



What Lacan and Freud Did See

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 analyst 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 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.

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.

For the Lacan students who desire the B-sides; most people will be fine without all of Lacan's papers. The only essential texts missing from the edition of the *Écrits* with only selections are, by my estimation, the essay on Poe and the essay on Kant and Sade.

Lacan is probably the only thinker I hold in high esteem whose writing style I very nearly despise. His style, he hoped, would train analysts in interpretation. As a reading experience, it means that Lacan meanders constantly; he often gets lost commenting on what seem to be highly abstruse matters unrelated to whatever he claims his central theme is; and his main theses are rarely argued for in any straightforward way. For me, reading him involves finding those key passages, even sentences, which stand out from the rest of the mess and seem to give it some sense of

order. This requires patience, as such passages or lines appear only every five of ten pages. The book is slow going until one gets to those passages, however. Much like analysis, I suppose, it is slow going until the truth speaks, which then has to be read back into what seemed to be nothing but was in reality the coming-to-be of the truth, or at least of its saying.

The essays that are in the shorter edition of the *Écrits* truly are the best ones here, so I would recommend starting there and getting a hold of the two essays mentioned above missing from that collection.

As far as content goes, I will say three things that surprised me:

1) Readers of Žižek should be unsurprised by the presence of Hegelian themes in Lacan's writings; what surprised me was how frequent and essential Lacan's own references to Hegel are. There is much that is new in Žižek's Hegel-Lacan synthesis, but perhaps much of it is already there -- something Žižek would no doubt admit. Dialectical thinking, the master-slave dialectic, the beautiful soul, the law of the heart, and other concepts taken (and recognized as such) right from Hegel show up throughout.

2) Lacan sees the symbolic as being at work, partially, in animals as well as humans. Indeed, Lacan is more nuanced on the difference between human and animal than I expected, considering that he is a thinker of the human condition as such. But it would appear that there is room in Lacan for languages, or at least proto-languages, among animals, even if language has a special existence in and for man.

3) The Lacan of the *Écrits* strikes me as a structuralist.

Lacan centered his career around his opposition to the degeneration of Freud's psychoanalysis into so many pitfalls that must be circumnavigated if the merits of Freud's work are to be received and revived. Most of those deviations stemmed from failures to recognize the essential role speech plays in healing, insight, initiation, truth, and being. Deviations to information theory, to Scholastic psychology, to behaviorism, to mysticism,—each path forsakes the responsibility that speech entails: all speech calls for a response, where the stakes are the (re)affirmation of the addressee as a subject, as someone who is capable of recognizing my own status as a person, sharing my reality in a meaningful way. Whenever I declare that you are X, X sets my own relation to you—if I say you're my friend, I receive back the message that I'm your friend in turn, simply by you being present and not refuting/correcting me, so long as I speak with integrity.

There's a distinction between empty speech and full speech: empty speech is everything that deflects from the important things that are weighing on your mind and important to you, and that generally fails to match your words to your intentions, needs, demands, and desires. In full speech, your words align with those four things, and your ego is disinhibited, its rigid walls momentarily disrupted; those are the intervals where seeds of lasting change can be planted, and where meaning can be punctuated by a listener's subtle gesture indicating the importance of the block of speech. Lacan calls these gestures scansion, like the line breaks in poems.

For an idea to present itself at all, it must appear through a narrative, and every narrator has their own fixations and biases. A drama can't manifest in the form of a pure structure, even if we can abstract a structure from a narrative. These narratives comprise what Lacan calls the imaginary register, and are outgrowths of the ego's demand for control, to fix things in place—stable, singular, definitive meanings for everything—, and to project and otherwise ward off feelings of internal fragmentation. The stories we tell ourselves when someone hurt us, especially when we've done wrong that we are unwilling to face,—such stories are the ego trading growth for a farce of stability, to save face, lest our self-images crumble as the incoherences in our narratives expose the lies we live and the truths we not only waste tremendous energy concealing, but that we're not even equipped to grasp: truth for Lacan seems to be something that can be expressed and shared, but not understood in the way we might understand gravity or the facts contained in an encyclopedia. If anything, truth is a rupturing force, that breaks free in spite of the subtle dishonesty we bathe ourselves in to maintain an orientation, a status quo.

If the story you tell yourself can be incoherent, that implies that there's coherence to approach: that's the symbolic order. As it turns out, we always say more than we mean, and mean other than we say, because of the cascades of associations and contexts that any non-trivial sentence with any personal charge proliferates. We can intuitively pick up on a lot of this information, but many of us are used to using tone and body language as cues; Lacan warns that relying on nonverbal cues is a risky move that often borders on proclaiming telepathy to mask that you're merely projecting your own intentions, "alibis" as Lacan says, onto the person. No, to listen for truth's speech is to listen like a poet, examining where a phrase has multiple significant meanings (such as someone saying something weighs

heavily on them when they're struggling with weight/body-image symptoms), expanding rather than contracting your intuition to hear the gaps, displacements, resistances, and so on that permeate speech, especially one it's out of pure empty speech.

Metaphors play a much more significant role in speech than analogies do. An analogy is nothing more than a comparison, but a metaphor substitutes a subject for an object, which then serves as a scapegoat for whatever the speaker unconsciously wishes to confess or explore. Lacan's example: "his pen was neither miserly nor hateful", where "his pen" is devoid of any personality, but the writer is not; the writer is miserly and hateful, but "his pen" blocks him off from that realization by the same stroke as it points the way to that realization.

Once we look closer, we realize that metaphor pervades language, because signifiers don't stand for things, but stand in for things, i.e. are substitutes, ersatz scapegoats mediating our feeble efforts at grasping the world on its own terms, by approaching the world with our terms and forcing it to conform to those terms before anything can enter into perception and understanding. This is especially clear with signifiers that explicitly only refer to other signifiers, like much of linguistic jargon and many metonyms (e.g. by "a fleet of 30 sails" we know is meant "a fleet of 30 ships", even though most ships have either zero or multiple sails).

While metaphors are the locks and keys of symptoms, metonyms are the slippery garden paths of desire. Desire is a bizarre concept in this book, because it isn't articulable, or fulfillable; we're constantly alienated from our desires, because desire is at root a desire for recognition, and at stem a desire copied from other people as models. Desire inhabits the fissure where demand outstrips need, and this fissure is one of the fragmentations that constitute the subject, another being the irreconcilable gap between speaker and spoken: when I say "I", I am the speaker, but "I" am spoken; the speaker never appears in the material of speech that she or he generates.

Demand is the realm of the imaginary. Desire is the realm of the symbolic. Need is the realm of the real; the real register is an ill-defined crossroads of contingency and physiology. While the imaginary is where we fool ourselves into overestimating our freedom, through accommodating mirages that avoid challenge when they're not voiced: think of how hard it is to polish a rehearsal, and then realize how little emotional honesty a rehearsal is able to achieve because it's so overcontrolled. Or, better still, think of how much you've "learned" through introspection, only for your self-image to eventually be uprooted when put into practice. We use resistances like empty speech and avoiding people to keep our self-images far away from destabilization: even when we're so thoroughly convinced that we're doing everything right in terms of maturation, most likely we've merely confined ourselves to a minor region, one that's controllable, where we're in charge, rather than what in us we don't accept as us.

We enter into human reality as subjects by seeing ourselves in a mirror and taking in a whole self-image—which is complete and controllable—at once. That's more of a myth than anything else, one of the few Lacan weaves. What's important there is threefold: first, it fixes an ideal of wholeness that we strive for, tantalized; second, it allows us to take ourselves as objects; and third, it confronts us with those in others, that they can take us as objects and relate us to their ideals. The third point inaugurates our competitive nature as strategic rivals, above and beyond the camouflage and feints in the animal kingdom. You can think about how I'll think about your action, and change your plan accordingly. Maybe that helps explain why humanity's preeminent antagonist is the master of serpentine language.

Lacan refers to speech as a lure, and as tesserae. Lures maneuver empty speech and metacognition to secure prestige and buttress self-imagery (in the imaginary). Tesserae are tokens that identify people in an exchange. Exchange, the circulation of signifiers, is another vital part of speech. It's often done without speech now thanks to the ability to text people, but signifiers flow through, bind, and rearrange relations between people. Your use of language distills and spreads your unique values, just as the trade of gifts condenses the values unique to each culture, entraining these differences to enable communication and alliance, and open the door for actions like betrayal. Speech is a series of pacts, accompanying the responsibility each exchange carries, through which you (re)calibrate where you stand with each person you interact with. This is faulty but indispensable, as you can only understand yourself through others' eyes.

No matter how fiercely we resist truth, no matter how sophisticated our distortions of it, it speaks. It will never go away, not as long as there's a shred of merit in Freud's project. Even in empty speech, truth shines; its light is beset by fog, dimmed, yes, but it will not fade. That is, we always have within ourselves the tools we need to mature, to dig ourselves out of the ways our upbringings and bad habits have fucked us over, even if those tools require the intervention of perceptive others to reveal, sharpen, and guide.

Lacan is rather pessimistic about our capacity for growth, but his ideas can be read in a hopeful light and repurposed for your own needs, as I've implied throughout this synopsis. Most of us reading this aren't going to be psychoanalysts, so the rather extreme advice Lacan gives for interactions with clients can be tweaked to improve our healing influence on others, through more compassionate and intellectually honest listening. Norms, insecurities, anxieties, and ignorance drown out our capacity for full speech, but psychoanalysis teaches us that most people have understandings of the principles psychoanalysts study and apply, just deeply buried, waiting to surface around someone able and willing to listen to their story and hold them accountable for telling it.

I don't know if I would recommend this to anyone. It's a brutal book. I really only read it because I wanted to prove I could keep a commitment to daily reading, which I did, for six months, before deciding I might get more mileage focusing on books I could make more tangible progress in. But *Écrits* was a trial-by-fire of improving my reading skills, as someone who has always struggled with reading, and who spends most of the time short-circuiting and not processing anything. I think my ability to follow complicated threads has improved a fair amount through this book. Everyone says to just read the seminars if you want to understand Lacan's content. I haven't read the seminars. There's an enormous amount to say about the book that I just don't have the understanding to share, but I tried to cover many of the anchors of Lacan's unique take on speech in the hopes of showing how they might be meaningful beyond merely fascinating.

As Freud says, we neurotics NEED a Totem, but that Totem was being politically dismantled. An Unbearable Lightness of Being was being born. The mad mishmash is our inheritance.

And so we no longer have a secure substitute for our parents' love - our childhood Totem - which our inner Oedipus has cut out of our lives. So we hide the Bugaboo - that's the sum of our fears, our taboo - safely in the symbol of a Totem: our books, our TV & our Films.

My own Oedipus took up his paricidal arms against the taboo when I was twenty. An overly affective type of kid, I had never really left my feathered parental nest. My inner Oedipus cut those ties, but they never stopped bleeding.

Until I read Judith Viorst's *Necessary Losses*. The myth of uniformly happy family ties MUST die, a necessary loss. Without wings we can't fly.

But back then I chose the false comfort of a Totem of icy alienation, like so many others. An invalid substitute for rage, because it too kills our SOULS.

And reality gives us wings ONLY if we have a valid Totem to substitute for the Taboo of finding liberation from the myth of the nuclear family. You see, severing himself like that is Oedipus' undoing. As with the alienated.

But it doesn't have to be like that.

Isaiah's suffering Servant was someone I could identify with - and He is THE traditionally valid Totem. The Totem Freud couldn't accept. When we hate, we are killing Him. And so eventually, it is OURSELVES we are killing with our primitive rage.

That happened to me, eventually, believe it or not!

You see, I have managed to kill my own high opinion of myself with that same rage, and recover my inner humanity. As in the great new book *Love and Rage*, I had to USE my anger as a means toward the end of attaining tranquility. So I did.

At the end of my road my heart is clear of spiderwebs - and happy.

The thunderheads of my rage are dissipating in a new sunrise.

For Freud was wrong.

A true Totem is STILL viable, because it brings peace.

And God is the Totem that leads us Home to Ourselves - WITHOUT illusions.

Freud's take on early anthropology and its psychological undercurrents offers the modern reader two things: firstly, an insight into the mode of scholarship used in the 1910s, and some food for thought on the anthropology itself. Although the approach and attitude of the book is rather dated, many of the questions it endeavours to tackle 'from the source', and the mental impulses that motivate cultural behaviours, are still debated by anthropologists to this day.

Approaching with a modern scholarly mindset, it's easy to balk at the immediate reference to 'savages' as the subjects of the book. Freud's initial assumption that tribal peoples are closer to our primitive ancestors is dubious and troubling, and he rarely specifies the particular tribes or cultures he means when he's talking about the 'bigger picture'. Despite all this, Freud's actual analyses do not seem to me particularly reductive or stereotypical, and he makes the same comparisons to what he terms 'civilised' societies — once again, it's the terminology that's troubling, not so much the ideas (though I cannot say if the German carries the same implications). Since I see the problem of word choice as more a result of the time period, and the position of Freud's contemporary scholarship (without the benefit of today's terminology), I would encourage anyone to continue with the book if they can get past this.

However, we still need to decide whether the initial false assumption, that tribal societies are inherently 'primitive' in structure, negates the analysis that follows from it — thankfully, I don't believe it does, because Freud's examination of these groups and their social psychology, followed by the natural comparisons to his own culture, are still insightful. They can provide an interesting psychological perspective, separate from Western *mores*, without needing to believe that they resemble prehistoric peoples. Although Freud's work here is largely discredited by modern anthropologists, lot of the study still takes an approach resembling his (though with fewer generalisations, I would think!), and he does cite some scholarship other than his own. If we treat the tribes as 'parallel' cultures, although we may gripe with some smaller points, the analysis essentially still works.

The details of early religion are of the most interest to me, and the primary reason why I read the book: I think these are slightly more creditable when likened to cultures which were already more encompassed by scholarship (i.e. the Romans and Greeks), and especially where we can identify wider 'trends' in religion, which are so often found in traditions ostensibly unrelated to one another. It's interesting to see how the limits and restrictions placed on high-ranking men, especially kings who double as high priests, can be connected to later restrictions placed on non-religious offices (like the higher ranks in the Roman senate), although religious justifications were often used in this case too. Freud uses the comparison of the *flamen dialis* and his wife (the highest ranking priest in Rome), but I also feel there's the more obvious example of the emperor coming to double as *pontifex maximus*, since, even if this was born out of Caesar's accumulation of offices, it still became important in the emperor's 'image' later on. It's also interesting to see how this level of power begins to backfire on the individual — just as it's easy to blame an authoritarian leader for anything that goes wrong, if someone can supposedly control the weather, they'll be witch-hunted as soon as the weather turns bad.

The greater theme of restrictions and separations is shared in Abrahamic religions (especially in Leviticus and other books of laws), and many of the rules about 'cleanliness' seem pretty logical (e.g. the treatment and disposal of corpses), though I would have liked more explanation on why *enemy* corpses are treated well — is it that the threat of the living person is gone, or based on a fear of retaliation from the spirits? Additionally, some of the rules seemed counterintuitive to me, especially excluding other chiefs after a chief dies, furthering the power vacuum, and shunning widows and widowers, which hardly seems socially conducive. This makes more sense for people who have a special spiritual role, who may benefit from withdrawal from reality, including human relationships (and this is sometimes extended to menstruating women, who were supposedly more open to spirits). I should probably follow this up with more modern anthropological reading, however, as I'm not sure how much of Freud's ideas here are verified, let alone explained in confident terms.

Some people may find Freud's view, that the stigma (or taboo) against incest and other issues has to be more psychologically enforced where the barriers are lesser, reductive, but even this could arguably be likened to other social phenomena: that is, supposedly those who are most vocal in their objections have the most guilty consciences. Those people are overcompensating for hidden urges. A bit like when people find naked children objectionable (in art, on the beach, etc.) when they should never be sexualised in the first place. It may not so much be a case of the 'primitive-ness' of a society, but rather the need to enforce change in a way that may overcompensate and deny or negate the problems of the past. Even if the person is 'overdoing it', they are at least rational in trying to avoid the worst outcomes.

As with the resulting suspicion for magical people where their power stops seeming to 'work' for community advantage, this may culminate in killing the individual to 'release' their power, gaining it for themselves. Frequently, sons will kill, and even eat, their fathers in the hopes of a transferral of their power. The transferral of power, both political and religious, can be very sinister: it's one we could even connect to the 'divine right of kings' — if you can kill the king and take over, you've proved your own 'divine right' if God has granted you victory. The theme and problem of violent seizure of power is a universal source of anxiety. Ironically, the tribes have come up with a solution that the West has always lacked in the form of the 'civilising' totem, working in tandem with the rules against incest and other taboo acts, allowing them to keep the social order without being overwhelmed by conflict over power.

In the midst of these 'bigger' questions, both my and Freud's extrapolations should be taken with a grain of salt: despite his use of sources, as we might expect from Freud, he speculates and interprets a lot, according to his own theories on behavioural explanations. There's some charm to this old-fashioned sort of scholarship, in which it's common for authors to get carried away by their own enthusiasm, but unfortunately creativity is usually inversely proportional to reliability in a text like this. This is probably a case where the reader has to make their own judgement about the value the text has to them. Even where they are framed as wild and primitive by Freud, we could find our own things to learn from these alternate societies, who have found solutions to problems that we have not — even if we accept Freud's perspective, perhaps we should not assume ourselves to be more 'civilised' after all.