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THE FANTASTIC STRUCTURE OF FREEDOM: SARTRE, FREUD, AND LACAN

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract
THE FANTASTIC STRUCTURE OF FREEDOM: SARTRE, FREUD, AND LACAN

Gregory A. Trotter B.A., M.A.

Marquette University, 2019

This dissertation reassesses the complex philosophical relationship between Sartre and psychoanalysis. Most scholarship on this topic focuses on Sartre's criticisms of the unconscious as anathema both to his conception of the human psyche as devoid of any hidden depths or mental compartments and, correlatively, his account of human freedom. Many philosophers conclude that there is little common ground between Sartrean existentialism and psychoanalytic theory. I argue, on the contrary, that by shifting the emphasis from concerns about the nature of the unconscious to questions about the role of imagination in psychical life, we can see that Sartre and Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalytic theory develop strikingly similar accounts of human subjectivity.

After establishing the historical background of Sartre's career-long engagement with psychoanalysis, I demonstrate the proximity of Sartre and Lacan on the nature of unconscious thought. I proceed to develop the claim that there is a homology between the concept of unconscious fantasy in psychoanalysis and the concept of the imaginary in Sartre's philosophical corpus. Despite the concept of fantasy being one of the more structuralist-inspired aspects of Lacan's metapsychology, I show that Sartre's concept of the imaginary is likewise a structural feature of the psyche, one which establishes the coordinates within which the subject engages with the world. For Sartre, Freud, and Lacan fantasies form the core of subjectivity, giving form to the basic patterns of one's character. Taken together, these three thinkers furnish a nuanced view of fantasy/the imaginary. On the one hand it is determining insofar as it is responsible for many of the psychopathologies met with in psychoanalysis. On the other hand, it is liberating insofar as the agency of the subject is implicated in the formation of fantasy. I thereby show that Sartre does not fit the caricatured picture of a radical voluntarist that is often attributed to him and that psychoanalysis can accommodate a conception of human freedom.

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Gregory A. Trotter B.A., M.A.

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Preface

How to Philosophize with a Tape Recorder: Existentialism, Psychoanalysis, and the Freedom of the Subject

By 1969, Jean-Paul Sartre had been the editor of *Les Temps modernes* for twenty-four years. In the intervening decades, Sartre had established himself as one of the leading philosophers and public intellectuals of the twentieth century, a span during which he continuously engaged either directly or indirectly several facets of psychoanalytic theory and practice. 1969 marks a particularly interesting moment in Sartre's long and complex engagement with Freud and his legacy. For it was in April of that year that Sartre decided to publish within the pages of *Les Temps modernes*, against the protestations of several editorial board members, "The Man with a Tape-recorder," a tension-riddled conversation between a patient and his psychoanalyst. The transcribed conversation chronicles an encounter between a man, known simply as 'A...', who is frustrated with his analyst, dubbed 'Dr. X', and the apparent lack of progress they have made together during the course of A...'s treatment. A... evidently sought to get his analyst on record so that he might impose a kind of check on his methods. During a particularly tense exchange, Dr. X, who up to this point has repeatedly expressed his distrust of A...'s tape recorder, implores his patient to turn the recorder off:

DR. X: You've got your tape-recorder there!

A: So?

Dr. X: Switch it off!

A: Come on, it's not so bad as all that. Does it frighten you? It's not a gun.

Dr. X: Switch it off!

A: Are you frightened?

Dr. X: Switch it off!

A: What do you mean—switch it off?

Dr. X: I don't like this sort of interview.

A: Now listen, do you want a spanking?

Dr. X: There, you see, you're dangerous!

A: Do you want a spanking?

Dr. X: You see, you're dangerous.

A: No, I'm not, I'm simply asking you this question: would you mind stop acting like a child? (Sartre 2008, 210)

The encounter escalates from here, culminating with Dr. X shrieking out of his office window for help and attempting to call the police only to be stopped by A... Why did Sartre see fit to publish this troubling conversation?

After qualifying his approval of A...'s recorded encounter with his analyst by noting that he does not intend the published conversation to serve as a blanket indictment of psychoanalysis itself, Sartre states the precise reason he felt compelled to publish the transcription, a reason quite pertinent to our purposes here. Sartre writes, "Why then did I find this dialogue so fascinating? Because it spotlights, with dazzling clarity, the irruption of the subject into the consulting room, or rather the overthrow of the univocal relationship linking the subject to the object" (Sartre 2008, 200). In his explanation of what he means by 'subject' here, Sartre references material from his early essay *The Transcendence of the Ego*, material that we will examine in closer detail below. Sartre proclaims that "by subject here I do not mean the Self or the Ego—a quasi-object that is a product of reflexion—but the agent: in this brief encounter, A... is the subject in the sense in which Marx called the proletariat the subject of History" (Sartre 2008, 200). According to Sartre, "The Man with a Tape-recorder" showcases the active irruption of subjectivity within the analytic situation, a situation that, Sartre seems to imply, transforms analysands into passive objects. For Sartre, what the exchange between A... and Dr. X reveals is the way in which psychoanalysis encourages analysands to relinquish their responsibility, which for Sartre, of course, is one of the gravest sins one

can commit. In other words, the psychoanalytic situation is designed precisely to prevent the patient from becoming a full subject. For Sartre, A...’s outburst reflects his decision to refuse the stymieing effect of psychoanalytic treatment. Sartre remarks that

the weekly or bi-weekly abdication of responsibility of the analysand to the analyst becomes an increasingly imperious need. For the condition of an object has certain advantages—violence becomes at least latent and insinuating, and then to be a subject is so exhausting. On the couch, everything solicits one to substitute the agonizing responsibility of being an individual, for abandonment to the incorporated company of basic drives. (Sartre 2008, 202)

These claims can perhaps serve as a summary of Sartre’s basic attitude toward psychoanalysis. By conceptualizing the subject as determined in certain ways by one’s biology, by one’s past, by others, psychoanalysis, for Sartre, provides too many excuses for one to give up the tremendous responsibility of being free. This kind of slavery reaches its apogee in the psychoanalytic consulting room where analysands are subject to the interpretations foisted upon them by their analysts. In this way, they behave as if they were inert objects.

Sartre’s enthusiasm apropos A...’s aggression toward his analyst belies some of his earlier stated claims to the effect that he does not think the conversation should serve as a condemnation of psychoanalytic practice in general. Indeed, Sartre points out that A...’s frustration with his analyst neither can nor should serve as an indictment of psychoanalysis as a whole: “If mistakes had been committed, we can quite understand that A..., as the victim of them, should be angry—but in our eyes an isolated case cannot call the whole of psychoanalysis into question, any more than an ecclesiastical crime could imperil the Church in the eyes of believers” (Sartre 2008, 200). A few lines later, he writes, “If objections to [psychoanalysis] are to be raised—objections to certain aspects of psychoanalytic practice, rather than to its principles—discussion of them

should be conducted with as much rigour as is invested by practitioners in their clinical and therapeutic procedures” (Sartre 2008, 200). Perhaps even more striking is Sartre’s claim that he is a “fellow-traveler” of psychoanalysis. At the very outset of his prefatory remarks to the recorded conversation, Sartre writes, “I am not a ‘false friend’ of psychoanalysis, but a critical fellow-traveller [sic], and I have neither the desire, nor the wherewithal, to ridicule it” (Sartre 2008, 199). How can Sartre be both a fellow-traveler of psychoanalysis and, at the same time, express his almost gleeful approval of the way in which A...’s recorded encounter with Dr. X reveals that psychoanalysis fundamentally fails in its task of enabling analysands to reclaim control of their troubled minds so that they might become full-fledged subjects?

Sartre’s ambivalence here regarding both his thoughts on psychoanalysis and the critical force that “The Man with a Tape-recorder” has with respect to it is characteristic of the entirety of his engagement with psychoanalysis. This ambivalence does not go unnoticed by two of the editorial board members objecting to Sartre’s decision to publish the conversation. By way of compromise, Sartre agreed to write a preface to the piece and allow Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, himself a well-known psychoanalyst, and Bernard Pingaud, a literary critic, to articulate their dissension at the conclusion of the piece. In his remarks, Pingaud writes, “Sartre has nothing against psychoanalysis. So be it. But what is he doing, after having made a show of his good intentions, if not denouncing both the practice of psychoanalysis and the theory on which it is based” (Pingaud 2008, 221)? He continues a few lines later, remarking that “when I read Sartre’s text, and see the way in which he uses phrases like ‘weekly or bi-weekly abdication’ to suggest an assimilation of psychoanalysis to narcotics—I cannot help thinking that it is the whole of

psychoanalysis that he is calling into question, in the name of his personal conception of the subject” (Pingaud 2008, 222). In his concluding remarks, Pingaud writes that Sartre is within his rights to open up a critical discussion vis-à-vis Freudian psychoanalysis and the conception of the subject that it develops, “but I still hold that A...’s text, precisely because it goes no further than an ‘acting out’, was the worst way of inaugurating such a debate” (Pingaud 2008, 223).

Pontalis’s opposition is a bit more measured, perhaps because of his position within the psychoanalytic community, but his relationship with Sartre—Pontalis was a former student and close friend of Sartre’s for many years—provides him with a unique perspective on Sartre’s conflicted relationship with the field of psychoanalysis. As he writes in a telling bit of prose:

I feel that to reach such conclusions [as Sartre’s] is to reveal a fundamental misunderstanding of the *whole* of psychoanalysis. How, for example, can one salute its ‘immense gains in knowledge’ and at the same time reject the very *principle* of the psychoanalytic relationship? Is it not praxis, here as elsewhere, that makes the appearance of the theoretical object possible? One day the history of Sartre’s thirty-year-long relationship with psychoanalysis will have to be written and perhaps his work reinterpreted in the light of it. (Pontalis 2008, 220)

While the present intervention will by no means elaborate the full extent of this long history, it will, I hope, offer an important piece of this multi-dimensional puzzle.

This vignette brings to the fore many of the central issues and questions that will be dealt with in this project. Sartre’s ambivalence toward psychoanalysis is evident at each stage of the controversy between him and his fellow editors. He is at once both averse and attracted to the promise of psychoanalytic inquiry, a simultaneous repulsion and attraction that characterizes his philosophical criticisms and appropriations of psychoanalysis throughout his career. By the same token, those thinkers in twentieth

century France explicitly working in a psychoanalytic vein themselves had awkward and challenging dealings with Sartre's ideas. The wager of this dissertation is that there is much philosophical insight to be gained through an in-depth exploration of the complexities and conceptual intricacies of Sartre's long intellectual relationship with psychoanalytic theory.

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Introduction

The Imagination Revisited: Philosophical and Psychoanalytic Perspectives

The imagination is a unique ability of the human mind. It is employed in creative activities such as painting or writing a screenplay. Fictional scenarios are crafted, imaginary people and objects are called forth through the activity of imagining. The imagination is employed in our understanding of others. By imagining what it might be like to be someone else, we can better empathize with them. This arguably gives imagination a role in moral reasoning and decision-making. And the imagination is a crucial part of one's self-understanding. People project themselves into the future, imagining possibilities for themselves, with these imagined possibilities coming to function as ideals that are either actively pursued or perhaps ignored because they are perceived as fanciful, unattainable goals. In this way, the imagination directly influences and organizes the practical lives of human beings. Imagining is thus an important and ubiquitous part of human mental life. As Edward Casey explains:

That imagining is crucial to a considerable portion of mental activity can be inferred not only from the frequent recourse which we make to concrete images and diagrams—to the devices of what Plato called *dianoia*—but also from the polymorphic use which human beings make of hypotheses and thought-experiments in everyday reasoning and in scientific theorizing. What John Dewey termed 'dramatic rehearsal in imagination' occurs constantly when we dream, day-dream, think, and even when we perceive. Indeed, it is rare to accomplish any of these quotidian activities without in some way making use of inherent imaginative powers. (Casey 1974, 3)

The imagination is a psychological function that is in constant, often unconscious, operation.

As we shall see, this idea informs in certain crucial ways the philosophy of freedom

developed by Jean-Paul Sartre and the psychoanalytic metapsychology of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan.

The power of imagination has received extensive treatment in the history of philosophy. The accounts given vary from critically hostile to ardently praiseworthy. In the modern philosophical tradition, for example, imagination was heralded as a source of spontaneous, creative freedom. Commenting on the transition from Medieval to modern conceptions of imagination, Richard Kearney remarks, “What most distinguishes the modern philosophies of imagination from their various antecedents is a marked *affirmation* of the creative power of man. The *mimetic* paradigm of imagining is replaced with the *productive* paradigm. No longer viewed as an intermediary agency...the imagination becomes, in modern times, the immediate source of its own truth” (Kearney 1988, 157). He continues, “As a consequence of this momentous reversal of roles, meaning is no longer primarily considered as a transcendent property of divine being; it is now hailed as a transcendental product of the human mind” (Kearney 1988, 157). From this perspective, the imagination represents the zenith of the creative powers of human beings.

The imagination is important to the phenomenological tradition, too. Edmund Husserl implicates the activity of imagining or “phantasying” in the process of phenomenological description and its resulting “eidetic universalization.”¹ Furthermore,

¹ See, e.g., Husserl 2005. In the very first section of this work, entitled “Ambiguity of the concept of phantasy in ordinary language—phantasy experience as the foundation of phenomenological eidetic analysis and concept formation,” Husserl states that he is interested in phantasying to the extent that it “gives rise to eidetic universalizations, consequently to concept formations that permit adequate realization through our being able to see directly the conceptual essence in evident generalization” (Husserl 2005, 5). Casey has written extensively on this topic. In his contribution to *The Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, he writes, “Edmund Husserl considered imagination a topic worthy of serious pursuit in two respects: as something to be described in its own right, and as having special methodological insight” (Casey 1997, 340). He continues, stating that imagination “is a keystone in the arch of phenomenological method. For

according to Martin Heidegger's (in)famous reading of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, the imagination is the "common unknown root" of the faculties of sensibility and understanding. Heidegger, by way of Kant, thereby establishes imagination as the creative source of experience in general.²

However, the imagination has also been regarded by both philosophers and psychologists as a pathological faculty. The imagination gives rise to all sorts of delusions, hallucinations, fabrications, and so on. Indeed, for all the praise certain philosophers heap upon imagination, there are countless others who regard it with intense suspicion. One need only think of Plato's distinction between Forms and appearances and its consequences for the products of imagination. If appearances are but degraded copies, then imaginings are but copies of copies and thereby further remove us from the world of truth and more deeply cement us within the world of falsity. Hence Plato's exiling of the poets from the *Kallipolis*. Along these Platonic lines, John Locke maintains that the imagination leads one astray from empirically verifiable truth and should therefore be suppressed as much as possible:

That the things which were most real to Locke...were not the realities of poetry, will perhaps be generally allowed, suspicious though we rightly are of all romantic presuppositions about what is poetic. Locke's philosophy is the philosophy of an age whose whole effort had been to arrive at 'truth' by exorcising the phantasms of the imagination, and the truth-standards which the eighteenth century inherited through him involved the relegation of the mind's shaping-power to an inferior status. (Willey 1952, 291)

only by the 'free variation' of examples through their imaginative exfoliation can genuine consistencies and regularities appear that might otherwise never be grasped" (Casey 1997, 341).

² See Heidegger 1990. Highlighting the importance of Heidegger's reading of the Kantian transcendental imagination to his general philosophical perspective, Kearney states that, "the concept of *Dasein* outlined in *Being and Time* is, by Heidegger's own admission, an existential reinterpretation of the Kantian concept of transcendental imagination" (Kearney 1988, 222). Heidegger's claim is notoriously controversial, but such controversy is well beyond the scope of my concern in the present project.

What is more, from a psychoanalytic perspective, imagination plays a significant role in psychopathology. As we shall see in greater detail below, what Freud dubs “fantasy,” in particular, the unconscious functioning of fantasy, is pathogenic and plays a significant role in the development of the psychopathologies he treats on his famous couch. He contends that neuroses consist in “a forcing of the patient out of real life, an alienating of him from reality” (*SE* 12: 218). In contrast to Plato, Locke, and their ilk, rather than suppressing imagination, Freud comes to emphasize imaginative life in his clinical and theoretical work. Nevertheless, he shows how it is implicated in many painful mental symptoms.

One way of characterizing this dissertation is as a rigorous accounting of the dual aspect nature of imagination. How can the imagination be the source of both creative freedom and psychopathology? How can it be the ground of both autonomy and determination? More than merely reconciling these two apparently conflicting aspects of imagination, one central wager of this project is that the determinative aspect of imagination or fantasy is a direct result of its freeing capacity. That is, it is precisely insofar as the subject is free that the subject can become ensnared in the products of its imagination.

This project approaches this problem from a historical perspective. In particular, the following chapters explore the complex and philosophically rich relationship between Sartrean existentialism and Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis. The topic of imagination is a central thematic concern in both Sartre’s philosophical corpus and psychoanalytic metapsychology. Some of Sartre’s earliest work tackles the topic of the imagination. His doctoral thesis, *L’Imagination*, provides a critical, historical assessment of imagination as

it has been theorized in both philosophy and psychology from the modern period to the mid-twentieth century. Sartre's follow-up to this book, *L'Imaginaire*, draws heavily on the work of Husserl and Heidegger. This work arguably establishes "the imaginary" as one of the primary focuses of his entire *oeuvre*. Therein, he associates consciousness with freedom, with the act of imagining being identified as the quintessential expression of this freedom:

We may therefore conclude that imagination is not an empirical power added to consciousness, but is *the whole of consciousness as it realizes its freedom*; every concrete and real situation of consciousness in the world is pregnant with the imaginary in so far as it is always presented as a surpassing of the real... The unreal is produced outside the world by a consciousness that remains in the world and *it is because we are transcendently free that we can imagine*. (Sartre 2010, 186; emphasis added)

From this point in his career onward, Sartre expands his conception of the imaginary and its role in human life. While in his early works on the topic, he explores more familiar notions of what is meant by the terms "imagination" and "imaginary" (e.g., artistic creativity, conjuring mental images, etc.), in later works, he makes the case that the imaginary underlies the acts and projects that make a person who and what they are. The subjects of two of his most extensive biographies, Jean Genet and Gustave Flaubert, are said to be "imaginary" men, individuals who fantasmatically fashion identities for themselves as writers, persons who live their lives in the world of the imaginary. In his biographies especially, Sartre demonstrates the schematic role the imaginary plays throughout the course of an individual's life. Moreover, he does so while arguably developing his own account of the imagination's unconscious functioning. The choices a person makes throughout his/her life are, according to Sartre, grounded in an initial "original" or "fundamental" choice which thereafter serves a kind of organizing function

for the subject, providing a basic orientation for each subsequent choice or action he/she makes (even though this orientation may not be explicit to the subject him-/herself). It is my contention that Sartre's account of the imaginary and the fundamental choice bear a striking resemblance to what, in psychoanalytic theory, is referred to as fantasy and the fundamental fantasy, respectively. By shifting the emphasis from concerns about the unconscious to questions regarding the role of fantasy in human life, the substantial common ground shared between Sartre and psychoanalytic theory is more clearly visible. Moreover, when read together, these two approaches offer a rich and nuanced understanding of the crucial ways in which fantasy influences the life of a human being.

Fantasy assumes an important role early on in the development of psychoanalytic metapsychology. In *Studies on Hysteria*, in which the specific clinical and theoretical orientation of psychoanalysis is still being worked out, Freud identifies fantasy as being of central concern to analytic practitioners. Dispensing with a theory—what Freud called his “neurotica”—according to which there is a specific “real” cause to which analytic treatment must lead, he comes to see that the imaginative productions of the human psyche may have just as much a role to play in psychopathology as any actually experienced trauma. The fantasmatic desires of a person and the way in which those desires conflict with socially and morally acceptable behavior are themselves pathogenic. This crucial insight is arguably the most decisive step Freud made in fashioning psychoanalysis as a distinct clinical and theoretical approach to the human psyche.

Lacan, by way of his well-known “return to Freud,” likewise takes up the concept of fantasy. For him, analysis culminates when the analysand has “traversed the fantasy,” that is, when the analysand has recognized their relation to the desire structuring the

fundamental fantasy according to which they live their life: “To traverse the fantasy thus means to face the subject with the ethical duty of assuming responsibility for their unconscious desire and their participation in the reproduction of the existing state of affairs” (Scott 2016, 9).

It is my contention in this dissertation that the notion of fantasy as it is developed in Freudian-Lacanian analytic theory and the notion of the imaginary as it is developed in Sartre’s thought allows us to see that even in situations in which one’s freedom appears most compromised, one’s own creative, autonomous activity is still at work. The symptoms that manifest and appear to strip away every bit of freedom from the subject are themselves the result of choices the subject makes. Part of the task of psychoanalysis, both existential and Freudian, is to assist a person in coming to recognize once again the agency they have in their own life.

Chapter one establishes the historical background of Sartre’s contentious relationship with psychoanalytic theory. One curious feature of Sartre’s engagement with psychoanalysis is that, despite his sometimes-terse criticisms of the theory and practice of psychoanalysis, Freud and psychoanalytic theory appear in some form or other in virtually all of Sartre’s major philosophical works. As is well known, he even develops his own version of psychoanalysis in *Being and Nothingness*. The central question animating the first chapter is whether Sartre’s moves to circumnavigate psychoanalysis proper are warranted, successful, or worthwhile. One of the principal conclusions drawn by the present work is that Sartre’s various attempts at developing concepts intended to get around psychoanalysis lead him to a theoretical position that is very much in line with a Freudian-Lacanian position.

In this chapter, I survey Sartre's principal criticisms of psychoanalysis. For him, psychoanalysis is a deterministic theoretical edifice that leaves little to no room for human freedom. The unconscious provides another excuse for failing to assume responsibility for one's freedom. Psychoanalysis is therefore a discourse of "bad faith." In the concluding section of chapter one, I indicate the many points of convergence that I proceed to draw out more thoroughly throughout the dissertation. In particular, I show that both Sartre and Lacan develop accounts of subjectivity according to which it is constituted by lack. In other words, for both thinkers, the subject is a being that does not coincide with itself; it is not complete, whole, or stable. This gap at the center of subjectivity is what Sartre argues is the condition of possibility for freedom. Because the "for-itself," i.e., human subjectivity or consciousness is not coincident with itself as a static, stable identity, it is able to ask questions about itself, to imagine things differently than they are. Likewise for Freudian-Lacanian theory, the hole in the heart of subjectivity creates a certain distance between the subject and itself, a space in which fantasies proliferate. In this way, I suggest that psychoanalysis provides the philosophical ground for an account of human freedom that proceeds along the same theoretical lines as Sartre's own account.

In chapter two, I explore arguably the most contentious aspect of Sartre's engagement with psychoanalysis, namely, the nature and status of the concept of the unconscious. Much of the scholarly ink spilled on Sartre's relationship with psychoanalysis focuses on his multiple criticisms of the unconscious. The amount of attention given to this topic makes some sense since, if Sartre's critiques are successful, then large portions of psychoanalytic theory must be regarded as either unsatisfactory or,

at the very least, wholly incompatible with Sartre's philosophy. After all, the unconscious is the cornerstone of psychoanalytic theory. But this project takes a different tack than most scholarly treatments of this topic. I want to shift the overall focus of the debate away from Sartre's multiple lines of criticism of the psychoanalytic unconscious.

This shift in focus nevertheless requires careful consideration of the unconscious. Chapter two, "The Truth Is Out There: Unconscious Structure in Sartre and Lacan," deals extensively with the apparent tension between Sartre's and Lacan's views about the relation between conscious and unconscious thought. This is important, first, because unconscious thought is integral to psychoanalytic theory and occupies a prominent place in Sartre's writings that specifically address psychoanalysis. Second, and most importantly for my purposes here, demonstrating a certain affinity between Sartre, Freud, and Lacan on the topic of the unconscious is crucial for demonstrating a basic agreement between them regarding the way in which imagination operates unconsciously. By showing that their views on the unconscious are compatible, this chapter goes some way toward showing the compatibility of their thought on fantasy.

The second chapter undertakes to reframe Sartre's criticisms and demonstrate that his concerns about the psychoanalytic unconscious share much more in common with a Freudian-Lacanian viewpoint than many, including Sartre and Lacan themselves, would be willing to admit. I show that Sartre's primary critical target is a depth psychological understanding of the unconscious, an understanding to which Lacan (and arguably Freud himself) is opposed. For Lacan, the unconscious is constituted in and through the experiences of everyday life. In other words, the unconscious is "out there," stitched into the fabric of the doings and utterances that are registered through consciousness but

which can and do carry much more meaning with them than one could consciously comprehend. In a sense, the “remainder” is what is rendered unconscious. In this way, the Lacanian “structural” approach, which disvalues the dynamic approach favored by ego psychology and other depth psychology-inspired schools of thought, shares much more in common with Sartre’s own conception of unconscious mental life than does the popularized notion of a depth-psychological unconscious.

Chapter three begins to address another tension that, on an initial approach, would suggest an unbridgeable chasm separating Sartre and Lacan, namely, the antagonism between existentialism and structuralism. This tension is especially pertinent to the account I develop in this dissertation insofar as Lacan’s concept of fantasy is one of the more structuralist-inspired aspects of his metapsychology. This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of Lacan’s concept of fantasy. For him, fantasy is, in part, constituted by the wishes and desires of various big(ger) Others, especially one’s parents. The fantasmatic identity one comes to take on is fashioned, to a certain degree, by the fantasies of other people. This raises questions about how much freedom one really has, even in one’s imaginative life.

Lacan’s structuralist concept of fantasy appears to create problems for my attempt to align his concerns with those of Sartre. As the principle representative of a supposedly radical voluntarism, it seems as though Sartre could tolerate this conception of fantasy about as much as the depth-psychological concept of the unconscious. However, I proceed to argue that, contrary to caricatured depictions of Sartre’s existentialist philosophy, he offers a nuanced account of subjectivity according to which the influences of culture, especially one’s relationship with one’s parents (what Freud would call the

Oedipal scenario), are just as constitutive as one's own free choices. Drawing on some of Sartre's later works, I argue that Sartre's own views about the nature of freedom and its expression in fantasy are developed in a Lacanian vein.

In the fourth and final chapter, "The Fantastic Structure of Freedom," I examine the other side of fantasy. Where chapter three focuses almost exclusively on the determinative aspect of fantasy, namely, the ways in which one's imaginative life is itself commandeered by forces that subvert autonomy (thereby creating a "fantasy of freedom"), chapter four examines how the freedom of the subject remains intact, even in moments when it appears to be nowhere in sight (thereby developing an account of the "freedom of fantasy").

The first section of chapter four offers a preliminary exploration of the issues that will be discussed throughout the chapter. The "paradoxical" conception of freedom developed by Sartre, Freud, and Lacan in which there is a kind of "freedom in determination" is elaborated by drawing some parallels between their thought and the events occurring in Paris during May of 1968.

Section two provides an in-depth account of the role of fantasy in psychopathology. Drawing on the work of Jonathan Lear, I show how fantasy distorts one's experience and how this "distortion" can develop in pathological ways. Fantasies can become rigid, calcified psychological structures that exert a tremendous influence over a person's practical life. In this way, a person can come to see the possibilities for his/her life as dramatically limited. Scenarios are played out over and over again according to the dictates of a singular fantasmatic template governing one's psyche.

Sections three and four proceed to argue that even in this kind of fantasmatically determined situation, one's freedom is nevertheless implicated in the way in which one lives one's life. Section three offers two case histories. The first (to which the notion of case history is applied loosely) is drawn from Sartre's massive biography of Gustave Flaubert, *The Family Idiot*. Drawing on Sartre's biographical work, I show that he develops a unique account of psychopathology that allows us to maintain a conception of human agency in the face of neurosis and other forms of mental illness. To align Sartre's account of psychopathology with Lacan's, I examine a case history developed by a Lacanian analyst that reaches conclusions very much in line with Sartre. Finally, in section four, I show how Lacan's notion of "traversing the fantasy," which marks the end of analysis, coincides with Sartre's notion of illuminating the fundamental project. Both notions consist in allowing a person to recognize the creative agency that is at work even at the level of the formation of symptoms.

Chapter One

A Violent Drama: Sartre and Psychoanalysis

§1 Sartre's Psychoanalytic "Adventure"

The Adventure of French Philosophy consists of a collection of essays, lectures, and book reviews by the philosopher Alain Badiou. Therein, Badiou offers an assessment of recent French philosophy, covering thinkers from Sartre to Althusser and Deleuze. For Badiou, France, during the mid-to-late twentieth century, fostered an environment in which philosophical thought exploded in a way similar to ancient Greece and enlightenment Germany. This "philosophical moment," he contends, is marked by several distinctive features. Among them is a philosophical engagement with Freudian psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is treated at length by the likes of Maurice Merleau-Ponty³, Paul Ricoeur⁴, Jürgen Habermas⁵, Michel Foucault⁶, Jacques Derrida⁷, and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri⁸, among many others. Psychoanalysis both informs the philosophical approaches developed by these philosophers—with psychoanalytic theory forming a lynchpin of structuralism⁹—as well as represents a field from which many philosophers felt the need to distance themselves—Merleau-Ponty, for example, tries to remove any trace of mechanistic explanation in psychoanalysis, retaining "only what is of value" (Askay and Farquhar 2006, 290).

³ See, e.g., Merleau-Ponty 1963; Merleau-Ponty 2013.

⁴ See, e.g., Ricoeur 1970; Ricoeur 2012.

⁵ See, e.g., Habermas 1971.

⁶ See, e.g., Foucault 1990; Foucault 2002.

⁷ See, e.g., Derrida 1987; Derrida 1998; Derrida 2001.

⁸ See, e.g., Deleuze and Guatarri 2009; Deleuze and Guattari 1987.

⁹ See, e.g., Deleuze 2004.

This engagement with Freud was brought about, in part, by the intense rethinking of subjectivity that was being undertaken by philosophers at the time.¹⁰ On the one hand, existential phenomenologists were attempting to account for aspects of experience that seem to escape the bounds of a conscious, reflective gaze but without appealing explicitly to the psychoanalytic unconscious. A fair amount of criticism was directed at psychoanalysis from the phenomenological camp.¹¹ But, despite these criticisms, psychoanalysis nevertheless played a pivotal role in the thought of many phenomenologists. On the other hand, the structuralists sought to do away with much of the phenomenological account of the subject according to which subjectivity plays a constituting role in experience. Armed with the notion of the unconscious, Freudian-

¹⁰ See Hallward 2012. Peter Hallward discusses the clash between phenomenologists (including existential phenomenologists) and structuralists, with the latter movement being spurred, in part, by a renewed engagement with Freud. Commenting on the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* which served for a brief period as a premier venue for works by those on the structuralist vanguard to publish their work, he writes, "Oriented by a concern for scientific rigour and guided in particular by the teachings of Lacan and Althusser, the *Cahiers* privileged the analysis of formal structures and concepts in opposition to theories based on the categories of lived experience or on the conscious subjects of such experience" (Hallward 2012, 1). Later on, with explicit reference to the notion of the subject, Hallward notes that, though the structuralists sought to replace phenomenological notions of subjectivity grounded in lived experience, they did not seek to dispense with the notion altogether. Psychoanalysis afforded a theoretical framework for integrating the subject within a structuralist theoretical perspective. Making reference to the work of Jacques-Alain Miller, Hallward writes, "In keeping with the anti-humanism [then] dominant at the ENS, the point of departure is not what is 'given' or 'lived' in experience but the effort to grasp what structures such experience...It isn't enough, though, simply to exclude the lived or to replace it with an abstract model: 'an exact integration of the lived into the structural must now be made to operate. Psychoanalysis, Miller argues, is especially suited to perform this integration" (Hallward 2012, 44). Thus, many of the philosophical divisions of this era centered precisely on the notion of the subject. Many of the essays originally published in the *Cahiers* testify to the rethinking of the notion of subjectivity occurring during this period in France. In "Structure and Subject," François Regnault characterizes the conflict between phenomenology and structuralism a bit more polemically than does Hallward: "Structuralism, in the form that it took in the late 1950s, and in the form that young students of literature and philosophy could encounter it, without asking themselves where exactly it came from was slowly to render phenomenology, the dominant philosophy of the day, empty and obsolete. Phenomenology retained consciousness as its main category. It was all about consciousness in those days, about lived experience, about intention, about perception" (Regnault, 2012, 15).

¹¹ See Eugen Fink's appendix to Husserl's *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* for a representative example of this. Heidegger is also exemplary of this critical attitude toward psychoanalysis. As William J. Richardson remarks, "if the Freudian unconscious is only the underside of a Cartesian conception of consciousness, conceived as an encapsulated ego-subject, what happens if this Cartesian model is scrapped? Does not the unconscious go too? Of course it does—and that is Heidegger's position" (Richardson 2003, 14). Elsewhere, he states, "Martin Heidegger was no friend of psychoanalysis" (Richardson 2003, 11).

Lacanian metapsychology provided the means to develop an account of subjectivity according to which it is largely constituted rather than constituting. Thus, for those structuralists who sought to retain the notion of the subject at all—Althusser and his followers wanted to dispense with it altogether¹²—psychoanalysis offered a way to incorporate an experiencing subject within an all-encompassing structure.

Psychoanalysis thus provides an interesting inroad for thinking about the various philosophical lines and schools of thought that developed in twentieth century France and their points of convergence and divergence. Many of the most prominent figures of this period in intellectual history either draw heavily from psychoanalytic theory or vehemently criticize it; sometimes both at once. Indeed, as Badiou describes it, many French philosophers make it a point to adopt certain aspects of Freudian theory but nevertheless to vigorously critique other features of psychoanalytic thought: “Contemporary French philosophy has therefore also been engaged in a long-running conversation with psychoanalysis. This exchange has been a drama of great complexity, highly revealing in and of itself” (Badiou 2012, lix).

As “the affair of the tape-recorder man” suggests, the drama that Sartre stages with Freud and his legacy is one of the most compelling to emerge from the French philosophical scene. As we shall see, Sartre moves from outright hostility to psychoanalysis in his early work to a more subdued contempt in his middle and late work. However, as per one of the central theses of this project, the philosophical path that Sartre forges is closely aligned with many of the concerns of psychoanalysis. Sartre goes

¹² “The greatest *différend* between us and ‘the others’ concerned the subject. It served as a shibboleth between psychoanalysis and materialist philosophy, between Lacanians and Althusserians, between Althusser’s process without subject and the procedures of the barred subject, between the logic of the signifier and a certain scientific positivism” (Regnault 2012, 20).

so far as to develop his own version of existential psychoanalysis outlined in *Being and Nothingness*. Indeed, certain psychoanalytic concepts appear to lie at the very heart of some of Sartre's texts. Badiou's further remarks prove instructive for framing what follows:

Naturally, there is always a certain friction where common aims are pursued by different means. There is an element of complicity—you are doing the same as I am—but also of rivalry: you are doing it differently. The relation between philosophy and psychoanalysis within French philosophy is just this, one of competition and complicity, of fascination and hostility, love and hatred. No wonder the drama between them has been so violent, so complex. (Badiou 2012, lx)

The aim of this chapter is to get a handle on some of the key issues at stake in Sartre's theoretical dance with psychoanalysis. This chapter reconstructs some of Sartre's basic objections to psychoanalysis, highlighting the features of the alternative picture of human subjectivity that he sketches, especially in *Being and Nothingness*. Moreover, this chapter will frame the problems facing a rapprochement between Sartrean existentialism and Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis. Desire will emerge as a touchstone for both existentialist and psychoanalytic accounts of human practical life, a concept that, from both perspectives, orients the life of the human subject. This shared emphasis on desire suggests what I argue throughout this project is a key point of intersection and an overlooked area of similarity between the two, namely, the concept of fantasy/the imaginary and its importance for conceiving the possibility of human freedom.

§2 The “Unblinking Eye” of Sartrean Consciousness

Psychoanalysis is one of the few points of reference that can be found throughout the entirety of the Sartrean corpus: “Among the existential phenomenologists, Sartre exhibited the most profound and protracted interest in Freud’s work” (Askay and Farquhar 2006, 232). Freud and Freudian theory—along with a few references to Lacan in some late interviews—make appearances in both Sartre’s vintage existentialist texts as well as in his Marxist-influenced work of the 1950s and 60s. All of this is in addition to the hulking screenplay on Freud that Sartre wrote for famed actor and director John Huston.¹³ During the course of Sartre’s career, the status of psychoanalysis in his thinking undergoes several changes. His relationship with psychoanalysis is, at first, purely antagonistic. In a 1969 interview with Perry Anderson, Ronald Fraser, and Quentin Hoare for *New Left Review*—incidentally, this is the same year that “The Man with a Tape-recorder” was published—Sartre states apropos his relation to both Freud and Marx:

I will begin by saying that I undoubtedly had a deep repugnance for psychoanalysis in my youth, which needs to be explained as much as my innocence of the class struggle. The fact that I was a petty-bourgeois was responsible for the latter; one might say that the fact that I was French was responsible for the former. (Sartre 2008, 10)

Sartre’s claims here indicate that at the time of the interview, his stance toward psychoanalysis has softened a bit from his initial “repugnance.” As he alludes to in terms of his French heritage, part of the reason for this revulsion was his adherence to certain Cartesian principles. In particular, Sartre never abandons the view that the mind is transparent to itself, that it can gain full, reflective access to itself. This is something that

¹³ See *The Freud Scenario*.

he argues the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious, conceived as a mental compartment that sits below or behind consciousness, prohibits. He continues, “I have to say that I was incapable of understanding [Freud] because I was a Frenchman with a good Cartesian tradition behind me, imbued with a certain rationalism, and I was therefore deeply shocked by the idea of the unconscious” (Sartre 2006, 11-12).

Sartre’s commitment to certain aspects of the Cartesian model of the mind is reflected in his claim that the human subject is completely transparent to itself.¹⁴ Indeed, it is this transparency that, in Sartre’s early work, at least, accounts for human freedom. In one of Sartre’s earliest philosophical works, 1937’s *The Transcendence of the Ego*, he develops an account of consciousness according to which there is nothing *in* consciousness, not even what could be called an ‘I’ or ‘me’. Indeed, this maneuver of expelling objects from consciousness is a central theme of many of Sartre’s major early works. In both of his monographs on the imagination, *L’Imagination* and *L’Imaginaire*—published in 1936 and 1940, respectively, but composed at roughly the same time as *The Transcendence of the Ego*—he combats theories of the image according to which miniature copies or representations of objects are thought to be inside the mind. He criticizes theories making similar points vis-à-vis the emotions in his 1939 text *Esquisse d’une théorie des émotions*. Sartre contends that a theory which places content within the mind, whether that content be an emotion, an image, or even the self, falls victim to what he calls “the illusion of immanence,” the idea that objects are immanent, in either a formal or a material sense, to the mind. This idea is articulated in the introduction to

¹⁴ In several other ways, however, e.g., his concern to argue against the notion that the self is substantial, Sartre’s conception of the self differs significantly from Descartes’.

Being and Nothingness where he writes, “The first procedure of a philosophy ought to be to expel things from consciousness...” (Sartre 1956, 11).

For Sartre, what many regard as contents of the mind are instead objects of experience, up to and including the self. In other words, the self (or, likewise, an image or an emotion) is not an “inhabitant” of the mind. For Sartre, there is no “inner world.” As he puts it, “There is no longer an ‘inner life’...because there is no longer anything which is an object and which can at the same time partake of the intimacy of consciousness. Doubts, remorse, the so-called ‘mental crises of consciousness,’ etc.—in short, all the content of intimate diaries—become sheer *performance*” (Sartre 1960, 93-94). Put differently, these phenomena are *acts* rather than contents. For him, everything, including one’s ego, is “out there,” discoverable in the world like an object among other objects. Sartre conceives of the mind as an agency rather than a container. Drawing on Husserlian phenomenology, the type of agency that Sartre insists belongs to the mind is that of intentionality. The mind, for Sartre, is “other-referring,” that is, it is always reaching out toward the world; consciousness is, in fact, nothing but a relation to the world. In the conclusion to *Transcendence of the Ego*, he states:

The conception of the ego which we propose seems to us to effect the liberation of the Transcendental Field, and at the same time its purification.

The Transcendental Field, purified of all egological structure, recovers its primary transparency. In a sense, it is a *nothing*, since all physical, psycho-physical, and psychic objects, all truths, all values are outside of it; since my *me* has itself ceased to be any part of it. But this nothing is *all* since it is *consciousness* of all these objects. (Sartre 1960, 93)

Thus, for Sartre, consciousness is “nothing” in the sense that it is neither a substance nor a container which harbors substances. Rather, it is a relation to objects in the world.

In one of his earliest philosophical essays—and one of the first essays on Husserlian phenomenology to be published in France—“Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl’s Phenomenology,” Sartre colorfully criticizes what he dubs “digestive philosophy”:

‘He devoured her with his eyes.’ This expression and many other signs point to the illusion common to both realism and idealism: to know is to eat. After a hundred years of academicism, French philosophy remains at that point. We have all read Brunschvicg, Lalande, and Meyerson, we have all believed that the spidery mind trapped things in its web, covered them with a white spit and slowly swallowed them, reducing them to its own substance. What is a table, a rock, a house? Answer: a certain assemblage of ‘contents of consciousness,’ a class of such contents. Oh digestive philosophy! (Sartre 1970, 4)

Against the notion that consciousness assimilates objects into itself, that it “digests” the world around it, Sartre marshals Husserl’s notion of intentionality: “You see this tree, to be sure. But you see it just where it is: at the side off the road, in the midst of the dust, alone and writhing in the heat, eight miles from the Mediterranean coast. It could not enter into your consciousness, for it is not of the same nature as consciousness” (Sartre 1970, 4). He continues, “Consciousness and the world are given at one stroke: essentially external to consciousness, the world is nevertheless essentially *relative* to consciousness” (Sartre 1970, 4; emphasis added). He proceeds to succinctly state the basic idea that will be elaborated in *Transcendence of the Ego*: “consciousness has no ‘inside’” (Sartre 1970, 5). Consciousness, for Sartre, is always reaching outward, relating to objects rather than taking them inside itself.

Effecting a reversal of Kant’s argument for the transcendental unity of apperception—this is the thesis according to which a transcendental ‘I’ is a necessary condition for maintaining the unity of one’s experiences, a condition for the possibility of attributing one’s experiences to oneself—Sartre contends that it is rather the unity of the

objects of experience themselves that accounts of the stability of the 'I'. At the conclusion of a series of questions regarding the unity of apperception, Sartre asks, "is the *I* which we encounter in our consciousness made possible by the synthetic unity of our representations, or is it the *I* which in fact unites the representations to each other" (Sartre 1960, 34)? Sartre concludes that it is, in fact, the former. He thereby shifts the emphasis from the ego as the localized site of the unification of experience to the world as the site of the constitution of the ego. The self, for Sartre, is just the empirical ego which appears upon reflection, the embodied, material being encountered by others in the world. As he points out, the ego "is a being in the world, like the ego of another" (Sartre 1960, 31). Sartre thus rejects the Kantian distinction between the empirical ego, the object of psychological reflection, and the transcendental ego, what Kant argues is the transcendental condition of such reflection and an object which is itself incapable of being reflectively or intuitively grasped.

What significance does Sartre's "transcendence of the ego" have for his claims about freedom and his rejection of psychoanalysis? To begin with, the transparency of consciousness is a necessary condition for its spontaneity and creativity. Sartre's claims about the way in which the ego is constituted as an object are supported by the distinction he draws between pre-reflective and reflective consciousness. To put it in Sartre's terms, the gap between pre-reflective and reflective consciousness is where subjectivity "erupts." What he wants to emphasize is that in the intentional activity of consciousness, there is no 'I' to be found. The objects of conscious awareness are precisely those objects out in the world that are the intentional correlates of consciousness. In an act of perception, for instance, one does not reflect upon oneself as the agent of a perceptual

intention and simultaneously home in upon the perceived object. Rather, the object captures the full attention of consciousness. It is only in an act of reflection that one comes to ascribe the action to oneself. To take Sartre's own illustrative example, when one reads, one does not explicitly reflect upon oneself as the reader of those words (Sartre 1960, 46-47). To do so would be precisely to interrupt the activity of reading. However, if a friend calls and asks what one is doing, one might reply 'I'm reading'. In making statements such as this, one engages in a second-order act of reflection, an act which constitutes one as an object. In other words, one objectifies oneself through this kind of reflective act, and by doing so, one constitutes one's ego.

During those moments when one is not explicitly aware of oneself engaging in some practical or thoughtful activity, one is in the mode of what Sartre calls "pre-reflective" conscious awareness. Pre-reflective consciousness—Sartre sometimes alternatively refers to this as "non-thetic" consciousness—designates the minimal threshold of self-awareness required by consciousness to carry out its intentional function. Sartre illustrates his point with reference to the cogito: "the consciousness which says *I Think* is precisely not the consciousness which thinks" (Sartre 1960, 45). For the consciousness that thinks, doubts, imagines, and so on is only pre-reflectively aware of itself. A second-order act of reflection is necessary to establish precisely *who* is doing the thinking, namely, 'me'. But there is no 'I' or 'me' to be found at the pre-reflective level.

What does this rift that Sartre identifies between these two levels of consciousness, between, on the one hand, certain thoughts and actions at which 'I' am nowhere to be found and, on the other hand, those moments of reflective clarity during

which ‘I’ am present to myself reveal about the structure of subjectivity? To reference the *cogito* once more, Sartre’s analysis reveals that Descartes’ “I think therefore I am” expresses a fundamental gap at the heart of subjectivity. The “I think” uttered by Descartes is uttered by a consciousness which did neither the thinking nor any of the doubting necessary to reach the purported apodictic certainty that one can be sure of one’s existence on the grounds that one is a thinking thing. There is a gap between the consciousness which articulates the *cogito* and the consciousness which makes it possible via the process of radical doubt. The self is, strictly speaking, to be located only at the site of utterance. In other words, two separate acts of thought are required to engage in skeptical doubt and to identify oneself as the one who engages in skeptical doubt, namely, a pre-reflective and a reflective thought. The uncanny conclusion that we are forced to draw is that much of our lives are lived at the level of pre-reflective consciousness, a level at which there is no ‘I’ to be found. We are virtually always engaged in pre-reflective acts of consciousness, acts of which we become aware only after the fact. Flynn aptly terms this all-seeing gaze the “unblinking eye of prereflective consciousness” (Flynn 2014, 102). This unblinking eye is privy to all aspects of our lives. However, it is only through second-order acts of reflection that we come to know them. The pre-reflective level is where, for Sartre, subjectivity is expressed. Indeed, he argues that the subject, properly understood, is to be located at the level of pre-reflective consciousness: “What can properly be called subjectivity is consciousness (of) consciousness” (Sartre 1956, 23).¹⁵

¹⁵ When referring to pre-reflective consciousness, Sartre uses the preposition ‘of’ out of grammatical necessity to avoid the odd sounding phrase “consciousness consciousness”. It should not be understood as expressing a reflective act but rather the immediate, non-cognitive self-awareness with which all consciousness is endowed for Sartre. It is put in parentheses to indicate its merely grammatical status.

§3 Sartre's Existential Alternative to Freudian Psychoanalysis

The distinction between pre-reflective and reflective consciousness establishes the basis for Sartre's existential alternative to Freudian psychoanalysis. For him, the idea of an unconscious qua mental compartment separated from consciousness is yet another attempt to introduce an object into consciousness. If the unconscious is hypostatized, if it is conceived as an actually existing space within the mind, then the intentional activity of consciousness is disrupted. Recall that for Sartre, the mind is not a container with an inner "depth." Rather, the mind is a form of activity, a relation to the world. Thus, despite appearances to the contrary, Sartre insists that the gap between pre-reflective and reflective consciousness does not mirror the Freudian distinction between conscious and unconscious thought. Though Sartre identifies two types of mental activity, these types of activity issue from one and the same consciousness. By contrast, Freud's metapsychological postulate of the unconscious appears to both render the mind a psychological space with hidden depths and divide the psyche into distinct parts cut off from one another. Both of these conclusions are unpalatable to Sartre.

Conceived as a kind of second mind, one cordoned off from conscious experience, the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious introduces a structure into consciousness, something which bars consciousness's pre-reflective access to itself. This is a move that Sartre stringently argues against. To introduce a thing into consciousness is to render consciousness opaque to itself, preventing its intentional activity. As Sartre writes of the transcendental ego, "If it existed, it would tear consciousness from itself; it would divide consciousness; it would slide into every consciousness like an opaque

blade” (Sartre 1960, 40). At this point in Sartre’s interpretation of psychoanalysis, the unconscious appears to be another such blade ushering in “the death of consciousness” (Sartre 1960, 40). As Flynn remarks, “...Sartre avoids appeal to an unconscious as incompatible with the spontaneity and evident lucidity of our awareness (in [*Being and Nothingness*] he will specifically reject the Freudian unconscious as incompatible with freedom)” (Flynn 2014, 70). And, as Lee Brown and Alan Hausman put the point, “Freud provides a mechanism to explain [the fact that analysis is necessary to reveal an unknown desire]: the desire is dynamically repressed into a region or a structure—we shall call it a compartment—of the mind. It is this notion which Sartre wants to demolish” (Brown and Hausman 1980, 544).

As might be guessed by anyone even remotely familiar with Sartre’s work, the primary criticism that he makes of psychoanalysis is that it does not account for human freedom. The thing-like quality of the unconscious represents one line of argument that Sartre mounts against Freud in this regard. By showing that there is nothing “in” consciousness, that the self is not a substance, Sartre demonstrates that the human subject is always engaged in a conscious process of creation. With no substantial egoic object, he claims, in effect, that one is nothing but what one does. For Sartre, the human subject is the being “which defines itself by *action*” (Sartre 1956, 431). By conceiving of the self as a relatively stable, unfluctuating thing, one stifles this kind of free, creative project.

Sartre takes the distinction between consciousness and things even further in his early *magnum opus* *Being and Nothingness*. Therein, Sartre distinguishes between two types or categories of being, namely, being-for-itself and being-in-itself. This quasi-Hegelian terminology is adopted in an effort to underscore the strangeness of human

subjectivity in contrast to the material world. Issuing from Sartre's arguments for the transcendence of the ego, being-for-itself refers to consciousness, a being that does not coincide with itself. As Sartre paradoxically characterizes it, the for-itself "must necessarily be what it is not and not be what it is" (Sartre 1956, 120). In other words, human subjects have the unique character of occupying certain positions (e.g., that of a father, academic, or waiter). But insofar as the self is not substantial, individuals are not these positions in the sense of being ontologically coincident with them (the for-itself is not what it is). Rather than being a substance, the self, on Sartre's account, is a relation, a "presence to self":

The *self* therefore represents an ideal distance within the immanence of the subject in relation to himself, a way of *not being his own coincidence*, of escaping identity while positing it as unity—in short, of being in a perpetually unstable equilibrium between identity as absolute cohesion without a trace of diversity and unity as a synthesis of multiplicity. This is what we shall call presence to itself. The law of being of the *for-itself*, as the ontological foundation of consciousness, is to be itself in the form of presence to itself. (Sartre 1956, 123-124)

In other words, there is a minimal gap, a negativity that separates the subject from itself. The for-itself distinguishes itself from other objects by determining that it is *not* those things; indeed, it is not even fully itself (the for-itself is what it is not).

The life of the human subject is thus precarious, an "unstable equilibrium" between opposing poles. This perhaps accounts for some of the terrible burden with which Sartre insists human beings are saddled. We are forced to live a tension between the facticity of our situatedness while nevertheless maintaining responsibility for our choices, including our choice to occupy whatever position we happen to occupy at any given point. The difficult task of living this tension is what Sartre terms authenticity. Flynn characterizes it as "the willingness to live in creative tension the impossible desire

to coincide consciously with oneself—that playful state of ‘chosen’ contingency and unjustifiability that Sartre terms ‘authenticity’” (Flynn 1997, 79-80). Apropos the discussion of the ego above, this would amount to living without one. Indeed, Sartre puts it in precisely these terms in *Notebooks for an Ethics*. In a series of aphorisms, he encapsulates much of his thought regarding the imaginary appearance of the ego, the impossibility of coinciding with it, and the need to transcend it:

The transcendent Ego as structure of alienation. The *I* as overcompensation. Magical dialectic of the Ego and the I. The Ego stems from others, its origin gets confused with the narcissistic image of postserfdom. The real subjectivity and ipseity of the person is to be sought in transcendence and in the circuit of consciousness. The real *Me* in the work. To live without the Ego. (Sartre 1992, 414)

Why is coincidence with oneself impossible for Sartre? Being-in-itself, Sartre’s term for inert objects like rocks, tables, and coffee mugs refers to things that, to put it in quotidian fashion, are what they are. A coffee mug is identical with itself. It cannot question its role in the world; it cannot perform another function of its own accord. These possibilities belong uniquely to conscious beings. This can perhaps serve to make Sartre’s point that the for-itself is a “presence to self” clearer. Insofar as things are fully coincident, they cannot question themselves. Human beings, by contrast, frequently question who and what they are, how others see them, how the other’s perspective differs from how one sees oneself, how to reconcile these two perspectives, and so on. The for-itself is present to itself in the sense that it bears a kind of relation to itself. But for this to be possible, there must be a distance, a gap separating the for-itself from itself. No matter what an individual is “playing” at being, the individual is never that and only that. The for-itself escapes any simple reduction to a single form of appearance. For example, I am not *only* a philosopher but also a son, friend, employee, and so on (moreover, I am these

things while, at the same time, I *am not* these things, i.e., these roles do not define my being as such). Each of these positions implies different relations to different people all of whom may see me in different ways and vice versa. This is what Sartre means in the passage from *Being and Nothingness* quoted in the preceding paragraph when he remarks that the for-itself is a “unity as a synthesis of multiplicity.” In other words, rather than representing a fixed identity (“absolute cohesion without a trace of diversity”), the for-itself encompasses any number of multiple relations to the world and other individuals.

How does this discussion of the for-itself and in-itself bear upon Sartre’s relationship with psychoanalysis? To begin with, Sartre explicitly associates the unconscious with the in-itself: “My possibility can exist as *my* possibility only if it is my consciousness which escapes itself toward my possibility. Otherwise the whole system of being and its possibilities will fall into the unconscious—that is into the in-itself” (Sartre 1956, 134). As mentioned previously, he views the unconscious as a thing-like entity residing within the mind: “the empirical psychologist, while defining man by his desires, remains the victim of the illusion of substance. He views desire as being *in* man by virtue of being ‘contained’ by his consciousness...” (Sartre 1956, 712).¹⁶ This not only interrupts the spontaneity of consciousness but also essentializes an individual, allowing him/her to shirk the risk and responsibility that he/she must assume by choosing. With appeal to an unconscious mind, an individual always has recourse to the claim that “my unconscious made me do it.” This amounts to saying that there is a “real you” underlying your acts and projects, that there are, in fact, some essential features of who and what you are that, though unknown to you, nevertheless guide and perhaps determine your actions:

¹⁶ Sartre often refers to Freudian psychoanalysis as “empirical psychology” or “empirical psychoanalysis” in an effort to distinguish its scope and methods from his own brand of existential psychoanalysis.

Sartre rejects the notion of an unconscious, for it implies a directive power within us that we did not put there through our own actions. Further, if our unconscious ‘knows’ the truth of our condition, then it is more intelligent than we are, and our personality is split at birth, prior to all actions. (Catalano 2010, 102)

To appeal to this version of the unconscious, for Sartre, is to live in “bad faith.”

Bad faith is perhaps the most famous of Sartrean concepts. It is treated most extensively in chapter two of part one of *Being and Nothingness*.¹⁷ Employing some concepts that have already been discussed, to be in bad faith entails buying into the notion that one is coincident with oneself, that one belongs to the category of being-in-itself. To reverse one of Sartre’s famous lines from “Existentialism is a Humanism,” to be in bad faith is to maintain that essence precedes existence. Sartre characterizes bad faith as a lie to oneself: “Bad faith then has in appearance the structure of a falsehood. Only what changes everything is the fact that in bad faith it is from myself that I am hiding the truth” (Sartre 1956, 89).

As has been well documented, Sartre’s conception of bad faith extends the parallelism between the notion of pre-reflective consciousness and the Freudian unconscious. Armed with the concept of bad faith, Sartre claims that any idea, emotion, or desire that might be attributed to the unconscious is, in fact, nothing but an attempt to hide the ugly truth from oneself. The fact that an individual may not be aware of certain ideas is not the result of dynamic repression, as per Freud, but rather a decision (and a conscious one, at that) not to recognize the idea, emotion, or desire as one’s own.

Curiously, in a late interview conducted for the volume devoted to his work included in

¹⁷ It has been convincingly argued that the chapter on bad faith is “misplaced” and comes too early in *Being and Nothingness*. Bad faith is, essentially, a social concept, but the chapter that elaborates the concept comes well before any description of social life. See Matthew C. Eshleman, “The Misplaced Chapter on Bad Faith,” in *Sartre Studies International*, Vol 14, no. 2 (2008), and “Bad Faith is Necessarily Social” published in the same volume.

the *Library of Living Philosophers* series, Sartre disavows the relation between bad faith and the Freudian unconscious: “The comparison between Freud and me in this area seems to me absurd. I did not create the theory of bad faith in order to argue against Freud, nor in connection with the works of Freud, but because it appeared to me to be true” (Sartre 1981a, 34).¹⁸ Despite Sartre’s protestations here—this is yet another example of his strange, complex relationship with psychoanalysis—Freud’s ideas receive extensive treatment in the chapter on bad faith. Indeed, the first part of this chapter is concerned almost exclusively with a critique of psychoanalysis, a critique that lays the requisite groundwork for the chapter on “existential psychoanalysis” that comes several hundred pages later.

Within the chapter on bad faith, Sartre insists that Freud and his followers opt for an easier interpretation of what is going on in the psyche when an individual is unaware of certain ideas or desires. By hypostatizing the unconscious, Freud establishes a more familiar and easier to account for model of the lie to oneself. On the psychoanalytic conception, it is merely the unconscious mind “lying” to the conscious mind or vice versa. It is as if one person is keeping something from another, and in this way, the lie can be easily maintained:

To escape from these difficulties people gladly have recourse to the unconscious. In the psychoanalytic interpretation, for example, they use the hypothesis of a censor, conceived as a line of demarcation with customs, passport division, currency control, *etc.*, to re-establish the duality of the deceiver and the deceived. (Sartre 1956, 90)

¹⁸ Most volumes featured in this series begin with an essay by the philosopher to whom the volume is devoted offering brief responses to each of the volume’s contributors. However, due to failing health, including loss of vision, Sartre was unable to provide a written response, and the editors opted instead to conduct an interview.

Though psychoanalysis is often recognized for its radically strange conception of the workings of the human psyche, for Sartre, it is tamer and more mundane than the picture he is presenting; psychoanalysis does not fully capture the subtleties of how we manage to hide things from ourselves: “to talk about the lie told by the conscious to the unconscious is simply to reduce the nature of the lie to someone who knows the truth and conceals it and someone who does not know the truth and from whom it is concealed. This ordinary, commonplace conception of the lie is only partly true” (Sartre 1981a, 34). However, when we recognize that it is oneself lying to oneself, it becomes much harder to explain how the lie can continue:

There are persons who know the truth and from whom one conceals it nevertheless, and there are persons who conceal a truth they know. At this point, there is no longer liar and lied-to, but each is liar and lied-to at the same time. This conception is much more complex but also much more true. (Sartre 1981a, 34)

Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, it becomes impossible to shirk responsibility for the lie. On Sartre’s account, at the end of the day, it is the individual him-/herself who must accept responsibility for his/her desires and for trying to keep them out of the light of conscious awareness. In this way, there is a deep moral dimension to Sartre’s notion of bad faith. An individual is morally culpable for the desires he/she harbors within his/her psyche and for refusing to acknowledge them.

The picture of subjectivity presented in the preceding paragraphs is the basic ingredient of Sartrean existential psychoanalysis. Although he retains the term ‘analysis’ in his version, it might be more appropriate to call what Sartre proposes existential “psycho-synthesis.” Indeed, he rejects the very process of analysis, the method of breaking down complex processes to their simpler components and explaining the former

in terms of the latter. For the psychoanalyst, “there is an effort to reduce the complex personality of an adolescent to a few basic desires, as the chemist reduces compound bodies to merely a combination of simple bodies” (Sartre 1956, 713). He continues, “Now in the first place such a psychological *analysis* proceeds from the postulate that an individual fact is produced by the intersection of abstract, universal laws. The fact to be explained...is resolved into a combination of *typical*, abstract desires such as we meet in ‘the average adolescent’” (Sartre 1956, 713; emphasis in original). Several pages later, he reiterates this point when he writes that existential psychoanalysis issues “a demand based on a pre-ontological comprehension of human reality and on the related refusal to consider man as capable of being analyzed and reduced to original givens, to determined desires (or ‘drives’) supported by the subject as properties by an object” (Sartre 1956, 717). In Sartre’s view, psychoanalytic interpretation reduces the individual to a set of general principles and thereby misses his/her unique, constitutive features.

For Sartre, in the theory and practice of psychoanalysis, the individual gets lost in the abstractions of metapsychology. Freud’s metapsychology proposes what might be regarded as a set of transcendental conditions of human mental life. Psychoanalytic metapsychology consists of the concepts of drive, the unconscious, and repression, among others. Adrian Johnston provides a helpful characterization of the role of metapsychology in Freud’s work:

In both his case studies and technical papers, Freud proceeds by focusing on the empirical evidence available through psychoanalysis as a therapeutic practice. By contrast, Freud conceives of metapsychology as psychoanalysis’s answer to metaphysics. In other words, Freudian metapsychology unlike its clinical applications, describes the system of structural functions known through the discovery of the unconscious. Additionally, although Freud arrives at these laws through empirical research—a method strikingly dissimilar to the procedures of most metaphysicians—they are presented as having something close to a

transcendental status. The metapsychological portrait of the unconscious sketches the necessary conditions for the possibility of psychical experience as postulated by analytic interpretation and its underlying model of the mind. (Johnston 2005, 11)

Sartre views the psychoanalytic method as attempting to explain the individual by appeal to metapsychological abstractions. On this view, every individual is more or less the same when we recognize basic patterns of development and the basic constituents of the human mind. All neuroses are explicable in terms of the conflict between the drives and the process of repression; all creativity is explicable in terms of the sublimation of the drives, and so on. The particularity of the analysand is lost.

Such an appeal to abstraction is anathema to the existentialist project with its emphasis on concrete, lived experience. Betty Cannon—the author of the most extensive attempt to date to develop a full-fledged set of Sartre-inspired existential psychoanalytic principles—echoes Sartre’s objections along these lines when she writes, “Freudian metatheory looks behind human experience for explanations which lie outside that experience” (Cannon 1991, 35).¹⁹ Each individual’s life can be explained, if it can be explained at all, only by considering it as its own enclosed totality. To invoke one of Sartre’s most frequent examples and the subject of his most extensive existential psychoanalysis, it will not do to explain Flaubert’s work by abstracting from his life and explaining it in terms of a general “temperament”. In that case, anybody could have been Flaubert. As Sartre puts it apropos of Paul Valéry in *Search for a Method*, “Valéry is a petty bourgeois intellectual, no doubt about that. But not every petty bourgeois intellectual is Valéry” (Sartre 1963, 56). What Sartre is interested in is how the specific set of conditions in which Flaubert lived, his unique family dynamic, his family’s socio-

¹⁹ Cannon’s criticisms will be elaborated and evaluated in much greater detail in subsequent chapters.

economic class, and so on, produced the singular Gustave, that is, how Flaubert assumed responsibility for his situation in the specific way in which he did. Sartre characterizes his existential biography of Flaubert as supplying an answer to the question: “what, at this point in time, can we know about a man” (Sartre 1981b, ix)? For him, no general principles can adequately capture what it means to be Gustave Flaubert for, as an individual, he is irreducible to such principles. Rather, a focus on the individual as an instantiation of what Sartre calls a “concrete” or “singular universal” is necessary to provide an adequate understanding of what makes someone who they are.

Flynn writes that “‘existential psychoanalysis’ illuminates the singular way a historical event or period is assumed by an agent even as it contributes to a moral assessment of that agent and his age” (Flynn 1997, 80). In other words, existential psychoanalysis seeks to show how an individual copes with his/her facticity, how he/she navigates the situation into which he/she happens to have been “thrown,” and how he/she transcends or surpasses that situation toward his/her own ends. The primary goal of existential psychoanalysis as Sartre conceives it is to discern what he calls an individual’s “original” or “fundamental project.” Such a project is initially characterized as a “*non-substantial absolute*” (Sartre 1956, 717). This expresses Sartre’s concern to develop a version of psychoanalysis that views the individual as irreducible. An individual’s original project is a principle that orients his/her life, an initial choice that structures each and every subsequent choice he/she makes. For Sartre, the traditional psychoanalytic approach focuses on particular behaviors or desires such as an individual’s criminality, his/her predilection for rare books, a desire for a certain body type in his/her sexual partners, and so on as if they were empirical details that could be added together to sum

up the individual in total. By contrast, Sartre argues that we ought to see each action, each desire as an expression of the *whole* of the individual. In other words, in each particular action from the mundane to the bizarre, an individual expresses the entirety of their character:

If we admit that the person is a totality, we can not hope to reconstruct him by an addition or by an organization of the diverse tendencies which we have empirically discovered in him. On the contrary, in each inclination, in each tendency the person expresses himself completely, although from a different angle, a little as Spinoza's substance expresses itself completely in each of its attributes. But if this is so, we should discover in each tendency, in each attitude of the subject, a meaning which transcends it. (Sartre 1956, 720)

A few lines later, he continues: "It is then rather by a *comparison* of the various empirical drives of a subject that we try to discover and disengage the fundamental project which is common to them all—and not by a simple summation or reconstruction of these tendencies; *each drive or tendency is the entire person* (Sartre 1956, 721; emphasis added).

What is this fundamental project that orients one's particular choices and desires? Echoing Heidegger's characterization of *Dasein*, Sartre maintains that human reality is the being for whom its being is in question. The ability to pose such a question is predicated on the fact that the for-itself is a presence to self. The lack of coincidence exhibited by the for-itself, the gap that separates the human subject from itself means that the subject can take different stances with respect to itself. It can consider itself and its relation to the world from different angles, so to speak. The original choice or project is the specific manner in which an individual poses this question. All of one's actions are in some way a manifestation of this more basic choice, or, put another way, all of one's actions are attempts to supply an answer to the particular way in which an individual has

chosen to pose the question about who and what he/she is: “In empirical desire I can discern a symbolization of a fundamental concrete desire which is the person himself and which represents the mode in which he has decided that being would be in question in his being” (Sartre 1956, 724). As Joseph Catalano notes, the act of questioning is a quintessential mark of human freedom, especially as regards the questions we pose about ourselves. For such questions are expressive of the gap that separates us from ourselves: “We are united to the question for it is our question about ourselves or about reality; yet, we are separate from this question insofar as we can take a new stance on it” (Catalano 2010, 69). He continues:

This bond between a questioner and what is questioned is described by Sartre as a ‘nothing,’ or then again, as a ‘nihilation.’ Whatever the term used in this context, it is clear that Sartre is not referring to an emptiness; perhaps it can be described as a certain ‘elsewhereness’ that fractures the identity between questioner and what is being questioned so that new possible relations may arise between them. Questioning is, in fact, the archetypical act of our freedom. (Catalano 2010, 69)

Curiously, despite Sartre’s objections presented above to the psychoanalytic tendency to explain certain psychological phenomena in terms of general principles, he seems to offer such a principle himself when he claims that human beings desire the same basic thing: to be one’s own foundation and to be fully coincident with oneself; in short, all human beings desire to be God, what Sartre calls the “in-itself-for-itself.” Each particular desire is a representation or expression of this more basic “desire for being.” The distinction between being-in-itself and being-for-itself turns on the fact that the latter lacks the full positivity of being. Rather, negativity structures the for-itself. It distinguishes itself from objects in the world by recognizing that it is not those things. However, this negativity extends to one’s relation to oneself. One is not fully who one is. The subject is constantly chasing its own tail, trying to regain some piece of itself that

was lost along the way, to become whole again (if it ever was to begin with). This goal, however, is an impossible ideal. Being-for-itself is precisely a being that lacks coincidence with itself, a lack that is the very condition of its freedom:

The for-itself chooses because it is lack; freedom is really synonymous with lack. Freedom is the concrete mode of being of the lack of being. Ontologically then it amounts to the same thing to say that value and possibility exist as internal limits of a lack of being which can exist only as a lack of being—or that the upsurge of freedom determines its possibility and thereby circumscribes *its* value. (Sartre 1956, 722)

Freedom, however, does not come without a price. For Sartre, freedom is a burdensome business with which one would just as soon do away (incidentally, this is the one thing human beings are not free to do insofar as they are “condemned” to freedom). Each particular desire that moves one to act in a specific manner is motivated by an attempt to regain a (fantasized) sense of wholeness. But these attempts are consistently thwarted precisely because the human subject, being-for-itself, is a being defined by lack. In other words, human beings are driven by an insatiable desire to become whole, to coincide with themselves, to be fully constituted and thereby be relieved of such desire. But, in virtue of the very constitution of subjectivity, such satisfaction is impossible: “every decision emanates from a pure and unqualified freedom which aims at giving itself a being, though without ever quite succeeding” (Sartre 2012b, 60). Each individual will have their own unique way of trying to satisfy this desire. But, at bottom, we all share the same basic project. Discovering the precise way in which an individual has framed the question regarding who he/she is, a framing that structures his/her projects and actions, is the task of existential psychoanalysis.

§4 Lack, Desire, and Fantasy in Sartre and Psychoanalysis

The previous sections have established the motivations and principles of Sartre's version of existential psychoanalysis and the ways in which this contrasts with Freudian psychoanalysis. Moreover, they have established the ground upon which I propose to begin refashioning the ways in which the relationship between existentialism and psychoanalysis has typically been conceived.

The preceding paragraphs in which I lay out the subtleties of existential psychoanalysis and its goal of illuminating an individual's "fundamental project" suggest many striking similarities to the concerns of psychoanalytic theory and practice. To begin with, Sartre situates desire at the heart of human subjectivity as the motor force of action. Desire is predicated on the basis of a lack. Something is missing in human beings, and individuals are driven to find that missing piece. This evokes Freud's famous contention in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* that "The finding of an object is in fact a refinding of it" (*SE* 7: 221). For Freud, the objects to which one becomes attached in later life function as a kind of stand-in for a perennially "lost" object, an object that, at some point in one's (perhaps imagined) past, provided full satisfaction. Importantly, these "substitute objects" can provide only a partial satisfaction. There is a perpetual margin of discontent that haunts all the acts and projects of human beings. This is because something is missing, and there is a constitutive inability on the part of human beings to put themselves back together. For his part, Freud attempts to explain this discontent with his controversial notion of *Todestrieb* or the death drive.

Putting off for now a more thorough investigation of Freudian drive theory and its rapport or lack thereof with Sartrean existentialism, it is worth stressing at this point that for Sartre, Freud, and Lacan human beings are oriented by their desires, desires that are shaped by a constitutive lack. (These ideas regarding the desired “missing piece” that is forever irretrievable are also, as we shall see in chapter four, taken up in important ways and embodied in the Lacanian notion of object *a*.) In the section on “Existential Psychoanalysis” in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre admits that “human reality...identifies and defines itself by the ends which it pursues...” (Sartre 1956, 712). He goes on to point out that the end toward which the for-itself projects itself “*forms a part* of absolute subjectivity and is, in fact, its transcendent objective limit” (Sartre 1956, 712). Alluding to a link between how he conceives of this “transcendent limit” and psychoanalysis’ conception, he writes, “This is what empirical psychology has hinted at by admitting that a particular man is defined by his desires” (Sartre 1956, 712). For both Sartre and traditional analysis, desire is that which structures the acts and projects of human beings. Sartre proceeds to distinguish his approach from psychoanalysis by arguing that the psychoanalyst turns desire into an immanent object thereby falling victim to “the illusion of substance,” but the basic point is the same. The particular shape of desire varies from individual to individual, but we are all motivated by the same void that gives rise to desire in the first place. To what extent psychoanalysis succumbs to the “illusion of substance” will be one of the central issues taken up in chapter two.

Sartre indicates further substantial points of intersection between his own brand of psychoanalysis and that of Freud:

The first outline of [the method of existential psychoanalysis] has been furnished for us by the psychoanalysis of Freud and his disciples. For this reason it will be

profitable here to indicate more specifically the points where existential psychoanalysis will be inspired by psychoanalysis proper and those where it will radically differ from it. (Sartre 1956, 727)

The sources of inspiration that Sartre identifies include an emphasis on the ontogenetic development of the individual. Both Freudian and existential forms of psychoanalysis concern themselves with the lived history of a person and how that history shapes his/her present and future actions. Interestingly, given his Cartesian proclivities, Sartre insists that “Both our psychoanalyses refuse to admit that the subject is in a privileged position to proceed in these inquiries concerning himself” (Sartre 1956, 728). For reasons already sketched, Sartre rejects the notion of the unconscious, the psychoanalytic concept offered as an explanation for the opacity of the subject to itself. Nevertheless, he is willing to admit, along with psychoanalysis, that the subject, in many ways, remains alien to itself; aspects of itself cannot, without some outside help, be grasped and integrated into conscious self-understanding.

This, however, is where the similarities end, at least in Sartre’s view. The most significant point of divergence between the two—a point highlighted in section three of this chapter—is the apparent denigration of freedom on the part of Freudian psychoanalysis: “The fact that the ultimate term of this existential inquiry must be a *choice* distinguishes even better the psychoanalysis for which we have outlined the method and principal features” (Sartre 1956, 731). Sartre takes his version of psychoanalysis to restore some sense of agency to the analysand (it is precisely this agency that he thinks *A...* demonstrates over against his analyst in the vignette that opens this project). For him, Freud’s theory renders the subject passive. The analysand is an individual who is merely acted upon rather than doing any acting of his/her own.

Encapsulating both the proximity between existential and Freudian forms of psychoanalysis and the distance that he takes to separate them, Sartre writes, “Empirical psychoanalysis, to the extent that its method is better than its principles, is often in sight of an existential discovery, but it always stops part way” (Sartre 1956, 732). What Sartre thinks Freudian analysis fails to discover are the choices which establish the coordinates of one’s subjectivity, choices which are themselves structured by a more basic, “original” choice.

It is worth noting at this juncture that there is perhaps more solidarity between Sartrean existential psychoanalysis and its Freudian precursor (and its Lacanian contemporary) as regards the notion of choice than is recognized in this assessment. At numerous points throughout his corpus, Freud writes of a basic “choice” of neurosis. What could it mean to choose one’s neurosis? In a series of queries, Johnston highlights Freud’s provocative characterization:

Here and there, Freud occasionally mentions what he puzzlingly designates as the ‘choice of neurosis.’ What does it mean to say that an individual ‘chooses’ his or her psychopathological character structures, especially for a model of mind based upon the axiom that an unconscious beyond conscious control (and, hence, presumably outside the parameters of any decision-making agency capable of choice) overdetermines mental life? Don’t psychopathologies, at least according to psychoanalysis, befall individuals, instead of being opted for through some sort of strange decision-making process? (Johnston 2008, 97-98)

These are the sorts of questions Sartre is undoubtedly putting to psychoanalytic theory in his attempts to contrast his proposed conception of psychoanalysis with that of Freud’s. What he and others who maintain that psychoanalysis is an unqualifiedly determinist theoretical framework according to which the subject is determined from sides both cultural and biological miss is that one is, in an important sense, responsible for one’s unconscious.

Continuing his Žižek-inspired interpretation of Freud's claim here, Johnston indicates that there is a subjective *act* that is responsible for creating the unconscious. Relying on Lacan's notion of "symbolic castration" (according to which, once the subject enters the domain of the symbolic order, i.e., once it has traversed the gap between being merely a "being" to a being a "speaking-being" [this is analogous to Freudian primal repression]) Johnston stipulates that, "prior to the advent of repression...there is no distinction to be made between that which is conscious and that which is unconscious; neither psychological system exists yet per se" (Johnston 2008, 98). The creation of these psychological systems is the result of a primordial act on the part of the subject, an act of repression which subsequently establishes the idiosyncratic character traits ("neuroses") of the subject. In other words, the very process of subjectivation is what creates the domain of the unconscious in the first place: "the unconscious and the subject are co-emergent, owing their existence to the same ontogenetic factors" (Johnston 2008, 98). Slavoj Žižek, in the context of developing an account of Schelling's views on the unconscious and temporality—this is a passage that Johnston himself employs in elaborating his own account of the unconscious act—states, "what is truly 'unconscious' in man is not the immediate opposite of consciousness, the obscure and confused 'irrational' vortex of drives, but the very founding gesture of consciousness, the act of decision by means of which I 'choose myself'—that is, combine the multitude of drives into the unity of my Self" (Žižek 1996, 34). In short, one does not get subjectivity without the unconscious. Or, as Alenka Zupančič puts it, primal repression, the very establishment of the unconscious, "coincides with [the subject's] emergence" (Zupančič

2017, 11). The unconscious and subjectivity thus reciprocally establish one another.

Johnston concludes that

the unconscious, concealed behind the veils of repression, isn't to be understood (merely) as an aggregate of overdetermining forces and factors compromising or impeding the individual's autonomous capacities as a free agent (this being a crude yet common depiction of the psychoanalytic unconscious). Rather, repression frequently conceals the opposite, namely, what Žižek dubs the Schellingian 'abyss of freedom,' a radical indeterminacy and groundlessness covered over by various psychical layers seeking to avoid this void. Confronting the unconscious, instead of involving a realization that one is a puppet dancing on the end of personal-historical strings held firmly in the grasp of a libidinal puppet-master, might very well amount to coming face-to-face with an abyssal autonomy, an anonymous groundlessness situated as the extimate kernel of one's subjective existence. Paraphrasing Freud ('the normal man is not only far more immoral than he believes but also far more moral than he knows' [SE 19: 52]), one could say that the normal man is not only far more determined than he believes but also far freer than he knows. (Johnston 2008, 102)

These remarks share a considerable amount in common with Sartre's claims about the fundamental or original choice/project that structures the life of the human subject.

For Sartre, the original choice establishes the coordinates of one's life in much the same fashion as the Freudian "choice of neurosis." In each case, this choice is unconscious (though Sartre would perhaps counter that the choice is "comprehended" or "understood" but not known); once one has undergone the process of subjectivation, the choice that set the process in motion recedes into the background, largely incapable of being brought before the lucid gaze of conscious awareness. However, despite being unaware of the choice, it nevertheless structures everything that follows in the life of the subject.

At this point, these remarks are more preliminary than definitive. But they should suffice to indicate that there are several striking similarities between Sartrean existentialism and Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis. In the remaining pages of this dissertation, I want to make the case that there is a major point of overlap that Sartre fails

to recognize between his conception of subjectivity and that of Freud's and Lacan's, something that I contend brings the affinities highlighted above into sharper relief. In particular, I want to shift the focus from conflicts about the status of the unconscious (though theoretical concerns about the unconscious will continue to play a pivotal role in what follows) to a consideration of the role of imagination in the work of Sartre, Freud, and Lacan. To return to the discussion of desire above, the desires that shape an individual's life are themselves framed by fantasies. Visions of what we want are staged in sometimes elaborate fantasmatic scenarios in which satisfaction is achieved. Objects become desirable for us insofar as they are coordinates within a fantasy promising a satisfaction yet-to-come. This is an insight that psychoanalysis takes quite seriously in its interpretations of various symptoms. A large portion of analytic work is geared toward illuminating what Lacan often calls an analysand's "fundamental fantasy," a Lacanian variation on the Freudian "choice of neurosis." This bears a striking resemblance to Sartre's concern to unveil an individual's "fundamental project," a project that "is everywhere in all desires...It is never apprehended except through desires" (Sartre 1956, 725). Insofar as desire is a force that motivates one to act, this implicates imagination in the practical lives of individuals.

Indeed, the imagination is integral to Sartre's conception of human subjectivity and the ways in which it realizes its freedom. As he puts it in his early monograph on the topic, "For consciousness to be able to imagine, it must be able to escape from the world by its very nature, it must be able to stand back from the world by its own efforts. In a word, it must be free" (Sartre 2010, 184). The choices one makes, the answers one attempts to give to the question posed through one's fundamental project are made

imaginatively. One imagines what life would be like if a particular set of circumstances were realized; one fantasizes possibilities for oneself; and one proceeds to act on those possibilities.

Sartre, Freud, and Lacan each develop a similar conception of the subject according to which it is fundamentally deficient in some way. The constitutively deficient subject tries to make up for this lack in various ways. Chief among the subject's methods for filling this void is engaging in acts of imagination, of fantasizing, of staging for oneself how one wants things to be. This idea that lies at the heart of the pictures of subjectivity developed by these three thinkers evinces a deep affinity among them, an affinity which, upon more extensive examination, I argue, can help us to shed new light on the notion and possibility of human freedom. In *Subjects of Desire*, Judith Butler hints at a link between Sartre and psychoanalysis, especially in its Lacanian form, along precisely these lines: "Indeed, for Sartre and for Jacques Lacan, desire's aim is the production and pursuit of imaginary objects and Others" (Butler 1987, x). The remaining chapters of this dissertation can be read as a systematic elaboration of the implications of this linkage.

At the close of Sartre's elaboration of existential psychoanalysis in *Being and Nothingness*, he writes:

This psychoanalysis has not yet found its Freud. At most we can find the foreshadowing of it in certain particularly successful biographies. We hope to be able to attempt elsewhere two examples in relation to Flaubert and Dostoevsky. But it matters little to us whether it now exists; the important thing is that it is possible. (Sartre 1956, 734)

Sartre's existential biographies are his most fully realized attempts to engage in the practice of existential psychoanalysis. In his most extensive biographies, those of Jean Genet and Flaubert (the biography of Dostoevsky proposed here was, as far as I know,

never written), the imagination plays a pivotal role in his assessment of what made these great figures who they were. The third and fourth chapters will address, in addition to other central themes such as the clash between existentialism and structuralism, the role of imagination in Sartre's application of existential psychoanalysis thereby establishing the frame for bringing Sartrean existentialism into the fold of Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis and discovering a conception of agency present within the latter. But first, a more in-depth account of the psychoanalytic unconscious and Sartre's complicated relationship with it is in order.

Chapter Two

The Truth is Out There: Unconscious Structure in Sartre and Lacan

§1 Sartre and Lacan Against Depth Psychology

The most glaring issue confronting anyone discussing the philosophical implications of Sartre's relationship with psychoanalysis is the notion of the unconscious. It is this concept that Sartre repeatedly criticizes in his discussions of psychoanalytic theory. In addition, one of the central topics of this dissertation, namely, the concept of fantasy in psychoanalysis, is an unconscious phenomenon. Thus, in order to show that Sartre develops a philosophical framework in which the notion of unconscious fantasy can be comfortably situated, this project will need to show, first, that Sartre's philosophy can accommodate some version of the psychoanalytic unconscious, too. This chapter will be primarily devoted to accomplishing this task.

As already noted in the previous chapter, one of the major themes running throughout the entirety of Sartre's philosophical corpus is that there is no substantial content inhabiting consciousness or subjectivity more broadly. In virtually all of his major early works (from *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* to *The Imaginary* and *Being and Nothingness*), Sartre argues that whatever subjectivity consists in, it is "out there," in the intersubjective world of experience. This is a thesis that he continues to emphasize in his later work, too. His claims along these lines form one of the major points of disagreement he has with psychoanalysis. From his perspective, the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious represents a kind of second mind, one which divides the subject unnecessarily, prohibits the activity of intentionality, and renders psychoanalysis

explanatorily ineffectual: “Sartre’s discussion of psychoanalysis in *Being and Nothingness* assumes that Freudian explanation is partitive, and he goes on to charge Freud with conceptual confusion” (Gardner 1993, 40).

If the partitive explanation of certain kinds of psychical phenomena presents one major obstacle to demonstrating the shared concerns of Sartre and Freud, then the metapsychological framework established by Lacan presents yet another. For any project wishing to align the approaches of Sartre and Lacan must contend with the antagonistic relationship between existentialism and structuralism, with structuralism heavily informing Lacan’s account of the unconscious. Interestingly, however, as I shall argue in what follows, it is precisely Lacan’s conception of the structured unconscious that overcomes many of Sartre’s criticisms of this most crucial of psychoanalytic concepts.

I will be departing from the approach taken in the bulk of scholarship that examines the relationship between Sartre and Lacan. The majority of published work on this topic tends to focus on Sartre’s distinction between ego and subject as elaborated especially in 1937’s *The Transcendence of the Ego* and the similarities it bears to Lacan’s account of the distinction between ego and subject as it is developed most famously in the “Mirror Stage” *écrit* (importantly, however, these distinctions are not without relevance to my subsequent remarks).²⁰ In particular, I hope to examine some underexplored territory in this project by developing the implications of a statement that Sartre makes in a 1969 interview conducted for *New Left Review* that could potentially relieve some of the tension that marks his various engagements with psychoanalysis. Therein, Sartre states that apart from his concerns about the deterministic implications of

²⁰ See, e.g., Gardner 1983; Frie 1997, 40; Tollini and Mueller 2015.

the concept of the unconscious, one of his chief complaints about psychoanalytic theory, especially regarding the manner in which the unconscious is conceptualized, is that it is not dialectical. Taking the Oedipus complex as his example, Sartre declares, “the fact is that analysts manage to find everything in it, equally well the fixation on the mother, love of the mother, or hatred of the mother, as Melanie Klein argues. In other words, anything can be derived from it, since it is not *structured*” (Sartre 2008, 38; emphasis in original). A few lines later, he continues, “But this is precisely what I am not sure of: I am convinced that complexes exist, but I am not so certain that they are not structured” (Sartre 2008, 38).

Now, anyone familiar with Lacan’s conception of the unconscious should have their interest piqued at this point. Sartre’s claims here resonate with one of Lacan’s most famous proclamations regarding the nature of the unconscious, namely, that it is “structured like a language” (Lacan 1977, 20) or, as he puts it more simply elsewhere, “the unconscious is precisely structured” (Lacan 1970, 187). Is it possible that the version of the unconscious developed by Lacan successfully responds to many of the criticisms that Sartre levies against the traditional Freudian notion? In what follows, I propose that the answer to this question is ‘yes.’ This chapter will draw a couple of surprising, interrelated conclusions. First, Lacanian psychoanalysis is not at odds with Sartrean existentialism but rather shares substantial common ground regarding the nature of human subjectivity. Along these lines, I claim that Sartre is far more sympathetic to a Lacanian psychoanalytic structuralism than is typically thought. Second, Lacan’s account of unconscious structuration overcomes many of the problems plaguing the depth psychological reading of psychoanalysis according to which the unconscious is an

opaque psychical realm completely cordoned off from the domain of lucid conscious awareness. The Lacanian unconscious thereby allows for an explicit association between and integration of this fundamental psychoanalytic notion and Sartre's various conceptual analogues to it. In short, the central thesis of the chapter is that Sartre's attempts to navigate around what he regards as the problematic aspects of the unconscious lead him to conceive of it in a fashion with which Lacan could be in agreement. This has important implications for a reassessment of Sartre's long and complex relationship with psychoanalysis since, as Thomas Flynn points out, "...Sartre's problem was the unconscious, not psychoanalysis as such" (Flynn 2014, 221).

§2 "There is No Longer an Inner Life"

Beginning with *The Transcendence of the Ego*, Sartre develops several conceptual analogues to the unconscious. The first of these, namely, pre-reflective consciousness which serves as the basis of his distinction between ego and subject, may be regarded as an initial attempt at navigating around the depth psychological reading of the unconscious. It heralds a prominent theme in Sartre's philosophical corpus, namely, ridding the subject of any psychical content. To return to a passage quoted earlier in Chapter One, Sartre states at the outset of *Being and Nothingness* that, "The first procedure of a philosophy ought to be to expel things from consciousness..." (Sartre 1956, 11). The emphasis on consciousness here aside, Sartre's claims along these lines indicate what we shall come to see by the end of this chapter as a profound sympathy between his and Lacan's efforts to rid the psyche of any hidden depths.

For Sartre, psychoanalytic theory presents a partitive, compartmentalized view of the psyche according to which there are psychical spaces with a kind of substantial existence within the mind: “The Freudian theory that Sartre is attacking posits compartments in the mind, that is, regions which have cognitive barriers between them” (Brown and Hausman 1981, 547). The appeal of a partitive explanation of unconscious phenomena is obvious. It easily accounts for certain thoughts and behaviors for which one has no rational explanation: “If I am irrational, then the cause of my deviation from the norm of rationality must lie—given that I am essentially rational—in some source other than myself; but since this source of my irrationality cannot be external to me in any ordinary sense of ‘external’, it must be ‘within’ me, but be only some part of me” (Gardner 1993, 41). But, as we saw in the earlier discussion of bad faith, according to Sartre, this kind of explanation is *too* easy. It does not sufficiently account for the complexity of self-deception or other types of unconscious mental functioning:

As Sartre sees it, psychoanalytic theory attempts to resolve the paradox of self-deception by constructing a model which represents the individual psyche as containing within itself divisions analogous to the divisions among different people, enabling us to view self-deception as merely a kind of intrapsychic interpersonal lying, possessing that duality between deceiver and deceived which renders the operation conceptually coherent and thus philosophically unproblematic. (Soll 1981, 583)

For Sartre, a number of different lines of criticism circle around the singular idea that the unconscious consists in a hidden depth qua hypostatized psychical compartment. To begin with, if the mind is split in the fashion that the Freudian model is typically thought to be, then all sorts of metaphysical problems arise. (Some of Sartre’s core objections to this interpretation are discussed in chapter one. See pp. 11-22.) Sebastian Gardner offers an astute analysis of the subtleties of Sartre’s argument. Basically, Sartre argues that the purportedly partitive account proffered by psychoanalysis ultimately fails

to do what it intends, namely, to explain seemingly irrational thought and behavior. How so? In brief outline, Sartre contends that Freud posits a second mind that ultimately shares the same qualities as what we might call the “first mind.” If that is true, then the second mind is conscious. And if that is true, then the second mind is identical with the first. Thus, there is no explanatory power to the partitive conception of the psyche:

Sartre’s argument rests on no special or exaggerated assumptions about personal unity or the necessary minimal degree of mental integration, but instead tries to show that partitive explanation fails on its own terms. Sartre aims to show that any theory that postulates distinct parts in order to explain motivated failures of self-knowledge must logically assume, even if it does not do so explicitly, the existence of an entity with the logical properties of the censor mechanism. These centre on a capacity for rationally manipulating mental contents. Any theory that has to make that assumption, Sartre argues, falls into explanatory vacuity or incoherence. His argument shows this in two stages. Freud’s modification of the argument from analogy and description of what it yields as an ‘unconscious mind’ is first rejected, as a purely nominal change: if the Second Mind is different in no other respect from the conscious mind, it might as well—and indeed must—also be a consciousness. The Second Mind, with consciousness restored to it, is then shown to collapse, once its claims to explanation are conscientiously followed out, into identity with the first mind of the person. The individual’s partitioning is thereby undone. Sartre’s argument may be viewed as attempting to demonstrate the untenability of Freud’s crucial move, in his ‘Justification’, of forming the concept of the unconscious by subtracting consciousness from mentality. (Gardner 1993, 44)

Sartre’s criticisms along these lines are prompted by some Freud’s own characterizations of the unconscious, primarily as stated in his 1915 metapsychological paper on the topic. Freud appears at times to explicitly hypostatize unconscious thought, discussing it as though it were a second person inhabiting a single psyche: “all the acts and manifestations which I notice in myself and do not know how to link up with the rest of my mental life must be judged as if they belonged to someone else: they are to be explained by a mental life ascribed to this other person” (*SE* 14: 169). He continues: “This process of inference, when applied to oneself in spite of internal opposition, does not, however, lead to the disclosure of an unconscious; it leads logically to the

assumption of another, second consciousness which is united in one's self with the consciousness one knows" (*SE 14: 170*).

However, Freud himself sees the shortcomings of this line of thought. If one conceives of the unconscious as a second consciousness of which one has no knowledge, then one is led into infinite regress, with there being no end in sight to how many "minds" might be contained within an individual's psyche (*SE 14: 170*). More pressingly for Freud, unconscious mental activity exhibits unique features, features that do not belong to conscious thought. Thus, he concludes, whatever the unconscious is, it cannot be a second consciousness:

we have to take into account the fact that analytic investigation reveals some of these latent processes as having characteristics and peculiarities which seem alien to us, or even incredible, and which run directly counter to the attributes of consciousness with which we are familiar. Thus we have grounds for modifying our inference about ourselves and saying that what is proved is not the existence of a second consciousness in us, but the existence of psychical acts which lack consciousness. (*SE 14: 170*)

He even rejects the notion of a "subconscious" which is often misattributed to psychoanalysis, further bolstering the view that the unconscious is a depth psychological structure: "We shall also be right in rejecting the term 'sub-consciousness' as incorrect and misleading" (*SE 14: 170*).

We can see here that even Freud is averse to the partitive conception of the psyche. Nevertheless, suspicions persist about a hypostatized depth psychological conception of the unconscious lurking within Freudian theory. For example, in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Freud writes of the process of unconscious resistance:

The whole theory of psycho-analysis is, as you know, in fact built up on the perception of the resistance offered to us by the patient when we attempt to make his unconscious conscious to him. The objective sign of this resistance is that his

associations fail or depart widely from the topic that is being dealt with. He may also recognize the resistance *subjectively* by the fact that he has distressing feelings when he approaches the topic. But this last sign may also be absent. We then say to the patient that we infer from his behaviour that he is now in a state of resistance; and he replies that he knows nothing of that, and is only aware that his associations have become more difficult. It turns out that we were right; but in that case his resistance was unconscious too, just as unconscious as the repressed, at the lifting of which we were working. We should long ago have asked the question: *from what part of his mind does an unconscious resistance like this arise?* (SE 22: 68; emphasis added)

Thus, despite Freud's own misgivings about a partitive or depth psychological understanding of the unconscious, Sartre is right to worry about the implications of some of Freud's theorizations.

Sartre's complaints about the psychoanalytic unconscious being "unstructured" are closely linked to the idea that the unconscious is a hidden compartment buried somewhere deep within the mind (as we will see, this connection holds true for Lacan, too). For Sartre, the depth psychological conception of the unconscious makes it all too easy for analysts to "uncover" whatever they see fit ("analysts manage to find everything in it..."). His concerns in this regard are highlighted in "The Man with the Tape-recorder". The unconscious qua depth psychological structure functions as a kind of blank slate onto which various emotions and ideas can be projected by the analyst. In this way, the depth psychological conception of the unconscious feeds into the suspect notion that the analyst possesses secret knowledge whereby he/she can uncover the hidden truth of the analysand's unconscious and that he/she can then bestow upon the analysand, curing the individual's mental anguish once and for all. The conception of the unconscious as a hidden depth of roiling instinctual desires thus contributes to the problematic power dynamic Sartre accuses psychoanalysis of fostering. There is thus a great deal at stake in developing a conception of unconscious thought that does not give

into the temptation to think of it as a concealed depth. Does Lacan's unique approach to theorizing the unconscious offer a way out of these conceptual and practical dilemmas?

§3 The Lacanian Unconscious

At the close of the previous chapter, I indicated that both Sartre and Lacan have a view of the human subject as a being defined by a constitutive lack. For both thinkers, the ego is not the subject but rather a kind of substantialized, subjective illusion. Moreover, as we shall see in greater detail later in Chapter Three, Lacan, unlike many of his structuralist counterparts, preserves the notion of the subject in his metapsychology. Thus, there appears to be at least some bridgeable ground between the two. Nevertheless, Lacan propounds a theory according to which human beings are heavily subjected to the determining influence of the symbolic order in which they are immersed even prior to their birth. In the *écrit* "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," Lacan makes this point in no uncertain terms:

Symbols in fact envelop the life of man with a network so total that they join together those who are going to engender him 'by bone and flesh' before he comes into the world; so total that they bring to his birth...the shape of his destiny; so total that they provide the words that will make him faithful or renegade, the law of the acts that will follow him right to the very place where he is not yet and beyond his very death; and so total that through them his end finds its meaning in the last judgment, where the Word absolves his being or condemns it. (Lacan 2006b, 231)

Importantly, one's place in the symbolic order plays a significant role in the formation of the structured unconscious.

Statements like this bolster the view that Lacan is a quintessential structuralist, if not in the sense that he denies the existence of the subject altogether, then at least in that he denies any sense of freedom belonging to it, with this freedom being usurped and

engulfed by an all-encompassing structure at every turn.²¹ But, though Lacan certainly gives a priority to the notion of structure that Sartre does not, the conceptual innovation that Lacan provides with his notion of a structured unconscious allows us to address many of Sartre's chief complaints with the idea.

There is ample evidence to support the view that Sartre is more sympathetic to a Lacanian approach to the unconscious than is obvious at first glance. To return to the passage I quoted at the outset of this chapter, Sartre declares that one of his concerns about the psychoanalytic conception of the unconscious and its formations is that it is not structured, which, for him, means that psychoanalysis theorizes the unconscious as a kind of jumbled mess onto which any interpretation whatsoever may be justifiably projected. This provides a key starting point for considering the potential resonances between Sartre and Lacan. The latter, against most prevailing psychoanalytic conceptions of the unconscious, postulates that unconscious mental processes are themselves structured in a manner as rigorous as that of language. As is well known, Lacan spent a large portion of his teaching career railing against the ego psychological conception of the unconscious as a collection of wild, unthinking impulses. For Lacan, this conception dramatically distorts Freud's discovery. In his eleventh seminar, Lacan elaborates the specificity of the Freudian unconscious in contrast to other, competing conceptions. Rather than referring simply to that which is non-conscious, the Freudian unconscious designates an elaborate network of thought that expresses itself in ways different from conscious thought but, for all that, is not any less complex:

To all these forms of unconscious, ever more or less linked to some obscure will regarded as primordial, to something preconscious, what Freud opposes is the

²¹ A more in-depth exploration of the rapport between Sartrean existentialism and Lacanian psychoanalytic structuralism will be undertaken in chapters three and four.

revelation that at the level of the unconscious there is something at all points homologous with what occurs at the level of the subject—this thing speaks and functions in a way quite as elaborate as at the level of the conscious, which thus loses what seemed to be its privilege. (Lacan 1977, 24)

The unconscious, then, far from being the province of an unstructured, untamed jumble of id-propelled desires is portrayed by Lacan as being quite sophisticated in and of itself. As Slavoj Žižek puts the point, “The Freudian Unconscious caused such a scandal not because of the claim that the rational self is subordinate to a much vaster domain of blind irrational instincts, but because it demonstrated how the unconscious itself obeys its own grammar and logic—the unconscious talks and thinks” (Žižek 2014, 163).

What is at stake in Lacan’s account of unconscious structuration? What precise advantages does his distinctive approach offer to psychoanalytic metapsychology? Most importantly for my purposes here, an emphasis on unconscious structure permits dispensing with a depth psychological understanding of the unconscious; this is a move that will prove crucial to my efforts to demonstrate the substantial common ground shared between Sartre and Lacan. The typical understanding of the unconscious presents it in imagistic terms as the large, unseen portion of an iceberg that sits below the visible surface of the water. There are several problems plaguing this idea, many of which Sartre himself astutely diagnoses and critiques. Likewise, for Lacan, the depth psychological reading of the unconscious is responsible for many of psychoanalysis’ most problematic aspects, in particular, its vague notions of libidinal energy and affect. Adrian Johnston highlights this association for Lacan: “As early as 1955, Lacan is adamant about [inverting] the priority of energy over structure. He perceives a deep-seated complicity between psychoanalysis’ pseudoscientific energetics and the depth psychological reading of Freud: Psychological energy is a fundamental ‘substance’ issuing from the libidinal

cauldron of an instinctual, interior id” (Johnston 2005, 199). On this view, which Lacan associates most especially with ego psychology, the unconscious is equated with the id of Freud’s second topography as a realm of wild drives to be tamed by the rational ego. (Incidentally, this is an important reason for Lacan’s privileging of the first topography over the second.)

As already noted, Lacan departs from this understanding of the unconscious as a swirling collection of conflicted, desirous impulses, opting instead to attribute to primary process psychological operations a level of sophistication typically reserved only for conscious thought. The distinctive features that Freud identifies as belonging to unconscious thought establish certain decisive differences from consciousness: “The distinction we have made between the two psychical systems receives fresh significance when we observe that processes in the one system, the *Ucs.*, show characteristics which are not met with again in the system immediately above it” (*SE* 14: 186). The principal qualities Freud identifies as belonging to the unconscious are timelessness, the primacy of psychical over external reality, the absence of negation, and the mobility of cathexes (*SE* 14: 186-187). But, for Lacan, though the nature of unconscious thought is different from conscious thought, it does not operate in a less cunning or sophisticated fashion. Underestimating the complexity of the unconscious is an error he charges psychoanalysts from various other schools of thought with making; he repeatedly insists that the majority of psychoanalysts misrecognize the primary object of their investigations, mistaking it for the comparatively dumb instinctual reservoir of the id. Indeed, Lacan regards the failure of the psychoanalytic establishment to recognize the structure of the unconscious as one

of its greatest missteps. He identifies it as “the most striking flaw in analytic doctrine: the neglect of the structural in favor of the dynamic” (Lacan 2001, 51).

Ego psychologists are the primary target of many of Lacan’s most venomous critical barbs. According to him, ego psychologists in particular are susceptible to misinterpreting the unconscious as a hidden, unknown depth which, by employing various kinds of defense mechanisms, resists the analyst’s attempts to uncover it. “The Freudian Thing, or the Meaning of the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis,” one of the key pieces published in the *Écrits*, is one of the most direct articulations of the central aims of Lacanian analytic theory and practice. Therein, Lacan states his vision of psychoanalysis as well as in what ways he understands other psychoanalytic approaches, especially that embodied by American ego psychology, to have gone astray and betrayed Freud’s legacy.²² The “thing” under discussion in this *écrit* is the notion of truth. More specifically, in this context, the notion of truth is associated, for Lacan, with the unconscious. He does not make his readers wait long to hear what the meaning of the return to Freud consists in:

The meaning of a return to Freud is a return to Freud’s meaning. And the meaning of what Freud said may be conveyed to anyone because, while addressed to everyone, it concerns each person. One word suffices to make this point: Freud’s discovery calls truth into question and there is no one who is not personally concerned by truth. (Lacan 2006c, 337)

²² It should be noted that the accuracy of Lacan’s presentation of ego psychology as regards its clinical practice is not at issue here. As Jacques-Alain Miller notes, “We no longer know very much about how [psychoanalysis] was practiced [during Lacan’s] time—we have to reconstruct it from Lacan’s critique. Ego psychology, for instance, is no longer in its prime, and we do not know exactly what ego psychology practice was like when it was in full bloom” (Miller 1996, 15-16). What is at issue are the shortcomings of the conception of the unconscious presented by ego psychology. In addition, though ego psychology takes the brunt of Lacan’s criticisms, he also expresses disdain for the direction in which Melanie Klein and her object relations school took psychoanalysis.

This truth that Lacan contends Freud uncovers forms the very *raison d'être* of psychoanalysis: “isn't [truth] inscribed in the very heart of analytic practice, since this practice is constantly rediscovering the power of truth in ourselves and in our very flesh” (Lacan 2006c, 337-338)? It is this truth that Lacan accuses his fellow analytic practitioners of failing to hear. In other words, Lacan's main bone of contention with ego psychologists lies precisely in their interpretation of the nature of the unconscious. By misconstruing the unconscious as a hidden depth consisting of blind instinctual impulses demanding satisfaction, psychoanalysts of this theoretical bent will ultimately fail to notice the sources of the problems ailing their patients. We can see here the inextricable link between theory and practice for Lacan. A misstep in theoretical approach leads to error in practical efficacy.

What does the ego psychological conception of the unconscious consist in? To begin with, in general, ego psychologists tend to privilege Freud's second topography over the first. As is well known, beginning in 1920 with *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud amends his metapsychological framework. Up until the publication of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, psychoanalytic theory operated with the three basic concepts of conscious, preconscious, and unconscious, with these three concept terms functioning as nouns designating certain psychical “spaces” or regions. During the reign of the first topography, the basic principle of psychoanalysis was that the psyche sought to achieve pleasure and avoid pain. All of the machinations of the psychical and libidinal economies are balanced with this general goal in view. But Freud was plagued by certain persistent problems met with in analytic work that he could not accommodate into his theory. In particular, he repeatedly saw patients, many of whom had just returned from the horrors

of World War I, that continued to relive painful and traumatic events. He thus had to conceptually account for how and why a psyche that supposedly seeks only pleasure would persistently repeat unpleasurable experiences. To do so, he went “beyond the pleasure principle” and introduced one of the most controversial concepts in psychoanalytic theory, namely, the death drive [*Todestrieb*]. This occasioned a refashioning of the basic architecture of psychoanalysis’s conception of the human psyche. In addition to the concept of *Todestrieb*, Freud introduced the now-familiar notions of the id, ego, and superego, notions that, like many psychoanalytic concepts, have infiltrated popular discourse. With these additions to the conceptual arsenal of psychoanalytic metapsychology, the previous triumvirate of conscious, preconscious, and unconscious became adjectives rather than nouns, and the psyche became a kind of dynamic entity with various interactions and conflicts emerging between the three psychical “agencies.”

It is crucial to point out that the terms ‘id,’ ‘ego,’ and ‘superego’ are not meant to be used interchangeably with the terms ‘unconscious,’ ‘preconscious,’ and ‘conscious’. However, this is precisely what Lacan argues many psychoanalysts have done, specifically as regards the notions of the unconscious and the id. Sander Abend, a prominent ego psychologist, hints at this conception (or conflation as Lacan might suggest) of the unconscious as an unstructured, jumbled mess of instinctual desires that Lacan argues is emblematic of the ego psychological approach more generally. For him, the unconscious is “an inchoate entity whose contents [are] subject to the primary process, and quite different from organized, coherent verbal forms of thought” (Abend

2008, 118). The implication here is that unconscious thought is ill-formed, disorganized, unstructured, and unsophisticated.

To get clearer about how Lacan conceives of the unconscious in contrast to other approaches, it will be helpful to consider some of Freud's remarks about the nature of unconscious thought before delving into Lacan's interpretation of Freudian theory.

Freud's conceptualization of the unconscious as being governed by primary process-style thinking is largely what prompts many psychoanalysts to regard it as a disorganized collection of instinctual impulses. Jonathan Lear describes the primary process thusly:

"Ideas and images are associated loosely—sometimes ideas are linked because the words that express them have a similar shape, or, when spoken, they have a similar sound.

Sometimes a link is created simply by the mind placing one thought next to another"

(Lear 2015, 5). The apparent disregard for logical structure in primary process thought

gives the appearance of purely arbitrary connections among ideas. As Freud himself

describes it, primary process mental activity is characterized by the "mobility of

cathexes."²³ In other words, the affective investments one typically places in a particular

object may become detached from that object and reattached to another, seemingly

arbitrarily selected one; emotional attachments become unmoored from their objects and

find intermediary replacements.

Psychical investments may be made in objects that seem, on initial reflection, to

be entirely inappropriate. For example, the anger one may feel toward a spouse may

become associated with a song that was playing in the background during a heated

²³ "The cathectic intensities [in the *Ucs.*] are much more mobile. By the process of *displacement* one idea may surrender to another its whole quota of cathexis; by the process of *condensation* it may appropriate the whole cathexis of several other ideas. I have proposed to regard these two processes as distinguishing marks of the so-called *primary psychological processes*" (*SE* 14: 186).

argument. The song bears no relation to the anger other than the mere fact that it was playing at the time of the argument. However, subsequent to the argument, the song may provoke similar feelings of anger without one being able to identify precisely why. The anger toward one's spouse has become "displaced" onto the song. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this is a psychological strategy to avoid dealing with the feelings of anger one has toward one's spouse. Owing to the dominance of the pleasure principle within the psyche, displeasure is avoided at all costs. By displacing the anger onto the song, one avoids the difficulty and awkwardness of having to work things out with one's spouse. The important point here is that within the primary process, psychological investments (cathexes) can "slide" from object to object; links in the ideational chain may therefore appear loosely forged.

Employing the phenomenon of dreams as a clue to the workings of the primary process, Freud contends that such thinking is marked, in addition to displacement, by the phenomenon of "condensation." Condensation is a process whereby highly cathected objects become condensed into a single nodal point:

The intensities of the individual ideas become capable of discharge *en bloc* and pass over from one idea to another, so that certain ideas are formed which are endowed with great intensity. And since this process is repeated several times, the intensity of a whole train of thought may eventually be concentrated in a single ideational element. Here we have the fact of 'compression' or 'condensation', which had become familiar in the dream-work. (*SE 5: 595*)

In a dream, this might manifest in the figure of an individual coming to simultaneously represent several different people. In one of Freud's own dream-reports, he describes seeing the image of a friend, known as R., who, in the dream, has a large yellow beard. This image is accompanied by the strange thought "*My friend R. was my uncle*" (*SE 4: 137*). Freud comments regarding the image, "The face that I saw in the dream was at once

my friend R.'s and my uncle's" (*SE* 4: 139). As Freud's analysis of the dream proceeds, various conflicted and ambivalent feelings he has toward each of these individuals are brought out. In addition, Freud's feelings toward these individuals are associated with his concerns about a promotion for which he had recently been recommended. In the dream, these seemingly disparate ideas and affects are brought together, so to speak, under one roof. In the image of a bearded face accompanied by a lone phrase is encoded a whole host of meaningful material. In this way, through the process of condensation, a variety of different feelings and ideas may be compacted into a single representation.

Likewise, the phenomenon of displacement is emblematic of the way in which the primary process operates. Early on in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud describes displacement as a "psychological process by which, according to our account, indifferent experiences take the place of psychically significant ones" (*SE* 4: 174). As described in the example above, through the process of displacement, something as innocuous as a song can come to take on the significance of a slight one feels one has suffered from a spouse. In the 1899 paper "Screen Memories," published one year prior to the first edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud remarks upon the mnemonic traces left by early childhood experiences. Judging from adult experience, one would think that childhood memories would consist of important life events, events that would leave powerful impressions on the psyche. However, this is not always the case:

Now, however, we are met by a fact that is diametrically opposed to our expectations and cannot fail to astonish us. We hear that there are some people whose earliest recollections of childhood are concerned with everyday and indifferent events which could not produce any emotional effect even in children, but which are recollected (*too* clearly, one is inclined to say) in every detail, while approximately contemporary events, even if, on the evidence of their parents, they moved them intensely at the time, have not been retained in their memory. (*SE* 3: 305-306)

Drawing on a survey conducted by psychologists Victor and Catherine Henri, Freud describes a philologist whose earliest memory, dating from around the time he was three or four, consisted of a table setting and a basin of ice. However, according to his parents, a much more significant event occurred at roughly the same time: “At the same period there occurred the death of his grandmother which, according to his parents, was a severe blow to the child. But the professor of philology, as he now is, has no recollection of this bereavement; all that he remembers of those days is the basin of ice” (*SE* 3: 306). Freud contends that this failure of memory is quite common in neurotics. Displacement, as a byproduct of repression, helps explain how such an emotionally significant event could fail to be registered. Through the process of repression, the cathectic energy bound up with the loss of a loved one is transferred (or displaced) onto the image of a set table with an ice basin. The latter, banal image receives the significance of one’s first memory, a memory which saves one the pain of recollecting the death. The choice of this relatively insignificant memory to take the place of the more painful one may be occasioned by little more than the fact that the experiences occurred at roughly the same time.

This description of primary process thought appears to support the depth psychological view according to which the unconscious is inchoate and consists of a hidden domain in which reside a multitude of irrational ideas and affects. How does Lacan oppose this view? What specific lines of argument does he deploy to demonstrate both that the unconscious is itself a highly structured and organized form of thought and that it is not a psychical container buried somewhere deep within the mind? Lacan’s recourse to Saussurian and Jakobsonian linguistics emphasizes the structural features he attributes to the unconscious. Structural linguistics plays a pivotal role in his conception

of the unconscious-structured-like-a-language. As is well known, he associates the phenomena of condensation and displacement, identified by Freud as two key features of primary process mentation, with the linguistic tropes of metaphor and metonymy, respectively. By conceiving the operations of the unconscious in this way, Lacan offers a way to acknowledge the idiosyncratic nature of primary process-style thinking, attributing to it all of the distinctive features Freud identifies (timelessness, absence of negation, and so on) while not giving up the idea that it is rigorously structured. Echoing Lacan's point, Alphonse de Waelhens remarks, "the claim that unconscious discourse does not obey the rules of logic is ambiguous. It is true that conscious discourse is different...But does this imply that there can be no logic of desire? Not at all, and it is enough to read Freud to be convinced" (De Waelhens and Ver Eecke 2001, 263).

What, then, provides the structural foundations of the unconscious? Put simply, for Lacan, the unconscious is structured by signifiers. In the *écrit* "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud," he explains the centrality of the signifier to psychoanalytic theory and practice. Again highlighting his opposition to the ego psychological view according to which the unconscious consists in a kind of hidden depth, Lacan states, "My title conveys the fact that, beyond this speech, it is the whole structure of language that psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious. This is to alert prejudiced minds from the outset that the idea that the unconscious is merely the seat of the instincts may have to be reconsidered" (Lacan 2006d, 413). In this *écrit*, Lacan proceeds to argue for the primacy of the signifier over the signified. This further signals Lacan's emphasis on the surface of things over against any hidden depth. Rather than tracing the signifier to what lies behind it (the signified), Lacanian psychoanalysis

focuses on signifiers themselves and their structural position in relation to other signifiers. A basic lesson of Saussurean linguistics is that phonemic differences constitute the basic differential elements upon which linguistic significance and meaning is constructed. For Lacan, the unconscious is structured along precisely these lines; the constituents of the unconscious qua signifiers achieve their status through their differential relations to other signifiers, both conscious and unconscious. Before circling back to Lacan's emphasis on surface over depth, an emphasis he shares with Sartre, it will be helpful to explore more fully the association Lacan makes between linguistic and unconscious structure, an association that sets his approach apart from most other dominant psychoanalytic schools of thought.

To return to the notions of condensation and displacement, Lacan demonstrates his unique approach to thinking about the unconscious with direct reference to linguistics. For him, these operations of primary process thought function in precisely the same fashion as the linguistic operations of metaphor and metonymy:

the mechanisms described by Freud as those of the primary process, by which the unconscious is governed, correspond exactly to the functions [the structuralist] school of linguistics believes determine the most radical axes of the effects of language, namely metaphor and metonymy—in other words, the effects of the substitution and combination of signifiers in the synchronic and diachronic dimensions, respectively, in which they appear in discourse. (Lacan 2006f, 677)

Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire, in a famous paper delivered at the 1960 Bonneval Colloquium on the unconscious, affirm Lacan's point and state that we may “identify what Freud calls the primary process—the free flow of libidinal energy along paths of displacement and condensation—with the fundamental laws of linguistics” (Laplanche and Leclaire 1999, 250). For Lacan, displacement is metonymical in the way that certain signifiers can “stand-in” for others. In “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious,”

Lacan uses the example of the phrase “thirty sails” functioning in the place of the phrase “thirty ships” (Lacan 2006d, 421). If one were to say, for example, “there are thirty sails approaching from the sea,” one would understand this as expressing the idea that thirty ships were sailing into port. In this instance, the signifier “sail” stands in place of the signifier “ship.” But, though the signifiers are different, the meaning remains the same. Moreover, the meaning of the statement “thirty sails are approaching from the sea” is in no way dependent on there actually being thirty sails. The approaching ships may have more or less than thirty sails:

We may not conclude...that a metonymical link between signifiers can simply be traced back to a link in reality outside of language. The connection between signifiers is not governed by a self-sufficient referent. Thus, for example, when we replace ‘thirty ships’ with thirty sails, this does not guarantee that in actuality we will also see ‘thirty sails’; ships can very well have more than one sail. The connection between the two signifiers is therefore not governed by the self-sufficient presence of the signified, something that, as we saw, is rendered impossible in any case by the differential determination of the signifier. Signifiers signify only by force of their difference from other signifiers. (Van Haute 2002, 15)

What allows for the signifier “sails” to function metonymically is the semantic context in which it occurs, not the referent to which the signifier refers. Again, the meaning of the sentence is not altered by employing a different signifier; no new meaning is generated by the effect of metonymy. Rather, the signifiers, insofar as they are bound by a certain context, are interchangeable.

This idea is important for understanding how this might play out in the analytic setting. In interpreting an instance of displacement, the analyst is tasked with deciphering the precise meaning of a formulation that may be initially perplexing. In the analysand’s speech, one signifier, say, the image of a set table, comes to stand in for another, say, the death of one’s grandmother. In this instance, the former has seemingly little to do with

the latter. In this way, we can see that unconscious processes operate according to a different logic than the linguistic rules individuals tend to abide by in their conscious, day-to-day dealings. But, as the preceding account has demonstrated, for Lacan, this does not mean that such processes operate according to no logic at all. What remains for the analyst to do, as per the rules of metonymy sketched above, is to determine the “semantic context” that binds the signifier the analysand employs in his/her speech with the one for which it is taking the place. The contiguous relations associating sails with ships, for example, is one of part to whole. Since we recognize sails as being parts of ships, we can allow the former to metonymically stand in for the latter. In the case of a displaced memory (with, e.g., a table setting metonymically standing in for the memory of the death of one’s grandmother), the context may be temporal. In other words, the context that allows for one signifier to function metonymically for another may be that they are associated by their proximity in time. By identifying this temporal context, the analyst may then be able to decipher the repressed signifier, in this case, the memory of the death of one’s grandmother.²⁴

²⁴ Along these lines, in “The Neuro-Psychoses of Defense,” Freud discusses several patients who developed obsessional ideas seemingly unrelated to their root cause (often an inappropriate sexual sensation or thought). These obsessions become attached to certain experiences often because the ideas originally occurred at the same time the experiences were had. For example, one patient in particular developed a severe phobia of public urination. However, this phobia was linked to her sexual attraction to a man sitting near her at the opera: “Another girl suffered from the dread of being overcome by the need to urinate, and of being unable to avoid wetting herself, ever since a need of this kind had in fact once obliged her to leave a concert hall during the performance. By degrees this phobia had made her completely incapable of enjoying herself or of going into society...A detailed examination showed that the need had occurred first in the following circumstances. In the concert hall a gentleman to whom she was not indifferent had taken a seat not far from her. She began to think about him and to imagine herself sitting beside him as his wife. During this erotic reverie she had the bodily sensation which is to be compared with an erection in a man, and which in her case...ended with a slight need to urinate. She now became greatly frightened by the sexual sensation (to which she was normally accustomed) because she had resolved within herself to combat this particular liking, as well as any other she might feel; and next moment the affect had become transferred on to the accompanying need to urinate and compelled her after an agonizing struggle to leave the hall” (*SE* 3: 56). In this case, the simultaneous occurrence of sexual desire and an urge to urinate prompt the development of the phobia.

Metaphor is the linguistic phenomenon that Lacan employs to explain the primary process of condensation. Unlike in the case of metonymy, there is no singular meaning. Rather, several different and distinct meanings may be incorporated into a single representation, and these meanings are not united by a semantic context. How can this phenomenon be interpreted in terms of metaphor? Whereas in the function of metonymy, one signifier “slides” into the place of another generating the same meaning as would be generated if no such metonymical process had occurred, in metaphor, by contrast, though one signifier takes the place of another, a further meaning is indeed created. As Bruce Fink remarks, “Metaphor...brings about a new configuration of thoughts, establishing a new combination or permutation, a new *order* in the signifying chain, a shakedown of the old order. Connections between signifiers are definitively changed” (Fink 1995, 71). If I say, for example, that “Steve is slimy,” ostensibly, I am claiming that Steve is off-putting. But, according to Lacan, I am claiming something more than merely that Steve makes me uncomfortable. The meaning of the phrase “Steve is slimy” is irreducible to the phrase “Steve makes me uncomfortable”; the former goes beyond the latter. The metaphorical statement evokes more than my discomfort with respect to Steve. Moreover, it could refer to a number of different sentiments. For example, there is a question about whether I am referring to Steve’s general character, his appearance, or his behavior in financial dealings, among other possibilities. In metaphor, “what it evokes is not reducible to the information we glean from it” (Pluth 2007, 34). Likewise, in the phenomenon of condensation, a single image “goes beyond” itself. It represents more than what it shows. In addition, after having undergone condensation, the associational links that bind representations to one another (with, for example, a bearded face representing several

different people along with one's ambivalent feelings about a promotion for which one has been recommended) go beyond standard means of association. Such disparate ideas are represented in a new way.

One important point of similarity between the phenomena of metaphor and metonymy is worth remarking upon at this juncture, namely, that neither depends for its effect upon the presence of a signified that directly corresponds to the signifier that picks it out. As mentioned above with respect to metonymy, the phrase "thirty sails" need not pick out thirty sails. There could be a hundred sails atop the masts of the thirty ships in the harbor. Nevertheless, the metonymical function operates unhindered due to the semantic context in which the phrase occurs. In other words, the signifier "sails" can stand-in for the signifier "ships" because of its position within the signifying chain. Similarly, with metaphor, there need not be a real object picked out by a metaphorical phrase. Though Steve may be slimy, he need not be covered in slime. Indeed, metaphor would cease to be metaphorical if it picked out objects in a literal, one-to-one manner of correspondence. As mentioned above, Lacan's privileging of the signifier over the signified is an expression of his concern for surface over depth. The analyst's task is not to search behind or beneath the level of the analysand's speech. Rather, his/her task is to allow the signifiers emerging through the patient's free-associational monologue to resonate with one another. This also offers a clue as to what a Lacanian psychoanalytic conception of unconscious truth consists in (with this "truth" being the "Freudian Thing" of the *écrit* of the same name). It is not the real objects or events to which the analysand refers in his/her speech and action but rather his/her speech and action themselves.

By interpreting the primary process along these lines, Lacan further demonstrates the structured ways in which the unconscious operates. Furthermore, he provides an account of the structuration and fantasmatic quality of the primary process. In the processes of both metaphor and metonymy, the operations are carried out with no reference to the signified, that is, in these processes, there need not be an external point of reference that verifies or corroborates the meaning generated by these processes in a direct, one-to-one fashion. Metaphor and metonymy occur “internally,” within the signifying chain itself. Just as in Freud’s account of psychological reality according to which early fantasies are rendered unconscious thereby abandoning “dependence on real objects,”²⁵ the processes of both metaphor and metonymy do not depend upon external referents to produce their effects. This reflects Lacan’s emphasis on the “primacy of the signifier,” with the chain of signifiers functioning as the Freudian “psychical reality” and the signified functioning as “external reality.” This further emphasizes Lacan’s antipathy toward the idea of psychological depths. What matters is not what lies behind or beneath the signifiers but rather what insists on the surface of the signifiers themselves.

Conscious and unconscious thought are expressed simultaneously, in and through an analysand’s free associational monologues. Unconscious thought continually interrupts and influences conscious thought. As Bruce Fink states the relation between conscious and unconscious discourse, “Lacan suggests that we view the process as one in which there are two chains of discourse which run roughly parallel to each other (in a figurative sense), each ‘unfolding’ and developing chronologically along a timeline, as it were, one of which occasionally interrupts or intervenes in the other” (Fink 1995, 14). The

²⁵ *SE* 12: 222.

unconscious can function in this way, continuously intervening in conscious patterns of thought, precisely because it is differentially structured in relation to conscious thought. Given this account, we can begin see the way in which the unconscious, including unconscious fantasies, can continually exert pressure on conscious patterns of thought and behavior.

Now, we are in a position to see how Lacan's conception of the unconscious as structured like a language allows us to move beyond depth psychological readings. Rather than constituting an unknown, hidden depth, the unconscious, for Lacan, is stitched into the very fabric of conscious life. The unconscious interjects itself into the utterances and activities of everyday life. And this because the unconscious is inherent to the structure of the psyche. That is, both conscious and unconscious psychological material are what they are by virtue of their structural position within the psyche. Each reciprocally structures the other in a fashion akin to the phonemes that constitute natural languages. Lacan's uses of topography and knot theory among other fields are attempts to explain the psyche in terms different than standard spatial depictions of it. As a favorite Lacanian reference has it, like the Moebius band that allows one to traverse what appears as two distinct sides along a single surface, the unconscious functions on the same plane as the conscious. Johnston spells this Lacanian point out nicely in his recent book-length treatment of "The Freudian Thing." He writes:

The primary processes of [the unconscious] are no less formed than the expressions voiced in free-associational monologues...this observation is meant to highlight Lacan's opposition to all pseudo-Freudianisms in which the unconscious is conflated with the depth-psychological id. By contrast with the dark, roiling waters of brute, dumb forces from the past of a prehistorical time-before-time, unconscious truths, as forming a structured network shot through with socio-symbolic mediations, are 'out there,' inscribed in, through, and

between the lines of manifest everyday life and its psychopathologies (both quotidian and otherwise). (Johnston 2017, 37)

From a Lacanian perspective, rather than being a depth forever unknowable in itself, the unconscious is part and parcel of the life of the subject, shining through in its speech and action.

In a 1993 paper that is critical of the manner in which Medard Boss dispenses with the unconscious, Richard Boothby reaches a similar insight. Boss—known for taking up the work of Martin Heidegger in a psychoanalytic context and developing the theory and practice of what he calls *Daseinanalysis*—criticizes the Freudian unconscious on grounds quite similar to the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness*. Like Sartre, he charges Freud with conceptual incoherence, alleging that the “censor” that performs the function of repression must both know and not know what it is repressing (Boss 1983, 48). As we have seen, this objection buys into the depth psychological reading of the unconscious. Scrutinizing Boss’s version of this Sartrean line of criticism, Boothby remarks that “we can also ask whether in his rejection of the unconscious Boss hasn’t once again adopted a straw man approach, choosing to attack the weakest formulation of Freud’s idea” (Boothby 1993, 153). He goes on to offer the Lacanian unconscious as an antidote to this frequent objection to the psychoanalytic unconscious coming from the phenomenological camp:

There are, however, other possible conceptions of the unconscious to be drawn from Freud’s text. Among them is the notion of the split between conscious and unconscious as a function of different inscriptions, *Niederschriften*. In this view, that a content remains unconscious results from a failure of translation between different registrations of a code. Here, the English rendering of Freud’s *Topik* as ‘topography’ is especially fortuitous as it suggests that what appears in the ‘other scene’ (*topos*) is another writing (*graphē*). (Boothby 1993, 153)

Lacan’s conception of the unconscious-structured-like-a-language takes its cue from this

point:

Over and over again, the telltale phenomena of the unconscious—dreams, slips, symptoms, and so on—are revealed to be precisely structured around plays of words and phonemic concatenations. The Lacanian concept of the unconscious as circuited by the structure of language is well suited to express the paradoxes of a split subject...In the structuralist point of view that inspired Lacan's work, language is conceived to be a web or network of signifiers, each defined differentially by its relation to the others in the network. Language thus forms an ordered system from which speech makes particular selections and combinations. Yet the relation of the speaking subject to the 'treasurehouse of the signifier' is by no means completely transparent or intentional for a number of reasons. (Boothby 1993, 154).

On the Lacanian view, the unconscious is not a mysterious, ineffable domain, as per Boss's Heidegger-inspired rejection of the notion, but is rather inscribed in the polyvalent utterances of ordinary speech and language.

Lacan's approach addresses many of the theoretical and practical problems identified earlier. By dispensing with the notion that the unconscious is a collection of irrational instincts that are harbored in some secret psychological space, we can now view the unconscious as a sophisticated form of thought that weaves itself in and through ordinary conscious life. For Lacan, this conception of the unconscious yields better clinical results insofar as analysts taking this Lacanian tack will not fail (or at least, will not fail as often) to see and hear the expressions of an analysand's unconscious. According to Lacan, depth psychological interpretations of the unconscious lend themselves to a clinical approach whereby analysts are persistently misrecognizing the workings of a patient's unconscious, often mislabeling expressions of unconscious thought itself as defenses against the analyst's attempts to "uncover" unconscious thought. In "The Freudian Thing," Lacan further bolsters his claim that the unconscious is, despite our inability relative to conscious thought to account for it, a calculating and clever form of thinking. In the section of this *écrit* entitled "The Thing Speaks of Itself," he imagines a

personified truth speaking a to bewildered audience. In the truth's monologue, it associates itself with Hegel's proclamations about the "cunning of reason": "If reason is as cunning as Hegel said it was, it will do its job without your help" (Lacan 2006c, 341). Here, Lacan is taking what he often refers to as "psychoanalytic orthodoxy" to task for misjudging and misrecognizing the points at which the truth reveals itself. The truth will make itself known "without your help," i.e., despite the analyst's best efforts to suppress it through diagnoses of defense mechanisms.

Lacan's point is that it is precisely in such defenses that the truth qua unconscious makes itself known. Drawing on Anna Freud's theorizations, the ego psychological approach lays a great deal of emphasis on overcoming a patient's resistance to treatment.²⁶ The first course of action is to disarm the defenses that a particular patient marshals to avoid dealing with whatever is causing his/her symptoms. Only after these defenses have been neutralized can the analyst proceed to work through with the patient the material that was being defended against. One of Lacan's main concerns with this methodological approach is that it assumes that such defense mechanisms are capable of shielding the psychological material in need of analysis from both the patient and the analyst. In other words, from the ego psychological perspective, the truth is so feeble that all it takes to suppress it is the institution of an ad hoc form of defense. For Lacan, this approach thus greatly underestimates the unconscious truths that find expression in the speech and bodily movements/functions of analysands. As far as Lacan is concerned, the

²⁶ "Anna Freud greatly extended this shift in clinical focus [on defense mechanisms] by cataloging and studying various defensive operations of the ego, noting both their modus operandi as well as locating them, in terms of appearance and operational sophistication, along a developmental continuum...Depicting the pervasiveness of ego processes throughout all areas of personality functioning, Anne Freud established the ego itself as an object of psychoanalytic inquiry worthy of study in its own right" (Mitchell and Black 2017, 29-30).

truth always finds a means of expression. As per the Hegelian “cunning of reason,” the (unconscious) truth will shine through, sometimes in the very behaviors and utterances that are intended to disguise it. Thus, from a Lacanian perspective, by claiming that defense mechanisms on the part of the analysand prevent analysis from moving forward, the analyst is actually indicating his/her own resistance/refusal to hear the unconscious truth expressing itself in the patient’s very resistances. Just as Freud claims that the unconscious constantly betrays itself by “oozing from every pore,”²⁷ so, too, for Lacan does the unconscious always win out, often despite the psyche’s attempts to bar it from seeing the light of day. Indeed, for Lacan, the very ways in which the psyche defends against the unconscious are themselves revelatory of the unconscious. As Johnston puts this Lacanian point, “an analysand who consistently lies to his/her analyst, fabricating all of his/her reported dreams, fantasies, and so on, still discloses to the analyst the truths of his/her unconscious, telling ‘true lies’ despite him-/herself insofar as the very selection of the fabricated verbal material cannot help but be itself revealing” (Johnston and Malabou 2013, 207). He goes on to state that this amounts to “‘telling the truth in the guise of lying’” (Johnston and Malabou 2013, 207). Even the most concerted attempts to conceal the subject of the unconscious ultimately fail in their endeavors. This position reflects Lacan’s basic commitment to Freud’s early theorizations of the unconscious and its distinctive forms of operation.

Lacan argues that another grave clinical error befalls ego psychologists and other depth psychology-inspired analytic approaches due to their misrecognition of the nature

²⁷ “He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his finger-tips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore. And thus the task of making conscious the most hidden recesses of the mind is one which it is quite possible to accomplish” (*SE* 7: 77-78).

of the unconscious, namely, taking on the position of the “subject-supposed-to-know” (*sujet supposé savoir*). This concept refers to the formal position of the analyst as one of absolute knowledge. Often during the course of an analysis, the analyst comes to function for the patient as a kind of omnipotent entity, one who knows the truth/secret of the patient’s being. Analysts come to occupy this position via the transference relation. Lacan contends that analysts must avoid occupying this position at all costs if an analysis is to meet with any success. But he laments that psychoanalytic institutions all too often give into the fantasy, opting to see themselves as arbiters of expert psychological knowledge which they can bestow upon their patients.

Hinting at his suspicion of psychoanalytic institutions, he asks in the eleventh seminar, “What does an organization of psycho-analysis mean when it confers certificates of ability, if not that it indicates to whom one may apply to represent this subject who is supposed to know” (Lacan 1977, 232)? For Lacan, psychoanalytic institutions, exemplified by the International Psychoanalytic Association²⁸, perpetuate the fantasy of psychoanalysts as experts in the mysteries of the human psyche: “no psychoanalyst can

²⁸ Lacan’s antipathy toward the IPA (and the IPA’s antipathy toward him) is well documented. Due primarily to his practice of variable length sessions—instead of sticking to the IPA sanctioned practice of conducting regular fifty-minute sessions, Lacan would “punctuate” sessions whenever he saw fit so that certain sessions could range anywhere five to sixty minutes or beyond—the analytic school to which he belonged prior to 1964 was threatened with decertification if they continued to allow him to act as a teaching analyst. Jacques-Alain Miller paints a fuller picture of the events that took place shortly before he delivered arguably his most well-known seminar, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, in 1964: “Lacan founded his own school in 1964. Previously he had just wanted to be readmitted into the IPA...In 1953, he decided with some colleagues to leave the French institute, the *Société psychanalytique de Paris*, because it was moving in an authoritarian direction he could not accept. They left the French institute and asked that their new group be accredited by the IPA...But in 1963, Marie Bonaparte, who was on the central committee and friendly with Anna Freud, Hartmann, and the others, convinced them to send a letter to Lacan saying that they were awfully sorry, but since Lacan had left the French institute, he was no longer a member of the IPA...for ten years after 1953, Lacan and his friends tried to prove that they were worthy of being asked back into the fold. In 1963 they received a definite ‘no’ from the IPA and split from the group. At that point, Lacan, who had never wanted to create his own school, did so, and he called it the *École freudienne* (Freudian School) to prove he was not a dissident” (Miller 1995, 6).

claim to represent, in however slight a way, a corpus of absolute knowledge” (Lacan 1977, 232). For Lacan, if there is any arbiter of the truth about what ails a subject, it is the subject him-/herself:

The subject supposed to know something of importance in psychoanalysis is the analysand’s unconscious. If there is an authority to be respected in the analytic setting, it is the manifestations of the unconscious in the analysand’s slips, mistakes, expressions of surprise, and so on. The ‘final authority’ in the analytic setting thus resides in the analysand’s unconscious, not in the analyst as some sort of master of knowledge who immediately grasps what the analysand is saying and the meaning of his or her symptoms. (Fink 1997, 31; emphasis in original)

Lacan thus restores an agency to the subject that Sartre argues psychoanalysis invariably strips away. Lacan’s efforts in this regard are of a piece with his criticisms of ego psychology and other depth psychological approaches. On Lacan’s understanding, ego psychology operates by offering the analyst’s own ego as a model for the analysand to emulate. This approach thus falls victim to the fantasy according to which the psychoanalyst has it all figured out and can bestow his/her special knowledge upon his/her patients. In his book *Against Adaptation*, Phillippe Van Haute states that for Lacan, the ego psychological approach consists in enjoining the analysand to become better adapted to reality, with reality amounting to nothing more than the established social order: “Lacan claims that psychoanalytic orthodoxy has aimed at a reinforcement of the ego in both theory and practice. The ego of the analysand must be reinforced so that it will be in a position to manage conflicts and creatively adapt itself to reality” (Van Haute 2002, xxvii-xxviii). He adds, “To the question of which reality the analysand must therefore adapt itself to, and how this can happen, the tradition has an answer that is as surprising as it is simple: ‘reality’ is the given social reality in which the analysand exists” (Van Haute 2002, xviii). Lacan, however, is totally opposed to this view. Indeed,

he argues that Freud himself is opposed to this approach, too: “What Freud taught is exactly the opposite” (Lacan 1988b, 246). Fink summarizes Lacan’s basic position as regards ego psychology: “To most analysts, psychoanalysis seeks to alleviate the patient’s symptoms and readapt him or her to social reality. Yet neither Freud nor Lacan ever adopts or endorses such aims” (Fink 1995b, x). Instead of plumbing the depths of the human psyche in search of some hidden secret to human being, a Lacanian approach insists that all one has to do is pay close attention to what lies on the surface.

§4 Sartre and the Lacanian Unconscious

How does the preceding account allow for an integration of the Lacanian structured unconscious and Sartre’s own theorizations about the more opaque dimensions of human psychical life? Throughout his intellectual itinerary, Sartre maintains his views about a “contentless” psyche while becoming increasingly sympathetic to the idea that not everything that comprises subjective life is strictly conscious. After introducing the notion of pre-reflective consciousness in *The Transcendence of the Ego* and *Being and Nothingness*, many of Sartre’s subsequent major works offer modified or new conceptual alternatives to the psychoanalytic unconscious. His existential biographies, which he intends to be a kind of putting into practice of the existential psychoanalysis for which he lays the groundwork in *Being and Nothingness*, offer the clearest picture of how he conceives those aspects of subjectivity that seem to escape conscious reflection. Some of the most prominent concepts he uses in this regard are “personalization,” “comprehension,” and *le vécu* [“the lived”]. All three of these major concepts serve as “functional equivalents” of the psychoanalytic unconscious for Sartre. The notion of the

lived perhaps best captures the resonances between him and Lacan on this matter. In a late interview with his bibliographers Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka, he explains, “I want to give the idea of a whole whose surface is completely conscious, while the rest is opaque to this consciousness and, without being part of the unconscious, is hidden from you... This notion of the lived is an instrument that I use but which I have not yet theorized...” (Sartre 1977, 127-128). Sartre’s intent to remain on the “surface” is striking. His explanation of the concept of “the lived” deserves even greater scrutiny in that he also notes an explicit affinity with Lacan regarding his conception of the unconscious. He states, “I suppose [the lived] represents for me the equivalent of conscious-unconscious, which is to say that I no longer believe in certain forms of the unconscious even though Lacan’s conception of the unconscious is more interesting” (Sartre 1977, 127-128).²⁹ He does not elaborate further, but based upon the account I have been presenting up to this point, I think there is evidence to support the view that Sartre reaches conclusions similar to Lacan’s regarding the unconscious aspects of psychological life. Of course, the primary reason Sartre insists on resisting the unconscious proper is precisely because it seems to commit one to the view that the psyche is a container with concealed depths. The concept of the lived by contrast carries the implication that, rather than being a hidden depth, there is a sense in which what is unconscious is something that is woven into the fabric of one’s day-to-day life and yet “overflows” (to use a Sartrean turn of phrase) one’s conscious understanding. In this way, Sartre’s primary critical target, whether he is aware

²⁹ Sartre’s statement here is characteristic of his ambivalence toward psychoanalysis. It’s strange that he remarks that he “no longer believes in certain forms of the unconscious” because he never explicitly endorses the unconscious in any of his writings. Nevertheless, he appears to hint at the fact that he views it as a useful concept. This vacillation marks virtually all of his engagements with psychoanalysis. Often in one and the same breath, he both rejects and accepts various aspects of psychoanalytic theory, especially the notion of the unconscious.

of it or not, is arguably a depth psychology-informed ego psychological approach to thinking about the unconscious.

This point is further bolstered by some of Sartre's remarks in his biography of Jean Genet, *Saint Genet: Comédien et Martyr*. Here, as well as in his other biographies, the extent to which Sartre himself employs a certain notion of the unconscious is on full display. However, he seeks to maintain a delicate balance between, on the one hand, aspects of oneself that are opaque and resist easy understanding and, on the other hand, a robust sense of agency and responsibility even when it comes to those dimensions of subjectivity to which one seemingly has no reflective access. In *Saint Genet*, he straddles this divide by appealing to one's first-person self-understanding and the way in which this sometimes fails to coincide with the third-person, objective perspective of others (what Sartre refers to as "being-for-self" and "being-for-others", respectively): "in the majority of cases, and particularly if it is a matter of feelings, qualities, traits of character, or complex behavior, we are unable to bring our inner data into line with the information given by our external informants because the two are not of the same nature" (Sartre 2012, 32). These perspectives are irreducible. The qualities that others perceive one as having cannot be "internalized" because such qualities reflect the external relationship one has with others: "If I am told that I am intelligent and witty or dull-witted and coarse, this information refers to the effect I produce on others" (Sartre 2012, 32). We are thus confronted with two irreducible perspectives on the self, both of which seem to reflect something important. Sartre goes on to state: "It is therefore quite true that these qualities which are recognized in us elude our consciousness, not because they are hidden in an unconscious which is situated behind it, but because they are in front of us, in the world,

and are originally a relationship to the other” (Sartre 2012, 32-33). Sartre again voices his aversion to the idea that those aspects of subjectivity that one cannot assimilate into one’s self-understanding exist in some hidden depth of the mind. On his view, the reason for the inassimilable character of certain aspects of subjectivity is that they emerge “out there” in the world through one’s relations with others. The unconscious appears in the gap between the two perspectives.

For both Sartre and Lacan, what Freud dubs the unconscious is inscribed on the surface of conscious life. Put more simply, the surface is all there is. It is not a matter of discovering what lies beneath; rather, it is a matter of paying careful attention to what is “out there.” Toril Moi calls attention to this crucial point in her essay “Nothing is Hidden.” In the context of comparing the methods of detection practiced by Freud and Sherlock Holmes (and, of course, Dupin of Poe’s “The Purloined Letter” to whom Lacan refers extensively), Moi questions whether the practices of psychoanalysis or detecting a crime (activities often associated with one another) are best captured by the metaphor of uncovering that which is hidden. Of Holmes specifically, she writes, “It’s not that the others look at the surface, whereas Sherlock looks beneath it. It is that he *pays attention* to the details they didn’t think to look at... Sherlock is a master in his field because he pays meticulous attention to what is there” (Moi 2017, 42). This, I think, is an apt characterization of Sartre’s and Lacan’s approaches to thinking about what goes by the name of the unconscious. The unconscious emerges through the polyvalent utterances issuing from the mouths of analysands and the resonance of the signifiers employed in constructing their free-associational monologues. Speaking of the ego, Sartre states that rather than being a kind of formal or material interior principle of unity for the subject,

the ego “is outside, *in the world*” (Sartre 1960, 31). This statement could perhaps be applied equally well to the notion of the unconscious.

As we have seen, a Lacanian approach to the unconscious allows us to move beyond depth psychological readings. Despite the apparent antagonism between Sartrean existentialism and Lacanian psychoanalytic structuralism, it is precisely the latter’s notion of unconscious structure that permits an explicit integration with the former’s own theorizations regarding the more opaque dimensions of the psyche. It is unclear whether Sartre had this upshot of Lacanian psychoanalysis in mind when he issued his remarks about the lack of structure in the psychoanalytic unconscious. But, the resonances between his own conceptual analogues to the unconscious and the Lacanian unconscious-structured-like-a-language suggest that there is much more shared theoretical ground between them than authors such as Betty Cannon or even Lacan and Sartre themselves would likely be willing to admit.

In the next chapter, I will begin establishing the links between Sartre’s and Lacan’s accounts of fantasy/the imaginary. In the course of elaborating these links, a more thorough investigation of the tensions between Sartrean existentialism and Lacanian psychoanalytic structuralism will be undertaken.

Chapter Three

Sartre and Lacan on Fantasy: Between Freedom and Structure

§1 Existentialist and Structuralist Conceptions of the Subject

In Chapter One, I began by highlighting the fact that for a large swath of twentieth century French philosophers, psychoanalysis is a key reference point. Interestingly, this is true of both existential phenomenologists as well as structuralists, two philosophical orientations often regarded as antagonistic. Why is psychoanalysis so important to both traditions? Does this shared reference indicate that there are philosophical lines of convergence between these two apparent theoretical adversaries? As the previous chapter indicated, there is ample evidence that psychoanalysis indeed provides a set of theoretical and practical conditions in which the concerns of Sartrean existentialism and Lacanian psychoanalytic structuralism can be seen to coincide. Both approaches operate with notions of the unconscious that run counter to typical quotidian conceptions of it. As the present chapter will argue, there is much more in addition to their respective accounts of the unconscious that these theoretical positions hold in common.

With the popularization of structuralism in French philosophy owing a large debt to Claude Lévi-Strauss³⁰, it is typically thought that structuralism seeks to do away with notions of consciousness and subjectivity, notions that are absolutely crucial to existential phenomenology. Jean-Michel Rabaté notes that, “Most accounts of Structuralism tend to portray it as the radical enemy of any philosophy of consciousness, therefore of phenomenology, a study of the way in which consciousness constitutes a world” (Rabaté

³⁰ Caws 2000, 22-23.

2003, 5). Peter Caws remarks similarly that, “The Structuralists” made an attempt at “thoroughly decentering the subject, or decentering the world in a stronger sense by removing the subject from it” (Caws 2000, 239). And, with reference to phenomenology’s emphasis on the meaning-giving activity of subjectivity, Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow state, “The structuralist approach attempts to dispense with both meaning and the subject by finding objective laws which govern all human activity...Transcendental phenomenology...is the diametric opposite of structuralism” (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, xix-xx).

Psychoanalysis first inserted itself into French structuralism by way of Lacan, in particular, his 1950s-era “return to Freud” during which he makes heavy use of structuralist linguistics to elaborate his notion of the symbolically structured unconscious³¹:

The psychoanalyst who has done most to bring out the dependence of Freud’s thought and method on language, and the convergence between Freudianism and Structuralism, is the Frenchman Jacques Lacan...it is through Lacan that the Freudian current has flowed once and for all into Structuralism or, if one prefers, that the Structuralist current has flowed into Freudianism. (Sturrock 2003, 94)

Jacques-Alain Miller—who would become Lacan’s son-in-law—introduces Lacan’s work to the group of structuralists associated with the *Cahiers pour l’Analyse*, cementing its place within the movement. What Miller sees in Lacan that is not available in Lévi-Straussian or Althusserian structuralism—two of the movement’s more prominent

³¹ Lacan’s intellectual itinerary is typically divided according to the varying degree of emphasis he places on one of the three registers that comprise his register theory. According to received wisdom, the early Lacan of the 1930s and 40s emphasizes the “phenomenological” dimension of the imaginary; the middle-period Lacan of the 1950s focuses primarily on the register of the symbolic; and the late Lacan of the 1960s and 70s is principally concerned with the elusive nature of the real. (See Johnston 2018a; Johnston 2019, 163.) This periodization unavoidably oversimplifies Lacan’s corpus, but it nevertheless serves a useful purpose in providing a navigable, basic road map of Lacanian theory. The Lacan with which the present chapter is primarily concerned is the one of the structuralist middle-period.

strains—is the preservation of the concept of subjectivity. As he notes in his seminal essay “Action of the Structure,” the “objects” of “psychoanalytic structuralism” are “experiences.” There is “an ineliminable subjectivity situated in these experiences” (Miller 2012, 71). Psychoanalysis provides a means for thinkers like Miller and his ilk to develop what they regard as a radically new conception of the subject, one that appears to have far less agency than the typical phenomenological conception but that nevertheless preserves the notion of the subject, however “subjected” it might be. And it is Lacan, with his refusal to give up the notion of the subject, who provides the exponents of this version of structuralism with their primary inspiration.³²

Why begin here with a discussion of structuralism and its vicissitudes? In addition to standard claims about the incompatibility of psychoanalytic theory with Sartre’s philosophy, the split between structuralism and existentialism is often cited as evidence that Lacan and Sartre are philosophically simply too far apart. In *Sartre and Psychoanalysis: An Existentialist Challenge to Clinical Metatheory*, Betty Cannon states that, “structuralism is really a new scientific positivism, a synchronic rather than a diachronic positivism, but one which is nonetheless as reductionistic as traditional Freudian metatheory” (Cannon 1991, 14). Later, in the same volume, she insists that we can see the stark contrast between Sartre and Lacan, “if we place [that difference] within the larger context of Sartre’s dialogue with structuralism...” (Cannon 1991, 256). Cannon argues that structuralism in all its forms fails to account for the intentional activity of the human subject. Specifically as regards Lacan, she states, “Lacan...errs in attempting to

³² “The psychoanalyst among the structuralists was Lacan, who devoted a large part of his work to the problem of subjectivity. Lacan’s career began at least as early as Levi-Strauss’s, and it is evident from his collected writings that he represented a genuinely independent source for structuralism” (Caws 2000, 30).

reduce everything to linguistic structure without adding human intentionality and meaning” (Cannon 1991, 259). She reiterates this point more recently:

I remain unconvinced that the Lacanian unconscious subject...can be responsible for its actions—or perhaps even capable of radically reorienting its way of being in the world...Lacanian analysis, as I read Lacan, leads not to recognizing and assuming our freedom, but to a kind of Nietzschean *amor fati*—an acceptance/love of the fact of being the plaything of the signifying chain that moves down to us from our ancestors. (Cannon 2016, 16)

Lacan, so the story goes, elaborates a structuralist conception of the subject according to which it is enveloped by language and other symbolic forces to such an extent that it is devoured and digested by them.³³ Sartre, by contrast, is unflagging in his insistence that, despite the “situation” into which one has been “thrown,” one is nevertheless fundamentally free. These perspectives seemingly cannot be reconciled. As Sartre’s bibliographers, Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka state, “the oppositions between Sartrean philosophy and Structuralism, for all that they have been artificially inflated by journalists and insufficiently studied by scholars, are nonetheless essential and seem, up to this point, insurmountable...” (Contat and Rybalka 1970, 430). Along similar lines, Ken Anderson remarks with regard to the structuralist linguistics so heavily employed by Lacan that, “The problem with structuralist philosophy of language...whether based on language in its totality and fixity or its duplicity and non-coincidence, is that it denies the freedom of the subject. Sartre consistently maintains his faith in freedom despite the modifications he makes in his views” (Anderson 1991, 2).

³³ Lacan sometimes invokes the image of a spider’s web trapping an individual when speaking of language’s effects on human beings: “The language apparatus is there somewhere in the brain, like a spider. It has a hold” (Lacan 2008, 33). This further demonstrates the determinative power of language for him.

These considerations are potentially problematic for the overarching conclusions of this dissertation, especially when we consider that Lacan's unique conception of fantasy appears to be one of the more structuralist-inspired aspects of his metapsychology. Lacan at times seems to suggest that it is precisely one's fantasies that most clearly rob the subject of its agency insofar as the fantasmatic formations of the psyche are themselves products generated by the symbolic order, thereby rendering them "extimate"³⁴ components of subjectivity. Ed Pluth, for example, comments that fantasy, for Lacan, "gives us a portrait of a subject with an identity" (Pluth 2007, 7). In other words, it is precisely a subject's fundamental fantasy that confers upon him/her a static/stable identity. Moreover, as we shall see, this fantasmatic identity is formed, in part, via the imposition of the desires of others. Or, as Žižek puts it in Lacanian fashion, "we all borrow the elements of our individual myths from the treasury of the big Other" (Žižek 1993, 41), with such "myths" being the fantasmatic core of one's self-conception. These claims are in apparent tension with Sartre's contention that the subject is non-self-coincident, that he/she does not have a static/stable identity and is ultimately responsible for the creative work of unfurling his/her life project. But, as I shall demonstrate herein, Lacan's notion of the fundamental fantasy bears many striking similarities to the Sartrean fundamental project, which Sartre characterizes as an imaginative project.

This chapter is, in part, an attempt to call the sharpness of the divide between Sartrean existentialism and Lacanian psychoanalytic structuralism into question. More specifically, I demonstrate the intersecting and mutually illuminating lines of thought

³⁴ Miller characterizes this Lacanian notion thusly: "The most interior—this is how the dictionary defines 'intimate' (*l'intime*)—has, in the analytic experience a quality of exteriority. This why Lacan invented the term 'extimate'" (Miller 1994, 76).

developed by Sartre and Lacan regarding the intimate link between imagination/fantasy and freedom. In addition, this chapter contributes to a growing body of literature arguing that the differences between structuralism and existential phenomenology may not be so great after all.³⁵ By showing that psychoanalytic structuralism and Sartrean existentialism share certain key theses, I make some inroads toward demonstrating that Lacanian psychoanalytic structuralism is compatible with many of Sartre's claims about human freedom.

§2 Lacan's Symbolic Account of Fantasy

When discussing Lacan's conception of fantasy, it is important to be careful regarding terminology. To begin with, fantasy is an offshoot of the imagination, a species of imaginative psychical activity. Laplanche and Pontalis define the psychoanalytic concept of fantasy as an "Imaginary scene in which the subject is a protagonist, representing the fulfilment of a wish (in the last analysis, an unconscious wish) in a manner that is distorted to a greater or lesser extent by defensive processes" (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973, 314). Thus, one could say that fantasy is a part of the imaginary. But this quickly leads to confusion and error regarding Lacan's precise conception of fantasy. We can get clearer about this by appealing to his "register theory."

Lacan distinguishes between three "registers" that constitute human experience, namely, the Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary. These registers constitute the Lacanian theoretical matrix for conceptualizing human subjectivity. As Richard Boothby remarks, "The tripartite distinction of imaginary, symbolic, and real constitutes the master key of

³⁵ See, e.g., Caws 1992, Howells 1992, Sass 2015, Scott 2016.

Lacan's work" (Boothby 1991, 19). For human beings, the Real is always-already filtered through the registers of the Imaginary, with its barrage of imagistic impressions, and the Symbolic, with its linguistic and conceptual apparatuses that overlay these imagistic impressions. What we experience as reality thus lies at the intersection of the Imaginary and Symbolic registers.

The register of the Real is a bit harder to define. For our purposes, suffice it to state that the Real functions as a kind of Kantian noumenal realm.³⁶ Lacan often characterizes it as a "lost cause." In the second seminar, he employs terms borrowed from Aristotle—*tuché* and *automaton*—to describe the relation of the real to imaginary-symbolic reality. The real is "tychic," meaning that it functions as a catalyst for events occurring in reality, but it is ungraspable in itself. Imaginary-Symbolic reality serves to cover over the register of the Real.

Importantly, one register cannot truly be dissociated from the others. For Lacan, the subject is not reducible to any one of the three registers but rather is situated at their intersection. Fantasy is thus composed of features of each of these registers (indeed, as per the claim above, this is true of human experience in general). Fantasy does not belong solely to the domain of the Imaginary, as a commonsense account would have it. In fact, for Lacan, it is the register of the symbolic that has the greatest share in the formation and structure of fantasy. As Bruce Fink notes, "in fantasy, as Lacan understands it, the

³⁶ Lacan offers a number of different characterizations of the Real, some of which conflict with one another. Incidentally, for Lacan, it is the very nature of the Real that accounts for such conflicting characterizations insofar as it is that which escapes our symbolically structured efforts to conceptualize it. Richard Boothby writes that, "the notion of the real is perhaps best introduced as being precisely that which escapes and is lacking in the other two registers. Neither figured in the imaginary nor represented by the symbolic, the real is the always-still-oustanding, the radically excluded, the wholly uncognized. As Lacan puts it, 'the real is impossible'" (Boothby 1991, 19). So, it is not quite right to state that this captures the whole sense of the Real for Lacan. For a comprehensive account the Lacanian Real, see Evers 2012.

imaginary has already been transformed, structured, or overwritten by the symbolic” (Fink 2014b, 40).

Why is fantasy largely a symbolic rather than an imaginary phenomenon? Early on in Lacan’s conceptualization of fantasy, he makes a few references to the work of Melanie Klein. As his thought develops, Klein comes to function as a foil for his own distinctive metapsychological concept of fantasy, a role she plays precisely because, according to Lacan, she does not move beyond the register of the imaginary. For Klein and her followers in the school of British object relations theory, early childhood fantasies play a constitutive role in shaping the subject’s psyche. This is true of virtually all psychoanalytic approaches, but fantasy is so integral to Kleinian theory that it can be said to constitute the very bedrock of psychical life. Indeed, for Klein, unconscious fantasy “is synonymous with the content of unconscious mentation” (Erreich 2015, 248).

As Lacan himself characterizes Klein’s thought on fantasy:

From the Kleinian perspective...the subject’s entire learning, as it were, about reality is primordially prepared and underpinned by the essentially hallucinatory and fantasmatic constitution of its first objects, which are classified into good and bad objects, insofar as they establish an initial primordial relation which, in the subsequent life of the subject, will give the subject the principal types of the relations he will have with reality. (Lacan 2017, 199)

At this stage of his thought—as articulated in the fifth seminar of 1957-1958 entitled *Formations of the Unconscious*—Lacan has become quite critical of Kleinian theory, especially as regards her conception of fantasy. From a Lacanian perspective, Kleinian fantasy consists solely in the subject becoming ensnared by the appearance of an image. In other words, the Kleinian conception of fantasy is neither constituted by nor situated in the symbolic order. This leads to a problematic theory of fantasy. Shortly after the statements in the immediately preceding block quotation, Lacan stipulates that Klein

offers an essentially psychotic account of the “normal” subject: “Here, we have what one can truly call a psychotic construction of the subject. From this perspective a normal subject is, in short, a psychosis that has turned out well, a psychosis in harmony with experience” (Lacan 2017, 200). Lacan contends that Klein’s conception of fantasy ultimately leads to a kind of Berkeley-style idealism whereby the subject fantasmatically creates his/her experience which, in “normal” cases, just so happens to coincide with external reality.

What is missing in Klein’s theory of fantasy? For Lacan, the highly structured domain of the symbolic order is a necessary, transcendental condition for the subject to be able to form fantasmatic objects in the first place. He asks:

How can we neglect, concerning reality, that signifiers effectively enter into play in the human real as an original reality? There is language, it speaks in the world, and by virtue of this fact there is an entire series of things, *objects that are signified and that would absolutely not be objects if there were no signifiers*. (Lacan 2017, 205; emphasis added)

Lacan asserts here that the subject enters into a world that is always-already symbolically constituted. The symbolic order is a preexisting matrix of differentially structured signifiers that make possible the subject’s constitution of certain privileged objects; these objects become what they are for the subject in part because of their existence within the symbolic order. It is only insofar as these objects are part and parcel of this order that the subject can identify them as such. He continues on the following page:

And so, why wish that man, who has very poorly adapted instincts, somehow fashion an experience of the world with his own hands? The fact that there are signifiers is absolutely essential to it, and the principal means of expression of his experience of reality—it’s almost banal, foolish to say this—is surely the voice. The teaching he receives comes to him essentially from the speech of adults. (Lacan 2017, 206)

It is precisely the interplay of signifiers—introduced to the child through “the speech of adults”—that establishes the primacy of the symbolic in fantasy; this demonstrates that fantasies can form only within an already existing symbolic order.

In the very next paragraph, Lacan continues along the same lines, spelling out some of the details of the subject’s immersion within the symbolic order. Importantly, this immersion is something which occurs even before the subject is capable of understanding the language in which he/she is being bathed³⁷:

But the significant margin that Freud achieves over this element of experience is the following—even before language acquisition is elaborated at the motor level, at the auditory level and at the level at which he understands what one tells him, there is already symbolization—from the outset, from the first relations with the object, from the child’s first relationship to the maternal object as the primordial, primitive object on whom its subsistence in the world depends. This object has effectively already been introduced as such into the process of symbolization and it plays the role of introducing the signifier’s existence into the world—and at a very early stage. (Lacan 2017, 206)

These statements are of a piece with Lacan’s earlier claim that, without signifiers, there wouldn’t be objects as such. Thus, for Lacan, in contrast to Klein, there is an additional layer to fantasy beyond the imaginary identification a subject makes with respect to a certain object. According to Lacan, for an object to be meaningful to begin with (“good” or “bad” as Kleinian object relations theorists would have it³⁸), there must already be a

³⁷ Lacan himself speaks of the subject being “bathed” in signifiers: “man is born [immersed] in a bath of signifiers” (Quoted in Fink 2014a, 19).

³⁸ The terms “good object” and “bad object” are employed by Klein to designate an individual’s primitive relationship with objects (with the term ‘object’ here being intended in the precise psychoanalytic sense). Laplanche and Pontalis remark with regard to these Kleinian concepts that they are “introduced by Melanie Klein to designate the earliest partial or whole instinctual objects in the form in which they appear in the infant’s phantasy life. The qualities ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are attributed to these objects not only in consequence of their gratifying or frustrating nature but also because of the subject’s projection of his libidinal or destructive instincts on to them. According to Klein, the part-object (breast, penis) is split into a ‘good’ and a ‘bad’ object, this split constituting a primary mode of defence against anxiety. The whole object is said to be split in a similar fashion (the ‘bad’ mother and the ‘good’ mother, etc.)” (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973, 187-188). For Klein, these concepts refer to the often conflicted, ambivalent, or aggressive feelings an individual (especially a young child) has toward the external world. The “good breast,” for example,

symbolically structured signifying chain, one which exists independently of the subject's psyche (the signifier as "original reality") that renders possible his/her fantasmatic constructions. These claims in *Seminar V* about the primacy of the signifier echo assertions Lacan makes in his third seminar of 1955-1956 to the same effect. Therein, he states, "My thesis...is as follows—reality is *at the outset* marked by symbolic nihilation [*néantisation*]" (Lacan 1993, 148).³⁹ In other words, from the very beginning, the subject's world is symbolically structured. Shortly after the preceding remark, he states, "Before a child can learn to articulate language, we have to assume that signifiers, which are already of the symbolic order, have appeared. When I speak of a primitive appearance of the signifier, this is something that already implies language" (Lacan 1993, 149). It is in this sense that, as Fink puts it, the imaginary is "overwritten" or mediated by the symbolic. Indeed, the tendency of the symbolic to "overwrite" imaginary phenomena is characteristic of much of Lacan's work, especially that produced during his most explicitly structuralist period during the 1950s and early '60s.

Darian Leader further emphasizes this aspect of the Lacanian notion of fantasy in contrast to Klein's. Highlighting the crucial difference between imagination and fantasy for Lacan, he remarks that Lacan "rebukes Klein and her followers for confusing phantasy with imagination" (Leader 2015, 84). This confusion stems precisely from Klein's failure to incorporate the notion of the symbolic into her theory of fantasy.

Commenting on Susan Isaacs' 1948 paper "The Nature and Function of Phantasy," which

designates the breast that feeds the infant while the "bad breast" reflects the child's feelings when subject to the pangs of hunger.

³⁹ Interestingly, the term "nihilation" [*néantisation*] that Lacan uses here is a key Sartrean neologism. Sartre coins the term in *Being and Nothingness* to describe the subject's relationship to the world as one of negation, distance, or lack. Lacan appears to be using the term in a similar fashion in this instance.

Leader notes often serves as the definitive statement on the Kleinian conception of fantasy more than anything Klein herself wrote, Leader criticizes in Lacanian fashion Isaacs' Klein-inspired contention that "Words are by no means an essential scaffolding for phantasy" (Isaacs 1991, 284). While it is true that unconscious fantasies themselves are not constituted by words per se, the images that make up a subject's fantasies achieve their status through their relations to other objects. Thus, "Lacan's argument implies quite the opposite [of Issacs' thesis]: the [fantasy] object only takes on its value in relation to words" (Leader 2015, 91). In what sense?

Referring back to the structuralist linguistics in which Lacan is heavily immersed during his elaboration of the unconscious-structured-like-a-language, the terms in a given linguistic system are meaningful/significant based upon their relation to other terms in the system. In this way, any system can have the structure of a language insofar as there are a sufficient number of differences to make the terms of the system distinguishable from one another. Systems of images, among other types of object, may be structured in this fashion. This crucial point is in the background of Lacan's criticisms of Klein cited above. The only way a subject can identify fantasmatic objects in the first place is because they are situated within a symbolic system of relations. Hence, according to Lacan's psychoanalytic appropriation of structuralist linguistics, fantasies have as their condition of possibility the symbolic structuration found in linguistic systems. Of course, as speaking-beings, speech is still of paramount importance here. Though a child may not fully understand the language spoken by his/her parents, language nevertheless informs the child's relationship to the objects that populate his/her world, and thus the spoken word does indeed serve as a kind of "scaffolding" for fantasy. Herein lies the

fundamental distinction between imagination and fantasy for Lacan, a distinction that he faults Klein, among other psychoanalysts, for failing to see. As he states in “The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of its Power,” “any temptation to reduce fantasy to imagination, that doesn’t admit to its failure, is a permanent misconception, a misconception from which the Kleinian school, which has certainly carried things very far here, is not free, having failed to even glimpse the category of the signifier” (Lacan 2006e, 532). Against the Kleinian conflation of imagination with fantasy, Lacan insists that “unconscious fantasy no longer presents any difficulty once it is defined as an image set to work in the signifying structure” (Lacan 2006e, 532).

Importantly, it is precisely the symbolic dimension of Lacan’s conception of fantasy that establishes its structuralist credentials. In the 1972 essay “How Do We Recognize Structuralism?,” Gilles Deleuze identifies several key features by which the admittedly nebulous notion of structuralism can be identified. First among the features (or “criteria” as Deleuze has it) identified by him is precisely the positing of a symbolic order that mediates the relation between the imaginary and the real: “The first criterion of structuralism, however, is the discovery and recognition of a third order, a third regime: that of the symbolic. The refusal to confuse the symbolic with the imaginary, as much as with the real, constitutes the first dimension of structuralism” (Deleuze 2004, 171). For Deleuze, the emphasis that structuralism places on the symbolic sets it apart from other philosophical approaches: “We are used to, almost conditioned to a certain distinction or correlation between the real and the imaginary. All of our thought maintains a dialectical play between these two notions” (Deleuze 2004, 171). As he points out, even Freud’s thought is marked by this tendency: “Even Freudianism is interpreted from the

perspective of two principles: the reality principle with its power to disappoint, the pleasure principle with its hallucinatory power of satisfaction” (Deleuze 2004, 171).

Lacan’s analytic innovation, then, consists partially in his introducing the symbolic into psychoanalytic theory.⁴⁰ And, as elaborated in the preceding paragraphs, his notion of fantasy fits squarely within this structuralist framework. This becomes all the more apparent when we consider the extent to which a subject’s fantasies are generated by its relations to others, i.e., the extent to which one’s fantasies are imposed rather than subjectively created.

§2 The Genesis of Fantasy in the Desire of the Other

Lacan’s claims about the primacy of the symbolic in the constitution of fantasy are closely associated with his point that fantasy originates in the “desire of the Other”—as per his claim in the eleventh seminar, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, that “man’s desire is the desire of the Other” (Lacan 1977, 38). As stated above, the subject’s ability to constitute objects is dependent upon his/her insertion into the symbolic order. The actions and speech of one’s parents typically serve as one’s introduction into the symbolic order; parents shower their child with a cascade of statements, commands, compliments, reprimands, and encouragements. These statements issuing from the mouths of one’s parents serve as a catalyst for the formation of the ego,

⁴⁰ This is an innovation for which Lacan himself would arguably not take credit, insisting as he does that the symbolically structured unconscious is already present in Freud. For example, in his third seminar, he states, “in focusing attention back onto the signifier we are doing nothing other than returning to the starting point of the Freudian discovery” (Lacan 1993, 221). Along similar lines, in the écrit “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire,” he writes, “Starting with Freud, the unconscious becomes a chain of signifiers that repeats and insists somewhere (on another stage or in different scene, as he wrote), interfering in the cuts offered it by actual discourse and the cogitation it informs. In this formulation, which is mine only in the sense that it conforms as closely to Freud’s texts as to the experience they opened up, the crucial term is the signifier...” (Lacan 2006f, 676).

one's sense of self-identity. Lacan's famous "mirror stage" clearly demonstrates the effects of this operation.

In what is arguably Lacan's most well-known *écrit*, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the 'I' Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," he elaborates a theory according to which an individual becomes aware of him-/herself as a distinct individual by identifying with his/her mirror image. The ego that results from one's passage through the mirror stage reflects an attempted answer to the question, "What does the Other want from me?" In response to the continuous prodding on the part of one's bigger Others (i.e., the adults/authority figures in one's life) to identify oneself with the image in the mirror, one accepts the picture that these Others have presented. One is thereby also making an attempt to satisfy what one perceives as the Other's desire, namely, that one be a self-contained/controlled autonomous individual. In short, one attempts to identify oneself with the image that one's bigger Others have fashioned, one attempts to fill the place in the symbolic order that others have carved out. As Boothby puts the point, "A highly significant consequence of such imaginary mimicry...is the way it introduces a profound confusion of self and other" (Boothby 1991, 24). This, as will be subsequently explained, serves as the catalyst for the formation of fantasy.

At this juncture, it will be useful to examine another of Lacan's conceptual triads—one that is closely related to that of the Lacanian registers—namely, the relation between need (*besoin*), demand (*demande*), and desire (*désir*). Need, for Lacan, refers to the basic biological requirements of the human organism. The instinctual impulses to eat, drink, defecate, and so on are captured by this term. But these biological needs themselves necessitate that the child begin "playing the game," so to speak, of the

symbolic order. To have his/her needs met, the child must engage the interest of its parents through the limited means available: crying, gesturing, and so on. The infant thereby unknowingly participates in the symbolically structured interplay of signifiers.⁴¹ The child's parents recognize the movements and vocalizations of their child as gestures indicating that the child needs something. This recognition thus situates the child's needs within the symbolic order. In short, the bodily origins of the needs of the human being require one to participate in the more-than-biological world of the symbolic order.⁴²

It is at this point that the notion of demand comes on the scene. Need becomes demand precisely at the point at which somatic impulses are captured in the net of the symbolic. One's needs are subsequently "filtered" through the defiles of the symbolic order. The subject must use the language of others in order to communicate its needs qua demands: "since the infant is incapable of performing the specific actions that would satisfy its biological needs, it must articulate those needs in vocal form (demands) so that another (the mother) will perform the specific action instead" (Evans 1996, 36). As Lacan himself states regarding the move from need to desire, "The system of needs enters the dimension of language where it's remodeled, but it's also permanently pouring into the signifying complex" (Lacan 2017, 78).

⁴¹ Pluth 2007, 60.

⁴² "In the mirror stage, the infant is 'sunk in his motor incapacity and nursing dependence.' The 'biological deficiency' at work in the formation of the specular ego is the anatomical, developmental fact of the infant's prolonged period of prematurational helplessness (what Freud terms '*Hilflosigkeit*'). This propels the young subject-to-be into a reliance on the protosocial bond with the (m)other, thereby heralding later intersubjective configurations. Thus, the somatic condition of the human being precipitates a series of relationships subsequently playing themselves out on a stage irreducible to this somatic origin. Lacan's 1964 conception of causality is already at work in a nascent form—Real *tuché* (that is, the infant's prematuration as a biological reality) and Imaginary-Symbolic *automaton* (the series of relationships and identifications motivated by this biological cause)" (Johnston 2005, 205).

Along these lines, Jean Laplanche directly links fantasy with the inability of the child to care for him-/herself, thus cementing the role of fantasy in the genetic development of the psyche. Similarly to Lacan, Laplanche argues that fantasy is instituted via the intersubjective dynamic between infant and mother:

The experience of satisfaction is incomprehensible if it is not related to the biological fact of prematuration. It is, in fact, by dint of what Freud called *Hilfslosigkeit*—i.e., his distress, his original impotence to help himself—that the human child cannot bring into operation the mechanisms necessary for the satisfaction of his needs, mechanisms grouped under the rubric of ‘specific action,’ which are nothing other than instinctual setups. The instinctual setups are insufficient, and in any event, they appear too late, with a gap: they are not there when one would expect: i.e., at birth. From birth onward, insofar as this gap subsists, there occurs a kind of *disqualification of the instinct*: the satisfaction of needs cannot pass through preestablished setups, that will emerge only gradually and according to the maturational rhythm of the central nervous system, but satisfaction must pass from the beginning through intersubjectivity; i.e., by way of another human, the mother. The analogy between this scheme and what we described concerning ‘propping’ may be perceived. The signs accompanying satisfaction (the breast accompanying the offering of nursing milk) will henceforth take on the value of a fixed arrangement, and it is that arrangement, a *fantasy* as yet limited to several barely elaborated elements, that will be repeated on the occasion of a subsequent appearance of need. (Laplanche 1976, 60)

As Laplanche makes clear here, fantasy activity is activated at the very outset of the subject’s life and constitutes a basic structural feature of an individual’s relation to others. Fantasy is thus co-emergent with psychical life in general. Indeed, for Laplanche, reality testing consists in the subject forever after trying to obtain the fantasy object first encountered in infantile life.

Thus, one rarely gains access to “raw” need, for needs are necessarily expressed within the parameters of the symbolic order (in this way, need is associated with the “lost cause” of the register of the Real): “The dependence of the infant on its surroundings is, as it were, redoubled by its dependence on the universe of language, which can *never* be overcome” (Van Haute 2002, 105-106). The transformation of need into demand offers a

clue as to why Lacan insists that the psyche is colonized by the symbolic order. The child must begin to assimilate into a “foreign language” so as to inhabit the same symbolic universe that its parents do. The signifying chains washing over the child gradually come to inhabit the child’s psyche: “A need becomes a demand when it is put into the Other’s terms, when it is put into language. A demand, therefore, involves an address to someone, an other, in that other’s terms. So articulating a demand implies that a child has ‘entered’ the Other [qua language]” (Pluth 2007, 61).

The transition from need to demand and from demand to desire is crucial for understanding the extent to which the fantasmatic productions of the psyche are grounded in the subject’s attempts to discern the desire of the Other. This sets the stage for the assumption of the Other’s desire as one’s own. Commenting on the move from demand to desire, Fink writes:

During infancy, our primary caretakers are immensely important to us, our lives being intimately tied to theirs. We make demands on them; they, in turn, demand that we behave in certain ways and not others, and that we learn many things: to speak their language (using words, expressions, and grammar not of our own making) and to regulate our needs for nourishment, warmth, excretion, and so on in accordance with their schedules. They are our primary source of attention and affection, and we often attempt to win their approval and love by conforming to their wishes. The better we satisfy their demands, the more approval we are likely to obtain. The more completely we satisfy their wishes, the more love we are likely to win from them. (Fink 1997, 53)

It is precisely the wish to receive love that Lacan equates with desire. And a condition for receiving that love consists in behaving in accord with what one thinks the Other wants: developing proper bathroom habits, eating at designated times, and so on. We can already see here the way in which the child comes to take on the Other’s desire as his/her own. By paying attention to signs of satisfaction on the part of its parents (certain facial cues, e.g., a smile or an approving glance), the child begins to discern what it thinks its parents

want. Insofar as the child desires the approval of his/her parents, and with such approval being dependent upon the satisfaction of the Other's desire, the child strives to align his/her own desire with that of his/her parents.

Of course, the desires of parents and others are often unclear. The child's capacity to grasp what its parents want is limited. After all, the child cannot telepathically access the contents of its parent's minds. Thus, the attempt to discern the Other's desire is an ongoing project. Fink continues along these lines: "Our parents' desire becomes the mainspring of our own: we want to know what they want in order to best satisfy them in their purposes, discover where we fit into their schemes and plans, and find a niche for ourselves in their desire. We want to be desired by them" (Fink 1997, 54). But, as explained above, one's desire for the Other's desire requires that one assume the Other's desire as one's own:

In the attempt to discern their desire...we discover that certain objects are coveted by the Other and learn to want them ourselves, modeling our desire on the Other's desire. Not only do we want the other's desire to be directed onto us (we want to be the object, indeed the most important object, of the Other's desire); we also come to desire like the Other—we take the Other's desires as our own. (Fink 1997, 54)

How do these remarks bear upon the problem of the genesis of fantasy? Precisely because the subject cannot fully know the Other's desire, his/her own desire is partially a fantasmatic construction. The unceasing attempts to receive the Other's love awakens the creative power of fantasy. The subject fantasizes the Other's desire ("This is what the Other wants, and I'm going to give it to him/her") and thereby fantasizes his/her own desire, too. Put simply, fantasies emerge when the limits of human knowledge become

apparent.⁴³ Because one cannot definitively know the desires of others, one fantasizes them.

We are beginning to see the ways in which the subject's immersion in the symbolic order impose upon him/her (that is, he/she is "subjected" to) a certain fabricated vision of who and what they are supposed to be. One's own fantasmatic vision is constituted in part by the fantasies of one's surrounding big(ger) Others. Thus, the subject's attempts to discern what the other wants and the attempts to satisfy that fantasized desire come to shape the subject's own projects.

Beyond fantasizing the Other's desire, one may, in fact, fantasize that one *is* the Other. This can have even more decisive consequences for the life of the subject. This kind of fantasy is what Freud dubs "identification." Freud discusses the process of identification in a number of his works. The most extensive treatment of the topic in his earlier work occurs in the paper "Mourning and Melancholia." He states that "identification is a preliminary stage of object-choice, that it is the first way—and one that is expressed in an ambivalent fashion—in which the ego picks out an object. The ego wants to incorporate this object into itself, and, in accordance with the oral or cannibalistic phase of libidinal development in which it is, it wants to do so by devouring it" (*SE* 14: 249-250). Later, in the 1921 work *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud situates the process of identification in the Oedipus complex: "Identification is known to psycho-analysis as the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person. It plays a part in the early history of the Oedipus complex. A little boy will exhibit a special interest in his father; he would like to grow like him and be like him, and

⁴³ As Andre Green puts the point, "Fantasy is born there where knowledge is in default" (Quoted in Johnston 2008, 34).

take his place everywhere” (*SE* 18: 105). In seeking to occupy the father’s position, the child attempts incorporate the father into him-/herself in an effort to become him.

This kind of fantasmatic identification forms a structural pillar of the subject’s psyche. This points to an important difference between fantasy in the psychoanalytic sense and a mere daydream or flight of fancy. The precise difference consists in the fact that fantasies have real effects on practical life. Indeed, fantasies are a form of practical activity in and of themselves. As Jonathan Lear explains, “Fantasy is not just a daydream with imagined content; it is a powerful form of mental activity by which the boundaries of the ego start to come undone” (Lear 2015, 173-174). As regards the process of identification, he states, “Identification is a fantasy that I *am* someone else, or that I have the essence of that person inside me. It is not merely a fantasy that I am like the other person. It can occur at varying levels of sophistication throughout development, but its core rests on an oral fantasy of taking a substance—physical as well as mental—inside” (Lear 2015, 175).

The consequences of this operation can be interpreted along the lines of the Sartrean “fundamental project” or Lacanian “fundamental fantasy” highlighted in Chapter One whereby one’s “neuroses” or “character traits” are formed. The question remains as to whether these neuroses are constituted solely via “borrowings” from the “treasury” of the big Other qua symbolic order or whether there is also an element of fantasmatic “choice” at work here, too. (The measure of how much is borrowed is being taken in the present chapter while the measure of how much is chosen will be dealt with in the following chapter.) In the next section, I will explore whether there are any

elements of Sartre's existentialist account of the imaginary that resonate with the Lacanian structuralist account of fantasy elaborated above.

§4 The Sartrean Imaginary

At this point, one might wonder how a Sartrean philosophy of freedom could have any resonance with the symbolically overdetermined subject of Lacanian psychoanalysis. After all, is not Sartre's entire philosophical program an account of the radical freedom of the human subject?

Most philosophical interpretations of Sartre's corpus depict it as nothing but an account of radical freedom divorced from both biological and cultural determination. Simon Glynn, for example, writes that "the Sartrean subject, as no-thing or nothingness, is, from the very first, free from both genetic and environmental determinism..." (Glynn 2002, 62-63). Somogy Varga likewise states that, "For Sartre, only our choices and their projected ends define our situations [as] meaningful, as threatening or favourable, as affording certain actions etc." (Varga 2011, 71).⁴⁴ Much of this caricatured view of Sartre arguably stems from superficial readings of *Being and Nothingness*, a text that features no shortage of hyperbolic statements such as "one is responsible even for one's birth." Sartre thus shares in some of the blame for these interpretations of his work, and there is a kernel of truth in such interpretations of Sartre's early work, even if they ultimately miss the mark.

⁴⁴ Varga's line of criticism is itself motivated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's critique of Sartre's account of freedom in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty argues that Sartre characterizes freedom as it occurs in a vacuum. For him, by contrast, it is crucial to recognize the cultural background conditions that make choice possible. See Merleau-Ponty 2013.

Furthermore, as has been much remarked upon, the social ontology of *Being and Nothingness* and other early Sartrean works is, compared with the view articulated in later works like the *Critique*, anemic, presenting a quasi-atomistic view of the subject. As William McBride remarks:

When all is said and done, however, *Being and Nothingness* still provides few grounds for the development of a comprehensive political theory. Its account of the ‘us-object’ is feeble at best...It would still be some years [after the publication of *Being and Nothingness*] before Sartre would be able fully to incorporate his intellectual recognition of the centrality of the sociopolitical and historical dimension of human existence into his own formal philosophical framework. (McBride 1989, 852)

Alain Badiou, a philosopher who, like McBride, is generally sympathetic to Sartre’s philosophy writes similarly that, “*Being and Nothingness* was published in 1943. There is a huge gulf between that philosophy and political commitment. Sartre made the absolute freedom of the Subject central to experience, and that freedom is still strictly a matter of individual consciousness” (Badiou 2009, 17-18). He continues, “Only the individual is an active centre” (Badiou 2009, 18). Hence, judging from the work of the early Sartre, it is unclear how human subjects could be manipulated, shaped, conditioned, or determined by cultural or structural forces in the manner posited by structuralist philosophers and social scientists.

While McBride and Badiou are correct that Sartre’s early phenomenological work does not adequately develop a social theory, in my view, the ingredients of Sartre’s later social ontology are present in his early work even if one has to look a bit harder to see them. However, arguing for the position that Sartre’s later Marxist-inspired work does not constitute a radical break with his earlier, existential-phenomenological work is,

however, not the primary task of this and the next section.⁴⁵ Instead, the remainder of this chapter will show that Sartre's work in general does not rule out of hand the structuralist approach taken by Lacan, and, more specifically, that his conception of the imaginary shares certain structural features of Lacanian fantasy. We will see that Sartre's existentialism and Lacan's psychoanalytic structuralism gel in unexpected ways.

In the present context, one might be especially struck by some of Lacan's claims specifically regarding fantasy. As seen, for him, fantasies are oftentimes just as determined, circumscribed, and delineated by the symbolic order as other aspects of psychical life. Furthermore, for both Lacan and Freud alike, fantasies are themselves pathogenic, giving rise to the sometimes debilitating psychical symptoms met with in psychoanalysis. Such symptoms are anything but liberating. Moreover, given Lacan's excoriation of Klein's conflation of imagination with fantasy, it must be asked whether the Sartrean imaginary falls prey to the same criticisms or whether it bears more of a resemblance to Lacan's symbolic account of fantasy.

On a first approach, Sartre might appear to engage in a bit of Kleinian misrecognition on this matter. His two treatises on imaginative life, 1936's *L'Imagination* and 1940's *L'Imaginaire*, as their titles indicate, specifically reference the psychical act of imagining, not the activity of unconscious fantasy. Further distancing these earlier Sartrean works from a Freudian-Lacanian conception of fantasy is Sartre's immersion at the time of their publication in the phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl and, consequently, his emphasis on consciousness over against any notion of the unconscious. Indeed, these works were written during what is arguably Sartre's most anti-

⁴⁵ This work has been undertaken elsewhere. See Barnes 1968; Flynn 1984; Flynn 1995; Catalano 2010.

psychoanalytic period. Thus, it is not immediately clear whether and how the Sartrean imaginary and Freudian-Lacanian fantasy can be interwoven. It will be useful to gloss the theory Sartre puts forward in the two just-mentioned volumes before proceeding to explain how this can be understood in terms of the psychoanalytic concept of fantasy.

In the late 1930s, just prior to his conscription into the French military, Sartre wrote two works examining the topic of the imagination. The first, *L'imagination*—Sartre's first published book-length manuscript—consists primarily of a critical-historical account of the concept of imagination as it is treated throughout the history of philosophy, especially in the modern philosophical tradition by the likes of Leibniz, Descartes, and Hume. Sartre diagnoses each of their respective accounts as falling prey to the “illusion of immanence,” i.e., regarding the image as a kind of degraded perception, a copy of an object that has a reified form of existence inside the mind (the tendency that Sartre identifies in these three figures can also be found in the work of Hobbes and Locke, among a handful of others, too). The book is a revised version of his *diplôme d'études supérieures*, written almost a decade earlier in 1927. (Within the present context, it is worth mentioning that this thesis was not written under the direction of a philosopher but rather under that “of a distinguished professor of psychology, Henri Delacroix” [Flynn 2014, 77].) This critical history is capped by a concluding chapter—a chapter absent in the earlier thesis—that foreshadows the positive phenomenological account that would appear in *L'imaginaire* in 1940. The presence of this chapter is indicative of the “conversion experience” Sartre had in Berlin from September 1933 to July 1934 during which he immersed himself in the work of Husserl and Heidegger. Owing to his experience in Germany, Sartre's subsequent work features a distinctly

phenomenological cast that aids him in his efforts to shirk the constrictive clutches of modern “picture thinking” that had come to define so much philosophical and psychological work on the topic of imagination.

The second volume Sartre authors on the topic of imagination features a full-blown phenomenological analysis of the mental act of imagining, an analysis prefigured by the concluding chapter of *The Imagination*. In *L’imaginaire*, Sartre proceeds to analyze imagination as an intentional act of consciousness. As is well known, the operative principle of phenomenology is that consciousness is always consciousness *of* something, and objects are always object *for* consciousness. When, for example, I perceive my desk, I have a perceptual consciousness of the desk; my consciousness is a consciousness *of* the desk as perceived. What is important to notice here is that the desk is not *inside* consciousness—as dupes of the illusion of immanence would have it—but rather the desk is the object of my perceptual consciousness; my consciousness is *related* to the desk perceptually. In this way, Sartre preserves a form of realism about the world. Consciousness does not create its objects according to its own whims. Rather, objects achieve their status as such insofar as they are the objective correlates of consciousness. There must be something “out there” for consciousness to intend.

How does this work as regards the imagination? For Sartre, an act of imagination is no less a relation than an act of perception. To imagine is simply to relate to an object in a certain way, namely, as imaged. However, the relation that obtains in an imaginative act is peculiar in several distinctive ways. To begin with, the imagination is an essentially negative act. In other words, to imagine is to negate—Sartre’s theses regarding the imagination thus anticipate the claims he will make about consciousness in general in

Being and Nothingness. For Sartre, absence lies at the heart of the imaginary object. Such objects, quite simply, are not there. There are four intentional acts or theses that Sartre argues are characteristic of imagination: “it can posit the object as nonexistent, or as absent, or as existing elsewhere; it can also ‘neutralize’ itself which is to say not posit its object as existent” (Sartre 2010, 12). These four theses, he concludes, share the “common characteristic” that they “include the entire category of negation, though in different degrees. Thus, the negative act is constitutive of the image” (Sartre 2010, 183).

If imaginary objects are not present, or more pressingly, non-existent, how can flesh-and-blood human beings consciously intend them in the precise phenomenological sense? What could be the objective correlate of imaginative consciousness? To answer such questions, Sartre develops the concept of the “analogon.” The analogon serves as a kind of material intermediary between consciousness and the imagined object; it is that which renders the absent object present (or makes it “present-absent” as Sartre sometimes puts it). An analogon would be something like a portrait, photograph, or even musical notes. So, for instance, a portrait of Bob Dylan, or more precisely, the portrait’s material structure (e.g., the canvas, paints, etc.) serves as an analogon for Bob Dylan. The portrait evokes a certain awareness of the absent Bob Dylan; it serves to make him present in a certain way. Importantly, however, the object intended is not the portrait but Dylan himself. Bob Dylan is posited “as imaged.” This captures Sartre’s aim to demonstrate that imagining is a psychical act in the same manner as an act of perception rather than being a degraded form of the latter.

All of this may appear to have little to do with the psychoanalytic notion of fantasy. In this brief sketch of the Sartrean imaginary, there is no mention of unconscious

psychical activity nor of the role that the imaginary might play in the formation of one's self-conception. Nevertheless, the theory of the imaginary that Sartre develops in these two early monographs form the foundation of his philosophical agenda. In much of his subsequent work, the imaginary functions either in the background or, in certain instances, at the forefront of his thought (though, increasingly, without reference to the notions of the analogon or phenomenological intentionality). For example, Sartre states that an important reason he undertook such a lengthy study of Flaubert "is that he represents a sequel to *L'Imaginaire*" (Sartre 2008, 46).⁴⁶ Remarking upon the linkage between the above-sketched theory of the image and his biographical work, he goes on to declare:

You may remember that in my very early book *L'Imaginaire* I tried to show that an image is not a sensation reawakened, or re-worked by the intellect, or even a former perception altered and attenuated by knowledge, but is something entirely different—an absent reality, focused in its absence through what I called an *analogon*...In *L'Imaginaire*, I tried to prove that imaginary objects—images—are an absence. In my book on Flaubert, I am studying imaginary persons—people who like Flaubert act out roles. A man is like a leak of gas, escaping into the imaginary. (Sartre 2008, 46)

In this passage, Sartre hints at the decisive influence of the imaginary on the life projects of human subjects. Both of his most extensive biographies, *Saint Genet* and *The Family Idiot*, explore in depth the consequences that the "choice of the imaginary" has on the "roles" that one may live out. This suggests that Sartre's discussion of the imaginary goes beyond a mere analysis of the act of imagination. One crucial feature shared in common between both images and persons is absence; they are characterized by absence or lack. This basic thesis is held by both Sartre and Lacan, and, as we shall see, it accounts for

⁴⁶ Interestingly, he also claims *The Family Idiot* to be a sequel to *Search for a Method*, the relatively short complement to *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (Sartre 1981b, ix).

both human freedom as well as the possibility of becoming trapped in a certain fantasmatic conception of oneself. But what I am claiming is a fundamental agreement between Sartre and Lacan on this matter is not at all apparent.

Given the antagonism between existentialism and structuralism (of all stripes), at first glance, it may appear that there is little room for agreement, and many of the thinkers who have written on the Sartre-Lacan rapport concur with this negative assessment. Betty Cannon is one of the most stringent Sartrean critics of Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis. She takes these apparent theoretical tensions between Sartre and Lacan (not without some justification) at face value as indicating that there is indeed an insuperable conceptual chasm separating the philosophical commitments of Sartre and Lacan. Her 1991 book *Sartre and Psychoanalysis: An Existentialist Challenge to Clinical Metatheory*, aims, as its subtitle indicates, to provide an existentialist rebuttal and critique of traditional Freudian psychoanalysis and some of its contemporary variants. Therein, Lacan receives almost as much of Cannon's critical attention as does Freud himself, with three whole chapters devoted to an explanation and critique of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

There are a couple reasons Cannon pays so much attention to Lacanian theory. To begin with, she acknowledges that there are at least some conceptual similarities between their respective projects: "For Lacan as for Sartre, the ego is an object based on a fundamental illusion...rather than a subject or seat of reality orientation" (Cannon 2016, 15). She continues along these lines: "both describe the ego as a false representation of the self with which consciousness has 'hypnotized' itself. In rejecting the idea that the task of psychoanalysis is to build a better ego, neither finds appealing the rejection of spontaneity implied in adhering to the 'reality principle over the 'pleasure principle'"

(Cannon 2016, 16). The similarities between Sartre’s and Lacan’s accounts of ego and subject formation is perhaps the most remarked upon facet of their theoretical relationship, with a good deal of scholarship on this topic focusing on precisely this dimension of their thought.⁴⁷ But, Cannon cites other similarities, too: “Like Sartre, [Lacan] objects to any attempt on the part of the analyst to colonize the analysand by substituting his or her own reified ego for that of the analysand. And like Sartre, he believes that the only legitimate position the analyst may take toward the analysand is a position of ‘ignorance’” (Cannon 1991, 223). She highlights Sartre’s concern, expressed in his project of existential psychoanalysis sketched in *Being and Nothingness* and his assessment of the encounter between an anonymous analysand and his analyst in “The Man with the Tape-recorder,” to avoid what he sees as the problematic power dynamic between patient and analyst. This same concern runs throughout Lacan’s analytic teachings as well. For Cannon, however, this is all veneer. As she puts it, the similarities between Sartre and Lacan “are more apparent than real” (Cannon 1991, 224). Why does she maintain this view?

As should be obvious at this point, the apparent freedom-denying nature of Lacan’s structuralism is to blame. For Cannon, despite certain specific points of agreement, the nucleus of Lacan’s theory remains a structuralism that refuses to admit the freedom of the subject, and this taints whatever claims may appear to be shared in common between Lacan and Sartre. On her account, if Freud was a biological reductionist—there are many arguments to be made against this picture of Freud, but such arguments are well beyond the scope of this chapter—then Lacan is a social

⁴⁷ Examples of this scholarship were referenced in the previous chapter.

constructivist, with constructivism, as itself a form of reductionism, being no more amenable to an existentialist philosophy of freedom than biological reductionism. All of this is not to mention the fact that Lacan, of course, continues to employ the distinctively psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious (upon which he puts a structuralist twist), a concept that Cannon, in good Sartrean fashion, spends much time railing against in the early pages of *Sartre and Psychoanalysis*. In the previous chapter, I spelled out in detail how Lacan's conception of the unconscious-structured-like-a-language overcomes Sartre's own objections to the unconscious and how it may, in fact, be operative in Sartre's own work. But, there are still aspects of Lacan's structuralist approach that remain to be dealt with, aspects that Cannon views as undeniably hostile to Sartrean existentialism. The remaining section of this chapter and the subsequent concluding chapter are devoted to addressing this conflict and drawing some surprising connections along the way.

§5 Sartrean Structuralist Sympathies

Where, then, do Sartre's and Lacan's claims converge? To begin answering this question in earnest, it will be helpful to gloss the ways in which Sartre's own work prefigures many of the theoretical developments most commonly associated with structuralism (specifically of the Lacanian psychoanalytic variety), an intellectual movement that is often regarded as having been developed in stark opposition to Sartrean existentialism. As I indicated above, the popular conception of Sartre's philosophical corpus takes it as an almost simple-minded account of human freedom, lacking the nuance and subtlety required for an accurate presentation of the actual situation of human

subjects. As Louis Althusser once pithily remarked about his great philosophical adversary, “[Sartre] is the author of wonderful philosophical novels such as *Being and Nothingness* and the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*” (Althusser 1993, 176). But, though as I claim, his social ontology is nascent in certain early texts, an emphasis on the conditions placed upon the free subject by its surrounding cultural milieu marks much of his middle and late-period works.

Sartre’s 1952 biography of the French writer and poet Jean Genet, *Saint Genet: Comédien et Martyr*, is perhaps one of the best places to see the extent to which a Sartrean account of subjectivity resonates with a Lacanian one regarding the structural influence of imaginative life. This biography was initially published as an introduction to Genet’s complete works.⁴⁸ Therein, Sartre renders Genet a patient on his existential-psychoanalytic “couch.” He recounts in existentialist fashion the decisive moment that Genet became a thief. Much of the first part of *Saint Genet* is occupied with an evocative literary description of Genet’s “metamorphosis” into a criminal. The two chapters comprising Part One of the work can be read as a kind of empirical case study elaborating Sartre’s theoretical conception of “the look” as it is described in *Being and Nothingness*. It focuses in great detail upon Genet’s private, imaginary world, a world in which he alone exists more or less happily until the veil of this world is pierced by another individual (in this way, Part One may similarly be read as elaborating another of Sartre’s famous dictums: “hell is other people”).

As presented by Sartre, Genet is made aware of the world outside himself in a brutal way when he is caught stealing by his adoptive parents. In one of the most striking

⁴⁸ In keeping with Sartre’s seeming inability to stop writing, this “introduction” comes to 625 pages (575 in the French).

passages in the entirety of the Sartrean corpus, Sartre relates the moment that Genet became who he was, a life-altering and orienting moment that would guide all of his subsequent decisions and choices: “The child was playing in the kitchen...A voice declares publicly: ‘You’re a thief.’ The child is ten years old” (Sartre 2012, 17).⁴⁹ Sartre indicates that Genet’s theft is an existential act that establishes his very subjectivity, and importantly, this act has its roots in the imaginary.

In the case of Genet, however, his thefts, far from challenging property, affirm it. This child who has enough to eat but whom society keeps at a distance wants, by means of a solitary act, to integrate himself into the community. He is aiming at the impossible. His austere and feverish quest for Being involves an imaginary satisfaction only. *Thus is born that most peculiar nature which carries out a real operation whose aim and meaning lie in unreality.* (Sartre 2012, 13; emphasis added)

According to Sartre, Genet’s thievery is the result of his desire to be a part of the society that has cast him aside, a desire to possess the things that have been denied him.

These passages highlight the way in which the recognition of others, the imposition of an identity from “outside,” plays a formative role in fashioning one’s ego. Sounding here at his most Lacanian, Sartre writes that “everything comes to us from others” (Sartre 2012, 6). One of the central questions animating the present discussion is: how far is Sartre willing to go with this “everything”?

As already indicated in these brief passages, *Saint Genet* seems to offer a picture of human subjectivity that departs in significant ways from that presented in *Being and*

⁴⁹ Lacan approvingly cites Sartre’s phenomenological description of the look of the Other and the consequent experience of shame in his first seminar, even describing it as “essential reading” for aspiring analysts: “I cannot refrain at this point from referring to the author who has described this place in the most magisterial manner—I am referring to Jean-Paul Sartre, and the phenomenology of the apprehension of others in the third part of *Being and Nothingness*...The entire phenomenology of shame, of modesty, of prestige, of the specific fear engendered by the gaze, is quite admirably described there, and I recommend you to look it up in Sartre’s book. It is essential reading for an analyst, above all given the pass that analysis has come to, forgetting intersubjectivity even in the perverse experience, where it is so firmly woven into a register in which you have to recognize the plane of the imaginary” (Lacan 1988a, 215).

Nothingness. Underscoring this point, Simone de Beauvoir remarks in one of her correspondences with Sartre that in *Saint Genet*, “there’s scarcely an ounce of freedom left to man anymore. You give a very great importance to the individual’s upbringing and to his whole conditioning. You speak about scores of people, not only about Genet, and there’s scarcely one of them who appears as a free subject” (Beauvoir 1984, 354). Sartre nevertheless responds that freedom remains an essential part of his conception of subjectivity: “Yet even so, that homosexual child, beaten, raped, and overwhelmed by young sodomites and treated rather like a toy by the toughs around him, did become the writer Jean Genet. There was a transformation here that was the work of freedom. Freedom is the metamorphosis of Jean Genet, the unhappy homosexual child, into Jean Genet, the great writer...” (Beauvoir 1984, 354). However, it seems clear that, at the very least, freedom plays a less decisive role here than the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness* would have it.

Commenting on the exchange between Sartre and Beauvoir referenced above, Thomas Flynn highlights the extent to which Sartre, at this stage of his thinking, has ceded ground to human situatedness. He notes that this exchange foregrounds a tension that exists in Sartre’s work from the very beginning:

Echoing his earlier claims about the important role of ‘situation’ in conceiving a revolutionary philosophy (‘Materialism and Revolution’) and the decisive function of the ‘bases and structures’ of choice in fostering an agent’s action (*Anti-Semite and Jew*), this exchange between Beauvoir and Sartre underscores again the ambiguity of the ‘given’ and the ‘taken’ (facticity and transcendence) that has plagued Sartre’s thought since [*Being and Nothingness*]. The force of circumstance will continue to grow until it gains nearly ‘equal importance’ with transcendence in the concepts of ‘free organic praxis’ and the dialectic of the *Critique*. (Flynn 2014, 276)

It is interesting to note that it is precisely when Sartre begins to put his existential psychoanalysis into “practice” that the concept of “situation” begins to rival the importance of freedom/transcendence in his work. In this way, Badiou’s efforts (which are themselves motivated by Lacan’s work) to synthesize Sartrean existentialism and Althusserian structuralism into a form of compatibilism are not without precedent in Sartre’s own thought.⁵⁰ For Žižek, too, Lacan represents a kind of middle path between Sartrean freedom and Lévi-Straussian and Althusserian forms of freedom-denying structuralism.⁵¹ But, as per one of my central claims in this chapter, Sartre represents less of an extreme in this divide than it might at first appear. Indeed, many of the modifications that Sartre makes to his conception of subjectivity in his later work signal some overt structuralist sympathies such that he can walk down this middle path alongside Lacan, if not in lockstep, then at least at a similar, comfortable pace.

Sartre’s 1960 *magnum opus*, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, elaborates more fully the theoretical concepts that are still being worked out in *Saint Genet*. With the *Critique*, the structuralist undertones that inflect much of the analysis in the earlier biography become much more explicit. A new conceptual arsenal that both compliments and undercuts some of the conceptual apparatus of *Being and Nothingness* is introduced. Concepts such as *praxis*, *practico-inert*, and *counterfinality* designate the much greater role assigned to “situation” in Sartre’s thought. For this reason, many philosophers have argued that the *Critique* and the relatively short *Search for a Method*⁵² mark a complete

⁵⁰ Badiou 2005, 241-243.

⁵¹ Žižek 2014, 240; Johnston 2018b, 14-15.

⁵² *Search for a Method* was initially published in two parts in 1957 in the September and October editions of *Les Temps modernes*. The *Critique of Dialectical Reason* was intended to supply the philosophical foundation for the theses elaborated in the shorter work, but *Search* was published first for fear that it would seem as if “the mountain had brought forth a mouse” (Barnes 1968, ix). See Contat and Rybalka 1974.

rupture with his vintage existentialist texts.⁵³ For reasons that will be elaborated shortly, I do not share this view. Rather, I contend that Sartre's later work represents more of an evolution than a radical break. I thus share Flynn's view apropos the relation between *Being and Nothingness* and *Critique of Dialectical Reason* that "The later work moved beyond but not counter to the earlier" (Flynn 1984, xii). However, for present purposes, I do want to emphasize some of the major differences between the concepts of the *Critique* and *Being and Nothingness*. In particular, Sartre offers numerous examples that perfectly capture some of the effects of the Lacanian symbolic order and its role in the constitution of fantasy.

One phenomenon that is emphasized to a greater extent in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* that falls by the wayside in *Being and Nothingness* and other early existentialist texts is the recalcitrance of material exteriority and the influence this exerts on one's possibilities. For example, Sartre offers extensive commentary on the autonomy-squelching forces of exploited labor under capitalist conditions. In chapter three of Book One of the *Critique* (entitled "Matter as Totalised Totality: A First Encounter with Necessity"), he approvingly cites several of Marx's reflections on class consciousness in *The German Ideology*. Aligning his own concerns with those of Marx, he reflects, in a particularly pertinent passage, on the situation of a woman laboring in a Dop shampoo factory. Sartre, in a Marxian vein, describes the way in which the woman's entire horizon of possibilities is circumscribed and determined by her position as a member of the working class: "the working woman is expected in bourgeois society, her place is marked in advance by the capitalist 'process', by national production requirements and by the

⁵³ Warnock 1965, Kline 1967, Sheridan 1973.

particular needs of the Dop shampoo factory” (Sartre 2004, 232). In a statement reminiscent of Lacan’s according to which the subject is nearly totally shaped by the defiles of the symbolic order, he continues:

Her life and destiny can be determined *before she gets her job*, and this prefabricated reality must be conceived in the mode of *being*, in the pure materiality of the in-itself. The role and attitude imposed on her by her work and consumption have never even been the object of an *intention*; they have been created as the negative aspect of an ensemble of directed activities; and as these activities are teleological, the unity of this prefabrication remains human, as a sort of negative reflection of ends pursued outside it, or, in other words, as a result of *counterfinality*. *At the same time*, this material apparatus in which everything is meticulously controlled as if by a sadistic will *is* the working woman herself. (Sartre 2004, 233)

For Sartre, the material conditions in which one lives mold one’s subjectivity right down to one’s very being. In this way, the quasi-atomist view of the subject put forth in *Being and Nothingness* is discarded in favor of a more socially conditioned one. One’s place in relation to that of others molds and constrains one’s possibilities.

Significantly, given Sartre’s phenomenological background, he states that the factory worker’s role here has “never been the object of an intention” (Sartre 2004, 233). In good structuralist fashion, Sartre claims that the position of the working class is the effect of structural forces operating above the level of individual, conscious intention. The factory worker does not, through an act of will, choose to be a member of the working class. Nor, for that matter, did members of the capitalist ruling class decide individually to divide socio-economic life along classist lines (though perhaps some of them had this outcome in mind). For Sartre, this is the result of the long history of human praxis working back upon itself. The history of human praxis leaves a kind of residue in the material world that accumulates and calcifies and can work to thwart future human projects (this is the Sartrean *practico-inert*). Indeed, in many cases, as Sartre demonstrates

via numerous examples throughout the *Critique*, the exteriorized residue of praxis often runs precisely counter to human intentions. As expressed in his concept of counterfinality, Sartre's claims along these lines express a bit of clichéd wisdom à la the remark according to which "the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry." Sartre thus builds into his later conceptual architecture a way to account for the manner in which the individual subject is fashioned in substantial ways by the surrounding culture. This leads Peter Caws to remark that Sartre's later position "would emerge into a full-fledged Structuralism if its emphasis were ever so slightly shifted" (Caws 1992, 309).⁵⁴ We can begin to see here that the quintessential philosopher of human freedom shares more than a little in common with the structuralist Lacan of the 1950s and early 60s.

To relate this back to the topic of fantasy/the imaginary, these deterministic material conditions have implications even for one's imaginative life. Continuing to elaborate the constrained possibilities of the working class, Sartre proceeds to highlight the way in which the sexual fantasies of factory workers are themselves conditioned by their material conditions:

When semi-automatic machines were first introduced, investigations showed that specialised women workers indulged in sexual fantasies as they worked: they recalled their bedrooms, their beds, the previous night—everything that specially concerns a person in the isolation of the self-enclosed couple. But it was the machine in them which was dreaming of love: the kind of attention demanded by their work allowed them neither distraction (thinking of something else) nor total mental application (thinking would slow down their movements). The machine demands and creates in the worker an inverted semi-automatism which complements it: an explosive mixture of unconsciousness and vigilance. The mind is absorbed but not used; it is concentrated in *lateral* supervision; and the

⁵⁴ In keeping with my view that Sartre's later work does not break from his earlier work but rather issues from it, Sartre's earliest texts themselves foreshadow some of the themes that would preoccupy structuralists and poststructuralists. As Frederic Jameson remarks, "it seems to be the first Sartre, of *The Transcendence of the Ego*, which has again achieved philosophical actuality, in its insistence on the impersonality of consciousness and its displacement of the 'self' and of personal identity: this short essay indeed may be said to have heralded that structuralist and post-structuralist 'death of the subject' which is still very much with us today" (Jameson 2016, 127).

body functions ‘mechanically’ while yet remaining *under surveillance*. Conscious life overflows the job; the minutes of false distraction have to be lived one by one; they must be lived without concentration, and there can be no attention to detail, or to systematic ideas; otherwise the lateral function of supervision would be impeded, and movements would be slowed down. It is therefore appropriate to sink into passivity. (Sartre 2004, 233)

In this case, rather than being a flight from the constraints of socio-economic life (with this being but one facet of the broader symbolic order qua domain of culture), such fantasies are in fact mere expressions of one’s circumscribed position. Imaginative life has been colonized by the vagaries of the classist structure of the culture in which one is situated. One’s structural position within the symbolic order places limits on one’s imaginative life. Indeed, in Sartre’s astute diagnosis, the domain of the imaginary can be coopted and put to work in the service of the very forces of one’s oppression.

But, the structuring effects of the cultural domain pierce further than the conscious daydreams referenced in the above-quoted passage, and this is where the concerns of Sartre and Lacan begin to converge most explicitly. In chapter one, I highlighted the affinity between Sartre and Lacan regarding their respective notions of the fundamental project and fundamental fantasy. What both of these notions share in common is the schematic function they perform for the subject. Outlining the notion of fantasy in psychoanalysis, Žižek remarks:

...fantasy mediates between the formal symbolic structure and the positivity of the objects we encounter in reality: it provides a ‘scheme’ according to which certain positive objects in reality can function as objects of desire, filling in the empty places opened up by the formal symbolic structure. To put it in somewhat simplified terms: fantasy does not mean that, when I desire a strawberry cake and cannot get it in reality, I fantasize about eating it; the problem is, rather, *how do I know that I desire a strawberry cake in the first place?* This is what fantasy tells me. (Žižek 2006, 40)

This passage echoes a statement he makes earlier in *The Ticklish Subject*. Commenting on the “out-of-joint” character of the relationship between subject and world, Žižek

remarks: "...the fundamental fantasy [is that] by means of which the subject 'makes sense of'—acquires the coordinates of—the situation into which he is thrown [*geworfen*], in which he finds himself, disorientated and lost" (Žižek 2009, 13). In this context, Žižek casts the fundamental fantasy as a kind of Kantian-style synthetic activity whereby the subject achieves a certain coherence for his/her reality. There is thus a fantasmatic template or screen that endows objects with their particular significance for an individual. The life of the subject is given its texture by means of fantasy. Objects appear as desirable because of their fantasy structure. So, where does this fantasmatic template originate? How does one come to have the particular fantasmatic view on the world that one has? For both Sartre and Lacan, the answer seems to be, at least in part, through others (or, to put in Lacanian parlance, through the big Other qua symbolic order).

Saint Genet extensively elaborates this view. For the wayward Genet for whom "everything" comes from others, his world is molded by the judgment issued by his adoptive parents. His criminality, according to Sartre, is an attempt to occupy the position carved out for him in the symbolic order. Sartre writes of Genet's struggle to deal with the identity that has been foisted onto him:

Here we have the key to Genet. This is what must be understood first: Genet is a child who has been convinced that he is, in his very depths, *Another than Self*. His life will henceforth be only the history of his attempts to perceive this Other in himself and to look it in the face—that is, to have an immediate and subjective intuition of his wickedness, to *feel* he is wicked—or to flee it. But this phantom—precisely because it is nothing—will not let itself be grasped. When the child turns to it, it disappears. When Genet tries to run away from it, suddenly it is there, like Carmen's rebellious bird. (Sartre 2012, 35)

Sartre describes the young Genet as an individual hell-bent on fashioning himself into the image that others have of him. He is aiming to fit the Other's frame as closely as possible:

To live is now to watch himself live. It is to acquire a deeper understanding of his condition every single instant, as a whole and in its details, in order to assume it unreservedly, whatever it may be. He takes his bearings every second. Duality is the permanent structure of his consciousness. He seeks himself and wills himself. His spontaneity dwindles. To feel and to watch himself feel are to him one and the same. He inspects his feelings and his behavior in order to discover in them that dark vein, the will to evil. He checks them or drives them to extremes. *He works away at himself in order to correspond more and more closely, every day, to others' opinion of him.* (Sartre 2012, 55-56; emphasis added)

These passages capture the way in which Genet lives out the role of criminal assigned to him from an early age. To relate Sartre's account of Genet's upbringing to the discussion of Lacan above, it is as if Genet is trying to supply an answer to the question "What does the Other want from me?" On the basis of the judgment of his parents, Genet believes he has figured out the answer, namely, to be a criminal, to be evil. And he resolves to play this part for the Other.

As already indicated in chapter one, both Sartre and Lacan emphasize the "incompleteness" of the human subject. That is, for both thinkers, the human subject is constituted around a fundamental lack. This prompts the subject to try to compensate for this lack, to fill in the "holes" that riddle his/her being in an effort to establish who and what one is. The principal recourse the subject has for "patching" these existential holes is fantasy. As stated above, fantasies serve to fill out gaps in one's knowledge about oneself and others. By supplying the content to complete one's picture of oneself, fantasies thereby anchor into place one's self-identity/self-conception:

...Sartre's analyses isolate as a crucial existential topic the question of the self's origins...The psychoanalytic theory of the 'fundamental fantasy'...directly grapples with this Sartrean theme. The basic idea is that the subject creates (unconscious) fantasies that 'fill in the gaps,' the necessary holes, of its ontogenetic, life historical experience as regards, for example, its birth and what transpired before this birth. The fashion in which the individual thus embellishes the tableau of his/her selfhood has, in the psychoanalytic view, decisive consequences for later psychical developments. (Johnston 2002)

As elaborated in the preceding paragraphs, a significant portion of this fantasmatic content is provided by one's relations with others. Recall that fantasy activity is first catalyzed by one's attempts to figure out what the Other wants. The fantasies that fill out this epistemological gap are, at least initially, efforts to conform to (what one fantasizes is) the Other's desire. Sartre and Lacan share this central thesis in common.

This chapter has argued that there is much more shared theoretical between Lacanian psychoanalytic structuralism and Sartre's existentialist account of the ontogenetic development of the subject than it might at first appear. Both thinkers argue for the decisive, determinative influence of one's cultural situation. One's position in the symbolic order exerts a tremendous gravitational pull on what one is able to do and to be. And it serves as the point of origin for what Sartre and Lacan call the fundamental project and fundamental fantasy, respectively. As I have shown above, this operates as a kind of anchor point for one's self-identity/self-conception. In other words, it can serve to further entrench the subject in the space carved out for it by others and further circumscribe the subject's possibilities. But, does the subject have a say in how much is "taken" from what is "given"? Is there an element of choice in this process? Sartre hints at this even as he elaborates the extensive influence one's situation has on one's choices.

After examining the role assigned to Genet in the first part of his biography, Sartre proceeds to move in a more familiar existentialist direction, namely, by showing how Genet makes his role his own. Indeed, on the very first page of Part Two of *Saint Genet*, Sartre reiterates a point he famously made several years prior in the lecture "Existentialism is a Humanism": "We are not lumps of clay, and what is important is not what people make of us but what we ourselves make of what they have made of us"

(Sartre 2012, 49). The responsibility one bears for choosing who and what one is is reflected in the title of the first chapter of Part Two, "I Will Be the Thief." Marking a shift from being fixed and determined by the suffocating look of his parents, Genet assumes responsibility for this very position and chooses to assume it with all of its consequences. This suggests that, despite being assigned a role or a position within the symbolic order, an element of choice remains open to the subject as regards the manner in which he/she will live this role. The extent of this freedom will be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter Four

The Fantastic Structure of Freedom

§1 From Freedom to Determinism and Back Again

In May of 1968, the streets of Paris erupted. What began as a student protest at the University of Nanterre (catalyzed by, among other things, the University administration's refusal to allow male students to visit the female-only floors of the dormitory) developed into a full-fledged revolt in which 9 million students and workers, including everyone from physicians to taxi drivers, went on strike.⁵⁵ On the academic philosophical front—a realm admittedly somewhat removed from the sometimes violent events taking place on the streets—this event came to represent the divide between existentialism and structuralism. At that time, structuralism had almost completely overtaken existentialism as the philosophy *du jour*.⁵⁶ But, during this brief period of intense unrest, the ideas of engagement and freedom that form the cornerstones of existentialism once again became the central concerns of the French people. Indeed, the first hints of structuralism's own decline in popularity began to appear at this time. Signaling the philosophical divide between the existentialist and structuralist camps, “an angry French student scrawled across the blackboard of one of the classrooms at the Sorbonne a sentence that immediately became a slogan for student discontent: ‘Structures don’t march in the streets’” (Copjec 2015, 1).⁵⁷

⁵⁵ See Gerassi 2009, 271n.1.

⁵⁶ Sartre's “existentialism was felt to have been superseded philosophically by structuralism and its derivatives” (Reader 1993, 63).

⁵⁷ Graffiti was used often during the events of May '68 to decry the anti-humanist conclusions of structuralism (and the walls and blackboards of the Sorbonne were apparently a popular canvas). As Reader reports, another piece of graffiti scrawled on a wall at that institution of higher learning read “‘Althusser-à-rien’/‘Althusser is useless’” (Reader 1993, 63).

This statement highlights what many at the time saw as the triumph of the existentialist conception of the free and engaged subject over against the abstract, formalized, and anti-humanist tendencies of the structuralists: “These latter [structuralists] with their dismissal of historicism—thus, too often, of history—and their undermining of the importance of purposive human action, seemed in many ways out of keeping with the *Zeitgeist* of May” (Reader 1993, 63). In fact, the events of May 1968 have been dubbed a “Sartrean revolution”: “The May Movement has sometimes been described as a ‘Sartrian’ revolution, and it has been said that it was ‘structuralism’s death warrant’” (Quoted in Contat and Rybalka 1974, 523). The French newspaper *Le Monde* likewise identifies Sartre as the most direct inspiration for the student-led revolt:

How was it possible for a riot to produce, in the brief space of a springtime, this sudden flowering? There is no need to look to Marx and Marcuse for an answer. The effects of it were prophesied eight years ago by a philosopher whom structuralism buried a little too soon... The students who sparked the outbreak of the revolution of the spring of 1968 were shaped by, if not this second Sartrian philosophy, at least a dialectical philosophy of history. May of 1968 is the historical upsurge of a ‘wild-flowering’ force of negation. It is the inroad of a ‘Sartrian’ [*sic*] freedom, not that of the isolated individual but the creative freedom of groups. (Quoted in Contat and Rybalka 1974, 523-524)

In the eyes of many, this very concrete instance of revolt reflected the more abstract theoretical debates playing out on the philosophical plane. The emphasis placed on structures by philosophers who, in Michel Foucault’s famous distinction, were dubbed “philosophers of the concept” as opposed to “philosophers of the subject”⁵⁸ seemed to

⁵⁸ For Foucault, there is a “dividing line...that separates a philosophy of experience, of meaning, of the subject, and a philosophy of knowledge, of rationality, and of the concept. On one side, a filiation which is that of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty; and then another, which is that of Jean Cavailles, Gaston Bachelard, Alexandre Koyré, and Canguilhem” (Foucault 1985, 466). The emphasis placed upon science by the likes of Koyré and Canguilhem was inherited by Althusser and his followers who sought to grant to scientific concepts a sense of objectivity that outstrips the subject. As I indicated in the previous chapter, Lacan, whom it would appear upon a superficial glance belongs squarely in the camp of the “philosophies of the concept,” is actually a kind of bridge between the two approaches. Precisely in bridging this gap, Lacan intersects with the thought of Sartre. Elisabeth Roudinesco writes: “Lacan’s

fail to capture the active engagement of the students and other protestors.⁵⁹ How could structuralism, which denied the efficacy of the traditional philosophical subject, account for what was happening in the streets?

Of course, to some extent, the notion that the events of May '68 reflected the philosophical debates of the times is a fabrication. In her biography of Sartre, Annie Cohen-Solal points out, "The leaders of May 1968 saw Sartre as a writer, no longer an initiator and even less a mentor" (Cohen-Solal 1987, 458). Indeed, apart from media reports, many of the individuals directly involved in the protests and strikes did not claim *any* single source of inspiration. As Daniel Cohen-Bendit, one of the student leaders of the protests who had a lengthy conversation with both Beauvoir and Sartre about the revolt, remarked, "Some [protestors] had read Marx, of course, maybe Bakunin, and, among contemporary authors, Althusser, Mao, Guevara, Henri Lefebvre. Almost all the political militants of March the 22 Movement read Sartre. But there isn't any author who can be taken to be the inspiration of the movement" (Quoted in Contat and Rybalka 1974, 524). Nevertheless, Paris in May of 1968 does serve as an exemplary test case for the major themes and ideas developed by these two intellectual movements. It is hard not to see the stakes of the debate represented in the events of May '68, regardless of whether existentialist and structuralist ideals were explicitly endorsed by the strikers and protestors themselves.

position between these two filiations [i.e., philosophies of the subject and philosophies of the concept] would remain paradoxical: in his nonphenomenological reformulation of the unconscious he showed that he was choosing the second, but his constant interrogation of the status of subject shows that he did not break cleanly with the first (through it in fact his discourse intersected with Sartre's)" (Roudinesco 2008, 39).

⁵⁹ Of course, it could be argued that the overarching systems posited by the structuralists won in the end since the de Gaullist order ultimately prevailed: "The paradox that so vast a social and cultural movement led to so massive a reassertion of the political status quo underlies Edgar Morin's view that: 'What we have to understand is at once the immensity and the insignificance of May 68'" (Reader 1993, 1-2).

In addition to the philosophical motivations that were said to underlie the Paris revolt being somewhat embellished by the media, this event also calls attention to the fact that the way in which the dispute between existentialism and structuralism is typically cast (with the former on the side of agency and freedom and the latter denying the very existence of agency and freedom) is too quick and easy. As already indicated in the previous chapter, certain self-proclaimed structuralists were explicitly pursuing a philosophical conception of subjectivity despite popular opinion regarding structuralism as ardently hostile to the very notion of subjectivity. Indeed, certain structuralist texts provide rich contributions to a discussion of freedom. Part of the case I have been making up to this point (a case that will be made more explicit in the present chapter) is that Lacan is chief among these structuralists. As we have seen, Lacan's conception of the subject shares much in common with (if it is not indebted to) Sartre's philosophical understanding of subjectivity.⁶⁰ Furthermore, Sartre was not averse to the notion that structures permeate the lives of individual subjects. In many of his later works, he highlights the profound effects that cultural objects like language and institutions can have on an individual.⁶¹ In many ways, this tension between, on the one hand, the

⁶⁰ In a 1971 interview, Michel Rybalka and Michel Contat highlight this resonance between Sartre and Lacan. They state, "According to Lacan, the self is an imaginary construction, a fiction that is identified after the fact. This is what he calls the mirror stage... Now your description of the Flaubertian self seems to correspond completely to Lacan's theory..." (Sartre 1977, 117). Sartre responds, "I was not thinking of Lacan when I described Flaubert's make-up—to tell the truth, I do not know Lacan's work very well—but my description is not far from his conceptions" (Sartre 1977, 117).

⁶¹ It is important to stress, however, that human agency always remains for Sartre the source or cause of such structural forces. His concept of the practico-inert best captures this thesis. The practico-inert designates objective matter (including products like books, films, homes, etc.) as well as cultural institutions such as legal systems or universities wherein the work of human praxis is present. That is, these objects are the result of human intention and the product of human work. But, once these objects are produced, once they become exteriorized and objective, they "work back" upon the human subjects who produced them. The practico-inert itself comes to act as a kind of cause along the lines of Althusserian "structural causality." The major difference, of course, is that for Althusser, structural causality is not reducible to human agency; structural causes function independently of human subjects. Whereas for Sartre, structural causes are set in motion, if indirectly, by human agents. Sartre states his position thus: "I

freedom of the subject and, on the other, this freedom's circumscription by various big Others lies at the heart of both Sartrean existentialism and Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis.

What Sartre calls "the imaginary" and what Freud and Lacan refer to as fantasy exhibits all of the many facets of this tension. It is at once an expression of the freedom of the subject and of its determination. The fantasy lives of individuals can be and are coopted and colonized by various socio-symbolic elements. We can observe the effects of this kind of colonization in the subjects of Sartre's biographies as well in the case histories detailing the treatments of Freud's and Lacan's analysands. Psychological symptoms of various sorts are generated by fantasy.

In a way, the events of May '68 mirror the intra- and inter-psychical conflicts described by Sartre, Freud, and Lacan. There is a constant tug of war between the expression of subjective freedom and the forces both internal and external that would stifle it. Freedom briefly erupts only to be quelled once more, with the established order reinstated. May '68 reflects the genuine difficulty of concretely realizing freedom. Perhaps it is for this reason that Sartre's conception of freedom becomes much more measured in his late works. In a 1970 interview, he states that freedom is "the small movement which makes a totally conditioned social being someone who does not render back completely what his conditioning has given him" (Sartre 1970, 22). It is fitting that this claim reads as a modified version of his well-known dictum, quoted several times throughout this dissertation, that freedom is what you do with what has been done to you.

am in complete agreement [with Marxist determinists] that the social facts have their own structures and laws which dominate individuals, but I only see in this the reply of worked matter to the agents who work it" (Sartre 2008, 55).

It suggests the gradual evolution of his views on the nature of human freedom while not giving up the core idea. It also emphasizes better than the original formulation that freedom is hard won, that one cannot help but be shaped and formed by social forms of conditioning, and that to throw off the yoke of this conditioning is a real feat.

This insight is reflected in psychoanalytic theory, too. This perhaps helps account for Sartre's fascination with psychoanalysis and why he found it so difficult to fully assimilate psychoanalytic theory into his own philosophical framework. One way to think about the accounts of subjectivity developed by Sartre, Freud, and Lacan is as offering the opposing poles of a compatibilist conception of freedom. On the one hand, Sartre represents, at least toward the beginning of his career, the pole of absolute freedom. The subject, from an early Sartrean perspective, is an uninhibited, pure freedom. On the other hand, a Lacanianism heavily informed by Freud represents, at least toward the beginning of Lacan's career, a position of total determinism. The subject, from an early Lacanian perspective, is wholly engulfed and determined by the vagaries of the symbolic order (Lacan, compared to Freud, puts much less emphasis on the heteronomy of biology, focusing instead on the influence of culture qua symbolic order). The account presented in this dissertation presents Sartre and Lacan as being on paths of convergence. From the beginnings of their careers, the directional arrows of their thought move toward one another.

In what follows, the emphasis will be on the dimension of freedom in Sartre's and Lacan's work. The thesis developed in chapter three maintains that Sartre's own philosophy prefigures and is in accord with some of the structuralist ideals that inform the Lacanian psychoanalytic approach. For both Sartre and Lacan, fantasies play a schematic,

organizing role in the practical lives of individuals. Problems emerge when these fantasies become rigid structures from which the subject seemingly cannot escape. In this way, a fantasy may create the illusion that, to put it in Sartrean terms, the subject is an “in-itself.” That is, an individual comes to see him-/herself as being what he/she is merely “playing at being,” à la the waiter in Sartre’s famous example from *Being and Nothingness*; the subject cannot see him-/herself other than the way in which the fantasy dictates. The rigidity exhibited by fantasies that have become psychically entrenched in this way dramatically limits an individual’s possibilities. Do Sartre and Lacan offer any theoretical resources for being able to conceive of the subject’s liberation from oppressive fantasy structures?

To answer this question, the present chapter will circle back to material established in chapter one and cash the promissory note offered at its conclusion. Sartre and Lacan, when read together, offer a unique perspective on the role of the imaginary in realizing human freedom. The minimal distance that both thinkers contend separates the subject from itself lies at the heart of the account of freedom presented in this chapter. For it is that distance that makes imagining possible to begin with. And it is that space that accounts for the fact that the consequences of fantasizing can be both liberating and determining or oppressive.

Section two offers an in-depth analysis of the relation between fantasy and psychopathology. I show the ways in which fantasies underlie the symptoms of neurosis dealt with in psychoanalysis. In this section, I also discuss the ways in which Sartre theorizes these phenomena thereby demonstrating the similarities between his approach and a Freudian-Lacanian one. In the third section, I present two psychoanalytic case

histories. The first is an analysis of Sartre's biography of Gustave Flaubert; the second is drawn from a Lacanian psychoanalyst. In both cases, the subject's agency is implicated in the symptoms, indicating that there is a degree of freedom even in circumstances that appear to be wholly out of one's control. Finally, in section four, I integrate the accounts of Sartre and Lacan by way of an analysis of the rapport between the Sartrean elucidation of the fundamental project and the Lacanian traversing of the fantasy.

§2 Fantasy and Psychopathology

The previous chapter analyzed the schematic and determinative role fantasy plays in psychological life. For both Sartre and Lacan, the imaginary/fantasmatic conception one forms of oneself establishes a kind of template according to which the subject lives his/her life. But this constitutive feature of psychological life can be problematic. For this fantasmatic template can come to form a rigid structure in which the subject becomes stuck. Indeed, as I shall argue, part of the problem in these scenarios is that the subject's own responsibility for sharing in the creation of the fantasy has been lost or forgotten.

The pathogenesis of fantasies is one crucial aspect of the psychoanalytic concept of fantasy that has yet to be discussed in adequate depth. An individual who has become psychically "glued" to a certain fantasy (or web of fantasies) may engage in repetitive patterns of thought and behavior that are destructive and/or harmful to his/her well-being. Furthermore, as part and parcel of Lacan's structuralism, the concept of fantasy appears to be yet another way in which psychoanalysis is a discourse of determinism. From this perspective, Lacan merely reinforces and confirms Sartre's view (and the views of countless others) that there is simply no room for the freedom of the subject in

psychoanalysis. Individuals are merely the products of their pasts and their environments or “situations” (especially as regards one’s familial relations as manifested in the Oedipus complex). Even though Sartre shares certain tenets of structuralism with Lacan, he nevertheless always maintains a basic commitment to the idea that one can transcend one’s situation. Though much of the five volumes comprising *The Family Idiot* are devoted to articulating Gustave Flaubert’s determination by his position within both the Flaubert family unit and, more generally, nineteenth century bourgeois French society, he states at the outset of *Volume Two* that “any determination imprinted in an existing being is surpassed by the way he lives” (Sartre 1987, 3). (This is yet another reworking of the foundational thesis of Sartre’s entire *oeuvre* that you can always make something out of that into which you have been made.) The question remains whether psychoanalytic theory is capable of sharing in this commitment.

It is worth noting at the outset that there is an operational concept of freedom at work in psychoanalytic practice. Psychoanalysis, especially in its clinical application, purports to be transformative. That is, psychoanalysis aims, at least in some sense, to bring about psychic change for the analysand. As Alfred Tauber asks, “Why else become an analysand if potential freedom from the tyranny of the unconscious did not exist” (Tauber 2013, 204)? Richard Askay and Jensen Farquhar state similarly that psychoanalytic treatment aims to help the analysand become more aware of him-/herself and thereby to accept responsibility for his/her actions and desires:

As long as one is held captive by unconscious desires and forbidden memories, there is a compulsion to repeat; only by awareness of the condition by which one has been compelled is one freed from the compulsion and able to not engage in past behaviors or symptoms. And hence, only through awareness is one able to fully exercise that fundamental responsibility we have for who we are and what we do. (Askay and Farquhar 2006, 268)

This transformative dimension is something Sartre sought to restore with his conception of existential psychoanalysis. But, part of what I have been arguing up to this point is that psychoanalysis and Sartrean existentialism are not so far apart on this issue. My argument has turned on the way in which the notion of fantasy/the imaginary is employed in Sartre's and Lacan's intellectual projects. For both thinkers, there is a fundamental choice that underlies the acts and projects of human subjects. In this chapter, I want to explore the way in which the fantasmatic dimension of psychical life can be reclaimed from various determining influences and put to work in the service of the aims of freedom.

For psychoanalysis specifically, the nature of the subject's freedom appears paradoxical. Indeed, both Tauber and Elisabeth Roudinesco speak of it in precisely these terms. Tauber states this explicitly in 2013's *Requiem for the Ego*: "And herein lies the inescapable paradox of Freud's theory: We are determined, yet we are free" (Tauber 2013, 205). At the close of the fourth chapter of his 2010 book *Freud: The Reluctant Philosopher*, aptly titled "The Paradox of Freedom," he writes of Freud's position that "the very structure of Freudian psychoanalysis sits on a deep fault line, namely, the paradox of *inferred* psychic determinism and the governing *conviction* of choice and liberation" (Tauber 2010, 144). Roudinesco claims similarly that "The Freudian unconscious rests on a paradox: the subject is free but has lost the mastery of his or her interiority, is no longer 'master in his own house,' in the well-known formulation" (Roudinesco 2001, 56).

Adding to the "paradox," it is hard to square what I am calling psychoanalysis' "operational" conception of freedom with some of Freud's explicit denials of psychical freedom. In *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis*, he states outright, "You nourish

the illusion of there being such a thing as psychical freedom, and you will not give it up. I am sorry to say I disagree with you categorically over this” (*SE* 15: 49). Therein, he also speaks of a “determinism whose rule extends over mental life” (*SE* 15: 106). Freud’s statements place psychoanalysis directly in the crosshairs of Sartre’s philosophical criticisms and seem to play into caricatured stereotypes of psychoanalysis as a discourse of determinism. In many ways, Lacan echoes Freud’s sentiments about freedom. He is highly critical of philosophical conceptions of freedom, and he often references Sartre, both explicitly and implicitly, in his criticisms.⁶² His structuralist sympathies only serve to further bolster the view of psychoanalysis as a deterministic theoretical edifice.

However, this “paradoxical” view of freedom is not unfamiliar to a Sartrean perspective. Sartre himself paints a similar picture of what human freedom consists in. In “Sartre and the Art of Living with Paradox,” Flynn comments that Sartre’s thought is marked by paradox and various irresolvable tensions.⁶³ Chief among them, of course, is the tension between freedom and determinism. In the play *The Devil and the Good Lord*, Sartre presents a young priest who is faced with an impossible situation. There are no good options for the priest. In such a situation, is one truly free? (This Sartrean-style dilemma resonates with the notion of “forced choice” that Lacan frequently references.⁶⁴) The play does not resolve this question, and arguably, Sartre’s philosophical corpus does not ultimately resolve it either. Remarking upon the philosophical conclusions that we are to draw from *The Devil and the Good Lord*, Flynn writes:

This seems to compromise [Sartre’s] popularly conceived notion of unlimited freedom. Sartre now shrinks the expanse by introducing the character of Heinrich into the play, the model of someone unable to choose... This is a lesson Sartre

⁶² See, e.g., Lacan 1988a, 224; Lacan 1988b, 240.

⁶³ Elsewhere, Flynn dubs Sartre the “philosopher of dichotomies.” See Flynn 1984, 196-201.

⁶⁴ See, e.g., Lacan 1977, 212-213.

learned during the Resistance. He could perhaps escape this contradiction with a distinction introduced in [*Existentialism is a Humanism*], between freedom as the ontological definition of man and concrete freedom which is what is at issue here. As before, are we being asked to live amidst paradox if not in explicit contradiction? (Flynn 2018, 7)

Earlier, in 1984's *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism*, Flynn references the delicate balance that Sartre's account of freedom attempts to strike. He states that Sartre's "position rests midway between libertarianism and determinism" (Flynn 1984, 8). His attempt to straddle this divide resembles a philosophical game of ping-pong, moving back and forth between the two sides. On what side are we to come down? Or is there a sense in which the Sartrean conception of freedom consists precisely in living the tension? Learning to "live the tension" is perhaps the fundamental lesson of Sartre's philosophy: "Sartre counsels us not to subordinate one side of the dichotomy to the other but to grasp both terms boldly 'to describe and demonstrate their ambivalence'" (Flynn 1997, 26). Indeed, this is precisely what Sartre's conception of authenticity consists in.

As social forms of conditioning continue to take on greater significance in Sartre's late work and he becomes ever more enthralled with Marxism and ever more sympathetic to psychoanalysis, the "paradoxes" with which Sartre asks us to live become all the more apparent. Remarking on his biography of Flaubert, *The Family Idiot*, Sartre states in an interview:

In a certain sense, all our lives are predestined from the moment we are born. We are destined for a certain type of action from the beginning by the situation of the family and the society at any given moment. It is certain, for example, that a young Algerian born in 1935 was destined to make war. In some cases history condemns one in advance. Predestination is what replaces determinism for me. I believe we are not free—at least not these days, not for the moment—because we are all alienated. We are lost during childhood. Methods of education, the parent-child relationship, and so on, are what create the self, but it's a lost self. (Sartre 1977, 116)

He goes on, however, to reassert the fact of human freedom: “I do not mean to say that this sort of predestination precludes all choice, but one knows that in choosing, one will not attain what one has chosen. It is what I call the necessity of freedom” (Sartre 1977, 116).

Hence, both Sartrean existentialism and Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis develop accounts of freedom that, to use Tauber’s phrasing, rest on a conceptual “fault line”. This fault line is clearly visible when we examine the link between imaginative life and freedom. For the imaginative lives of human beings are deeply conflicted, fractured, and disunified. Imagination can exert a powerful, sometimes painful and pathological influence on one’s life. But imagination can also be liberating by supplying the means for creativity, for considering unrealized possibilities, and for empathizing with others, among other productive practices. As James Phillips and James Morley remark:

this power of imagination is a double-edged sword; it is destructive as much as it is creative, disintegrative, and integrative. While imagination may define our transcendence *from* and ascendancy *over* nature, it is also the means by which we capitulate to it. When Nietzsche declared man ‘the sick animal,’ he referred to our unique capacity for unhappiness, self-deception, alienation, and—ultimately—self-destruction. Though we are able, in some degree, to free ourselves from our givens by imagining future possibilities, this same power can, in pathological conditions, exile us from the real. (Phillips and Morley 2003, 7)

In psychoanalytic theory, fantasy demonstrates perhaps better than any other psychical phenomenon the fine line the subject must walk between “hysterical misery” and “common unhappiness,” as Freud’s famous distinction has it.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ “When I have promised my patients help or improvement by means of a cathartic treatment I have often been faced by this objection: ‘Why, you tell me yourself that my illness is probably connected with my circumstances and the events of my life. You cannot alter these in any way. How do you propose to help me, then?’ And I have been able to make this reply: ‘No doubt fate would find it easier than I do to relieve you of your illness. But you will be able to convince yourself that much will be gained if we succeed in transforming your hysterical misery into common unhappiness. With a mental life that has been restored to health you will be better armed against that unhappiness’ (SE 2: 305).

What is the role of imagination in psychopathology? Through fantasmatic processes of projective identification, internalization, and the like, the subject's psyche takes on its own, unique form. But, in shaping itself in this fashion, there are various "short circuits" that occur, ontogenetic mishaps that can and do lead to subsequent psychopathologies. In "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning," wherein Freud identifies and describes the two basic principles governing all of psychical life, he states that a complete immersion within the imaginary is perhaps the chief end of neurosis. Though fantasy and reality are both integral components to the functioning of the human psyche, total submission to either principle may well result in illness: "We have long observed that every neurosis has as its result, and probably therefore as its purpose, a forcing of the patient out of real life, an alienating of him from reality" (*SE* 12: 218). It is in this way that one of Freud's greatest insights is borne out, namely, the pathogenesis of fantasies.

Aside from the unconscious, fantasy is arguably the most integral component of psychoanalysis' clinical and theoretical orientation, and this holds true across various psychoanalytic schools of thought. Laplanche and Pontalis identify fantasy as "the fundamental object of psychoanalysis" (Laplanche and Pontalis 1968, 7). Sander Abend writes that fantasy is "an essential foundation stone of our [psychoanalytic] theoretical edifice, and it continues to occupy a central position in the technique of analyzing intrapsychic conflict" (Abend 2008, 117). And Jonathan Lear explains that, "the most important development in psychoanalytic thinking has been an ever-increasing appreciation of the role of fantasy in human life" (Lear 2017, 159). Indeed, it is precisely

when Freud discovers the pathogenic capacity of fantasies that psychoanalysis proper is born.

On September 21, 1897, a frenzied Freud writes to his long-time friend and confidant, Wilhelm Fliess, regarding a theoretical breakthrough that he had just made in the burgeoning field of psychoanalysis. With a few strokes of his pen, he sketches the radical shift that has occurred in his thinking about the origin and treatment of neuroses. He writes, “And now I want to confide in you immediately the great secret that has been slowly dawning on me in the last few months. I no longer believe in my *neurotica* [theory of the neuroses]” (Freud 1985, 264). To this point, Freud has maintained that hysteria and various other forms of mental illness are invariably caused by an actually experienced sexual trauma. As he remarks in “The Aetiology of Hysteria,” “Whatever case and whatever symptom we take as our point of departure, *in the end we infallibly come to the field of sexual experience*” (SE 3: 198; emphasis in original). This was the mark of his so-called “seduction theory.” However, Freud had come to realize that there may be other, less “real” causes. In his letter, Freud lists several reasons for ultimately rejecting the view that each and every case of hysteria is the product of sexual assault, including the limited success of several of his analyses and the reluctance of unconscious mental processes to reveal themselves.

One reason Freud offers in this letter is particularly pertinent for our purposes here: “there are no indications of reality in the unconscious, so that one cannot distinguish between truth and fiction that has been cathected with affect...” (Freud 1985, 264). With this startling claim, Freud decisively situates the focus of psychoanalysis on fantasy, the imaginative productions of the human psyche. This shift in focus entails an

interesting conclusion: as far as psychoanalysis is concerned, there is no distinction between the fantasmatic and the real. The idea that the unconscious cannot distinguish between fact and fiction, between real events and imagined ones means that psychoanalytic treatment will have to take a different approach than most other forms of therapy. As this letter indicates, Freud is beginning to see the complexity and power of the imaginative lives of his patients and the extent to which psychoanalysis will need to focus on this dimension of the psyche to be an effective form of treatment. This is a clinical and theoretical stance that shapes virtually every aspect of psychoanalytic thought. As Bonnie Litowitz puts it, “When Freud revised his views on the centrality of actual seduction as the causal factor in psychopathology in favor of unconscious fantasy, he made the latter the bedrock of psychoanalysis” (Litowitz 2007, 201).

The fantasies that structure the psyche can have very real effects on one’s practical life. One can become stuck in a kind of repetitive loop, continually trying and failing to realize a fantasy. Lear has introduced a helpful taxonomy of the various effects fantasy can have, identifying two species of imaginative influence, what he calls “swerve” and “break”.⁶⁶ Regarding the first of these concepts, Lear states that fantasies cause an “imaginative” or “wishful swerve” on practical life, a gravitational pull that orients the daily habits and practices of an individual. With reference to various of Freud’s case studies—Anna O., Dora, the Rat Man, Elizabeth von R.—Lear remarks that “What they [Freud’s patients] don’t understand is that their perception of the world is getting distorted in wishful ways. As one sees its effects in adults, the pleasure principle exerts a gravitational pull on reality-testing and practical life. There is a kind of *swerve*

⁶⁶ For my purposes here, “swerve” will be the primary topic discussed.

towards wishfulness in ordinary life” (Lear 2015, 151-152). Elsewhere, Lear explains the notion of a wishful swerve in greater depth:

It seems to me that what Freud has shown is that, on the broadest possible scale, there are two different types of unconscious mental activity. The first is the by-now-familiar workings of the mind according to the loose associations of the pleasure principle...Here we have displacement and condensation, as well as various forms of inhibition and repression, which altogether serve to diffuse our associations as well as express them in dreams, bodily expressions, and other symptomatic acts. These are, of course, all sorts of different mental activities, but they can all be summed up under one grand type: the functionings of the mind according to the pleasure principle. (From this broad perspective, the mind functioning according to the reality principle is only a variant: the search for pleasure through realistic considerations.) I call this type of mental functioning *swerve* because it exercises a kind of gravitational pull on the entire field of conscious mental functioning, bending it into idiosyncratic shapes. By way of analogy, we detect the existence of black holes by the way light swerves toward them. We detect this type of unconscious process by the ways our conscious reasoning, our bodily expressions, our acts, and our dreams swerve toward them. (Lear 2017, 164)

There are several important features of this species of psychological activity identified by Lear that are worth emphasizing and elaborating. First, the concept of swerve helps clarify the ways in which unconscious fantasies exert pressure on conscious life. As filtered through the “lens” of fantasy, the world takes on a specific character. Importantly for Freud, this feature of psychological life whereby one “turns away” from reality belongs to all of us, not just neurotics.⁶⁷ As Lear acknowledges, fantasies have their origin in negotiations between the two basic principles Freud identifies as governing all psychological life. As Freud himself puts it, drawing out the tension between the pleasure and reality principles, “The motive forces of phantasies are unsatisfied wishes, and every single

⁶⁷ Indeed, for Freud, the margin separating “normal” individuals from neurotics is slim: “psycho-analytic research finds no fundamental, but only quantitative, distinctions between normal and neurotic life” (*SE* 5: 373).

phantasy is the fulfillment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality” (*SE* 9: 146).⁶⁸

However, in the case of neurotics, more so than in ordinary cases, one’s fantasy life takes precedence over that of reality. The neurotic absorption in the fantasy renders reality a mere stage for playing out the fantasy; fantasy is an attempt to make a recalcitrant reality conform to one’s subjective fantasy frame. From this perspective, reality, for example, the real people with whom one engages in real relationships often serve merely as “placeholder[s] in a fairly rigid imaginative structure” (Lear 2015, 153). Slavoj Žižek makes a similar point, calling this one of psychoanalysis’ “elementary insights”:

In the network of intersubjective relations, every one of us is identified with, pinned down to, a certain fantasy place in the other’s symbolic structure. Psychoanalysis sustains here the exact opposite of the usual, commonsense opinion according to which fantasy figures are nothing but distorted, combined, or otherwise concocted figures of their ‘real’ models, of people of flesh and blood that we’ve met in our experience. We can relate to these ‘people of flesh and blood’ only insofar as we are able to identify them with a certain place in our symbolic fantasy space, or, to put it in a more pathetic way, only insofar as they fill out a place preestablished in our dream—we fall in love with a woman insofar as her features coincide with our fantasy figure of a Woman, the ‘real father’ is a miserable individual obliged to sustain the burden of the Name of the Father, never fully adequate to his symbolic mandate, and so forth. (Žižek 2008, 6-7)

It is worth stressing that what Lear and Žižek are discussing is a typical function of mind. That is, fantasmatically structuring the real in this fashion is simply what the mind does. But, as psychoanalysis brings to light, this “wishful swerve” can be so overpowering and impose a structure that can become so rigid and calcified as to remove

⁶⁸ Immediately preceding this quotation taken from “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming,” Freud states, “Let us now make ourselves acquainted with a few of the characteristics of phantasying. We may lay it down that a happy person never phantasies, only an unsatisfied one” (*SE* 9: 146). On a superficial reading, this claim might lead one to believe that once an analysis has been terminated and happiness restored, one’s fantasy life would cease to exist. But, from a psychoanalytic perspective, it is fair to say that a human subject is never completely happy, that one is always at least marginally discontent. Freud himself indicates as much in the earlier-quoted statement according to which psychoanalysis allows one to pass from “hysterical misery” to “common unhappiness.” Thus, one need not fear that one will cease fantasizing anytime soon!

one's sense of agency with respect to how one engages with the world. The element of creative responsibility one bears for establishing the fantasy frame is no longer anywhere to be found.

A basic thesis of Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis is that one can become stuck in a singular fantasmatic vision of oneself. Indeed, fantasies can become quite insidious. Consider a case familiar to psychoanalytic practice. An individual who fantasizes him-/herself as someone deserving of punishment, someone who is riddled with a sense of guilt (guilt that may have no consciously discernible motivation) may continuously engage in behavior that provokes the wrath of others. He/she may habitually sabotage relationships, employment opportunities, etc. Psychoanalytic theory suggests that such behavior is perhaps attributable to an unconscious fantasy structuring these repetitive patterns of behavior (this would be a paradigmatic case of what Freud calls "repetition compulsion," behavior in which an individual is compelled to engage over and over again).⁶⁹ Such behavior can be interpreted as an attempt to realize the unconscious fantasy according to which the individual is undeserving of reward; it is an attempt to bring about in the external world the state of affairs that the individual has constructed in fantasy, an attempt to make the fantasy "true." In this way, an unconscious fantasy can actually structure and determine the way in which one conceives of oneself and the way in which one interacts with other people. In short, fantasy dictates the field of possibilities that appear open to a person.

⁶⁹ Laplanche and Pontalis define a compulsion to repeat thus: "At the level of concrete psychopathology, the compulsion to repeat is an ungovernable process originating in the unconscious. As a result of its action, the subject deliberately places himself in distressing situations, thereby repeating an old experience, but he does not recall this prototype; on the contrary, he has the strong impression that the situation is fully determined by the circumstances of the moment" (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973, 78).

Similarly to Lear's account of the phenomenon of "swerve," Jean Laplanche argues that the compulsion to repeat induced by certain fantasmatic objects is precisely a result of the failure of real objects to fill the space carved out by fantasy, the failure of objects of need to fully satisfy desires which are perpetuated through fantasy (Laplanche 1976; Laplanche 1989). On Laplanche's account, "The concrete, tangible objects of need are thereby demoted to being mere stand-ins for ephemeral, fantasmatic things" (Johnston 2005, 359). In other words, the real objects which one encounters in experience are fundamentally deficient in relation to the fantasized object of desire. What this means is that an individual is compelled to seek out an object which can never be found, an object which is always-already lost. Of course, the fact that the object is fundamentally lost does not stop the individual from seeking it out. Thus, repetitive cycles are instituted. For the real objects that confront a person in the thrall of a wishful swerve are being distorted by the fantasy screen through which the person experiences them.

Another feature of unconscious fantasy is brought to light by Lear's description of a fantasmatic swerve. Recall that the central conclusion of chapter two is that unconscious processes do not operate in hidden depths of the mind. Rather, they are manifest in the everyday lives of individual human subjects. Unconscious fantasy is no different. Its effects are indicated by the character of an individual's speech, actions, and so on. To take a perhaps mundane example, consider a person who constantly says "I'm sorry" after every statement, even when the occasion requires no apology. This seemingly innocuous phrase is perhaps indicative of an unconscious fantasy in which the subject is seen as unworthy and undeserving of respect.⁷⁰ Despite the individual him-/herself being

⁷⁰ It is important to point out that the results of a psychoanalysis, the specific causal factors at work in a subject's psychical make-up are unique to a particular individual. The etiology established by an

the one repeating the phrase, he/she may be totally unaware of the frequency with which the phrase is spoken. In this way, though the fantasy remains unconscious, one need not look very far to see its effects. There may of course be other, much more serious and self-destructive effects produced by this kind of fantasy. Commenting on the role of fantasy in symptom formation, Laplanche and Pontalis state that fantasy “is also the result of analysis, an end-product, a latent content to be revealed behind the symptom. From *mnesic symbol* of trauma, the symptom has become the *stage-setting of fantasies* (thus a fantasy of prostitution, of street-walking, might be discovered beneath the symptom of agoraphobia)” (Laplanche and Pontalis 1968, 7). The important point here is that fantasies structure an individual’s basic orientation to the world. That orientation can be quite distorted and therefore may lead to the kinds of mental suffering that land people on analyst’s couches.

Indeed, it is hard to overstate the structuring power of an unconscious fantasy.

Fantasy establishes the very field in which possibilities and obstacles appear as such:

Every core unconscious fantasy is itself an implicit metaphysical theory: it provides the person whose fantasy it is with a sense of what is and what is not possible. If a person inhabits, say, an unloving world, then everything that happens to her will be experienced as unloving. Lack of love will permeate not only everything that actually happens but it also permeates everything that *might* happen—just so long as she continues to inhabit this unloving world. For in this world, unloving possibilities are the only possibilities there are. (Lear 2017, 172)

This is why fantasies can seem insurmountable. From the subject’s first-person perspective, it appears as if “there is no way out”. The world simply *is* unloving for the subject. Or, the subject just *is* undeserving of respect, and so on. It is the business of

interpretation offered through psychoanalytic treatment pays careful attention to the details of an analysand’s experience as revealed through his/her free associations. Thus, there may be factors other than or in addition to an unconscious fantasy. But, for the purposes of this example, it will suffice to simplify matters a bit.

psychoanalysis to discern the way in which an individual's possibilities are constrained by an unconscious fantasy: "Even when we consider a high-functioning neurotic—an 'ideal' analysand—we will eventually find a core fantasies [sic] that structures this person's life and, indeed, come to structure the transference" (Lear 2017, 172).

Unconscious fantasies thus shape the very way in which one engages with the world, the way one views the world, and the practical possibilities for the way one lives one's life in the world.

We see here, too, an important reason why repetition is such a significant feature of human life. If everything one does is structured according to a core fantasy (or, to put it in Lacanian parlance, a fundamental fantasy), then every object one encounters will be brought into the fantasy's orbit. Lacan introduces what is arguably his most well-known concept, namely, object *a* to explain this phenomenon. Like many other Lacanian concepts, object *a* occupies many different places in Lacan's metapsychology and is called on to perform quite a bit of conceptual labor.⁷¹ It is therefore easy to get bogged down in explaining this difficult concept. The following few paragraphs are thus a highly condensed description of object *a* insofar as it pertains the topic of fantasy.

Object *a* comes to be a point of fixation for the subject. It is the nodal point around which a person's fundamental fantasy is constructed. For this reason, Lacan's "formula" for fantasy, the "matheme" he often uses to represent it is: $\$ \diamond a$, or, the "barred" subject's relation to object *a* (the object of desire). Put more simply, object *a*

⁷¹ "Obviously, whole books easily could be written on the topic of the Lacanian *objet a*, given that this object functions as a nodal point...across a vast and richly intricate expanse of the French Freud's mature teachings. This *a* quickly becomes, after Lacan's introduction of it as a concept-term to his theoretical arsenal in the late 1950s, a condensed knot of associated meanings and references tied together with varying degrees of tightness over time" (Johnston 2013, 252).

takes center stage as the object of desire in the fantasy, or, as Lacan will come to refer to it, object *a* is the “object-cause” of desire (this formulation raises an ambiguity about whether it is merely the object of a pre-existing desire or whether it actually causes the desire in the first place).

There is a close link between fantasy and repetition in psychoanalytic psychopathology, and the Lacanian notion of object *a* emphasizes this connection. In the fifth session of *Seminar XI*, Lacan elaborates his conception of repetition. Toward the end of this session, Lacan references the famous game of *fort-da* (gone-there) played by Freud’s grandson and used by Freud as an example in his own theorization of repetition compulsion in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.⁷² In the game, the child throws a small, wooden reel over his crib, hiding the object from view. He then pulls the string attached to the reel and brings it back into view. According to Freud, his grandson is staging the daily occurrence of his mother’s departure from and subsequent return to their home. His grandson has no control over this rather distressing situation. But, by staging the action with one of his toys, the young boy can regain some degree of mastery over his environment.⁷³ Lacan finds Freud’s description insightful, but he adds his own unique twist to it.

For Lacan, rather than merely representing the mother, the child’s reel represents object *a*: “This reel is not the mother reduced to a little ball by some magical game worthy of the Jivaros—it is a small part of the subject that detaches itself from him while

⁷² See *SE* 18: 14-16.

⁷³ Of course, the child’s game is not entirely successful in this regard. As Freud observes, the part of the game in which the object goes missing is repeated much more frequently than the part where the object returns into view. This represents the most distressing aspect of the situation the child is attempting to represent for himself. *This* is what Freud struggles to explain, namely, why people are given to repeat unpleasurable experiences. And it is this which occasions his development of the concept of the death drive.

still remaining his, still retained” (Lacan 1977, 62). Why does Lacan claim that the object is both “a part” of the subject and that it is “detached” from the subject? Object *a* is perhaps the quintessential example of Lacan’s concept of “extimacy,” that which is both part of the subject yet, at the same time, is the most alien to it.

Part of what is at stake in Lacan’s admittedly enigmatic formulation is that what matters to the child is not his flesh-and-blood mother. Rather, what he wants is the primordially “lost object.”⁷⁴ He is seeking out an object that, at one point in his (fantasied) past, allowed for complete satisfaction, not the partial satisfaction of only sometimes getting what he wants (as illustrated by the two moments of the *fort-da* game). In psychoanalytic theory, this “object” is typically identified with the unbroken union between mother and child as experienced from the infant’s early perspective. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud analyzes the process of object loss and thereby develops a genetic explanation for the formation of the ego:

Normally, there is nothing of which we are more certain than the feeling of our self, of our own ego. This ego appears to us as something autonomous and unitary, marked off distinctly from everything else. That such an appearance is deceptive, and that on the contrary the ego is continued inwards, without any sharp delimitation, into an unconscious mental entity which we designate as the id and for which it serves as a kind of façade—this was a discovery first made by psycho-analytic research, which should still have more to tell us about the relation of the ego to the id. (*SE* 21: 65-66)

In other words, the ego is not completely cut off from other elements of the psyche. It is intimately connected to them. But, what about objects external to the psyche? Freud goes on:

Further reflection tells us that the adult’s ego-feeling cannot have been the same from the beginning. It must have gone through a process of development, which cannot, of course, be demonstrated but which admits of being constructed with a fair degree of probability. An infant at the breast does not as yet distinguish his

⁷⁴ See chapter one for a discussion of the lost object.

ego from the external world as the source of the sensations flowing in upon him. He gradually learns to do so, in response to various promptings. He must be very strongly impressed by the fact that some sources of excitation, which he will later recognize as his own bodily organs, can provide him with sensations at any moment, where as other sources evade him from time to time—among them what he desires most of all, his mother’s breast—and only reappear as a result of his screaming for help. In this way there is for the first time set over against the ego an ‘object’, in the form of something which exists ‘outside’ and which is only forced to appear by a special action. (*SE* 21: 66)

On Freud’s view, the ego gradually develops as the infant begins to recognize its separation from the external world. Painful sensations and the repeated failure of others to deliver the child what he/she wants when he/she wants it are partially responsible for the ego’s development: “In this way, then, the ego detaches itself from the external world. Or, to put it more correctly, originally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an external world from itself. Our present ego-feeling is, therefore, only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive—indeed, all-embracing—feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it” (*SE* 21: 68). Once the child begins to form a notion of itself as an individual distinct from its mother (and the external world, more generally), that “object” is “lost.” Object loss is thus implicated in the process of subject formation. It is in giving up the object that the subject is created as such. It is only in and through the loss of the object that the subject can come into being: “In ceding the object, the locus of the subject emerges for the first time, the loss of the part establishes the whole virtually, negatively, retroactively...the being of the sacrificer emerges for the first time only with the loss effected by the act of sacrifice” (Boothby 2001, 247).

Freud’s account of primordial object loss is operative in the background of Lacan’s presentation of object *a*. Lacan continues: “If it is true that the signifier is the

first mark of the subject, how can we fail to recognize here...that it is in the object to which the opposition is applied in act, the reel, that we must designate the subject. To this object we will later give the name it bears in the Lacanian algebra—the *petit a*” (Lacan 1977, 62). The reason we must “designate the subject” in object *a* is because it is this object which frames the subject’s experience. Later in *Seminar XI*, Lacan further explains the concept of *objet petit a*. In response to a question posed by Jacques-Alain Miller regarding the relation between fantasy, desire, and object *a*, Lacan emphasizes the lack that characterizes subjectivity.⁷⁵ He states that “...a subject, through his relations with the signifier, is a subject-with-holes (*sujet troué*)” (Lacan 1977, 184). Moreover, “These holes came from somewhere” (Lacan 1977, 184). He goes on to say that “The subject is an apparatus. This apparatus is something lacunary, and it is in the lacuna that the subject establishes the function of a certain object, *qua* lost object. It is the status of the *objet a* in so far as it is present in the drive” (Lacan 1977, 185). In part, Lacan is emphasizing that the initial object loss is what generates the “hole” in the subject. And object *a* is the fantasied “missing piece” that might “stitch” one back together again.

How does fantasy figure into this equation? As the stage-setting of desire, namely, the desire for the lost object, the fundamental fantasy, in which object *a* occupies the central structural place, establishes the parameters within which the subject operates in its unending search for the object. In his insightful, in-depth analysis of object *a*, Boothby likewise emphasizes the “hole” that is left after the loss of the object. In a vaguely Sartrean vein, he writes, “The *objet a* is the point at which the subject assumes a certain paradoxical consistency precisely by virtue of marking the impossibility of coincidence

⁷⁵ See chapter one for a discussion of the subject-as-lack.

of the subject with itself” (Boothby 2001, 245). Recalling Sartre’s own arguments along these lines, the subject cannot coincide with itself precisely because there is a lack or gap at its heart. This empty place is marked for Lacan by the notion of object *a*. The desire provoked by this lack or emptiness is staged by fantasy. Desire thus requires a kind of fantasmatic support. If the object encountered in experience fails to fit the contours of the fantasy, desire itself will remain dormant.

We can now see even more clearly the link between fantasy and repetition. For there are only certain kinds of object that fit the frame of a fantasy, especially one that has been hardened into neurosis. Even though certain experiences, people, objects, and so on may appear entirely novel, rigid unconscious fantasies are adept at homogenizing experience and assimilating the new to the same. Consider Lear’s description of the function of fantasy in neurosis:

With a high-functioning neurotic the structuring fantasy can be astonishingly protean. On the one hand, the fantasy reaches out to interpret every experience in its light—so that every experience turns out to be somehow disappointing, or somehow a lack of love—and, on the other hand, the repetition is far from automatic or rigid. *The core fantasy can be quite creative in taking in new experiences and metabolizing them in terms of old structures.* (Lear 2017, 172; emphasis added)

Fantasies are remarkably effective when it comes to putting new wine in old bottles.

Bruce Fink offers an example drawn from clinical experience that perfectly captures the way in which an individual beholden to a certain fantasy (a person whose experience is “swerving” toward wishfulness and is being distorted by fantasy) is compelled to continue (unconsciously) staging the fantasy over and over again.

Regarding his position as a clinician, Fink states that an analyst can often interpret a patient’s symptoms in terms of “libidinal stasis: *his or her desire is fixated or stuck*”

(Fink 1997, 50; emphasis in original). A common way in which this kind of stasis manifests is in a person's choice of sexual partner. An individual may repeatedly seek out the same type of person as their mate, even if his/her relationships repeatedly end in failure or have otherwise problematic features: "Consider, for example, a male analysand who repeatedly gets 'hung up' on women who refuse his advances, manifest disinterest in him, or dump him. He meets a woman at a party, is vaguely attracted to her, and asks her out a couple of times. He remains somewhat indifferent toward her until the day she says she does not want to see him anymore" (Fink 1997, 50). Strangely, it is precisely the woman's indifference that provokes the man's desire: "Suddenly he comes alive: he desires her passionately, and pursues her doggedly. She becomes the focus of all his attention, all his love, all his desire. She is *it*, his one and only. And the more she refuses him and remains disinterested, the more his desire blossoms" (Fink 1997, 50).

In this case, the man continues to seek out the same type of woman, or, more precisely, he seeks out the same type of relationship. For the woman herself matters little in terms of the man's desire. What matters for him is the structural relation between the two, namely, that his desire is provoked by her seeming lack of desire. In this example, new potential partners are siphoned through the same fantasy structure, reducing each particular woman the man might meet, with her own unique features, down to the same homogeneous type. Fink continues:

What demonstrates that *she* (the real, live, flesh-and-blood woman) is not what captivates him is the fact that the moment she succumbs to his never-ending endeavors to win her back, 'she's history'—he has no further use for her. As long as she agrees to refuse him (perhaps letting him get closer only to push him away the next moment), she enflames him, setting his love ablaze. As soon as she shows him that she is really letting him in, his desire fades: its cause disappears and it can make no further use of the object at hand. (Fink 1997, 50)

The preceding account demonstrates the powerful pull of unconscious fantasy. The practical lives of human beings are structured according to core unconscious fantasies, but fantasies can so radically distort a person's experience that they develop painful psychopathologies that render them incapable of engaging with the world. How does this discussion of repetition and fantasy in psychoanalytic theory resonate with a Sartrean perspective?

Interestingly, Sartre himself offers an insightful description of the way in which subjectivity is manifested in repetitive patterns of behavior, indicating that this dimension of psychological life is integral to his theory of the subject, too. Indeed, he gives what could be construed as a precise account of the phenomenon of repetition compulsion. In *What is Subjectivity?*, the published version of a lecture Sartre delivered at the Gramsci Institute in Rome in 1961, Sartre explicitly references the repetitive nature of subjectivity. In the section of the talk entitled "Repetition and Inventiveness," he emphasizes the way in which an individual lives his/her past, the way in which an individual's particular "style" of being shines through in his/her actions. In other words, one's past is not simply remembered and rearticulated but is rather lived and re-lived, whether one is aware of it or not: "we have to be our past. To regard the past as a set of memories that it is always possible to evoke is to reduce it to something passive, a set of objects that are available to us and which we can line up before us" (Sartre 2016, 25). He continues, "for this past to exist all the time as the possibility of distancing oneself from it, it must be perpetually re-totalised. *This implies that repetition is a constant in subjectivity*" (Sartre 2016, 25; emphasis added).

Importantly for Sartre, as for Freud and Lacan, such repetition is enacted unknowingly. The reason one is compelled to continue engaging in certain types of behavior despite the sometimes destructive nature of such behavior is because one is unaware of the power or “gravitational pull” of the unconscious fantasy; the Learian “imaginative swerve” distorts psychical life from within, and it operates without the explicit, conscious intention of the subject him-/herself. In this way, the subject’s “past is there in its entirety, but in the mode of non-knowledge, non-consciousness, in the form of a necessary re-integration...” (Sartre 2016, 26). This is Sartre’s way of indicating that these processes function unconsciously.

To elucidate his own conception of repetition, Sartre references a discussion with a friend. (This example is quite similar in nature to my example of the perpetually apologetic individual offered above.) For Sartre, this friend’s entire character is manifest in his speech and action. The particular story Sartre recounts in this context concerns the origin of the name of the famous journal *Les Temps modernes*, which he co-founded: “There we were, about ten of us, trying to come up with a name for the journal. As you know, the aim was to adopt a critical position with regard to the French bourgeoisie and the right; we were left on principle, allied to left-wing forces, and we examined the world from that point of view, combining action with critique, in order to help change it” (Sartre 2016, 20-21). During this brainstorming session, a friend (whom the translators insist was Michel Leiris), suggests the title *Le Grabuge*. For Sartre, this seemingly innocent gesture carries with it more than a whiff of his friend’s character: “Subjectivity was immediately apparent in my friend’s suggestion and created a mismatch” (Sartre 2016, 21).

Sartre explains that *grabuge* “is a familiar French word that occurs in writings from the eighteenth century and means, we could say, ‘anarchic violence’...It is a word that evokes violence, blood and scandal—something that suddenly disrupts the order” (Sartre 2016, 21). The themes captured by this term, Sartre insists, are indicative of his friend’s basic approach to the world. He proceeds to explain that “Paul⁷⁶ was and remains a petty bourgeois from a rich family whose childhood—which it would take too long to describe—means that bourgeois life has a hold over him and suits him. He cannot really escape it...” (Sartre 2016, 22). Sartre tells us that, in 1920, his friend made a habit of shouting “‘Long live Germany! Down with France!’”, which, he goes on, “was definitely not a thing to shout in 1920” (Sartre 2016, 23). He continues, “What was he doing? As far as he could, he destroyed bourgeois reality through scandal, and in so doing destroyed the bourgeois within himself, in an act of self-destructive, not to say suicidal violence. There is an element of that in *grabuge*” (Sartre 2016, 23). According to Sartre, his friend repeatedly incited violence, often against himself, by shouting at people in bars. All of this is encapsulated in his suggestion of *Le Grabuge* for the title of their burgeoning journal: “[Paul] knows himself admirably well—indeed, he has written remarkable books about himself—yet when he said that, it did not occur to him that what he had written was coming to the surface. He was just thinking that he had chosen a good title for a journal” (Sartre 2016, 22). Of course, he was doing much more. By suggesting a title that evokes images of violence, polemical insults, and so on, Paul is manifesting his own character, indicating his own approach to the world. In proposing *Le Grabuge* as the title of the new journal, Paul is engaging in another form of repetition; through his proposal,

⁷⁶ Paul is a pseudonym Sartre uses to refer to his friend.

he is repeating the scandalous violence in which he had engaged on numerous past occasions (and recalling the punishment to which he subjected himself in masochistic outbursts). This repetition has come to define Paul's relation to others. As Sartre puts the point, "no one who knows him and who heard what he said at the time could have failed to think, 'That's just like Paul!'" (Sartre 2016, 21).

Sartre's insistence that subjectivity consists of a certain degree of repetition is in accord with the psychoanalytic notion that a significant portion of who and what we are is unconscious and that character traits established in early life continue to emerge in later life. Apropos of his friend Paul, he writes, "it remains the case that back then [Paul] was being the self he was and did not know" (Sartre 2016, 24). He adds that, "His past is there in its entirety, but in the mode of non-knowledge, non-consciousness, in the form of a necessary re-integration, and this past in turn is linked in a contradictory way to his class being. While his class being may lead him to be something else in different circumstances, the past, on the contrary, implies repetition" (Sartre 2016, 26). Sartre's description here highlights the way in which one's position in the social milieu—in this case, identified with one's class being—may shift and change. However, even in shifting social circumstances, subjectivity carries with it its own past. In new circumstances, the subject will enact old methods of coping, patterns of behavior that have been molded over the course the subject's life history.

There is a crucial Sartrean point that is pertinent to the present discussion, and it will inform the conclusions of this chapter. Though subjectivity consists to a large degree in the process of unconscious repetition, there is another, no less integral aspect to the life of the subject. While an individual frequently and unknowingly repeats his/her past, that

very repetition allows for a degree of creativity: “Subjectivity appears as both repetitive being and inventive being. These two characteristics are inseparable, because Paul repeats himself in circumstances that are always new, and always projects the same being through inventiveness, in circumstances that are quite different” (Sartre 2016, 26).

Throughout a person’s life, repetition is enacted in novel situations which themselves constitute a link in the his/her life-historical development thereby reshaping the very subjectivity that will be repeated in still newer situations.⁷⁷ Each new experience in an individual’s life adds an additional node to the network of associations that constitute his/her psyche. The form and structure of the psyche thus changes slightly with each new experience, even as the basic psychical form, constituted by way of past experience, remains intact. Sartre gives an extended account of how he sees the relation between

⁷⁷ There is an element of the psychoanalytic concept of *nachträglichkeit* or *après-coup* at work in Sartre’s description of the dialectical relation between “repetition” and “inventiveness”. The term is translated into English as “deferred action,” but this misses some of the critical import of the concept, namely, that elements of one’s past are not only enacted in a delayed fashion but that future events can actually restructure the past. Laplanche and Pontalis define it as a “Term frequently used by Freud in connection with his view of psychical temporality and causality: experiences, impressions and memory-traces may be revised at a later date to fit in with fresh experiences or with the attainment of a new stage of development. They may in that event be endowed not only with a new meaning but also with psychical effectiveness” (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973, 111). Further elaborating the theoretical details of this concept, Laplanche and Pontalis state, “The first thing the introduction of the notion does is to rule out the summary interpretation which reduces the psycho-analytic view of the subject’s history to a linear determinism envisaging nothing but the action of the past upon the present” (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973, 112). (This concept therefore goes a long way toward refuting one of Sartre’s criticisms of one form of psychoanalytic determinism.) In 1970’s *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, Laplanche writes, “it is the *later* which is perhaps more important, and alone allows us to understand and to interpret what we persist in calling *the prior*. We are alluding here to a notion which is equally prevalent in Freud’s thought...the notion of ‘deferred action’ (*Nachträglichkeit*)” (Laplanche 1976, 25). In other words, present experience is just as important, if not more so, to psychoanalytic theory than past experience. For it is what occurs presently that “activates” the past experience and renders it psychically efficacious. In “Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through,” Freud briefly sketches what this psychical process consists in: “There is one special class of experiences of the utmost importance for which no memory can as a rule be recovered. These are experiences which occurred in very early childhood and were not understood at the time but which were *subsequently* understood and interpreted” (*SE* 12: 149). Sartre’s account of “repetition and inventiveness” fits squarely with this important psychoanalytic concept. For it emphasizes the way in which the past influences the present, but, at the same time, it acknowledges the way in which the present influences the past. That reciprocal influence, in turn, dramatically affects future experience. Sartre’s own concept of totalization and its dialectical couple re-totalization also serve to capture some of what’s at stake in the Freudian concept of *nachträglichkeit*.

what he calls repetition and inventiveness, taking care to highlight the unconscious aspects of this dialectical relation:

The raw material, as it were, of the inventiveness is subjectivity itself. We will never recognise and understand what human inventiveness is if we assume it to be pure *praxis*, grounded in clear consciousness. Elements of ignorance are necessary to permit inventiveness. So we can say that subjectivity has two characteristics that are essential and contradictory. Through them *human beings repeat themselves indefinitely, although they never stop innovating and, by this very fact, inventing themselves, since what they have invented reacts on themselves.* (Sartre 2016, 26; emphasis added)

Sartre provides a way of seeing both that human beings are, to a large extent, governed by unconscious processes and that in the very acting out of these processes, they remain free to change, to affect a kind of “downward causality” whereby the psychical structures prompting certain actions are themselves altered by one’s actions.

There are several interesting points Sartre makes in this passage along these lines. To begin with, he states, contrary to some of the conclusions of the early Sartre, that, in effect, the unconscious is necessary for there to be anything like creative invention. We cannot take such inventiveness to be “pure *praxis* grounded in clear consciousness” (Sartre 2016, 26). If action were only conscious praxis, then, Sartre seems to imply, repetition would be all that subjectivity consisted in. It is precisely the degree of unconscious “ignorance” one has with respect to oneself that allows for the perpetual reinvention of oneself. He concludes by stating that what a person has “invented reacts on themselves” (Sartre 2016, 26). Each new experience a person has is integrated into the totality of past experiences that constitute subjectivity. This new piece of experience retroactively reshapes those past experiences generating something (perhaps only slightly) new.

To conclude this section, Lear's remarks on the notion of swerve also bear upon the topic of psychical structure which has been at issue throughout this dissertation.⁷⁸ Why is a focus on psychical structure so important in this context? How does it allow us to think about freedom in a different light? Fantasy is a structural pillar of the psyche. To employ a metaphor drawn from architecture, fantasy is a load-bearing beam that supports the scaffolding of the psyche. As explained in the previous chapter, early childhood experiences begin laying the groundwork for the formation of fantasy. Not to be confused with mere daydreams or imagistic flights of fancy, fantasies, in the psychoanalytic sense, form the core of one's self-conception. It is because fantasy structures are so deeply rooted, emerging from early life experiences and establishing the framework for later experiences, that they can so radically distort one's relation to the world: "Childhood can offer a privileged observation point on psychopathological processes as they are developing—processes that, if not identified and transformed early on, become rooted in a structural and definitive way, limiting and distorting the mental function of the child who is destined to become an adult" (Colombi 2010, 1073). But, if fantasy is omnipresent, if it can influence a life to the point of oppressing it, how can one get out from under it? Indeed, how does one "get out" of who and what one is?

Instead of fumbling around in the murky dark of a hidden psychical depth, attempting to pull from "underneath" the secret cause of one's suffering, a structural approach sets about affecting structural change. In short, a psychoanalytic approach should attempt to alter the fantastic structure of the psyche: "It is because fantasies of mental functioning are present from the beginning of mental life and actually influence

⁷⁸ Remember that the concept of psychical structure is also crucial to the argument I developed against the depth psychological conception of the unconscious.

mental functioning that psychoanalysis can be a ‘talking cure.’ If mental functioning were as remote from a person’s self-understanding as, say, brain functioning, there would be no reason to think that a person could tell us about his mental processes” (Lear 1998, 37). But, since fantasies are themselves a form of mental functioning, they can manipulate the inner workings of such functioning. This offers a clue as to how to approach the kind of psychological transformation at which psychoanalysis aims, namely, by reshaping the fantasy:

But it seems that even the most archaic unconscious mental process contains within it an implicit, fantasied ‘theory’ of that process. A ‘theory’ of the mental process is part of the person’s (perhaps unconscious) experience of that process. *Thus the fantasied ‘theory’ becomes part and parcel of the mental process, and in altering the fantasy one alters the mental process itself.* (Lear 1998, 37; emphasis added)

Herein lies the clinical and theoretical import of fantasy. Something about what Lacan calls “traversing the fantasy” and what Sartre describes as illuminating an individual’s fundamental project is liberating and therapeutic.

What does this process consist in? The next section will proceed by examining two “case histories,” one developed by Sartre and the other by a Lacanian analyst. Exploring the similarities in the two cases will shed light on the role of fantasy in liberating the psyche from unacknowledged or unintegrated desires.

§3 The Fantasy of Freedom or The Freedom of Fantasy?

In a recent contribution to the journal *Crisis and Critique*, “On Psychoanalysis and Freedom: Lacan vs. Heidegger,” Richard Boothby offers an account of the psychoanalytic contribution to the philosophical problem of freedom that directly challenges the central conclusion I wish to draw in this project. In the course of

developing his argument, he raises the concern that fantasy is itself merely another way in which the subject is determined. He begins his essay by discussing the way in which Lacan establishes some philosophical room for the concept of freedom by severing the human being from the strict ordinance of nature. By emphasizing human beings' pre-maturational helplessness, Lacan demonstrates that, unlike other animals, human beings are not subject to the strict instinctual programs nature imposes on other creatures, at least not entirely. However, Boothby states that, though Lacan shows how human beings may be free to a certain degree from the heteronomous influence of their natural biological constitution, he also demonstrates how, precisely in their severance from mechanistic instinctual programs, human beings are subject to another form of determination: "With this result [of the subject being freed from the laws of nature], however, we are already faced with a paradox, insofar as the Lacanian imaginary is as alienating as it is liberating" (Boothby 2019, 12). He goes on to discuss how this Lacanian point results in what might be called the "fantasy of freedom" (as opposed to the freedom of fantasy):

The subject comes to itself only outside of itself and, even then, only in the form of an illusion. We are well familiar with the extended consequences of this fact, among which is that the discourse of free choice becomes a mere alibi of the ego, an illusion of self determination, an almost irresistible temptation to be seduced by a fantasy of independent agency. (Boothby 2019, 12)

It is precisely the so-called fantasy of freedom that Lacan, in his essay on "The Mirror Stage," accuses Sartre of indulging: "Unfortunately [the contemporary philosophy of being and nothingness] grasps...negativity only within the limits of a self-sufficiency of

consciousness, which, being one of its premises, ties the illusion of autonomy in which it puts its faith to the ego's constitutive misrecognitions" (Lacan 2006a, 80).⁷⁹

Boothby's remarks echo arguments made by Ed Pluth in his 2007 book, *Signifiers and Acts: Freedom in Lacan's Theory of the Subject*. Pluth states outright that fantasies are "highly deterministic" (Pluth 2007, 94). Why? Recall the account presented in chapter three according to which it is the enigmatic desires of others, in particular, one's parents and various other authority figures that generate fantasies in the first place. Fantasies are formulated as answers to questions about what others want. For Pluth, this means that subjects are themselves "produced," fashioned, determined by fantasies; that is, the relation between fantasy and subject flows in one direction. Pluth aims "to show that fantasy, far from presupposing either a desire or a subject capable of desiring, produces both desire and a particular kind of subject-effect" (Pluth 2007, 84). For him, fantasy consists entirely in capitulating to the Other: "[Fantasy] sets up objects of desire, but it also 'sets up' a position for jouissance in the Other (which is to say, in signifiers) and a representation or place for the subject itself in the Other" (Pluth 2007, 84). Later, he writes that fantasy "is an attempt to stage oneself as the object of the Other's desire" (Pluth 2007, 92). He concludes that "fantasy achieves nothing but the affirmation of a place for the subject in the Other" (Pluth 2007, 94).

Boothby's and Pluth's central claims about fantasy should not be unfamiliar at this point. A version of them was considered in the previous chapter. But the manner in which Boothby, in particular, establishes his claims poses the problem with fresh

⁷⁹ As should hopefully be clear at this point, Lacan's criticisms of Sartre along these lines are misguided. For Sartre does not ground his conception of freedom in the "ego's constitutive misrecognitions." On the contrary, he, like Lacan (indeed, *before* Lacan) grounds his conception of freedom in subjectivity which, as constituted by negativity, lack, and possibility is fundamentally different from the reified ego-object.

significance in this context. Interestingly, Boothby's claims unfold after he highlights the potential intersection between Lacan and Sartre on the topic of freedom:

Lacan famously claimed never to have spoken about freedom, which may in a sense be true, depending on your definition of freedom. Though if we accept the dictum of Epictetus—'free is he who lives as he desires'—we might equally well conclude that Lacan hardly spoke of anything else. In this respect, Lacan might even be offered as a worthy successor of Sartre, though certainly not for propounding Sartre's brand of radical voluntarism, nor by virtue of criticizing Freud, as Sartre did, for asserting the contradiction of an unconscious consciousness. (Boothby 2019, 11)

For Boothby, Lacan is just as preoccupied with elaborating an account of human freedom as is Sartre. However, he goes on ultimately to distance the two thinkers: "Lacan was true less to Sartre than to the legacy of German idealism..." (Boothby 2019, 11).⁸⁰ There is some insight in Boothby's remarks here, but in the remainder of this chapter, I will proceed to bring Lacan and Sartre back together again apropos the topic of freedom and its relation to fantasy, indeed, with some support and justification from Boothby himself.

As I argued in chapter three, Boothby is correct in thinking that there is a certain "fantasy of freedom." And the way in which this fantasy operates is manifest in psychoanalytic practice. As has already been discussed at length in the present chapter, fantasies distort psychical life from within, creating the illusion that one is making one's own choices regarding sexual partners, objects of desire, and so on. But there is an important sense in which these choices are not so illusory after all. In order to see the passage from the fantasy of freedom to the freedom of fantasy, it will be useful to take a detour through some analytic case histories (including one of Sartre's existential

⁸⁰ Arguably, claiming that Lacan should be situated within the lineage of the German idealists does not significantly separate him from Sartre. For Sartre is himself one of the progenies of Kant and his successors in the German idealist tradition. In fact, there is a good deal of scholarship exploring the affinities between Sartre and J.G. Fichte in particular. See, e.g., *Fichte und Sartre Über Freiheit: Das Ich und der Andere*, ed. Violetta L. Waibel, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015.

psychoanalytic “case histories” in the form of his biography of Gustave Flaubert).

Through an examination of the practice of psychoanalysis, the agency of the subject, even and especially at the level of symptom formation, will be brought to light.

Sartre’s biography of Flaubert is arguably the best place to look for an account of the relation between fantasy and psychopathology in the Sartrean corpus, especially since it demonstrates some direct lines of resonance with Lacanian theory. Christina Howells points out regarding the evolution of Sartre’s thought on psychoanalysis that “his knowledge of Lacan led him to interpret Freudian theory in a new light. *L’Idiot de la famille* provides clear evidence of this *rapprochement* with Freud [by way of Lacan]” (Howells 1988, 145). The five large volumes—and the project remains unfinished!—comprising *The Family Idiot* chronicle Flaubert’s reluctance to enter the place established for him by his parents and by the place of the Flaubert family name within nineteenth century bourgeois French society. His refusal to occupy the symbolic place of a Flaubert coupled with his inability to actively resist society’s prescriptions, what Sartre refers to as Gustave’s “passive constitution,” led to an illness that bears more than a resemblance to hysterical neurosis. In an interview conducted for the May 14, 1971 edition of the newspaper *Le Monde*, Sartre comments on the link between what he explicitly terms Flaubert’s “neurosis” and his relationship with his parents: “I believe [his parents] made Flaubert what he was—that is to say, someone who was unhappy and who found a neurotic solution to this unhappiness” (Sartre 1977, 114). In this interview, Sartre also distinguishes his approach from psychoanalysis, despite the obvious overlap in terms of his emphasis on the decisive relationship between the child and his parents:

I am taking a different point of view here from that of an analyst, who would say, ‘We are studying Flaubert; we will consider his family as it is—objectively,

coldly, and so on—and we will see how this child created his difficulties from objective structures.’ Now I myself think that the family had a harmful effect, that the father was abusive, that the mother was frustrating and almost totally without affection—which was the source of Flaubert’s autistic tendencies—and that the older son unintentionally provoked in Gustave a jealousy which in a certain sense destroyed him. (Sartre 1977, 115)

However, Sartre’s approach here is not all that different from a Freudian-Lacanian one. For he, too, posits that Flaubert’s conception of himself is heavily influenced by the wishes, desires, and fantasies of his parents, a fact that has radical consequences for his psychical development and later life. As Marieke Mueller remarks, Flaubert has an “imaginary or subjective perception of his own life as pre-determined” (Mueller 2014, 18). This imaginary perception is directly influenced by the roles imposed upon him by his parents and the society in which he lives, that is, his “existential situation”. Indeed, we might regard Flaubert’s passivity as his fundamental project, or, in psychoanalytic terms, his core unconscious fantasy is one according to which he is a tragic figure, one to whom things merely happen: “Flaubert’s ‘passive constitution [is] a fundamental attitude of passivity and withdrawal from the world, whose origins are to be found in Flaubert’s early childhood” (Mueller 2014, 19). We can see here the way in which, to put it in Sartrean terms, too strong an identification with the fantasy can result in the subject, i.e., the for-itself, conceiving itself as an in-itself. We also see that, for Sartre, though the imagination is the locus of freedom, it also harbors a threat, namely, of radically severing one from the real. (Recall that Freud’s definition of neurosis proceeds along precisely these lines.) Mueller goes so far as to say that Sartre depicts Flaubert as falling victim to an “imaginary determinism” (Mueller 2014, 22).

Sartre establishes the strict confines of Flaubert’s situation early on: “When, bewildered and still ‘brutish,’ little Gustave Flaubert emerges from infancy, skills await

him. And roles” (Sartre 1981b, 3). As an heir to the Flaubert family name, much is expected of Gustave. But the youngest son of the Flauberts does not initially show much promise: “There was a certain uneasiness in the Flaubert family when Gustave, confronted with his first human tasks, distinguished himself by his failure to perform them” (Sartre 1981b, 4). Flaubert struggled in particular with language. As Sartre describes it, Flaubert utterly resists being initiated into the world of words, a world that he would inhabit completely in later life: “we know that this future writer stumbled when it came to the prime test, his apprenticeship in words...he made a poor showing in the other linguistic test—that chief initiation and rite of passage—learning the alphabet” (Sartre 1981b, 3). Flaubert’s early “failures” contribute, Sartre claims, to his being largely “forgotten” by his parents. Preferring to focus on their more “successful” son, Achille, Gustave is left to his own devices. This, Sartre will go on to argue, is largely responsible for fashioning his “destiny”.

It is worth underscoring Sartre’s analysis of Flaubert’s relation to language. The account presented in *The Family Idiot* overlaps considerably with a Lacanian perspective. For example, he shares the Lacanian view that it is through language that human beings become initiated into the symbolic order: “The symbol can be understood in only one way: from his earliest years, the child is touched by human relationships through the *word*” (Sartre 1981b, 11; emphasis in original). Sartre stipulates further that language is “the conductive medium of all articulated communications. It surrounds [children] from the beginning, they are born into it, shaped—for good or ill—to adapt themselves to it” (Sartre 1981b, 11).⁸¹ Echoing the Lacanian point that children must learn to speak the

⁸¹ One cannot help but be reminded here of Lacan’s statement from *Seminar XVI*, quoted earlier, that children are born into a “bath of signifiers.”

“foreign language” of their parents, Sartre writes, “And in the spiral garland of words must be seen, too, myself in the Other; language expresses human relationships, but it is the relationship of those who seek out the words—to support them, to censure them to reject them—in each individual. The Other in me makes my language, which is my way of being in the Other” (Sartre 1981b, 12). Sartre, like Lacan, indicates that the child’s entrance into language results in his/her alienation from him-/herself. As I argued in chapter three, there is a price to be paid for entrance into the matrix of the symbolic order. Joseph Catalano echoes my sentiments in this regard: “with the Flauberts, the intermingling of words and things were constantly within the family project—the father’s watchfulness and the mother’s dutiful care; that is to say, the price of admission into this linguistic web is the child’s acceptance of his role within the family, a role that Gustave resists” (Catalano 2010, 11). It is in and through this alienation that the subject begins to sense the loss or gap at the center of its being. Fantasies proliferate in order to “plug the hole” at the heart of subjectivity.

Further bolstering the psychoanalytic point that language represents an intrusion from “outside,” and that this intrusion subverts one’s agency, Sartre goes on to state, “Through memory, childhood corrupts us from its first words: we believe we have chosen them for their light and airy meanings, when they are actually imposed on us by some obscure sense” (Sartre 1981b, 13). Indeed, in the first volume of *The Family Idiot*, Sartre indicates that his views on the relationship between the individual and his/her social milieu have changed, with the conditioning of the social environment being given a much larger role to play in his philosophy. However, he does not give up the agency of the individual entirely: “A child of six ordinarily finds himself defined down to his very

innermost being by others and by himself, for to live is to produce meanings, to suffer is to speak. The child is receptive to external meanings because he is himself filled with meaning and producer of meanings...” (Sartre 1981b, 16). Finally, highlighting an explicit affinity between his thoughts on matters pertaining to language and psychoanalytic theory, he writes that questions about the subject’s relationship to language are “essential for the analyst” (Sartre 1981b, 13). Questions about the nature of the subject’s relation to language are essential for both psychoanalysis and Sartre’s unique existential approach precisely because they bring the matters of freedom, determinism, and the unconscious to the fore.

Flaubert’s “early failures,” Sartre insists, lay the groundwork of his fundamental project. Every subsequent action he makes is in some way related to his early childhood, and it establishes the ground for what Sartre will later term Flaubert’s “choice of the imaginary.”: “To be a Flaubert, to be seven years old and not know how to read, was what Gustave could not tolerate...At fifteen, this failure remains an intolerable reminder; it is misery and disaster, the origin of what he is, the humiliation for which he compensates by perpetual scrutiny—it is himself” (Sartre 1981b, 21). Over the course of the next few volumes of his massive study of Flaubert’s life and work, Sartre establishes the setting leading up to an evening in January 1844 that Sartre will argue is *the* decisive act of Flaubert’s entire life, a kind of Lacanian-style “quilting point” (*point de capiton*) that unifies or “totalizes” his past and integrates it with the project of his future as an author.

Saddled with the duty of living up to the Flaubert family name and, at least in the eyes of his parents, falling well short of the mark, Gustave develops a “passive”

constitution; he lets things happen to him rather than expressing any agency in his own life: “In the child Flaubert, passive activity and gliding are his *way of living* this constituted passivity; resentment is his *way of living* the situation assigned to him in the Flaubert family. In other words, the structures of the family are internalized as attitudes and reexternalized as actions by which the child makes himself into what others made him” (Sartre 1987, 3). Note the way in which Sartre characterizes Flaubert’s situation. He lives it passively, taking on the roles that are given to him. But Sartre does not let him off the hook. Flaubert’s passivity is a *choice*: “we shall find in [Flaubert] no behavior, as complex and elaborate as it might seem, that is not originally the surpassing of an internalized determination” (Sartre 1987, 3). Flaubert’s passivity, however, characterizes his entire life. In this way, we can see the resonance with the idea of a “wishful swerve” developed above. Indeed, as Hazel Barnes remarks, Sartre chronicles “the gradual building up of an orientation which will culminate in Flaubert’s nervous crisis and his final choice of himself as a writer” (Barnes 1981, 71). His life is structured around the core idea that he is not an agent in his own life. This “orientation” establishes the possibilities that appear open to him. But there is an important sense in which those possibilities are themselves chosen. Hence, Barnes’ claim that Flaubert’s passivity establishes the condition for his “final choice” of himself. Sartre’s characterization of Flaubert’s neurotic symptoms as a kind of “strategy” emphasizes this aspect of one’s unconscious project/fantasy.

Flaubert’s lived experience as a “passive” individual culminates in what Sartre regards as an attack of hysteria on a night in January 1844. Gustave is visiting his home on a break from studying law in Paris. Studying for a degree in law is Gustave’s attempt

to maintain contact with the prestige of the Flaubert family name, his way of still trying, against his own desire, to be the dutiful son his parents wish for him to be.⁸² He is miserable in school because he wants to be an artist, a writer if not an actor. Sartre describes Flaubert's increasing "nervousness" at what he calls emphatically "*the profession*" (Sartre 1991, 6; emphasis in original). This is the preestablished role that Flaubert's family, in particular, his father has carved out for him. While Flaubert is decidedly against occupying the role of respectable young professional, he experiences the weight of familial expectation as a kind of tragic fate, an inescapable conclusion to his doomed life. But this situation becomes psychologically unbearable for him: "From one day to the next he grows more nervous, more irritable; he is sometimes depressed, sometimes overexcited, always anxious" (Sartre 1991, 6). Sartre goes on to emphasize Flaubert's passivity with respect to his situation, a passivity which arguably intensifies both his psychological and physiological turmoil:

If these disorders expressed anything, it would be the structural disarray of an unhappy young man who does not know what to do, who doesn't even take it into his head to devise a solution, who is at once convinced of the fate that awaits him and unable to believe in it; in sum, the disorders present themselves exactly for what they are: meaningless agitations that take the place of an impossible and even inconceivable behavior in a tormenting but unrealizable situation. (Sartre 1991, 7)

Though these "agitations" appear as meaningless physiological happenings, they are, in fact, the first hints of the singular strategy Flaubert is (unconsciously) developing for transcending his intolerable situation.

⁸² Catalano aptly characterizes Flaubert's acquiescence to his father's wish for him to go to law school, itself an attempt at solving his family problems, though on that will ultimately prove inadequate: "The father is watchful, always wondering what this 'idiot' will do next. The 'idiot' responds by getting his own way. Clearly, an 'idiot' cannot be a doctor. His father agrees; but surely he could at least become a lawyer. Gustave has no answer, and thus he wears himself out preparing for his law classes" (Catalano 2010, 16).

Throughout his biography, Sartre presents Flaubert as an individual who sees himself as a tragic figure, one who is subject to an inescapable fate. But, Sartre insists, whether Flaubert recognizes it or not, he is implicated in his own destiny, in the very way in which he lives his situation. Strangely, his agency is manifest most explicitly in the symptom that appears to befall him in 1844. Sartre explicitly states that Flaubert's illness is a solution to the problem of his not wanting to follow the life-plan his father has laid out for him. Importantly, this "solution" reflects Flaubert's general passivity. He writes that Flaubert's "passive obedience robs him of any possibility of refusing the activity his father imposes on him, but this increasingly difficult passivity, and his basic distaste for the future being prepared for him, succeed in making it impossible. Impossible to obey, impossible to refuse obedience. There is no solution, he knows, but he also knows that there will be one" (Sartre 1991, 42-43). Sartre casts Flaubert's trip home from his law studies in Paris as both a way in which he is behaving "according to plan" while also preparing for himself his way out:

He persists in saying to himself that he is going to spend 'two or three days' with the family in order to get over his emotions: this means that he will be taken at his word, that he will take himself at his word, and that he will be sent back, gently, implacably, with his own full consent, to the Parisian prison. The imaginary escape would be only an inconsequential escapade if he did not have the obscure conviction that he is awaited there by a terrible and ineluctable event: a fall is etching itself on the horizon. (Sartre 1991, 43)

Ostensibly following his duty as a Flaubert and studying to enter bourgeois society by more or less conventional means, Gustave is secretly "choosing" a life as an artist, but without having to make his choice explicit to his family. His illness will provide him the exit from his law studies he so desperately seeks, and it will afford him the leisure to write freely.

Sartre describes Flaubert's initial attack thus:

One evening in January 1844, Achille and Gustave were returning from Deauville, where they had been to see the site of the new country house. It was pitch dark; Gustave was driving the cabriolet himself. Suddenly, in the vicinity of Pont-l'Eveque, as a wagon passed to the right of the carriage, Gustave dropped the reins and fell at his brother's feet as if struck by lightning. Seeing him motionless as a corpse, Achille thought he was dead or dying. (Sartre 1991, 3)

Now, Flaubert's neurosis is clearly painful for him.⁸³ He is incapacitated for a considerable amount of time. He must spend long stretches confined to bedrest, and he is repeatedly stricken by subsequent attacks. Regarding the repetitiveness of his hysterical attacks, Sartre writes that "the basic character of these attacks is that they are explicitly constituted as references to the first attack. In a way, they resurrect it" (Sartre 1991, 15). He adds, "It is like a conjuring trick: the patient *invokes* and *convokes* the false death that felled him one night" (Sartre 1991, 16). (Flaubert's repeated attacks are not unlike the cases of repetition compulsion that Freud attempts to decipher and treat in his later analytic work and that occasion his creation of the concept of *Todestrieb*.) But his illness also serves a strategic function. Indeed, as Sartre shows through numerous excerpts of Flaubert's own letters, Gustave was more troubled by the bad food he was compelled to eat during his convalescence than by the illness itself. To one colleague, he writes, "If you are asked how I am doing, say: very badly, he is following a stupid regimen; as for

⁸³ There is some controversy surrounding precisely what caused Flaubert's illness. Was it a case of hysterical neurosis, or was it epilepsy? To begin with, the diagnostic category of hysteria was not at the disposal of Flaubert's father and the other physicians treating him. But, even then, there was some controversy. Gustave's father initially concluded that it might have some kind of "cerebral congestion." Others were convinced it was epilepsy. And still others, including Gustave, described it as a "nervous crisis." Against the prevailing clinical diagnoses of Flaubert's condition that his attacks were "accidental," that is, that they are merely somatic maladies along the lines of a cold or other common illness, Sartre insists that Flaubert's "illness was organized as a function of an original intention; its sudden and terrible structuring at Pont-l'Eveque was not an accidental fact but a necessity endowed with meaning" (Sartre 1991, 18). For a discussion of the controversy surrounding the nature of Flaubert's symptoms, see Barnes 1981, 183.

the illness, he doesn't give a damn about it" (Quoted in Sartre 1991, 24). He is more frustrated by the fact that he is being denied good food, drink, and tobacco (his "stupid regimen") than that he is suffering from a mysterious affliction that is preventing him from living his life. Sartre quotes a particularly funny statement Flaubert makes about his treatment: "'pipe deprivation, *horrible suffering* to which the early Christians were not condemned'" (Quoted in Sartre 1991, 24).

Flaubert's ambivalence about his illness aside, the important point here is that, in some sense, his hysteria is intentional (in the more commonsense understanding of this term); it is the result of a basic choice. Furthermore, it is what Sartre calls a "choice of the imaginary." Suggesting resonance with psychoanalysis on the topic of the pathogenesis of fantasies, Sartre comments on the role of the imaginary in both Flaubert's neurosis and how this compares to the function of the imaginary in "ordinary" life (this recalls Freud's distinction between neurotic and "healthy" individuals). He states, "It is certain that with Flaubert the element of unreality is all-embracing. The difference between Flaubert and other people in whom imaginary elements obviously cannot help appearing—is that Flaubert wanted to be *totally* imaginary" (Sartre 1977, 177). Mueller points to the concept of "*imaginarisation*" that is introduced in *The Family Idiot* as further support for that claim that Flaubert's illness stems in part from his total immersion in the imaginary: "Being constituted as a 'passive agent,' Gustave's only option is to radically embrace the imaginary, and to turn himself into *l'enfant imaginaire*, the imaginary child. He constantly derealises himself and the world, a process for which Sartre not only relies on his earlier writings in *L'Imaginaire*, but further introduces a new concept which...represents a conceptual radicalization, 's'imaginariser' ('imagining oneself')"

(Mueller 2014, 21). This is “an attitude that instead of acting on the world transforms life into fiction” (Mueller 2014, 21).

This “choice” accomplishes a number of aims. To begin with, it allows him to flout his father’s plan for him without having to directly confront him: “in January 1844, the unloved son of Doctor Flaubert began his solitary strike against his father, entering neurosis the way one enters a convent” (Sartre 1989, 60n.48). Here again, Flaubert’s “passive activity” is manifest. Second, it affords him ample time to write. After falling ill, Flaubert withdraws from law school and writes many of the novels that would make him famous. Thus, Flaubert is invested in maintaining his neurosis. In fact, he says as much: “For myself, I am really rather well since consenting to be always ill” (Quoted in Sartre 1991, 26). This ascription of agency is, as we shall see, apt. For though there is a genuine sense in which neurosis befalls a person, it is also true that he/she is partially responsible for the form it takes.

Sartre’s existential psychoanalytic “case history” of the life of Gustave Flaubert presents us with an individual who suffers deeply. But this person has far more agency in his own life than he knows. The title of Part Three, Book One of *The Family Idiot*, “The ‘Fall’ Seen as the Immediate, Negative, and Tactical Response to an Emergency,” hints at Sartre’s philosophical aim in analyzing Flaubert’s hysteria. As Sartre describes it, Flaubert’s neurosis and subsequent life as a writer are the direct result of his “choice of the imaginary.” As I argued in section two, fantasies can radically distort the way one sees the world. Flaubert’s basic “project” as a “passive” individual shapes the possibilities that are open to him, but that project is, in part, of Flaubert’s own making. And he makes certain choices from within his “imaginary” perspective. Flaubert’s choice

of neurosis solidifies his fundamental project/fantasy. His hysterical neurosis “marked a turning point. In Sartre’s view it was the moment of choice, the point at which Flaubert fixed once and for all the essential patterns of his personality” (Barnes 1981, 182). Or, as Flynn puts the point:

Sartre reads this crisis as the fundamental break in Flaubert’s life, as the (necessarily passive) ‘choice’ of the life of an invalid, free from the vocational demands of his bourgeois family to pursue the life of a literary artist. In other words, Flaubert’s ‘neurosis’ is not so much a problem as the solution to the problem of avoiding his father’s expectation that he earn a degree in law while obtaining the leisure for his art, without resorting to disobedience or outright rebellion, precluded by his ‘passive constitution.’ In Sartre’s view, Flaubert’s attacks were psychosomatic and intentional; *they were strategic moves*. (Flynn 1997, 183; emphasis added)

Sartre writes in an explicitly psychoanalytic vein when elaborating the way in which Flaubert’s illness serves his purposes. Despite the suffering his hysteria causes, it prevents an even greater form of suffering: “between ’44 and ’46 he ‘went forward with the rectitude of a particular system made for a special case.’ This is the very definition of neurosis: *the self-defense mechanisms have refined a rigorous strategy that is none other than the illness itself*” (Sartre 1991, 30; emphasis added). Sartre is careful to emphasize Flaubert’s agency with respect to his neurosis: “The Flaubert son has *organized himself* deep down to suffer as little as possible” (Sartre 1991, 30; emphasis added). Sartre refers to this self-organization as “neurotic planning” (Sartre 1991, 30). As we will see, this puts Sartre’s interpretation in line with how psychoanalysis understands the symptom. The psychoanalytic symptom is not simply an illness that must be cured (although, in certain ways, it is that). Rather, the symptom is precisely a strategy, a way of coping with desires and feelings that may be too overwhelming. The symptom, while causing a

certain degree of suffering in and of itself, causes less suffering than the seemingly simpler option of dealing with one's desire.

Sartre is quick to cast his account of Flaubert's hysterical neurosis as distinct from the approach psychoanalysis might take to the same phenomenon: "My analysis of [Flaubert's] neurosis was a kind of antipsychiatry: I wanted to show neurosis as the solution to a problem" (Sartre 1977, 118). However, the idea that neuroses are "strategic" finds expression already in Freud's work. In the 1914 paper "On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement," Freud writes:

Psycho-analysis recognized early that every neurotic symptom owes its possibility of existence to a compromise. Every symptom must therefore in some way comply with the demands of the ego which manipulates the repression; it must offer some advantage, it must admit of some useful application or it would meet with the same fate as the original instinctual impulse itself which has been fended off. (*SE* 14: 53)

Thus, Sartre's "antipsychiatry" fits decisively within a traditional psychoanalytic framework. As we shall see in the next case history, this idea is crucial to a Lacanian approach, too. Furthermore, grasping the notion that neurosis is in some way a strategy deployed by the subject will prove crucial to demonstrating the agency that belongs to it.

Psychoanalysis furnishes numerous examples of fantasies distorting reality in wishful ways (along the lines of Lear's psychical "swerve"). In *After Lacan: Clinical Practice and the Subject of the Unconscious*, Willy Apollon, Danielle Bergeron, and Lucie Cantin detail the ways in which a Lacanian clinical practice operates. Apollon, in particular, aims to show how Lacanian analysis helps patients "traverse the fantasy": "One might add that for Lacan, the end of analysis presupposes that the fantasy has been worked through" (Apollon 2002, 127). In one particular case history presented by Apollon, a young woman from Montreal named Marguerite describes her inability to

derive any enjoyment from sex. She avoids intimacy with men, claiming to fear that she will faint during intercourse. During her analysis, she recounts two recurring dreams to her analyst. In the first, she is in water and is swept up in a large wave. She cannot swim and cannot break free from the undertow; she is drowning. This dream seems to be coupled with the symptom prompting Marguerite to seek analytic treatment:

Her dream, which monopolizes the entire first part of her treatment, accompanies a specific symptom that brought Marguerite to analysis. She experiences the feeling that, in her words, her ‘whole body is getting away from her’ and that, for instance, she ‘could faint’ while making love. That feeling reappears in the treatment when she speaks of her desire, and in circumstances in which a man shows interest in her and courts her. In such situations, she finds herself with her back to the wall; she can no longer sustain the cat and mouse game. She is excited, but flees at the last moment. And if she feels that no escape is possible, her whole world falls apart. (Apollon 2002, 128-129)

In the second dream, a little girl runs into a city street to retrieve a spoon. As the girl stoops to pick up the spoon, a knight, fully clad in armor approaches her on horseback with his sword drawn. The girl plays dead in the road to avoid the knight’s attention.

What do these dreams reveal about the nature of Marguerite’s symptoms, and how does fantasy structure these symptoms?

As is always the case in analysis, the events of the analysand’s dreams must be connected to other material verbalized by the patient in his/her free-associational monologues. Apollon points to one piece of associational material to shed light on Marguerite’s dream reports:

In her childhood, [Marguerite’s] mother, a very Christian person, would tell her ‘stories of young girls kidnapped to be sold in far away countries or else used as prostitutes in the big cities.’ Whatever the reality of such stories attributed to her mother, this is what comes out in treatment as an association. She specifies that the mother told her such ‘terrifying stories’ for the purposes of her education. Her mother wanted to reinforce a prohibition against ‘being free with strangers.’ Marguerite admits that she wondered for a long time what ‘being free with

strangers' really meant. It must have been something quite bad for it to be so strongly prohibited. (Apollon 2002, 132)

According to Apollon, Marguerite's dreams, in particular, the way in which satisfaction, whether from being rescued from drowning or from retrieving the spoon, is never achieved is somehow tied to her mother's prohibition to not "be free with strangers." Importantly, Apollon raises the possibility that this all may have been provoked by a fantasy: "Whether fantasy or reality matters little, the crucial thing here is that something was imposed upon the child that would, some twenty-five years later, be attributed by the adult to the maternal Other" (Apollon 2002, 133). The prohibition established by Marguerite's mother forms a specific point of orientation for her, a coordinate that is constitutive of the fantasmatic template according to which Marguerite lives her life, especially the way in which her romantic relationships unfold. More specifically, Marguerite's mother established an untraversable gulf between her daughter and pleasure. Sexual pleasure, for Marguerite, is unattainable:

What repeats itself here for Marguerite through dreams and symptoms progressively confronts her in treatment with an unbearable truth about what jouissance is for her, and about the place held by her mother in the stakes of her jouissance...For Marguerite, jouissance is prohibited for her solely because it is reserved for her mother. There is a level of satisfaction forever out of her reach because a young girl must never enjoy more than her mother. And because she cannot know when she is enjoying as much as her mother, nor when it is on the verge of overstepping that limit, she does just as well to faint before reaching such a point. (Apollon 2002, 134)

Marguerite's symptoms and the repetitious character of her relationships reflect the rigid structure imposed by her fantasy life. The prohibition first implemented by her mother comes to influence her encounters with potential sexual partners. What is the clinical approach that might allow Marguerite to pass beyond this deadlock? Importantly,

Apollon insists that it involves allowing Marguerite to discover her own agency in the fantasy generating the symptom:

The analyst's maneuver is to sustain an ethical approach rather than remitting the subject indefinitely back to the Oedipal situation by imposing himself as a third party through force. It is important that the subject escape from the trap of the false prohibition. *As long as Marguerite continues to impute responsibility for the prohibited onto her mother*, she will never gain access to the savoir of the impossible, where the very fact of language directly affects jouissance. (Apollon 2002, 134; emphasis added)

In other words, by failing to recognize her self-imposed prohibition and continuing to attribute an authority to her mother's command, she cannot know what is on the "other side" of that command. Indeed, Marguerite's symptom is, at least in part, a matter of her own choice: "Of course, the fainting is in itself a jouissance, but the choice she makes removes any responsibility for it" (Apollon 2002, 134). Note the twist here in terms of Marguerite's agency. Her fainting is itself a kind of "choice." And in this sense, she is active in her own life. But this choice (*à la* the Freudian "choice of neurosis"), is precisely one that removes her sense of responsibility for what happens to her. Marguerite's neurosis is, in this sense, quite similar to Flaubert's. It is a strategy for coping with an unbearable situation. It is a choice that creates the illusion of not having to choose. It is this sense of agency and responsibility that must be restored.

Agency can be hard to discern when one is in thrall of an all-consuming symptom. Marguerite's attitudes toward men, women, and sex are colored by the remarks her mother made to her when she was a child. In addition to threatening her with kidnapping if she were to become a "loose woman," Marguerite's mother frequently insulted her father, ridiculing his impotence and inability to satisfy her sexually. Such emotionally charged statements can have a profound effect on a young, developing

psyche. We see here the way in which the attitudes and fantasies of others influence and determine one's own fantasies, thereby bolstering the view that the freedom of fantasy is really only a fantasy of freedom. As Apollon notes, Marguerite's complaints about her boyfriend "were only copied on the complaints her mother made against her father" (Apollon 2002, 135). But, through the process of analysis, that is by confronting her own agency in the fantasy behind the symptom, she is able to reorient herself with respect to the fantasy. Throughout her analysis, there are "various transformations of the fantasy" (Apollon 2002, 138). It is precisely through these transformations of fantasy that Marguerite finds herself in a position to recognize her own responsibility and agency in the treatment: "what prevails in the work of analyzing the fantasy is a consequence of the fact that the outcome of the clinic of the symptom consists in the subject assuming personal responsibility for the treatment" (Apollon 2002, 138). Though a person necessarily takes on board the desires of others, responsibility for the specific form a fantasy takes ultimately lies with the person him-/herself. It is only through recognizing one's own agency with respect to the formation of the fantasy that genuine psychical change can occur.

§4 Traversing the Fantasy, or, How to Read Lacan as a Sartrean (And Vice Versa)

In his 1997 book *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique*, Bruce Fink offers an account of a specifically Lacanian approach to the psychoanalytic clinic. One important feature of Lacan's approach to analytic practice is to emphasize the agency and ultimate authority of the analysand him-/herself, but in ways different than one might expect. Fink references a bit of hackneyed wisdom according to

which analysis and other forms of therapy are generally worthless unless the patient “genuinely wants to change.” While partially true, this commonsense notion nevertheless misses something crucial about the nature of the psychoanalytic symptom. As Fink notes, for Lacan, the analysand has a considerable amount of psychical energy bound up with maintaining his/her symptoms. In fact, there is a degree of enjoyment experienced in and through the symptom (it is this dimension of enjoyment through suffering that is captured by the Lacanian term *jouissance*; the English term ‘enjoyment’ thus misses the specificity of Lacan’s usage). For this reason, the patient’s desire is precisely *not* to change; he/she has a vested interest in remaining the same:

Of course the patient does not *really* want to change! If symptoms have developed, if the patient engages in symptomatic behavior, it is because a great deal of energy has become tied up in those symptoms. The patient has a great deal invested in keeping things the way they are, for he or she obtains what Freud referred to as a ‘substitute satisfaction’ from symptoms, and cannot be easily induced to give it up. Although the patient may initially claim to want to be relieved of his or her symptoms, he or she is ultimately committed to not rocking the boat. (Fink 1997, 3)

Hence, if an analyst buys into the notion that a psychoanalysis can only be successful if the patient him-/herself wants to change, wants to be made “better,” then analysis will never, or at least, quite rarely meet with any success. For if one is deprived of one’s symptom, one must confront that which prompted its formation. That can be a frightening prospect.

As we have seen, neurotic symptoms serve a function. They are painful solutions to problems that, for the subject, appear more unbearable than the symptom itself. Per the account developed in sections two and three, unconscious fantasies underlie and provide structure and form to the symptom. Repetitive patterns of behavior are structured around core fantasies. One’s relationships are played out according to the structure of the

fantasy. The possibilities that appear open to a person are governed by unconscious fantasy. One's very way of living is structured by a fundamental fantasy. Is it possible to reorient oneself in relation to the fantasy? Is it possible to restructure the fantasy?

The aim of Lacanian psychoanalysis is for the analysand to "traverse the fantasy." A superficial glance at this notion would suggest that the aim of psychoanalysis is to divest a person of his/her fantasies, to enable him/her to accept reality for what it is rather than continuing to filter this reality through the screen of an unreal fantasy. Is not the best way to treat the suffering caused by a rigid unconscious fantasy to get rid of the fantasy altogether?

From a Lacanian perspective, the aim rather is to allow the subject to recognize his/her own agency in the construction of the fantasy, to aid in the recognition that it is the subject him-/herself who engages in fantasizing. In other words, the fantasy must be "subjectivized." Žižek offers a helpful characterization of this central aim of Lacanian analysis:

This notion [of traversing the fantasy] may seem to fit perfectly the common-sense idea of what psychoanalysis should do: of course it should liberate us from the hold of idiosyncratic fantasies, and enable us to confront reality as it really is! However, this, precisely, is what Lacan does not have in mind—what he aims at is almost the exact opposite. In our daily existence, we are immersed in 'reality' (structured and supported by the fantasy), and this immersion is disturbed by symptoms which bear witness to the fact that another, repressed, level of our psyche resists this immersion. To 'traverse the fantasy' therefore, paradoxically, means fully identifying oneself with the fantasy—namely, with the fantasy which structures the excess that resists our immersion in daily reality. (Žižek 2002, 17)

It is only in and through this identification with or "subjectivation" of the fantasy that a person can recognize how active he/she already is in shaping his/her own life. Through a slight shift in perspective, what once was perceived as the vagaries of fate governing one's life may now appear as the result of one's own creative fantasy activity. Echoing

Žižek's remarks in the passage above, Boothby similarly comments on the "Janus face" of fantasy, as being both something that traps the subject in superficial, phenomenally registered "Imaginary" experiences and the creative unfurling of a subject's life history in relation to the symbolically mediated Real:

[W]e now see how and why Lacan associates the end of analysis with a 'traversing of phantasy.' In the analytic situation, the analyst occupies the position of the *objet a* with the result that the analysand is progressively drawn beyond the imaginary sedimentations of phantasy toward a symbolic horizon in which the lack that stimulates desire remains open to the play of signifiers. 'Traversing the phantasy' thus does not mean that the subject somehow abandons its involvement with fanciful caprices and accommodates itself to a pragmatic 'reality,' but precisely the opposite: the subject is submitted to that effect of the symbolic lack that reveals the limit of everyday reality. To traverse the phantasy in the Lacanian sense is to be more profoundly claimed by the phantasy than ever, in the sense of being brought into an ever more intimate relation with that real core of the phantasy that transcends imaging. (Boothby 2001, 275-276)

What accounts for this double character of imaginative life between, on the one hand, an autonomous creative act and, on the other hand, a possibility-squelching, sometimes painful psychical "prison"? Paradoxically, it is precisely that which renders human beings free that creates the condition for the possibility for the kinds of "imaginary determinism" encountered herein. In other words, it is only insofar as human beings are free that they can become trapped in the fantasmatic creations of their own psyches. The idea of the subject's lack of coincidence with itself is a view of subjectivity held in common by Sartre, Lacan, and arguably Freud, too. For these three thinkers, the subject is never "whole," "put together," or content. The "missing piece" at the heart of subjectivity generates both desire and the fantasies that serve as desire's structural support. To gloss material covered at the close of chapter one (and referenced at various points throughout this dissertation), it is precisely the subject's lack of coincidence with itself, its incompleteness that creates the space or screen to be filled in by fantasy.

This idea is at the heart of the Lacanian process of traversing the fantasy. At the close of the eleventh seminar, Lacan glosses what this activity consists in. Referencing his “formula” of fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$), Lacan insists that traversing the fantasy ultimately means that one has reoriented oneself in relation to object *a*: “...after the mapping of the subject in relation to the *a*, the experience of the fundamental phantasy becomes the drive” (Lacan 1977, 273). For Lacan, traversing the fantasy means that the subject has come to realize that it will never catch this little *a*. It means that the subject has somehow come to recognize its perpetually incomplete character; the subject recognizes that it will never coincide with itself, will never be “filled in” by the missing object.⁸⁴ The passage from desire to drive occurs when this recognition has been achieved. The desire for particular experiential objects is demoted in relation to the pure insistence of the drive. That is, the drives continue to exert pressure, but the subject proceeds to act on their insistence with the idea that no object in particular will quell their demands. In this way, the subject is no longer wedded to a singular pursuit. We might cast this point in Sartrean terms as the recognition of the for-itself that it will never achieve the status of the in-itself. Indeed, we can construe Sartre’s idea of the “impossible project” of being in-itself-for-itself, i.e., the desire to be “God” as precisely analogous to the similarly doomed project of retrieving the “lost object” or capturing object *a*.

The formation of fantasy, the act of making the Sartrean-style original choice, forms a necessary structural feature of the human psyche which establishes the foundational coordinates of the subject’s character. As stated earlier in chapter one, the

⁸⁴ The Lacanian traversal of the fantasy bears some resemblance to Sartre’s conception of “authenticity” insofar as both require that the subject recognize that it will never coincide with itself. I suspect, however, that Lacan would have been quite averse to this characterization.

fundamental choice or fantasy can be construed as the subject's answer to the question about who and what it is. The subject must answer this question for itself, but it must also, as seen in chapter three, formulate this answer in the first instance about its value in relation to the Other. Commenting on the structural necessity of fantasy, Adrian Johnston remarks that "these fantasmatic productions striving to seal this crack in reality are semblances. And yet they are the inevitable results of a structurally determined dynamic rooted in subjectivity's internal division" (Johnston 2008, 33). In other words, the act of fantasizing is prompted by the subject's lack of coincidence with itself (its "internal division"); fantasizing is the direct result of the incomplete constitution of subjectivity. The fundamental fantasy is thus the "...the fantasmatic core of the subject's very being as subject, the hidden nucleus of its identity structure" (Johnston 2008, 33). For both Sartre and psychoanalysis, this original fantasmatic choice governs the basic orientation the subject will have toward the world: "The complex...is, in this respect, the Freudian equivalent of the [Sartrean] 'choix originel'...the comparison of the 'choix originel' is faithful to Freud's own specific notion of the complex as a fundamental structuring force rather than a description of a state or a merely pathogenic phenomenon" (Howells 1988, 146). (As discussed chapter one, the Freudian "complex" or "choice of neurosis" is analogous to the Lacanian concept of the fundamental fantasy.)

Despite appearances that one has no choice in the matter about who one is or what one does, the task is to recognize that one has always-already chosen, that, underlying the activity of ordinary, everyday life there is a more fundamental grounding act or choice that establishes the parameters within which all other choices are made, what Sartre calls "the original upsurge of human freedom" (Sartre 1956, 727). From a Sartrean

perspective, the choices one makes throughout one's life history invariably refer back to this original choice which, in turn, renders all other choices partially explicable in terms of itself.⁸⁵ The task is for the subject to recognize this basic autonomy.

Another reference to Jonathan Lear's work is appropriate here. In the context of a discussion of fantasy in psychoanalysis, he draws a distinction between "holding oneself responsible" and "accepting responsibility." Lear likewise acknowledges the point that the subject is constituted, or rather constitutes itself as a kind of "response" to the Other:

As Freud comes to appreciate that the individual is an achievement, he becomes increasingly interested in the conditions under which this achievement occurs. The individual, he realizes, cannot be understood other than as a *response* to certain forces that permeate the social world into which he is born. And the individual is a manifestation and embodiment of *the very same forces* to which his existence is a response. (Lear 1998, 156-157)

But precisely in formulating its "response," the subject can become trapped, unable to creatively pose the question of itself anew or to formulate variations on its initial "answer." To put this in terms of Sartre's account of repetition discussed above, from the perspective of the neurotic or the hysteric, the idea of "inventiveness," of fashioning new dimensions of oneself out of what has come before, cannot occur. This is because one has become blinded to one's own agency in forming one's own fundamental project.

For Lear, a hallmark of neurosis is that one "holds oneself responsible" for something. This attitude is one of assigning blame for having done or thought something untoward, for having desires that conflict with what is socially accepted or expected. Strangely, it is precisely because one holds oneself responsible for something that one may be prompted to *deny* responsibility via the process of repression. Elisabeth von R.,

⁸⁵ It is this mutual illumination of choice and project that is at stake in Sartre's "progressive-regressive" method. See *Search for a Method* for an in-depth discussion of the progressive-regressive method.

for example, whose hysteria was brought on by her love for her brother-in-law, developed her hysterical symptoms precisely in response to her holding herself responsible for her romantic feelings. She blamed herself for both loving her sister's husband and rejoicing in the fact that her sister's death freed him up for romantic advances: "It is because she would have held herself responsible, blamed herself, for her love, that Elisabeth von R. archaically denied responsibility via repression" (Lear 1998, 66). What Elisabeth von R. cannot do when she is in thrall of her neurosis is accept her desires as her own; she cannot *accept* responsibility for who and what she is. The transformative dimension of psychoanalysis consists precisely in allowing people to make this perspectival shift: "But as she is able to cease *holding* herself responsible for her emotions, she is able to *accept* responsibility for them: that is, she is able to acknowledge them as hers. Accepting responsibility is essentially a first-person relation. In accepting responsibility I acknowledge who or what I am" (Lear 1998, 66).

The distance separating the idea of holding oneself responsible and accepting responsibility is manifest in both the case histories presented in section three. Both Flaubert and Marguerite deny their own agency and responsibility. Flaubert refuses to accept that his own passivity is partially to blame for the misery he experiences. He will not defy his father and accept responsibility for his desire to be an artist. By taking "refuge" in neurosis, he is able to choose the life he wants while not explicitly accepting responsibility for it. Similarly, Marguerite refuses to accept her sexual desires as her own. By taking on her own neurotic symptoms, she does not have to accept responsibility for perhaps illicit sexual desires.

This idea finds expression in Lacan's work, too. As we have seen, Lacan takes issue with the ego psychological approach to psychoanalysis. His problems with ego psychology pertain to both theory and technique, with errors in the former invariably leading to errors in the latter. One rather well-known interpretive point on which Lacan differs from ego psychology (at least as practiced in the 50s, 60s, and 70s) is in its reading of Freud's famous dictum *Wo es war, soll Ich werden*. In *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, Freud remarks once again on the therapeutic procedure of psychoanalysis: "[Psychoanalysis'] intention is, indeed, to strengthen the ego, to make it more independent of the super-ego, to widen its field of perception and enlarge its organization, so that it can appropriate fresh portions of the id. Where id was, there ego shall be" (*SE* 22: 80). As initially translated into English by James Strachey, the sentence reads, "Where id was, there ego shall be." But Lacan insists that this misses a crucial dimension of Freud's intended meaning. For Lacan, the Latin terms 'ego' and 'id' should be rendered more colloquially as 'it' and 'I', respectively, so that the phrase reads: "Where it was, there I shall be," or "there I shall become." Lacan writes, "...Freud said neither *das Es*, nor *das Ich*, as was his wont when designating the agencies he had used to organize his new topography for the previous ten years; and, considering the inflexible rigor of his style, this gives a particular emphasis to their use in this sentence" (Lacan 2006c, 347). Part of the importance of Lacan's emphasis on this point here lies in the distinction between ego and subject, with the former being the reified imaginary phenomenon with which a person identifies as he/she passes through the "mirror stage" and the latter being the true nucleus of subjectivity. This is a distinction Lacan shares with Sartre. Lacan insists that Freud wrote *The Ego and the Id*, in which he consistently

uses the definite article ‘*das*’ when referring to the two psychical agencies of the book’s title, precisely “in order to maintain the fundamental distinction between the true subject of the unconscious and the ego as constituted in its nucleus by a series of alienating identifications” (Lacan 2006c, 347). On Lacan’s reading, then, when Freud proclaims in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis* “*Wo es war, soll Ich werden*’, he is really contending that, through the process of psychoanalysis, the *subject* must come to be where previously there was an impersonal “it,” namely, the desires, wishes, and fantasies of others.

One way of interpreting Lacan’s recasting of this Freudian statement is as suggesting that one must accept responsibility for those things that appear outside of one’s control. In other words, Lacan’s shift of emphasis here corresponds to Lear’s account of the shift from the third-personal attitude of holding oneself responsible to the first-personal attitude of accepting responsibility. As Fink puts the point, Lacan’s interpretation suggests

a morally dictated movement from the impersonal ‘it’ form (and not the id per se—for Freud says neither *das Es* nor *das Ich* here, as he usually does when designating the agencies of the id and the ego) to I. I must become I where ‘it’ was or reigned; I must come to be, must assume its place that place where ‘it’ was. I here appears as the subject that analysis aims to bring forth: an I that assumes responsibility for the unconscious, that arises there in the unconscious linking up of thoughts which seems to take place all by itself, without the intervention of anything like a subject. (Fink 1995a, 46)

This procedure requires one recognize the agency one has in one’s life, even if that agency is limited in certain significant ways. Where once one gave precedence to the Other’s desire, one now recognizes the place of one’s desire: “The traversing of fantasy involves the subject’s assumption of a new position with respect to the Other as language and the Other as desire... There where it... was, the subject is able to say ‘I.’ Not ‘It

happened to me,' or 'They did this to me,' or 'Fate had it in store for me,' but 'I was, 'I did,' 'I saw,' 'I cried out'" (Fink 1995a, 62).

This account permits a reassessment of one of Sartre's most direct engagements with psychoanalysis, namely, his account of bad faith in *Being and Nothingness*. One aspect of the account presented therein that seems initially to be problematic is the negative moral valence of the concept of bad faith. Sartre's description of a lie one tells oneself and the examples he gives to elucidate his discussion present individuals engaged in acts of bad faith as deliberately deluding themselves, at times so that they may delude others. It is a nefarious attempt to shirk the responsibility from which one cannot ultimately escape insofar as one is condemned to be free. Of course, he argues that the unconscious is itself nothing more than an excuse for getting out from under the weight of the responsibility one must bear. By organizing itself around the unconscious, psychoanalysis, according to the early Sartre, is a discourse of bad faith. Sartre often strikes a highly critical attitude with respect to the people he suggests are engaged in bad faith (Baudelaire and Flaubert are exemplary in this regard). This is an attitude that one clearly should not strike in relation to an analysand. But, per the account I have been developing, the approach of Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis shares the Sartrean thesis that, ultimately, a person must accept responsibility for him-/herself. Is this not precisely the shift that Sartre encourages those suffering from bad faith to make?

Sartre hints at the possible pathological character of bad faith in his scathing early study of Baudelaire. Of the quintessential *flâneur*, he writes, "his bad faith went so deep he was no longer master of it" (Sartre 1950, 83). But, the project of existential psychoanalysis, as Sartre conceives it, is arguably to allow individuals to once again

become masters of their own destiny, to accept responsibility for who and what they are. This is accomplished by illuminating a person's fundamental project or original choice. Along the lines I have been developing in this section, this amounts to elucidating the fantasmatic core at the heart of subjectivity, the fantasy structure that provides that basic orientation for the myriad choices one makes and the acts in which one engages in everyday life: "Sartre's aim is to uncover the necessity that inhabits the contingency of the lives of each of his subjects as they 'choose' to become what he reveals they are (destined to be)" (Flynn 2014, 386).

To "traverse the fantasy," to "uncover the fundamental project" amounts to reorienting a person with respect to him-/herself. Importantly, Lacanian analysis takes a cue from Sartre in its approach. For the analysand him-/herself is the authority when it comes to this reorientation. One of the lessons of Lacan's *écrit* "The Freudian Thing, or the Meaning of the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis" is that the subject's unconscious is the ultimate arbiter of truth in the analytic setting. It is this point that Lacan takes to be his biggest bone of contention regarding the clinical approach of ego psychology. Practically speaking, this consists in refusing to require that the patient to model his/her desire on the analyst's. For the task is for the patient to accept their desire as their own. Lacanian analysis thus accepts Sartre's challenge to provide a therapeutic environment in which the analysand is not subject to the domineering demands of his/her analyst and in which the freedom the subject is not stifled but rather encouraged.

There is a profound similarity between the accounts of subjectivity developed by Sartre and Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis. From both perspectives, subjectivity is generated by an original, fundamental fantasmatic choice. According to this basic thesis,

the subject is always-already implicated in his/her desire. What remains is for a person to recognize him-/herself in that desire and to understand his/her relation to it. To traverse the fantasy, in the Lacanian sense, it to realize that one can never “catch” the object of one’s desire but also that one must not “give ground relative to one’s desire” (Lacan 1992, 319). That is, one must go on desiring, and furthermore, one must recognize that desire as one’s own. Otherwise, one has fallen short of one’s moral duty. As Alenka Zupančič puts it, “...claims like ‘circumstances forced me to do’, ‘I could not help it’, ‘it was beyond my control’ are the best testimony to the subject’s guilt. They show that the subject has given up on his desire” (Zupančič 2000, 119). Put another way, realizing one’s implication in the way in which one desires is precisely to recognize that one is condemned to be free. Desire will not cease; human beings are compelled to press on in their endeavors. But, the way in which desire is pursued rests upon one’s own shoulders.

Conclusion

According to the view developed in this project, from both Sartrean and psychoanalytic perspectives, the imagination is a strange and powerful faculty of mind, one that forms the center of gravity of subjectivity. Fantasy establishes the coordinates of one's self-conception, laying the groundwork of a project that will play itself out over the course of an individual's life. There is thus a powerful creative dimension to fantasy. This dimension is captured by both Sartrean and Freudian-Lacanian descriptions of a basic or fundamental choice that thereafter establishes the scheme according to which a person's unique character traits are developed and how his/her life unfolds.

However, as I have argued in the preceding chapters, this autonomous, creative function of mind also carries with it the potential to strip away the very autonomy with which it appears to endow human subjects. The fantasies that undergird a person's life-historical project can, at a certain point, lose their "elasticity" in the sense that the creative expanses that the imagination once opened become closed worlds in which one's possibilities are dramatically circumscribed. Rigid fantasies compel one to live within their narrow confines, repeating patterns of behavior such that anything like free choice with respect to one's life appears out of the question. The Learian notion of an "imaginative swerve," to which I appealed extensively in the fourth and final chapter, captures the sense of this determining power of fantasy. As we have seen, the distorting swerve or spin fantasies put on experience receive some of their power from the cultural milieu into which a person is "thrown". The demands and desires of one's parents and, later, friends, employers, and other social institutions—part of what Lacan would call the "symbolic order—are imposed and significantly shape and determine one's sense of self.

One's own fantasy life is, in this way, foisted upon one from others rather than subjectively created.

A central question animating this dissertation has been: How, in the grips of a determining fantasy, one that fails to grow and expand as one has new experiences, can one retrieve the sense of possibility that once characterized one's imaginative life (if, indeed, this sense ever did characterize one's imaginative life in the first place)? A significant portion of the account developed in this dissertation as a response to this question has been devoted to an historical concern, namely, aligning the philosophical and metapsychological projects of Sartre, Freud, and Lacan, thinkers who, at first glance, seem like strange bedfellows. To begin with, Freud is a kind of philosophical enemy and presents a foil to Sartre's career-long endeavor to develop a robust account of human freedom. The concept of the unconscious coupled with the reductionist natural scientific pretensions of Freudian psychoanalysis (at least in its early phases) go against the grain of the conceptions of radical freedom and responsibility developed by Sartrean existentialism. Furthermore, the structuralist underpinnings of Lacan's return to Freud appear to further distance psychoanalysis from Sartre's conclusions about the nature of human subjectivity rather than bring them closer together. Nevertheless, the wager staked within the pages of this dissertation is that the work of Sartre, Freud, and Lacan can be seen as addressing the same sorts of questions about subjectivity and developing accounts that proceed along the same lines.

To make this case, I have emphasized the ways in which these thinkers approach the role of imagination or fantasy in human life. As we have seen, it is of crucial importance for all three, with fantasy rivaling the unconscious as a central concern in

psychoanalytic theory and practice and the imagination being the fullest expression of human freedom for Sartre. It is my contention that the resonance between Sartre and psychoanalysis on the topic of imagination is a neglected area of research. By focusing on this topic, several lines of convergence, to which Sartre himself arguably remained blind during his lifetime, are illuminated.

Most importantly, I wish to emphasize their shared conclusions about human freedom. Despite Sartre's many criticisms of psychoanalysis as a discourse of determinism, and, similarly, despite Lacan's many criticisms of Sartre's "mythology" of freedom, I argue that Sartre and Lacan (and ultimately Freud, too) are philosophically committed to the idea of human freedom. What is more, this shared commitment proceeds from similar premises. For Sartre, human freedom is the result of the subject's lack of coincidence with itself. Likewise, for Lacan, there is a gap or hole at the center of subjectivity, one that prevents the subject from fully coinciding with itself. It is precisely this minimal distance that is the condition for the possibility of freedom. The non-self-coincident subject is able to take different perspectives on itself; it is able to ask questions of itself; it is able to conceive of things differently than they are; it is able to fantasize and imagine.

However, it is also this minimal distance between the subject and itself that creates the possibility of the subject being caught in its own fantasmatic web. What once functioned as a vehicle for the free expression of the subject's own creative forces can come to function as a trap ensnaring the subject in the guise of freedom (what, in chapter four, I referred to as the "fantasy of freedom"). Here, the double character of fantasy, with it being, on the one hand, the creative expression of the subject's own self-

determination and, on the other hand, it being the fantasmatic image of itself as a unified, integrated, and self-coincident entity with circumscribed possibilities comes to light. Both Sartre and Lacan maintain that there is a compulsion for human beings to see themselves as fully integrated and self-identical individuals. As I discussed at the conclusion of chapter one, for Sartre, this compulsion is characterized as the desire to be “in-itself-for-itself,” or as he also sometimes phrases it, the desire to be God. In other words, human beings want to see themselves as individuals with fixed, singular identities, but they also want to maintain their freedom. According to Sartre, however, these two options are mutually exclusive. The freedom of the subject is predicated on the “nothingness” of subjectivity, a nothingness that allows for fields of possibility to remain open.

Similarly, for Lacan, the process of analysis consists, in part, of divesting the analysand of the idea that there is a “big Other”. In other words, a successful analysis culminates with the analysand coming to realize that he/she is not a consistent, unified, stable ego, and moreover, that no one else who possesses a fully integrated sense of self either; no one else has the answers, and therefore, there is no one (no fully integrated “big Other”)—not God or even one’s analyst—who can provide some kind of ultimate solution to one’s problems. Thus, the process of traversing the fantasy leads finally to the subjectification of the subject’s own fundamental fantasy. That is, the subject comes to recognize this fantasy *as one’s own*. To put this in Lear’s terms, one ceases holding oneself responsible and begins to accept responsibility for oneself.

This Lacanian thesis resonates with Sartre’s idea that human beings are condemned to bear the full brunt of responsibility for themselves. Lacan thereby overcomes many of Sartre’s most principled criticisms of psychoanalysis—several of

which were highlighted in the preface to this dissertation—according to which it is a practice that supplants the analysand's desire with the analyst's own. Lacan restores the practical import to some of Freud's original ideas, ideas that were arguably altered by ego psychology, at least as it was practiced and popularized in the United States. Coupled with the fact that Lacan and Sartre share a common enemy in depth-psychological views of the human psyche, we can better see that Sartre's existential psychoanalysis is far closer to the traditional Freudian version than it appeared when *Being and Nothingness* was first published and the outlines of "existential psychoanalysis" were first sketched. As we saw in chapter two, even Sartre's views about the unconscious, which themselves are born out of his aversion to depth psychology, are not opposed to Freudian-Lacanian thinking (and vice versa).

Ultimately, then, contrary to much received scholarly wisdom, Sartre and Lacan develop philosophical and metapsychological accounts that emphasize the freedom of the subject. Even in the grips of neurosis, freedom can be discerned. For the very form neurosis takes is in some sense chosen (*à la* the Freudian "choice of neurosis," Sartrean "fundamental choice," and Lacanian "fundamental fantasy"). The task, from this combined existential and psychoanalytic vantage, is to recognize one's own creative activity informing the way in which one's life unfolds. Yet this is no easy task. For the very imaginative activity that allows for the degree of freedom that belongs to human beings also carries the potential to ensnare them in imaginary traps of their own making.

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