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Sensation(all) Ontology¹

I'd like to start with what we can call the problem of extimacy (*extimité*), which centres on the mixture of how 'inside' and 'outside' allows for the specificity of both knowledge and *know-how*. Here we are exploring how extimacy articulates the problem of traversing knowledge into *know-how*, that is, a praxis of truth of the symptom. Such a praxis harnesses knowledge of the unconscious as a specific knowledge which affords boundless, repetitive jouissance. However, the perception of ourselves as subjects in the world is never immediate – as Freud observed, “truth is complicated and not particularly obvious”². As divided subjects we must contend with the distinctive, disorienting Lacanian gaze in order to contend with his proposition that the “unconscious is outside”³.

What precisely are we dealing with here? On the one hand, the unconscious – the cause of the symptom – is inside and feels internal to the subject – dreams, slips of tongue and other parapraxes emanating from the symptomatic body. Such parapraxis is a replication of an articulation which stands out *verbatim*: the symptom literally speaks. On the other hand, these very symptoms are oriented outwards towards the Other. Thus as we crawl around the Möbius Strip being careful not to trip here or fall off the edge there, we know that there is no smooth pathway out of the symptom. We are both Kafka-esque like bugs crawling along the Möbius strip, weaving in and out of its coil unable to find our way and simultaneously traumatic witnesses to this stupid repetitive act of chasing our tails. Even when we can rise above ourselves, all we see is the symptom's

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² Isidor Sadger, *Recollecting Freud*, trans. A. Dundes, Madison, University of Wisconsin, 2005, p. 19.

³ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. D. Porter, London, Routledge, 1992.

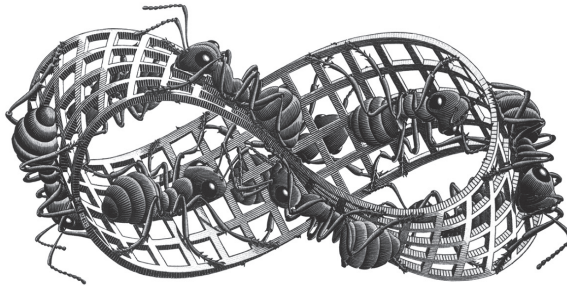
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insistence on repetition, a symptom we count on to perpetuate our search for something, anything which might pertain to knowledge which enables us to take up a subjectivity of knowing *how* to be in the world.⁴

At this point we can say that while the subject may not know about their symptom, they certainly suffer from it. This specific knowledge is justified by being a lexicon within everyday life, yet it is at the same time opaque. That is, the formation of the symptom is beyond the reach of the ego, but the ego is not altogether aware of this and pushes for the unconscious tendency to repeat. It cannot be easy for us in our search for knowledge, to admit to knowing nothing else but to repeat (our initial relationship to truth), because as we travel along the Möbius Strip only to return to where we started, knowledge remains the elusive object of the drive which all the while structures mastery of manoeuvring along the strip's continuous surface. It is important to remember that the purpose of the drive (*Triebziel*) is not so much to reach a final destination, but rather to follow its way, which is to circle round the object, this being the attainment of knowledge. And here we have the perfect entry into *know-how* (praxis) which encompasses the elements of the knowledge drive. The desire to know, to seek knowledge is a constant force which is taken up rhythmically, building momentum into desire which is at the same time unconscious yet physical. That is, one has to do something in order to find out about things which remain elusive and just out of reach. In this way for Lacan, the Möbius Strip is a metaphor for the subject's relationship to their desire to know something, to possess this object we name knowledge.⁵

⁴ Thank you to Jelica Šumič-Riha for here reminding me of the tradition of Walter Benjamin, which maintains that all discourses allow us to be opaque and enigmatic subjects in the world, willing dupes to our imaginary Other. As a further association, in Brecht's poem, *On Suicide* subjective enigma is discarded in favour of complete and utter realistic destitution, powerfully realised in Hanns Eisler blending of words with sound as specifically arts for the commons. We can even say that the Brecht-Eisler's fate-determining qualities of their characters assemble the subject as a repetition of the drive and towards a coherence of endurance. Brecht, Bertolt, "Über den Selbstmord", *The Brecht-Eisler Song Book*, Michigan, Oak Publications, 1967. To continue this thread, I am also reminded of Lacan's reference to Louis Aragon's poem, *Contre-chant* in *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Here Lacan captures the symptom relationship between unconscious truth and its discontinuity: "Je suis ce malheureux comparable aux miroirs". Lacan, Jacques, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Seminar XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. A. Sheridan, New York, Norton, 1981, p. 17.

⁵ It is important to distinguish between drive and instinct – the latter we can think of as flight or fight whereas the former does not harbour such a preserving quality, being inter-



The Möbius Strip as Lacan's specific topology illustrates how opposites are intrinsically bound in a repetitive and conflicting dialectic. Such a conflict exists as the centre is always shifting and 'outside' of the subject. As David Pavón-Cuéllar says, "exteriority is intimacy, but intimacy, as exteriority, is rather an 'extimacy', that is no longer either intimacy or exteriority."⁶ The strip itself is narrower than we think, this path we tread is precise and to veer off it means certain death or at least, demise of subjectivity. Each time we repeat the journey we are guided by the traces we left when we walked the same path many times before. This path, much like our conception of what we think we know, is somehow comforting because it is already trodden and somewhat familiar. For the divided subject who is struggling to reconcile this journey of repetition which encompasses two gazes (the well-worn path ahead and the outer gaze which attempts to look for a horizon), the question arises of which gaze to trust amidst the somatic upheaval of *jouissance*. This is the ultimately unanswerable question, *che vuoi?*, unanswerable because the question itself captures us in an excessive anguish of *jouissance*. This immanence of *jouissance* brings together the divided subject's necessary relation with the extimacy which structures their division. *Jouissance* is described by Lacan in Seminar VII as "not purely and simply the satisfaction of a need but as the satisfaction of a drive"⁷.

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For Lacan desire implicates *jouissance* as a question addressed to the Other – *what can I be for the Other?* – and emerges from the split between need and

pellated into the Symbolic Order via its own repetition.

⁶ David Pavón-Cuéllar "Extimacy", in T. Teo (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*, Springer, New York, NY, 2014. Available at <https://www.academia.edu/4374516/Extimacy>, accessed 10 October 2022.

⁷ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. D. Porter, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 209.

demand for satisfaction. However, what does the subject do when, for one reason or another, negotiating the narrow well-trodden strip evokes not comfort of what is presumably known but only the pain of *jouissance*? Is the subject then catapulted into some sort of void, thereby putting at risk the symptom, which although not always reassuring is at least reliable? To be clear the symptom anchors the unconscious subject, it provides a fixed reference point from which the subject can handle and enjoy their singular symptom emanating from the unconscious. For the neurotic this transpires as the marking of the oedipal procedure: what kinds of template slide across their life, what choices mark their desires and frames their *jouissance* as a singular way of being in the world? Put simply, the symptom is the way in which the subject attempts to return to that which they have repressed whereas the unanalysed subject, normally unaware of their symptom, enjoys it but without knowing what to do with it. The subject is most present when they do not think but must at the same time struggle with the revelation of something unacceptable to the ego. It is here where the unconscious haunts and hunts the subject. The desire of psychoanalysis begins with this very ontological curiosity as the object of the drive.

But first, what exactly constitutes the symptom? It is a form and a force that without realising it we are bound to go on repeating, something not far removed from libidinal fixation in so far as we are repeating what has been repressed, and the act of repetition allows a somewhat clumsy, partial access to repressed memory, that is, the fundamental fantasy from which desire springs. At the same time the symptom does us a favour in at least allowing us go on living in a complex world – doing this and that, thinking, having relationships, falling in love, experiencing desires to take up particular subjectivities and so on. We could say that while the subject certainly identifies with the symptom this is not so much a given as a cultivation of identification supported by the Symbolic Order. At the same time, although ever present, the symptom doesn't function smoothly in that it can present as a companion who is alternately amiable and annoying. It is important also to understand that the symptom dates back to infancy when the subject as a child was confronted with the psychic trauma of individuation. From this arose the symptom which by ensuring subjectivity remains divided provides the psychic logic to cope with such alienating trauma. It is important to be clear about the origins of the trauma we are referring to arising from the realisation that one is allowed to express sexual energy to anyone else – except one's mother or father, the very source which marks original desire. Hence the impor-

tance of the symptom, which the analyst with great care both preserves and puts to work establishes the specificity, the exactness of *jouissance* being triggered in the analysand. This is the knowledge – of what makes the analysand tick – that through transference the analyst seeks. In addition, we might speculate that during transference it is not only the analysand's symptoms which are engaged but also those of the analyst's curiosity to find out what motivates the analysand. Such a transferential transmission can only take place and be sustained if the analyst wholly assumes the position of the *objet a*. It is up to the analyst to listen for the signifier, catch it, then throw it back to the analysand, time and time again until the analysand realises that what they are catching is something with little, if any substance. It is the psychic nature of this procedure which is what keeps the analyst curious and listening. Following the analysand's destitution a different psychic work begins, one which enables the subject to live (as much as possible) on their own terms. Thus if the subject repeats, they know what they are repeating and if they do not repeat, then they know what they are making a cut into. Either way the subject is handling knowledge of their *jouissance*. Here psychoanalysis has enabled the subject a *know-how*.

Prior to undergoing analysis, the analysand may presume that knowledge always has the upper hand, and not without reason since what we don't understand we are likely to repeat – we repeat without knowing but with full knowledge that we don't know what exactly we are repeating. We might either know something, think we do when in fact we don't, or just don't know at all. Socrates addressed this problematic when maintaining that we both know and don't know at the same time. Freud and, later, Lacan suggested that we act with the knowledge we *think* we have, an apparently conscious one which is nevertheless driven by unconscious forces in which repetition is retroactively constituted and reified by the fidelity to repeat. Freud is clear on this compulsion to repeat when he says,

What interest us most of all is naturally the relation of this compulsion to repeat to the transference and to resistance. We soon perceive that the transference is itself only a piece of repetition, and that the repetition is a transference of the forgotten past not only to the doctor [psychoanalyst] but also on to the other aspects of the current situation. We must be prepared to find, therefore, that the patient yields to the compulsion to repeat, which replaces the impulsion to remember, not only in his personal attitude to his doctor [psychoanalyst] but also in every oth-

er activity and relationship which occupy his life at the time – if, for instance, he falls in love or undertakes a task or starts an enterprise during the treatment. The part played by resistance, too, is easily recognised. The greater the resistance, the more extensively will acting out (repetition) replace remembering.⁸

Here the symptom comes in very handy in giving repetition a trajectory but with a distinctive nuance which imparts to our otherwise familiar journey along the Möbius Strip an uncanny feeling of newness. This is what gives a certain pleasure to the journey's repetition of subverting linear space and oppositional forces. It is important not to forget that such a resistance to binary opposition is the project of psychoanalytic praxis. Inside/outside; signified/signifier and so on, are not so distinctive as categories from which the conscious/unconscious can be clearly articulated. Although we've been here before, there is now in our journey a hope of experiencing some new satisfaction. In this way the symptom promises an ever-better, new and improved jouissance, one in which pleasure eclipses pain or offers just enough pain to enhance pleasure. The symptom is here ticking along nicely, engaging with fantasies and declarations, acts and resistances, while jouissance is harbouring what can be called the visceral kernel of knowledge: *I know because I can't help but feel it*. This is a knowledge, a play of the symptoms which is immanent, manifesting in the material body as a condition of it. That such knowledge lies beyond language is precisely what characterises the feminine in Lacan's graph of desire – in Seminar XX⁹ Lacan talks at length about this, especially as it applies to feminine jouissance. Yet there are those, Freud and Lacan tell us, who know all about jouissance, where to find it, where to get it, and who to take it from. This pervert's position attempts but fails to make feminine jouissance into subjective *know-how*. However, if we stay with the hysteric's discourse in which jouissance should always remain a question, we can say that we thrive on jouissance, indeed that it constitutes our very subjectivity at least until the analysand reveals to the analyst the anguish of the symptom and the desire to be free from the painful part of their jouissance. Lacan illustrates this compulsion to jouissance – even when the stakes are high such as the realisation that one enjoys being in a bit of pain – in Seminar VII

⁸ Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through", in *Further Recommendations in the Technique of Psychoanalysis II*, trans. J. Riviere, New York, Basic Books, 1914, p. 6.

⁹ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XX. Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, trans. B. Fink, New York, Norton, 1999.

Suppose, says Kant, that in order to control the excesses of a sensualist, one produces the following situation. There is in a bedroom the woman he currently lusts after. He is granted the freedom to enter that room to satisfy his desire or his need, but next to the door through which he will leave there stands the gallows on which he will be hanged... As far as Kant is concerned, it goes without saying that the gallows will be a sufficient deterrent; there's no question of an individual going to screw a woman when he knows he's to be hanged on the way out...¹⁰

So, we can deduce that one must make a decision in the above fantasy whether or not one is Kantian, especially should such a fantasy become an actuality. But more than this, the promise of *jouissance* not only eventually fails to please the subject (either way – guilt or death) but the subject feels duped by their compulsion towards this choice. Such an inside/outside dilemma captures Lacan's neologism of *extimacy* (*extimité*) as an uncanny internal feeling which is at the same time radically externalised to objects. Samo Tomšič's uptake of the problem of the *extimate* is notable for its succinct conceptualisation of the word 'extimacy':

The infrequent occurrence of this term in no way diminishes its critical value, which lies above all in its union of contraries. The prefix “ex-” marks a register that precedes the distinction between the intimate (subjective) and the public (intersubjective). Instead of describing the opposite of intimate—as the prefixes “in-” and “ex-” would normally suggest—the *extimate* pinpoints a specific modality of the intimate, the emergence of an element of foreignness at the intimate core of the subject. One could think here of the feeling of *Unheimlichkeit*, or uncanniness, which according to Freud has a sense of both the proximity of foreignness and familiarity.¹¹

What exactly is happening when we think of *jouissance* as uncanny, that is, inside and outside the subject? It is not simply that *jouissance* is not working when it unpleasant or disappointing; rather, on the contrary, it is working only too well, with direct access to the subject firmly in place, continuing to give enjoyment albeit within painful limits. Knowledge of the symptom remains elusive because the repetition of *jouissance* is too fascinating for it to be closely scru-

¹⁰ Lacan, *Seminar VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p. 108.

¹¹ Samo Tomšič, “The Ontological Limbo: Three Notes on Extimacy and Ex-sistence”, in N. Bou Ali and S. Singh (eds.), *Extimacy: Encounters Between Psychoanalysis and Philosophy*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press (Forthcoming 2023) (unpaginated).

tinised. That is, until the pain inherent in the orgasmic pleasure of *jouissance* begins to obtrude in hurt and heartbreak. What now? This is where the original function of the symptom, in particular the effect of it on the divided subject *vis-à-vis* the original psychic trauma, provides a way forward. Until the advent of trauma the subject works with such knowledge as a speaking being in the world may have. The inheritance of language provides a tool which fixes the subject within the paradox of Lacan's gaze-drive. That is, the uncanny experience of being caught both within (ours) and outside (imaginary Other) the gaze also means that we are subjects of our singular *jouissance*.

At this strange conjuncture we can put words to those objects and subjects which circulate us and which we in turn circulate. When such a relation touches on the Real, as Lacanians are fond of saying, it is heartbreaking because what follows is the terrible realisation that perfect knowledge of language and what to do with it, is but a fantasy. Our traumatic breaking away from the inevitable disappointment of the limits of language – the very thing we are thrust into prior to our birth – brings with it a different kind of knowledge, one which for us as subjects of *jouissance* causes disorientation and confusion by throwing knowledge into chaos and what we think we know into destitution. Here we are dealing with two radically different kinds of knowledge: the first is dependent on the Symbolic Order, (in order to be in the world, we need to invest our symptoms relationally) whilst the second comprises a different language drawn from the subject's experience of *jouissance* resulting from their particular symptom. Although these kinds of knowledge are radically different both are necessary: one cannot reach full or true speech without at the same time full immersion in the repetition of empty speech.¹²

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Here the work for the analysand truly commences in putting the symptom to work in order to embrace a different knowledge. If we are to grapple with the Kantian choice Lacan puts to us, then we could say it is not the fantasy of choice which throws us into psychic chaos, but rather that the choice itself is not even

¹² For those of us on the couch and/or in psychoanalytic training, this moment of radical language transition becomes abundantly clear when we face our own symptomatic contradictions: the cut is most apparent not when we choose to stop believing in the bullshit of the Other, but rather when we stop believing in our own bullshit and thus not be complicit in the bullshit of the Other. The uptake of this radical knowledge position resulting from full/true speech has a permanent and sensational effect.

viable one in the first instance. This is what hurts the most: such a proposition can be thought of as more Pascalian in that the choice has already been made and accommodated as distinctly extimate. The extimate contours of the divided subject are here activated: the extimate being a space inhabiting the uncanny which is also new yet familiar. What is most important for the subject on their well-trodden path around the Möbius Strip is that the extimate *feels* uncanny. In this uncanny space one is free to feel bewildered and confused yet not so much that it is incapacitating. The spectre of the uncanny needs to appear to come from the ‘outside’, taking the subject by surprise but then disappearing, only to reappear later...

As mentioned, the intimate exterior is often referred to as the extimate space. Jacques-Alain Miller puts it succinctly when he says, that “(e)xtimacy is not the contrary of intimacy. Extimacy says that the intimate is Other-like a foreign body, a parasite”.¹³ Pavón-Cuéllar elaborates on this duality of extimacy:

Extimacy indicates the nondistinction and essential identity between the dual terms of the outside and the deepest inside, the exterior and the most interior of the psyche, the outer world and the inner world of the subject, culture and the core of personality, the social and the mental, surface and depth, behaviour and thoughts or feelings.¹⁴

It is a space somewhat akin to a vortex or riptide: once something is caught up it continues to circulate in a flurry of repetition. Although disorienting, the subject remains aware of being and feeling caught. Prior to all this, knowledge for the subject is situated externally and oriented to the subject’s desire for mastery whilst retaining a residual suspicion of it. This is the Hysteric’s discourse wherein the Master (who represents the extimate other as the one who is “something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me.”¹⁵ is closely examined and knowledge is configured through a dialectic between agency and causality. Such knowledge not only captures but also undermines the subject because its under-

¹³ Jacques-Alain Miller, “Extimacy”, *The Symptom*, 9, (2008). Available at <https://www.lacan.com/symptom/extimacy.html>, accessed 10 October 2022 (unpaginated).

¹⁴ David Pavón-Cuéllar, “Extimacy”, in T. Teo (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*, Springer, New York, NY, 2014. Available at <https://www.academia.edu/4374516/Extimacy>, accessed 10 October 2022.

¹⁵ Lacan, *Seminar VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p. 71.

pinning dialectic has to be repeated countless times before the subject can make any sense of it. It is disconcerting for the subject, especially when on the couch and willingly rendered into jouissance, only then to be reminded that the symptom which has kept one nicely ticking over, won't work in the same way forever. This reminder that we are not mere divided subjects of knowledge but rather divided subjects of jouissance is unnerving and not really always enjoyable.¹⁶

In this context the Lacanian catchphrase 'enjoy your symptom!' appears overly vitalist, even somewhat stupid because there is nothing enjoyable about repeating the anguish of the symptom which is no longer working as it used to do. This is the moment wherein *know-how* gains traction: where identification with blind enjoyment of one's symptom is less about enjoyment and more about unconscious knowledge that one is wrestling and reconciling with one's mode of jouissance. It is here that one either knows what one enjoys or more poignantly, what one loathes enjoying when enjoyment begins to diminish. It gets even worse for the subject in that knowledge of one's symptom is not about mutual recognition but rather what Lacan refers to as a misrecognition which one is compelled to repeat in the quest for elusive recognition. It is at this point the subject must contend with the ethical kernel of psychoanalysis: the extimate and not entirely knowable space which captivates and nourishes us into a false sense of security about who we are and the knowledge we have or presume we have.

Generally speaking, and unsurprisingly, such destabilisation logically signals the end of analysis, especially since, as Jacques-Alain Miller insists that "in no way can one say that the analyst is an intimate friend of his analysand. The analyst, on the contrary, is precisely extimate to this intimacy".¹⁷ Only the most masochistic and pessimistic could bear continuation of such psychic misery, so for some this is where the analytic procedure ends. Yet not always as for both analysand and analyst there lingers a strange sense of unfinished business and curiosity as to what might constitute different subject positions: for the analysand who is desperate for a jouissance which works, any other subject position is viable, and for the analyst, finally, there is a gleam of insight into which

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¹⁶ I am situating the subject as Hysteric here – but of course, the subject can be positioned as an object for enjoyment such as in sadism where supposed *know-how* of short-sighted sensation is overdetermined.

¹⁷ Miller, "Extimacy", (unpaginated).

knowledge structure makes the analysand tick. Furthermore, the analysand is provoked by what might happen when they are curious as to the transition from one knowledge position to another. It is this specific desire which keeps transference in place; the analysand returning to the couch and the analyst listening. We can say that this is the praxis of the extimate, where the analysand has the intermittent ability to gaze upon themselves. This metonymic procedure, where two gazes slide into and across each other allows a double perspective: alongside the fantasy the subject has about themselves as a knowledge subject, the subject also slides into another discourse framed by the Other.

Bearing in mind that the *jouissance* which continues to torture us holds a kernel of truth whilst the knowledge which has been represented to us by the Master has a fictional quality, we are led to confront subjectivity as no more than a chain of signifiers, a schema which speaks, sometime politely but sometimes obscenely to the symptom. Here we can say that the inside/outside extimate space is structured like a sensation, which gives ground to the not-all of subjectivity. That is, we experience that which is at the limit or edge of thinking the symptom, of the symptom sliding across into another domain, as a sensation which cannot altogether be put into words.

What has been described so far is the subject's experience of anguish, something not exclusive to those undergoing psychoanalysis since everyone must contend with anguish, especially when it manifests from desire, error, folly, trauma and so on. It is traumatic simply being a subject in the world. Such anguish is usually met with an affective reaction of some sort, for instance that our anguish must have an underlying validation which restores a degree of dignity. Such a relation or search for meaning invokes the Hysteric's discourse which looks for the right inscription to mark our anguish and lay it to rest so that we can comfortably resume tantalising our *jouissance* as before or the memory of good *jouissance*. What we are here attempting through invoking discourse is to rein-'state' our mark (whose inscription has left us with) on to the designated subject-supposed-to-know. This keeps us not-all-knowing subjects who are driven by the desire to know something.

Let us take a close look at how knowledge is inscribed and how one takes up this inscription. For Lacan, language is inscribed in us before we are born. That is, because we are born into language, we have no choice but to take it up, oth-

erwise our very subjectivity is cancelled – we go to gallows. Upon birth we enter the field of signifiers and systems which uphold them – family, institutions, words, thinking, rituals and so on – already in place and through which we can take up knowledge as a discourse ‘to know’. We become attuned to them because they are embedded in social life so as to maintain the social bond. As life continues, we come to embody them, for instance by finding passions, falling in love, cultivating talents, experiencing desires, attending to our curiosities, all in the name of an inscribed knowledge which logically requires us to maintain that knowing is something we ‘do’. We trust not only this knowing but also its effects, that is, those traces which stick to us as subjects. Although we would like to think that we exercise discernment about what kinds of knowledge we want to accept, knowledge nevertheless operates as the great external generaliser which bonds us. Such an inscription of knowledge is for us profound in so far as we inscribe again and again whatever we think affords us the certainty of an external coherence to our subjectivity. The more we progress our knowledge, the more of it we think we continue to acquire. However, our experience as subjects of knowledge is – as Freud contended – overrated (no wonder Freud enjoyed the story of *Don Quixote*, the man who thought he knew everything about women only then to realise his total ignorance of feminine jouissance! One is here reminded of the amusing line indicative of Phallic jouissance as a force which somehow transcends desire in the name of brave deeds: “Those whom I have inspired with love by letting them see me...”). To presume one’s knowledge is complete or at least on its way to completion is an obvious stupidity: we are better off putting knowledge to the test by first admitting that although our curiosity is contingent on the acquisition of knowledge, we initially know nothing, not even about ourselves. Freud was himself especially curious and felt it his ethical duty to act on behalf of the less curious by keeping the traumatised analysand on the couch and their analyst listening. For the analysand, the question of how can I live the life I imagine the other to have, transforms into a more urgent question of knowing: with such knowledge as I have, how can life be bearable under its savagery of jouissance?

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My claim here is that we seek truth to short-circuit knowledge which is so incredibly savage. To be clear, the psychoanalytic thinker is on par with the philosopher in that they both seek truth. However, the mechanisms and locations for such truth are very different. The Freudian-Lacanian looks to the truth of the unconscious. Here in our quest for knowledge neither (sometimes) dizzying di-

alectic nor its antithesis, common sense is necessarily of much help. However, Lacan's metaphoric topology of the Möbius strip as one continuous surface can help us traverse this fantasy of knowledge, especially when it is too savage for the subject to bear. For Freud and Lacan, knowledge has more to do with sensation than with sense, sensations being the repetition of acts which don't make completely conscious sense but whose satisfaction comes from suffering the symptom. In *Three Essays in Sexuality*,¹⁸ Freud contends that we know little about what makes up any claim to either normality or abnormality. Notwithstanding Freudian psychoanalytic theory has biological – even positivistic – roots, Freud insists that there is nothing natural about sex in so far as our knowledge of it is a construction derived from the influence of significant others, authorities such as parents, morals, social taboos and so on. This construction enables knowledge of how one identifies as a sexed subject in the world, how sexuality functions – or ought to, how in the repetition of daily life we unconsciously resist such knowledge to take up a taboo position. For Freud whether we resign to the gallows or enjoy our desire with another is neither here nor there: we live knowing that what we desire may be the death of us. We unwittingly give ourselves to desire: everyone has made Freudian slips when saying one thing and meaning another; everyone has forgotten something which is important to remember; everyone has had a nightmare or an erotic dream. All such sensations belong to parapraxis, the emerging pathology of what is knowable in the unconscious. They are neither merely distractions nor are they counterpoints supporting so-called legitimate knowledge. Instead, for Freud and Lacan these sensations demonstrate a logic and knowledge of their own precisely through their opacity (that is, from symptom to *sinthome*). They are a repetition of what is repressed and are unable to be simplified or domesticated through the Master's discourse. Thus the problematics of uncertainty, unpredictability and indeterminacy become hallmarks of a knowledge of which the subject would do well to be curious, even and especially if this is destabilising and hurtful. Freud wanted to normalise psychoanalysis as science on the couch, a project then refined by Lacan into a praxis or method for knowing rather than a science. This method is concerned with thinking and putting the symptom to work which is potentially a hurtful, even savage project little appreciated by the academy because during psychoanalysis the unconscious can be brutal in enabling the uptake of a very

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. J. Strachey, London, Imago, 1949.

different position regarding knowledge and knowing. In this process subjective division becomes all too real, widening more and more until the subject surrenders to the sacrifice demanded by psychoanalysis namely recognition or acceptance that the subject-supposed-to-know is also a castrated divided subject. The savagery of this realisation – usually occurring when one gets a glimpse of the (unshared) desire of the other – is accompanied by the strangely life affirming framing of desire as a specific ontological form with which the subject must now engage. To elaborate, this is the true trauma (sensation) for the Hysteric who can go along with a fantasy, even in speech. The acting out or actuality of the fantasy is the traumatic tipping point. That is, obtained jouissance is hardly satisfactory.

In this Lacanian ontology the subject is one of lack, a gap which symptoms attempt to fill with a feeling of wholeness or at least a fantasy of wholeness.¹⁹ This is how the ontological structure of Lacan's symbolic order is founded. In replying to Jacques-Alain Miller's question, "what is your ontology?"²⁰ Lacan drew attention to the gap as itself the ontology. In, *Remembering, Repeating and Working Through* ²¹Freud points towards direct access whereby the analysand can return to earlier situations, where once unconscious forgotten traumas become a normalised conscious procession. Freud says, "When the patient talks about these 'forgotten' things he seldom fails to add: 'As a matter of fact I've always known it; only I've never thought of it.'"²² As a pointed example of unconscious repetitious acting out which stands in for the forgetting, Freud remarks, "...the patient does not say that he remembers that he used to be defiant and critical towards his parents' authority; instead, he behaves in that way to the doctor [psychoanalyst]".²³

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Part of what makes unconscious knowledge that is uncovered in the transferential relationship (which is arrived at and produced by the analysand at the end of analysis) so potentially savage are the very defences which it engenders in us. Why do we feel the need of defences? The answer is that desire, being a law

¹⁹ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XXVI. Topology and Time, 1978-1979*, trans. D. Collins, Unpublished manuscript, p. 28.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Freud, "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through", p. 2.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²³ *Ibid.*

unto itself entices us to live beyond our means, keeping us in a symptomatic repetition which is bound to fail either in fantasy or actuality. Hence the purpose – even duty – of psychoanalysis, is that of helping us transform desire and the management of *jouissance* into something akin to a tolerable life. As Verhaeghe and Declercq assert,

A psychoanalytic cure removes repressions and lays bare drive-fixations. These fixations can no longer be changed as such; the decisions of the body are irreversible.²⁴

They elaborate on this claim in a footnote,²⁵

This instance is the Real of the body, that is, the Real of the drive. This Real of the bodily drive is independent of the subject; it is an instance that judges and chooses independently: *Ce qui pense, calcule et juge, c'est la jouissance*. [Translated by original authors as: “What thinks, computes and judges, is the Enjoyment.”].²⁶

This is not easy and sometimes feels impossible, especially in the extimate as a psycho-ontological space of transition between knowledge discourses which reveal their circulation and conflicts. It is as much a bodily experience as it is psychical. Here the object (that which is thrust into the domain of desire and which was once thinkable, at least) is reconstituted on realising that no object will ever fill the gap, not even that of knowledge. We come to understand when transitioning discourses that life is still possible even when not filled with gap-filling objects. We might be curious to invest in the sensation of Lacan’s extimate ontological space (a ubiquitous form for psychoanalysis) but at the same time try to remain impervious to it and its effects. The extimate nature of Lacan’s ontology ensures that we are always somewhat lost in both it and the signifiers it produces. Furthermore, although it is a fantasy that we can be sovereign from, it, at least fantasy triggers the very anxiety needed in grappling with the savage abundance of *jouissance*, one which is so affective, it causes a momentary sen-

²⁴ Paul Verhaeghe & Frédéric Declercq, “Lacan’s Analytical Goal: “Le Sinthome” or the Feminine Way”, in: L. Thurston (ed.), *Essays on the Final Lacan. Re-inventing the Symptom*. New York, The Other Press, 2002, p. 62.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Lacan, *Seminar XXVI. Topology and Time*, 1978-1979, p. 9.

sation of having it all, which is either confirmed or refused within the extimate space of which this ontology is constituted.

I'd like to riff on this notion of having it all, of feeling a sensation(all) drive towards chasing one's desire. For psychoanalysis, Lacanian ontology shifts the focus from the object to sensation manifesting from discontent, anxiety, and the desire for wish-fulfillment. All the objects and experiences which make social and intimate life possible prepare those fantasies which enable us to put our senses to work. Inevitable discontinuity between the pragmatics of life and fantasy are not bridged by objects but rather by understanding the conditions from which objects are made intelligible, notwithstanding that eventually objects become fragmented or even discarded the more one distances oneself from the knowledge previously invested in. What emerges is not synchronicity between one's external and internal world, but rather a better way of handling jouissance in the contradiction emanating from being situated in the psycho-ontological extimate. Jouissance – always a visceral sensation – can be understood not as an abridged version of the split subject but instead as emanating from difference in how one is taking up a new knowledge in which the lost object resurfaces bearing a different inscription. Thus even knowledge of one's deception is an ontological sensation apprehended within the extimate. In this way we can think of ontological sensation as an initial visceral experience of an extimate logic drive. By providing both jouissance and its limits, this is where psycho-ontology takes place and realised as being *in* service to the subject.

Lacanian theory proposes that jouissance, the enjoyment of the symptom, emanates from the subject's division, from the not-all. It is important to note that jouissance is a concept many Lacanians resist translating. Adrian Johnston²⁷ puts such resistance under scrutiny when he discusses the distinction between 'jouissance expected' (full mythical jouissance which is imagined) and 'jouissance obtained' (pleasure which falls short), claiming that given Lacan located jouissance as beyond the pleasure principle, it necessarily bypasses the mitigation of the ego. Simply put, the ego cannot enjoy or is incapable of enjoying jouissance. Jacques-Alain Miller offers a functional exposition of jouissance when he says

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²⁷ Adrian Johnston, "The Forced Choice of Enjoyment: Jouissance between Expectation and Actualization", *The Symptom*, 2 (2002). Available at <https://www.lacan.com/forcedf.htm>, accessed 10 October 2022.

that it is “precisely what grounds the alterity of the Other when there is no Other of the Other. It is in its relation to *jouissance* that the Other is really Other.”²⁸

We could say that for satisfaction and frustration to not only occur but also to be contained within the domain of *jouissance*, the extimate acts as a vector for such libidinal investment to be reiterated. This circulation is all in the name of knowledge as an object, also as an orientation towards it manifesting as a strange satisfaction in two kinds of knowledge. Firstly, that of the subject-suppose-to-know (the knowledge presumed to be already known) and secondly, that of the subject-supposed-to-soon-know (the knowledge yet to come). It is not only knowledge itself which is captivated, and which provides *jouissance* but rather these are two unmoving ever-present simultaneous symptoms. These are firstly, subjective desire to articulate something about what is supposedly known (that is, for the knowledge to speak for itself via the subject and in so doing to grapple with what needs to be explained). Secondly, it is the subject’s strange and unsettling curiosity which accompanies this differentiation and which manifests as a powerful drive in which pleasure and displeasure, intimacy and the social bond, appropriation and alienation are all simultaneously invested as a contradictory and traumatic necessity.

The function of curiosity especially about the symptom is the foundation to any psychoanalytic inquiry. Indeed, it constitutes the method and desire of psychoanalysis. The question concerning the location of truth is straightforward for psychoanalysis: the truth it is so curious about resides in the unconscious. Here, curiosity as a specific drive is an unyielding floating attention which navigates subjective frustration about what can be known and the trauma of what can’t. Samo Tomšič again offers that “[t]he drives, then, are fictions, which nevertheless explain the causality pertaining to language, the disturbances and the disequilibrium that the functioning of the symbolic order produces in the speaking body, in short, the production of enjoyment.”²⁹ Thus drive does not seek to address empirical questions (notwithstanding these are what often attract the analysand to the couch – how and what do I need to be for the other?) but rather it is simply an inscription in the name of *jouissance*, one which ill-fits either the production of knowledge or the social bond. For example, the social bond

²⁸ Miller, “Extimacy”.

²⁹ Tomšič, “The Ontological Limbo: Three Notes on Extimacy and Ex-sistence”.

doesn't deal with trauma particularly well when issuing judgement rather than seeking for a cure. The radical idea that knowledge is a fantasy provides the foundation of Lacan's 1967 proposition in Seminar XI. In this proposition Lacan contends that the analyst trusts not how well one can articulate a narrative of their supposed knowledge, but what constitutes the desire for this articulation. Both Freud and Lacan approach knowledge from a new and original perspective in which knowledge is a fantasy whose function is to keep the curiosity of one's *jouissance* alive. In political terms this might translate into: what is everyone getting off on, is everyone delusional? Although in the earlier Lacanian position the signifier of knowledge negates *jouissance*, contemporary Lacanian theory, following *Encore* frames the symptom as coexisting with *jouissance* through producing enjoyment via speech. Considered as a bodily event, we can think of *jouissance* as the vessel which contains the too-muchness of the confrontation with the not-all. What this means is that the subject suffers from not only the symptom but from over-attachment to its effects. This all-encompassing sensation is the motor of the drive allowing repetition of that which, in the search for knowledge of *jouissance*, seems impossible to master. It is here that *lalangue* – those elements of speech which on their own are non-sensical (radically outside meaning) but which are nevertheless components of speech, for example phonemes, sounds, stutters, prefixes and so on – is operationalised as a great non-sense mystery. This is what allows us to manage both *jouissance* and its effects differently. Put simply, trying to articulate one's *jouissance* can feel impossible, partially sensical only when it is half said, unreferenced, not fixed. This leaves the sensation of speech (and language) as forever unfinished yet always ready to be taken up again.³⁰ Lacan observes that

³⁰ It is worth marking the bodily foundation of the symptom as a specific linkage to *lalangue*: “We must start with Lacan’s contribution. There is language and it is structured. It acts as a brake on *jouissance*; it is used for speaking, communicating and constructing our fictions. Then there is *lalangue*, that is, the material consisting of sounds, phonemes and words in their raw state and not articulated into the structure of a discourse – material that collides with living bodies. *Lalangue* is something that is endured or suffered. It is a passion. Human beings are the patients of this encounter between *lalangue* and the body. It leaves marks on the body. What Lacan calls ‘the *sinthome*’ is the substance of such marks. These are events, bodily events. Man has a body, and events occur within this body” Bernard Porcheret, “The Bodily Roots of Symptoms”, *Psychoanalysis/Lacan*, Lacan Circle of Melbourne, 2022, unpaginated. Available at <https://lacancircle.com.au/psychoanalysislacan-journal/psychoanalysislacan-volume-1/the-bodily-root-of-symptoms/>, accessed 12 October 2022.

[t]he drives are our myths, said Freud. This must not be understood as a reference to the unreal. For it is the real that drives mythify, as myths usually do: here it is the real which creates [fait] desire by reproducing in it the relationship between the subject and the lost object.”³¹

The myth that the body is a site for knowledge can be traced back to fragments of language which present but a tenuous connection with what needs explicit linkage. Russell Grigg understands myth as “a fictional story woven around a point of impossibility.”³² Esther Faye further comments “that the drive is not only a fundamental concept, it is a fundamental fiction – it performs a fundamental and fictional function in relation to the real. This highlights the necessary artifice of the drives – the way in which what in itself is un-representable – the real from which desire is born – gets represented, or rather, acquires its representative through the drives.”³³ Such fragments are what constitute *lalangue* and are in themselves meaningless, satisfying nothing and producing suffering, confusion and disorientation. The subject’s fixation is on meaning and the possibility of identification with an intimate part of oneself, notwithstanding that suffering feels strangely detached and outside the body. Here we have the real of the symptom in action: *jouissance* without meaning. Psychoanalysis works not with the knowledge one purports to have but with the symptom, the strange sensation of too-muchness. Engaging the signifier as the site of some specific knowledge, as Lacan advocates, binds the body with the signifier. In psychoanalysis these are not unbound but separated allowing the signifier to speak to unconscious rather than to material forces. But from the perspective of subject-supposed-to-know, curiosity as the main instigator for knowledge is foreclosed because of the presumption that one already knows and therefore has no need to traverse anything. Here *jouissance* can be understood as an economic as well as a psychic problem in that it structures one’s curiosity about one’s symptom: Psychoanalysis is an ontological sensation which marks knowledge as a question of *jouissance*. Such a drive is certainly symbolically productive (providing one does not fall into cynicism) and validated by the very sensation of it. Jan

³¹ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits. The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. B. Fink, New York, London, W.W. Norton, 2006, pp. 723–724.

³² Russell Grigg, “Beyond the Oedipus Complex”, in J. Clemens and R. Grigg (eds.), *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis: Reflections on Seminar XVII*, Durham & London, Duke University Press, 2006, p. 55.

³³ Esther Faye, Esther, “The Real of the Drive”, *Analysis*, (2014), p. 1.

Völker³⁴ purports a logic of curiosity in his ontology of speculation as two distinctive yet combined forms extending beyond the materiality of life. It is at this speculative fork in the road Völker marks the commencement of Freudian psychoanalysis about what later becomes Lacan's construction of the enjoyment of the symptom:

The most important passage for this can be found in the famous 1921 text, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Following a synopsis of various problems in the theoretical construction of psychoanalysis, Freud marks an interruption: 'What now follows is speculation, often far-reaching speculation, that each one will appreciate or neglect according to their particular attitude...'³⁵

Later in *Four Fundamental Concepts* Lacan offers that subject's orientation to the speculation of the symptom "is properly the other, appears in so far as the drive has been able to show its circular course."³⁶ Such speculation provides for our desire to be curious about our drive. The subject navigates the grammatical ontology of the Möbius strip with two oppositions in mind: firstly, another Lacanian neologism *non-sense* (which nevertheless harbours a sensical logic) and secondly the *non-sensical* as a rejoinder (a suturing point of knowledge based on presumption, ambivalence, or convenience) which together give meaning to the life of the neurotic – arguably also the perverse and psychotic. The psychoanalytic cure allows for *non-sense* to be a source of knowledge by allowing the subject to get lost in it for a while until its initial unthinkability becomes less fantasmatic as psychic defences start disintegrating, together with the compulsion to be sensical, to attribute coherent meaning to symptoms – to put the non-sensical to work. Nevertheless, what also happens when navigating the Möbius strip and thereby taking up another position in relation to knowledge, is that the subject gains intimate knowledge of their symptom and its function in the repetition of a composite of unconscious knowledge and conscious knowing. This constitutes a specific drive for the subject of psychoanalysis thrust into the throws of the 'impossible profession', to play along with un-

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³⁴ Jan Völker, *Geteiltes Denken: Marx, Freud, Kant, Hegel*. Habilitationsschrift. Eingereicht am Fachbereich Philosophie und Geschichtswissenschaften der Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main im Fach Philosophie, 2022, p. 211.

³⁵ From unpublished manuscript in original German, *Geteiltes Denken: Marx, Freud, Kant, Hegel*. Translation by C. Zeiher.

³⁶ Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 9.

certainty. In this situation the signifier acts as a supportive logic of a subjective sensation vital to the rationale of transference, which invites identification with a tantalising knowledge to be known. Here the Real is allowed to take over and only time can reveal the evolution of a new subjective knowledge and its sensation(all) effects, inevitably absolved as a *know-how* which is not-all.

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