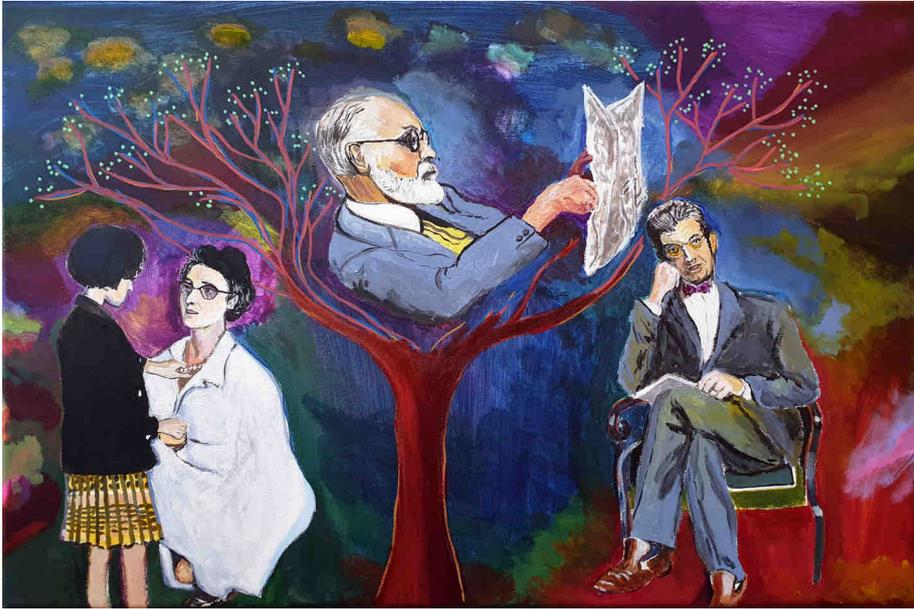


The Interpretations of Psychoanalysis



To say this is addressed to nonspecialists, and relies on references to extremely obscure authors like Cornelius Agrippa and references work by Merleau-Ponty (which I doubt many nonspecialists have read) is ridiculous! How is anybody going to understand this? Even the vague references to dreams sampled from Freud's magnum opus *The Interpretation of Dreams* are mentioned in passing with very little semblance to their actual elucidation. Whilst authors like Žižek, Copjec, Bruce Fink and others seem to be able to pull apart the theory from the abstruse style, I cannot.

I will perhaps return to this work, but for now its contents remains a mystery to me.

2nd Reading - "The art of listening is almost as important as that of saying the right thing" (123)

Okay, so Lacan is pretty fucking difficult, that's a given. Below I'll post my summary of the sections of the seminar, and I hope people can chip in in the comments and provide me with some help understanding the great master. I can only apologise for any vagaries and gaps in knowledge.

In this set of seminars, conducted in 1964, Lacan tries to get at the heart of what Psychoanalysis is. For Lacan, Psychoanalysis is rooted in four, Freudian concepts - the unconscious, repetition, transference and finally the drive. The lectures are then set out in these four themes, with a set of lectures devoted to one of the four aspects, all bar the first lecture, 'Excommunication'.

Excommunication - Lacan explains why psychoanalysis is a science, despite the analytic community oftentimes being similar to a religious community, which excommunicates heretics. Lacan of course was excommunicated by the IPA for his insistence on variable length sessions, and Lacan was also famously interrupted by Ernest Jones, when Lacan was delivering the early version of 'The Mirror Stage'. Unfortunately, for Lacan, despite this lecture, the Lacanian community has become more cultish than the community he was criticising, with the longstanding beef between Freudian revisionists of varying shades (characterised by the legacy of Melanie Klein, Karen Horney and Erich Fromm) and the classical Freudians (characterised by folks like Anna Freud) still brewing around this time. Lacan is reflective on his own excommunication in this essay however, drawing similarities between his expulsion from the IPA to Baruch Spinoza's excommunication from the Jewish community in Amsterdam. Whilst Lacan pushes back against the claim that the psychoanalytic community "is a church" (4), he does want to rescue the four concepts from the analytic community's abandonment of them, and instead carry the Freudian torch, by taking it and highlighting how Freudianism fits with modern linguistics.

The Unconscious and Repetition - "The linguistic structure assures us that there is, beneath the term unconscious, something definable, accessible and objectifiable" (21)

"Man's desire is the desire of the Other" (36)

This set of lectures draws on the themes of the title, with Lacan pushing back against the accusations of him being a Heideggerian due to his linguistic focus. For Lacan, the unconscious "thinks in our place" and situates our subjectivity, in a very similar way to Heidegger's arguments about Being and its relation to language (remember

Lacan's repetition of Heidegger's famous statement that "In language man dwells".

Lacan here wants to question our ideas around truth also, with him rejecting playing with the idea of there being "truth in lying" (38). He appears to be trying to reveal the truth inherent in speech, or the unconscious, which is expressed through language. For example, if I were to lie about my sexual performance, the 'truth' behind this statement is that unconsciously I hold a deep seated insecurity about my sexual performance, and this truth would only be revealed through analysis.

Whilst analysis gets at this Other, this 'unconscious' we speak of, it does so not in an idealist manner. In fact, Lacan aggressively rejects the notion of idealism in psychoanalysis, something which isn't helped by Freud's talk of mental representations (Vorstellungsrepräsentanz), which reads almost Berkeleyan at times. No, analysis is not idealism for Lacan, because its praxis is "orientated towards... the heart of experience" (54). The real is in itself, apprehended through analysis of signs, like unveiling a mask or filtering out a chemical from a mixture. This kind of claim I can only attribute to Lacan's interest in phenomenology, wherein experience is interpreted through a realist perspective, without the kind of mechanical materialist outlook, nor a leap of faith - à la Descartes, another figure which Lacan speaks through in these lectures.

One of the key ideas in this section of lectures is the idea of 'the tuche', which is an Aristotelian term for apprehending the Real. The Real is beyond simple 'return', as Freud's dictum of the return of the repressed tells us, things don't happen again as identical events. Rather, they return in a fragmented and confused manner.

On the Gaze as Object Petit a - "Man's desire is the desire of the Other"

Here, in this set of lectures, Lacan attempts to explain his ideas on the Gaze, and distance himself from Merleau Ponty's and Sartre's phenomenology. For Lacan, the gaze is not a literal, real gaze like that of Sartre's (think of the example of a peeping tom being caught in Being and Nothingness), but rather it is for Lacan an imagined gaze, a gaze "imagined in me by the Other" (84). Lacan then discusses his ideas around the gaze with some illustrations and discussions of geometry and topology. The gaze is represented through art, a theme which has been picked up on my film and art theorists in the Lacanian tradition (see Žižek and Copjec). The eye, for Lacan, may act as an object petit a, insofar as it involves "lack" (104). This objet a is the object cause of desire, the Other which is evident through the gaze. Simply put, it is that which we cannot attain, the 'apple of the eye'.

Transference and the Drive - "I will ask analysts this: 'have you ever felt, for a single moment, the feeling that you are handling a clay on influence?'" (126).

These lectures see Lacan shifting his focus to rejecting Szasz's attack on transference, with Lacan standing stubbornly in favour of the idea that transference doesn't require a subject-presumed-to-know. Here, we can see Lacan's idea of the analyst acting as a mirror for the analysand, and being a tool for the analysand, rather than an authoritative figure, like that of Winnicott's parent model of analysis, which is vital to the Lacanian approach, and provides a much more non-hierarchical approach which is too often overlooked.

Cormac Gallagher explains this very well in his summary notes of the seminar, noting "The concern with the scientific nature of psychoanalysis had occupied

many analysts since Freud and one of Lacan's principal interlocutors in this and other Seminars, Thomas Szasz, argued that it could only achieve this status by conforming to the objective norms of the physical sciences. In particular Szasz felt that the whole notion of the transference, which consisted for him in deliberately leading the analysand into error and then correcting him on the basis of the analyst's superior knowledge, had to be abandoned in favour of an honest reciprocity between the two people in the analytic situation. Lacan's wager is that he can construct a science which does not abandon the fundamental tenets of analysis, for example, that it involves one person who is suffering coming to address himself to another subject who is presumed to know. To accept Szasz's proposition that psychoanalysis is a science only if it has objective realities against which there can be measured the correctness of the analyst's as opposed to the analysand's statements is to reduce psychoanalysis to some sort of cognitive-behavioural therapy and eliminate any reference to the four concepts that ground its theory and practice." (see LACAN'S SUMMARY OF SEMINAR XI* pg9 by Cormac Gallagher)

Part of the focus on transference through speech also leads Lacan to separating the "enunciation" from the "statement", wherein he separates the signifiers from their Unconscious meaning.

I - Am lying to you. Again, think back to Lacan's critique of simplistic notions of truth as being different to the truth in analysis, and also Lacan's critique of the Cartesian 'I'.

Repeating his famous dictum that "the unconscious is structured like a language", Lacan attacks Carl Jung's desexualisation of the libido and his idea that the solution to the unconscious is to be found in history, with some

primitive mental ideas.

Related to this, Lacan also takes aim at the translation of Freud's 'drive', which Lacan sees as problematising the actual idea itself in the minds of many analysts. This is something Lacan devotes a whole *écrit* to in the full collection of the *Écrits*.

The Field of the Other and back to Transference - "Not wanting to desire is wanting to not desire" (253).

This set of lectures has a very Hegelian focus, with Lacan exploring the notions of Being, alienation and separation in a way which holds a great (albeit acknowledged) debt to Hegel. Alienation occurs with the sliding of signifiers, and anaphora is explored as a consequence of the death of the subject. Whilst signifiers are empty and have no relation to themselves, rather they take meaning when imbued with a "pure non-meaning" at the root (251). Much of this section remains fairly impenetrable, and my deficiency in Hegel only adds to this.

Conclusion - Lacan concludes, circling back to largely the same things he said in the first couple of lectures, rounding up discussing the scientificity of Psychoanalysis which proceeds from, not science, but "science itself".
([less](#))

Basically - yes, Lacan lays down the gauntlet. *Objet petit a* represents a lack inherent to all human beings, whose incompleteness and early helplessness produce a quest for fulfillment beyond the satisfaction of biological needs - a fantasy that functions as the cause of desire; it determines whether desire will be expressed within the pleasure principle or 'beyond' in pursuit of unlimited *jouissance*, an impossible, and even deadly enjoyment.

Desire is mediated through language. The Real is beyond the scope of language. The Symbolic Order is constructed around the Big Other and constructs the non-positional disposition of the subject that forms an invisible unity with the positional consciousness. consciousness is directed toward an object other than itself - also called 'thetic' consciousness.

Reality is symbolically constructed through our usage of language we resolve to turn the Real into a hard kernel; and fail to express the trauma that can never be expressed in words. (Basically he deconstructs his own position - the talking cure is impossible...and the only way to 'cure' anyone is through anti-transference where the analysand stands up and walks out of the psycho-analyst's office).

If you haven't yet read the "The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis" by Jacques Lacan, don't bother. You'll be better off. Let me explain:

In Kevin Smith's film, "Dogma", when God (Alanis Morissette) speaks, all those in the know, angels and such, cover their ears. They do this for good reason. In full harmonics, God's voice is just a horrendous blast of noise that can't be understood. It hurts the ears to listen and therefore it's not worth listening to. The same might be said about Lacan.

In the 1950s and 60s, Lacan conducted a series of lectures, in French, to explain his psychoanalytical theories. "The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis" is a transcription of a series of lectures from 1964. In essence, it's Lacan speaking. If I were able to read and understand the original French text, perhaps I would have a better impression of the work, but I highly doubt it.

Like God in the film "Dogma", when Lacan speaks it too is a horrendous blast of noise that's not worth listening to, or in this case, reading. My intuition tells me that Lacan's ego (yes, in the Freudian sense) would appreciate being compared to God—his "*objet petit a*", so to speak.

As God, or Lacan, you're not required to explain yourself to anyone and even when you try, it's only heard as noise anyway. Many scholars study the word of God and search for meaning in their interpretations—so too with Lacan. Butler, Copjec, Feldstein, Fink, Žežek and perhaps a dozen or so others have all tried. While many have tried, in my opinion, all have failed. And I like to believe that the both Lacan and God would agree with me. Because, really, how could any beings with such depth be ever completely understood with language? It's too base a medium to even attempt it.

Since we are equating Lacan and God, I suggest that the Old Testament makes for the best comparison—a place where the power-over subjects is the preferred MO rather than offering the power-to. After all, isn't this the place where God's "*jouissance*" is at it's best?

Turn the gaze toward the mirror and remove the mask. Who's behind it? Is it Lacan as Freud or Freud as Lacan? Is it God as Lucifer or Lucifer as God? Or are they always one in the same depending where in the picture, I, as subject, am placed?

At this point all I have left to say is: good riddance to psychoanalytic blather such as Freud's id, ego and superego and to Lacan's Imaginary, Real, the symbolic order and the big Other. Just as the notion of a flat earth or the application of leeches as a cure-all came to be just crazy talk, so too will the theories of psychoanalysis. They enable and maintain power-over for some rather than providing the power-to for all. Such methods no longer serve humanity's higher potential and it's time to move on.

In his attempt to correct Freud, bring him up to date, Lacan approaches the same metaphysical abstraction as so many post-structuralists. A big part of psychoanalysis's problem stems from methodology. In order to help his patients, Freud had to determine what normalcy was. And he did this through the cultural signs that were available around him. Lacan's abstraction of these terms is an attempt to get away from the original limits of Freud and get at the principles of what Freud was talking about. The ordering that Lacan utilizes in order to center the subject is actually pretty deft. He approaches sort of sideways, from the abstraction of human desire as drive -- in doing so, he places us in relation to the subject, but only from the angles at which we can see it. The distortion apparent in the subject's view of itself, the only part where we can come to understand itself as as being -- in essence, torsion in a field of the symbolic. Whether this happens through the other, or through itself, or through drive or any other conception is not as important.

What's interesting about this difficult structure is that Lacan's highlight follows a very familiar path. We need to have two things to measure itself against. This could be a phallic and a drive. It could be the other and its gaze. It could be the analyst and the subject. Really, there are so many available! Each of these different metrics presents for us different normalcys, different ways of sparking what may be normal. Ultimately though, Lacan is able to get us back to normalcy only when we approach the imaginary and symbolic regimes in conjunction with their phallic suture. This master signifier becomes the unit that marks the weave of meaning, in the same way that money is used as a filter in our current civilization to codify relative values.

While this is terribly interesting and a good gauge of what Lacan is talking about, what is missing in all of this psychoanalytic structure is the need for agency. We can retroactively stamp the structure onto any story or person or event we like. But we have a hard time trying to figure out how to get us back to where we need to go. The point of all this is to find out what normal is, so that we can help patients recover their sense of person, or their direction, or whatever is wrong. And that becomes a huge issue as to why psychoanalysis starts to lose its prestige today.

Of course, this is just a seminar about the conceptual framework. But shouldn't this approach also be considered? We take this thought for granted because, I assume, we enter the seminar already believing. ([less](#))

Lacan wanted to introduce a certain coherence into the major concepts on which psycho-analysis is based, the unconscious, repetition, the transference and the drive. In re-defining these four concepts he explores the question that, as he puts it, moves from "Is psycho-analysis a science?" to "What is a science that includes psycho-analysis?" He argues in particular that there is a structural affinity between psycho-analysis, construed as the science of the unconscious, and language. the science of linguistics being one of the significant discoveries of our time.

JACQUES LACAN has proven to be an important influence on contemporary critical theory, influencing such disparate approaches as feminism (through, for example, Judith Butler and Shoshana Felman), film theory (Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, and the various film scholars associated with "screen theory"), poststructuralism (Cynthia Chase, Juliet Flower MacCannell, etc.), and Marxism (Louis Althusser, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Fredric Jameson, Slavoj Zizek, etc.). Lacan is also exemplary of what we can understand as the postmodern break with Sigmund Freud. Whereas Freud could still be said to work within an empirical, humanist tradition that still believes in a stable self's ability to access the "truth," Lacan is properly post-structuralist, which is to say that Lacan questions any simple notion of either "self" or "truth," exploring instead how knowledge is constructed by way of linguistic and ideological structures that organize not only our conscious but also our unconscious lives. Whereas Freud continued to be tempted by organic models and with a desire to find the neurological and, thus, "natural" causes for sexual development, Lacan offered a more properly linguistic model for understanding the human subject's entrance into the social order. The emphasis was thus less on the bodily causes of behavior ([cathexis](#), [libido](#), [instinct](#), etc.) than it was on the ideological structures that, especially through language, make the human subject come to understand his or her relationship to himself and to others. Indeed, according to Lacan, the entrance into language necessarily entails a radical break from any sense of materiality in and of itself. According to Lacan,

one must always distinguish between reality (the fantasy world we convince ourselves is the world around us) and the real (a materiality of existence beyond language and thus beyond expressibility). The development of the subject, in other words, is made possible by an endless misrecognition of the real because of our need to construct our sense of "reality" in and through language. So much are we reliant on our linguistic and social version of "reality" that the eruption of pure materiality (of the real) into our lives is radically disruptive. And yet, the real is the rock against which all of our artificial linguistic and social structures necessarily fail. It is this tension between the real and our social laws, meanings, conventions, desires, etc. that determines our psychosexual lives. Not even our unconscious escapes the effects of language, which is why Lacan argues that "the unconscious is structured like a language" ([Four Fundamental 203](#)).

Lacan's version of psychosexual development is, therefore, organized around the subject's ability to recognize, first, iconic signs and, then, eventually, language. This entrance into language follows a particular developmental model, according to Lacan, one that is quite distinct from [Freud's version of the same](#) (even though Lacan continued to argue—some would say "perversely"—that he was, in fact, a strict Freudian). Here, then, is your story, as told by Lacan, with the ages provided as very rough approximations since Lacan, like Freud, acknowledged that development varied between individuals and that stages could even exist simultaneously within a given individual: 0-6 months of age. In the earliest stage of development, you were dominated by a chaotic mix of perceptions, feelings, and needs. You did not distinguish your own self from that of your parents or even the world around you. Rather, you spent your time taking into yourself everything that you experienced as pleasurable without any acknowledgment of boundaries. This is the stage, then, when you were closest to the pure materiality of existence, or what Lacan terms "the Real." Still, even at this early stage, your body began to be fragmented into specific erogenous zones (mouth, anus, penis, vagina), aided by the fact that your mother tended to pay special attention to these body parts. This "territorialization" of the body could already be seen as a falling off, an imposition of boundaries and, thus, the neo-natal beginning of socialization (a first step away from the Real). Indeed, this fragmentation was accompanied by an identification with those things perceived as fulfilling your lack at this early stage: the mother's breast, her voice, her gaze. Since these privileged external objects could not be perfectly assimilated and could not, therefore, ultimately fulfill your lack, you already began to establish the psychic dynamic (fantasy vs. lack) that would control the rest of your life.

6-18 months of age. This stage, which Lacan terms the "mirror stage," was a central moment in your development. The "mirror stage" entails a "libidinal dynamism" ([Écrits 2](#)) caused by the young child's identification with his own image (what Lacan terms the "[Ideal-I](#)" or "[ideal ego](#)"). For Lacan, this act marks the primordial recognition of one's self as "I," although at a point "before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject" ([Écrits 2](#)). In other words, this recognition of the self's image precedes the entrance into language, after which the subject can understand the place of that image of the self within a larger social order, in which the subject must negotiate his or her relationship with others. Still, the mirror stage is necessary for the next stage, since to recognize yourself as "I" is like recognizing yourself as other ("yes, that person over there is me"); this act is thus fundamentally self-alienating. Indeed, for this reason your feelings towards the image were mixed, caught between hatred ("I hate that version of myself *because* it is so much better than me") and love ("I want to be like that image").^{Note} This "Ideal-I" is important precisely because it represents to the subject a simplified, bounded form of the self, as opposed to the turbulent chaotic perceptions, feelings, and needs felt by the infant. This "primordial Discord" ([Écrits 4](#)) is particularly formative for the subject, that is, the discord between, on the one hand, the idealizing image in the mirror and, on the other hand, the reality of one's body between 6-18 months ("the signs of uneasiness and motor unco-ordination of the neo-natal months" [[Écrits 4](#)]): "The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation—and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic—and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development" ([Écrits 4](#)). This misrecognition or *méconnaissance* (seeing an [ideal-I](#) where there is a fragmented, chaotic body) subsequently "characterizes the [ego](#) in all its structures" ([Écrits 6](#)). In particular, this creation of an ideal version of the self gives pre-verbal impetus to the creation of [narcissistic](#) phantasies in the fully developed subject. It establishes what Lacan terms the "[imaginary order](#)" and, through the [imaginary](#), continues to assert its influence on the subject even after the subject enters the next stage of development.

18 months to 4 years of age. The acquisition of language during this next stage of development further separated you from a connection to [the Real](#) (from the actual materiality of things). Lacan builds on such semiotic critics as Ferdinand de Saussure to show how language is a system that makes sense only within its own internal logic of differences: the word, "father," only makes sense in terms of those other terms it is defined with or against (mother, "me," law, the social, etc.). As Kaja Silverman puts it, "the signifier 'father' has no relation whatever to the physical fact of any individual father. Instead, that signifier finds its support in a network of other signifiers, including 'phallus,' 'law,' 'adequacy,' and 'mother,' all of which are equally indifferent to the category of the real" ([164](#)). Once you entered into the differential system of language, it forever afterwards determined your

perception of the world around you, so that the intrusion of [the Real](#)'s materiality becomes a traumatic event, albeit one that is quite common since our version of "reality" is built over the chaos of [the Real](#) (both the materiality outside you and the chaotic impulses inside you). By acquiring language, you entered into what Lacan terms the "[symbolic order](#)"; you were reduced into an empty signifier ("I") within the field of the Other, which is to say, within a field of language and culture (which is always determined by those others that came before you). That linguistic position, according to Lacan, is particularly marked by gender differences, so that all your actions were subsequently determined by your sexual position (which, for Lacan, does not have much to do with your "real" sexual urges or even your sexual markers but by a linguistic system in which "male" and "female" can only be understood in relation to each other in a system of language).

[The Oedipus complex](#) is just as important for Lacan as it is for Freud, if not more so. The difference is that Lacan maps that complex onto the acquisition of language, which he sees as analogous. The process of moving through [the Oedipus complex](#) (of being made to recognize that we cannot sleep with or even fully "have" our mother) is our way of recognizing the need to obey social strictures and to follow a closed differential system of language in which we understand "self" in relation to "others." In this linguistic rather than biological system, the "phallus" (which must always be understood not to mean "penis") comes to stand in the place of everything the subject loses through his entrance into language (a sense of perfect and ultimate meaning or plenitude, which is, of course, impossible) and all the power associated with what Lacan terms the "symbolic father" and the "[Name-of-the-Father](#)" (laws, control, knowledge). Like the phallus' relation to the penis, the "[Name-of-the-Father](#)" is much more than any actual father; in fact, it is ultimately more analogous to those social structures that control our lives and that interdict many of our actions (law, religion, medicine, education).^{Note} After one passes through [the Oedipus complex](#), the position of the phallus (a position within that differential system) can be assumed by most anyone (teachers, leaders, even the mother) and, so, to repeat, is not synonymous with either the biological father or the biological penis.

Nonetheless, the anatomical differences between boys and girls do lead to a different trajectory for men and women in Lacan's system. Men achieve access to the privileges of the phallus, according to Lacan, by denying their last link to [the Real](#) of their own sexuality (their actual penis); for this reason, [the castration complex](#) continues to function as a central aspect of the boy's psychosexual development for Lacan. In accepting the dictates of the [Name-of-the-Father](#), who is associated with the symbolic phallus, the male subject denies his sexual needs and, forever after, understands his relation to others in terms of his position within a larger system of rules, gender differences, and desire. (On Lacan's understanding of desire, see [the third module](#).) Since women do not experience [the castration complex](#) in the same way (they do not have an actual penis that must be denied in their access to [the symbolic order](#)), Lacan argues that women are not socialized in the same way, that they remain more closely tied to what Lacan terms "jouissance," the lost plenitude of one's material bodily [drives](#) given up by the male subject in order to access the symbolic power of the phallus. Women are thus at once more lacking (never accessing the phallus as fully) and more full (having not experienced the loss of the penis as fully).^{Note} Regardless, what defines the position of both the man and the woman in this schema is above all lack, even if that lack is articulated differently for men and women.

structures and infant sexuality, and how the human subject becomes an 'other' through unconscious repression and stemming from the [Mirror phase](#). The conscious ego and unconscious desire are thus radically divided. Lacan considered this perpetual and unconscious fragmentation of the self as Freud's core discovery.

Lacan thus sought to return psychoanalysis on the unconscious, using [Ferdinand de Saussure](#)'s linguistics, structural anthropology and post-structural theories.

Lacanian psychoanalysis is rather ruthless in its aggressive challenging that seeks to dismantle the imaginary sense of completeness (as in the [Mirror phase](#)) and to remove illusions of self-mastery through a mirror image. A strong ego is seen as defensive deceit and expressing it during analysis is seen as resistance to change. Fear of disintegration and lack drives the person to realize themselves in another imaginary individual.

Lacan would cope with transference by suddenly terminating the session.

The [Oedipus crisis](#) precipitates the child into the symbolic stage, from which they can become a speaking [subject](#). It is not just the father, but language that creates the division. Language is used to represent desire and is an 'intersubjective order of symbolization' and force that perpetuates the 'Law of the father'. The father prohibits the desire of the mother, subverting this desire into language.