

Lecture 4

Lecture 4 (Lacanian) Psychoanalysis

Coexistent Perspectives (ADAA7000)



the aim of this lecture is to provide an overview of some of the key concepts of (**Lacanian**) **Psychoanalysis** with examples of its expression within art practice.

Content note: this lecture discusses trauma, childhood abuse, psychosis and compulsive eating in relation to artists' lives and work.

Lecture **map**

Nine short blocks. The three registers (Imaginary, Symbolic, Real) are the thread that runs through all of them.

1 Freud, Lacan, Jung

Three maps of the mind; the three registers

2 The subject and language

Descartes inverted; “a letter always arrives at its destination”

3 The mirror and the gaze

Mirror stage; Fujiwara; Holbein’s skull; Lacan vs Mulvey; Cézanne

4 The unconscious and dreams

Goya; Neshat; Deren; Lynch

5 The three registers and the Law

The phallus as signifier; Oedipus; Antigone

6 Lacan and the feminine

Fillette; Irigaray, Kristeva, Cixous; Ettinger

7 Desire, drive and the Real

objet a, das Ding, jouissance; Lee Price; Richter; Stalker

8 Symptom and cure

The sinthome; Bourgeois; Kusama; Bacon

9 Coda: psychosis and AI

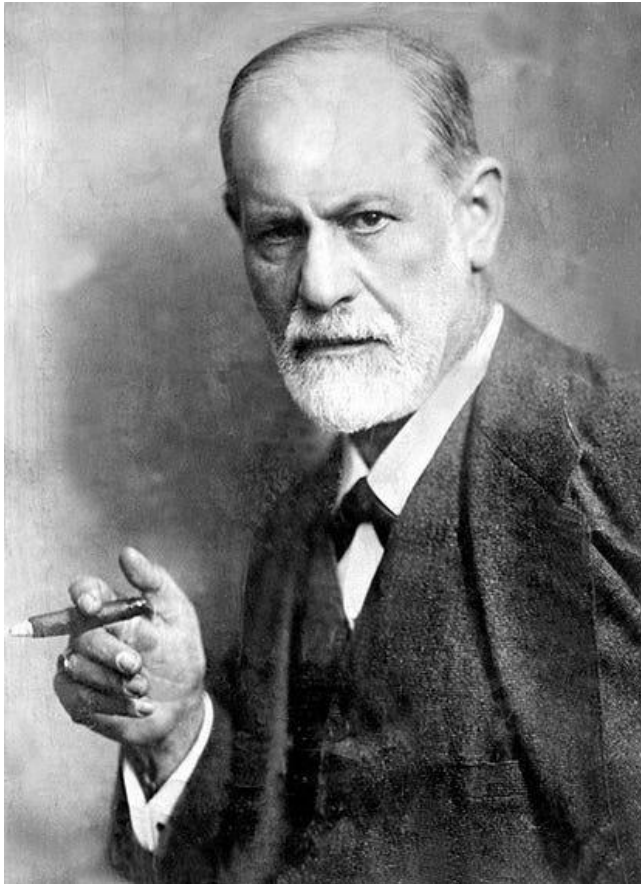
Marcus Coates; Lacan on psychosis; the subject supposed to know

Jacques Lacan

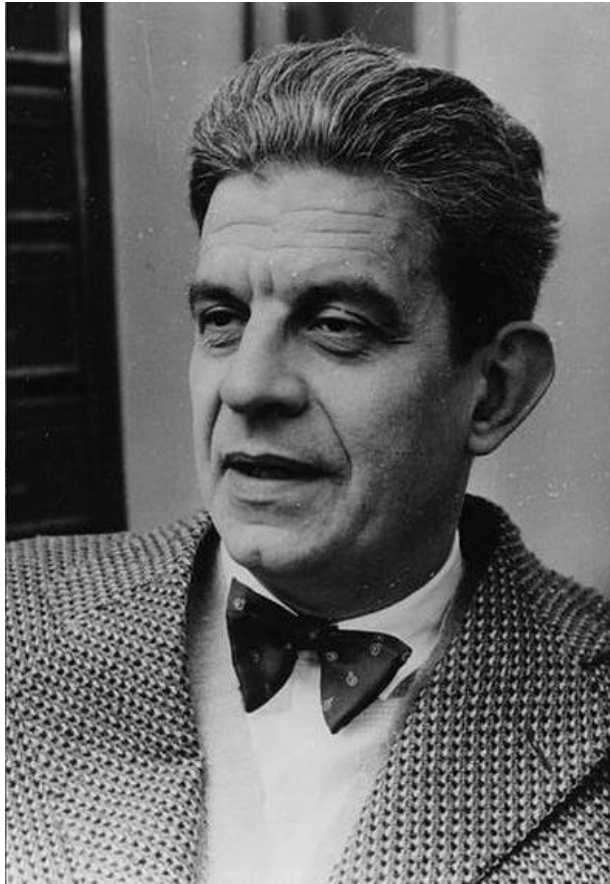
(1901-1981)



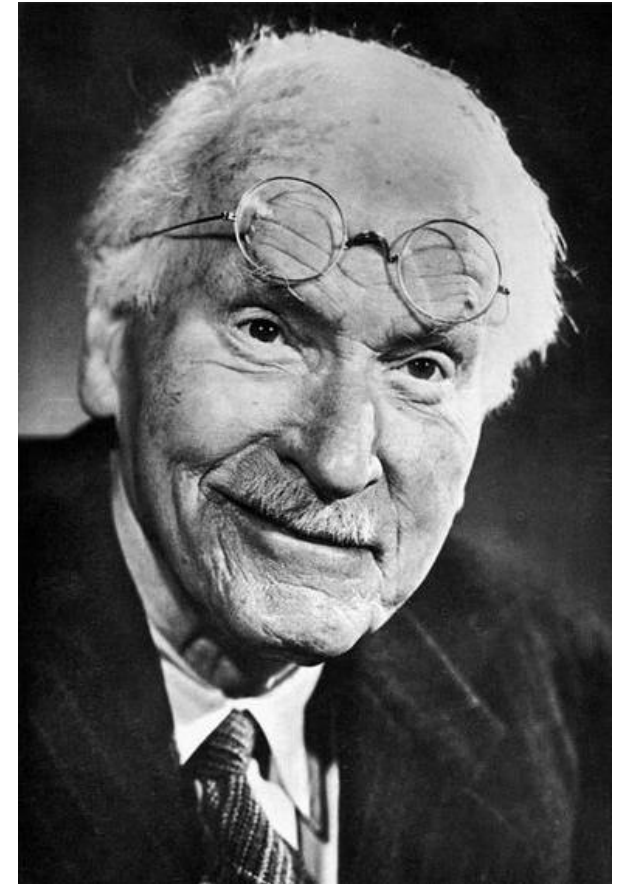
Overall, the theories of **Carl Jung**, **Jacques Lacan**, and **Sigmund Freud** provide valuable insights into **the role of language, symbols, and the unconscious** in shaping human experience and identity.



Sigmund Freud (1856-1939):
Developed psychoanalysis, emphasizing **biological** drives, the unconscious, and the role of repression.



Jacques Lacan (1901-1981):
Reinterpreted Freud, focusing on the role of **language**, symbols, and the unconscious structured as a language.



Carl Jung (1875-1961):
Diverged from Freud, focusing on the **collective unconscious** and archetypes that influence human behavior.

Structures of the Mind



Structures of the Mind

Freud's Two Models of the Mind

- **Conscious Mind:** Freud's first, topographic model (1900) divides the mind into conscious, preconscious and unconscious. The conscious mind contains thoughts and perceptions we are currently aware of.
- **Preconscious Mind:** This is the region where thoughts and memories that are not currently in conscious awareness reside. They can be easily brought into consciousness.
- **Unconscious Mind:** According to Freud, the largest and most influential part of the mind is the unconscious. It contains repressed memories, desires, and unresolved conflicts that influence our behavior and thoughts without our awareness.
- **Id:** In Freud's later, structural model (1923), the id is the primal, instinctual part of the mind, driven by the **pleasure principle**. It seeks immediate **gratification of desires** and operates on unconscious, primitive impulses.
- **Ego:** The ego is the **rational, conscious** part of the mind. It **mediates between the id and the superego**, striving to balance desires with social norms and reality.
- **Superego:** The superego represents our **internalised moral and societal values**. It functions as a **moral compass**, enforcing rules and standards.

Lacan's Three Registers (and the Other):

- **Imaginary:** The imaginary realm involves the formation of a **unified self-image** through identification with an image: one's own reflection, or another person. It is the register of the ego and the **"mirror stage."**
- **Symbolic:** The symbolic realm is characterized by **language, symbols, and cultural norms**. It is where we develop our sense of self in relation to others and where we construct meaning through language.
- **Real:** The real is an **elusive and abstract dimension beyond our direct comprehension**. It represents that which cannot be fully represented in language or symbols. The real is often associated with the irrational, traumatic, and unrepresentable aspects of the human experience.
- **The Other:** Lacan introduced the concept of **"the Other"** to represent the external, societal influences that shape an individual's sense of self and identity. **The Other is a key element in Lacanian psychoanalysis.**

Freud's theory has a stronger **biological** emphasis, while **Lacan's theory** places more emphasis on **the symbolic and linguistic** dimensions of human psychology. Note that the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real are **registers of experience, knotted together**, not compartments of the mind.

Structures of the Mind

From Freud to Lacan

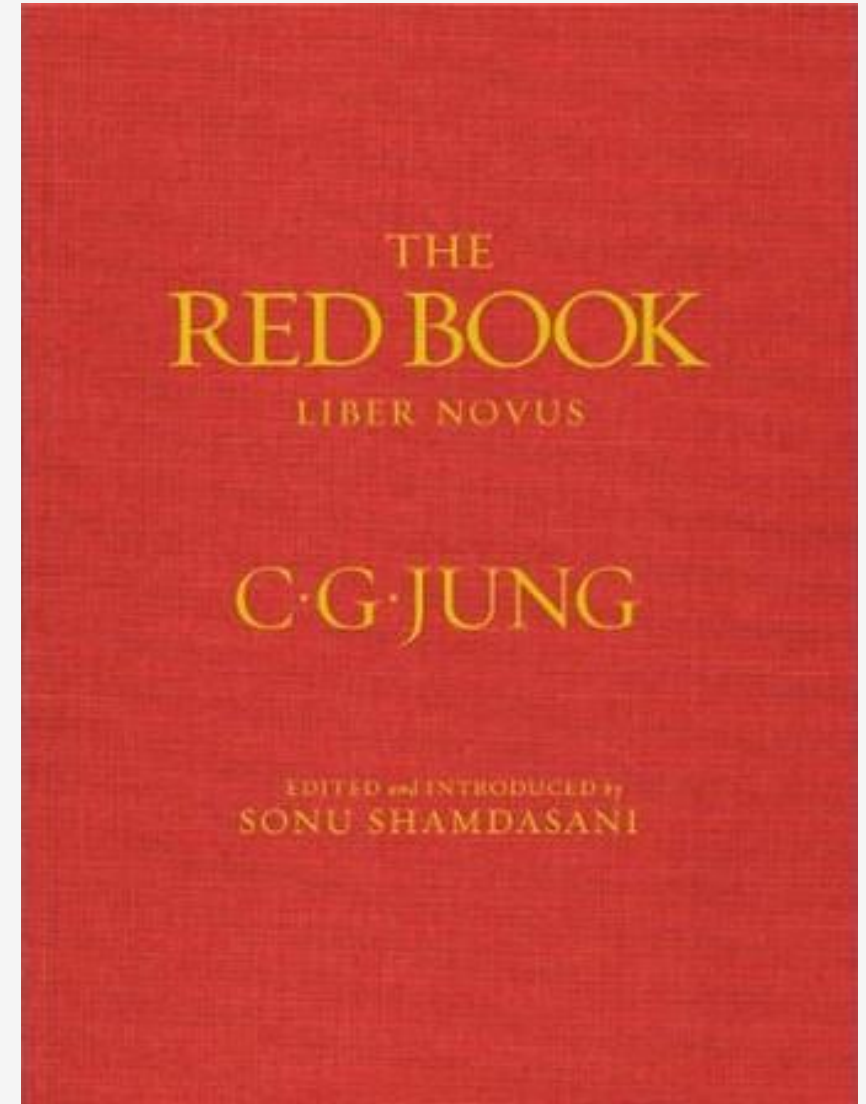
- **Freud's** emphasis on the **biological roots** of human psychology set the foundation for understanding the **unconscious mind**.
- **Lacan's** Reinterpretation, however, shifted the focus to **language** and **symbolism**, introducing new ideas about how humans are structured by the **Symbolic order** and the role of **desire**.
- This transition highlights how psychoanalysis evolved from a **biologically rooted theory** to one that focuses on **linguistic and cultural structures**.
- **Key Differences:**
 - **Freud:** **Focus on biological drives**, **repression**, and the **id, ego, and superego**.
 - **Lacan:** **Focus on language**, the **Symbolic order**, and the **role of desire and lack**.

Jung's Structure of the Mind

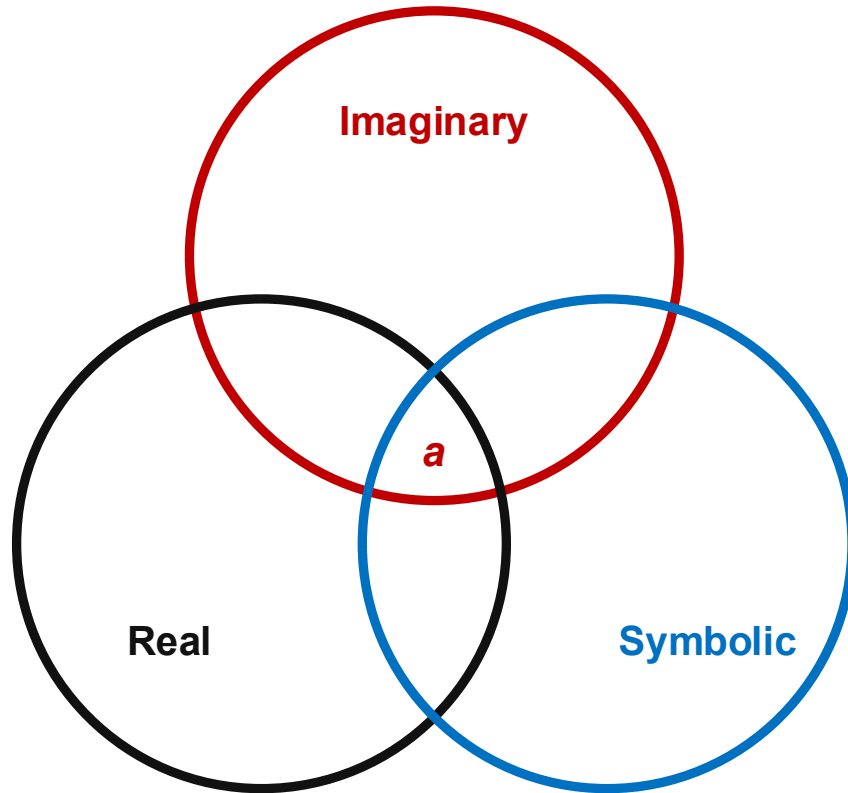
Jung's Contribution: **Personal unconscious** and **collective unconscious**, with **archetypes** like the **Shadow** and **Persona**.

Jung is the road not taken in this lecture: he broke with Freud in 1913. (The "Electra complex" was Jung's coinage; Freud rejected it.)

1. **Conscious Mind:** Jung's conscious mind is similar to Freud's conscious mind, containing thoughts, feelings, and perceptions that are currently within an individual's awareness.
2. **Personal Unconscious:** This aspect of the unconscious mind is unique to each individual and contains repressed or forgotten memories, experiences, and thoughts. Jung believed that exploring the personal unconscious could lead to greater self-awareness.
3. **Collective Unconscious:** Jung's most distinctive concept, the collective unconscious, is a deep and shared layer of the unconscious mind that is common to all humans. It contains universal, innate elements, including archetypes, which are symbolic representations of fundamental human experiences and themes. Archetypes, such as the Hero, the Shadow, and the Anima/Animus, are thought to influence our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and can be found in myths, legends, and cultural narratives worldwide.
4. **Archetypes:** These are recurring, universally recognizable symbols, themes, and characters found in the collective unconscious. They play a significant role in shaping an individual's personality, behavior, and experiences.
5. **Persona:** The persona is the social mask or facade that an individual presents to the outside world. It represents the public self and is influenced by societal and cultural norms.
6. **Shadow:** The shadow is the darker, hidden aspect of an individual's personality. It consists of repressed desires, fears, and instincts that the person is often unaware of. Integrating the shadow is a central goal of Jungian therapy.
7. **Anima and Animus:** The anima represents the feminine qualities within a man's psyche, while the animus represents the masculine qualities within a woman's psyche. They are important aspects of the unconscious that can lead to personal growth and balance.



A map for today: **Imaginary**, **Symbolic**, **Real**



Imaginary

Images, identification, the ego.

The mirror stage and the gaze (block 3).

Symbolic

Language, the Law, the big Other.

The subject, the unconscious “structured like a language”, the phallus and Oedipus (blocks 2, 4, 5).

Real

What resists symbolisation: trauma, the impossible, jouissance.

Desire, drive and the symptom (blocks 7, 8).

*These are registers of experience, not compartments of the mind. Every experience is knotted from all three. Lacan's knot is “Borromean”: cut any one ring and all three come apart. At the centre sits **objet a**, which we meet in block 7.*

the self and the subject

I think therefore **I am**

Lacan's inversion: *"I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think."*

"The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious" (1957), Écrits

The Nature of Subjectivity

Gilles Deleuze's and Jacques Lacan's theories of the subject are distinct and sometimes even divergent.

Deleuze: Deleuze's view of subjectivity is marked by fluidity, multiplicity, and becoming. He rejects the idea of a fixed and stable self, emphasising that subjectivity is a continuous process of transformation.

Lacan: Lacan's view of subjectivity is characterised by division and conflict. He posits that the subject is fundamentally split between the conscious ego and the unconscious, with desire and lack playing central roles.

the Lacanian Subject

the ego 'is not even master in its own house, but must content itself with scanty information of what is going on unconsciously in its mind.'

— Sigmund Freud, "A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis" (1917)

The notion of the 'subject' is not peculiar to Lacan, but rather is used widely in **post-structuralist theory** and in fact has its roots in the philosophy of Hegel.

Nevertheless, the idea of **the subject** is used very effectively in **Lacanian psychoanalysis** to emphasize the way in which the 'person' is not in control of her or himself, but is rather a kind of **alienated** being at the mercy of certain kinds of **internal and external forces**.

Whereas much psychoanalysis and psychotherapy is humanistic in its orientation, taking the person as its core interest (sometimes using terms like 'self' or even 'ego' to substitute for 'person'), Lacanianism places the **locus of subjectivity outside** the person. In this way it is probably closer to Freud's view that **the ego 'is not even master in its own house, but must content itself with scanty information of what is going on unconsciously in its mind.'**

What this nicely captures is the way in which **the subject might be the source of action and meaning, but is also subject to forces that operate upon it, notably in the form of unconscious impulses** and in the activities of what Lacanians call the 'big Other' of society.

Lacan and Language

One of Lacan's early achievements was to integrate
structuralism with phenomenology

Lacanian see language as a structure that pre-exists
the individual 'subject'.

"a letter always arrives at its destination"

For Lacanian psychoanalysis, language is not just an example of how the subject is affected by social and unconscious forces.

It is central to understanding human consciousness and also psychoanalysis itself, which is seen as a 'practice of speech'.

The first thing to note is that Lacan adopted a very modern view of language as performative. What this means is that language is understood not as something that merely reflects underlying thoughts (speech simply as putting ideas into words), but it does things.

The line closes Lacan's "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" (1956; *Écrits*). The letter, like the signifier, **determines the positions of those it passes between**, and the sender receives his own message back from the Other in inverted form. Derrida replied that a letter can always *not* arrive ("Le facteur de la vérité", 1975).

The Mirror Stage

The Birth of the Ego

For Lacan the mirror stage – in which an infant begins to recognise their own image in a mirror – was not just part of childhood mental development but also a key moment in the development of the ego and self-identity.

The infant jubilantly identifies with an image of a wholeness it does not yet have. Lacan calls this *méconnaissance* (misrecognition): the ego is founded on an image outside itself, an ideal self set against a fragmented reality.



The Mirror Stage

"all sorts of things in this world behave like mirrors"

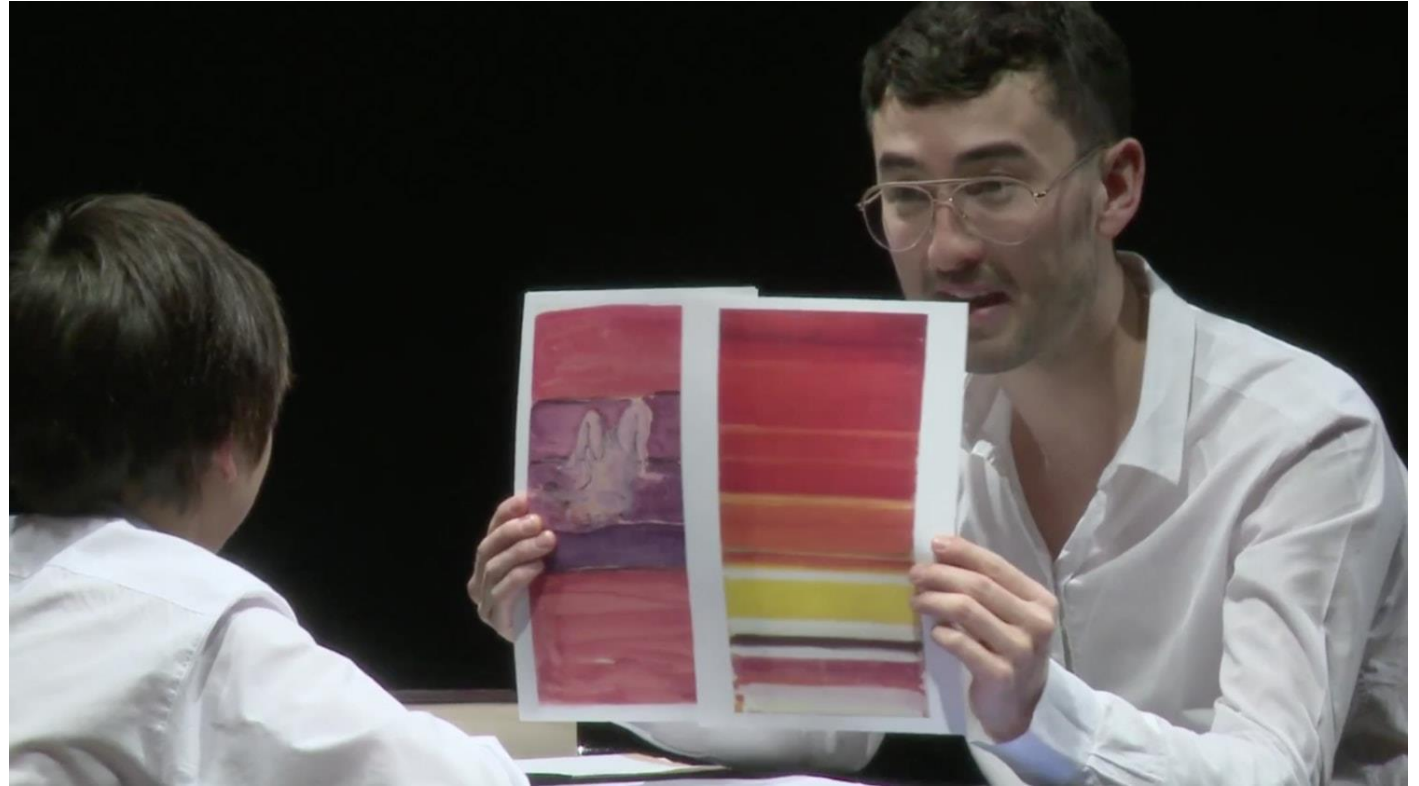
The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955, Jacques Lacan,



Lacan's 'Mirror Stage' Interpreted By Leonie Barth

We Want Images to Deceive Us

The Mirror Stage 2009–12 is a multipart video installation by the artist Simon Fujiwara. In this work the artist re-stages his first encounter, aged eleven, with the British modernist painter **Patrick Heron's *Horizontal Stripe Painting: November 1957 – January 1958*** at the Tate in his hometown of St Ives, Cornwall. The video included in the work recounts how Heron's painting elicited both an artistic and a sexual awakening – after which Fujiwara understood both that he wanted to be an artist but also that he was gay. In this way Fujiwara likened his encounter with Heron's painting to the function of the mirror in the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's theory of the mirror stage. **For Lacan the mirror stage – in which an infant begins to recognise their own image in a mirror – was not just part of childhood mental development but also a key moment in the development of the ego and self-identity.** With this work Fujiwara continues the performance of his own biography as fiction, which constitutes the basis of the majority of his practice.



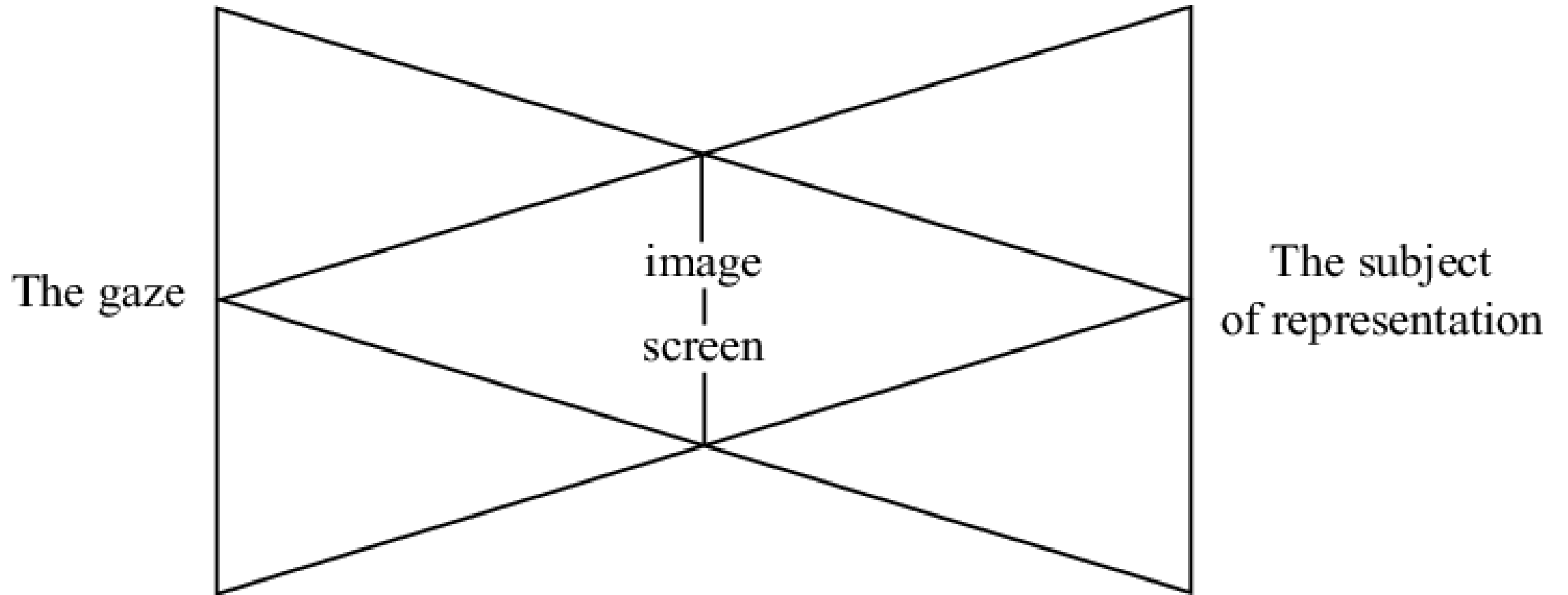
The Mirror Stage, 2009–12, Simon Fujiwara

Lacan's Concept of the Gaze



Hans Holbein the Younger, The Ambassadors (1533)
National Gallery, London

- The **gaze** is not my look, nor simply other people looking at me. It sits on the side of the object: the point in the visual field that **looks back** and implicates the viewer.
- Lacan calls it **objet a** in the field of vision: a stain or blind spot where the picture includes me (*Seminar XI*, 1964).
- The **gaze** undoes the mastery of the seeing subject: “I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides.”



The Gaze

Lacan's diagram of the gaze: the subject of representation and the gaze, crossing at the image/screen. Seminar XI (1964)

The **stain** in the picture

Hans Holbein the Younger, The Ambassadors (1533), National Gallery, London

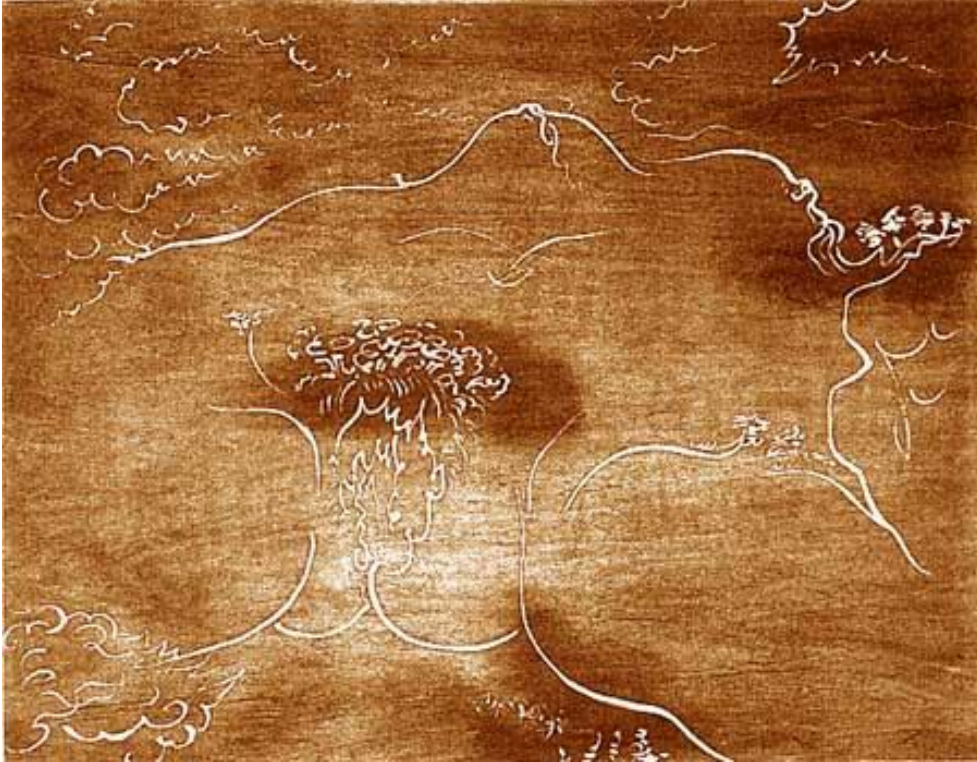


- In *Seminar XI* (1964) Lacan uses *The Ambassadors* to show the gaze at work.
- Seen head-on, the painting is a display of learning, wealth and mastery. A grey smear floats across the floor.
- Step to the side, at the edge of the room, and the smear resolves into a skull. At that moment the rest of the picture slides out of focus.
- The skull is where the picture “looks back”. It marks the viewer’s own place in the picture. This is the **gaze as objet a**: the stain we cannot see from where we stand.

“You see that can? Well, it doesn’t see you!” Lacan’s sardine-tin anecdote, *Seminar XI*. His reply: the can, glinting in the sun, was looking at him all the same.

Behind the **screen**

Lacan's hidden Courbet



- In 1955 Lacan and Sylvia Bataille bought Gustave Courbet's *L'Origine du monde* (1866).
- At their country house at Guitrancourt it hung behind a sliding wooden panel painted by André Masson (Sylvia's brother-in-law). The panel was an abstracted landscape tracing the contours of the hidden image.
- Lacan would slide the panel aside for chosen guests. The painting entered the Musée d'Orsay in 1995.
- A picture that hides a picture: the **screen**, the veil, and desire staged as a reveal. The gaze is not about seeing more. It is the point where looking gets caught.

Two gazes

Lacan's gaze is not the same as Mulvey's "male gaze"

Laura Mulvey

"Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", Screen (1975)

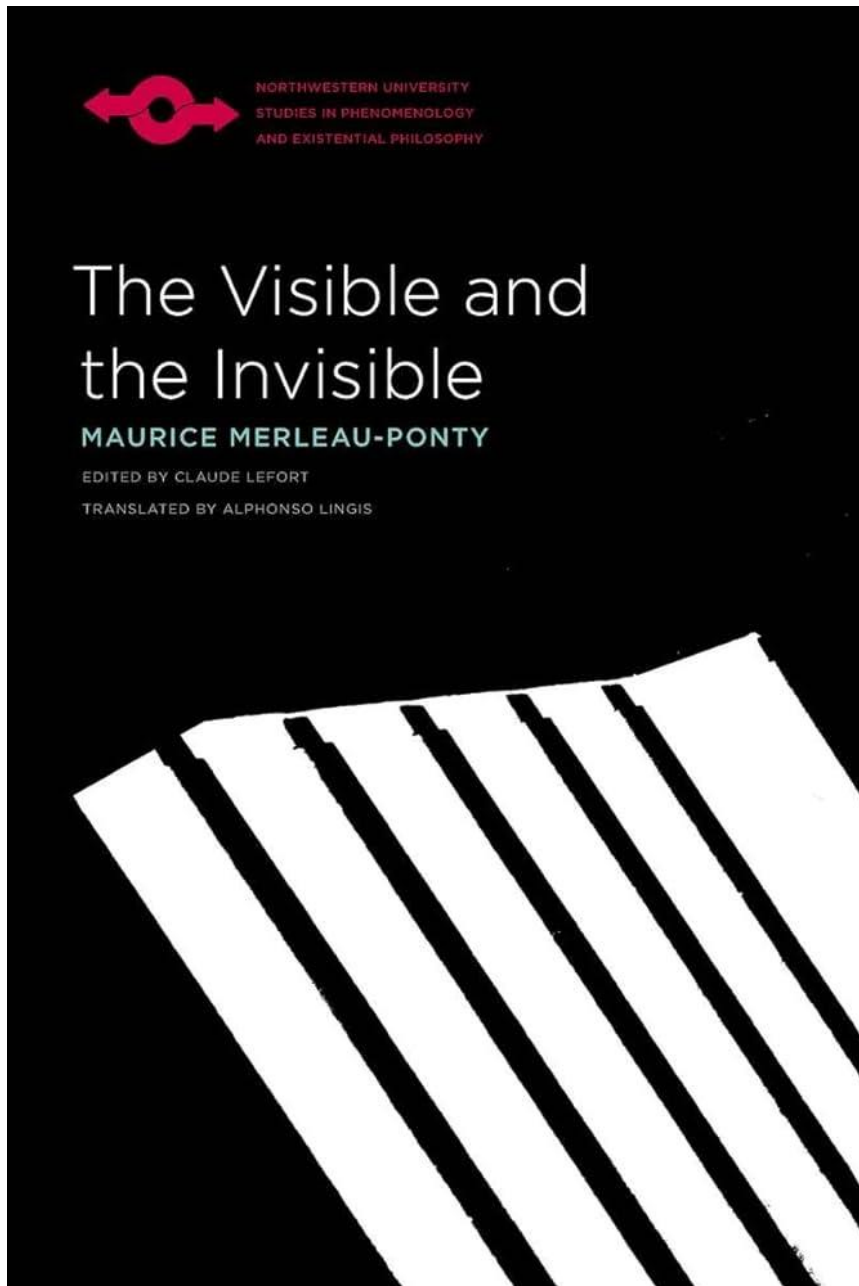
- The gaze is a **look**: active, possessive and coded male.
- Woman is positioned as image, defined by her "to-be-looked-at-ness".
- Cinema gives the spectator a position of **mastery**.
- Mulvey borrowed Lacan (especially the mirror stage) through 1970s Screen theory.

Jacques Lacan

Seminar XI (1964)

- The gaze is not a look but an **object** (objet a) in the visual field.
- It sits on the side of the thing seen: the point where the image looks back.
- It undoes mastery. The viewer is **caught in the picture**.
- Examples: the anamorphic skull; the sardine tin.

The standard correctives: Joan Copjec, "The Orthopsychic Subject", in *Read My Desire* (1994); Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory after Lacan* (2007).



The Visible and the Invisible

Lacan fused phenomenology with structuralism

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible* was published posthumously in 1964. Lacan's sessions on the gaze in *Seminar XI* that year open with it: both thinkers explore **perception, subjectivity**, and the relationship **between the visible and the invisible**.

- Phenomenology and Perception
- The Gaze and the Other
- The Symbolic Order
- Embodiment

Merleau-Ponty concentrated on **phenomenology** and the philosophy of **perception**, while **Lacan's primary domain was psychoanalysis**. Nevertheless, the shared exploration of **perception, embodiment, and subjectivity** makes Merleau-Ponty's work relevant and influential in understanding certain aspects of Lacan's theory.

“Pats of Paint”

“Pats of Paint” – involuntary traces of an instinctual act. In relation to Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of Cézanne’s application of paint to the surface of the canvas.

The Gap Between the Visible and the Representable

Lacan was drawn to the idea that Cézanne's work highlighted the gap between what is visible and what is representable.

Cézanne's paintings, characterised by the use of geometric shapes and multiple perspectives, demonstrated how the visible world could not be fully captured in a single, coherent representation.

Lacan's psychoanalytic theories often dealt with the idea of the unconscious and how it cannot be directly represented but only alluded to or symbolized.



Paul Cézanne, Lake Annecy (Le Lac d'Annecy), 1896, The Courtauld, London [check]

the **Unconscious**

*“The interpretation of
dreams is the royal road to
a knowledge of the
unconscious activities of the
mind.”*

SIGMUND FREUD

Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* was one of the most important books of the 20th century.

First published in 1900, it provides a groundbreaking theory of dreams and an innovative method for interpreting them that captivates readers to this day.

The book represents Freud's first major attempt to set out his theory of a dynamic unconscious, created in childhood, which operates continuously in every human mind.

For Freud, dreaming is a mental activity that follows its own logic. By identifying its mechanisms, Freud also shed new light on the workings of the unconscious and its powerful role in human life.



Title page of the first edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

The **Unconscious** is the Discourse of the **Other**

For Lacan, “The unconscious is structured like a language.” He meant that the unconscious is made up of “chains of repressed signifiers” that relate to one another through their own rules of metaphor and metonymy. These repressed signifiers express themselves through slips of the tongue, associations to dreams, mistaken actions, and through psychiatric symptoms. Metaphor corresponds to Freud’s condensation, metonymy to displacement.



Francisco Goya, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (*Los Caprichos*, no. 43), 1799



Shirin Neshat, from the Women of Allah series (1993–97)
[add title]

Dreams Are Where Our Fears Live

Shirin Neshat

Shirin Neshat's early photographic works include the Women of Allah series (1993–1997), which explored the question of gender in relation to Islamic fundamentalism and militancy. Her subsequent video works departed from overtly political content or critique in favor of more poetic imagery and narratives.

In her practice, she employs poetic imagery to engage with themes of gender and society, the individual and the collective, and the dialectical relationship between past and present, through the lens of her experiences of belonging and exile.





Shirin Neshat, *Land of Dreams* (2019). Simin, a young Iranian artist, goes door to door in New Mexico photographing residents and recording their dreams for an institution that archives them (in the 2021 feature film, the US Census Bureau). The unconscious becomes, quite literally, the discourse of the Other.



Shirin Neshat, *Illusions & Mirrors* (2013), from the *Dreamers* trilogy [check still]

Dreams are incredibly powerful. I think only in dreams are we free and naked. In dreams we search in the deepest regions of our soul, where we see who we are, what we are afraid of, and everything we want to use to avoid reality. — Shirin Neshat

Shirin Neshat – somnambulist, surrealist influences – from Maya Deren



Illusions & Mirrors (2013), Shirin Neshat



Meshes of the Afternoon (1943), Maya Deren

I was very fascinated by surrealist filmmakers, like Man Ray, Jean Cocteau, [Luis] Buñuel, and Maya Deren; in their work they even used the camera in a way that was very dreamy. It's kind of the logic of a dream that you are faced with references of reality, but nothing makes sense.

— Shirin Neshat



David Lynch, Rabbits (2002); the rabbits return in Inland Empire (2006)



David Lynch, Mulholland Drive (2001)

Jacques Lacan

Explaining the **Imaginary, the Symbolic,**
and the **Real**

Lacan described **three 'orders'** or
'registers' of psychoanalytic experience.
One of Lacan's major revisions to Freud's
thought is his emphasis on the "symbolic"
order and language.

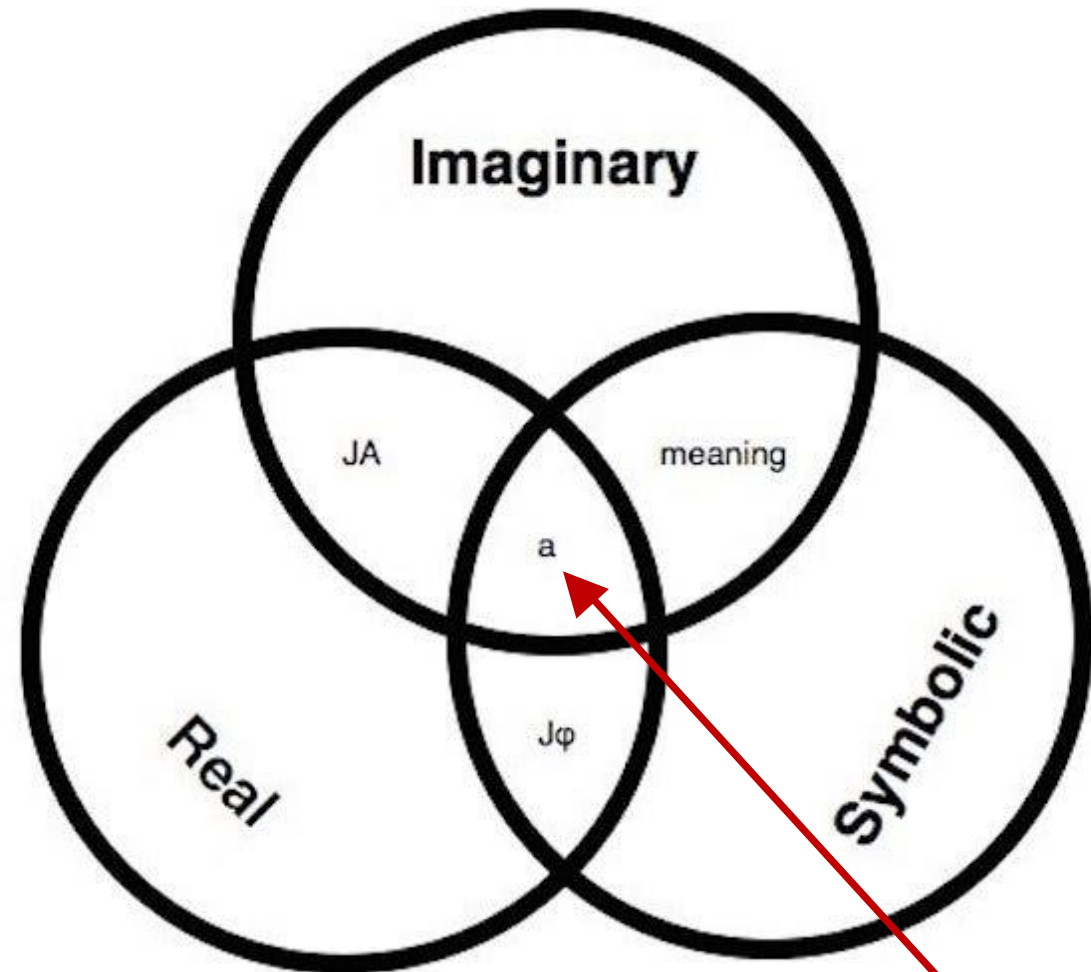


RSI and the Borromean Knot

Three Orders

The **IMAGINARY**, the **SYMBOLIC** and the **REAL** thus comprise a basic classification system which allows important distinctions to be drawn between concepts which, according to Lacan, had previously been confused in psychoanalytic theory.

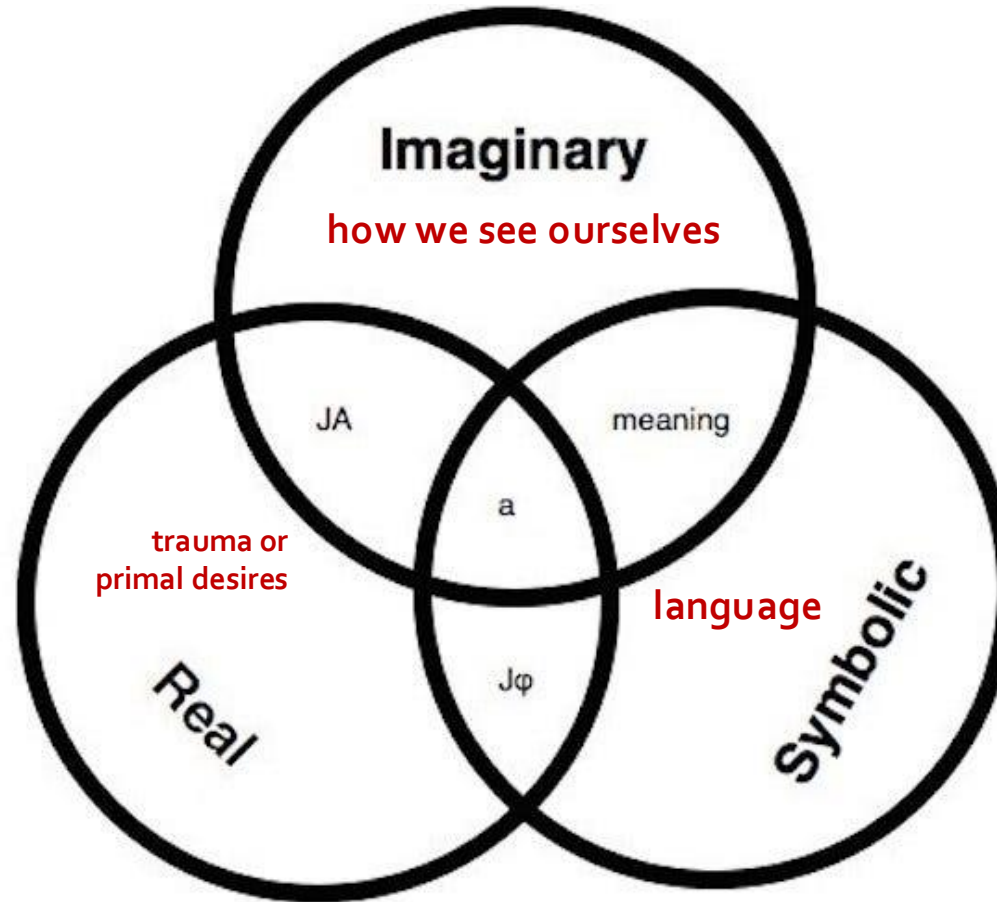
The three orders posited by Lacan—the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real—are always present in the psychoanalytic subject, and there is no sense in Lacan's thought that one order could or should become psychologically dominant through treatment. Indeed, the three orders, or “registers,” are strictly interdependent.



The **Real** is the realm of impossible enjoyment, the **Symbolic** refers to the symbolic order of language and communication, and the **Imaginary** is the domain of images with which we identify.

objet petit a

The Imaginary: The world of images and illusions, including the ego.



The Real: The realm beyond language and representation. It is where trauma resides.

The Symbolic: The realm of language, rules, and societal norms that structure our reality.

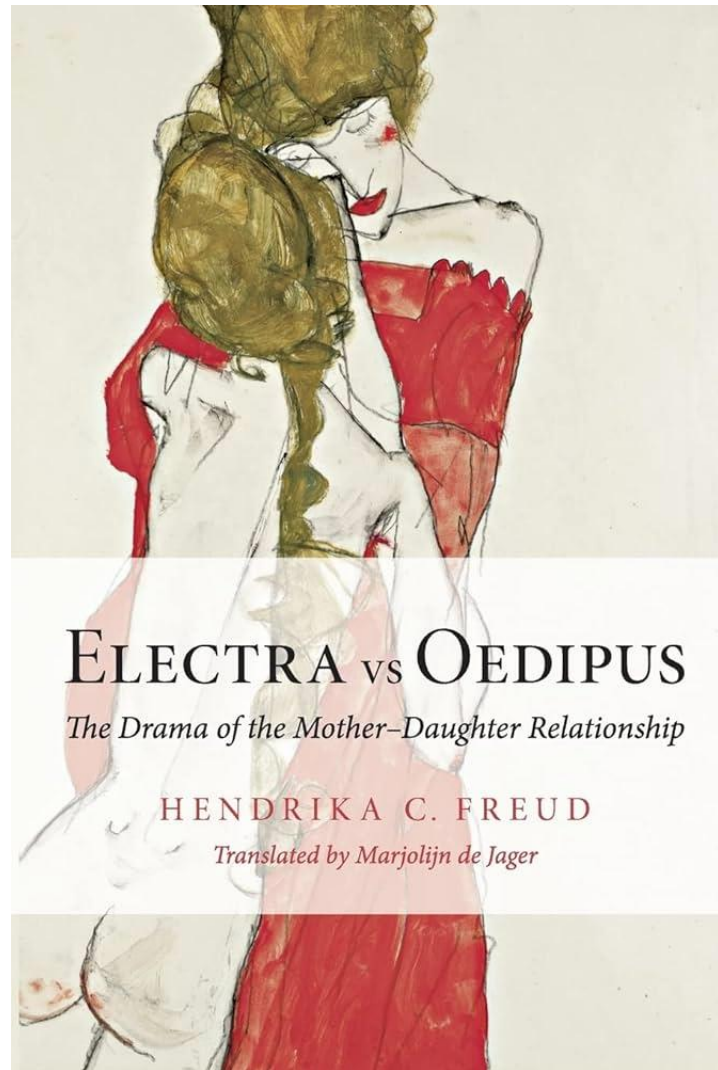
The Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic

the meaning of
the **phallus**



phallus – penis – phallogocentric - phallogocentrism

“The Signification of the Phallus” (1958): a signifier, not an organ. Nobody “has” it.



Hendrika C. Freud, *Electra vs Oedipus* (2011)



Oedipus and the Sphinx, Attic red-figure kylix, c. 470 BCE, Vatican Museums

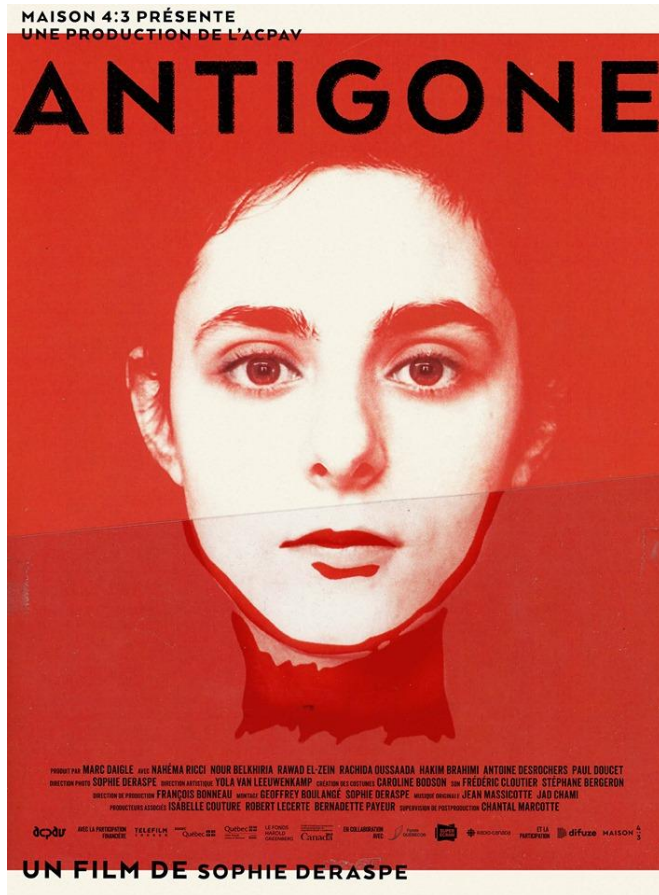
the **Oedipal Drama**, which introduces the **Law of the Father**

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the concepts of '**lack**', '**castration**', and the '**phallus**' are interrelated but distinct elements in the construction of **psychosexual identity and desire**.

- The relationships between these concepts can be summarized as follows:
- **Lack** is a fundamental aspect of human subjectivity, representing a sense of incompleteness or absence.
- **Castration** is symbolic: the child's passage through the Oedipus complex into the Symbolic, under the Name-of-the-Father (*le Nom du père / le Non du père*: the father's name and his "no"). It installs the Law and regulates desire.
- **The phallus** is not the penis but a signifier: the signifier of desire and of lack. Nobody actually "has" it.
- Together these concepts explain how sexual identity and desire are structured by the Symbolic order.

Antigone

Desire, Law, and the Real in Psychoanalysis



Antigone is one of the most sublime and in every respect most excellent works of art of all time. G.W.F. Hegel, Aesthetics.

- **Antigone's Defiance**

In Sophocles' play, Antigone defies King Creon's law by burying her brother Polyneices, prioritising familial duty over societal law. Her actions challenge the **Symbolic order** (social rules and laws).

- **Lacan's Interpretation**

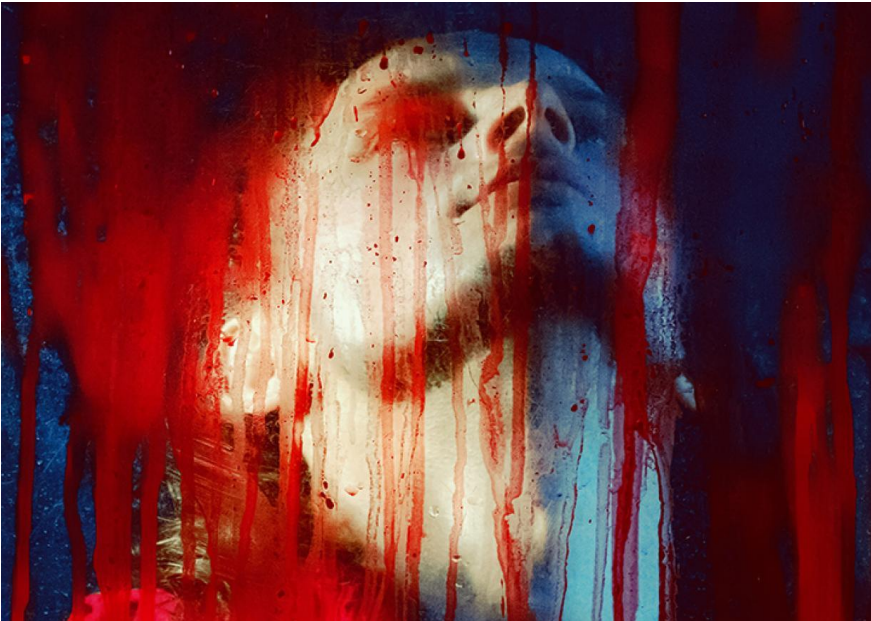
For Lacan, Antigone represents **absolute desire**, one that defies the **Symbolic Law** and enters the realm of the **Real**. She is driven by an uncompromising ethical commitment that transcends the constraints of society.

- **Lacan's ethical question (Seminar VII, 1959–60)**

"Have you acted in conformity with the desire that is in you?"
Antigone does not give ground on her desire (*ne pas céder sur son désir*), even unto death.

Antigone vs. Oedipus

Family Dynamics and Ethical Desire



- **Oedipus Complex**

Freud's Oedipus complex focuses on the child's repressed desire for the parent, resulting in **guilt** and **internal conflict**.

- **Antigone's Desire**

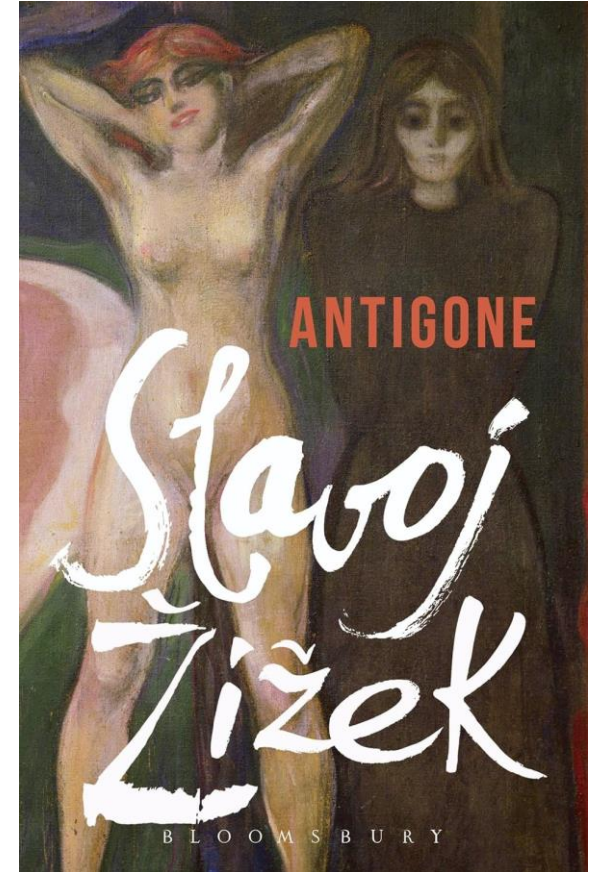
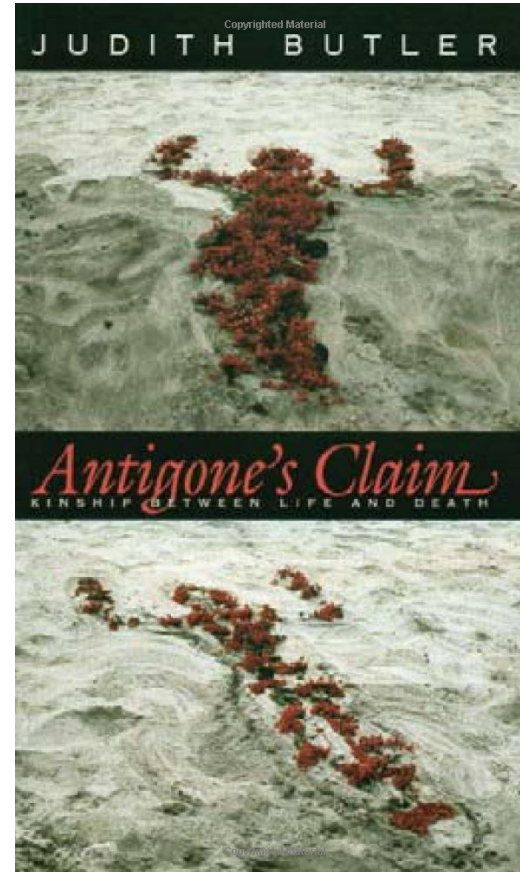
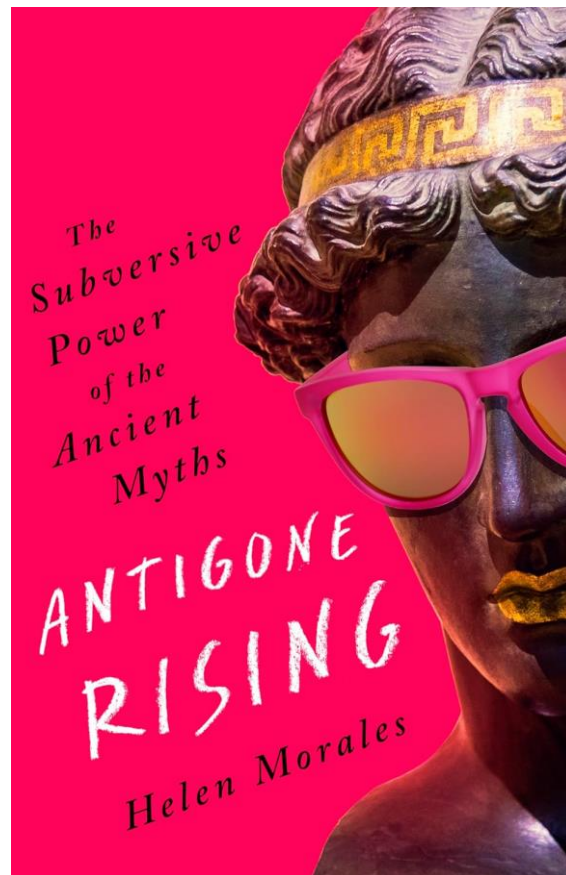
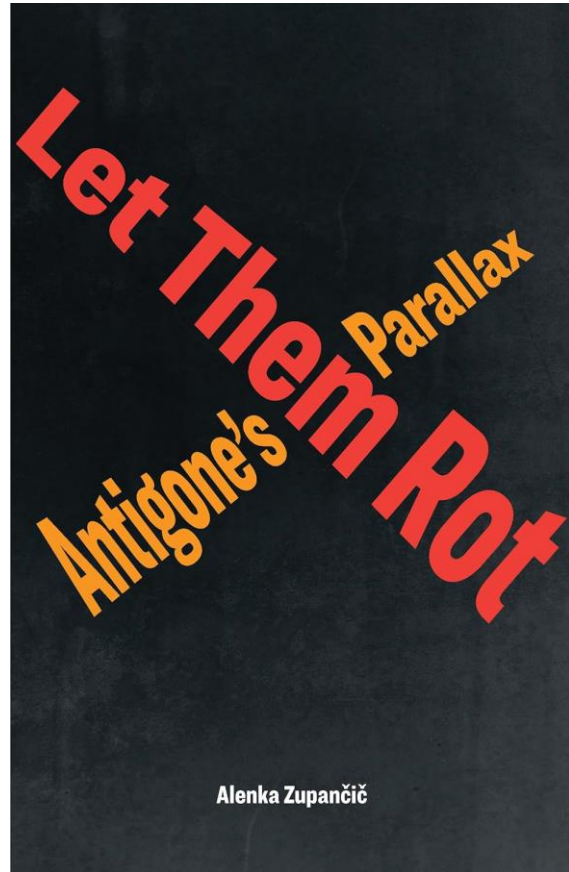
Antigone's devotion to her brother Polyneices introduces a broader **family dynamic** in psychoanalysis, where desire is not repressed but acted upon. Her defiance of societal rules reflects a **desire beyond the Symbolic order**, aligned with Lacan's notion of ethical desire.

Oedipus:

Desire → Repression → Guilt → Internal conflict.

Antigone:

Desire → Defiance → Ethical action → Confronting the Real.



Fillette

the phallus as a “little girl”



- Louise Bourgeois, *Fillette* (1968), latex over plaster: a large phallic sculpture titled “little girl”.
- For Mapplethorpe’s 1982 portrait she carried it under her arm like a handbag, grinning.
- Recap: for Lacan the phallus is a **signifier, not an organ**. Nobody “has” it. *Fillette* makes the joke visible, and asks who gets to name it.
- Next: the feminist critiques ask whether a theory organised around the phallic signifier can make room for feminine subjectivity at all.

Feminist Critiques of Lacan



Luce Irigaray accuses Lacan of maintaining a phallogentric focus, where the male viewpoint dominates psychoanalytic theory.



Julia Kristeva suggests Lacanian theory limits the feminine to the role of "lack" and absence.



Hélène Cixous critiques the symbolic order Lacan emphasizes as inherently masculinist, leaving little room for feminine subjectivity.

Can Lacanian psychoanalysis be adapted to support feminist perspectives, or is it too entrenched in phallogentric language?



Bracha Ettinger



Matrixial Theory

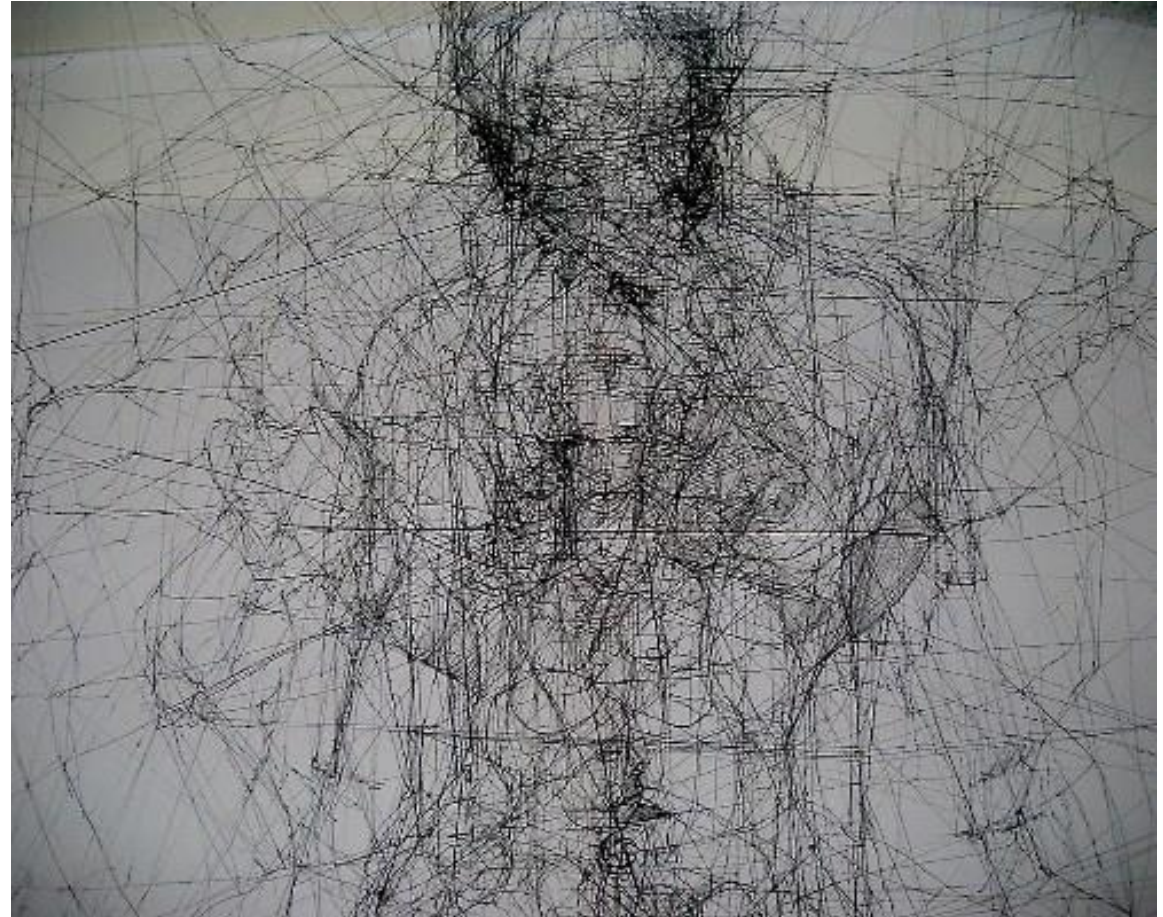
Disrupting **Phallic** Logic: (Re)thinking the Feminine

The Matrixial Gaze

Bracha Ettinger

the **matrix** and the **phallus**

Similar to Lacan's formulation, which is a metaphorical reference to anatomy to discuss symbolic masculine power, the matrix is a metaphorical reference to the uterus (matrix - womb) in order to discuss the origins of human ethics and relationality. This shift was "not just to exchange an organ (penis) and its image for another (womb), but to conceive of an alternative to the phallus in terms of structure, mechanism, functions, logic".



objet petit a

the object-cause of desire

the Thing

das Ding: the void at the centre of desire

jouissance

enjoyment beyond the pleasure principle

drives and **desire**

The **repetition** in Price's oeuvre might produce an unsettling or uneasy feeling in some viewers. In the realm of Lacanian psychoanalysis, this uneasiness is associated with what Sigmund Freud called the "**death drive**," the unconscious aim toward death. The drive toward death entails **repetition**, that is, it entails an attempt to go beyond the limits that reality imposes on pleasure. The uneasiness elicited by the **repetition** in Price's work is associated with the **death drive** because it signals a reduction of the gap between reality and the *objet petit a* qua Real object.



Lee Price: Self Portrait with Parfait in Floral Room.

What is a Photograph?

Punctum, Petit objet a, and the Richterian Blur

For Margaret Iversen, “Barthes’s **punctum** is equivalent to **Lacan’s gaze** or, in other words, to that which is elided in classical optics.” (“What Is a Photograph?”, Art History, 1994)



This makes sense in that both, **the punctum and the Lacanian gaze**, are indicators of lack: the **punctum** involves an “incapacity to name,” and the gaze is “a hole, a lack in [the subject’s] visual field—a something that, because it is present but cannot be seen, functions as a point of failure of the visual field” (in other words, it is what is irrevocably excluded from the field of the visible).



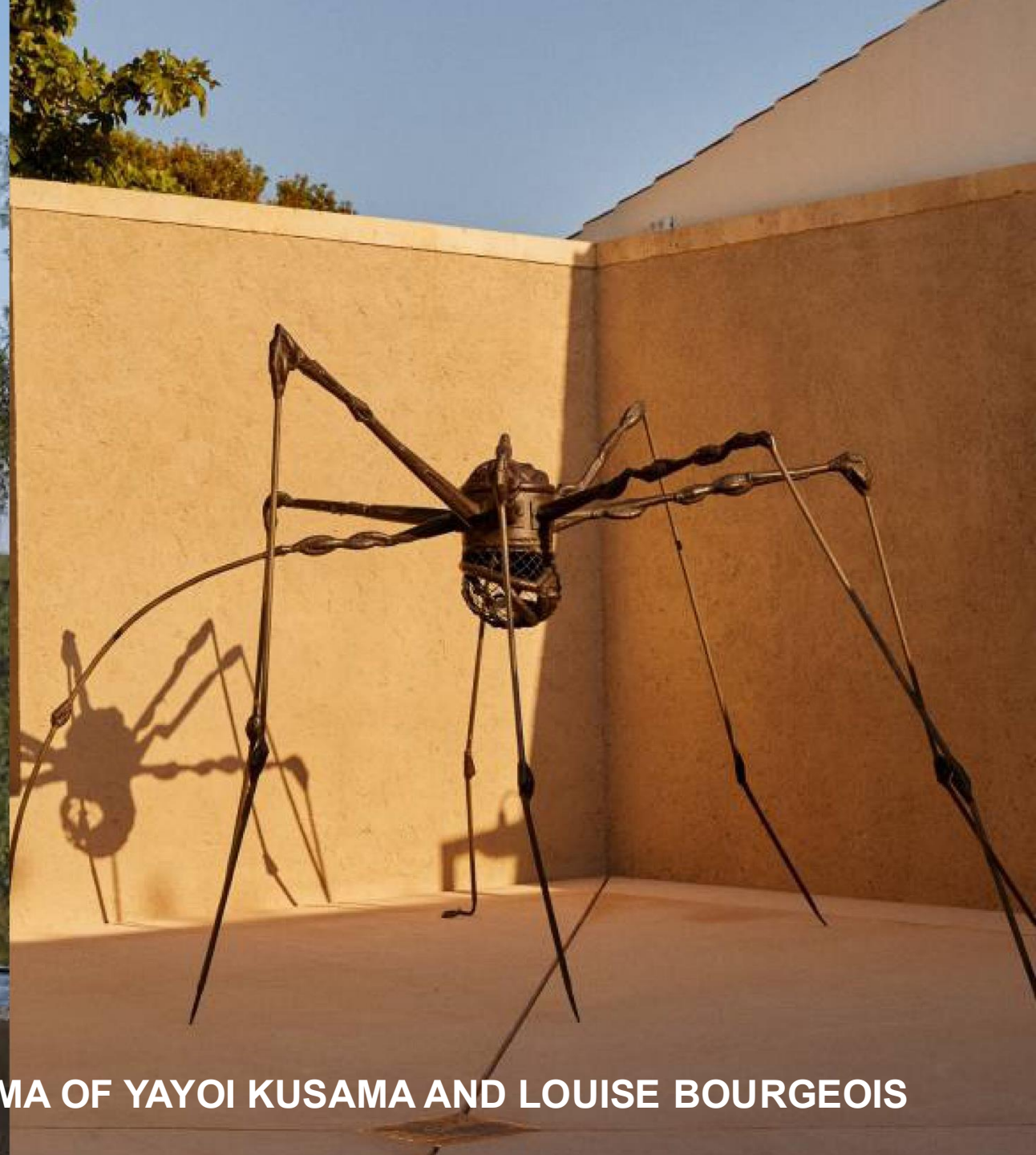
Stalker (1979), Andrei Tarkovsky

THE ROOM OF **DESIRE**

objet *petit a*

In the Zone a Room grants your innermost wish: not what you ask for (your **demand**), but what you unconsciously **desire**. Porcupine went in to bring back his dead brother, came home rich, and hanged himself.

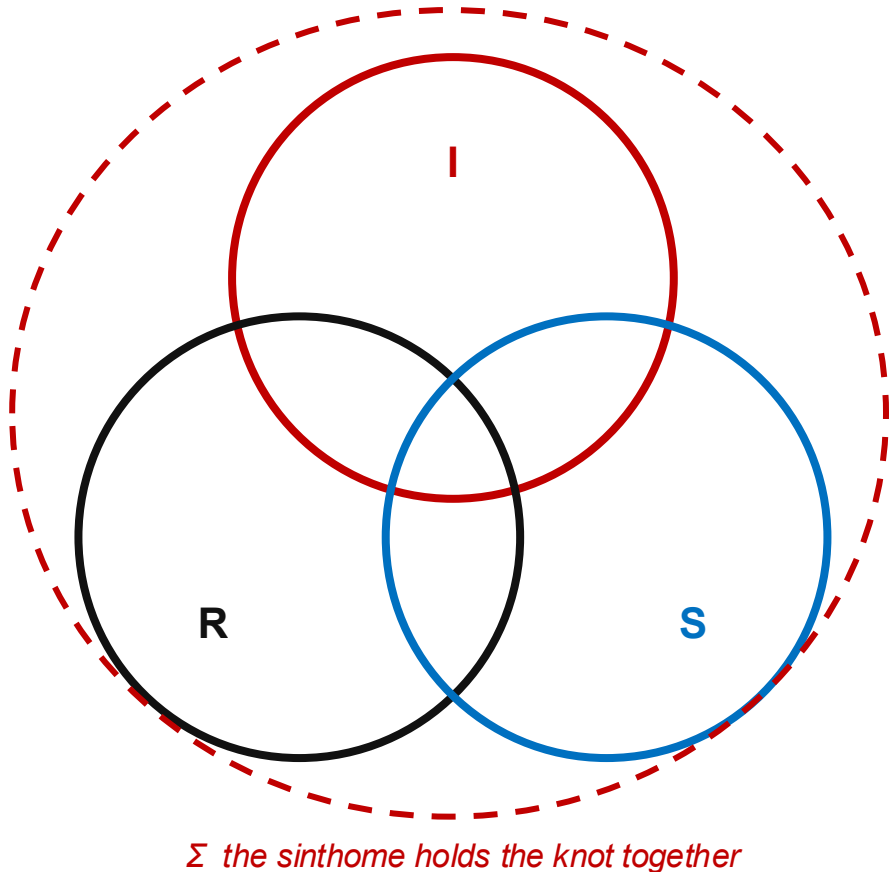
That is why no one dares enter. **Objet petit a** is not the thing we want but the **object-cause** of wanting, which never coincides with what we get. (On desire and capitalism, see Todd McGowan, *Capitalism and Desire*, 2016.)



SYMPTOM AND CURE: THE ART AND TRAUMA OF YAYOI KUSAMA AND LOUISE BOURGEOIS

The **sinthome**

art as the fourth ring...



- In his late seminar on James Joyce (*Seminar XXIII*, 1975–76) Lacan adds a fourth ring to the knot: the **sinthome**, an old spelling of *symptôme*.
- When the **Real, Symbolic and Imaginary** fail to hold together, a singular invention can knot them. For Lacan, Joyce's writing did this: it let him "make a name" for himself.
- The sinthome is not cured or interpreted away. It is a symptom one can live with, and use.
- Keep this in mind for Bourgeois ("artists repeat themselves... because they have no access to a cure"), Kusama and Bacon: **repetition as what holds a life together**.

A glimpse into the mind of Louise Bourgeois: art & psychoanalysis

“To be an artist involves some suffering. That’s why artists repeat themselves – because they have no access to a cure.”

“The connections that I make in my work are connections that I cannot face. They are really unconscious connections. The artist has the privilege of being in touch with his or her unconscious, and this is really a gift. It is the definition of sanity. It is the definition of self-realisation.”



Louise Bourgeois, *Hysterical*, 2001, fabric, stainless steel, glass, wood, and lead, 18 x 8 x 6 1/4"

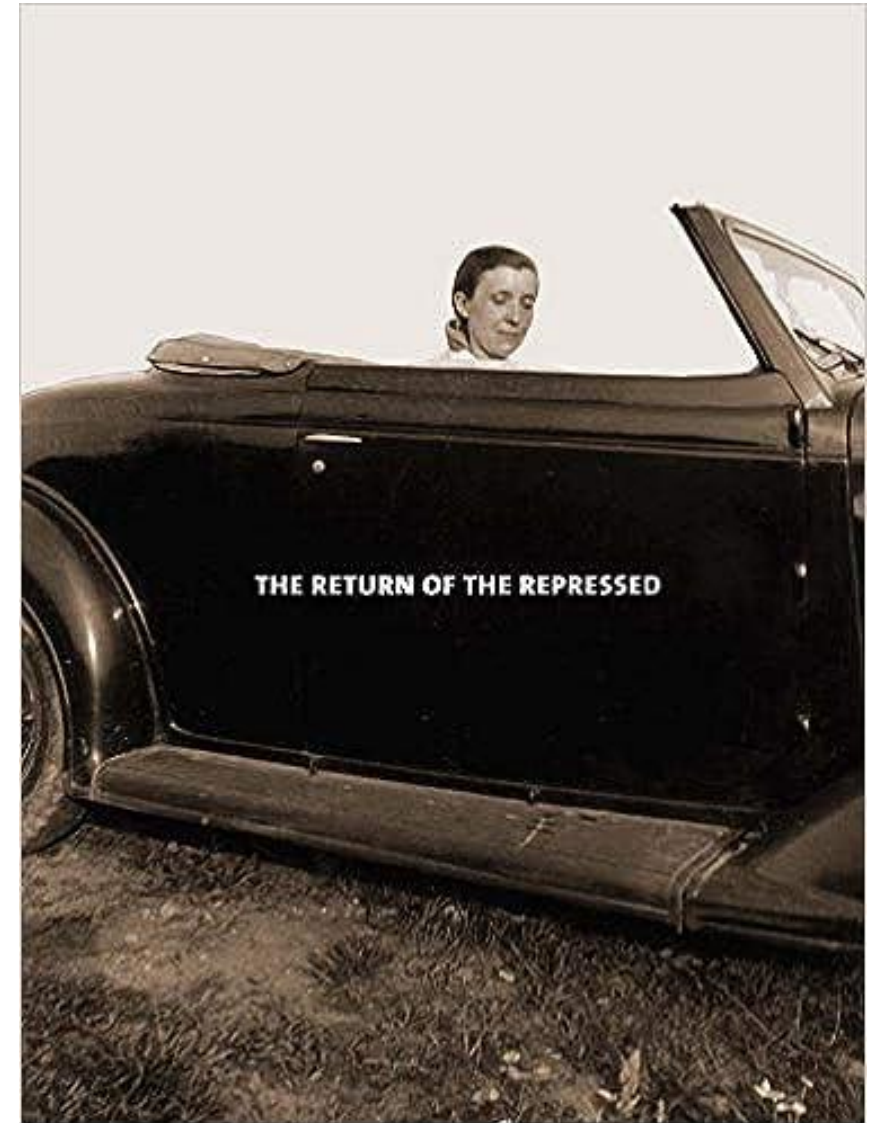
The Return of the **Repressed**

Freud's theory that repressed memories, desires, and emotions inevitably surface, often in disguised forms. This process is central to both neuroses and creativity.

Freud on The realm of imagination

"The realm of imagination was seen to be a "reservation" made during the painful transition from **the pleasure principle** to the reality principle in order to provide a substitute for instinctual satisfactions which had to be given up in real life. The artist, like the neurotic, had withdrawn from an unsatisfying reality into this world of imagination; but, unlike the neurotic, he knew how to find a way back from it and once more to get a firm foothold in reality. His creations, works of art, were the imaginary satisfactions of unconscious wishes, just as dreams are; and like them they were in the nature of compromises, since they too were forced to avoid any open conflict with the forces of repression. But they differed from the asocial, narcissistic products of dreaming in that they were calculated to arouse sympathetic interest in other people and were able to evoke and to satisfy the same unconscious wishful impulses in them too." — Sigmund Freud, *Autobiographical Study, Standard Edition, Vol. XX*, pp. 64–

65

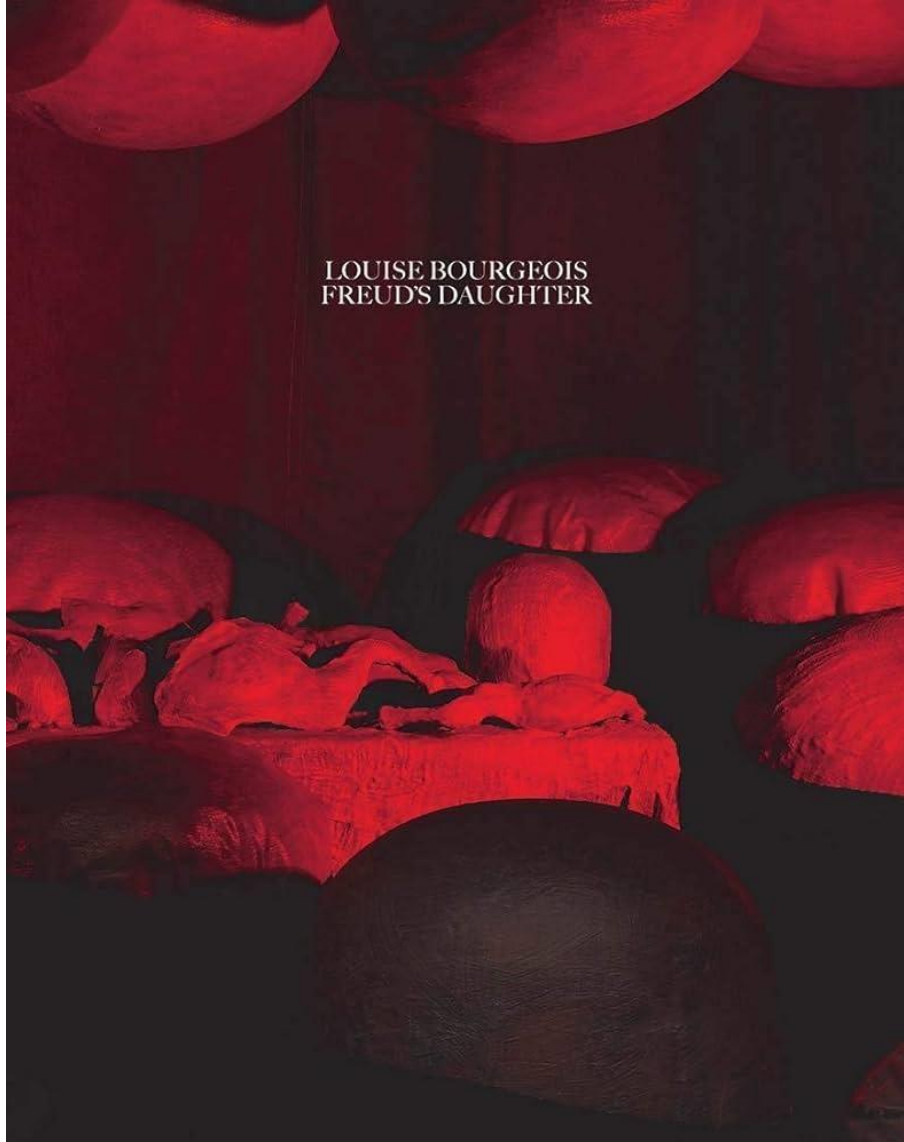


Louise Bourgeois: The Return of the Repressed
Psychoanalytic Writings

Louise Bourgeois Freud's Daughter

the exhibition "**Louise Bourgeois, Freud's Daughter**" explores Bourgeois's complex relationship with **Freudian psychoanalysis** through her art and writings.

Bourgeois' work is deeply autobiographical, revisiting her childhood traumas, repressed emotions, and unconscious desires. Her sculptures and installations often give physical form to psychological conflicts.





Louise Bourgeois – Freud's Daughter

Louise Bourgeois, a renowned French-American artist, drew inspiration from Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories, which influenced her work in several ways:

Louise Bourgeois' work is relevant to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories in its exploration of **the unconscious, the impact of early experiences, the expression of sexuality and desire, and the use of recurring symbols and motifs**. Her art is deeply psychological and reflects the enduring influence of Freudian concepts on the world of contemporary art.

- **Exploration of the Unconscious:** Bourgeois' art often delves into the realms of the unconscious mind, a concept central to Freud's psychoanalysis. Her sculptures, drawings, and installations frequently explore hidden or repressed aspects of human psychology, reflecting the idea that the unconscious plays a significant role in shaping behavior and emotions.
- **Recurring Motifs:** Bourgeois' work often features recurring motifs and symbols, such as spiders, cages, and anatomical forms. These motifs can be seen as representations of deep-seated psychological themes. For example, her spider sculptures have been interpreted as symbols of her mother's nurturing and, at times, suffocating presence, drawing from Freud's Oedipal complex.
- **Childhood and Trauma:** Freud's work on the influence of childhood experiences and traumas on adult psychology is evident in Bourgeois' art. She frequently revisited her own traumatic childhood experiences, such as her father's infidelity and her mother's death, in her work. These themes align with Freud's emphasis on early life experiences and their impact on later development.
- **Expression of Sexuality:** Bourgeois' art also touches on themes of sexuality, repression, and desire, which are central to Freud's psychoanalytic theories. Her exploration of the human body and its vulnerabilities, as well as the use of sexual and anatomical imagery, can be linked to Freud's discussions of sexuality and the subconscious.
- **The Unconscious as a Source of Creativity:** Like many artists influenced by psychoanalysis, Bourgeois saw the unconscious as a wellspring of creativity. Her ability to tap into her inner world and translate her emotions and experiences into art is in line with Freud's view of the creative process being rooted in unconscious drives and desires.

The Return of the Repressed

Louise Bourgeois' work can be assessed in the context of the Freudian concept of the **"return of the repressed"** as it reflects themes of **repressed memories, traumas, and emotions**. The **"return of the repressed"** is a key idea in Freud's psychoanalytic theory, referring to the reemergence of suppressed or unconscious material into conscious awareness, often resulting in psychological distress.

Louise Bourgeois' art can be assessed in relation to the return of the repressed as it explores the release of repressed emotions and memories, the use of recurring symbols, and the confrontation of the unconscious.

Her work serves as a visual and emotional exploration of the depths of the human psyche, providing a platform for viewers to engage with their own repressed material and emotional complexities.

- **Exploration of Trauma and Memory:** Many of Bourgeois' artworks delve into personal traumas and memories from her past, particularly her traumatic childhood experiences and complex family dynamics. Her sculptures, drawings, and installations serve as a means of confronting and expressing these repressed memories.
- **Release of Repressed Emotions:** Bourgeois' art can be seen as a method of releasing and working through repressed emotions. The act of creating art allows her to externalize and give form to the repressed material, providing a cathartic and therapeutic outlet for her inner struggles.
- **Recurrence of Symbols:** The recurrence of certain symbols and motifs in Bourgeois' work, such as spiders, cages, and body parts, can be interpreted as manifestations of the return of the repressed. These symbols often carry deep emotional and psychological significance, surfacing from the depths of her unconscious.
- **Confronting the Unconscious:** Bourgeois' art confronts the unconscious and brings the repressed material into the open, allowing viewers to engage with it. This process aligns with the Freudian idea that addressing and acknowledging repressed content can lead to a better understanding of one's psychological makeup.
- **Ambiguity and Disquiet:** Bourgeois' art is known for its ambiguity and the sense of disquiet it evokes. This can be attributed to the unresolved conflicts and repressed emotions that are woven into her work, mirroring the tension associated with the return of the repressed in psychoanalysis.
- **Personal and Universal Themes:** While Bourgeois' art draws from her personal experiences, it also taps into universal themes related to the return of the repressed. Viewers often resonate with the emotional and psychological content in her work, connecting with their own repressed material.

Key Works

The Return of the Repressed in Bourgeois' Art

Maman (1999): The giant spider represents Bourgeois' mother, who was a weaver. The spider is a symbol of protection but also evokes fear, representing the duality of repressed emotions—love and fear, protection and trauma.



Key Works

The Return of the Repressed in Bourgeois' Art

Cells (1991-2008): These installations are miniature rooms filled with symbolic objects that represent Bourgeois' repressed memories and emotions. The enclosed spaces reflect the internal compartments of the psyche.



Key Works

The Return of the Repressed in Bourgeois' Art

**Destruction of the Father
(1974):** A sculptural scene where
family members devour the father, this
work addresses Bourgeois' complex
relationship with her father and
repressed childhood rage.



Art as Catharsis



Robert Mapplethorpe, Louise Bourgeois (1982) [check]

The Therapeutic Process in Bourgeois' Work

- **Psychological Impact:** For Bourgeois, art was a way to release repressed emotions. She often described her creative process as therapeutic, helping her confront and express unconscious fears.
- **Connection to Freud:** Like Freud's neurotic patients, Bourgeois transformed her inner conflicts into external symbols—her artwork is a manifestation of the return of the repressed, where unresolved traumas find their way into the visible world.
- **A Lacanian reframe:** not catharsis or cure but the sinthome: a symptom she could live with, and work from.



Yayoi Kusama

THE MULTIPLICITY OF THE
PHALLUS:
BECOMING AND
REPETITION



Yayoi Kusama's Accumulation No. 1 (1962)

Infinity Mirror Room – Phalli's Field (1965) Yayoi Kusama

For Lacan, the **mirror image** is a lure: it offers the subject an image of a wholeness it never had. The ego is built on this *méconnaissance* (misrecognition); there is no “real self” hidden behind it.

Kusama's mirror rooms multiply that image to infinity, so that wholeness dissolves into repetition. Today visitors photograph themselves inside them: the Infinity Rooms have become **selfie machines**, a mirror stage for the smartphone age.





Installation view of *Narcissus Garden*, 1966, by Yayoi Kusama at Space Shifters, Hayward Gallery 2018.

Mirrors Reflect the Self as Identity and a unified construct of the psyche (which it's not – it's just an illusion)

The word itself is derived from the Latin mirari, which means 'to look at, to wonder at.' When a baby wonders at his or her reflection in the mirror for the very first time, an internal transformation is said to occur. This change is psychoanalyst **Jacques Lacan's theory of the 'mirror stage'**, which is described as **the moment that humans begin to realise their 'selves' exist separately from the world.** The **realisation of the 'self' is a violent process of internal change** that splits one's viewpoint of the world into two. Internal chaos of conflicting desires, fears and hopes of the child merge into a **construction of 'self,' while everything else becomes the 'other.'** By the time we are adults, we become used to looking at ourselves in the mirror. We are familiar with our own features, our own facial expressions. **Our identity solidifies as we study our own images in reflective objects.**

Melancholia/ Mania

There is a cyclical rhythm to the work of both **Bourgeois** and **Kusama**: manic **repetition and obsessive production** is met with **depressive withdrawal and melancholic annihilation**. This psychological and creative spiral – propelled by **what Freud termed the death drive** – persisted with growing intensity throughout their careers. Bourgeois confronted and repeated the traumatic implications of her childhood more intently over time; she was in her eighties when she began creating her powerful and iconic Cells, various enclosures filled with symbolic objects, sculptures and highly charged personal items. For her part, Kusama has increasingly sought to capture in her work the sense of **total obliteration** she describes in her hallucinations. Her striking mirrored Infinity Rooms recreate this disconnected state, bringing viewers inside Kusama's vision of endless time and the absoluteness of space.



Yayoi Kusama's Infinity Mirrored Room – The Souls Of Millions Of Light Years Away, 2013

Good Mother/Bad Mother

For Bourgeois and Kusama, the maternal figure played a complex and ambivalent role, waging traumas that persisted into adulthood and that found representation in their work.

Bourgeois repeatedly alluded to the conflicting emotions elicited by her mother as well as her own difficult experience of motherhood. The violence often evoked by her work confronts a taboo on maternal aggression: instead of presenting an exclusively nurturing and passive ideal of motherhood, Bourgeois stakes a claim for a potentially ferocious and powerful mother, an empowered feminine position that challenged gendered stereotypes and patriarchal authority. For Bourgeois, this aggressive yet protective force was embodied by the spider, which was often a stand-in for her own mother, a weaver and tapestry restorer.

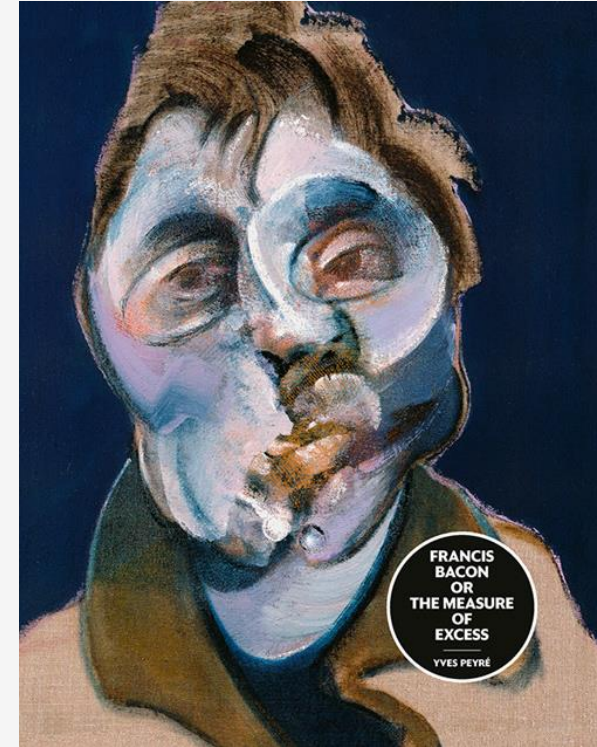
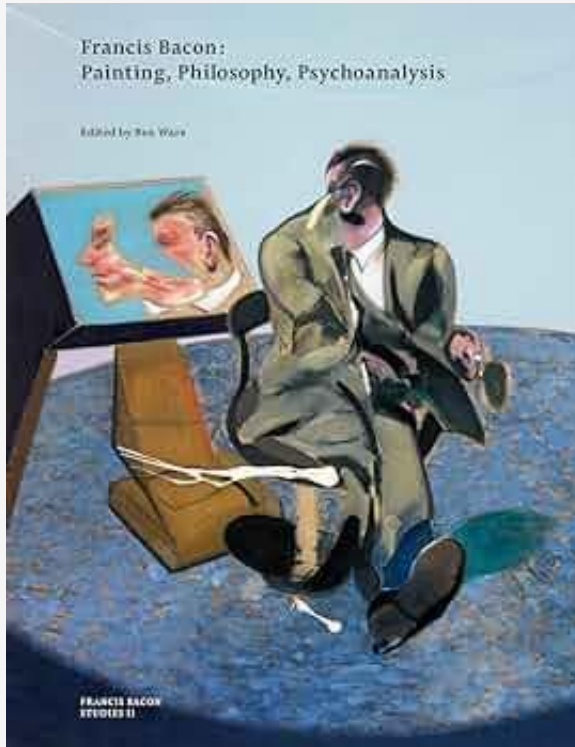
Deprived of essential maternal love, Kusama – whose mother abused her physically, destroyed her canvases and asked her never to return from the US after leaving Japan in 1957 – developed a simultaneously comforting and frightening hallucinatory world in compensation. Kusama's identification with annihilative modes of subjectivity, as acutely expressed in her 1967 film *Self-Obliteration*, is therefore not surprising.



Louise Bourgeois's Spider, 1995

Francis **Bacon**

Violence and **Trauma** - Confronting the **Real**



Jacques Lacan's concerns in the 1960's **with defining the real in terms of trauma** (in his seminar The Unconscious and Repetition which was roughly contemporaneous with the Death in America images). Here Lacan defines the traumatic as “a missed encounter with the real. As missed, the real cannot be represented; it can only be repeated, indeed it must be repeated.” Lacan stresses that repetition is not reproduction.

“To gaze upon Francis Bacon’s *“Two Studies for Self-Portrait”* is to stare unflinchingly into the void”

Mirror, Mirror

In the opening paragraph from the **Ecrits**, Lacan suggests an alternative to the self-certainty and self-assurance that exists according to the cogito in the psyche. In sharp opposition to this cogito in the psyche, Lacan presents the mirror stage which, according to him, is a crucial stage in the formation of the ego, which itself is the source of paranoia and uncertainty. The ego according to Lacan is indeed very far from being the firm and stable entity that the cogito accounts for. In this regard, Bacon’s paintings are taken as evidence of his perspective on himself. Bacon paints what he sees in the mirror which is a distorted and deformed self.



“Two Studies for Self-Portrait” 1977 Francis Bacon

When asked about his “Two Studies for Self-portrait” his answer was: “People have been dying around me like flies and I have had nobody else to paint but myself...I loathe my own face.” Bacon, according to Katie Tsouros of Artfetch “was consumed by the human condition and what comes across as some sort of internal suffering.”

how does psychosis feel?

The Directors (2022) by Marcus Coates at Churchill
Gardens Estate, London attempts to understand the
'un-understandable'



Lacan and **psychosis**

From the Surrealists to The Directors

1932

The thesis

- Lacan's doctoral thesis on paranoia, built around the case of "Aimée".
- Admired by Dalí and the Surrealists. Lacan wrote for their journal *Minotaure* (1933).
- Recall the Deren and Buñuel slide: Surrealism and psychoanalysis grew up together.

1955–56

Seminar III, The Psychoses

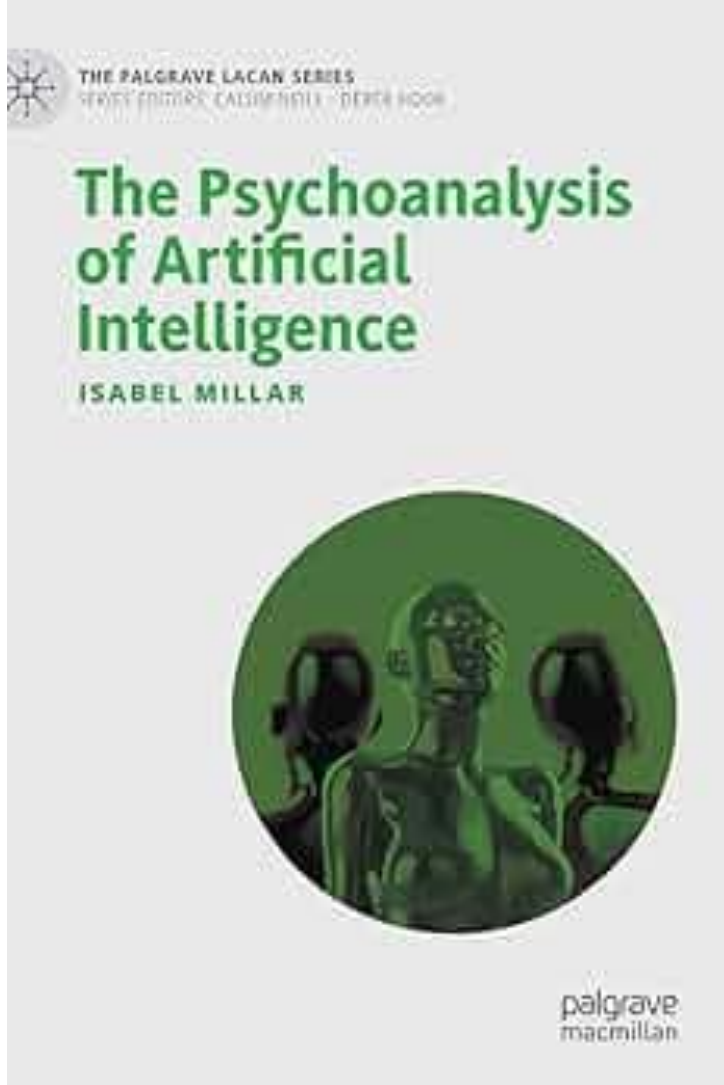
- Psychosis as **foreclosure** of the Name-of-the-Father: a key signifier is never admitted to the Symbolic.
- "What is refused in the Symbolic order re-emerges in the Real", for example as hallucination.

2022

Marcus Coates, The Directors

- Five people with lived experience of psychosis direct Coates in re-enacting their experiences.
- Karl Jaspers called some psychotic experience "un-understandable". Coates asks whether it can be **shared**.

Question: is psychosis simply "un-understandable" (Jaspers), or a different structure of meaning (Lacan)?



Isabel Millar's '**The Psychoanalysis of Artificial Intelligence**' (2021) highlights some of the key psychoanalytic concepts at stake and articulates their relationship to a more critical approach to intelligence, the body, thought and their simulation.

This is examined through an interrogation of the **Lacanian notion of sexuation** in relation to the idea of the 'Singularity' and **the concept of enjoyment** as a factor in the creation of AI.

Its approach to the psychoanalytic challenges of AI is framed by **Kant's four questions**:

- What can we know?
- What should we do?
- What may we hope for? and
- What is man?

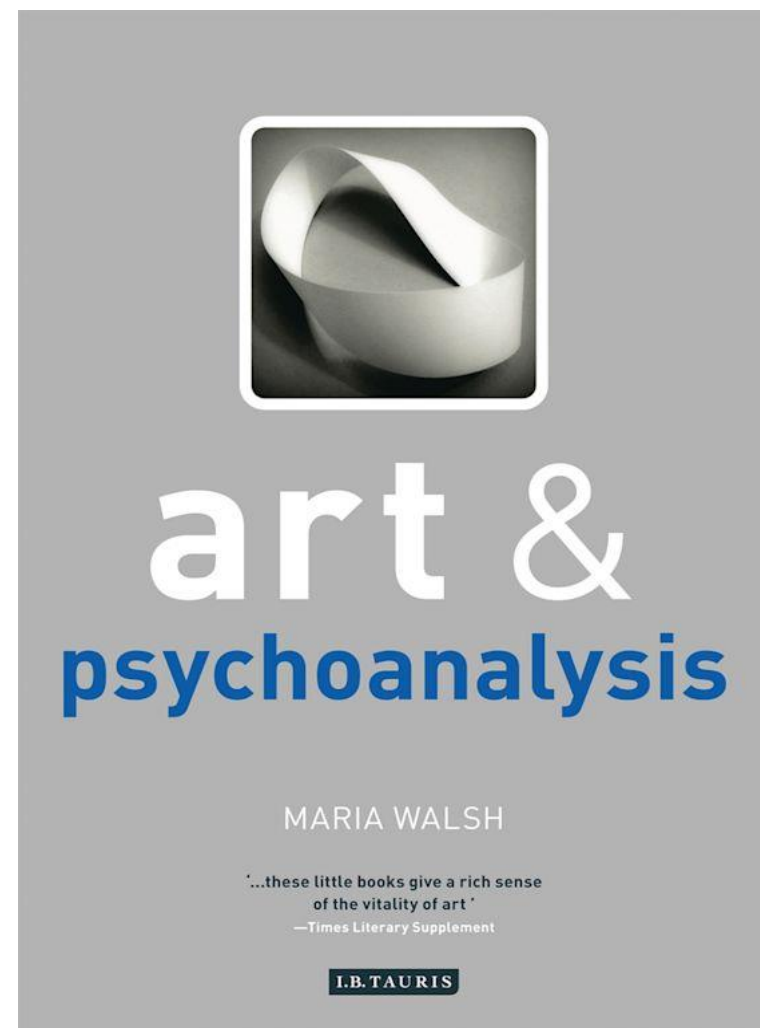
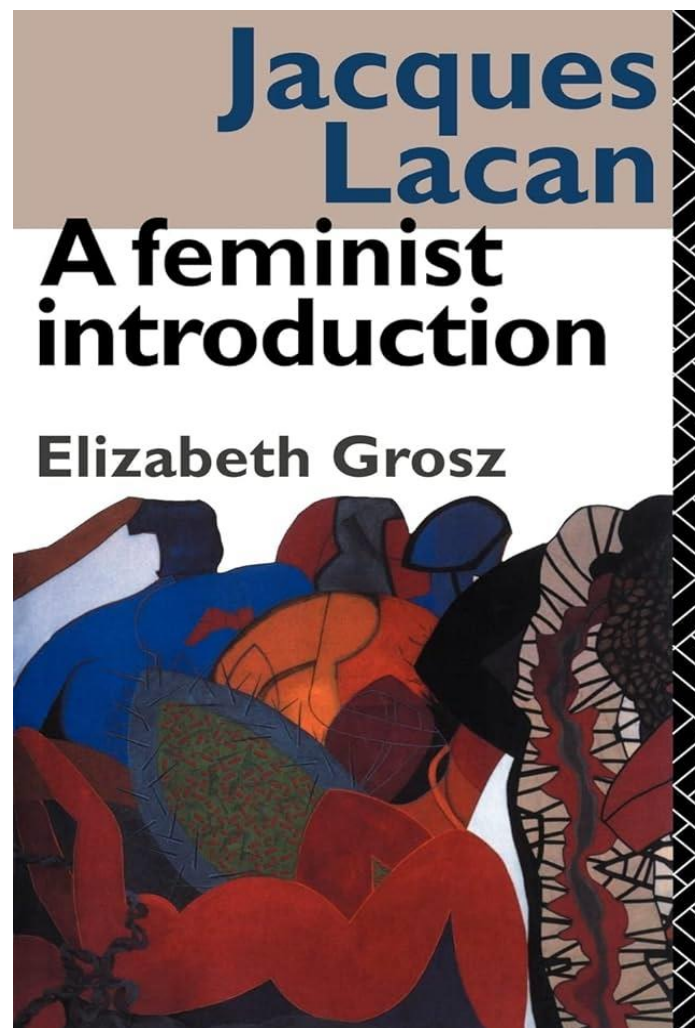
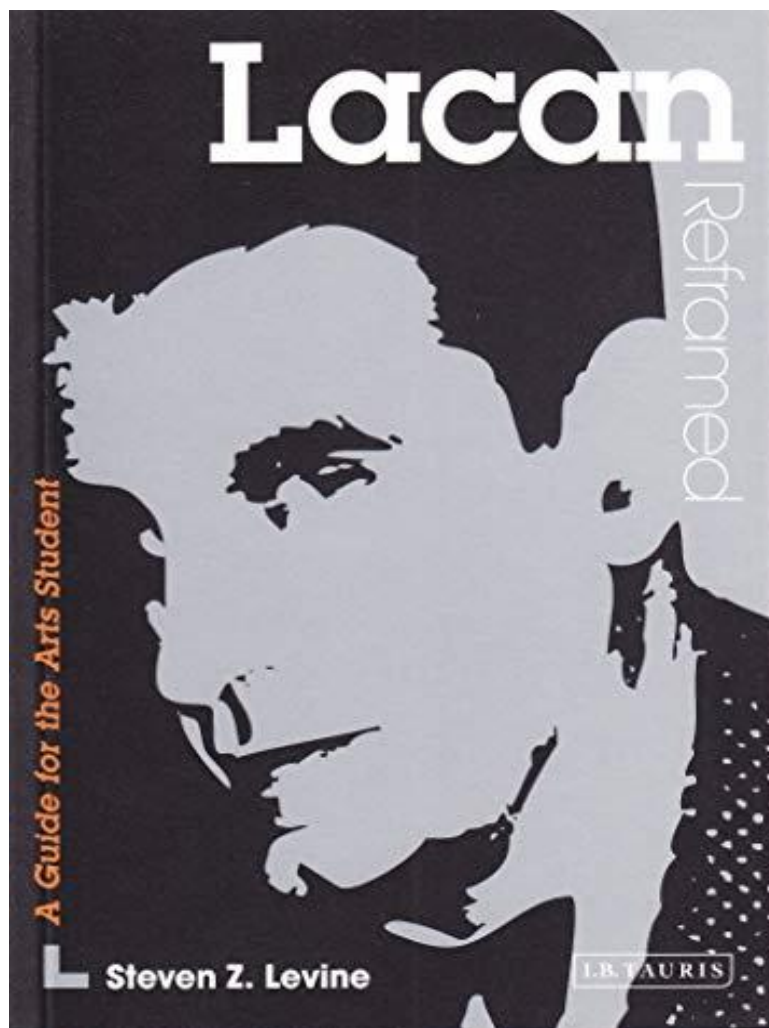
The subject **supposed to know**

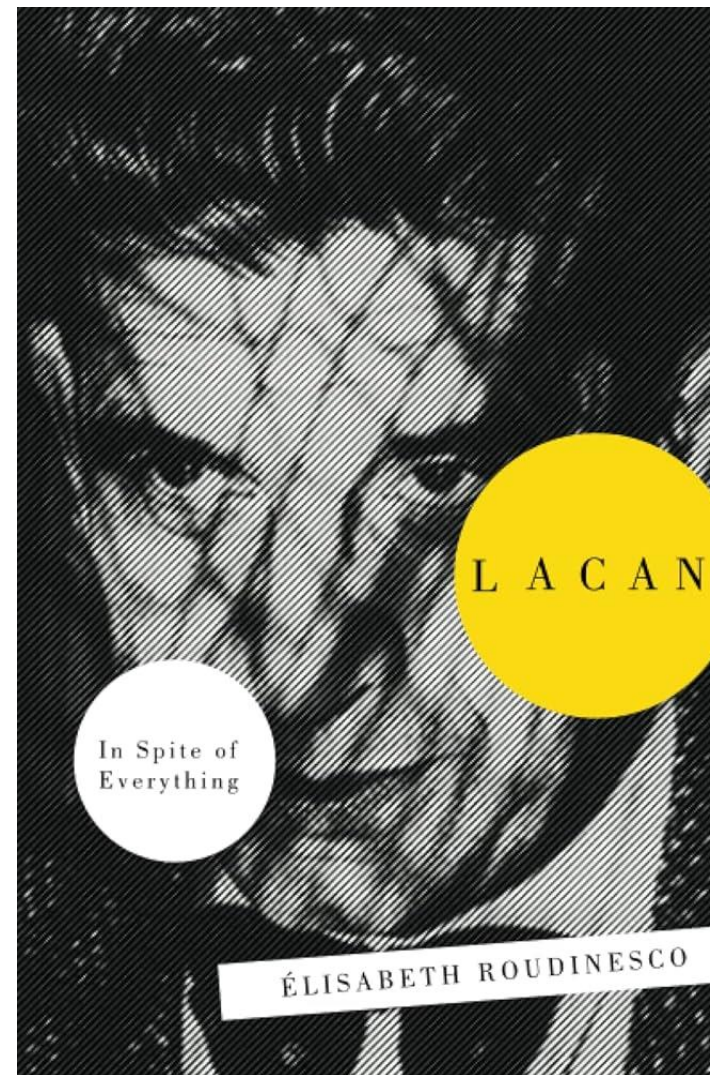
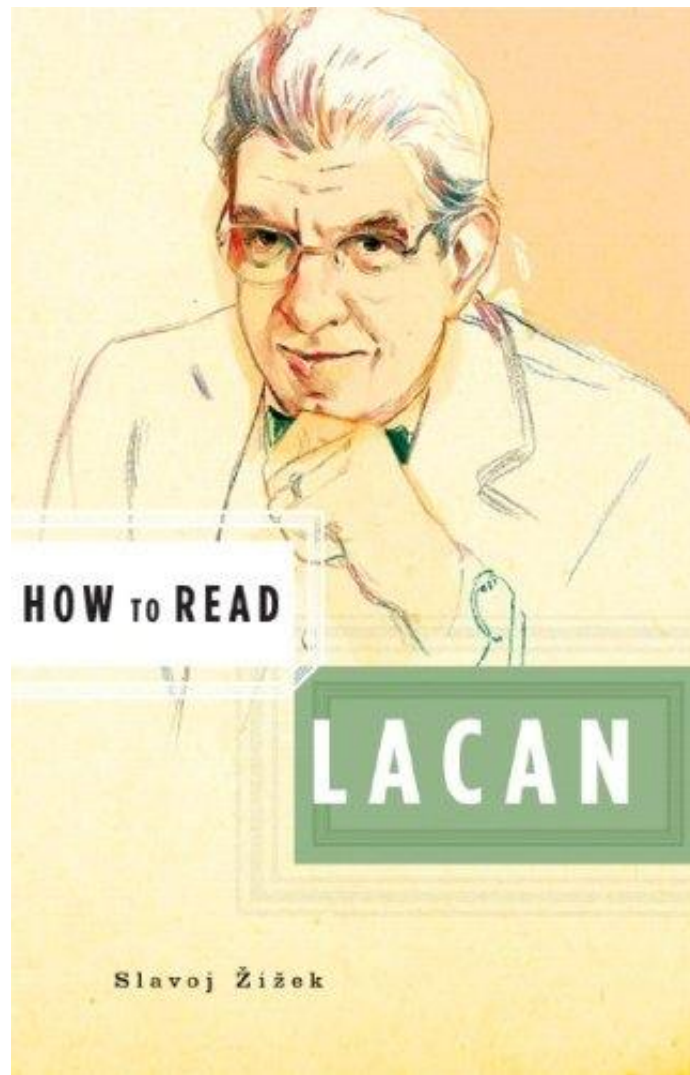
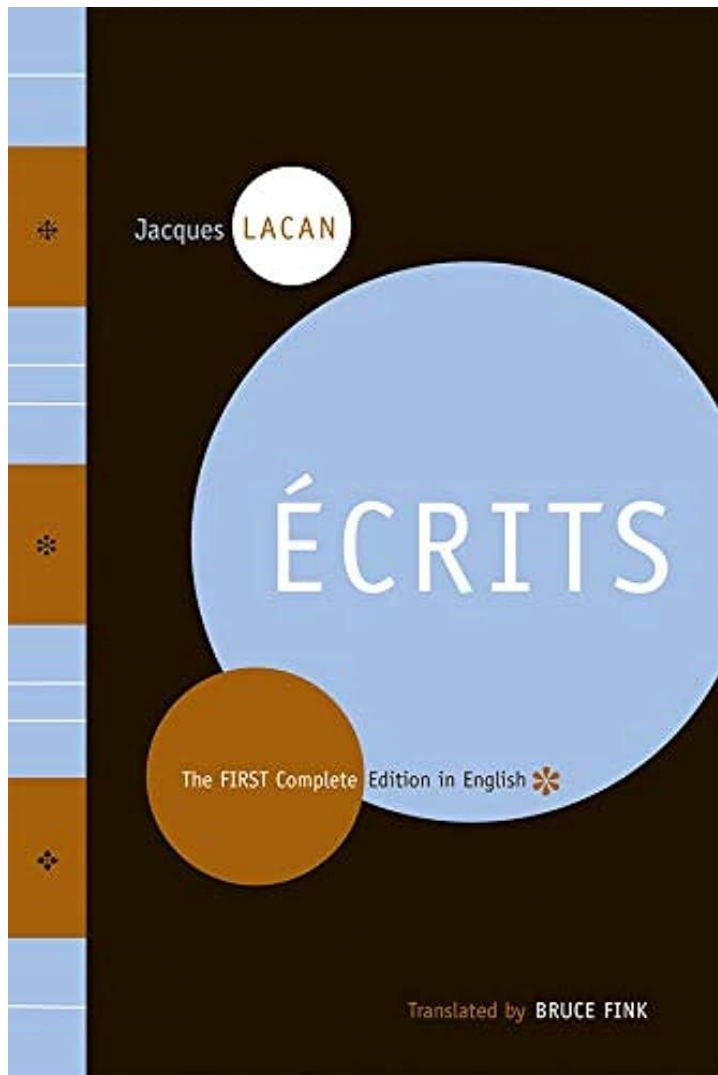
transference, now with chatbots

- For Lacan, transference rests on a supposition. The patient addresses the analyst as the **subject supposed to know** (*sujet supposé savoir*): the one who already holds the meaning of my symptom (*Seminar XI*, 1964).
- The analyst's job is not to fill that place but to let it fall, so the patient discovers that the knowledge was in their own speech.
- Today, many people tell their troubles to a chatbot that always answers. What happens to transference when the “subject supposed to know” is a **machine that never says “I don't know”**?

Discuss

- Who do you suppose knows? A search engine, a chatbot, a teacher, a parent?
- Does a machine that reflects your own language back to you act more like a mirror (Imaginary) or like the big Other (Symbolic)?
- See Isabel Millar, *The Psychoanalysis of Artificial Intelligence* (2021), previous slide.





Further reading

Added for 2026–27, alongside the books on the previous two slides

Introductions

- Dylan Evans, An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis (1996)
- Bruce Fink, The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance (1995)
- Darian Leader, Stealing the Mona Lisa: What Art Stops Us from Seeing (2002)

Art and visual culture

- Margaret Iversen, Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes (2007)
- Hal Foster, The Return of the Real (1996)
- Joan Copjec, Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists (1994)

Film

- Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, Screen 16:3 (1975)
- Todd McGowan, The Real Gaze: Film Theory after Lacan (2007)
- Todd McGowan, The Impossible David Lynch (2007)

Critique and beyond

- Judith Butler, Antigone’s Claim (2000)
- Bracha L. Ettinger, The Matrixial Borderspace (2006)
- Todd McGowan, Capitalism and Desire (2016)
- Gilles Deleuze, Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation (1981; Eng. 2003)

Summary of Key Points

- Overview of **Freud, Lacan, and Jung's** psychoanalytic frameworks and their key differences.
- Feminist critiques of 'phallogentric' world view via Irigaray, Kristeva, Cixous, Ettinger, Butler and others.
- Lacan's critical concepts, including the **Mirror Stage** and **the Gaze**, and how they manifest in contemporary art (and why the gaze is not the "male gaze").
- Psychoanalysis continues to shape artistic practices, revealing the unconscious desires and anxieties embedded in culture. The sinthome offers a way to think of art as neither cure nor mere symptom.
- While some critique its relevance in **feminist thought**, its legacy remains profound.
- How can we continue to engage with psychoanalytic thought while addressing its limitations?
- In what ways does art allow us to explore the unconscious that theory alone cannot? ('pats of paint'...phenomenology)

enjoy your symptom

Žižek, S. (1992; Routledge Classics 2013) *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*
Chapter 1: "Why Does a Letter Always Arrive at Its Destination?"