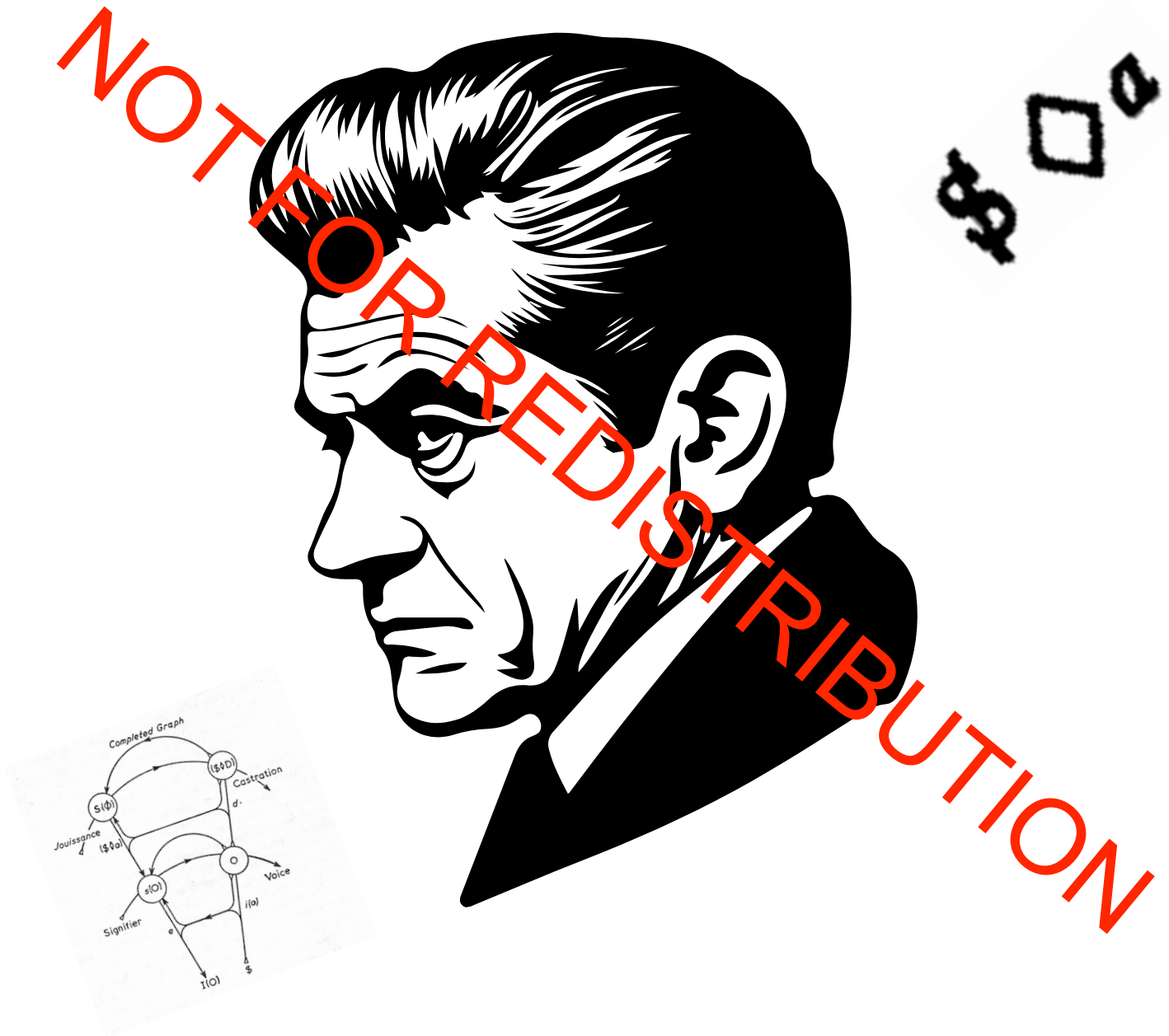


Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis



Arranged by:

© 2025 Abhinav. M. T

B.Sc. Biochemistry (Hons)

Carleton University (Canada, Ottawa)

Some Notes

This document does not aim to replace authoritative texts on Lacanian Psychoanalysis but to bridge a much needed gap between the intricacies of academic theories and what is easily available to the reader with a psychoanalysis background gathered from popular internet resources. It foregoes the formalisation of the theories through diagrams, although some of the essentials are provided for the reader if he wishes to gain a better grasp on the subject.

NOT FOR REDISTRIBUTION

Table of Contents

Some Notes.....	2
Table of Contents	3
Freud's Work	4
Post-Freud Psychoanalysis.....	6
Early Lacan.....	7
The Imaginary Order.....	8
The Symbolic Order.....	10
Link between Imaginary and Symbolic Order.....	13
Concept of Lack.....	14
Excess-Desire	15
Desire and Drive.....	17
Bodily Drives	17
Phallus and Phallic Signifier	20
Jouissance	20
Formulas for Sexuation.....	22
Freud's Symptom	24
Lacan's Sinthome	25
Change in Lacan's Thinking	25
Lacan's Diagrams.....	29
Mechanisms of Signification.....	31
Art, Science, and Technology in the Lacanian Framework	33
References	34
Graph of Desire	35

Freud's Work

Freud noticed a peculiar case in his practice where humans tend to repeat traumas as if they desired pain. This conflicted with his early model of the economy of the psyche.

- Child Starts as a foetus and is born
- All needs are satisfied immediately
- Biochemical Principles and Caregiver unconditional attention [oxytocin]
- Child's desire oriented towards mother for food, care, love
- Child is ruled by the pleasure-unpleasure principle
- Instinctual id

The child then notices that the father competes and successfully limits access to the mother.

- Prohibition of access to mother, hence fulfilment with his object of desire is halted
- Frustration
- Child integrates Father's Authority/Identity
- Prevents conflict with father by identifying with him
- Become the man the mother desires so to keep "secret wish"
- Accepts "delayed gratification" and The Reality Principle
- Forms super-ego/father's authority
- Forms ego, manager between id and super-ego
- This is a healthy clearance from Oedipus Complex

The concert of Reality + Pleasure Principle make up Eros

- Life Drive
- Defers raw desires of the id to material things and co-existence with others
- Create Relationships/Love instead of only Sexual Gratification
- Creates civilization/co-operation instead of selfish survival

Eros functions with a negative-feedback system

- Aim is to maintain creative principle and integrity of the mind
- If energy is too much for the psyche to bear, person collapses
- It discharges excess energy
- Feeling better after crying
- Thinking clearly after venting
- Intimacy and bonding after orgasm
- Eros maintains desire to motivate person to carry on creating complexity

Destabilizing this economic model, Freud found patients tending to repeat traumas

- Goes against sustenance of creative principle
- Desire is aimed in self-destruction
- Beyond the pleasure principle
- Drug consumption despite awareness of ill-effects
- Self-harm
- Choose despair over continuing to live
- Choice is not in volition, but seem unconscious death wish

This could not be explained by the pleasure principle

- Desire oriented towards dissolution of desire
- Instead of maintenance of desire for creativity

He termed this the Death Drive (Thanatos)

- Signature of that was repetition of trauma
- Not well accepted
- Even in Freudian circles

Freud's Treatment of Obsessional Neurosis and Hysteria

- Symptoms were repressed wishes (sexual or hostile) which came back
- Or conflict with ego or super-ego [Moral Prohibition]
- Making the repression conscious would loosen its effect
- Free Association, Interpretation of dreams to reveal unconscious content
- Transference of repressed feeling onto analyst for the latter to understand

Jung

- Emphasized archetypal symbols instead of primarily sexual drives in unconscious
- Unconscious was source of wisdom
- Freud focused on early childhood and repression treatment
- Jung proposed these provided life-long experience

Post-Freud Psychoanalysis

US [Ego Psychology] (Hartmann, A. Freud, Kris)

- Focused in strengthening ego [manager]
- Prevent hysteria by negotiating repressed desires and social life

UK [Object Relations Theory] (Klein, Fairbairn, Winnicott, Bion)

- Deviates from Freud saying psyche were drives
- Psyche is a structure of relations between internalized objects: Father's Authority, Mother's Breast, Schemas
- Pathology comes from distorted early relational patterns affecting adult life
- Split good and bad relationship with caregiver, dichotomy
- Integration is realizing that caregiver can be both "good" and "bad"
- Treatment was mainly through transference
- Analyst acts as a subject for analysand and can re-enact early relations with objects

Early Lacan

He critiqued Ego Psychology and Object-Relation Theory

- Both involve ego
- He proposed ego to be an imaginary concept
- Unstable
- Misrecognized as identity
- Makes no sense to strengthen it
- Ego psychology focused on adaptation
- Analyst acts as model “mature ego”
- Goes back to Freud’s Early principles

He presents as the ego forming during the mirror stage

- The child’s fragmented body experience
- Jubilation upon seeing a whole coherent self
- Identifies with the “whole image”
- Ego forms
- Mistakes it for the self, instead of the fragmented body
- Alienated from his body
- The “I/Self” shifts to something external, a label to this whole mass of cells that sees itself
- Not necessarily involving mirror
- Can also form ego in mother’s gaze
- The “I” is believed to exist because mother is confirming and acting like it does.
- The idea of an I is not just a transient thought when seeing the “whole” body
- Not tending to herself but tending to something else (him)

This association with the Imaginary I, results in an image to defend, even though that image is imaginary.

The Imaginary Order

- Before mirror stage, the child is fragmented, a mass of flesh
- Be it in foetal form where needs are fulfilled by biochemistry
- Or just after birth where there is unconditional care by mother
- After mirror stage, there is the “I” and the (little) “other” masses of flesh
- The child-mother dyad sets the child’s ego and the mother (other) that reflects, supports, or threatens this new “I”.
- The child is alienated from his body. The sense of I exist insofar as the mother confirms it, visually, affectively, affectionately.

This ego is fragile as it depends on the mother or (little) other

- Idealisation born from this
- The mother has the thing that fully supports my ego, the power to unite or shatter it
- Mirroring
- She confirms the existence of my ego [Recognition]
- Rivalry towards little other (mother)
- Jealousy towards mother
- I need you --> You have power over me --> I envy you for you have what makes me whole [Structure for jealousy and rivalry]
- The imaginary is governed by these ambivalent feelings [love + hate]. When you want something, you realize you depend on it, and that makes you feel lacking and weak.
- The child thinks she could demand more than the child can be, and if he is not enough, anxiety results in fear of her withdrawing his feeling of wholeness.
- The mother is not seen as a subject but as an object satisfying all needs
- The imaginary is fundamentally competitive because it is based on lack, mimicry, and misrecognition.
- These looping feelings of completeness and emptiness, love and hate, anxiety and peace tend to be signature of the Imaginary register in action in a pathology??

Proto-Symbolic entry is marked when the child starts to notice that his mother is reacting to other things/needs which are not the child.

- He is no longer the sole thing that the mother desires
- He has no proper knowledge of the world outside the mother-child dyad
- Rivalry is now oriented towards whatever captures her desire
- Whatever does that is not the child, and thus he feels a lack
- The mother is seen as omnipotent and complete that restores his wholeness
- He wants to be the one the mother wants so as to be whole

Slowly, the child enters the Symbolic Order

- The realm where desires are routed, and laws exist what can be had and not
- It is impersonal, that is there are more points than just the child and the little other (mother)
- The dyad breaks when the mother is seen not to be omnipotent
- Before when her production or withdrawal of love could not be understood, causing anxiety, now it is seen as her obeying laws beyond her
- She has lack, and so desires too, hence she is a subject
- The name-of-the-father works as signifier that elucidates her enigmatic desires
- Her desire is governed by the phallic signifier
- The child's satisfaction thus no longer lies with the mother, but in the (big) Other
- Like his mother, he too is a subject and desires the Other to desire him to fill the lack
- The name-of-the-father shows the mother to not be omnipotent and instruct the child to orient his need to fill the lack using signifiers in the Symbolic order
- What drives this lack is the barring or separation of the child from his imaginary thing (little other) that would give him wholeness. He seeks to get that back through the symbolic order. When projected on objects, this is the elusive *objet petit a*.

At this point, neurosis is seen as releasing the analysand from the grasp of the imaginary and inaugurate his entry into the symbolic order.

The Symbolic Order

The symbolic is the order of language.

- Regular speaking “language” is a part of it
- It contains signifiers
- Saussure gave the structure of language as made of signifiers and signified
- Signifiers are expressions of the signified (the underlying concept)
- Saussure explained meaning was in the underlying concept
- Lacan focused on the signifiers as they captured well the instability of meaning/subjectivity
- For Lacan, the signifier precedes the meaning
- Signifiers are defined as distinct from each other through differential relations, not by their concept or meaning

Through the contribution of other structural linguists, Lacan proposed

- Meaning did not arise by the content/underlying concepts
- Meaning arose by the linking of signifiers
- Either through binary opposition/ differential relations [Lévi-Strauss]
- Mother itself is meaningless
- It is the thing, which is not the father, not the tree, and so...
- Thus, the meaning of mother arises in relation to other signifiers
- The system depends on difference, not intrinsic qualities

He also brought in further notions from structural linguistics to explain Freud’s structuring of the unconscious

- Displacement where Freud said it is the shifting of psychic energy from one idea/object to another,
- Lacan linked this to Metonymy, the sequential relation between signifiers
- Library to books to knowledge to scholar

- Condensation where Freud said it is the compressing of multiple ideas into one symbol
- Lacan linked this to metaphor or substitution of one signifier for another
- Her skin, like sand dunes, her love, like a flame

Unfortunately, as part of the symbolic, a signifier cannot fully capture a concept, it requires an infinite chain of signifiers to obtain the full meaning in metonymy.

- Meaning is always deferred down the chain.
- Metaphor which condenses together multiple signifiers
- But each signifier having a lack
- Metaphor does not cover that lack for the lack in the single signifier
- Signifiers are defined by opposition, hence difference, so relative lack
- No single signifier can fill all the gaps; metaphor fails too

Lacan mentions that the unconscious bears the structure of a language

- The unconscious being the set of behaviours of a subject not under volition or knowledge
- The unconscious similarly is a constellation of signifiers
- These signifiers were borrowed/transmitted from the symbolic/through the Other
- It does not originate "inside"
- It naturally bears the structure of a language
- It is also the discourse of the Other [What the Other communicated to us]

The conscious mind only sees the signified (meaning)

- The chaining of the signifiers occur in the unconscious
- This chain gives rise to meaning interpreted in the conscious mind
- This through the ego-image form the identity
- E.g., People say one is Intelligent; chains to well liked, chains to success in love, chain to success in career,...all of this form the ego and its fantasy and what it aspires to do/chase.

- Intelligent is a Master Signifier (S_1) and it chains to the others like well liked, success (S_2)
- Some behaviour beyond meaning, originate in the unconscious chain

Health and Pathology are in the different arrangements of the Signifiers. The neurotic is what the normal functioning look like, within a certain limit.

- In Healthy Neurotic
- The symbolic coordinates are stable
- Person relates well to the symbolic and functions well in language
- Unconscious chain of signifiers aligned with the Symbolic Order
- Desire flows in metonymy in the unconscious
- This matches the graphs [Vertices and Edges] of the Symbolic order
- Repression blocks traumatic/threatening signifiers
- Repressed signifiers return but the symptoms are manageable
- In Pathological Neurotic
- Symbolic coordinates/alignment is intact
- But repression is too strong or poorly managed
- Symptoms become hard to manage
- Repression is not abolished; it is important to maintain the symbolic intact
- No repression, means no restrictions, means no law, means no structure

Process of Analysis and Treatment for Pathological Neurotic

- Desire flow within the symbolic is oriented in such a way to reach the imaginary wholeness [*objet petit a* hiding behind]
- This is projected onto objects/signifiers upon entry in the Symbolic Order
- In the case of a repressed signifier
- There is a blockage in desire flow down the signifying chain in the unconscious

- This coincides with a special attention onto the signifier, and it is further repressed as it conflicts with the image of the ego
- In healthy neurotics, the desire flow finds an alternative route around other signifiers to bypass the repressed one
- In strong repression, the blockage of desire flow returns in symptoms of obsession, fixations, repetitions
- Also, the repressed signifier is not interrogated or made aware of. There are no coordinates to position the self and the repressed signifier in the Symbolic Order.
- Signifier chaining result in meaning, collapsing of the chain by repression cause meaninglessness/no articulation
- This gap generates anxiety due to exposure to the real
- Desire is re-routed through the Imaginary fantasy to close the gap, making the fantasy, usually flexible, more rigid. This allows desire to flow like before
- This is done to stabilize identity and compensate for the gap in the self.
- The repressed signifier without coordinates cannot be named and is interpreted as danger/threat to identity
- The real keeps returning, and this is interpreted as invasive thoughts
- Analysis aims to weaken the ill-effects of the repression to make it more manageable

Link between Imaginary and Symbolic Order

The Symbolic Order is made of signifiers. Each have no inherent meaning. There is a difference relation between the signifiers. None signify for complete meaning. The gap in the signifiers involved in self-image, when absorbed in the unconscious generate anxiety.

To resolve this anxiety, the Imaginary Order employs fantasy to ligate the gaps and allow for desire flow metonymically. This process occurs in healthy psyches. Not all gaps within

the symbolic are ligated; only those that the subject's attention/ego is directed to, hence perceived lack. The repressed signifier, forming the gap, is mediated by fantasy.

Fantasy is a natural ligating mechanism. It can cover a gap but clinging to it too hard or looking too much into it reveals the inherent gap. Making the repressed signifier known is the first part of analysis. If the analyst does not intervene, the fantasy can tighten even more to try to cover the structural gap inherent in all signifiers or condense back onto another master signifier, creating a new chain. Or the subject realizes that the gap is present in all signifiers and is a structural problem, not personal one. This is the aim of analysis.

Healthy unconscious symbolic re-linking would involve borrowing the correct signifiers from the Symbolic Order and using that to give to the ego so repression can re-occur again and is manageable. Through articulation, under the name-of-the-father.

Concept of Lack

Manque-à-être

- This is the lack generated by a subject's entry into language
- When he is named, he is represented by a signifier
- Signifiers are incomplete and without meaning
- This generates a perceived lack in his being
- This lack is an illusion relative to imaginary wholeness prior to the subject's entry into language

Manque-à-avoir

- This covers the lack in being after entry into language
- The subject projects this lack onto an object
- Object that if had would result in wholeness
- The lack is never filled despite the chase

- Because signifiers are structurally incomplete

Objet-petit-a

- The *manque-à-être* cannot be seen or grasped
- *Objet-petit-a* is not the gap/lack itself, but the lack given shape
- The objectified trace of this *manque-à-être*
- It is the left-over after the entry into language
- It is not an object, but is felt as something taken from us upon entry
- It belongs to the Real, it cannot be symbolized
- The subject projects a promise of wholeness onto the objects of chase, in front of the *objet-petit-a*
- If *objet-petit-a* was the lack itself, possessing it would end desire
- It is the object stand-in for *manque-à-être*
- The subject cannot desire his own lack. Like a mirror cannot reflect its absence
- *Objet petit a* cause of desire is hidden behind objects stand-in for desire
- It cannot be symbolized but is felt in the things that make someone unreasonably attractive; the “it” factor.

Desire

- Desire is always metonymic. When one object is acquired, it slides to another object.
- The real lack (*manque-à-être*) cannot be filled by having (*manque-à-avoir*)
- Fantasy organises this chase.
- It forms a scenario that the subject would get this missing being.
- This scenario only stabilizes desire not resolve it.

Excess-Desire

Freud noticed people repeating painful desire as if to extract something. He called this thing beyond the pleasure principle, The Death Drive.

- There is an enjoyment beyond pleasure, an excess

- It exceeds pleasure and goes into pain
- Lacan calls this *Jouissance*

This excess results from the laws of the Symbolic Order

- The subject is barred from full mythical enjoyment of *The Thing*
- Castration in form of laws impose limits
- Unmediated, immediate enjoyment is forbidden

This occurs because language entry prevents direct access/reference to bodily immediacy

- Pleasure is what stays within the limits of the symbolic
- Jouissance is what transgresses, tries to go beyond those limits

The Thing

- Lacan reinforces that the Real is the Impossible
- He presents a schema how can something that resists symbolization be put into language
- Consider a portal:
- Absolute Void----|Subjectivity----|-----Object stand-in
- *The Thing*-----|*manque-à-être*|-----*objet petit a*
- *The Thing* corresponds to the absolute kernel of lack in the Real which resists symbolization
- Lacan holds that the subject is not a substance but a lack created by language
- The *manque-à-être* is the subjective representation of this lack. It creates desire
- The stand-in for the *manque-à-être* is the *objet petit a*. It is what makes desire move within the Symbolic
- Like the *objet petit a* is felt and not symbolized by the subject (except through stand-in objects)
- *The Thing* can neither be symbolized nor felt by the subject for it would obliterate the subject.
- Subjectivity is undefined in the realm of *The Thing*.
- **NOTE FOR LATER:** [*The Phallus is what structures desire flow within the symbolic*].

Desire and Drive

- Desire is structured, symbolic, regulated, and mediated by *objet petit a*
- Desire is a movement within the symbolic
- It aims at objects which stand-in for *objet petit a*
- The subject cannot desire his own lack. Like a mirror cannot reflect its absence
- It produces symbolic fulfilment and relational orientation in the Language Network
- Drive has no aim. It circulates around *The Thing*
- It is repetitive. There is no aim at something which cannot be symbolized.
- It produces painful enjoyment
- The subject orbits close to what he un-understandably desired at the cost of his subjectivity
- This is Lacan's explanation for Freud's Death Drive
- He joins the pleasure principle and the death drive under one theory through language

Bodily Drives

Freud noticed that Drives are not a whole organism seeking a whole object. Drives are partial because they involve parts of the body. Drives do not aim at full objects but partial objects. Drives don't aim at restoring wholeness but aim at *jouissance* extracted from a circuit around a "bodily hole". Partial objects are concrete ways in which *objet petit a* appears in each partial drives.

All drives share the same principles:

- They go out of the body towards an object
- They circle around it without reaching a final goal
- They return to the same bodily zone when tension releases
- This looping returns with excess *jouissance*

The Oral Drive

- Zone is the mouth
- Partial Object is the Breast
- Mode of satisfaction: sucking, taking in, engulfing
- The breast is not the object of desire
- But the object that marks a break between need and demand
- The Oral drive is not about milk
- But the circuit of seeking, mouthing, and returning to tension
- In adult: Smoking, Eating, Drinking, Kissing, Chewing
- The satisfaction is in the *rhythm*, not the content

The Anal Drive

- Zone is the anus
- Partial object is faeces (symbolically, any gift, refusal, withholding)
- Mode of satisfaction: retaining or expelling
- This drive is about control and giving/refusing
- The object is the placeholder, the real aim is in the rhythm of the circuit of holding and releasing
- Jouissance shows up in controlling rhythms, hoarding, perfectionism, meticulous routines, or in enjoying giving/refusing something to the Other

The Scopic Drive

Note: The scopic object is not seeing, but an object which one feels himself being looked at

- Zone is eyes
- Partial object is *The Gaze*, not vision
- Mode of satisfaction is being seen, or seeing oneself being seen

- The drive is about occupying the place as the object of the Other's look or controlling the look oneself
- Both voyeurism and exhibitionism are similar in that aspect
- Both seek the circuit of gaze, not the content of what is seen
- Selfies
- Surveillance
- Curated visibility
- Hiding/Appearing
- Checking how one appears
- The tension and its release is the satisfaction

The Invocatory Drive

- Partial object is the voice (not the meaning)
- Not about language content but voice as a sonorous object
- Zone: ear/voice apparatus
- Mode of satisfaction: emitting or receiving sound
- Hearing one's name
- Compulsion to fill silence
- Singing
- Humming
- The drive satisfaction comes from resonance

Analysis reveals the drive as a mode of satisfaction and not object of desire

Drive is not Biological instinct. Instinct has a biological program, a natural object, and a function goal like to ensure reproduction and survival. A drive has no biological origin, no end point, no evolutionary purpose, and is marked by the signifier and related to the Other. The drive is a detour created by the signifier. It is a fragment of the body captured by the symbolic.

Phallus and Phallic Signifier

With how the symbolic structured like an interconnected web and any objects stand-in for objet petit a can, and make desire flow, the flow of desire gets really messy. Everybody has their own lack.

The phallic signifier is an empty signifier within only the symbolic order that acts as stand-in for lack. Hence, it allows for the flow of desire towards itself. It organizes desire structurally. It tells the subject what is desired, and what is unattainable. It mediates the subject's relation to the Other and to their own lack.

It is important as it allows for co-operation in a messy network.

The phallus is an imaginary fantasy object representing wholeness, power, and completeness. It is the object that the subject imagines possessing or lacking. It is tied to narcissism and rivalry. E.g., "One does not have the phallus while others have it". The phallus can exist in fantasy/imagination but does not exist in the symbolic.

It represents social power where everybody will bow to that person for what he has.

Jouissance

Jouissance is the enjoyment that emerges at the edge of desire's pursuit when the symbolic is involved.

- Jouissance is NOT Desire
- Jouissance is the feeling
- Desire keeps the subject oriented around a structured lack
- Drive keeps the subject around *The Thing*
- Both produce enjoyment, but drive produces a painful enjoyment called jouissance
- Enjoyment is not Jouissance but a moderate response to fulfilment of desire in chasing objects of desire.
- Jouissance is the excessive feeling from circling around *The Thing*.

Phallic Jouissance

- Ordinary enjoyment is obtained in achieving a goal
- Like eating a meal and being satisfied
- Phallic jouissance is enjoyment shaped by lack and symbolic regulation
- It is the pleasure found in the motion towards a goal or its anticipation, even if it is never complete
- Like mastery over something, recognition
- It is an enjoyment mixed with frustration and tension, while still within symbolic limits
- It is still structured by the rules of desire
- The masculine is linked with phallic jouissance, but the feminine can also experience this [not male or female]
- For diagram lower quadrants
- Masculine have jouissance towards objet petit a
- $\$ \rightarrow a$
- Feminine have it towards phallus
- $\$a \rightarrow \Phi$

Non-Phallic Jouissance

- It is jouissance that escapes the symbolic order ($\$$), not tied to the phallic signifier or structures of desire
- It is unstructured, excessive, and unmediated.
- It is of the realm of the Real
- It is ecstatic, overwhelming, and can be painful
- This jouissance is mostly associated with the feminine position [not female]
- In the graph, it is represented as $\$a$ to $S(\$)$

Additional Notes [Unverified/Unprocessed]

Formulas for Sexuation

Lacan describes 2 ways of relating to language, law, and jouissance. The masculine and the feminine. In the top quadrants, he compacts through logical notation each position takes; the left side being masculine, and the right, feminine.

He wants to show the cut within the symbolic order that result in masculine and feminine subjectivity; the two possible responses to castration. One accepts it, one rejects it.

Note: This does not satisfy mathematical truths but is a placeholder for describing the relations symbolically.

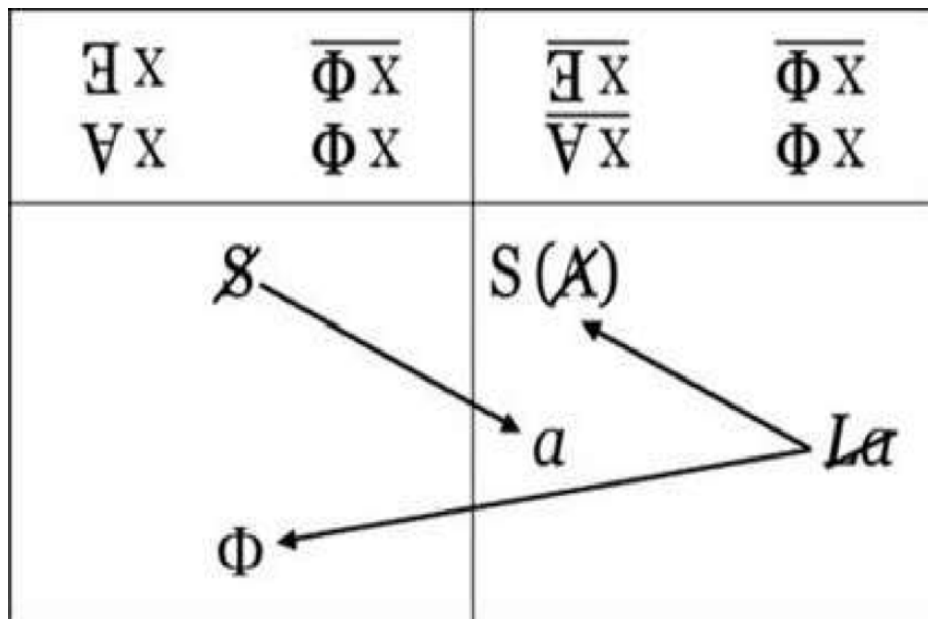


Figure 1: Formula for Sexuation and flow of Jouissance

$\Phi(x)$ denotes the phallic function, or the subjection of a subject to castration/lack imposed by the Symbolic Order.

Masculine Subjectivity (Left)

- The subject relates to Language, Law, and the Symbolic in a masculine frame
- $\forall x \Phi(x)$
- All men are subjected to castration
- This rule is universal; the set of all men is closed
- $\exists x \neg \Phi(x)$
- There is one man who is not subjected to castration
- This is the Masculine Ideal
- "HIM"
- Freud's Mythical Father
- There is a singular exception that embodies the law (name-of-the-father) but is not fully subjected to it. Someone who escapes lack
- The existential clause is needed to ground the universal clause
- Men believe in castration/see castration as meaningful because they know they are different from the uncastrated one
- They compare themselves to that ideal, striving to be the uncastrated man. While experiencing prohibition against being that man
- The ideal man cannot exist within civilization
- The masculine desire is oriented to be the one "who fulfils the law" or wholeness
- But he cannot succeed for all subjects are barred/castrated

Feminine Subjectivity (Right)

- $\neg \exists x \neg \Phi x$
 - No one on the feminine side escapes castration/lack
 - No corresponding feminine exception/ideal to make rule universal
 - $\neg \forall x \Phi x$
 - Not all women are subjected to castration
 - The set of all women is not closed/ An open set of women
 - There is a split in the feminine ideal
 - Virgin Mother
 - The Sex Object
 - “La Femme n’existe pas”
 - No like ideal to strive for like men
 - Group modeled on feminine subjectivity falls apart
 - Not meaning woman can’t form group.
 - Feminine position
-

Freud’s Symptom

For Freud, a symptom (unexplained, uncontrolled desire/feeling to do something) was a message from the unconscious to be decoded. It could be a repressed desire.

Psychoanalysis’ aim was to decode the symptom, making it conscious by interpretation, loosening its hold.

Lacan's Sinthome

Early and Middle Lacan posit the symptom as a repressed signifier in the unconscious to be articulated. The symptom belongs to the Symbolic order and can be understood to reveal desire.

Late Lacan suggests not all symptoms can be articulated or interpreted away. Some are not messages but knots that hold the subject together.

The Lacanian Borromean ring (SIR) model suggests all 3 registers hold each other. Failure in one link collapses all of them, hence the subject. Also, Lacan explains that all humans are creatures aimed at Jouissance, for the best and for the worst.

The sinthome is the subject's style of being, it is not something to be cured, but it is the thing that holds the subject together. Interpretation can't dissolve it because it is beyond meaning.

Traditionally, the name-of-the-father is the signifier that installs the subject in the symbolic order [No complete access to mother, laws and rules present prior to the child, regulate desire]. The raw drives and maternal desires of the Real become Symbolized. The name-of-the-father stabilizes the subject.

If that signifier fails to take its place, foreclosure occurs, the symbolic cannot hold the Imaginary and Real together; and the subject faces the invasion of the Real; hallucination, fragmentation, delusions. This is psychosis as the Real overlaps with the Imaginary.

Examples of this include healthy imaginary has the body as whole while in overlaps, fragmentation of the body occurs.

The sinthome acts as a private law, compared to the universal name-of-the-father, that ties all 3 registers together and prevent the subject from collapsing. It is the subject's own way of holding the world together.

For example, James Joyce, having a weak paternal figure, thus a weak symbolic link, did not collapse form invasion of the Real. His writing held him together. Joyce was not cured by meaning, he was held by his sinthome. He defied established literary structures (Symbolic) in his writings. He gave himself a name.

The suggested solution is to identify with one's sinthome if the name-of-the-father is foreclosed.

In speculative cases where the Imaginary is weak, the symbolic and the real overlap. This can result in theological insights (Symbolic) fused with bodily sensations (Real) while the ego disintegrates. One feels oneself merging with the ideas of man and the flows of the world.

When the real is weak; the uncertain/unknowable aspect of the world vanishes. Imaginary and Symbolic overlap. Everything feels meaningful and everything feels complete. This is like social media where the unexplainable things are sent to the kernel, or neurotic hyper-rationalism.

Change in Lacan's Thinking

In Middle Lacan, his lessons are encapsulated in the following:

"Castration means that jouissance has to be refused in order to be attained on the inverse scale of the law of desire".

He suggests that one must accept the limit placed on enjoyment by the symbolic. Pursuing total jouissance leads to anxiety and destruction, in accepting prohibition, there is a limited access to jouissance; enjoyment can only exist under prohibition. The more one accepts castration, the more one's desire can circulate and the more *some* jouissance becomes possible. The more one transgresses the law, the more the jouissance collapses into suffering. One is allowed to enjoy (properly, no pain) only because one cannot enjoy everything.

Late Lacan presents the Sinthome as one's unique way of binding the 3 registers together, giving one a workable relationship to one's own jouissance. One no longer seeks to normalize his relation to jouissance via Law or the Other, but one assumes one's own singular mode of enjoyment, not as error, but as identity and structure.

The goal of analysis shifted from accepting castration and traversing one's own fantasy to identifying with one's sinthome.

This is further expanded in the barred other ($\bar{A}$). In early Lacan, the name-of-the-father sutures the lack of meaning in language; accepting things for what they are, arresting metonymic sliding, and organizing desire. Eventually, Lacan proposes that the symbolic is itself incomplete, the name-of-the-father is also another signifier and is hence incomplete. The Other does not guarantee itself. There is no endpoint to reach completeness of desire in the other.

Démande

- Need are biological needs, instinctual
- Demands are biological needs expressed in language
- Its satisfaction is never achieved as baseline reference is imaginary wholeness
- Desire is what remains of the fulfilment of demand

Che Vuoi?

The subject learns that the other also desires. To know what the other desires is important to get the other to desire us. The Other wants something, is incomplete, and also lacks. There is anxiety in not knowing what the other wants. It is the anxiety in the impossibility to answer: "What am I for the Other?" It gives a position and identity on the symbolic and the Other's fantasy. But it is impossible to know. Fantasy stabilizes this anxiety

The Gaze

Le Regard (The Gaze) is a structural point that shows the subject that he is seen by the Other (without control). He is no longer the master of the visual field. The ego's imaginary supposes it sees the world from its viewpoint and is the one that organizes meaning. The gaze breaks this illusion; that we are a subject too, like others and seen by the Other.

It is a partial *objet petit a* of bodily drives. It is not only about being seen by the other, but it is more about feeling visually exposed, seen, or objectified.

La Voix

The voice is the auditory equivalent of the *The Gaze*.

Fantasy

Fantasy stabilizes us to the role in other's desire, and subsequently stabilizes us to *objet petit a*, prevent us in falling into the real. It gives structure and meaning of ourselves in Other's desire.

Fantasy transforms the lack in being into a lack in having. The incompleteness of the self is too traumatic to bear, it results in associating an object to this lack. $\$ \diamond a$. Fantasy substitutes the lack in being for the lack in having.

Analysis aims to traverse fantasy, loosening its grip on the subject in realizing its emptiness. It allows desire to function without the obsession with completion.

Lacan's Diagrams

The discourse diagram shows how subjects are produced inside language.

The elements:

(S) Barred Subject

It denotes the subject's entry into language. The bar denotes the lack produced by signification and inability to reach wholeness.

(S₁) Master Signifier

Signifiers are defined by difference and can keep chaining one referring to each other.

There is no natural connection between signifier (word/sound) and signified (concept).

S₁ --> S₂ --> ... --> S_n

The signified keeps sliding under the signifiers. There is no bottom signified or absolute meaning. Like looking up meaning in a dictionary and one definition sending us to another infinitely. Meaning and Identity never stabilize. Nothing explain "What am I?" or "What this means?"

A signifier never fully captures the subject, it points to the subject only through relations to other signifiers. For example, a person named Bob, is not contained entirely in the name Bob. It only points to him in the symbolic network. It's meaning come from other signifier; identity and desire is always mediated, never fully present. A signifier represents the subject for another signifier; all contribute to partial meaning. Example, someone calls you the genius (S₁). The label S₁ represents you, the subject in the eyes of another word like leader, thinker, revolutionary (S₂). There is no standalone intrinsic meaning signifier; it keeps sliding; the subject is divided and lacks full presence in language.

A master signifier is a signifier taken as self-evident, and without question. Instead of chasing meaning across the chain, S_1 defines meaning around itself and all subsequent chains evolve from it.

Examples:

A child is told "You're gifted". This organizes all subsequent chains and their interpretation like grades, performance, failure, desire. His identity gets organized around the master signifier.

In politics, freedom is taken as a master signifier; it is not question but people mobilise around it.

In reality, master signifiers don't stop sliding; they stop sliding subjectively by being treated as non-negotiable.

The subject ($\$$) is produced at the point S_1 halts sliding. This is known as the *point de capiton* (quilting point). This organises discourse to allow for meaning. When sliding stops, something is said about that person; he becomes identified, and thus he also becomes divided.

The name-of-the-father is the signifier of signifiers. It is the Master signifier that assigns all master signifiers. The first S_1 . It is a signifier without a signified. It is empty. It anchors all meaning, it means nothing. It obtains its meaning only after looping through S_2 . It is meaningful enough to anchor identity, but empty enough to keep desire going.

(S_2) Knowledge/Signifying Chain

The network of all signifiers that elaborates the master signifier, but also erodes it of meaning.

(a) *Objet petit a*

It is what remains when the subject is split, the leftover of signification process across subject and signifiers. The lack of having that masks the lack of being.

The bars represent lack.

$\$$ the bar in the subject produces lack but also allows meaning to appear.

Sign = Signifier (sound image)/Signified (concept) [Saussure Notation]

Lacan: Signified/Signifier

Mechanisms of Signification

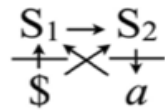
When S_1 enters the chain, it forces a cut. Meaning and Identity is formed as “Something is said about you”. But the cut also divides you, $\$$.

S_1 crystallizes an identity but the child is split trying to live up to it or understand his identity.

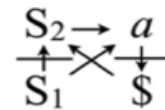
S_2 is the knowledge that elaborates or destabilizes S_1 (his identity). The chain can never finalize what the master signifier meant. So, S_1 anchors meaning but S_2 perpetually shifts it. This is why every identity wobbles.

From the split, *objet petit a* is produced. It is the remainder that cannot be captured in meaning. The part of oneself that cannot be explained but causes desire.

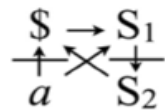
Discourse of the Master



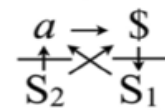
Discourse of the University



Discourse of the Hysteric



Discourse of the Analyst



Discourse of the Capitalist

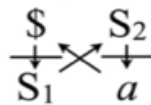


Figure 2: Lacan's four discourses

Objet petit a loop back into $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$.

This causes the desire to seek further signification, further identities, further explanations.

The drive to find meaning in S_2 is fuelled by a.

Either it expands S_2 seeking more meaning, more explanations or it loops to S_1 , seeking new identity, new fixation, new authority.

a makes S_1 never fully satisfying and S_2 never end.

Clinical Correlation: Obsessional Neurosis tries to stabilize S_1 using more S_2 . It is futile for there is always lack.

A perverse try to take the position of the master signifier, embodying the law.

Psychotic problems occur when name-of-the-father is not installed properly and S_1 is not anchored causing meaning floods. Further discourses can be observed by rotating the axes of the graph.

Art, Science, and Technology in the Lacanian Framework

The symbolic precedes all human faculties according to Lacan. In Metonymy (Horizontal Sliding) one signifier calls in the other, based on context, grammar, and language in the unconscious, like mother to home to love to care,... and so. In Metaphor (Vertical Sliding), one signifier substitutes another like authority to law to origin and so. This allows for meaning and symptom.

Metaphor (constitution of meaning) is the creative moment in language, metonymy (movement of desire) is the desiring moment.

Art does not only attempt to continue down the signifier chain; it is not creativity. Art brushes against the real and introduces new master signifiers. It bends, twist, introduces gap, or push the chain to its limits. Subsequent signifiers constellate around the master signifiers. Metonymy is still involved in art. But it does not slide towards a known meaning but to the objet petit a, when pushing the chain to its limits.

The formal demands of the scientific methods arrests sliding of signifiers. It stabilizes the signifier chain; it restricts substitution and metaphor. Art approaches the Real by showing the limits of the signifier, showing how a metaphor is possible, science restricts metaphors and through rigorous metonymy chains, it forms meaning.

The real that science deals with is different from the traumatic psychoanalytic one. The real always returns to its place and this is captured by the scientific method. The psychoanalysis' real is the impossible. The scientific real is also outside the symbolic; it has no relation to humans; these laws just exist. Banach Tarski Decomposition, Quantum Mechanics, Relativity all deal with counter-intuitive principles outside human symbols. One can model and write about these laws; but for example, a blackhole, electron orbitals, or selective pressure can be modelled but they do not put the real into meaning. We can only get meaning in human sense and apply that to technology.

Art attempts to approach the impossible to understand and science aims to define formally the limits of the impossible. These are their relationships to the Real.

Logic, emotion, and intuition enter after the creation of the symbolic structure, after the signifiers are linked. Emotions are felt because a certain chain position us relative to lack and hence a desire. Logic is felt because a master signifier stabilizes the chain. Intuition is felt because imaginary stabilizes and make a coherent image out of the signifiers. None of this cause signifier linkage, they are the effects. All these faculties are result how the symbolic structure, and the unconscious orders us.

References

Is it Possible to Represent the Sexual Relation in Cinema? - Scientific Figure on ResearchGate. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-formulae-of-sexuation_fig1_360624688 [accessed 25 Nov 2025]

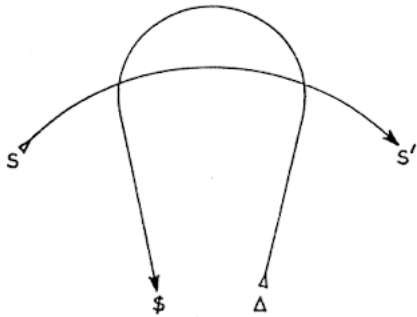
The Subject Lagging Behind the Acceleration of Neoliberal Capitalist Discourse - Scientific Figure on ResearchGate. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Lacans-discourses-Lacan-1970-1991-1972-1978-Pauwels-2019_fig1_354704713 [accessed 25 Nov 2025]

The Cambridge Introduction to Jacques Lacan (Cambridge Introductions to Literature)
by Todd McGowan

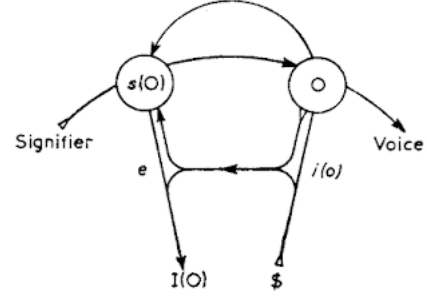
Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English 1st Edition by Jacques Lacan (Author),
Bruce Fink (Translator)

Graph of Desire

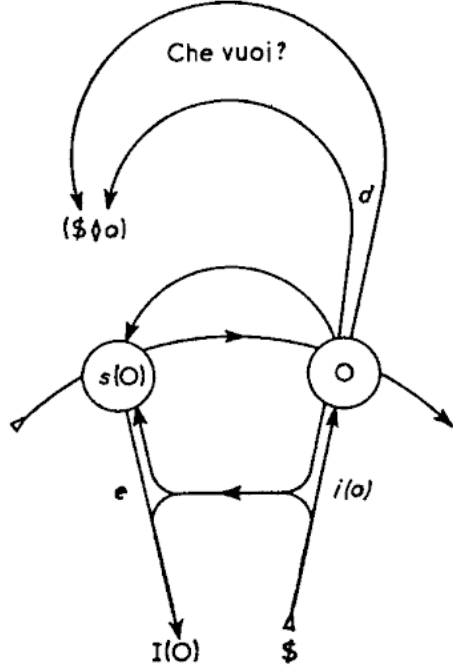
Graph I



Graph II



Graph III



Completed Graph

