later work provides conceptual categories – around sexualisation and *lalangue* – that are useful for the productive reassessment of sublimation through the lens of artistic musical practices. This strategy, I suggest, offers a more nuanced, practical and accessible clarification of the conditions of possibility that surround transformative change, and avoids the apparent deadlock of the inaccessibility and fixation of unconscious fantasy.

The interrogation of Lacanian psychoanalysis through the prism of creative musical practices highlights a need to reconsider the prevalent emphasis upon unconscious fantasy and its traversal in post-Marxist debates. As early as Seminar VII, Lacan indicates that the void of unconscious desire, and its potentially destructive torsion between the Symbolic and the Real, can be externalised and modified through cultural practices. This early insight is, however, occluded by the dominance of the role of unconscious fantasy (construed as resistant to Symbolic intervention). This depiction changes radically with the conceptual shift of Lacan’s later work and the possibilities it presents for the reconsideration of artistic modes of sublimation as cultural practices through which the recognition of indeterminacy and contingency create the conditions of possibility for shifts in the economy of human desire. Accordingly, this thesis contends that artistic sublimation is a potentially productive and justifiable avenue through which Lacanian psychoanalysis might be utilised in social-political and cultural-theoretical analysis.

Indeed, suggestions to this effect have very recently emerged on both sides of the post-Marxist debate. Fabio Vighi (2010) – who writes in support of Žižek’s position – suggests the addition of sublimation as a necessary constructive phase to follow the negative deconstruction of ‘the act’ (as Žižek conceptualises it). Vighi’s suggestion, however, remains at the level of abstract theory rather than any concrete practical example. In reply to Žižek’s criticisms of his work, Stavrakakis (2010) has also recently suggested the transformative possibilities of sublimation through the specific example of art. His examples, however, place emphasis upon visual art forms and their potential

impact upon a viewing audience, rather than the direct participation of individuals within a cultural artistic practice. The model of musical practice is, I have suggested, closely allied to the temporality of the signifying process, and its affective *ur*-lining of *lalangue*. Moreover, as a cultural practice, music involves direct and active participation at the level of the ‘individual’; not only through signification and affect, but also through the use of the body. These ideas, it is pertinent to note, are closely aligned with Althusser’s insight into the pivotal role of cultural practices in the process of interpellation, the formation of subjectivity, and the function of contingency (‘aleatory materialism’). If cultural practices are the fulcrum upon which the entwinement of the social-political realm and singular instances of subjectivity emerge, then artistic practices (particularly musical improvisation and composition) appear to offer a concrete modality through which that entwinement may be further understood, not only in its multi-dimensional complexity, but as a fluid and ongoing process through which the modification of human desire appears negotiable.

Lacan’s depiction of aesthetic sublimation (in contradistinction to Freud’s) suggests that social recognition is *not* a requisite condition and that conformity to normative ideals – such as prevalent capitalist values where artistic endeavours are caught up in the ‘circuit of goods’ – augur potentially fatal consequences for the ongoing efficacy of sublimation in contemporary society. The social value that is currently placed on scientific approaches that favour constant assessment against Ideal criteria, the dominance of replication according to methodologies of ‘best practice’ and ‘risk management’, combined with the belief that the achievement of Ideal goals is entirely possible in nearly every aspect of life, works against more flexible and open responses to changing social-cultural circumstances. The further development of the psychoanalytic concept of sublimation in connection with musical practices presents itself as the first step towards understanding performative processes that have the potential to be transformative. As Chapter 3 makes clear, Lacan not only privileges ‘artistic sublimation’ as the most effective modality for the individuals actively involved in its practice, but suggests that it potentially reveals the mechanisms through which the matrix of meaning around key signifiers can alter the general fabric within which various social and cultural practices take place. The extent to which the recalibration and

expansion of the Symbolic through 'artistic' cultural practices constitutes the social transformation portrayed in somewhat utopian – if not hubristic – terms within post-Marxism is a point to be debated in future work. Indeed, the example of change through cultural practice perhaps signals a more modest but nuanced perspective of the complexity of change, not only across multiple registers of trans-subjective interaction, but the temporal vista over which it occurs. As Attali insightfully observes, 'it is necessary to imagine ... new theoretical forms, in order to speak to new realities' (Attali, 1985, p.4). Following Attali's suggestion that the intention is 'not only to theorise *about* music, but *through* music' (ibid.), this thesis has suggested that musical paradigms of understanding embrace the dynamic flux of human relationality, and that music-making (as a cultural practice) enables a reconsideration of artistic sublimation and its potential as a site for social transformation.

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