

# The Failed Interventions of Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis and Neuroscience as a Proxy-Intervention to Psychoanalysis and  
Philosophy

*(Pre-Publication Version)*

Rafael Holmberg  
University College London

Cite:

Holmberg, R. (2023). The Failed Interventions of Psychoanalysis: Psychoanalysis and Neuroscience as a Proxy-Intervention to Psychoanalysis and Philosophy. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*. doi: [10.1037/teo0000261](https://doi.org/10.1037/teo0000261).

## Abstract

A strange dialectical reversal characterises the oppositions which psychoanalysis posits against philosophy and neuroscience: what psychoanalysis intervenes with as a unique and missing quality of these subjects, reveals itself upon enquiry as *already having been* a feature of said subjects. This paper firstly discusses the failed intervention of psychoanalysis within the perceived totalities and absolutes of German Idealism. Psychoanalysis, founded on an ontological division and internal inconsistency with a retroactive logic, finds this internal contradiction already reflected within the supposed totalities of Schelling and Hegel. Schelling's 'blind act', a decision with no prior foundation that grounds an abstract identity-in-itself, appears as the counterpart to what Badiou calls the strictly 'analytic act'. Hegel's *Science of Logic*, in which the inconclusive interpenetration of *being* and *nothing* presupposes its own conclusion in the transitions to *essence*, and in which an internal incompleteness and contradiction is retroactively constitutive of the *concept*, similarly nullifies the intervention of psychoanalysis. Finally, precisely such a reversal is presented in neuroscience, where the constitutive contradiction of contingently functional neuronal formations in the adaptive 'multiple demand' model of executive functioning repeats the contingent and self-contradicting psychoanalytic subject as *being* its own deference within linguistic, discursive formations.

*The Fallacy of a Negation: Sexuality and Knowledge*

The history of psychoanalysis is that of a series of, partially failed, interventions – interventions which have in turn determined the unusual constitution of psychoanalysis itself. A popular idea, primarily amongst psychoanalysis and its historians, is of the irreducible *event* that the psychoanalytic revolution engendered: psychoanalysis as the *negation* of Victorian moralism; the *negation* of philosophical idealism; and the *negation* of scientific, psychiatric progress in psychopathology as a biological, neurological study. The interventions of psychoanalysis have not, however, in any way been as determinate or categorical. In fact, by an interesting reversal, the interventions of psychoanalysis have revealed to a more complex extent the quality of that which it intervened in.

If we must take one lesson from the treatises of discursive historicism, and Foucault's recreation of historical knowledge-forms as *epistemes*, it is that rather than forming a negation of what preceded, the deviations which characterised the psychoanalytic intervention – the intervention of an antagonistic and disjunctive unconscious – was deployed as a continuation, a logical advancement, of the knowledge which preceded it. Beginning with the fiction of Victorian moralism and its supposed 'horror' at sexuality. Foucault's project, in *The History of Sexuality* (2020[1976]), was instead to situate the Freudian discovery as the ultimate culmination of the psychopathological, theological, and ethical studies that had characterised this supposedly 'repressive' era. There was, indeed, no repression in sight. Religious confession demanded the persistent reproduction of sexual fantasies and transgressions. Sexology and the psychopathology of sexual excesses were the forerunners, and by no means the antinomies, of Freud.

To use a phrase of Foucault's, there had been a successive 'deployment of sexuality' that conditioned the psychoanalytic intervention upon everyday life. A collective effort, on the ethical, scientific, and theological levels, to categorise, collate, record, and study the

various manifestations of sexual deviations, to understand the insistence of sexuality in *das Alltagsleben*. Rather than repress sexuality, to in fact keep it in permanent presence to awareness, to locate its effects on the individual in all aspects of expression – sexuality was an obsessive object of study. Freud, at his entry onto the historical scene, presents himself as the very *opposite* of a negation of, an incomprehensible deviation from, the scientific and social narratives preceding it. Instead, Freud can be neatly placed at the zenith of a trend which for decades and even centuries attempted to place sexuality in every corner of everyday life.

Foucault's *The Order of Things* (2002[1966]) can be used to paint a similar picture, whereby the Freudian 'intervention' was reversed into a direct continuation of its predecessor. The progression of *epistemes* (the conceptual understanding of a subject-knowledge as reconstructed by discursive historical analysis) shaped the human sciences. From categorising (e.g. demography, empirical classifications), to representation (e.g. in economics: commodity use-values), to moving beyond representation towards *production* (e.g. Marx's labour analyses), the human sciences have defined their objects by constructive categories of knowledge. Each *episteme* gradually defined the object-of-study, by determining it according to a particular series of discursive formations, categories, and substitutions. Thus classical economics' preoccupation with the representational aspects of commodity-use was superseded by Marx's finite analyses, in the 1850s with his *magnum opus*, *Capital*, of the divisions of labour-production in consequences of which commodities enter into circulation. The *episteme* preoccupied with distinguishing representation from production was reiterated, and succeeded, in identical fashion in psychoanalysis about 100 years later. For Bion (1962), for example, successful  $\alpha$ -functioning comprised the comprehension of sense impressions as *representational* phenomena (i.e. not as the Kantian thing-in-itself); Sandler's (1969) conscious-unconscious 'experiential realm' similarly

operated through its function of *representability*; and the importance of transitional objects for Winnicott (1953) is that they only *represented* maternal presence. Gradually an episteme which separates representation from production is succeeded by their apparent indistinguishability. The 'Limits of Representation', as Foucault terms it, is representation's doubling into itself, its *becoming-other* – representation must in this sense be considered as implying its failure in the form of a non-representational *drive or production*. This, too, is a character of the development of knowledge that is reproduced within psychoanalysis. We will not spend too much time on this point, except for mentioning Laplanche's 'enigmatic signifier' as a psychoanalytic rendering of precisely this 'limit of representation'. The representative function of the enigmatic message, the radical alterity of an incomprehensible *à traduire* (to-be-translated) in the parental gestures, comprises *in itself* the libidinal-productive dimension. Through the failure of the enigmatic signifier, its incomplete mastery by the infant which "necessarily leaves behind itself unconscious residues" (Laplanche 1987, p.128, own translation), is instituted the 'source-object' of the *drives*. The untranslatable enigma of parental messages *is* the point of emergence of the sexual drives. The cleft in the infant's ego by parental alterity leaves a lack to be filled, and from this instance emerges the drive which attempts to fill the lack which it itself occupies (it is this finding of something which always-and-never existed, *Wiederfindung* as Freud called it, that constitutes the structural impossibility of sexual satisfaction for Laplanche [c.f. Laplanche's *Vie et Mort en Psychanalyse*, 1970]). As both signifier and source-object of the drives, the enigmatic message unites representation and production into a combined movement.

In this movement, psychoanalysis therefore becomes something far more unspecified than a categorical *negation* of its predecessors – where psychopathology, sociology, sexology meets its limit, a subversion of said limit, and a new continuation, is met with by the means of psychoanalysis.

This begs the important question of precisely what we do with psychoanalysis. We have something far from a wholly constituted or self-subsistent subject – the knowledge of psychoanalysis determines itself according to *what it means* for other fields. Here, I propose two *significant* interventions of psychoanalysis: its earlier (yet still operative) philosophical intervention, and its more recent intervention in brain sciences and neuroscience. It is by understanding precisely what psychoanalysis means for the philosophy which common-sense knowledge opposes it to, most interestingly for the Idealism of Kant, Schelling, and Hegel, and by understanding that this intervention went unresolved, that we can glean the responsibility that psychoanalysis takes on by transposing this intervention into the brain sciences.

#### *The Act Between Schelling and Lacan*

It is the fact that psychoanalysis *distorted* philosophy, forced it to adapt and strengthened it in its deviations from it, which must be opposed to the naïve notion that it negated it and maintained a clear separation from the latter. We must see that, far from negating philosophy, the intervention of psychoanalysis was something more indeterminate – we see all too frequently a type of dialectical reversal, where philosophy *always-already* had that quality which seemed so unique to psychoanalysis. Whilst psychoanalysis extolled a dynamic unconscious previously alien to philosophy, it comes to situate itself amongst the rationalist, idealist doctrines that seem irreconcilable to it. Freud the materialist must be reconstructed according to the veiled allegiance, especially to German Idealism, which he inadvertently expressed – and from this the reason for the transition of psychoanalysis from philosophy to modern brain sciences can be better situated.

German Idealism, with its emphasis on the unconditioned and the absolute, with its ‘suspicion of yet desire for the Whole’ as it has been described (Gardner, 2018), a totality in

which subject and substance are a sublime and indistinguishable formation that emerges *out of itself* – this is a philosophical trend which, at first glance, appears in profound contradiction to the vicissitudes and internal contradictions which determine the psychoanalytic subject. The latter, with its ‘division of the subject’, its internal antagonism of an unconscious that disrupts and distorts the fluidity of consciousness, appears entirely irreducible to the former. From this perspective, psychoanalysis becomes the constituted *negation* of the totalities of German Idealism. However, one insistence recurs in the philosophy of psychoanalysis: that any such categorical opposition fails as philosophy morphs to accommodate the negations of psychoanalysis.

This section will suggest that, especially for Schelling – who posits an ‘act’ as retroactively conditioning the abstract identity of the unconditioned – and even more for Hegel – in his *Logic* in which the incomplete *becoming* of being and nothing leads to a retroactive positing of *essence* as ground in the dialectic of the concept – psychoanalysis forms the ultimate counterpart for German Idealism. This is a strange paradox, whereby the ‘intervention’ of psychoanalysis here is reinscribed as an allegiance to and strengthening of German Idealist traditions. We have therefore an intervention which entirely failed to reach a conclusion, and a type of proxy-intervention comes to fill its place: that between psychoanalysis and brain sciences.

One of Schelling’s most interesting endeavours is that of grounding substance in an *a priori* identity, the abstraction which grounds the proposition  $A=A$  – this *identity-in-itself* is an ontological necessity which is eventually conceived through the retroactive logic of a ‘blind act’. Prior to the event of Schelling, we could already outline an unusual allegiance between Kant and psychoanalysis. Aside from one of Lacan’s most enlightened papers, *Kant avec Sade* (2007[1966]), in which Kant is utilised in Lacan’s proposition that fantasy is nothing but the consequence of the failure of desire to maintain *itself*, we see the strange, yet

questionably successful, allegiance between Kantian transcendental idealism and Bion's experience-based psychoanalytic model. One of Bion's crucial distinctions is between  $\alpha$ -functioning and  $\beta$ -functions – two systems of sensibility which constitute the coherence of mental life. This distinction is Bion's strongest attempt at a Kantian system of psychoanalysis. The  $\beta$ -elements which compose this mode of functioning consist of unprocessed partial fragments of impulses, drives, emotions, as well as their fragmentation by a dissolution of self-other divide (i.e. the manifold constituents of experience). These inconsistent and disjointed elements are synthesised by the  $\alpha$ -function into functional categories which structure experience and relate to each other, as well as relate a given subject to the world in which it is placed (Bion, 1962). The patient must, as a goal, often achieve the knowledge that emotions, impressions, sensations, are indeed phenomena, since “in contrast with the alpha-elements the beta-elements are not felt to be phenomena, but things-in-themselves” (Bion, 1962, p.274). Through a series of references to Kant, Bion essentially recreates, in a psychoanalytic translation, the basics of Kant's *a priori* synthesis of the categories of understanding from the manifold of sense-information conditioned by the intuition of space and time. In Kant's transcendental idealism, a cognitively active subject enables the formal apprehension of reality through *a priori* categories of understanding (quality, quantity, relation, and modality) apperceived through the sensible intuitions of space and time, allowing for the reflection upon reality by the faculty of reason (Kant, 2008[1781]). For a variety of reasons – including a mostly careless translation of a metaphysics of categories of understanding and the manifold of intuition into an existential-developmental theory – this Bionian Kantianism can be considered as unsuccessful. Therefore, we return to Schelling.

The grounding of Reason was the principal introduction to Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*. Reason, as ‘all there is’ had to be situated on the foundation of an

unconditioned principle, which for Schelling meant that the grounding of reason proceeds from an *a priori* identity which conditions the possibility of substance. Reason is founded upon the unconditioned proposition of identity – an *identity-in-itself* from which the elementary proposition  $A=A$  can be justified. The unconditioned, in other words, is the abstract identity that grounds the proposition  $A=A$ . The proposition  $A=A$  presupposes an abstraction of identity which is neither reducible to *A as subject* nor *A as predicate*. This necessity of deducing an identity-in-itself as ground for the metaphysical system constructed from the basis that  $A=A$ , is a formulation most clearly expressed in *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* (2002[1801]). The identity of subject and predicate (of the formula  $A=A$ ) is the concrete conclusion of a pure identity, the logical antecedent of the *something* which is identical.

The problem, as Schelling moves onto a sophistication of his philosophy of identity within *Ages of the World*, is of the seeming immediacy of a difference implicit within the act of positing an abstract identity. The Parmenidean problem recurs here: positing the identity of the *one* to itself implies a simultaneous immediacy of difference between *one* and *many*. Something must be posited in an essential primacy, out of the impasse of an alternate positing between *one* and *others*, where if the former *one is*, the *others cannot be*, yet if one of the *others are*, then the remaining *others are not*. Something must, nevertheless, break out as *first*. In other words, the positing of an abstract identity that, as unconditioned, grounds  $A=A$  and therefore grounds reason – this positing immediately defeats itself by the difference implied in it. Schelling has a unique solution to this, one in which the metaphysics of identity finds its highest expression as a defining moment of German Idealism, and yet, in this defining moment, expresses an uncanny similarity to those paradoxical and unusual operations of psychoanalysis. Schelling posits a ‘blind act’ which intervenes between the

impossibility on the one hand and necessity on the other hand of positing an *a priori* self-identity as a prerequisite for the dialectic of the *one* and the *many*.

“But just in order *that* one begin, that one be the first, a decision must ensue, which, to be sure, cannot happen consciously, by deliberation, but only in the pressure between the necessity and the impossibility of being, by a violence blindly breaking the unity. That alone in which a determinative ground for the priority of the one and the consequence of the other can be sought, however, is the particular nature of each one of the principles, a nature which is distinguished from their common nature, which consists in this, that each is equally original, equally independent, and each has the same claim to be that which is. Not that one of the principles would have to be absolutely the one which precedes or which follows, but only that, permitted by its special nature, the possibility is given to it to be the first, the second, or the third. Now it is evident that what is posited for a beginning is precisely that which is subordinated in the sequel. The beginning is only beginning inasmuch as it is not what really should be, not that which is veritably and unto itself. If there is a decision, then only that can be posited for a beginning which distinctively inclines most to the nature of what is not.” (Schelling 1942[1815], p.106-107)

The absolute beginning, the unconditioned ground is in fact the consequence of a *decision*. It is an *act* which posits its own ground as identity-in-itself *after the fact* – or, as French psychoanalysis says, ‘*après-coup*’. What Schelling places as primary is the conclusion – a conclusion without antecedent– of an act. It is this blind act ‘between impossibility and necessity’ which finally yet only retroactively posits the unconditioned ground of identity as something *prior* to difference. The proposition  $A=A$ , in other words, is contingent upon the retroactive logic of an act which grounds its own presuppositions in the form of an identity-in-itself. Positing the outcome of an act as the unconditioned grounding of metaphysical

substance places *Ages of the World* in a defining position not only within the development of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* but also within the German Idealist tradition itself – such a logic, though in more sophisticated form, would become a staple piece of Hegel's *Science of Logic*. But interestingly, such a precondition of substance within an act that 'precedes itself' is itself a strictly psychoanalytic operation.

Is it not Lacan, in his most Lacanian moments, in his distinct brand of 'anti-philosophy', who places within psychoanalysis this contingency of an act and its retroactive grounding of what is presupposed by it? Badiou's brilliant seminar on the anti-philosophy of Lacan, which enumerates the qualities with which Lacan negates philosophy, can be inverted to show, here with regards to Schelling, precisely where the 'intervention' of psychoanalytic qualities within philosophical traditions does little but merely exemplify the latter as *already having possessed* this *new* quality. In this seminar we see what is considered a distinct feature of Lacan's psychoanalysis as opposed to philosophy: the pre-discursive, grounding *act*. The discursive operations of philosophy cannot think the grounding function of the act: "It consists in saying that the discursive appearance of philosophy dissimulates the constitutive operations that compose an act-proper which must be reconstructed. Philosophy is itself blind to these operations, even if they compose its proper action." (Badiou 2013, p.167, own translation). This '*acte analytique*' is a contraction of a series of discursive relations, the 'either/or' as a non-discursive *act* of subjective projects, as the unique grounding of the very subject itself which is uniquely posited by psychoanalysis. Philosophy does nothing but dissimulate within discursive operation the act constitutive of its own discourse.

The analytic act, for Badiou, distinguishes itself from the discursive acts of philosophy, since the former acts as a break, a transgression or irruption, which is the ontological stain of the subject itself – the analytic act returns the subject to the impasse of its irreconciled internal division. Far from being a product of discourse, it is the subjective

division which discourse comes to fill; in other words, “the analytic act, itself, is properly speaking not a production of discourse, even though it is, in a certain sense, entirely within this tension. The analytic act is an enunciative act, but it is also its reversion, the interruption, the waste product.” (ibid., p.169, own translation). Badiou opposes the psychoanalytic act, that break constitutive of the subject which doubles in the linguistic support of the Symbolic order, to the purely ‘discursive act’ of philosophy. The philosophical act, in other words, is not constitutive, it does not precede that which acts, but is rather conditioned by philosophical discourse itself.

But this philosophical act ‘conditioned by discourse’ is nowhere to be found in Schelling. Schelling’s act must instead be framed as becoming the counterpart, the doubling, of the Lacanian act. By Badiou’s own terms, Schelling’s act can be understood as an analytic act, as that which grounds the formal possibility of discourse or substance. This is a movement which places itself between impossibility and necessity, between an either/or, and erupts into a decision which posits its own ground. Schelling’s act is the necessary yet impossible contraction of ‘analytic’ treatment which Badiou speaks of. Both of these acts retroactively condition discourse, they are the product which precedes its own qualification. It is an interruption at the unconditioned level – a break which locates itself as the possibility of identity, of  $A=A$ , between the profound antagonism which cannot posit identity without difference. Something is reverted, interrupted, a tension moves into a decision, and this is the decision which posits its presupposition in an absolute, presupposed, and abstract identity-in-itself.

Where with the analytic act we have the “idea of facing the act as a legitimation of discourse” (ibid., p.170, own translation) – the act thereby legitimating the field in which the act takes place – we have in Schelling’s *Weltalter* act that which legitimates the identity of the *one* as itself having conditioned the necessity of the act. This is the retroactive logic of an

act which legitimates its own presuppositions, an act which grounds the necessary constructions which precedes it: for Lacan, discourse, and for Schelling, substance. The grounding act is the impossible necessity of a choice: “this is the act: to be at the point where there is but the possibility of choosing” (ibid., p.189, own translation) – it is this forced choice, the necessary yet impossible *break* constituted in blind act, which Schelling begins to present to us in *Ages of the World*. And it is this act which was presented as the uniquely psychoanalytic ‘missing piece’ of philosophy – and yet we find in Schelling precisely such a conditioning and conditioned act as the decision which grounds the *absolute first* of a system of reason.

Act itself as utterance, not merely as analytic act, is constitutive of the retroactive function of speech and signification so characteristic of Lacan. What Lacan calls the retroaction of the signifier – the retroaction of the act of speaking upon what is spoken – the irreducible transformation of a *thing* upon its *being spoken*, where “the signifier in fact enters into the signified” (Lacan 1966, p.500, own translation). Is this not once again an example of the opposition that psychoanalysis presents philosophy, and which is in turn inscribed as a pre-existing feature of philosophy itself? *The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious* is Lacan’s treatise precisely on this retroaction of signification, and yet the temporal logic which grounds Lacan’s linguistic-structural psychoanalysis is something already-existing in Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*.

Certainly, there exists a profound distinction between philosophy and psychoanalysis – Badiou’s seminar states these with little doubt. Yet in considering these distinctions we must once again confront the fact that psychoanalysis, in opposing an *act* that legitimates its own presuppositions, as grounding of discourse, does not negate philosophy, but rather doubles precisely such a self-grounding act in the German Idealist system of reason. That which psychoanalysis accuses philosophy of ‘kidding itself’ into thinking is unnecessary, and

that by which the difference between these subjects is posited, reveals itself upon this intervention as already in fact having been thought by it. There is of course a logic of positing its own presuppositions which, so crucial for psychoanalysis, meets its ultimate culmination in Hegel, and it is in moving onto the ‘psychoanalytic’ dimension of Hegel that we further demonstrate the failed intervention of psychoanalysis.

*Hegel, Positional Psychoanalyst*

Above we briefly contrasted the apparent ‘desire for the whole’ of German Idealism compared to the constitutive incompleteness and disjunction of psychoanalysis. And certainly, we are not arguing for the identity of psychoanalysis and philosophy, but instead for the failed intervention of the one in the other. Where philosophy finishes and psychoanalysis begins is a boundary that is increasingly obscured the more it is approached – and with Hegel we see precisely the extent to which the clear intervention of psychoanalysis within philosophy must in some sense be abandoned (only to be taken up within the brain sciences). Psychoanalysis may be the study of subjective division, of internal contradiction as the ground for an inconsistent and incomplete subject – but the interesting thing here is that, of all writers on such division, is not Hegel the philosopher of contradiction, of internal antagonism and incompleteness *par excellence*?

Several philosophical projects have, in the light of the psychoanalytic revolution, attempted to do away with Hegel and Hegelian categories. One notable attempt, arguably stronger and more militant than the variations on a theme of Lacan (Baudrillard, Derrida, Lyotard, etc.), is Deleuze’s ground-breaking *Difference and Repetition*. This is Deleuze’s negation of a Hegelian tradition from the perspective of an ontological *difference-in-itself* (*différence-en-elle-même*) – a pre-substantial ontological difference which grounds that which differs – and an ensuing complex repetition (*répétition-pour-elle-même*) which, in

recreation of a constitutive difference, grounds a principle which in itself enables a function of repetition (Deleuze, 1968). Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* should be read as (the beginning of) one of the most creative attacks on the 'philosophy of identity' (signifying a tradition since Plato which emphasises the primacy of identity, of substance's identity to itself, in the question of Being and Becoming, whereby difference is a secondary category) and Hegelian negation (which Deleuze disposes of for presupposing a 'negated *identity*'). Deleuze's philosophy of difference was *new* in that it grounded itself in the necessity to 'think *difference* before thinking *that which differs*'. Deleuze's philosophy is in other words one of a constitutive internal, ontological difference – a grounding internal contradiction. Interestingly, however, one of Žižek's great contributions, in his self-described *magnum opus*, *Less Than Nothing* (2013), is showing that precisely such an internal ontological difference (identical to the one of Deleuze, and with which the latter thought he saw the key to a negation of the Hegelian and the psychoanalytic tradition) is in fact already present in Lacan's *objet petit a* (the indeterminable *something* that is 'less than nothing' – the unassimilable aspect of the Real – whose distortive effect constitutes the elusive object-cause of desire), which in turn can be situated within Hegel's project.

A similar process can be seen in the dialectical reversal exposed in the intervention of psychoanalysis within philosophy. This dialectical reversal, negation-of-the-negation, that characterises the psychoanalysis-philosophy (especially the psychoanalysis-Hegel) relation, runs as follows: psychoanalysis intervenes and negates the supposed totality of philosophy with the constitutive contradictions of the former – upon which precisely these contradictions are reflected as internally constitutive of the supposed totality of philosophy itself. That the various oppositions which psychoanalysis presents philosophy are already inscribed within philosophy, is a paradox that could with some effort be exemplified to infinity. Here, it is instead intended merely to give some examples of the series of failures psychoanalysis faced

in intervening within Hegelian philosophy (and by extension, philosophical idealism generally). Hegel's *Science of Logic* is likely one of the greatest achievements in philosophy – and it is on the question of the self-referentially determined *coming-to-be* of the concept that this discussion will be framed.

In seeming contradiction to his philosophy of the *absolute idea* as the return of the concept into itself, Hegel had, it is necessary to mention, already thought and examined the internal contradiction and constitutive incompleteness that would be displaced as the determining moment of the explicitly *psychoanalytic* subject. We see even in the very first section of his *Greater Logic* this determination of a constitutive incompleteness which grounds Hegel's entire system. The foundation of this lay in *being's* ceaseless lack of self-identity in its interminable confrontation with *nothing* – being in this sense becomes the unresolved transition of *becoming*, where being and nothing indefinitely presuppose each other in a determinate series of irreconciled negations:

“The Logic *does* make an ontological commitment, namely that being is in becoming. But it makes it transcendently, one might say, by demonstrating that, unless so conceived – unless “being” holds an internal difference by virtue of which a discursive account of what it is can be construed – it could not be the object of intelligent apprehension” (Hegel, 2014[1812], p.liii)

This ‘internal difference’ is the subject of the first part of the *Greater Logic*, namely *The Doctrine of Being*. Being moves towards essence in consequence of its internal irreconcilability to itself, by the moment of *nothing* that inscribes a transitioning-away-from-itself as constitutive of a *determinate* being. We see mirrored here a defining feature of psychoanalysis: the internal contradiction of subjecthood, reflected within the philosophy it opposes – and it is through a certain logic of the retroaction of *essence* that we see the most distinct failure of psychoanalysis' intervention in philosophical idealism.

The logic of retroaction has found its most recognisable home within psychoanalysis. Freud began this trend with the temporality of *Nachträglichkeit*, in which the recollection of a scene, its trace in other words, reconstructs the original memory of the scene itself. This retroaction of the trace upon the scene finds an excellent exposition in Laplanche's seminar *L'Après-Coup* (2006) – a term translated into the English *afterwardness*. This logic of *après-coup* is constitutive of the psychoanalytic subject itself – it determines the autonomy and dominance of a trace over that material scene of which it is the recurrence. A scene becomes, in this sense, a secondary construction, a non-fixed and incomplete formation that is constructed according to its recollection and transmission in the form of a trace. We saw in Schelling the retroaction of an act that posits its own presuppositions, and the repetition of this operation in the *acte analytique* of Lacan. But we see an even more precise formulation of the act of 'positing its own presuppositions', a retroactive logic comparable to the *après-coup* of the trace, in the movement from *being* to *essence* described in Hegel's *Logic*. The confrontation of being and nothing – the possibility of determinate being (*Dasein*) in the form of a determinate negation – culminates in the transition into essence which grounds this very *being-nothing* dialectic. Essence itself, as the product of this transition – a transition which breaks out from the interminable and incomplete confrontation, the transitioning contradiction, between the determination of being out of nothingness – is posited as the mediated yet *first* ground for the incomplete determinations of being and nothing. In other words, the consequence of a contradiction becomes the possibility of this contradiction itself – a trace (*essence*) grounds the functions (*being* and *nothing*) which 'precede' the trace.

The contradictory transition between reciprocally including-and-excluding determinations of positive and negative itself is sublated [*aufgehoben*] into a posited ground for the contradiction itself. Precisely the movement from the *essence* of internal contradiction of positive and negative towards a foundation which grounds the contradictory *being* from

which *essence* emerges – this unusual retroactive logic – can be understood in the chapter that follows, *The Doctrine of Essence*, in Hegel’s *Logic*:

“Essence is only this negativity which is pure reflection. It is this pure reflection as the turning back of being into itself; hence it is *determined, in itself* or for us, as the ground into which being resolves itself. But this determinateness is not posited *by the essence itself*; in other words, essence is not ground precisely because it has not itself posited this determinateness that it possesses. Its reflection, however, consists *in positing* itself as what it is *in itself*, as a negative, and in *determining* itself. The positive and the negative constitute the essential determination in which essence is lost in its negation. These self-subsisting determinations of reflection sublimate themselves, and the determination that has foundered to the ground is the true determination of essence.

Consequently, *ground* is itself *one of the reflected determinations* of essence, but it is the last, or rather, it is determination determined as sublated determination.” (Hegel 2014[1812], p.386)

Hegel here moves towards the idea (as it preliminarily appeared in the first chapter, *The Doctrine of Being*, of his *Science of Logic* regarding the grounding of indeterminate existences of *being* and *nothing* within the *essence* that they produce in the incompleteness of their reciprocal determinations) of a ground, or foundation, which is posited in consequence of its predicates. A logic, in other words, which is forced to posit its own presuppositions in the outcome of an irreconcilable necessity.

That a *result* is in fact what must be presupposed for its own determination, is articulated more exactly at the beginning of *The Doctrine of the Concept*, in which *concept*, as product of *being* and *essence*, is installed as the absolute foundation, the possibility, of the latter two:

“Now the concept is to be regarded indeed, not just as a subjective presupposition but as *absolute foundation*; but it cannot be the latter except to the extent that it has *made* itself into one.

Anything abstractly immediate is indeed a *first*; but, as an abstraction, it is rather something mediated, the foundation of which, if it is to be grasped in its truth, must therefore first be sought. And this foundation will indeed be something immediate, but an immediate which has made itself such by the sublation of mediation. From this aspect the concept is at first to be regarded simply as the *third to being and essence*, to the *immediate* and to *reflection*. Being and essence are therefore the moments of its *becoming*; but the concept is their *foundation and truth* as the identity into which they have sunk and in which they are contained.” (ibid., p.508)

We have a perpetual sublation (*aufhebung*) of the determinants of the concept by the product of its self-determination – in an indefinite series of retroactive displacements, the product of an unreconciled antagonism becomes the ground of that which determines itself towards this very antagonism. We see, therefore, why the psychoanalytic description of the trace, as producing the ground of which it is the product, the scene of which it is the trace, fails to produce the final word on a distinction between psychoanalysis and philosophy. The logic of *après-coup*, as compared with the retroaction of the *act* in Schelling and the *concept* in Hegel, obscures, rather than clarifies, the supposed negation that psychoanalysis directs towards philosophy. Laplanche describes the precedence of a trace over its scene, by its retroactive reworking of this scene. The formulation of the trace as *repetition*, precedes that *content* which is expressed through said repetition – what is here presented is not a negation, but a mediated *mirroring*, of the logic of the ground in Hegel’s logic.

The retroaction of the trace had, of course, already been posited by Freud – to evidence this was precisely the purpose of Laplanche’s seminar on *L’Après-Coup*. This unique temporal logic of the trace was also a feature, gradually exposed through a long series of theoretical turns, of the *work of traces* subsumed under Freud’s use of displacement and

condensation. The retroactive logic specifically of *condensation and displacement* appears across Freud's early treatises on the formations of the unconscious, with a concrete recapitulation of its retroaction in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*:

“In the paper which I have mentioned I only touched on and in no way exhausted to multiplicity of the relations and meanings of screen memories. In the example quoted there [...] I laid special stress on a peculiarity of the *chronological* relation between the screen memory and the content which is screened off by it. In that example the content of the screen memory belonged to one of the earliest years of childhood, while the mental experiences which were replaced by it in the memory and which had remained almost unconscious occurred in the subject's later life. I described this sort of displacement as a *retro-active* or *retrogressive* one.” (Freud 1901, p.43-44)

A logic of retroaction here forms a characteristic of displacement as Freudian *Arbeit* (unconscious work). A particular mental experience of later life, designated as unconscious, installs itself amongst the supposed recollections of childhood. In other words, a retrogressive movement is made apparent, in which later experiences reorganise infantile memories, or even wholly *construct* these infantile scenes, by a backwards temporal displacement. Freud's references to these works of displacement and condensation would eventually diminish, but his recurrent emphasis on a retroactive logic of a trace (of a scene) would recur, most famously in the Wolf Man case. Here, infantile memories appear to be altered by the very act of reflecting upon them. Memories are reworked according to the expression and transmission of the traces left of them in adulthood.

“[...] it may easily seem comic and incredible that a child of four should be capable of such technical judgements and learned notions. This is simply another instance of *deferred action* [*Nachträglichkeit*]. At the age of one and a half the child receives an impression to which he is

unable to react adequately; he is only able to understand it and to be moved by it when the impression is revived in him at the age of four; and only twenty years later, during the analysis, is he able to grasp with his conscious mental processes what was then going on in him. The patient justifiably disregards the three periods of time, and puts his present ego into the situation which is so long past.” (Freud 1918, p.45)

A scene (the *primal* scene, likely fantasised, of the child watching its parents having sex in their bedroom) experienced at 1.5, is recalled/revisited at age 4 and then age 20, during treatment. What is being described, however, is evidently not a simple ‘recall’ at successive stages of life. Rather, what Freud suggests is a movement which proceeds contrary to the arrow of time, by which the mature ego is reinserted into the infantile scene, and from its developed knowledge reinterprets and reworks what was only incompletely and obscurely implanted/located there during infancy. We point, here, towards the psychoanalytic aspect of Hegel that preceded psychoanalysis itself – more accurately, the psychoanalytic dimension of Hegel which *reveals itself* upon an attempted intervention of psychoanalysis within Hegel.

A retroactive logic, in which the internal incompleteness of contradictory determinations culminates into a transitory ground for this very contradiction, as its *essence*, this is precisely the ‘original’ quality which psychoanalysis presented German Idealism, yet through Schelling and in particular Hegel, found itself to be constitutive of the very substance which the latter tries to determine. Badiou still maintains that the greatest task facing today’s philosopher is the difficulty of knowing what to do with Lacan (and psychoanalysis generally). Psychoanalysis evidently is not philosophy, yet at multiple attempts to oppose philosophy with psychoanalysis, the latter seems to morph into the former – or, more accurately, philosophy morphs into psychoanalysis.

This effect of psychoanalysis upon philosophy is an unresolved difficulty, where philosophy appears to have anticipated the negations of psychoanalysis. Today, the question

of psychoanalysis' intervention is as much in the realm of philosophy as it is the brain sciences. In this latter field, a similar anticipatory outcome to the intervention of psychoanalysis appears to be revealing itself.

*Psychoanalysis within the Paradoxes of Brain Sciences*

The indeterminate intervention of psychoanalysis in philosophy has been replaced, today, by a more pressing 'proxy-intervention' of psychoanalysis within the brain sciences. Here we find the most elusive aspect of psychoanalysis – a study that emerged from the scientific empiricism and neurological models of a Viennese doctor. Philosophy was of little concern to Freud at the beginning of his psychoanalytic writings – it is only much later that authors such as Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Kant, or Plato make their appearance to aid his metapsychological investigations.

Freud followed a neuro-biological model in his early *Project for a Scientific Psychology*; however the interesting effect of his scientism was its reverse-effect in the early reception of psychoanalysis. Paradoxically, the anti-philosophy/pro-scientism foundations of psychoanalysis had the inverse effect of what would be expected. He was quickly acknowledged, for example by the Frankfurt School, as having made a discovery of groundbreaking philosophical relevance. Meanwhile, the scientific community would dismiss him almost entirely. Psychology, psychiatry, and neurology have echoed the name of Freud only in a profound denigration and miscomprehension of his discovery – certainly a failed intervention if there ever was one! Today, however, something new is happening. The philosophy-psychoanalysis intervention is, as has been expressed above, at an impasse. At the same time, a unique interest and avenue of research presents itself in the brain sciences for the intervention of psychoanalysis, with research on this psychoanalysis-neuroscience intersection becoming increasingly important to universities across the world.

Psychoanalysis filling the gap of neuroscience and brain sciences is not limited to such discoveries as Freud's unusually accurate formulation of what would come to be known as long-term potentiation (Centonze et. al. 2005): the sensitisation of sequences of neuronal pathways over repeated activation, which in Freud's formulation was the basis for neurotic defences and the traumatic effect of foreign memory-traces. In the example of long-term potentiation, a dialectical reversal is evident: Freud opposed to the naïve view of an absolute, unchanging threshold necessary for any sequence of neuronal signal-patterns, the possibility of an unconscious sensitisation of certain pathways, which are more easily triggered and with a lesser stimulus-threshold. This, in its reversal, is subsequently posited to always have a feature of the neurological-biological model of the mind.

Aside from this, we are witnessing a wide-spread intervention of psychoanalysis within brain sciences – where 'Neuropsychanalysis' is now an established field of research. Currently this field bases itself upon a relatively limited, drive-model of psychoanalysis (mixing for example libido-theory, with its secondary and primary processes, and research on frontal lobe disfunction – thus restricting explorations both on the psychoanalytic and the neuroscientific side).

However, a more creative intervention of psychoanalysis within neuroscience can be gleamed – take the example of recent research into frontal cortex executive functioning. Decades of research was directed at locating the neurological basis of psychological executive functions: attention, focus, response inhibition etc. The result was nevertheless a series of contradictions: where several studies perhaps found the localisation of specific executive functions within determinate locations of the frontal cortex, other studies would contradict these findings by suggesting no determinate 'locale' for specific executive functions (i.e. response-inhibition could not be suggested to belong to one specific cluster of neurons, and was not reliably localisable across repeated studies).

A creative resolution to this frontal-cortex-contradiction became a new model of an adaptive ‘multiple demand’ (or adaptive neural coding) function of frontal cortex neurons, which reconceptualised the structure and function of the frontal cortex to be able to adopt and utilize these contradictions. In essence, unlike with other lobes (e.g. the occipital or the temporal), the function of frontal cortex neurons was not determinate – they were rather indeterminate and responded to the specific executive task at hand (Duncan & Miller, 2013). This was a discovery aided by sophistications in multivoxel pattern analysis (MVPA) through which alternating organisations of neuronal clusters can be studied. In other words, neurons were found to become determinate only at the instance of their necessity to carry out a given task, a contingency immediately lost once this task was no longer necessary. In this sense, the frontal lobe operated precisely by the contradiction of its neuronal clusters from one task to another – the contradiction found in the previous studies constituted a new model of indeterminate and shifting neuronal functions. This multiple demand model in other words posited a constitutive indeterminacy to the frontal cortex neurons – their function was contingent to the executive function that was temporarily necessary. Specification was, unlike with other neurons, a purely temporary function, where frontal neurons necessarily contradict themselves.

Do we not see here, in that functional indeterminacy and self-contradiction of frontal neurons, precisely that constitutive incompleteness which acts as a resolution to the internal contradictions of the psychoanalytic subject? The subject is a functional formation contingent upon the discursive formations in which it is posited – it is that which is communicated between one signifier and another (Lacan 2008). In other words, the function of the subject, as a consequence to its constitutive contradiction, is contingent to the articulations of speech and language which it determines itself by – language and subject are in a state of reciprocal support, where the subject *is* its contingent determination within the formations of language.

There is no ‘consistent, determined subject’ which pre-exists its articulation within language. In the same way, there is no ‘fully determined frontal neuron’, but rather the contingent determination of neuronal functions in the very tasks for which they are utilised. For both neuroscience and psychoanalysis, here, an ineradicable *contingency* determines a function previously thought to be stable and determinate: the subject as much as the frontal cortex.

We see here an intervention of psychoanalysis within neuroscience in which the indeterminacy of the linguistic subject is doubled in the inconsistent and contingent determinations of neuronal functions. Is such an embodiment of contradiction in the form of internal incompleteness precisely where psychoanalysis most interestingly touches neuroscience? And do we not see, in this intervention, a reconsideration of brain sciences which nullifies the psychoanalytic intervention? What such an intervention of psychoanalysis in the brain sciences means is of course yet inconclusive. It is clear that the intervention of psychoanalysis within philosophy failed in defining itself – instead obscuring the delimitation between the two. With neuroscience we therefore see a ‘proxy-intervention’ which blurs the boundary between itself and psychoanalysis – especially in the case above in which both subjects posit a type of functional contradiction. What is important here is understanding the failures which characterise and constitute psychoanalytic interventions – a *constructive* failure through which we can form an image of precisely the unusual subject psychoanalysis is, and more importantly the constitutive inconsistencies which it introduces both to philosophy and the brain sciences.

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