

THE ENIGMA OF DESIRE 1: LACANIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS

Reference: Kellett, P. (2006). *The Enigma of Desire Part 1: Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. Originally published in: Hannah, F. (Ed.) *Transactions*, 5: 18 – 32. Retrieved from: <http://www.psychomericainfo/home/publications>

ABSTRACT

Object-relational psychoanalysis and ego- and self-psychology are among the foundational philosophies that continue to enrich the development of transactional analysis. Yet these psychoanalytic perspectives, like many other founding approaches within TA, are largely rooted in the modernist paradigm that arose from the Western Enlightenment and which, from a post-modernist perspective, no longer adequately accounts for many of the dialectic dynamics of our contemporary worlds. In contrast, the psychoanalytic approach developed by Jacques Lacan offers a means to creatively and more comprehensively address such post-modernist dynamics, elucidating theories that give rise to a radically different understanding of concepts central to TA such as personality and relationality. This article, the first of two, reviews some of the consequences that adopting predominantly modernist psychoanalytic accounts has had for TA and outlines a Lacanian account of selfhood as an introduction to some central Lacanian themes. In the second article, this account of selfhood is related to cocreative and relational principles within TA. A more postmodernist TA model of selfhood is then outlined and illustrated with client work.

INTRODUCTION

Psychoanalysis is a broad faith amongst many overlapping belief systems, including existentialism and humanism, all of which have influenced the development of transactional analysis. Within the psychoanalytic faith are many churches, and amongst these it is British object relational models and American ego- and self-psychologies that have had a dominant influence on TA to date. This influence is seen predominantly in the transactional psychoanalytic perspective (e.g. Moiso and Novellino, 2000 and Novellino, 2005) the integrative transactional analytic perspective (e.g. Erskine, 1988) and the relational transactional analytic perspective (e.g. Hargaden and Sills, 2002 and Cornell and Hargaden, 2005). Like the psychoanalytic perspectives they integrate, these TA perspectives embody the project of modernity that emerged from the European Enlightenment.

Outside the realm of modernist psychoanalyses are those approaches that offer radically contrasting accounts of human nature; accounts that have developed in response to the challenges post-modernist reflections have posed to modernist philosophy. In turn, such post-

modern psychoanalytic models pose significant and potentially rich challenges to the modernist assumptions inherited by TA; assumptions that have become invisibly inscribed within our theories, models and practices. One such psychoanalytic perspective, originated by the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, and further developed notably by feminist psychoanalysts and cultural theorists, exemplifies and embodies many fundamental post-modernist principles. Lacanian theory addresses, most significantly, both the socially constructed and fundamentally relational nature of human being and, as such, offers a fertile environment in which to nurture the continuing growth of a more fruitfully post-modernist transactional analysis.

I begin by describing and contrasting modernist and post-modernist paradigms. I then contextualise the development of psychoanalysis as a fledgling post-modernist philosophy situated within a predominantly modernist social and historical frame. I then introduce Lacanian psychoanalysis as a development of Freud's radical project that, perhaps more than any other psychoanalytic perspective, offers the promise of a more usefully post-modernist approach through which we might more fully conceptualise the dialectic nature of the contemporary worlds in which we live.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LIFE, THE UNIVERSE AND EVERYTHING

It's an important and popular fact that things are not always what they seem.

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy (Douglas Adams, 2005)

The Enlightenment was a secular project that replaced the dominant theological paradigm within Europe from the mid-seventeenth century, though this process had begun to emerge earlier through the ideas espoused by Francis Bacon and René Descartes. In *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) and *Novum Organum* (1620) Bacon advocated a new method of empirical enquiry as the way in which to demystify existing faith-based explanations of man's experiences. Descartes further developed this into a fledgling scientific approach, based on the reductive analysis of verifiable phenomena. As a consequence, human consciousness was positioned as the author of rationality, inscribed within the Cartesian principle, *cogito ergo sum*; "I think, therefore I exist". And so, it became assumed that human reasoning was the source of truth and the guarantor of progress. Thus, a brave new world of humanity, reason and scientific enquiry, rendered obsolete the fatigued old world of divinity, faith and theological interpretation (Smith, 1998), a world that could no longer adequately account for the expanding universe of human experience, such as the Copernican discovery that the earth orbited the sun.

Such developments gave birth to the modernist age, an age that embodied the values, goals, beliefs and methods of the Enlightenment. Hollinger (1994) has summarised this project under four unities;

1. The unity of epistemology; everything worth knowing can be represented by a set of beliefs that all human beings can agree, on the basis of universally valid methodological assumptions.
2. The unity of morality; universal rational moral principles are binding on all rational beings everywhere, providing measurable standards for all judgement.
3. The unity of exclusion; anything that does not conform to this system is an obstacle to human progress and happiness. Only a society based on science and universal values is free; only its members can be happy.
4. The unity of truth; ignorance is the cause of unhappiness, and only scientific enquiry and the acceptance of rational truths can make life better.

The Enlightenment project consequently developed over the following centuries as the *modus operandi* by which to make answers to humanity's questions. Many of these questions initially concerned the physical fabric of nature, such as the nature of the universe as Copernicus saw it. In time, however, more metaphysical questions were raised concerning, for example, the nature of man's passions and desires. In 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', T.S. Elliot's famous anti-hero (1917, page 15) wonders about a possible future in which he seizes the day and pursues his inchoate desires. What, he wonders, would it have been like:

*To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it towards some overwhelming question*

As modernism squeezed man's metaphysical universe with scientific enquiry, the limits of the assumptions and methods of this paradigm to address such questions came into view around the turn of the nineteenth century. That is, it became increasingly apparent that, while largely successful at constructing explanations and predictions concerning natural, non-sentient phenomena, science alone could not meaningfully account for human nature. And so, like the reign of faith before the Enlightenment, as scientific enquiry became rigid and dogmatic, more and more life began to spill out, haunting this project like a ghost in the machine. This became apparent by the early twentieth century when Sigmund Freud illuminated the ghost in the human machine with his articulation of unconscious life as the larger, hidden part of all our everyday relating. Man, he argued, was not the rational truth-generating machine he had assumed himself to be but, rather, one motivated by irrational and repressed desires that were beyond his conscious control. In doing so, Freud voiced a dawning realisation that modernist philosophy, theories and practices could not adequately account for human nature.

This dawning realisation represents an important precursor to the emergence of the post-modernist paradigm, a perspective within art, literature, linguistics, cultural studies, social science, psychoanalysis and philosophy that was finally crystallised as a result of the upheavals of the two world wars and continues to be elaborated in response to the processes of globalisation, consumerism, the fragmentation of authority, and the commoditisation of knowledge, amongst

other contemporary social developments. It is in the arts that we find the most colourful illustration of some of the salient aspects of the shift to post-modernism, and I make a brief detour here into the world of painting in order to describe just what post-modernism entails.

In the visual arts, we can follow this shift from modernism to post-modernism from the paintings of the High Romantics, through the Impressionists, the development of Cubism, Dadaism and Surrealism to Concept Art and beyond. This developmental line represents an increasing level of abstraction from figurative depiction, and an increasing fragmentation of styles and foci. Picture, if you will, the late paintings of William Turner; unique depictions of London and Venice in which the diffusion of light and colour takes centre stage, relegating the ostensible subject of the painting incidental to the artist's evocation of mood and feeling. Such masterpieces of the High Romantic period represent the evolution of an aesthetic in which the painter's view, or interpretation, came to represent the defining purpose of artistic statement; beauty became, literally, a product of the eye of the beholder, an eye that was less concerned with 'true' or 'objective' representation but, rather, more and more concerned with the communication of subjective experience. Such works thus took traditional artistic ethics and practices to limits which the Pointillists and Fauvists began to cross and, thus, dissolve. As such Impressionist schools in turn made possible the birth of the Cubist styles of Pablo Picasso and Charles Braque, the fragmentation of traditional modernist values became more and more graphically depicted.

The Dadaists and Surrealists such as, perhaps most famously, Salvador Dalí, furthered this turn to post-modernity through their radical subversion of traditional representations of the world. Thus, we find, in Dalí's mature works, melting clocks draped over tree branches, enigmatic 'objects' situated in the midst of traditional scenes and collages of impossibly superimposed objects and actions that have no 'logical' connection but which are related by what Dalí came to term 'paranoiac', or unconscious processes. These developments, in turn, led to the increasingly abstract works of Piet Mondrian, Marc Rothko and Jackson Pollock in which any kind of naturalistic representation was abandoned. By the time conceptual artists such as Andy Warhol became established, such naturalistic depictions had become detached from their modernist meaning; think only of the seemingly mass-produced photographs of Marilyn Monroe. This continuing fragmentation of the modernist hegemony of meaning has resulted in artists working in relative isolation, replacing 'schools' with localised and relatively unique styles with their own philosophies and techniques and, most importantly, definitions of what is art. Ultimately, then, the definition of art has been fractured and no longer retains the hegemonic authority that was constructed during the modernist period.

Thus, the term 'post-modern' more generally refers to a philosophical critique and deconstruction of assumed absolute truths and grand theories, or meta-narratives. The concept was crystallised by Lyotard (1979) who argued that an era of disillusionment with the modernist project had been ushered in as a result of the accelerating pace of cultural change, an acceleration that had reached the point where constant change and plurality had become the status quo, rendering obsolete the notions of universal progress and unifying meta-narratives. Lyotard characterises post-modernity as, "incredulity toward meta-narratives"; that is, that

people have rejected the supposedly universal stories of religion, conventional philosophy and capitalism, for example, that had defined culture and behaviour in the past, and have instead begun to organise their lives around a variety of local and subcultural ideologies, myths and stories. Post-modernism consequently promotes the idea that all meta-narratives and paradigms are stable only while they fit available evidence, and can potentially be overturned when phenomena occur that the paradigm cannot account for, and a better explanatory model (itself subject to the same fate) is found. Ultimately this means that different realms of discourse are incommensurable and incapable of judging the results of other discursive practices (Kuhn, 1962/1970).

Returning to our story of psychoanalysis, Freud's theory of the unconscious was viewed as heretical by many of his contemporaries still grounded, as they were, in modernism, in part because of psychoanalysis' potential to subvert such modernist grand-narratives and 'truths'. Consequently, in order to have his story listened to and taken seriously, Freud, like Descartes, had to tell it in such a way as to fit into the dominant paradigm of the day; he had to ground it in a modernist scientific orientation. And so, like Descartes, one of the fathers of modernism centuries before him, Freud, one of the fathers of post-modernism had to diplomatically adapt his radical ideas, so as not to appear to unduly challenge established authority. An anxious and power-hungry church had threatened Descartes with death (and had indeed executed some of Descartes' less wily contemporaries) and Freud had to flee Germany in fear of his life in response to the reactionary conservative fundamentalism of power-hungry Nazis. Thus, Freud initially dressed his ideas in the modernist garb in which he had been schooled and indoctrinated, and so his radical, post-modernist insight was itself squeezed into a modernist ball to make it more palatable, credible and authoritative.

In his charting of the history of psychoanalysis, Schwartz (1999, page 9) sums up the position of psychoanalysis in comparison with the dominant scientific paradigm thus:

Psychoanalysis has developed in close relation to the events of the twentieth century. As opposed to the natural sciences – the pride and joy of a triumphant bourgeois culture of the nineteenth century – psychoanalysis has been charged not with participating in the glory of the Industrial Revolution but with cleaning up the mess it left behind. As we enter the twenty-first century, we have still not fully digested how much of a mess is caused by our worlds system. Sometimes the news is indigestible.

The modernist garb in which Freud chose to dress his post-modernist paradigm became, over time, more and more restrictive; a straight-jacket that artificially restrained the implications of his radical insight. Thus, the modernist project had a profound and lasting influence upon the birth and development of psychoanalysis. Many developments of Freudian theory inherited such limitations, including those perspectives that have had particular influence upon TA, which itself, developed within a particular context. Eric Berne rebelled against the American derivatives of Freudian psychoanalysis in which he was schooled and whose adherents repeatedly denied him admittance as a member of its flock. His revenge was the popularising of a rival church's creed

rooted in an earnest desire to 'give psychology away', a call made by George Miller, the president of the American Psychological Association in a much-quoted address at the 1969 Annual Conference. However, in a review a decade later, most concluded that this project had not turned out as had been hoped, as Leahey (1992, page 481) recounts:

Most of the reports were rather gloomy; even the optimists thought little had been accomplished... Sigmund Koch tore Miller's speech apart. He argued that, if anything, psychology was being given away too well in pop psychotherapy and a flood of self-help books. Koch said, 'In sum, I believe the most charitable thing we can do is not to give psychology away, but to take it back.'

A century on, as our post-modernist worlds are beginning to become more reflexive and to grasp more fully the limitations of modernism (and, indeed, the mess it has left behind) those developing Berne's legacy have struggled to account for the colourful nature of human relating that continues to spill out of the more monochrome modernist project. If we are now to begin to give voice to a more post-modern TA that reclaims the dialectically rich implications of both Freud's brave new world, as well as Berne's own early radical agenda, we must broaden the psychoanalytic base upon which we draw for further growth and development. In particular, we need to begin to integrate models different in nature to those still rooted within the modernist paradigm; models that can more comprehensively account for the indeterminate and chaotically complex nature of human life as well as the formative influences of invisible social discourses such as language, power and desire. Lacanian psychoanalysis offers us one such opportunity.

A LACANIAN ACCOUNT OF SELFHOOD

Jacques Lacan

Jacques Marie Émile Lacan (1901-1981) began studying psychoanalysis in the 1920s with the psychiatrist Gaïtan de Clérambault at the Faculté de Médecine de Paris, working with patients diagnosed as suffering from automatism, a condition in which a person believes his or her actions, writing, or speech, are controlled by an outside agency. This experience was to have a prophetic influence on Lacan's interest in the formative function of language and his radically innovative integration of Freudian theory with contemporary philosophy, linguistics and mathematics. Lacan's project of re-working Freudian theory, his so-called 'return to Freud', represents, to some extent, a project of freeing Freud's ideas from the straightjacket of modernism. His work developed as a response to what Lacan saw as the betrayal of the Freudian project by European and American psychoanalysts of the mid-twentieth century. Lacan's work has had a significant effect on literature, film studies, and philosophy, as well as on the theory and practice of psychoanalysis and, along with the wide-range of subsequent developments of this unique approach, represents one of the foremost comprehensive post-modernist accounts of human nature to date.

It is no simple matter to offer a succinct summary of Lacanian concepts, for Lacan's writing is intentionally complex and, as such, can be seen as contrasting with the principle of simplicity that has been prevalent within TA and other humanistic psychotherapies. Lacan famously described his style as "impossible" in order to challenge readers to engage with his ideas in such a way as to re-author them and develop their own reflexive thinking. His style thus mirrors the

dialectic post-modern tension between complex and, at times contradictory theories and a philosophical distrust of grand narratives; for reading Lacan is like reading the novels of James Joyce. It is in part due to this non-reducible complexity that Lacanian ideas continue to be explored and developed in an atmosphere untainted by the dumbing down and subsequent devaluing of theories and models that TA has suffered from to date, largely as a result of the project of popularising TA.

Both complex and simple ideas may invite imaginative reflection in a process of integration and re-authorship that parallels the post-modernist therapeutic project. The crucial point is that digesting ideas in this way facilitates the capacity for critical and creative reflection whereas swallowing whole pre-packaged sound-bites of dogmatic models invites passivity and is, ultimately, repressive; a sedative that numbs curiosity and artificially satiates an appetite for discovery. Rather than attempt, then, a misleadingly simple review of Lacanian theory, I offer interpretive recapitulations of three central Lacanian models in order to sketch a contrasting account of the development of selfhood and whet readers' appetites for these challenging ideas. As such, readers will do well to bear in mind that what follows are not claimed to be authoritative accounts of Lacanian models; for such claims turn on misleading modernist notions of truth and objectivity. Rather, those interested in furthering their acquaintance with Lacanian psychoanalysis and its developments are referred to the recommended reading list at the end of this article, and invited to creatively play with their own interpretations.

THE MYTH OF STRUCTURE

In order to begin to explore a Lacanian understanding of selfhood, it is first necessary to address the vexed relationship between structure and function within the Bernian model of self, and to contrast this modernist concept with the more post-modernist one of 'selfhood'. In the light of his needing to fit into the zeitgeist of the day, as outlined above, Berne, like Freud, appears to have wished to anchor his account of ego states in physical structures of the brain in order to provide scientific legitimacy for his descriptions of the intra- and inter-psychic relational dynamics that form the bedrock of TA as a psychotherapy of human interactions. One important consequence of this quest for legitimacy has been the assertion that supposedly discreet capacities, such as thinking and feeling, representational capacities and senses of self-other emerge from normative *structural* ego state growth; that such capacities are properties of the Parent, Adult and Child. In turn, such structural growth is assumed to be rooted in the physical development of the central nervous system. That is, function is dependent upon psychical and, in turn, physical structure. This assumption of a causal relationship between function and structure, concept and reality has its roots in the modernist developmental paradigm that a capacity for, say, intuition, autonomy or feeling represents a structural property that arises from age-related physical development of the brain.

Let us first look at the assumed link between conceptual structure and function. Berne struggled and ultimately failed to offer a clear delineation between structure and function, and, indeed, often conflated the two (Erskine, 1988), and many authors have since grappled with this confusion with little success. The distinction between structure and function ultimately rests

upon an artificial divide that has arisen from the mixing of metaphors; for *structural ego states represent conceptual categories of function*. These categories have, at times, been seen in developmental (age-based) terms, at other times in phenomenological terms (experiences of self-other relations) and, at yet other times, what has traditionally been termed 'functional' in the TA literature (ways of thinking, feeling and acting). All these categories represent functional processes and the divide between structure and function is thus not only artificial but also misleading and finds no useful place in a post-modernist account of selfhood.

Second, evidence for the link between psychical structure and the physical brain remains elusive at best, despite the citing of neuroscientific research to support the assertion that ego states are 'real' physical structures in the brain. From a post-modernist perspective, the assumption that psychical function equates with physical structure is seriously flawed, and exemplifies the fallacy of reification (Loria, 1990) in which 'the real thing' is mistaken for the metaphor used to illustrate certain dynamics. As Schwartz (1999, page 7) argues, the reduction of emergent processes to static structures cannot account for psychological processes,

Biology is not simply applied physics and chemistry, because although the properties of atoms and molecules make life possible it is their organisation, not their properties by themselves, that produces the phenomenon of living matter. Similarly, there have been many vain attempts to reduce the phenomena of human psychology – consciousness, memory, human emotions – to no more than a (complicated) manifestation either of the molecular events taking place in the living cell or of events occurring in the individual neurones of the human central nervous system. But just as molecular biology is not simply applied physics or chemistry, psychology is not applied molecular biology or applied neuroscience. The phenomena of psychology emerge from the organisation of the physiological and molecular substrate of the human organism and, like the phenomena of molecular biology, need to be understood in their own terms, not in terms of the successes of other disciplines

Indeed, if neuroscience teaches us anything, it is that equating function with bits of the physical brain, has us, like blind people in a dark room, searching for a black cat – that does not exist.

Similarly, the reification of 'the self' reflects a modernist fantasy, an example of the principle of 'atomisation' first advocated by Bacon. From this perspective, 'the self' is seen as an essentialist property of the person, continuous in time, the autonomous product of its author. From a more post-modern perspective, however, *selfhood* is more usefully seen as a relational process, a being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962) and being-with (Stern, 2000) that comes into play only in and through relating. As such, selfhood is forever in the process of becoming and is always-already contingent upon relationships with others, relationships that, in turn, are situated within cultural systems that themselves determine meaning. As a function, an experiential process, selfhood is not meaningfully reducible to psychical or physical structures, though structural properties may represent one of a number of necessary (but not sufficient) prerequisites for a coherent sense of selfhood to emerge, along with, for example, the capacity

for mindfulness (Allen, 2003). Structural models of ego states should, as such, be understood as metaphorical categories for ways of relating; as categories of function. What an account of selfhood requires, then, is the development of a functional model that addresses the dynamic, relational and cocreated processes of our being with others in the world.

With this foundation laid, let us now turn to a Lacanian account of selfhood.

THE ENIGMA OF DESIRE

Lacan did not offer a single, meta-narrative developmental account, but, rather, a number of partial metaphors focusing on different aspects of developmental processes; accounts which, taken together, offer a rich and challenging collage of the formation of selfhood and the nature of human identity. As with Freud's phenomenological approach, Lacan developed theories in the light of his clinical experience, arguing that developmental theories are retroactive attempts at making meaning of psychic processes and human motivation.

This is not the only testimony to Lacan's pragmatism. The title of this article is that of a painting by Salvador Dalí (1929) in which a biomorphic rock is depicted containing spaces in which is occasionally inscribed, 'ma mere'; 'my mother'. A year later, Dalí's paper, *L'Ane Pourri* ('The Rotten Donkey') offered Lacan a framework with which to reformulate Freud's theory of paranoia that he was concurrently reading. Lacan asked to meet Dalí, who received him with a bandage on his nose, and Lacan spent the time listening to the bandaged Dalí talking about his surrealist theories. Nearly forty years later they met up by accident in New York, and had lunch together. Roudinesco (1994, page 378) recounts that, having discussed the Borromean knots that came to fascinate Lacan in his later years, Dalí asked, "Why didn't you say anything that time we met and I had a bandage on my nose?" and Lacan replied, "Because I knew there wasn't anything wrong with you."

The following account of familial relational dynamics elaborates Freud's use of the Sophoclean drama of Oedipus Rex, an account in which desire serves as a powerful metaphor for the motivating drive in the development of selfhood. The child (C) emerges within a primary symbiotic fusion *in utero* in which there is no meaningful differentiation between self and other both physically and psychically, at least for the neonate. The trauma of birth prematurely wrenches the newborn from this fusion since, as Freud points out, the newborn is not yet equipped for survival, and is still dependent, both physically and psychically on the (m)Other (M). If we view the foetus' 'relationship' in utero as a primary symbiosis with the (m)Other, then a secondary symbiosis forms after birth in which the newborn retains a primary attachment to the (m)Other, and in which she (or he) in turn, ideally invests a primary love (PL) in the child (see figure 1).

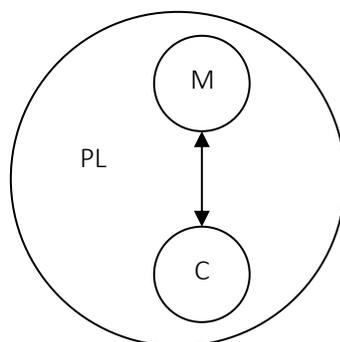


Figure 1: the Domain of Primary Love; a Secondary Symbiotic Relationship

Soon, the newborn experiences repeated, if minor instances when (m)Other’s attention is occasionally directed elsewhere. Impelled by the resulting frustration of his or her needs, the newborn is required to somehow come to terms with a new reality in which he or she does not appear to always be the exclusive focus of the (m)Other; that her gaze occasionally reaches for an other beyond the child. This lack of absolute attention is acutely painful for the newborn situated, as he or she is, within the realm of primary love. The newborn thus faces the (non-verbal) enigma, “what Other (X?) could hold or inspire such desire for (m)Other?” (see figure 2). The newborn experiences this enigma as threatening, since it points to life and desire beyond the realm of primary love, threatening the primary symbiosis’ omnipotent promise.

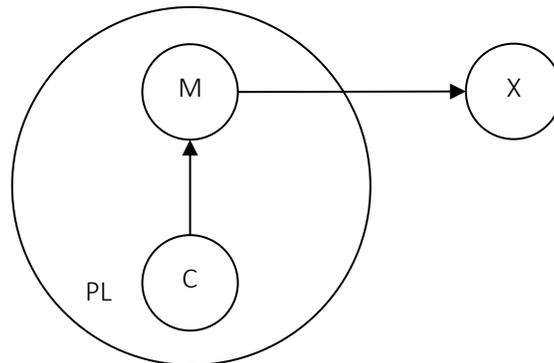


Figure 2: the Enigma of Desire

In time, a crucial shift occurs in this enigma to the extent that the child begins to sense that the (m)Other must be lacking something in order to desire that which she lacks. (This lack is represented by the Phallus, the fourth term in the Lacanian lexicon, but we need not concern ourselves with this construction here). As a result of this shift, the (m)Other is transformed in the eyes of the child into an enigma herself (dM, for desiring (m)Other). That is, the (m)Other’s desire becomes equated with her very being; a being that is now lacking. Now the child becomes mesmerised by the enigma, “what does (m)Other desire, what does she lack?” (see figure 3).

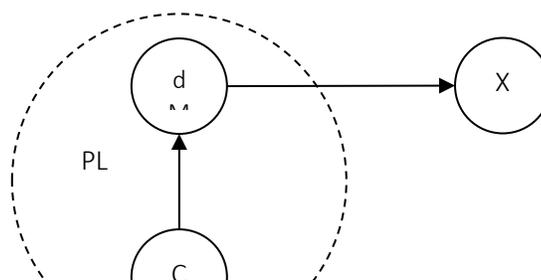


Figure 3; the Enigma of Lack

The child is now powerfully motivated to become what (m)Other lacks in order to supply what she desires. In order to maintain the illusion of the secondary symbiosis, he or she invests in the fantasy that, if he can fulfil his (m)Other's desire, she will want for no-one else and the omnipotence of primary love will be sealed. The child may elaborate this fantasy with a proto-understanding of his physical expulsion from his union with her (birth); narcissistically attributing himself as the cause of her lacking (he took something of her with him when he was born) and misassigning to himself the power to supply what is lacking and thus guarantee their libidinal reunion and everlasting happiness (the Eden myth).

Yet what the child inevitably becomes painfully aware of is that, not only can he or she not fulfil the (m)Other's desire (since, despite his efforts, she continues to look beyond him) but that the Other to whom her desire is directed, the Father Function (F), prohibits the child from being or offering that which the (m)Other lacks and desires, as shown in figure 4. This Father Function does not have to be a biological father, a man or even a real person; rather, this term represents that which forbids the child's fulfilment of the (m)Other's desire; the social order, culture, civilisation.

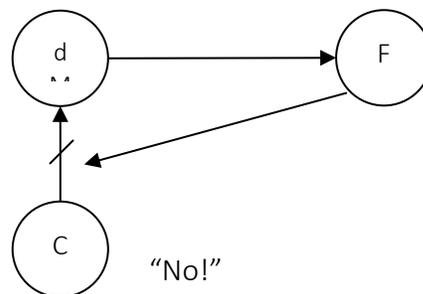


Figure 4: the Paternal Prohibition

Lacan called this third term (F) the Name of the Father. In French, the words for name, 'nom' and 'no', 'non', sound the same. Thus, the Name of The Father sounds like a 'no!' to the libidinal union of (m)Other and child; the paternal prohibition representing the castration threat that enacts the incest taboo. The Father's 'No!' bursts the secondary symbiotic bubble of Primary Love (now reframed as incest) and ushers in wider social and cultural codes, the domain of language; that which makes civilisation possible, replacing nature with culture. While normal

psychic development thus emerges from the bursting of this secondary symbiosis, this process is a profoundly painful one that haunts the individual henceforth. In the words of Gurewich (1998, page 11),

For such a dependence [the libidinal union experienced within the realm of Primary Love] to be severed the child must be able to come to terms with his mother's inevitable absences or unavailability, to tolerate a frustration that is incomprehensible.

MIRROR, MIRROR

In order for the child to journey through the oedipal drama outlined above, he or she must become able to make some pre-linguistic distinction between self and other. Lacan offers a complementary account of the process of self-construction that further enriches this account of the formation of selfhood. He first presented his ideas on this subject at the fourteenth International Psychoanalytic Congress in Marienbad, Germany, in August 1936, and the paper subsequently formed of this seminar has become one of Lacan's most famous articles; 'Le Stade du Miroir comme Formateur de la Fonction du Je', or 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I'.

From six months onwards, the infant recognises him or herself for the first time in a mirror or mirror-substitute, such as the eye of the m(O)ther. Many have attributed great importance to this event since, within the animal kingdom, only the human child responds with such absorbed fascination to his or her mirror image. Lacan describes how the infant plays at making gestures that he or she comes to associate with those he or she sees in the mirror, and the jubilation with which the infant identifies with this mirror-image, or imago, since this idealised imago screens out the infant's dependency on others, inner affective conflict and, as yet, lack of physical coherence and maturity. In other words, the cohesive whole offered by the imago fails to reflect the profound sense of fragmentation the infant experiences. In being seduced into assigning to this imago the mysteries of autonomy and self-determination, the infant *mis-identifies* this reflected ideal self as a true reflection of selfhood;

Thus, this Gestalt ... symbolises the mental permanence of the I, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination; it is still pregnant with the correspondences that unite the I with the statue in which man projects himself with the phantoms that dominate him, or with the automaton in which, in an ambiguous relation, the world of his own making tends to find completion. (Lacan, 1949/2004, page 3).

Lacan describes the process of identification as, "I'm like he whom I recognise to be a man, and so recognise myself as being such" (ibid, page 25). Ultimately, he suggests that the result of the mirror phase is the establishment of an imaginary and misleading relationship between inner and outer worlds. That is, the mirror provides a false link between the infant's internal phenomenological world and the external world of others. In forming a self-image that is located in a reflection, the infant thus bases his or her sense of self upon an idealised 'other' (the imago). This identification brings about a fundamental split in the child's intersubjective sense of selfhood

and from this point forevermore there is a gulf or schism between a phenomenological sense of selfhood based on physical experiences, and a self-identity that Lacan asserts is fundamentally alienating; the *imago* is a lie and self-recognition constitutes a mis-recognition.

THE REAL, IMAGINARY AND SYMBOLIC

Lacan's accounts of the oedipal drama and the mirror phase offer a useful way in which to distinguish three experiential domains that are central to Lacanian theory and the constitution of selfhood. The neonate is born into a reality which is incomprehensible since, initially, it is unmediated; the newborn is not able to make meaning of a bewildering onslaught of external and internal sensory inputs. Most significantly, since these sensations are interactive, the newborn cannot distinguish between outside and inside, self and other and similar dichotomies since, as we have seen, these are social constructs that can only be conceptualised later upon the acquisition of language. Nonetheless, the only way to deal with this experience that threatens to overwhelm and annihilate is to symbolise it, and the child goes about doing this through the mirror of the (m)Other right from the start. The Real, then, is reality in its unmediated, incomprehensible and therefore threatening form and something that, from the very beginning, the newborn attempts to mediate. From a Lacanian perspective, all trauma results from unmediated encounters with the Real.

The Imaginary, for Lacan, represents intersubjective experience per se. This experience has its genesis in the mirror phase since, as we have seen, the newborn quickly learns to construct a sense of selfhood through the gaze of the (m)Other. Henceforth, this gaze mediates the child's perception of his or her worlds. The mis-recognition that arises from the mirror phase is used by the infant to defend against the Real (as well as the split from this domain) and to mediate all experience. From a Lacanian position, the Imaginary sense of self *lies* at the heart of our subjective sense of self; that is, this sense of self is fictional, a lie.

The Symbolic represents the order of culture, and its genesis, for the child, is the resolution of the oedipal challenge where this culminates in the child's acquiescence to the Law or Name of The Father. As we have seen, the symbolic father ushers in the prohibition of the incest taboo. The impetus of the child's submission to the law propels him or her into the realm of the Symbolic as a more effective way of mediating the real and of covering over, or compensating for his or her lack. This new form of representation is language and, as the child takes on the representational structure of language, two crucial processes are set in motion. First, the Imaginary is repressed and split off and, second, this repression gives birth to unconscious dynamics. This process parallels the spilling out of life from the modernist project described above; what cannot be signified (represented in language) haunts the individual like a ghost; literally un-speakable yearnings and desires. Thus, there is an intimate link between the child's insertion into the Symbolic, his or her acceptance of the paternal prohibition and effective castration (from the realm of Primary Love), the acquisition of language and the birth of the unconscious.

SUMMARY

Modernist psychoanalytic models have played and continue to play significant roles in the development of TA. As such, however, modernist philosophical and practical limitations have infused transactional analytic understanding, becoming unseen assumptions that diminish the potency and effectiveness of TA to address the social and relational dynamics of our post-modern societies. Other more post-modern psychoanalytic approaches, such as Lacanian psychoanalysis, more comprehensively account for such dynamics. Lacanian theory offers us a richly relational account of the formation of selfhood, an account in which the premature newborn struggles to account for his expulsion from a libidinal union with the (m)Other and the demand of his society to find a place within its symbolic order. The Mirror Phase offers us a useful way in which to conceptualise the adoption of an imaginary sense of selfhood as a comfort to the desperate threat of this demand and the domains of the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic further elaborate on the psychic consequences of the trajectory of each person's developmental career.

RECOMMENDED READING

Lacan's central writings are published complete by a number of publishers. These papers were first published in a collection by Éditions du Seuil in 1966. An English translation by Tavistock Publications was published in 1977 and consequently by Routledge in 1989. The latest edition by Routledge is,

Lacan, J. (2004) *Écrits: a Selection*, Routledge Classics

As I mentioned above, reading Lacan at source is challenging and there are a number of summary accounts of Lacanian theory that provide a more accessible introduction to his body of work and, thus, a door into the Lacanian world. These include introductions by; Jean-Michel Rabaté in both the 'Cambridge Companion to Lacan' and 'Lacan in America'; Judith Feher Gurewich in 'The Subject and the Self: Lacan and American Psychoanalysis'; and Jacqueline Rose in 'Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne. Indeed, feminist psychoanalysis and social theory represent one of the most fertile areas for the development of Lacanian thought. This development is further discussed by Anthony Elliot in his comprehensive book, 'Psychoanalytic Theory; an Introduction', which also places Lacanian theory with a broader psychoanalytic developmental context and offers a critique of its status as a post-modernist philosophy.

Elliot, A. (1994). *Psychoanalytic Theory: an Introduction*. Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers

Rose, J. and Mitchell, J (Eds) (1982). *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*. London: Macmillan

Rabaté, J-M (Ed) (2000). *Lacan in America*. New York; Other Press

Rabaté, J-M (Ed) (2003). *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Gurewich, J., Tort, M. and Fairfield, S. (Eds) (1998). *The Subject and the Self: Lacan and American Psychoanalysis*. Northvale, NJ and London: Jason Aronson Inc.

The title, “A Brief History of Life, the Universe and Everything”, represents a thematic combination of Stephen Hawkins’ (1988) book, ‘A Brief History of Time’, and Douglas Adams’ (2005) ‘The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy’. ‘A Brief History of Time’ was one of the first best-selling books to summarise contemporary developments of Einstein’s theories (amongst others) for a lay public – a very Bernian project, perhaps. ‘The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy’, also a play first serialised and broadcast by the BBC and, more recently (2005) made into a film, refers to the title of a mythical book that offers answers to “everything you ever wanted to know but couldn’t be bothered to ask” – a very therapeutic project, perhaps. I add ‘The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy’ to this recommend reading list since it represents, to me, one of the best and, importantly, *entertaining* examples of post-modernist philosophy; summed up by the claim that, “It’s an important and popular fact that things are not always what they seem.” Indeed, during the course of the story we come across a fish that translates, a spaceship that uses an improbability drive, and a computer that calculates the answer to life, the universe and everything, built by people who wanted “something simple”; a very transactional analytic project, perhaps. The answer; 42, which illustrates the tendency for over-simplified answers to beg further exploration of the question.

Adams, D. (2005) *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, London; Pan

REFERENCES

- Allen, J. (2003). *Concepts, Competencies and Interpretative Communities*. Transactional Analysis Journal 33 (2): 126-147
- Berne, E. (1961). *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy*. London: Souvenir Press Ltd.
- Berne, E. (1966). *Principles of Group Treatment*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Berne, E. (1972). *What do you do after you say hello?* New York: Grove Press Inc.
- Cornell, W. & Hargaden, H. (2005). *Introduction*, in W. Cornell & H. Hargaden (Eds) *From Transactions to Relations: the Emergence of a Relational Tradition in Transactional Analysis* (5 – 20) Chadlington: Haddon Press
- Elliot, A. (1994). *Psychoanalytic Theory: an Introduction*. Oxford and Malden, MA; Blackwell Publishers
- Elliot, T. S. (1917). *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. In *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Elliot* (1969). London: Faber and Faber, pages 13-17
- Erskine, R. (1988). *Ego Structure, Intrapsychic Function, and Defence Mechanisms: a Commentary on Eric Berne’s Original Theoretical Concepts*. TAJ 18 (1): 15-19
- Erskine, R. and Moursund, J. (1988). *Integrative Psychotherapy in Action*. Gestalt Journal Press
- Gurewich, J. (1998). *Who’s Afraid of Jacques Lacan?* In Gurewich, J., Tort, M. and Fairfield, S (Eds) *The Subject and the Self: Lacan and American Psychoanalysis*. Northvale, NJ and London; Jason Aronson Inc.
- Hargaden, H. and Sills, C. (2002). *Transactional Analysis; a relational perspective*. London: Brunner-Routledge

- Hawkins, S. (1988). *A Brief History of Time*. Kent: Transworld Publishing Ltd.
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and Time*. New York: Harper & Row
- Hollinger, R. (1994). *Postmodernism and the Social Sciences*. London: Sage
- Kuhn, T. (1962/1970). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Lacan, J. (1949/2004). *Le Stade du Miroir comme Formateur de la Fonction du Je (The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I)*. *Revue Française de Psychanalyse*, 4, 449-455. In *Ecrits; a Selection*. London and New York; Routledge Classics
- Leahey, T. (1992). *A History of Psychology; Main Currents in Psychological Thought*, 3rd Edition. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey; Prentice Hall
- Loria, B. (1990). *Epistemology and Reification of Metaphor in Transactional Analysis*. *TAJ* 20: 152-61
- Loria, B. (2003). *Whither Transactional Analysis: Obsolescence or Paradigmatic Shift?* *TAJ* 33 (2): 192-200
- Moiso, C. and Novellino, M. (2000). *An overview of the psychodynamic school of transactional analysis and its epistemological foundations*. *TAJ* 30 (3): 182-91
- Novellino, M. (2005). *Transactional Psychoanalysis; Epistemological Foundations*. *TAJ* 35 (2): 157-172
- Roudinesco, E. (1994). *Jacques Lacan*. New York: Columbia University Press
- Schwartz, J. (1999). *Cassandra's Daughter; a History of Psychoanalysis*. New York, London: Viking Penguin
- Smith, M. (1998). *Social Science in Question*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Open University
- Stern, D. (2000). *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* (2nd edn). London: Karnac Books