Chapter I

Lacan and psychoanalysis

Introduction

It could be said that the Marxist dialogue with psychoanalysis began in 1963 when Louis Althusser, the leading communist philosopher in France, invited Jacques Lacan to hold his seminars at the École Normale. During this period there must have been considerable interdisciplinary activity; at any rate, a year later Althusser published the famous article ‘Freud and Lacan.’ He argued that both Marx and Freud invented new sciences. Each discovered a new object of knowledge. They both defined a new way of knowing about the social, but, not surprisingly, they were weighed down by the cultural baggage of their time. Freud ‘thought’ his discovery in concepts borrowed from biology, mechanics and the psychology of his day. Marx thought his discovery using Hegelian notions of the subject. It is fascinating to read how Althusser sees Lacan as being involved in a similar project to his own. Just as he, Althusser, is trying to rethink Marxism without any reference to Hegel’s absolute subject, he sees Lacan as trying to think psychoanalysis without any reference to a unified conception of self or ego.

A few years later, during the May ’68 uprising, it was felt by many students and workers that a liberated politics could only emerge from liberated interpersonal relationships, and there was an explosion of interest in Lacanian psychoanalysis — a movement which seemed to reconcile existentialism and Marxism. A part of existentialism’s popular appeal may have been that it provided a way to think through the issues of choice and individual responsibility. But as a theory of the self...
existentialism remained within Cartesianism. Its psychology tended to portray the individual as a rational, conscious actor who could understand the basis for his or her action. It remained firmly rooted in a philosophy of individual autonomy and rational choice.

At the time of the May '68 events people were very concerned with questions of self-expression, desire and sexuality, and Lacan's theory offered a way of thinking about the social and the linguistic construction of the self, of thinking through the problem of the individual and society. For Lacan there is no separation between self and society. Human beings become social with the appropriation of language; and it is language that constitutes us as a subject. Thus, we should not dichotomize the individual and society. Society inhabits each individual.

It is often said that Lacan wants to be understood only by those who want to make an effort. I think we should make the effort. Lacan's writing, which exemplifies his views about language, is very allusive. His language fuses the theoretical and the poetic. His associative style is intended to slow the reader down. His text is not there to convince, but to do something to you. He relies heavily on punning and word games, and he uses symbols, signs, etc., to express himself without referring to ordinary language. He wants to resist the over-simplification of much psychoanalytic writing. He also wants to subvert the normalization that everyday language imposes.

I believe that Lacan's unique achievement was that he fused phenomenology and structuralism. His early work coincided with the growth of French phenomenology and he was influenced by the thought of Hegel and Heidegger. Structuralism offered Lacan a way of talking about systems of interpretation. His work is fascinating in that it keeps sliding between phenomenology and structuralism. Phenomenology stresses the free self (the subject); structuralism emphasizes language determinism. Lacan uses structuralism but never rejects the subject.

Lacan also belongs, in part, to the hermeneutic tradition, which states that social phenomena always have meaning and that the task of the social sciences is not to explain (as traditional psychiatry seeks to do) but to understand. Psychoanalysis is a method of interpretation. However, Lacan is aware that in the act of interpretation we often impose our own assumptions.

His doctoral thesis 'On Paranoid Psychosis and its Relation to the Personality' is very interesting because he wrote it before Saussure's work on structuralist linguistics was available. At that time he had not yet become a psychoanalyst; he was still a psychiatrist. What is revealing is the angle from which he approaches Freud and the way in which he repudiates physiological reductionism.

One of the main features of Lacan's work is that it is implacably antibiological. The accepted view in the 1930s, for example, was that madness had organic causes. Lacan argues that organicist accounts cannot explain madness. Madness is a discourse, an attempt at communication, that must be interpreted. We have to understand rather than give causal explanations. He emphasizes that the personality is not the mind but the whole being. We cannot separate a person's psychology from his or her personal history.

When Lacan became a psychoanalyst he made a few tentative criticisms of Freud. The main one was that Freud made a number of biologistic assumptions. Lacan's view is that biology is always interpreted by the human subject, refracted through language; that there is no such thing as the body before language. It could be said that by shifting all descriptions from a biological-anatomic level to a symbolic one he shows how culture imposes meaning on anatomical parts.

Lacan denigrates not only behaviourist psychologists such as Pavlov and Skinner but also (American) ego psychologists such as Fromm and Horney. The latter stress the adaptation of the individual to the social environment. Lacan argues that they have watered down and sweetened Freud's ideas about the unconscious and infant sexuality. Ego psychology asserts that self-improvement is possible without calling society into question.

Lacan often asserts that he is returning to Freud, but this should not be taken too literally. He retains the main concepts but juggles with them to create a new system of thought. A subtle thinker, he offers us a rigorous reformulation of Freud. He is looking for objectivity, but not the objectivity of natural science. He is very interested in mathematical logic and poetry, and in his own writing tries to fuse them. His theory of language is such that he could not return to Freud: texts cannot have an unambiguous, pristine meaning. In his view, analysts must relate directly with the unconscious and this means that they must be practitioners of the language of the unconscious—that of poetry, puns, internal rhymes. In word play causal links dissolve and associations abound.

**Overview**

Lacan's psychoanalytic theory is partly based upon the discoveries of structural anthropology and linguistics. One of his main beliefs is that
the unconscious is a hidden structure which resembles that of language. Knowledge of the world, of others and of self is determined by language. Language is the precondition for the act of becoming aware of oneself as a distinct entity. It is the I-Thou dialectic, defining the subjects by their mutual opposition, which grounds subjectivity. But language is also the vehicle of a social given, a culture, prohibitions and laws. The young child is fashioned and will be indelibly marked by it without being aware of it. Let us look at some of the main stages in Lacan’s theory.

In Beyond the Pleasure Principle Freud describes a child’s game.3 The child had a cotton reel with a piece of string tied to it. Holding the string he would throw the reel over the edge of his cot and utter sounds that Freud interpreted as being an attempt at the German ‘fort’, meaning ‘gone’ or ‘away’. He would then pull the reel back into his field of vision, greeting its reappearance with a joyful ‘da’ (‘there’). This game allowed the eighteen-month-old child to bear without protest the painful experience of his mother’s absence, to cope with her disappearance and reappearance. It illustrates the birth of language in its autonomy from reality and allows a better understanding of how language distances us from the lived experience of the real. The distancing from the lived experience is effected in two stages: the child moves from the mother to the reel and finally to language.

The first articulation of the ‘I’ occurs in what Lacan calls the mirror stage. Lacan often refers to the mirror stage as it prefigures the whole dialectic between alienation and subjectivity.4 Self-recognition in the mirror is effected (somewhere between the ages of six and eighteen months) in three successive stages. At first, the child who is together with an adult in front of a mirror confuses its own reflection with that of its adult companion. In the second phase the child acquires the notion of the image and understands that the reflection is not a real being. Finally, in the third stage, it realizes not only that the reflection is an image, but that the image is its own and is different from the image of the Other.

Lacan sees, in a way similar to Lévi-Strauss, the Oedipus complex as the pivot of humanization, as a transition from the natural register of life to a cultural register of group exchange and therefore of laws, language and organization. Lacan contends that at first the child does not merely desire contact with the mother and her care; it wishes, perhaps unconsciously, to be the complement of what is lacking in her: the phallus. At this stage the child is not a subject but a ‘lack’, a nothing.

In the second stage the father intervenes; he deprives the child of the object of its desire and he deprives the mother of the phallic object. The child encounters the Law of the father. The third stage is that of identification with the father. The father reenacts the phallus as the object of the mother’s desire and no longer as the child-complement to what is lacking in her. There is, then, a symbolic castration: the father castrates the child by separating it from its mother. This is the debt which must be paid if one is to become completely one’s self.

It needs to be stressed that the Oedipus complex for Lacan is not a stage like any other in genetic psychology: it is the moment in which the child humanizes itself by becoming aware of the self, the world and others. The resolution of the Oedipus complex liberates the subject by giving him, with his Name, a place in the family constellation, an original signifier of self and subjectivity. It promotes him in his realization of self through participation in the world of culture, language and civilization.5

As I mentioned earlier, Lacan has rethought Freud in the wider framework provided by linguistics and structural anthropology. In his view the unconscious shows itself in dreams, jokes, slips of the tongue, symptoms. The unconscious is comparable in structure to a language. In fact, Lacan argues that language is the condition for the unconscious, that it creates and gives rise to the unconscious. Like conscious discourse, the formations of the unconscious (dreams, etc.) are saying something quite different from what they appear to say. These formations are governed by the same mechanisms as language, namely metaphor and metonymy. At certain privileged points, such as in slips of the tongue and in some jokes, language seems to be torn apart. Conscious discourse is rather like those manuscripts where a first text has been rubbed out and covered by a second. In such manuscripts the first text can be glimpsed through the gaps in the second. The true speech – the unconscious – breaks through usually in a veiled and incomprehensible form.

Lacan suggests that, thanks to human beings’ metaphorical ability, words convey multiple meanings and we use them to signify something quite different from their concrete meaning. This possibility of signifying something other than what is being said determines language’s autonomy from meaning. Lacan insists on the autonomy of the signifier. He assimilates the metaphorical and metonymic processes of language to condensation and displacement respectively.6 All the formations of the unconscious use these stylistic devices to outwit censorship.

Throughout his work Lacan strives to denounce the common illusion which identifies the ego with the self. In contrast to those who say
‘I think, therefore I am’ Lacan asserts: ‘I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think.’ Or, ‘I think where I cannot say that I am.’

Having provided a general introduction to Lacan’s theory, I will now focus on some important aspects of his work: the relation between self and language; problems of self and identity; the main theoretical differences between Lacan and Freud; the influence on Lacan of Hegel; the meaning of need, demand and desire; the sense of loss.

Self and language

Lacan’s theory cannot be presented coherently without a discussion of the function of language. He has a complete theory of language, which he links with subjectivity. He believes that there could not be a human subject without language but that the subject cannot be reduced to language. This is a circular (and not a reciprocal) relationship in which language has privilege. Lacan writes (in ‘The Mirror Stage’) that it is the ability to speak that distinguishes the subject. It is this feature that separates the social from the natural world. There is no subject independent of language. Lacan is highly critical of those encounter-therapy groups that tend to deny the role of verbal language and imply that the body and its gestures are more direct.

While Saussure implied that we can somehow stand outside language, Lacan insists that we are all immersed in everyday language and cannot get out of it. There is no such thing as metalanguage. We all have to represent ourselves in language. Indeed our only access to others is through language. (According to Lacan a psychotic person is someone who has not learnt what language is.)

Saussure regarded the relationship between signifiers and signified as stable and predictable. He argued for the possibility of anchoring particular signifiers to particular signifieds in order to form linguistic signs. In Lacan’s view, on the other hand, meaning emerges only through discourse, as a consequence of displacements along a signifying chain. Like Derrida, Lacan insists upon the commutability of the signified, upon the capacity of every signified to function in turn as a signifier. A consequence of the non-representational status of language is, of course, that the signified is always provisional.

In a Lacanian view of language a signifier always signifies another signifier; no word is free from metaphoricity (a metaphor is one signifier

in the place of another). Lacan talks of glissement (slippage, slide) along the signifying chain, from signifier to signifier. Since any signifier can receive signification retrospectively, after the fact, no signification is ever closed, ever satisfied. Each word is only definable in terms of other words. Moreover, each word uttered only makes complete sense when the sentence is finished; and it is perhaps only the very last word uttered which retrospectively establishes the full sense of each word that came before. From anything that is said it cannot be predicted what is going to be said. Any ‘sentence’ can always be added to. No sentence is ever completely saturated. There is no natural link between signifier and signified. In repression, for example, one signifier comes to substitute for another. The old signifier and what it signifies is ‘pushed down’ to the unconscious. In the course of a lifetime the individual builds up many chains of signification, always substituting new terms for old and always increasing the distance between the signifier that is accessible and visible and all those that are unconscious.

It is true that at the end of his life Lacan become interested in the possibility of expressing the laws of the unconscious in terms of mathematical statements called ‘mathemes’; some people think that this was because he believed that through the process of formalization we might be able to find out what we cannot mathematize.

To illustrate that there is no unequivocal meaning, Lacan relates the following story:

A train arrives at a station. A little boy and a little girl, brother and sister, are seated in a compartment face to face next to the window through which the buildings along the station platform can be seen passing as the train pulls to a stop. ‘Look’, says the brother, ‘we’re at Ladies!’; ‘Idiot!’ replies his sister, ‘Can’t you see we’re at Gentlemen’. In this story each child is able to see only one of the rooms; each child sees a one-to-one correspondence between the word and the ‘thing’ – a way of understanding the relationship between signifier and signified that is totally inadequate. Note that it is the girl who sees ‘Gentlemen’ and the boy who sees ‘Ladies’, as if one could only see the sex one is not. Through the biological given of sitting on one side of the compartment or the other each sex is placed in a structure and as such is unable to see that structure. Lacan seems to be saying: we are all sitting on one side of the compartment or the other; we are all subject to the blindness imposed by our seats in the compartment; there is no other way of being on the train(chain).
Self and identity

It should be stressed that Lacan uses the idea of a child before the mirror as a metaphor. The notion of reflection is a common one (especially in German Idealist philosophy), stemming from Hegel. In this philosophy there is a concern with questions such as: What is it to be conscious of oneself? How do we recognize the self? What is that ‘something’ that reflects consciousness back on to itself? In self-consciousness the subject and the object are identical; but can I reflect on the self and reflect on that reflection? Can the self that is self of consciousness grasp the self of consciousness? When we see ourselves we see only a look. We do not get nearer to what we are. This is called ‘the infinity of reflection’.14

Another important Lacanian idea is ‘the dialectic of recognition’. This refers to the idea that we get knowledge of what we are from how others respond to us. It is useful to compare D.W. Winnicott’s discussion of the mirror role with Lacan’s view. Winnicott suggests that the first mirror is the mother’s face.15 He argues that other people provide the stability of our self-identity. Some feminists have criticized him because he unquestioningly focuses only on the ‘mother’ role. (Moreover, what happens if the mother is ill or mentally disturbed and cannot send back an image?)

In contrast with Winnicott, Lacan says that we are never going to get a stable image. We try to interpret our relation to others but there is always the possibility of misinterpretation. There is always a gap, a mis-recognition. We can never be certain of the meaning of the other’s response. We have an idea of our identity but it does not correspond with reality; the mirror image is back to front.

Our notion of the self as an isolated self is in some way connected with bourgeois individualism. (Lacan hints, however, that it may always be like this.) Lacan continually attacks the American psychologists (Erich Fromm and Karen Horney again) who keep stressing the ego. In his view the stable ego is illusory. We can shed the illusions of the ego only asymptotically (in geometry an asymptote is a curve approaching a straight line but never reaching it short of infinity).16

Lacan insists that we do not have a fixed set of characteristics. This is very much the view Sartre expressed in Being and Nothingness.17 In Sartre’s theory consciousness can never grasp itself. Reflection always turns the subject into an object. Sartre rejects the idea that drives consciousness. He suggests that as soon as we say, ‘I’m like that – that’s me’, we have made ourselves into an object. We often build up a set of characteristics retrospectively. Sartre insists that we are more than a fixed set of categories. We should not think of ourselves as merely a set of characterizations. Nor should we go to the other extreme and conceive of ourselves as pure nothingness.

Lacan argues that we are never any one of our attributes. There is no truth if by truth is meant that an individual expresses an inherent characteristic. Sceptical of any ‘underlying truth’, he writes: ‘If Freud had brought to man’s knowledge nothing more than the truth that there is such a thing as the true, there would be no Freudian discovery. Freud would belong to a line of moralists . . . ‘18

Lacan stresses the point that there is no subject except in representation, but that no representation captures us completely. I can neither be totally defined nor can I escape all definition. I am the quest for myself. Lacan believes that how we present ourselves is always subject to interpretation by others. On the other hand, any attempt to ‘totalize’ someone else, to grasp the other completely, is bound to fall short – no description does the other justice. Moreover, one can only see oneself as one thinks others see one.

There is an inherent tension, a feeling of threat, because one’s identity depends on recognition by the other. This is the theme of Hegel’s story of Master and Slave. I will give a detailed exposition of it later in the chapter. For the moment it is only necessary to say that Hegel argued that consciousness cannot grasp itself without recognition by others. The Master demands recognition from the Slave but this is a self-defeating process. He feels threatened because recognition of himself depends exclusively on the Slave. To generalize from the story, we would like to reduce others to an instrument – a mirror. There is a moment of aggression when we want to overcome our dependency. (We often hear people say: ‘I’ve got to insist on my independence.’)

But is there a possibility of mutual recognition? Lacan suggests that intersubjectivity can never be completely attained because we can never enter another person’s consciousness completely. Full mutual recognition is not possible partly because of the ambiguity of signifiers. There is a gulf between saying and meaning. All this is reminiscent of Sartre, who says that when we love another we want that person’s love – and this attitude instrumentalizes love. As soon as one person is the subject, the other is the object. Lacan belongs to the tradition that believes that the subject and the object are irreconcilably divided. Undoubtedly he has an
ontology: we all have a need for wholeness, a longing for the state of unity, but the achievement of plenitude is a logical impossibility.

**Freud and Lacan**

There are many differences between Freud and Lacan and in this section I will discuss some of them. I will focus particularly on their different conceptualizations of the ego, the unconscious, the dream, and the Oedipus complex.

In Freud’s early work the ego is connected with the reality principle, and the unconscious is related to the pleasure principle. Later Freud reformulated his theory: the ego is formed through an identification with parental figures. The important point to note is that Freud never says the ego is illusory.

Lacan’s argument is the opposite of this. He believes that identification stabilizes the individual but at the same time takes us away from ourselves. He says that Freud starts from individuals’ drives and their satisfactions and that he neglects social dimensions. For Lacan, however, the subject-to-subject relation, what we call intersubjectivity, is there right from the beginning.

Freud believed that the aim of analysis was to integrate a drive into ‘the harmony of the ego’. Lacan, of course, would never use such a phrase. While for Freud the unconscious has a threatening aspect, in Lacan it is the locus of ‘truth’, of authenticity. And yet Lacan believes that the unconscious cannot be an object of knowledge: the ego projects itself and then fails to recognize itself. Self-knowledge, the notion that the self can reflect on itself, is not possible.

While Freud seems to have believed in the unconscious as a substantive concept, for Lacan ‘the unconscious is not the real place of another discourse’. Lacan proclaims that the unconscious is neither primordial nor instinctual. The unconscious is implicit in everything we say and do. However, in trying to grasp the unconscious we lose it – like ‘twice-lost Eurydice’. The unconscious is that which we can never know, but this does not mean that the effort is not worth while.

Two processes are of central importance in Freudian theory: the primary process, which is associated with the unconscious (irrational thought), and the secondary process, which is associated with the conscious (logical thought). When the object of satisfaction is denied and life is difficult we often retreat from reality and overcome frustration by hallucinating. But after a certain time, in order for us to survive, the reality principle comes into play. The ego intervenes, separates things out and puts a stop to the hallucination. This secondary process is continually being interrupted by the unconscious. Human rationality is a thin, fragile ‘façade’ which the unconscious keeps bursting asunder. Again, Lacan rejects Freud’s view. For him the unconscious is neither primordial nor instinctual; the secondary process is more like the primary process than Freud thought.

It is in the dream that we can see the operation of the primary process. As Freud said, it is the dream that is ‘the royal road to the unconscious’. For Lacan a dream is not a pictorial representation; though it happens to be an image a dream is really a text:

The dream is like the parlour-game in which one is supposed to get the spectators to guess some well-known saying or variant of it solely by dumb show. That the dream uses speech makes no difference since for the unconscious it is only one among several elements of the representation. It is precisely the fact that both the game and the dream run up against a lack of taxematic material for the representation of such logical articulations as casuality, contradiction, hypothesis, etc. that proves they are a form of writing rather than of mime.

It is in dreams that the processes of condensation and displacement take place. According to Lacan, in condensation there is a superimposition of the signifiers which metaphor takes as its field. A simple image can thus have different meanings. Displacement, another means used by the unconscious to foil censorship, is associated with metonymy.

Though Lacan believes that the desire of the dream is to communicate, he does not ever say to an analysand ‘this is what you really want’, or ‘this is what your dream really means’. If he did, this would be another alienation. In his view the subject is a process and cannot be defined.

Freud was very interested in the relationship between nature and culture and emphasized the dominance of culture over nature. Lacan rejects the notion of an innate human nature. Nature, for Lacan, is the real which is out there but impossible to grasp in a pure state because it is always mediated through language. In Freud’s work one is aware of a tragic element in the nature–culture dichotomy. In Lacan, tragedy lies in the fact that we have a perpetual lack of wholeness.

Freud and Lacan also have different views of the Oedipus complex. In Freud’s theory the Oedipus complex must be understood in the
context of his theory of psychosexuality. In the first stage of infant sexuality, the oral stage, there are fantasies of incorporating and devouring. The second stage, the anal/sadistic, is associated with submission and domination. In the third, the phallic stage, the boy wants the mother exclusively. He is threatened with castration and develops an impotence fear. There is an introjection of the father's threat which leads, finally, to a resolution of the complex.

Lacan tries to rationalize Freud's thesis by not taking the Oedipus complex literally. Whereas Freud's Oedipal Father might be taken for a real, biological father, Lacan's Name-of-the-Father operates in the register of language. The Name-of-the-Father is the Law. The legal assignation of a father's name to a child is meant to call a halt to uncertainty about the identity of the father.

Lacan does not abandon the idea of the focus on the oral, the anal and the phallic, but he says that these stages are intersubjective. Freud's theory refers to the physical and not the symbolic. In Freud the penis is a guarantee of a possible union with the mother. Lacan transforms all this to the level of the symbolic. This is why he writes not of the penis but of the phallus. 21

Lacanians, separating the two notions 'penis' and 'phallus', argue that there is no phallus incoherency; that is, neither sex can be or have the phallus. The penis is what men have and women do not, the phallus is the attribute of power which neither men nor women have. Lacan suggests that all our fantasies are symbolic representations of the desire for wholeness. We tend to think that if we were the phallic or had the other's phallus we would then, somehow, be whole. In other words, the phallus is the signifier of an original desire for a perfect union with the Other. The phallus refers to plentitude; it is the signifier of the wholeness that we lack.

There is another difference between Freud and Lacan. The former held that rational discourse was possible, even though it was often distorted by unconscious forces. For Lacan discourse constitutes the unconscious. Language and desire are related. In Lacan desire is ontological, a struggle for wholeness rather than a sexual force. 'Desire is the metonymy of the desire to want to be.'

While Freud talks of instincts and drives Lacan talks of desire — a concept which comes from Kojève's lectures on Hegel. These lectures are important, as Lacan, Sartre and others were highly influenced by them. Kojève describes the development of self-consciousness. Hegel insists that self-consciousness develops out of the biological self.

Self-consciousness would not be possible without an organic lack. A lack ('I feel hungry') makes us aware of ourselves as a being that needs something. Hegel continues that for a desire to develop in us we need to focus on a specific object. When we desire not a thing but another's desire we become human. Moreover, desire is mobile, not static; a desire can be continually negated, but it continues.

Hegel and Lacan

As what Lacan means by desire is drawn from Hegel, I want to retell in this section Hegel's metaphorical story of the Master and the Slave before I try to elucidate the Lacanian concepts of need, demand and desire. 22 What follows may seem a digression, but this 'detour' through Hegel is necessary because the Master/Slave theme, in both Marxist and Nietzschean versions, constantly reappears in contemporary social thought.

Hegel remarks that we all know that the person who attentively contemplates a thing is 'absorbed' by this thing and forgets himself. He may perhaps talk about the thing but he will never talk about himself; in his discourse the word 'I' will not occur.

For this word to appear, something other than purely passive contemplation must be present. And this other thing is, according to Hegel, Desire. Indeed, when man experiences a desire, when he is hungry, for example, and becomes aware of it he necessarily becomes aware of himself. Desire is always revealed to the individual as his desire, and to express desire he must use the word 'I'. 23

Desire dis-quiets him and moves him to action. Action tends to satisfy desire but can do so only by the 'negation', the destruction or at least the transformation of the desired object: to satisfy hunger, for example, the food must be destroyed or in any case transformed. Thus, all action is 'negating'. The being that eats creates and preserves its own reality by overcoming a reality other than its own, by the 'transformation' of an alien reality into its own reality, by the 'assimilation', the 'internalization', of an 'external' reality. Generally speaking, the 'I' of Desire is an emptiness that receives a real positive content by a negating action that satisfies Desire in destroying, transforming and assimilating the desired non-I.

Desire, being the revelation of an emptiness, the presence of an absence, is something essentially different from the desired thing.
Desire is directed towards another Desire, another greedy emptiness, another 'I'. Desire is human only if one desires not the body but the Desire of the other; that is to say, if one wants to be 'desired' or, rather, 'recognized' in one's human value. All Desire is desire for a value. To desire the Desire of another is really to desire 'recognition'.

**Master and Slave**

If there is a multiplicity of desires seeking universal recognition, it is obvious that the action that is born of these desires can – at least in the beginning – be nothing but a life-and-death fight. It is assumed that the fight ends in such a way that both adversaries remain alive. Now, if this is to occur, one must suppose that one of the adversaries, preferring to live rather than die, gives in to the other and submits to him, recognizing him as the Master without being recognized by him. The Master, unable to recognize the other who recognizes him, finds himself in an impasse.

The Master makes the Slave work in order to satisfy his own desires. To satisfy the desires of the Master, the Slave has to repress his own instincts (for example, in the preparation of food that he will not eat), to negate or 'overcome' himself. The Slave transcends himself by working, that is, he educates himself. In his work he transforms things and transforms himself at the same time. In becoming master of Nature by work, the Slave frees himself from Nature, from his own nature, and from the Master. It is because work is an auto-creative act that it can raise him from slavery to freedom. The future and history hence belong not to the warlike Master, but to the working Slave. The Slave changes himself by changing the world.

To summarize, according to Hegel it is a fight to the death for the sake of recognition that leads to a relation between a free man and a man who is enslaved to him. Hence man is necessarily either Master or Slave. But the difference between Master and Slave can be overcome in the course of time. Mastery and Slavery, then, are not given or innate characteristics. Man is not born slave or free but creates himself as one or the other through free or voluntary action. In short, the character of the Master/Slave opposition is the motive principle of the historical process. All of history is nothing but the progressive negation of Slavery by the Slave. Finally, the thesis of Mastery and the antithesis of Slavery are dialectically 'overcome'.

**Identity and negativity**

Thanks to identity every being remains the same being, eternally identical to itself and different from the others. But thanks to negativity an identical being can negate or overcome its identity with itself and become other than it is, even its own opposite. Identity and negativity do not exist in an isolated state. Just like totality itself they are only complementary aspects of one and the same real being.

The thesis describes the given material to which the action is going to be applied, the antithesis reveals this action itself as well as the thought which animates it ('the project'), while the synthesis shows the result of that action, that is, the completed and objectively real product. The new product is also given and can provoke other negating actions. Human beings are always negating the given. Negativity is the negation of identity. Human beings are truly free or really human only in and by effective negation of the given real. Negativity, then, is nothing other than human freedom. The freedom which is realized and manifested as dialectical or negating action is thereby essentially a creation. What is involved is not replacing one given by another given, but overcoming the given in favour of what does not (yet) exist. In short, man is neither identity nor negativity alone but totality or synthesis; that is, he 'overcomes' himself while preserving and sublimating himself.

In my view this discussion has a direct bearing on education. All education implies a long series of auto-negations effected by the child. As Kojève remarks,

> it is only because of these auto-negations ('repressions') that every 'educated' child is not only a trained animal (which is 'identical' to itself and in itself) but a truly human or 'complex' being; although in most cases, he is human only to a very small extent, since 'education' (that is, auto-negations) generally stops too soon.

**Particularity and universality**

Particularity refers to the individual agent. Every man, to the extent that he is human, would like – on the one hand – to be different from all others. But on the other hand he would like to be recognized, in his unique particularity itself, as a positive value; and he would like this recognition to be shown by as many people as possible. Universality refers to the social aspect of man's existence. It is only in and by the
universal recognition of human particularity that individuality realizes and manifests itself.

Individuality is a synthesis of the particular and the universal, the universal being the negation or the antithesis of the particular, which is the thetical given, identical to itself. In other words, individuality is a totality and the being which is individual is, by the very fact, dialectical. Man is and exists only to the extent that he overcomes himself dialectically (i.e. while preserving and sublimating himself). The opposition of particularity and universality is fundamental for Hegel. In his view history will develop by the formation of a society, of a state, in which the strictly particular, personal, individual value of each is recognized as such, in its very particularity, by all. The synthesis of particularity and universality is possible only after the ‘overcoming’ of the opposition between the Master and the Slave, since the synthesis of the particular and the universal is also the synthesis of Mastery and Slavery.27

The desire for desire

What use does Lacan make of these Hegelian insights? We all have physical needs to satisfy. The child in the oral phase, for example, wants the mother’s breast. It makes an appeal to its mother to have its needs met. This is the transformation from need to demand, but there is also the desire for love, for recognition. Needs, then, are biological. In demand the biological is mediated; a demand is always specific. Desire is what cannot be specified by demand.28 A child cries. The mother gives a bar of chocolate; but the child can never know whether this action was performed for the satisfaction of its need or as an act of love. Lacan believes that such a response is inherently ambiguous. And because the response is ambiguous the demand is repeated, repeated . . . ad infinitum.

Need, demand, desire – how are these three categories interconnected? A child cries. It can use physical hunger as a vehicle for a communication. Sometimes the food satisfies a physical need but it can also become symbolically freighted. There can be a split between need and desire. In an account of anorexia Lacan states how a young woman is given food but wants love. The meaning of demand is not intrinsic but is partly determined by the response by the other to the demand. Though our demand is specific we can never be certain of other people’s responses to ourselves. After all, how do you give love?

People can continually be making a demand but they need not to be conscious of it. A demand is the means of revealing desire, but it is oblique. Desire is desire for the Other but it has to be interpreted. Lacan says that need is cancelled by demand which re-emerges on the other side of desire. We often want an object that could be given only to us, but there is no such object. A demand is for a response, but that response is never particular enough. We can never be certain that others love us for our unique particularity.

It could be said that some people are too confident that they are loved. Lacan suggests that their identities may become rather rigid. And there are other people who lack confidence. Desire emerges when satisfaction of need is not enough, when there is a doubt or gap which cannot be closed. Desire arises out of the lack of satisfaction and it pushes you to another demand. In other words, it is the disappointment of demand that is the basis of the growth of desire.

The sense of loss

In this section I will retell Lacan’s story and will focus specifically on the sense of loss or lack that the subject undergoes. You will have noticed that Lacan’s theory of the subject reads like a classic narrative; it begins with birth and then moves in turn through the territorialization of the body, the mirror stage, access to language and the Oedipus complex. Each of the stages of this narrative is conceived in terms of some kind of self-loss or lack.

Lacan situates the first loss in the history of the subject at the moment of birth. To be more precise, he dates it from the moment of sexual differentiation within the womb; but it is not realized until the separation of the child from the mother at birth. This lack is sexual in definition and has to do with the impossibility of being physiologically both male and female. The notion of an original androgynous whole is central to Lacan’s argument. The subject is defined as lacking because it is believed to be a fragment of something larger and primordial.

Let me clarify this briefly. Lacan often makes references to a fable on the subject of love in Plato’s Symposium.29 Aristophanes speaks of beings that, ‘once upon a time’, were globular in shape, with rounded back and sides, four arms and legs and two faces. Strong, energetic and arrogant, they tried to scale the heights of heaven and set upon the gods. Zeus retaliated by cutting them all in half so that each one would be only half as strong.
Now, when the work of bisection was complete it left each half with a desperate yearning for the other and they ran together and flung their arms around each other's necks and asked for nothing better than to be rolled into one. So much so that they began to die. Zeus felt so sorry for them that he devised another scheme. He moved their genitals round to the front and made them propagate among themselves. So you see how far back we can trace our innate love for one another, and how this love is always trying to reintegrate our former nature, to make two into one and to bridge the gulf between one human being and another.

The second loss suffered by the subject occurs after birth but prior to the acquisition of language. The loss in question is inflicted by what might be called the 'pre-Oedipal territorialization' of the subject's body. For a time after its birth the child does not differentiate between itself and the mother upon whose nurture it relies. Then the child's body undergoes a process of differentiation; erogenetic zones are inscribed and the libido is encouraged to follow certain established routes. By indicating the channels through which that libido can move the mother or nurse assists in the conversion of incoherent energy into coherent drives which can later be culturally regulated. The drives possess a coherence which needs do not have, because they are attached to particular corporal zones. As a result of the attachment the drives provide only an indirect expression of the original libidinal flow. Thus very early in its history the subject loses immediate contact with its own libidinal flows and succumbs to the domination of its culture's genital economy.

'Imaginary' is the term used by Lacan to designate that order of the subject's experience which is dominated by identification and duality. Within the Lacanian scheme it not only precedes the symbolic order, which introduces the subject to language and Oedipal triangulation, but continues to coexist with it afterwards. The imaginary order is best exemplified by the mirror stage.

Lacan tells us that somewhere between the ages of six and eighteen months the subject arrives at an apprehension of both its self and the Other — indeed of itself as Other. This discovery is assisted by the child seeing, for the first time, its own reflection in a mirror. That reflection has a coherence which the subject itself lacks. But this self-recognition is, Lacan insists, a mis-recognition. The mirror stage is a moment of alienation, since to know oneself through an external image is to be defined through self-alienation. The subject, then, has a profoundly ambivalent relationship to that reflection. It loves the coherent identity which the mirror provides. However, because the image remains external to it, it also hates that image. The subject experiences many radical oscillations between contrary emotions.

Lacan believes that once the subject has entered the symbolic order (language) its organic needs pass through the 'defies' or narrow network of signification and are transformed in a way which makes them thereafter impossible to satisfy. The drives offer only a partial and indirect expression of those needs, but language severs the relationship altogether.

The fort-da game can be seen as the child’s first signifying chain and hence its entry into language. It should be noted that whereas Freud describes the child’s actions in the fort-da game as an attempt to diminish the unpleasure caused by his mother’s absence, Lacan stresses instead the self-alienation which those actions dramatize. Lacan identifies the toy reel with which the child plays as an objet petit a — that thing the loss of which has resulted in a sense of deficiency or lack. The breast, for example, certainly represents that part of himself that the individual loses at birth and which may serve to symbolize the most profound lost object. (Other objects which enjoy the same privileged status as the breast include the gaze and voice of the mother.) Lacan thus interprets the story as being more about the disappearance of the self than that of the mother. Like Freud Lacan reads the fort-da episode as an allegory about the linguistic mastery of the drives. Lacan describes this complete rupture with the drives as the ‘fading’ of the subject’s being, as ‘aphanisis’. Not only is the subject thereby split off or partitioned from its own drives, but it is subordinated to a symbolic order which will henceforth determine its identity and desires.

The formation of the unconscious, the emergence of the subject into the symbolic order and the inauguration of desire are all closely connected events. Desire is directed towards ideal representations which remain forever beyond the subject’s reach. Since others will be loved only if they are believed to be capable of completing the subject, desire must be understood as fundamentally narcissistic. Object love is nothing more than the continued search for the lost complement.

Lacan conceptualizes the Oedipus complex as a linguistic transaction. He supports this claim by pointing out that the incest taboo can only be articulated through the differentiation of certain cultural members from others by means of linguistic categories like 'father' and 'mother'. Lacan defines the paternal signifier, what he calls the 'Name-of-the-Father', as the all-important one in both the history of the subject and the organization of the larger symbolic field.
This means that Lacan gives us a very different account of sexual difference from that provided by Freud, one in which the privileged term is no longer 'penis' but ‘phallus’. The word ‘phallus’ is used by Lacan to refer to all of those values which are opposed to lack. He is at pains to emphasize its discursive (rather than its anatomical) status, but it seems to have two radically different meanings. On the one hand, the phallus is a signifier for those things which have been partitioned off from the subject during the various stages of its constitution and which will never be restored to it. The phallus is a signifier for the organic reality or needs which the subject relinquishes in order to achieve meaning, in order to gain access to the symbolic register. It signifies that thing whose loss inaugurates desire. On the other hand, the phallus is a signifier for the cultural privileges and positive values which define male subjectivity within patriarchal society but from which the female subject remains isolated. The phallus, in other words, is a signifier both for those things which are lost during the male subject's entry into culture and for those things which are gained.

Lacan believes that the discourse within which the subject finds its identity is always the discourse of the Other — of a symbolic order which transcends the subject and which orchestrates its entire history. An important part is played by sexual difference within that order, and this has made us aware of the phallocentrism of our current practices.

One Lacanian tenet is that subjectivity is entirely relational; it only comes into play through the principle of difference, by the opposition of the ‘other’ or the ‘you’ to the ‘I’. In other words, subjectivity is not an essence but a set of relationships. It can only be induced by the activation of a signifying system which exists before the individual and which determines his or her cultural identity. Discourse, then, is the agency whereby the subject is produced and the existing order sustained.

The imaginary, the symbolic and the real

I will now try to bring some of the threads together by briefly stating what Lacan means by the imaginary, the symbolic and the real. This will also enable me to recapitulate some of the key points of this chapter. It is clear that the imaginary — a kind of pre-verbal register whose logic is essentially visual — precedes the symbolic as a stage in the development of the psyche. Its moment of formation has been named the ‘mirror stage’. At this stage there does not yet exist that ego formation which would permit a child to distinguish its own form from that of others. The child who hits says it has been hit, the child who sees another child fall begins to cry. (It is from Melanie Klein’s pioneering psychoanalysis of children that the basic features of the Lacanian imaginary are drawn.)

The imaginary order is pre-Oedipal. The self yearns to fuse with what is perceived as Other. The child confuses others with its own mirror reflections; and since the self is formed from a composite of projections based on such mis-recognitions, it can hardly constitute a unified personality. In other words, we experience a profoundly divided self.

Lacan suggests that the infant’s first desire for the mother signifies the wish to be what the mother desires. (Désir de la mère refers to the desire for the mother and to the mother’s desire.) The infant wants to complete the mother, to be what she lacks — the phallus. The child’s relationship with the mother is fusional, dual and immediate. Later, the child’s desire to be its mother’s desire gives way to an identification with the father.

The child’s asocial, dual and fusional relationship with its mother is forsworn for the world of symbolic discourse. The father becomes the third term and we enter the symbolic order by accepting his name and interdictions. In the symbolic there is no longer a one-to-one correspondence between things and what they are called — a symbol evokes an open-ended system of meaning. Symbolic signification is social, not narcissistic. It is the Oedipal crisis which marks the child’s entrance into the world of the symbolic. The laws of language and society come to dwell within the child as he accepts the father’s name and the father’s ‘no’.

I said earlier that Lacan understands the Oedipus story in terms of language, not in terms of the body, and that there is no such thing as the body before language. Biology is always interpreted by the human subject. But not only biology, all experience is symbolically mediated and has to be interpreted (in the context of social convention).

The Lacanian notion of the symbolic order is an attempt to create mediations between libidinal analysis and the linguistic categories, to provide, in other words, a transcoding scheme which allows us to speak of both within a common conceptual framework. The Oedipus complex is trans literated by Lacan into a linguistic phenomenon which he designates as the discovery by the subject of the Name-of-the-Father. Lacan feels that the apprenticeship of language is an alienation for the psyche but he realizes that it is impossible to return to an archaic, pre-verbal stage of the psyche itself.
I have underlined the point that Lacan places great emphasis on the linguistic development of the child. He argues that the acquisition of a name results in a thoroughgoing transformation of the position of the subject in his object world. There is a determination of the subject by language. The Freudian unconscious is seen in terms of language: ‘The unconscious is the discourse of the Other’ – a notion that tends to surprise those who associate language with thinking and consciousness.

Lacan’s theory has attracted a good deal of interest among feminists because the emphasis on the production of gendered subjectivity via signification (the processes whereby meaning is produced at the same time as subjects are fabricated and positioned in social relations) implies that it is possible to escape the subordination of women inherent in Freud’s recourse to biological difference. However, it could be argued that, in privileging the phallus as the sign of difference as opposed to the penis, Lacan’s analysis is not any less deterministic than Freud’s. This is because Lacan relies heavily on Lévi-Strauss’s structural analysis of the incest taboo which, it is said, underlies all human societies. The use of Lévi-Strauss’s thesis means that the terms of the debate are fixed around the ‘Law of the Father’. Because Lévi-Strauss’s theory is a universalist one Lacan’s account tends to collapse into an account of a universal subject who is not situated historically.

The third order is the real. The reality which we can never know is the real – it lies beyond language . . . the reality we must assume although we can never know it. This is the most problematic of the three orders or registers since it can never be experienced immediately, but only by way of the mediation of the other two: ‘the Real, or what is perceived as such, is what resists symbolization absolutely’. Fredric Jameson, however, thinks that it is not terribly difficult to say what is meant by the real in Lacan: ‘It is simply History itself.’

Some criticisms of Lacan

To conclude the chapter, let me now turn to some criticisms of Lacan. It is often said that he intellectualizes everything and does not consider the emotions. He is highly critical, for example, of the Reichian approach which asserts that we can get to the emotions directly. For Lacan an emotion is a signifier; it means something but what it means is an open question. Secondly, as his writings lack clinical material it is difficult to learn from his procedures or to test their validity. He seems to be more interested in developing theory in the university than in clinical practice. (On the other hand, it could be argued that though Lacan fails to provide case studies one way out of the problem is to examine the work of his followers, for example child psychologists such as Françoise Dolto and Maud Mannoni.) As he believes that in analysis nothing should be routine or predictable his sessions are sometimes only ten minutes long! He argues that psychoanalysis is not a psychology. If it was a psychology it would be like ethology (the study of animal behaviour); but the salient difference is that we cannot predict human behaviour. Moreover, Lacan holds that only an analyst can authorize himself or herself as an analyst. But, surely, self-authorization leads to problems about standards? Is it enough to be told that becoming an analyst is like becoming a poet, one who has a new, intimate relationship with language?

Feminist criticisms of Lacan

Lacan continues to be one of the most controversial figures within contemporary feminist theory. Many feminists use his work to challenge phallocentric knowledges; others are extremely hostile to it, seeing it as elitist, male-dominated and itself as phallocentric. Three key areas of Lacan’s work are of deep interest to feminists: the interlocking domains of subjectivity, sexuality and language. His decentering of the rational, conscious subject (identified with the ego), his undermining of common assumptions about the intentionality or purposiveness of the speaking subject’s ‘rational’ discourses and his problematizations of the idea of a ‘natural’ sexuality have helped to free feminist theory of the constraints of humanism.

It seems that feminist relations to psychoanalysis fall into two broad categories: those committed to Lacan’s work, seeing it as a means of describing patriarchal power relations, and those who reject it from a pre- or non-psychoanalytic position. In the first category can be included Juliet Mitchell, Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, Julia Kristeva, Monique Plaza and Catherine Clément. In the second category are Germaine Greer, Dale Spender and others.

There are, however, feminists who occupy neither category. Here can be included feminists who have an impressive familiarity with Lacan’s work while maintaining a critical distance from it: Jane Gallop, Jacqueline Rose, Sara Kofman, Luce Irigaray.

On behalf of Lacan it could be argued that, firstly, his work is a necessary counterbalance to the humanism so common in theories of
human subjectivity. Secondly, his sharp distance from ego-psychology and object-relations accounts of psychoanalysis makes Freud's work more useful to feminism. And, thirdly, his intermingling of language-like processes with Freud's notion of sexuality and the unconscious have been useful to feminists in a wide variety of disciplines in which questions of subjectivity and desire are usually ignored.

On the other hand, many feminists have criticized Lacan and he is often censured for his conception of woman as lack, as other, as castrated. Secondly, Lacan is accused of privileging masculinity and participating in, and perhaps developing, Freud's phallocentrism. A fierce critic of Lacan, Luce Irigaray, has suggested that what Lacan's work does is to renew the familiar theme of the female as support or substratum of the male subject.

One of Irigaray's objections is the way in which Lacan takes a particular discursive organization to be unchangeable. The Lacanian conceptual system offers little possibility for radical social change. It implies a deep social conservatism as far as the situation of women is concerned. The conservatism is embedded in the Lacanian concept of the symbolic order. Since this order is phallocentric, structured according to the law of the father, it represses the truly feminine, defining femininity in patriarchal terms as a consequence of lack.

Irigaray argues that Western systems of representation privilege seeing; what can be seen (presence) is privileged over what cannot be seen (absence) and guarantees Being. Nothing to be seen is equivalent to having nothing. No being and no truth. As a result, within discourse, the feminine finds itself defined as lack, deficiency, or as imitation and negative image of the subject.

Irigaray has examined the role of the mirror in the construction of subjectivity. Taking Lacan's mirror as an image of representation, she asks why he used a flat mirror, 'in that the flat mirror reflects the greater part of women's sexual organs only as a hole'. To put it in another way, the flat mirror does not reflect the sexual specificity of the woman. For the exploration of woman's sexual specificity, a different sort of mirror would be needed — for example, a speculum, the concave mirror which gynaecologists use to inspect the 'cavities' of the female body. I will be discussing Irigaray's work in Chapter 5.

In defending Lacan, Juliet Mitchell has made some important points. She claims that feminists have not adequately understood Lacan's position and she suggests that he provides an accurate description of patriarchal power relations. Moreover, she argues that feminists have not fully understood the psychoanalytic explanation of patriarchy as not simply relations between men and women, but the relation both have to the phallus.

Other writers, like Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, also defend Lacan and emphasize his achievement in ridding Freudian theory of biologism. She argues that some critics of Lacan, like Irigaray, read him substantively rather than structurally and thus see him as prescriptive instead of descriptive and analytic. In her view, Irigaray's assessment of Lacan as a phallocrat is wrong; she does not fully understand the symbolic nature of the Lacanian phallic signifier which is neutral in its own right.

Elizabeth Grosz believes that Lacan's defenders are correct on two counts. One, Lacan does shift the ground of our understanding of patriarchal power relations and their social reproduction. That is to say, it is not men per se who cause women's oppression, but rather the socio-economic and linguistic structure. Yet in his formulation of this structure as an inevitable law, patriarchal dominance is not so much challenged as displaced, from biology to the equally unchangeable socio-linguistic law of the father. Two, although he himself does not acknowledge the structure of patriarchal oppression, Lacan does provide some crucial elements for a description and explanation of the psychic components of women's oppression.

Further reading


This clear and helpful book discusses Lacan's major texts from the early works, 1926–33, to the works of the mid-1970s in chronological order. An excellent introduction.


In the Fontana Modern Masters Series, this book is a coherent and comprehensive outline of Lacan's theory.


Three interconnected case studies of the theoretical imagination at work. A very interesting book which contains an analysis of Freud's self-images as archaeologist and conquistador. Bowie argues that Freud's
desire-laden fantasies are the fertile psychical soil from which Freud’s working fictions and conceptual models sprang. After a consideration of the similarities between Freud and Proust, there is a concise introduction to Lacan’s work.


One of the most accessible accounts that I know. A very readable introduction that explains many aspects of Lacan’s work.


An accessible and helpful book. Most of the chapters focus on the famous texts in Lacan’s *Écrits*.


A sympathetic overview from a feminist perspective. The topics covered include: the ego, the Oedipus complex, language and the unconscious. The chapters on sexual relations and feminism are particularly useful.


An informative and useful guide to the ‘structuralist’ (post-1955) Lacan, whose debts to Heidegger, Kojève, Bataille and others are not mentioned. Lacan’s work is presented as a system; and Lemaire reads it in purely synchronic terms.


The title is accurate. The book is a clear introduction to the social-historical context of Lacan’s work. It contains chapters on his early writings, the influence of Surrealism, his relationship with philosophers like Hegel, Heidegger and Sartre, linguistics, and the nature of femininity. There is also a useful overview of the major events in Lacan’s life from 1901–81.


An indispensable collection of seven articles written by Lacan between 1964 and 1981. The aim of the editors, especially in the lucid Introduction, is to show the importance of Lacan for psychoanalysts, and of psychoanalysis for feminism.


Is it true that Lacan spent so much of his time on theory that he lost touch with clinical practice? And is the theory so intellectual that it neglects emotion and affect? I found this book a valuable account of this and other matters. He writes sensitively about death and its symbolization, the relation of the dead and the living, and the importance of Sophocles’s *Antigone* for an understanding of ethical conduct. The author describes the organization of the *École Freudienne* and the short session.


A clear introduction to the post-1968 growth of psychoanalysis in France. Part One is most useful as it places Lacan’s thought in a post-war social and political context.


The key theme is the relationship between different psychoanalytic theories and theories of art and literature. It is an excellent introduction to Freud, Klein and Lacan.
Notes

Introduction

1 For a good introduction to these debates see K. Soper, Humanism and Anti-Humanism, London: Hutchinson, 1986.
6 It is important to differentiate clearly structuralism, structuralist Marxism and post-structuralism. By putting these three together as theories of structure (as opposed to action) many writers fail to underline the profoundly anti-Marxist nature of post-structuralism. See, for example, I. Craib, Modern Social Theory: From Parsons to Habermas, Brighton: Harvester Press, 1984.

Chapter 1 Lacan and psychoanalysis


Notes to pages 7 to 20

8 Ibid., pp. 156–60.
9 Ibid., p. 166.
10 When the psychoanalytic session begins the analysand talks of himself or herself as an object. This is what Lacan calls 'empty speech'. In contrast, 'full speech' is when the subject coincides with the object, when who is talking coincides with what is being talked about.
21 Ibid., p. 281.
22 A. Kojève, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit, assembled by Raymond Queneau, New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1969. It should be noted that for Hegel human consciousness was an aspect of Geist. Kojève brings Hegel down to earth and stresses the elements of labour, language and struggle.
23 Ibid., p. 37.
24 Ibid., p. 228.
25 Ibid., p. 206.
26 Ibid., p. 220.
27 Ibid., p. 58.
28 Lacan makes a distinction between need (a purely organic energy) and desire, the active principle of the physical processes. Desire always lies both beyond and before demand. To say that desire is beyond demand means that it transcends it, that it is eternal because it is impossible to satisfy. It is forever insatiable since it refers back to the ineffable, to the unconscious desire and the absolute lack it conceals. Every human action, even the most
altruistic, derives from a desire for recognition by the Other, from a wish for self-recognition in some form or another. Desire is the desire for desire, the desire of the Other.


32 Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957), a prophet of sexual revolution, asserted that mental health is dependent on the capacity to experience orgasm and that mental illness is the result of inhibition of the capacity to experience orgasm. See C. Rycroft, *Reich*, London: Fontana, 1971.


Chapter 2 Derrida and deconstruction


4 For critiques of Saussure, Rousseau, Lévi-Strauss, see Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.

5 Derrida finds the same powerful metaphors at work in Husserl’s meditations on language and thought; see Derrida’s *Speech and Phenomena*.

6 See Derrida’s ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’, in *Writing and Difference*, p. 196. Derrida traces the emergence of the metaphor of writing through three texts placed on a thirty-year span in Freud’s career: ‘Project for a Scientific Psychology’ (1895), *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and ‘Note on the Mystic Writing Pad’ (1925).