

Adrian Johnston\*

## Affective Life between Signifiers and *Jouis-sens*: Lacan's *Senti-ments* and *Affectuations*

As Lacanian analyst and scholar Bruce Fink correctly observes, Sigmund Freud is far from consistent in his theorization of affect.<sup>1</sup> In line with Fink's observation, what absolutely must be acknowledged is that Freud is indeed genuinely and entirely inconsistent apropos a metapsychology of affect, erratically oscillating in indecision between various speculations regarding the existence and nature of unconscious affects in particular.<sup>2</sup> Jacques Lacan, perhaps strongly motivated in this instance by what could be deemed (in his own parlance) a "passion for ignorance"<sup>3</sup> (perhaps a passion for ignorance about passion), tends not to admit even this much; he repeatedly insists with vehemence that Freud unflinchingly bars affective phenomena from the unconscious *qua* the proper object of psychoanalysis as a discipline. By contrast, Fink at least concedes that Freud wasn't of one mind on this issue, especially concerning the topic of guilt.<sup>4</sup> However, Fink's concession is tempered by a very Lacanian qualification to the effect that, despite his superficial changes of mind concerning affective life, Freud's metapsychological apparatus is, at a deeper and ultimate theoretical level, consistent in ruling out *a priori* the existence of unconscious affects.<sup>5</sup> And, following closely in Lacan's footsteps, Fink likewise ignores the letter of Freud's original German texts by conflating as synonymous affect (*Affekt*) and feeling (*Empfindung*) so as to sustain the claim that affects are felt feelings (i.e., *Empfindungen*) and, hence, cannot be unconscious strictly speaking.<sup>6</sup>

113

---

<sup>1</sup> Bruce Fink, *Lacan to the Letter: Reading Écrits Closely* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> Adrian Johnston, "Misfelt Feelings: Unconscious Affect between Psychoanalysis, Neuroscience, and Philosophy," in Catherine Malabou and Adrian Johnston, *Auto-Affection and Emotional Life: Psychoanalysis and Neurobiology* (New York: Columbia University Press [under review]).

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XIX: Le savoir du psychanalyste, 1971-1972* [unpublished typescript], session of November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1971.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Fink, *Fundamentals of Psychoanalytic Technique: A Lacanian Approach for Practitioners* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007), p. 130.

<sup>5</sup> Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, p. 142.

<sup>6</sup> Fink, *Fundamentals of Psychoanalytic Technique*, p. 130.

Most Lacanians not quite of Fink's caliber, in parroting Lacan, simply pass over in silence those numerous textual occasions in which Freud mobilizes the hypotheses that (certain) affects can be and, in actuality, are unconscious. These followers of Lacan present an utterly false portrait of a Freud steadfastly unwavering in his dismissal of the notion of unconscious affect as a muddleheaded contradiction-in-terms inadmissible to correct psychoanalytic reason. Although somewhat superficially faithful to the letter of Lacan's text, such Lacanians flagrantly flout its spirit, failing to "return to Freud" by not, like Lacan before them, bothering to read Freud's *oeuvre* closely and carefully; they are complacently content to swallow the Freudian corpus as chewed over for them by Lacan. Recalling the fact that, in relation to the topic of the psyche's affective side, Lacan uncharacteristically makes no references whatsoever to the German words *Affekt*, *Gefühl*, *Empfindung*, and *Affektbildung* as these words operate literally in Freud's texts,<sup>7</sup> one might risk asserting that Lacan violates the spirit of his own endeavor when discussing the Freudian metapsychology of affect. One can only guess why this breakdown befalls Lacan. Why does he turn a blind exegetical eye, typically so sharp and discerning, to everything Freud says about affective life in addition to, and often at odds with, the far from unqualified denial of unconscious affects connected to the claim that solely ideational representations (ideas as *Vorstellungen*, to be identified by Lacan as signifiers) can become unconscious through repression?

And yet, like Freud, Lacan too isn't thoroughly consistent in the manners in which he addresses affect in psychoanalysis. Although his wavering and hesitations on this matter are more muted and less explicitly to the fore than Freud's, they are audible to an appropriately attuned interpretive ear. Especially in his tenth and seventeenth seminars (on *Anxiety* [1962–1963] and *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* [1969–1970]), Lacan does more than just underscore the non-existence of unconscious affects for a psychoanalysis grounded upon properly Freudian concepts. But, before turning to focus primarily on these two seminars, foregrounding the nuances and subtleties of Lacan's own contributions to a yet-to-be-systematized Freudian-Lacanian metapsychology of affect requires establishing a background picture of his general, overarching account of affects. This is best accomplished via a condensed chronological tour through the seminars, with topical detours into corresponding *écrits* and other pieces.

---

<sup>7</sup> Johnston, "Misfelt Feelings".

In the first seminar (*Freud's Papers on Technique* [1953–1954]), Lacan argues against distinguishing between the affective and the intellectual such that the former becomes an ineffability beyond the latter. He states his staunch rejection of:

the notorious opposition between the intellectual and the affective — as if the affective were a sort of colouration, a kind of ineffable quality which must be sought out in itself, independently of the eviscerated skin which the purely intellectual realisation of a subject's relationship would consist in. This conception, which urges analysis down strange paths, is puerile. The slightest peculiar, even strange, feeling that the subject professes to in the text of the session is taken to be a spectacular success. That is what follows from this fundamental misunderstanding.<sup>8</sup>

Particularly during the first decade of *le Séminaire*, the primary audience to whom Lacan addresses himself consists of practicing analysts. Discussions of clinical work in Anglo-American analytic circles, both in Lacan's time as well as nowadays, indeed frequently do give the impression that prompting patients on the couch to produce verbalizations of feelings in the here-and-now of the session is the principle concern of analysis; listening to analysts of the stripe Lacan has in mind in this context, it sounds as though therapeutic progress is measured mainly by the degree to which an analysand is willing and able to struggle to voice affects as he/she is being affected by them between the four walls of the analyst's consulting room. In short, this is to treat upsurges of emotion irrupting into patients' forty-five-minute monologues as analytic pay-dirt, as self-evident ends-in-themselves requiring no further explanation or justification (i.e., “a spectacular success”).<sup>9</sup> Although this is an aggressively exaggerated caricature, it informs Lacan's remarks here. He warns those analysts listening to him not to go down this “puerile path” in their practices.

However, Lacan isn't saying that affects are irrelevant to or of no interest in analytic practice. He's reacting to what he sees as an indefensible and misguided elevation of affective life into the one and only alpha-and-omega of analysis. What he actually claims, with good reason steadily and increasingly vindicated since the 1950s, is that neither the intellectual nor the affective (or, in more con-

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953–1954* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. John Forrester (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1988)], p. 57.

<sup>9</sup> Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, pp. 51–52.

temporary vocabulary borrowed from neuroscientific discourse, the cognitive and the emotional) are independent of one another, each standing independently on its own. Not only, *contra* other analytic orientations guilty of fetishizing the appearance of affects within the scene of analytic sessions, are affects inextricably intertwined with ideas (as thoughts, memories, words, concepts, etc.) — ideas, as incarnated in living speech, are permeated with something other than themselves, affected by non-ideational forces and factors (as indicated in the above-quoted passage when Lacan speaks of “the eviscerated skin which the purely intellectual realisation of a subject’s relationship would consist in”).

Lacan’s point can be made by paraphrasing Kant: Affects without ideas are blind (the dynamic movement of the affective/emotional is shaped and steered by the intellectual/cognitive), while ideas without affects are empty (the structured kinetics of the intellectual/cognitive are driven along by juice flowing from the affective/emotional). Of course, given the tendencies and trends within psychoanalysis Lacan is combating at this time, his comments immediately following the ones in the quotation a couple of paragraphs above highlight one side of this two-sided coin, namely, the dependence of the affective on the intellectual:

The affective is not like a special density which would escape an intellectual accounting. It is not to be found in a mythical beyond of the production of the symbol which would precede the discursive formulation. Only this can allow us from the start, I won’t say to locate, but to apprehend what the full realisation of speech consists in.<sup>10</sup>

This is of a piece with Lacan’s denunciation, in his 1953 “Rome Discourse” (“The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis”), of an “illusion” plaguing analysts and their practices, one “which impels us to seek the subject’s reality beyond the wall of language”<sup>11</sup> (Fink also points out this connection between the mirage of language being a barrier between those who use it and certain conceptions of affect<sup>12</sup>). In other words, analysts shouldn’t erroneously strive somehow to gain access to a reservoir of feelings and emotions sheltering behind the manifest façade of analysands’ utterances. It’s not as though there re-

116

<sup>10</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I*, p. 57.

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Lacan, “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis,” *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* [trans. Bruce Fink] (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006), p. 254.

<sup>12</sup> Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, p. 51.

ally is a transcendent Elsewhere of ineffable qualitative phenomena subsisting in a pure state of extra-linguistic immediacy outside of the strictures of the linguistic latticework woven session after session by the patient's speech. When dealing with speaking beings — analysis deals with nothing but — any affects inevitably will be immanent and impure *qua* tied up with constellations and configurations of ideational representations (i.e., Freudian *Vorstellungen* as Lacanian signifiers). At least as regards these particular 1954 observations bearing on affects in analysis, Lacan's position seems to be that the affective/emotional and the intellectual/cognitive are mutually co-entangled — although, to counterbalance what he considers to be misguided deviations from Freudian orthodoxy, he slants his stress in the direction of underscoring the intellectual/cognitive mediation of the affective/emotional.

In the ensuing years, this slanted stress seems to lose its status of being strictly a tactical counterbalance against prevailing clinical analytic developments, with Lacan coming to contend that signifier-ideas have metapsychological priority over affects. That is to say, as is particularly evident between 1958 and 1962 (in the sixth, seventh, and ninth seminars specifically), Lacan tilts the balance in the complex ideational-affective *rapport* decisively in favor of ideational structures, maintaining that these are the driving, determining variables in relation to affective (epi)phenomena. This *rapport*, deprived of a dialectic of bidirectional, reciprocal influences between its poles, now appears to be organized by a unidirectional line of influence originating from one side alone, namely, in signifiers and their interrelationships. In a session of the sixth seminar (*Desire and Its Interpretation* [1958–1959]), Lacan, basing himself on what he takes to be Freud's 1915 metapsychological exclusion of affects from the unconscious (as oxymoronic unfelt feelings), claims that affects are only ever displaced within consciousness relative to chains of signifiers as concatenations of ideational drive-representatives, some of which can be and are repressed. Stated differently, whereas *Vorstellungen*-as-signifiers are able to become parts of the unconscious through being dragged, via the gravitational pull of material and/or meaningful associations, into the orbit of branching formations of the unconscious, affects, as felt qualitative phenomena, must remain within the sphere of conscious experience. In line with what Freud posits in another 1915 paper on metapsychology (the essay entitled "Repression"),<sup>13</sup> Lacan views repression as bringing about

---

<sup>13</sup> *SE* 14: 152.

red-herring-like false connections; more precisely, Lacan thinks the Freudian position here is to assert that affects, after repression does its job and disrupts the true connection of these affects with their original ideational partners, drift within the sphere of conscious awareness in which they remain and form false connections through getting (re-)attached to other signifiers.<sup>14</sup> As Roberto Harari, in his examination of Lacan's tenth seminar on anxiety, puts it, "there are *no unconscious affects but, rather, affects drift*".<sup>15</sup> Both Harari and, in certain contexts, Fink express agreement with this aspect of Lacan's reading of Freud as articulated in 1958.<sup>16</sup> In this same session of the sixth seminar, Lacan also underscores Freud's reservations when speaking of unconscious affects, emotions, and feelings (three terms Lacan lumps together on this occasion); with a calculated weighting of exegetical emphasis, he thereby aims at supporting the thesis that, for Freudian metapsychology, such talk can amount, when all is said and done, only to incoherent, contradictory formulations without real referents.<sup>17</sup>

The seventh and ninth seminars continue along the same lines. In the seventh seminar (*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* [1959–1960]), Lacan denounces "the confused nature of the recourse to affectivity" so prevalent in other strains of psychoanalysis basing themselves on what he alleges to be "crude" non-Freudian psychologies — although he's careful to add that, "Of course, it is not a matter of denying the importance of affects."<sup>18</sup> In the ninth seminar (*Identification* [1961–1962]), Lacan, responding to a presentation by his analyst-student Piera Aulagnier in which she appeals to an unbridgeable abyss separating affective phenomena from their linguistic translations (i.e., to something akin to the earlier-denounced image of the "wall of language"), denies that affects enjoy an immediate existence independent from the mediation of words. On the contrary, even in affective life, signifiers (as ideas, symbols, thoughts, etc.) are purported

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre VI: Le désir et son interprétation, 1958–1959* [unpublished typescript], session of November 26<sup>th</sup>, 1958.

<sup>15</sup> Roberto Harari, *Lacan's Seminar on 'Anxiety': An Introduction* [ed. Rico Franses; trans. Jane C. Lamb-Ruiz] (New York: Other Press, 2001), p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> Harari, *Lacan's Seminar on 'Anxiety'*, pp. 12–13; Roberto Harari, *Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: An Introduction* [trans. Judith Filc] (New York: Other Press, 2004), p. 268; Bruce Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 113–114.

<sup>17</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre VI*, session of November 26<sup>th</sup>, 1958.

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Dennis Porter] (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992), p. 102.

to be the primary driving forces at work in the psyche. Lacan encapsulates his criticisms with a play on words, a homophony audible in French: Insisting on affects as somehow primary (*primaire*) is tantamount to simplemindedness (*primarité*).<sup>19</sup> Instead, affects, in Lacanian psychoanalysis, are secondary, namely, residual by-products secreted and pushed to-and-fro by the kinetic relations between networks of signifiers. Harari maintains that the true “Lacanian conception” of affects is that which “*postulates affect as one effect of the signifier*”.<sup>20</sup>

Although, starting the following academic year (1962–1963), Lacan significantly refines and enriches his metapsychology of affect, it isn't as though this poorer, less refined treatment of affects as mere after-effects of the interactions of ideational representations falls entirely by the wayside. For instance, in the text of the 1973 published version of Lacan's appearance on television, he reiterates his earlier opinions on affect. Complaining about “the story of my supposed neglect of affect,” a narrative by then quite popular and widespread in the “post-structuralist” intellectual climate of Paris in the wake of May 1968, Lacan indignantly retorts:

I just want an answer on this point: does an affect have to do with the body? A discharge of adrenalin — is that body or not? It upsets its functions, true. But what is there in it that makes it come from the soul? What it discharges is thought.<sup>21</sup>

The word “thought” here functions as a synonym for ideational representations as signifiers, as chains of multiple linguistic-symbolic constituents. The affected body is affected by words and ideas; even though the effect might be somatic, the cause is not. Lacan adds:

All I've done is rerelease what Freud states in an article of 1915 on repression, and in others that return to this subject, namely that affect is displaced. How to appreciate this displacement, if not so the basis of the subject, which is presupposed by the fact that it has no better means of occurring than through representation?<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre IX: L'identification, 1961–1962* [unpublished typescript], session of May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1962.

<sup>20</sup> Harari, *Lacan's Seminar on 'Anxiety'*, p. 27.

<sup>21</sup> Jacques Lacan, “Television” [trans. Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson], *Television/A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment* [ed. Joan Copjec], New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 1990, p. 20.

<sup>22</sup> Lacan, “Television,” p. 20.

From a vantage point reached through an examination of the literal details of Freud's writings relevant to the debated enigma/problem of unconscious affects,<sup>23</sup> Lacan's professions of modesty are in danger of ringing false: Even in his 1915 papers on metapsychology, Freud doesn't limit himself to saying solely that affects are invariably conscious experiential qualia displaced relative to the shifting ground of webs of representational contents — and this in addition to those numerous other places in the Freudian corpus, both before and after 1915, where affect is discussed in ways relevant to the issues at stake here, places neglected by Lacan's highly selective and partial rendition of Freud's metapsychology of affect. In struggling against the excessive over-emphases on affectivity, embodiment, and energetics promoted by a range of figures and orientations (non-Lacanian analysts, disenchanted ex/post-Lacanian, existential phenomenologists, feminist theorists, and so on), Lacan sometimes succumbs to an equally excessive counter-emphasis on the foundational, fundamental primacy of "representation" in psychical life.

Along the same lines and echoing remarks made in the seventh seminar, Lacan, in the twenty-third seminar (*Le sinthome* [1975–1976]), sidelines the topic of affect as too bound up with vulgar, unsophisticated psychologies based on the "confused image we have of our own body"<sup>24</sup> (i.e., mirages mired in the Lacanian register of the Imaginary). In a late piece from 1980, Lacan contrasts the indestructible fixity of desire with the "instability" (*mouvance*) of affects, an instability symptomatic of their status as volatile fluctuating displacements within consciousness buffeted about by the achronological machinations of the unconscious formations configuring desire in its strict Lacanian sense<sup>25</sup> (the latter, not the former, thus being identified as what is really of interest in analysis). Once again, at the very end of his itinerary, Lacan insists that intellectual/cognitive structures, and not affective/emotional phenomena, are what psychoanalysis is occupied with insofar as the unconscious, as constituted by repression and related mechanisms, is the central object of analytic theory and practice.

120

Before directing sustained critical attention toward the tenth and seventeenth seminars, in which determining the status of affect in Lacan's thinking is a

<sup>23</sup> Johnston, "Misfelt Feelings".

<sup>24</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIII: Le sinthome, 1975–1976* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller] (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005), p. 149.

<sup>25</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXVII: Dissolution, 1979–1980* [unpublished typescript], session of March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1980.



trickier task, mention must be made of a peculiar German term employed by Freud and singled-out as of crucial importance by Lacan: *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* (a compound word whose translation, as soon will become evident, raises questions and presents difficulties not without implications for analysis both theoretical and practical — hence, its translation will be delayed temporarily in this discussion). Lacan's glosses on this word's significance, as used by Freud, often accompany his pronouncements regarding the place of affect in the Freudian framework.<sup>26</sup> In the third section on "Unconscious Emotions" in the 1915 metapsychological paper "The Unconscious" — as is now obvious, these three pages of text lie at the very heart of the controversies into which this project has waded — the *Repräsentanz* represented by the *Vorstellung* isn't a representation as an idea distinct or separate from an affect, but, instead, an affectively-charged (i.e., "cathected", in Freudian locution) ideational node. To be more specific and exact, a *Repräsentanz* would be, in this context, a psychological drive-representative *qua* a mental idea (representing a drive's linked aim [*Ziel*] and object [*Objekt*]) invested by somatic drive-energy *qua* the affecting body (consisting of a drive's source [*Quelle*] and pressure [*Drang*]). Such cathexes are the precise points at which soma and psyche (and, by extension, affects and ideas) overlap in the manner Freud indicates in his contemporaneous paper on "Drives and Their Vicissitudes"<sup>27</sup>. *Vorstellungen* would be ideational representations which represent representations-as-*Repräsentanzen* once these *Repräsentanzen* have been submitted to the vicissitudes of defensive maneuvers rendering them unconscious (*à la* the patterns of "repression proper" in connection with "primal repression" as described by Freud in his metapsychological paper on "Repression"<sup>28</sup>). As Freud words it in "The Unconscious" apropos the concept of an "affective or emotional impulse" (*Affekt- oder Gefühlsregung*), "Owing to the repression of its proper representative (*eigentlichen Repräsentanz*) it has been forced to become connected with another idea (*anderen Vorstellung*), and is now regarded by consciousness as the manifestation of that idea."<sup>29</sup> The violent cutting of repression tears away affects/emotions from their own primordial and initial accompanying representatives (*Repräsentanzen*). Thereafter, they move in, along,

<sup>26</sup> Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 8, 73–74; Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, pp. 167–168.

<sup>27</sup> *SE* 14: 121–122.

<sup>28</sup> *SE* 14: 148.

<sup>29</sup> *GW* 10: 276; *SE* 14: 177–178.

and about “other ideas” as *Vorstellungen* associated with their original *Repräsentanzen*.

Incidentally, Fink, on a couple of occasions, indicates that Lacan identifies the *Vorstellung* as a primordially repressed Real (i.e., a pre-Symbolic “x” inscribed in the psyche as a proto-signifier) and the *Repräsentanz* as the Symbolic delegate of the thus — repressed, unconscious *Vorstellung* (i.e., the signifier signifying that which is primordially repressed).<sup>30</sup> However, the preceding quoted sentence from “The Unconscious” (quoted in the paragraph immediately above) indicates that this reverses Freud’s metapsychological usage of these two German words. Moreover, in Freud’s contemporaneous metapsychological paper on “Repression” (a text Lacan refers to apropos Freud’s use of the compound word *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*), the German makes clear that Freud identifies the ideational representatives of drives (i.e., *Triebrepräsentanzen*) which are submitted to repression (both “primal” and secondary/“proper” repression [i.e., *Urverdrängung* and *Verdrängung*]) as *Repräsentanzen*, not *Vorstellungen*.<sup>31</sup> *Contra* Fink (and, perhaps, Lacan himself), the Freudian usage will be respected throughout the rest of the ensuing discussion below.<sup>32</sup>

This Lacanian (mis)reading of Freud aside, an upshot of the preceding to bear in mind in what follows is that affective elements (intimately related to the drives of the libidinal economy) are infused into these ideational representations right from the start. One cannot speak, at least while wearing the cloak of Freud’s authority, of intra-representational relations between *Repräsentanzen* and *Vorstellungen* as unfolding prior to and independently of drive-derived affective investments being injected into the *Ur-Repräsentanzen* constituting the primordial nuclei (i.e., the primally repressed) of the defensively eclipsed unconscious. In Freud’s name, one might venture positing as an axiom that a *Repräsentanz* is a strange locus of convergence in which energy and structure are indistinctly mixed together from the beginning. Rather than theorizing as if affective energies and ideational structures originally are separate and distinct, only subsequently

122

<sup>30</sup> Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, p. 74 ; Bruce Fink, “The Real Cause of Repetition,” *Reading Seminar XI: Lacan’s Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* [ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, and Maire Jaanus] (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 227–228.

<sup>31</sup> *GW* 10: 250–251; *SE* 14: 148.

<sup>32</sup> Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co.: A History of Psychoanalysis in France, 1925–1985* [trans. Jeffrey Mehlman] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 312.

to be brought together over the course of passing time in unstable admixtures through ontogenetic processes, maybe this metapsychological perspective needs to be inverted: The neat-and-clean distinction between energy and structure, between affect and idea, is a secondary abstraction generated by both the temporally elongated blossoming of the psyche itself (a blossoming made possible in part by repressions) as well as the psychoanalytic theorization of this same emergence. In short, one might speculate that energetic affects and structural ideas, separated from each other as isolated psychical constituents, are fall-outs distilled, through repression and related dynamics, from more primordial psychical units that are neither/both affective energies nor/and ideational structures.

A paragraph in Lacan's 1959 *écrit* "In Memory of Ernest Jones: On His Theory of Symbolism" summarizes the basic gist of what he sees as being entailed by the Freudian concept-term "*Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*". As usual, when the topic of affect is at stake, Lacan appeals to Freud's 1915 papers on metapsychology in particular:

Freud's conception — developed and published in 1915 in the *Internationale Zeitschrift*, in the three articles on drives and their avatars, repression, and the unconscious — leaves no room for ambiguity on this point: it is the signifier that is repressed, there being no other meaning that can be given in these texts to the word *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*. As for affects, Freud expressly formulates that they are not repressed; they can only be said to be repressed by indulgence. As simple *Ansätze* or appendices of the repressed, signals equivalent to hysterical fits [*accès*] established in the species, Freud articulates that affects are simply displaced, as is evidenced by the fundamental fact — and it can be seen that someone is an analyst if he realizes this fact — by which the subject is bound to "understand" his affects all the more the less they are really justified.<sup>33</sup>

123

Nearly everything Lacan pronounces apropos *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen* in Freudian metapsychology over the course of seminars ranging from 1958 through 1971 is contained in this passage. Before turning to the issues involved in translating Freud's German word into both English and (French) Lacanese — these issues will be gotten at through examining relevant moments in *le Séminaire* running from the sixth through the eighteenth seminars — a few remarks on the above

---

<sup>33</sup> Jacques Lacan, "In Memory of Ernest Jones: On His Theory of Symbolism," *Écrits*, p. 598.

quotation are in order. First of all, Lacan clearly asserts that his Saussure-inspired notion of the signifier is synonymous with Freud's *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*.<sup>34</sup> Secondly, the implied delegitimization of any theses regarding unconscious affects looks to be in danger of resting on the erroneous assumption that repression is the sole defense mechanism by virtue of which psychical things are barred from explicit conscious self-awareness (as Lacan well knows, for the later Freud especially, there are a number of defense mechanisms besides repression — and this apart from the fact that what is meant by “repression” [*Verdrängung*] in Freud's texts is far from simple and straightforward in the way hinted at by Lacan here). Third, in tandem with emphasizing the displacement of affects within the sphere of consciousness following repression, Lacan indicates that these mere “signals” — in a session of the seventh seminar, he again contrasts affects as signals with *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen* as signifiers<sup>35</sup> — are fixed, natural attributes of the human animal (i.e., “signals [...] established in the species”). That is to say, emotions and feelings themselves don't distinguish speaking beings from other living beings. Rather, only the web-like network-systems of ideational nodes into which affects are routed, and within which they are shuttled about through drifting displacements, mark the denaturalized human psyche as distinct from other animals' nature-governed minds. Put differently, affective phenomena on their own, as signals, are purportedly no different-in-kind from the stereotyped repertoire of invariant reactions characteristic of any animal species. Finally, Lacan, presuming that affects remain conscious in the wake of repression (albeit thereafter reattached to other representations-as-signifiers in what Freud deems “false connections”), insists that a properly analytic stance *vis-à-vis* affects is to call into question the pseudo-explanatory rationalizations people construct in response to seemingly excessive displaced sentiments whose “true” ideational bases have been rendered unconscious.

124

In the sixth seminar, Lacan reiterates much of this apropos the Freudian *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*.<sup>36</sup> The following academic year, he returns to discussing this term several times. Lacan starts with the first half of this compound German word, namely, the word “*Vorstellung*” (usually rendered in English by Freud's translators as “idea” — thus, “*Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*” could be translated into English as

<sup>34</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, p. 103.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102–103.

<sup>36</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre VI*, session of November 26<sup>th</sup>, 1958.

“representative of an idea” or “representative of an ideational representation”). Lacan situates these ideas “between perception and consciousness,”<sup>37</sup> thus suggesting, along accepted and established Freudian lines, that *Vorstellungen*, although being ideational representations registered by the psychical apparatus, aren’t necessarily registered in the mode of being attended to by the awareness of directed conscious attention. However, when it comes to the unconscious, Lacan is careful to clarify that its fabric is woven not of *Vorstellungen* as free-standing, atomic units of mental content, but, instead, of differentially co-determining, cross-resonating relations between multiple representations. This is taken as further justification for his psychoanalytic recourse to a modified Saussurian theory of the signifier à la structural linguistics, a theory including the stipulation that signifiers as such exist only in sets of two or more signifiers<sup>38</sup> (a signifier without another signifier isn’t a signifier to begin with—for there to be an  $S_1$ , there must be, at a minimum, an  $S_2$ ). This, he claims, is the significance of Freud’s mention of *Vorstellungen* in connection with *Repräsentanzen* in his paper on “The Unconscious”. The concept-term *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* “turns *Vorstellung* into an associative and combinatory element. In that way the world of *Vorstellung* is already organized according to the possibilities of the signifier as such.”<sup>39</sup> For Freudian psychoanalysis as conceptualized by Lacan, everything in psychical life (affects included) is “flocculated” through the sieve-like matrices of inter-linked signifiers, with these signifiers mutually shaping and influencing each other in complex dynamics defying description in the languages proffered by any sort of psychological atomism of primitive, irreducible mental contents<sup>40</sup> (in a contemporaneous talk entitled “*Discours aux catholiques*,” he relates the Freudian *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* to a “principle of permutation” in which the possibility of displacements and substitutions is the rule<sup>41</sup>). Lacan reads “*Vorstellung*” and “*Repräsentanz*” as both being equivalent to what he refers to under the rubric of the signifier, with one signifier (the  $S_1$  *Vorstellung* — really,

<sup>37</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, p. 61.

<sup>38</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XIX: Le savoir du psychanalyste, 1971–1972*, session of February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1972; Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXV: Le moment de conclure, 1977–1978* [unpublished typescript], session of November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1977; Jean-Claude Miller, *Le périple structural: Figures et paradigmes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), pp. 144–146.

<sup>39</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, p. 61.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102, 118.

<sup>41</sup> Jacques Lacan, “*Discours aux catholiques*,” *Le triomphe de la religion, précédé de Discours aux catholiques* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller] (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005), pp. 50–51.

Freud's *Repräsentanz*) being represented by another signifier (the  $S_2$  *Repräsentanz* — really, Freud's *Vorstellung*).

This becomes even clearer a few years later. Jacques-Alain Miller entitles the opening part/sub-section of the June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1964 session of Lacan's deservedly celebrated eleventh seminar "The question of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*". Lacan gets his lecture underway by again stressing the importance of this term in Freud's discourse.<sup>42</sup> He ties it to the Freudian metapsychological account of repression, including this account's purported denial and dismissal of the possibility of affects being rendered unconscious.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, auditors are reminded of the correct Lacanian translation of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*: not "the representative representation (*le représentant représentatif*),"<sup>44</sup> but, instead, "*the representative (le représentant) — I translated literally — of the representation (de la représentation)*"<sup>45</sup>. Or, as he quickly proceeds to formulate it, "The *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is the representative representative (*le représentant représentatif*), let us say."<sup>46</sup>

Lacan's point, here and elsewhere,<sup>47</sup> is that a *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is not the psychoanalytic name for a single, special piece of ideational content in the psychological apparatus. It isn't as though a *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is one individual item of representational material. Rather, according to Lacan, it designates the co-determining *rapport* between two (or more) ideational representations wherein one representation (the repressed  $S_1$ ) is represented by another representation (the non-repressed  $S_2$ , different from but linked in a chain with the repressed  $S_1$ ).<sup>48</sup> In this vein, he goes on to claim that, "The *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is the binary signifier"<sup>49</sup> (and this in the context of elaborations concerning the

<sup>42</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, 1964* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Alan Sheridan] (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977), p. 216.

<sup>43</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, pp. 216–217.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XIII: L'objet de la psychanalyse, 1965–1966* [unpublished typescript], session of June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1966.

<sup>48</sup> Harari, *Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 267–268.

<sup>49</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, p. 218.

now-famous Lacanian conception of “alienation”, elaborations too elaborate to deal with at the moment). In the next session, this is re-stated — “this *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* [...] is [...] the signifying  $S_2$  of the dyad”<sup>50</sup>. A few years later, in the fifteenth seminar, the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, as the “representative of representation” (*représentant de la représentation*), is similarly linked to the notion of a “combinatorial” (*combinatoire*).<sup>51</sup> In the sixteenth seminar, he warns against equivocating between the terms “representative” (*représentant*) and “representation” (*représentation*).<sup>52</sup> These terms are distinct from one another insofar as representation is a function coming into operation between two or more representatives (in terms of the psychoanalytic *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* involved with repression, this interval is the connection between, on the one hand, the repressed  $S_1$  *Repräsentanz*, and, on the other hand, the non-repressed  $S_2$  *Vorstellung* as both that which contributes to triggering retroactively the repression of the  $S_1$  *Repräsentanz* and, at the same time, the associative/signifying return of this same repressed). Hence, the function of representation isn't reducible to one given representative as an isolated, self-defined atomic unit constituting a single element of discrete content lodged within the psychical apparatus.<sup>53</sup>

What Lacan means when he claims that the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, accurately translated and understood, is the “representative of the representation”<sup>54</sup> is the following: In the aftermath of repression constituting the unconscious in the strict psychoanalytic sense (with the unconscious being the proper object of psychoanalysis as a discipline), certain repressed signifiers (remembering that, for Lacan, only ideas/representations *qua* signifiers can be subjected to the fate of repression) are represented by other, non-repressed signifiers associated in various ways with those that are repressed. In the restricted, circumscribed domains of self-consciousness and the ego, the Lacanian “subject of the unconscious” manages to make itself heard and felt (or, perhaps, misheard and misfelt) through the  $S_1$ - $S_2$  signifying chains that Lacan equates with Freud's *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen*, with these chains bearing witness to significant “effects of

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

<sup>51</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XV: L'acte psychanalytique, 1967–1968* [unpublished typescript], session of November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1967.

<sup>52</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVI: D'un Autre à l'autre, 1968–1969* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller] (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006), p. 261.

<sup>53</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, p. 102.

<sup>54</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, p. 218.

truth” (*effet de vérité*)<sup>55</sup> having to do with the repressed (this also helps to explain why Lacan maintains that “repression and the return of the repressed are the same thing”<sup>56</sup>). These claims about the place of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen* in the vicissitudes of repression are reiterated in subsequent seminars after 1964 too.<sup>57</sup>

What, if anything, is problematic in Lacan’s glosses on Freud’s *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*? Arguably, difficulties arise as soon as Lacan (again in the June 3<sup>rd</sup> session of the eleventh seminar) proceeds further to flesh out the sense in which he uses the word “representation” with respect to Freudian metapsychology:

We mean by representatives what we understand when we use the phrase, for example, the representative of France. What do diplomats do when they address one another? They simply exercise, in relation to one another, that function of being pure representatives and, above all, their own signification must not intervene. When diplomats are addressing one another, they are supposed to represent something whose signification, while constantly changing, is, beyond their own persons, France, Britain, etc. In the very exchange of views, each must record only what the other transmits in his pure function as signifier, he must not take into account what the other is, *qua* presence, as a man who is likable to a greater or lesser degree. Inter-psychology is an impurity in this exchange.<sup>58</sup>

He continues:

The term *Repräsentanz* is to be taken in this sense. The signifier has to be understood in this way, it is at the opposite pole from signification. Signification, on the other hand, comes into play in the *Vorstellung*.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XIV: La logique du fantasme, 1966–1967* [unpublished typescript], session of December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1966 ; Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVIII: D’un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant, 1971–1972* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller] (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006), p. 14.

<sup>56</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I*, p. 191.

<sup>57</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XIV*, session of December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1966. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, 1969–1970* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Russell Grigg] (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007), p. 144.

<sup>58</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, p. 220.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*



There are (at least) two ways to read this invocation of the figure of the diplomat: one, so to speak, more diplomatic (i.e., charitable) than the other. The less charitable reading, for which there is support here and elsewhere in Lacan's *oeuvre*, is that Lacan completely neglects the fact that, according to Freud, the repressed portions of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* configurations/constellations are not "pure" (*à la* the "pure function as signifier") *qua* functionally independent of affective and libidinal investments. In fact, for Freud and much of psychoanalysis after him, intra-psychical defense mechanisms, repression included, are motivated and driven by the recurrently pressing demands of affect-regulation within the psychical apparatus (primarily, fending off and tamping down unpleasurable negative affects). Additionally, for Freud in particular, the repressed drive representatives (*Triebrepräsenzen*) constituting the nuclei of the unconscious are saturated with cathexes (*Besetzungen*), with the potent "energies" of emotions and impulses. Such electrified representatives, laden and twitching with turbulent passions, are anything but bloodless diplomatic functionaries, cool, calm, and collected representatives (*Repräsenzen*) able to conduct negotiations with other representatives (*Vorstellungen*) in a reasonable, sober-minded manner.

The more charitable reading of Lacan's 1964 invocation of the figure of the diplomat in specifying the meaning of "representative" at work in Freudian psychoanalysis involves further elucidating what lies behind this figure. Lacan is sensible enough to realize that the flesh-and-blood human beings charged with the status of being diplomatic representatives are, as all-too-human, influenced by their particular interests, motives, reactions, tastes, etc. (i.e., their peculiar "psychologies"). And yet, as diplomatic representatives, they can and do conduct their business with others in ways putting to the side and disregarding these idiosyncrasies of theirs as irrelevant to the matters at stake in their negotiations. But, the states these representatives represent frequently are far from being as dispassionate as their diplomats. In 1915, Freud, responding to the outbreak of the first World War, is quick to note, with a sigh of discouragement he proceeds to analyze, just how emotionally discombobulated and irrationally stirred-up whole countries can become, even the most "civilized" of nations<sup>60</sup>; the essay "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" is from the same period as the papers on metapsychology upon which Lacan relies in his downplaying of the importance of affect in psychoanalysis. And, to render Lacan's reading of Freud's

<sup>60</sup> *SE* 14: 278–279, 287–288.

metapsychology of affect even more suspect, Freud's war-inspired reflections emphasize the top-to-bottom dominance of affects in the mental life of humanity, in relation to which the intellect is quite weak and feeble.<sup>61</sup>

Considering this fact about the relation between diplomats and the nation-states they represent, a sympathetic and productive way to read Lacan here (in the eleventh seminar) is to interpret the processes unfolding at the level of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen* (as representational/signifying materials) as set in motion by something other than such Symbolic "stuff". Starting in the seventh seminar, the Lacanian register of the Real consistently plays the part of that which drives the kinetic concatenations of signifiers without itself being reducible to or delineable within the order of the signifier. However, once set in motion, these representational/signifying materials help shape subsequent psychological-subjective trajectories in fashions not entirely determined by their originary non-Symbolic catalysts (just as diplomats are dispatched at the behest of their countries' whims, although, once caught up in the intricacies of negotiations, these representatives can and do contribute an effective influence of their own on events). As regards a metapsychology of affective life, this would mean that fusions of energy and structure (i.e., *Repräsentanzen*, as analogous to nation-states *qua* combinations of collective will, with all its passions and sentiments, and socio-symbolic edifices) mobilize and push along signifier-like representational networks (i.e., *Vorstellungen*, as analogous to diplomatic representatives of nation-states licensed to speak on their behalf) — with these networks taking on a relative autonomy of their own that comes to exercise a reciprocal, countervailing influence over that which propels them forward (or, sometimes, drags them backward).

130

Fink rightly notes that the concept of representation in Freudian-Lacanian theory is very much in need of further clarification.<sup>62</sup> As will be argued later, such much-needed clarifications lead to revisions of and/or deviations from Lacan's signifier-centered version of Freud's metapsychology of affect and repression. But, in the meantime, certain things should be articulated apropos Lacan's more nuanced pronouncements concerning affective life, pronouncements located in the tenth and seventeenth seminars in particular. The first session of the tenth

---

<sup>61</sup> *SE* 14: 287–288.

<sup>62</sup> Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, pp. 73–74, 188.

seminar, a seminar devoted to the topic of anxiety, closes with Lacan rapidly enumerating a series of points bearing upon the psychoanalysis of affects (considering that this seminar's treatment of anxiety has been gone over at length by others, the focus in what follows will be highly selective and partial). To begin with, here and in the next session, Lacan insists that anxiety is indeed an affect.<sup>63</sup> Few people, whether analysts or not, would disagree with this seemingly banal observation. But, Lacan proceeds to clarify his relationship to affect as a psychoanalytic thinker:

Those who follow the movements of affinity or of aversion of my discourse, frequently letting themselves be taken in by appearances, undoubtedly think that I am less interested in affects than in anything else. This is absurd. I have tried on occasion to say what affect is not. It is not being (*l'être*) given in its immediacy, nor is it the subject in some brute, raw form. It is not, in any case, protopathic. My occasional remarks on affect mean nothing other than this.<sup>64</sup>

He adds:

what I have said of affect is that it is not repressed. Freud says this just like me. It is unfastened (*désarrimé*); it goes with the drift. One finds it displaced, mad, inverted, metabolized, but it is not repressed. What are repressed are the signifiers that moor it.<sup>65</sup>

Lacan's comments betray a palpable awareness of charges indicting him for negligence with respect to affects, accusations with damning force in many clinical psychoanalytic circles (several years later, starting in the late 1960s, various so-called "post-structuralists" in France, including many non-clinicians, noisily repeat this long-standing refrain of complaint about Lacanian theory). At the very start of the tenth seminar, he lays the foundations for what becomes a repeated line of defensive self-exculpation: I, Lacan, devoted a whole year of my seminar to the topic of anxiety; Therefore, I am not guilty of neglecting affect, as I'm so often accused of doing.<sup>66</sup> Of course, critics could respond by pointing out that one academic year out of twenty-seven (not including out of a mountain of other

131

<sup>63</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre X: L'angoisse, 1962–1963* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller] (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004), pp. 23, 28.

<sup>64</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre X*, p. 23.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII*, p. 144; Lacan, "Television," p. 21.

texts in addition) isn't all that much time for a psychoanalyst to spend addressing affects. Even Lacan admits that his "remarks on affect" are "occasional". What's more, as he goes on to say in the closing moments of this inaugural session of the tenth seminar, he has no plans to elaborate a "general theory of affects" (at least not prior to an exploration of anxiety as one specific affect of momentous significance for psychoanalysis), an elaboration derided as a non-psychoanalytic endeavor for mere psychologists.<sup>67</sup>

Anyhow, in the passages from the tenth seminar quoted above, Lacan also, as is manifest, repeats his mantra according to which Freud flatly denies the existence of repressed (i.e., unconscious) affects (a mantra ignoring the fact that Freud tacitly distinguishes between, on the one hand, feelings [*Empfindungen*], and, on the other hand, affects [*Affekte*] and emotions [*Gefühle*] — additionally, he vacillates considerably on the issue of whether affects/emotions can be unconscious<sup>68</sup>). Again, in the wake of repression, affects are said to undergo only detachment from their original ideational partners (i.e., Freud's ideas and/or Lacan's signifiers) to which they are coupled initially; subsequent to this, they meander off and end up reattached to other ideational partners further away down the winding, branching tendrils of enchained representations. Curiously, Lacan, instead of declaring that what he states regarding affect echoes Freud, announces the reverse: What Freud states regarding affect echoes him ("Freud says this just like me" [*Cela, Freud le dit comme moi*]), and not "I say this just like Freud"). Perhaps, whether consciously or not, Lacan is signaling, through this odd reversal of positions between himself and Freud, an awareness that the Freud he presents in his teachings as regards affect is one retroactively modified and custom-tailored to the needs, constraints, and requirements of a specifically Lacanian framework.

132

But, although none of the above is new relative to Lacan's basic metapsychology of affect as sketched in earlier contexts, he does utter something very important, something pregnant with crucial implications — "affect [...] is not being (*l'être*) given in its immediacy, nor is it the subject in some brute, raw form". This project entirely agrees with Lacan on this key point. That is to say, there's agreement here that affects, at least those affecting the sort of subjectivity of concern in analy-

<sup>67</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre X*, p. 24.

<sup>68</sup> Johnston, "Misfelt Feelings".

sis (i.e., the human *qua* speaking being [*parlêtre*]), are anything but primitive phenomena of a self-evident nature calling for no further analysis or explanation. Affects are not ground-zero, rock-bottom experiences incapable of additional decomposition; they are not *Gestalt*-like, indissolubly unified mental states of an irreducible sort. As per the very etymology of the word, to “analyze” affects (as an analyst) is to dissolve them into their multiple constituents. Along these lines, Harari, in his commentary on Lacan’s tenth seminar, helpfully highlights what’s entailed by Lacan emphasizing, in fidelity to Freud, anxiety’s position as a “signal”<sup>69</sup> — “The mere fact of pointing this out implies considering it as *something referring to another order*. Thus, it is not a self- or auto-referential phenomenon but, on the contrary, has a condition of retransmission to another field. *Anxiety does not represent itself*.”<sup>70</sup> However, on this reading, if anxiety is emblematic of affects in general, then the “other order” in relation to which this affect is a residual phenomenal manifestation (i.e., a signal) is none other than Lacan’s “symbolic order”. Affect is thereby once more reduced to the role of a secondary by-product of the intellectualizing machinations of “pure” signifiers. But, what if it’s possible for certain affects to “represent” different affects? Or, what if the complex, non-atomic organizations of subjects’ affects involve components that aren’t strictly of either an affective or signifying status? These are hypotheses yet to be entertained whose consequences await being pursued.

In 1970, during the seventeenth seminar, Lacan refers back to the tenth seminar. Speaking of the latter, he observes:

Someone whose intentions I don’t need to describe is doing an entire report, to be published in two days time, so as to denounce in a note the fact that I put affect in the background, that I ignore it. It’s a mistake to think I neglect affects—as if everyone’s behavior was not enough to affect me. My entire seminar that year was, on the contrary, structured around anxiety, insofar as it is the central affect, the one around which everything is organized. Since I was able to introduce anxiety as the fundamental affect, it was a good thing all the same that already, for a good length of time, I had not been neglecting affects.<sup>71</sup>

133

<sup>69</sup> SE 16: 395, 405; SE 20: 140–141, 166–167, 202; SE 22: 84, 93–95; SE 23: 146, 199.

<sup>70</sup> Harari, *Lacan’s Seminar on ‘Anxiety’*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>71</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII*, p. 144.

Immediately after using the seminar on anxiety to exonerate himself, Lacan continues:

I have simply given its full importance, in the determinism of *die Verneinung* [negation], to what Freud has explicitly stated, that it's not affect that is repressed. Freud has recourse to this famous *Repräsentanz* which I translate as *représentant de la représentation*, and which others, and moreover not without some basis, persist in calling *représentant-représentatif*, which absolutely does not mean the same thing. In one case the representative is not a representation, in the other case the representative is just one representation among others. These translations are radically different from one another. My translation implies that affect, through the fact of displacement, is effectively displaced, unidentified, broken off from its roots — it eludes us.<sup>72</sup>

Lacan's reference to "*die Verneinung*" sounds like an invocation of the concept of negation *à la* Freud, and not a citation of the 1925 paper of the same title. That is to say, he seems to be asserting that he indeed pays attention to affects, albeit in a negative mode emphasizing what affects are not: not repressed, not unconscious, not irreducible, not primitive, not self-explanatory, and so on. If he talks about them as a psychoanalyst, it tends to be under the sign of negation. Furthermore, Fink's previously noted reading of the Lacanian translation of Freud's *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* appears to be supported here; in these particular remarks, Lacan too evidently reads backwards the positioning of *Repräsentanzen* and *Vorstellungen* relative to each other in the core texts of Freudian metapsychology. Perhaps a contributing factor to the confusion evinced by Lacan and Fink with respect to Freud's original German writings is the distinction between "primal repression" (*Urverdrängung*) and "repression proper" (*eigentliche Verdrängung*) in the paper on "Repression". More precisely, in primal repression, a *Repräsentanz qua Triebrepräsenz* is condemned to unconsciousness, thereafter to be represented in the psyche by other ideas *qua Vorstellungen*. Some of these *Vorstellungen* of the primally repressed *Triebrepräsenz*, if the former become too closely associated with the latter, can succumb to repression as repression proper.<sup>73</sup> But, once repression proper, as secondary in relation to primal repression, is up and running — by this point, a whole web-like network of ideational representations is established in the psychical apparatus — one could

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *GW* 10: 250–251; *SE* 14: 148.

speak of certain representatives (signifiers as *Vorstellungen*) being represented by other representatives (signifiers as *Repräsentanzen*).

The alternate translation of the Freudian *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* which Lacan mentions above would appear to be that of his two protégés Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire. In their famous 1960 paper “The Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Study” (given at the Bonneval colloquium, the same venue at which Lacan orally delivers his *écrit*, rewritten in 1964, entitled “Position of the Unconscious”), Laplanche and Leclaire discuss this vexing compound German word. They indeed translate it as “*représentant représentatif*”.<sup>74</sup> In the third chapter of this text, Leclaire explains:

It is emphasized that the drive, properly speaking, has no place in mental life. Repression does not bear on it, it is neither conscious nor unconscious and it enters into the circuit of mental life only through the mediation of the “(*Vorstellungs-*)*Repräsentanz*”. This is a rather unusual term of which it must be immediately said that in Freud’s usage, it is often found in divided form as one of its two components. We will translate this composite expression by “ideational representative” and we shall inquire into the nature of this mediation, through which the drive enters into (one could even say “is captured by”) mental life.<sup>75</sup>

Laplanche and Pontalis, in their psychoanalytic dictionary, echo this interpretive translation/definition proffered by Leclaire.<sup>76</sup> Therein, Laplanche and Pontalis explain:

“Representative” renders “*Repräsentanz*” [...], a German term of Latin origin which should be understood as implying *delegation* [...] “*Vorstellung*” is a philosophical term whose traditional English equivalent is “idea”. “*Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*” means a delegate (in this instance, a delegate of the instinct) in the sphere of ideas; it should be

<sup>74</sup> Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire, “L’inconscient: Une étude psychanalytique,” in Jean Laplanche, *Problématiques IV: L’inconscient et le ça* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981), p. 289.

<sup>75</sup> Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire, “The Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Study” [trans. Patrick Coleman], *Yale French Studies: French Freud — Structural Studies in Psychoanalysis*, no. 48, 1972, p. 144.

<sup>76</sup> Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* [trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith] (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1973), pp. 203–204.

stressed that according to Freud's conception it is the idea that represents the instinct, not the idea itself that is represented by something else — Freud is quite explicit about this.<sup>77</sup>

In the passages from his seventeenth seminar quoted in the paragraph above, what appears to concern Lacan about the way his students Laplanche, Leclaire, and Pontalis translate/define Freud's *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is that their rendition of this compound German word implies that the affective forces of libidinal life are adequately represented by the ideational inscriptions (as Lacan's signifiers) forming the signifying networks of the structured psychical apparatus. Although he grants that his students' perspective on this issue of interpreting Freud's texts is hardly unjustified ("not without some basis"), Lacan feels that, when it comes to the (non-)relation between affects and signifiers in the speaking subjectivity of interest to psychoanalysis, it's inappropriate to imply that affects are accurately represented (i.e., depicted, mirrored, reflected, transferred, translated, etc.) by signifiers as ideational representations — hence Lacan's emphasis that, in his own translation/definition of this Freudian term, "the representative is not a representation" (and, as he proceeds to clarify apropos this point, "My translation implies that affect, through the fact of displacement, is effectively displaced, unidentified, broken off from its roots — it eludes us"). As Lacan presents this disagreement in which he's embroiled, Laplanche *et al*, on the one hand, hint at the hypothesis that fundamental affective phenomena connected with the driven psyche can be and are distilled into more or less faithful representational delegates whereas, on the other hand, he, Lacan, insists upon the disjunctive break creating a discrepancy/gap between affects and their non-representative "representations". According to this presentation, Laplanche and company posit a synthesizing, harmonious-enough *rapport* between affects and their signifier-like delegates; Lacan, by contrast, maintains that (to paraphrase one of his most [in]famous one-liners) "*Il n'y a pas de rapport représentatif entre l'affect et le signifiant.*" The Lacanian metapsychology of affect stresses, among other things, the estrangement of the *parlêtre* from its affects. Rather than remaining self-evident, self-transparent experiences, the affective waters are, at certain levels, hopelessly muddied from the viewpoint of the speaking subject struggling to relate to them. For signifier-mediated subjectivity, the feel of its feelings ceases to be something immediately clear and unambiguous.

<sup>77</sup> Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, pp. 203–204.



Picking up in the seventeenth seminar where the last passage quoted above from this text leaves off, Lacan remarks, “This is what is essential in repression. It’s not that the affect is suppressed, it’s that it is displaced and unrecognizable.”<sup>78</sup> To be more precise, there arguably are two senses of displacement operative here (parallel to the two types of repression, primal and secondary): first, the shuttling of an affect from one signifier-like ideational representation to another (a displacement of affect corresponding to secondary repression) and, second, the split between an affect and its non-representative “representations” introduced with the ordinary advent of the mediation of signifiers (this mediation amounts to a primal repression of affects through irreversibly displacing them into the foreign territories of symbolic orders). Consequently, not only can affects become “unrecognizable” (“*méconnaissable*”) through being transferred from one ideational-representational constellation onto another (*à la* such common analytic examples as the displacement of emotional responses linked to one significant other onto a different person who is somehow brought into associational connection with the significant other) — the foundational gap between affects and signifiers means that, to greater or lesser extents, the subject’s knowledge (*connaissance* as much as *savoir*) of its affective life in general is problematized through the unavoidable distorting intervention of the signifying systems shaping speaking subjectivity. These statements are made by Lacan during a question-and-answer session entitled “Interview on the steps of the Pantheon” (May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1970). Right after this discussion of the representation (or lack thereof) of affect, Lacan is asked an unrecorded question about “the relations between existentialism and structuralism”. All he says in response is this — “Yes, it’s as if existential thought was the only guarantee of a recourse to affects.”<sup>79</sup> This one-sentence reply is worth highlighting if only because it serves as yet another indication that Lacan doesn’t conceive of himself as seeking to eliminate any and every reference to the affective in psychoanalysis (as he is sometimes accused of doing). He doesn’t perceive his Saussure-inspired re-reading of Freud as entailing the reductive elimination of everything other than the signifier-systems of Symbolic big Others.

137

At the start of the immediately following session of the seventeenth seminar (May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1970), the topic of affect resurfaces. Lacan’s succinct statements here with

---

<sup>78</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII*, p. 144.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

respect to this topic are rather inscrutable, at least at first glance. To begin with, he comments that, “Thought is not a category. I would almost say it is an affect. Although, this is not to say that it is at its most fundamental under the aspect of affect.”<sup>80</sup> This easily could be read in several fashions. However, Lacan undoubtedly intends in this context to call into question what is often assumed to be a firm, sharp distinction between the cognitive-structural and the emotional-energetic (but, as the last sentence of this quotation indicates, he nonetheless doesn’t deny some sort of distinction between the intellectual and the affective). He then proceeds to declare that:

There is only one affect — this constitutes a certain position, a new one to be introduced into the world, which, I am saying, is to be referred to what I am giving you a schema of, transcribed onto the blackboard, when I speak of the psychoanalytic discourse.<sup>81</sup>

Lacan goes on to note that there are those, such as some student radicals who reproached him when he appeared at Vincennes in 1969, who would protest that Lacan’s mathemes in dry white chalk against a black background (such as his formal formulas for the four discourses forming the focus of his 1969–1970 annual seminar) are bloodless, sterile academic constructs with no bearing whatsoever on anything truly “real” (*qua* concrete, palpable, tangible, and so on).<sup>82</sup> Lacan retorts, “That’s where the error is.”<sup>83</sup> On the contrary, “if there is any chance of grasping something called the real, it is nowhere other than on the blackboard.”<sup>84</sup> Resonating with prior reflections on the dialectical entanglement of the concrete and the abstract in both Hegelian and Marxist reflections on the nature of reality (not to mention with the history of mathematical models in the modern natural sciences from the seventeenth century through the present), Lacan denounces the naïve appeal to any concreteness unmediated by abstractions. Human social and subjective reality is permeated and saturated by formal structures and dynamics irreducible to what is simplistically imagined to be raw, positive facts on the ground. Hence, only a theoretical grasp of these abstractions, abstractions which do indeed “march in the streets” in the guise of socialized subjects, has a

---

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 150–151.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

chance of getting a handle on a real(ity) that is so much more than a mere aggregate of dumb, idiotic concrete givens.<sup>85</sup> It ought to be observed that Lacan makes this point on the heels of talking about affect, thus insinuating that affects are not to be thought of (as, perhaps, some in psychoanalysis do) as elements of a brute, pre-existent psychical concreteness already there before either the analysand on the couch speaks (or even becomes a speaking subject in the first place) or the analyst clinically interprets and/or metapsychologically theorizes.

Lacan quickly returns to his assertion of there being solely a single affect. Again invoking the “psychoanalytic discourse” — this would be the discourse of the analyst, as distinct from the other three discourses delineated in the seventeenth seminar, that is, those of the master, university, and hysteric — he maintains that, “In effect, from the perspective of this discourse, there is only one affect, which is, namely, the product of the speaking being’s capture in a discourse, where this discourse determines its status as object.”<sup>86</sup> A series of steps are necessary to spell out the reasoning behind Lacan’s assertion. First of all, one must remember that, according to the Lacanian theory of the four discourses, the analyst’s discourse has the effect of “hystericizing” the analysand.<sup>87</sup> In other words, through the peculiar social bond that is an analysis, a language-organized situation in which someone occupies the position of an analyst in relation to another speaking being, he/she who speaks under the imperative to freely associate (i.e., the analysand) is led to lose the certainty of being equal to his/her discourse, of meaning what he/she says and saying what he/she means. Such a loss of self-assured certainty is inseparable from what is involved in any genuine confrontation with the unconscious. Along with this, the analysand comes to wonder whether he/she is equivalent to his/her previously established coordinates of identification, coordinates embedded in socio-symbolic milieus (i.e., avatars and emblems of identity embraced by the analysand as constitutive of his/her ego-level “self”). Hystericization occurs when the *parlêtre* on the couch is hurled into a vortex of doubts through coming to be uncertain about being comfortably and consciously in charge of his/her discourse and everything discourse entails for an entity whose very identity depends on it. From a Lacanian perspective, one of the analyst’s primary aims in an analysis, to be achieved through various means, is to

<sup>85</sup> Joan Copjec, “May ‘68, The Emotional Month,” *Lacan: The Silent Partners* [ed. Slavoj Žižek] (London: Verso, 2006), p. 92.

<sup>86</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII*, p. 151.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

derail the analysand's supposed mastery of speech and meaning, to disrupt the discourse of the master as the (illusory) mastery of discourse.<sup>88</sup> Referring back to the brief quotation at the start of this paragraph, the thus-hystericized subject becomes riveted to questions about what sort of "object" he/she is, first and foremost, for both inter-subjective others (i.e., incarnate alter-egos, embodied partners actual and imagined, and so on) and trans-subjective Others (i.e., the symbolic order, the anonymous "They," institutions and societies, etc.), but also for him/her-self in terms of self-objectifications: "Who or what am I for you and/or others?"; "Am I really the 'x' (man, woman, husband, wife, son, daughter, authority, professional...) I have taken myself to be?"

In short, the position Lacan labels the discourse of the hysteric, unlike that of the master, is essentially characterized by uncertainty. However, what, if anything, does all of this have to do with the topic of affect? There are several connections. To begin with, another possible line of questioning speaking subjects hystericized through analyses inevitably will be prompted to pursue on a number of occasions is: "How do I truly feel?"; "Do I honestly feel the way that I feel that I feel?" Not only is the figure of the master certain of being equivalent to what he/she says and how he/she identifies and is identified socio-symbolically—the *parlêtre* pretending to occupy a position of masterful agency (in Lacan's discourse theory, agency itself, in any of the four discourses, is invariably a "semblance" [*semblant*] beneath which lies the obfuscated "truth" [*vérité*] of this agent-position<sup>89</sup>) is also certain of how he/she feels: "I know exactly how I feel"; "When I feel 'x,' that's how I really feel." Hystericization undermines confident sureness as regards affects just as much as regards anything else — and this insofar as, within the subjective structures of speaking beings, affective phenomena, like everything else, are inextricably intertwined with socio-symbolic mediators.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, in an effective analysis worthy of the name, doubts arise

140

<sup>88</sup> Slavoj Žižek, "The Undergrowth of Enjoyment: How Popular Culture Can Serve as an Introduction to Lacan," *The Žižek Reader* [ed. Elizabeth Wright and Edmond Wright] (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 1999), pp. 28–29; Slavoj Žižek, *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle* (London: Verso, 2004), pp. 133–134, 144; Adrian Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008), pp. 251–253, 259–260.

<sup>89</sup> Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology*, pp. 251–252; Paul Verhaeghe, "From Impossibility to Inability: Lacan's Theory on the Four Discourses," *Beyond Gender: From Subject to Drive* (New York: Other Press, 2001), p. 22.

<sup>90</sup> Mladen Dolar, "Hegel as the Other Side of Psychoanalysis," *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis: Reflections on Seminar XVII* [ed. Justin Clemens and Russell Grigg] (Durham:

about the seeming obviousness and trustworthiness of feelings. The analyst can and should guide the analysand to realizations that affects aren't always directly related to what they appear to be related to in conscious experience (thanks to displacement, transference, etc.) and that given feelings can work to conceal other emotions and their associated thoughts (such as, to take one common example, affection/love masking aggression/hate and vice versa). Lacan's neologisms "*senti-ment*" (a neologism linking sentiments to lying)<sup>91</sup> and "*affectuation*" (a neologism linking affects to affecting *qua* putting on a false display)<sup>92</sup> both point to the analytic thesis that, as Slavoj Žižek bluntly and straightforwardly puts it, "emotions lie."<sup>93</sup> But, whereas Lacanians often explicitly assert or implicitly assume that the unconscious "truths" masked by the "lies" of conscious emotions (as felt feelings [*Empfindungen*]) are non-affective entities (i.e., signifiers, structures, and so on), the preceding glosses on Lacan's inadequately elaborated metapsychology of affect indicate that, behind the façade of misleading felt feelings, might be other, misfelt feelings, rather than phenomena of a fundamentally non-affective nature.

---

Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 143–144.

<sup>91</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIII*, p. 66.

<sup>92</sup> Jacques Lacan, "La mort est du domaine de la foi," October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1972, <http://www.ecole-lacanienne.net/pastoutlacan70.php>.

<sup>93</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), p. 229.