

## THE OTHER IN HIS IMPOTENCE THE PROBLEM OF MULTIPLICITY ACROSS DELEUZE, LAPLANCHE, AND LACAN

Rafael Holmborg

**ABSTRACT:** A similar framing of inarticulable formations, of pure multiplicities, marks the respective projects of Deleuze and Laplanche. The absolute exteriority of a disjunctive multiplicity is re-inscribed as a relativised, interiorised trace. This trace-logic of Deleuze and Laplanche has definitive implications where the psychoanalytic subject and the unconscious is concerned. However, there is a difficulty in this logic of accounting for the unconscious formations enumerated by Freud (slips of the tongue, jokes, symptoms etc.). In turning to Lacan, however, the positions of Deleuze and Laplanche can be illuminated (despite their attempt to ‘move beyond’ him). We see the trace in its material, unconscious substantiality upheld by the function of the big Other as an absent centre to which discourse is referred and through which the speaking subject is revealed as being in a discrepant relation to itself. The big Other, in his function as intimate, yet lacking, alterity, seems to help to resolve the problematic of multiplicity for Deleuze and Laplanche.

**KEYWORDS:** Lacan; Deleuze; Laplanche; The Other; Multiplicity

### INTRODUCTION: THE INCOMPLETE MATURATION OF DELEUZE AND LAPLANCHE

Contextually, Laplanche and Deleuze are more closely united than one might initially think. In their psychoanalytic contributions, both theoreticians relied on their extensive education in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy. Laplanche had been a student of French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty, and had thus inherited the phenomenological tradition that included Husserl, Heidegger, and Sartre, yet he

betrayed an influence which additionally extended back to the philosophical innovations characterising German Idealism (especially Kant and Hegel). Deleuze was a central figure of the 60s-70s French philosophical movement, yet unlike some of his post-structuralist contemporaries (e.g. Foucault, Baudrillard, Lyotard) he maintained a close affinity to the pre-60s phenomenological tradition (including Bergson, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty), and, despite his theoretical disagreement with the movement, built the foundations of his philosophical project partially in response to the trends inaugurated by German Idealism.

Additionally, both theorists were forced to define themselves after the *Lacan-Event* in philosophy and psychoanalysis. Lacan's profound reworkings of multiple philosophical and psychoanalytic categories (through his fusion of linguistics and psychoanalysis, his eccentric reformulations of the Cartesian cogito, and his subsumption of various philosophical categories under the retroactive constructions of a structurally contingent yet profoundly anti-structural 'Real') led to a generation of theorists evidently not entirely sure of 'what to do with/after Lacan'. Laplanche and Deleuze defined themselves by an ambivalent critique-and-fidelity to Lacan. Laplanche evidently stayed in the realm of a philosophically mediated psychoanalytic theory and, despite his rejection of a 'linguistic-unconscious', maintained traces of Lacan in his work, including the affinity between the Real and the alterity of the enigmatic signifier, as well as the categories of Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real, however much they were altered. Deleuze inversely moved towards a psychoanalytically-mediated philosophy, subsuming Lacan, and the latter's emphasis on the structuring effect of the phallus, under his critique of Oedipus and psychoanalytic structuralism, whilst at the same time coming to rely on a variation on Lacanian categories throughout his philosophical projects. This could be seen not only in his early work, in which Deleuze's difference-in-itself (difference *preceding* any internal identity of that which differs, c.f. *Différence et Répétition*, 1968) finds a unique affinity to Lacan's formulas of sexuation (on the *Real* of the sexual being it's a *priori* 'pure difference' [where there is, formally, 'no sexual relation'], c.f. Badiou's seminar on Lacan, 2013) but his later work too. For example, *A Thousand Plateaus*, despite its nomadic re-conception of a rhizomatic, undifferentiated multiplicity, is haunted by the ghosts of the Lacanian logic of reciprocal and retroactive determinations of the Symbolic and Real, in the form of stratas of subjectification and lines of flight onto a plane of consistency, and a State which is retroactively constructed by its

being-a-defence (a response which precedes the thing that responds) of the inconsistent intensities and textualities of a plane of consistency-multiplicity.

Evidently, in other words, both Laplanche and Deleuze, even in their immediate attempts to ‘move beyond’ Lacan, could not avoid maintaining an, at times surprising, fidelity to Lacanian categories. Perhaps the most explicit tie between Deleuze and Laplanche is their treatment of a form of multiplicity (for Laplanche: the parental unconscious carried by the enigmatic signifier; for Deleuze: the Body without Organs or plane of consistency) which is irreconcilable with a pre-given structure (of subjectivity or of signification), as well as their direct rejection of the Freudian Oedipus (or more precisely their designation of the Oedipus’ position as a secondary, displaced, and even ‘false’ repression). This similarity between Deleuze and Laplanche, in their treatment of multiplicities within the structural instances (i.e. trauma or axiomatisation) they transgress, will be the subject of the following subsection.

#### UNCONSCIOUS TRACES AND SCHIZOPHRENIC EXTERIORITY

Both Laplanche and Deleuze posit a form of external multiplicity (the radical alterity of parental seduction or the plane of consistency) which recurs in the form of a trace as an intimate, internal relativisation of this multiplicity-limit (the *étrangeté intérieure* or the axiomatized schizophrenic intensity). Their precise mirroring of a formally identical process must be described in greater detail. Laplanche’s unique, decentring theory of seduction is founded upon the alterity (the multiplicity irreconcilable with the infant’s comprehension) of the parent’s enigmatic signifier, which is installed as a trace of an *étrangeté intérieure*. However, for Deleuze and Guattari, precisely such a trace of an irreconcilable external multiplicity is posited as crucial to the internal functioning of the *socius* (by *socius* Deleuze and Guattari generally mean the set of unparticularised practices and relations of exchange which define the social body in its signifying and interactive form).

Deleuze and Guattari’s use of multiplicity was a continuation of the debate raised in Plato’s *Parmenides*, in order to deny the ontological consistency of the One. It was an attempt to delimit the simultaneous antithesis and groundwork of structure itself: the aggregation of interacting partial entities which shared the impossibility of reducing their ontological status to any counting operation of ‘One-ness’. This ‘antithesis of structure’, of the One, was a zone of virtual

difference, of subsistence by textual and tonal difference and variation rather than stratified development by negation. Hence Deleuze and Guattari dealt with haecceities (monadic abstractions or atomic ‘units’ of qualitative individuality) and intensities, dismissing semiotic relativisations or any form of hermeneutics of content and meaning. The false three-dimensional layering of appearance over meaning is replaced by the two-dimensional, creative operation of variations in ‘content’ and ‘expression’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013/1980). Their characterisation of the plane of consistency, the body without organs, is thus  $n-1$ , a multiplicity operating by its non-reference to the One. In the two-part work of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Schizophrenia was understood as the spontaneous and eruptive construction of desiring-production (desiring as doubly liberated from its ‘socialisation’ in channels of social productivity and from this repression’s secondary displacement onto the false ideal of the Freudian Oedipus) on the body without organs (BwO). In other words, an allowing of desire to operate, without the repressive categories of representation-signification, as a supplemented partial-function to the field of unstructured multiplicity (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013/1972). This de-territorialisation of the artificial structuralism instituted by the socius (reaching its zenith with Freud’s Oedipus), which allows for schizophrenic desiring, is, however, doubled by its own axiomatisation, doubled by the displacement of the schizophrenic limit into an internal axiom of capitalism. The socius in a sense re-territorialises (re-inscribes) the excess multiplicity of desiring-production into an articulable, symbolically exchangeable unit. This appropriation appears internally to the socius only as a trace: an absolute limit (to the multiplicity of the plane of consistency) is territorialised or codified (i.e. made to appear according to a structured type of logic) as an internal limit/axiom. It therefore reproduces its limit by returning a false signifying operation, by forcing the One onto the limit of multiplicity. The limit, opening onto the plane of consistency, is displaced precisely by appearing as a subjectivised, internalised trace of itself. In this process of doubling, the limit is preserved as a ‘substantiation’, a reintegration, of its own denial.

The trace as a reformulation of an absolute limit to the coding-subjectivising capacity of an entity – i.e. the trace distortedly as articulating what is irreducible to the trace itself – is central to the system Deleuze and Guattari present. This will be explored by a comparative approach to Laplanche’s General Theory of

Seduction, for both of which an absolute, external limit-to-multiplicity reappears as a subjectivised trace formation, a relative, internal limit-to-multiplicity. The BwO as the site pure multiplicity perpendicular to the structured socius, as rhizomatic (centre-less) textuality of difference and repetition, is the true site of desiring-production and lies as the obverse side of the territorialising (repressive) functions of socialised signification. This multiplicity is the destitution of the One; it is the penetrative plane of consistency, the space of purely subsisting *haecceities* (abstracted properties of uniqueness), the “continuums of intensities or continuous variations, which goes beyond constants and variables” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013/1980, p.590). It is the transgressive effect of vermicular intensities towards which the Schizophrenic limit is located. Yet it is precisely the approach of this limit which institutes the limit’s doubling in the form of its auto-inscribed trace internal, a disjunctive, yet part-articulable, appropriation:

Schizophrenia [is the] *absolute* limit that causes the flows to travel in a free state on a desocialized body without organs. Hence one can say that schizophrenia is the *exterior* limit of capitalism itself or the conclusion of its deepest tendency, but that capitalism only functions on condition that it inhibit this tendency, or that it push back or displace this limit, by substituting for it its own *immanent* relative limits, which it continually reproduces on a widened scale. It axiomatizes with one hand what it decodes with the other.” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013/1972, p.282-283).

Yet, and identically in form to Laplanche’s constitution of the *étrangeté intérieure*, the exterior limit to multiplicity, to the plane of consistency, that characterises schizophrenia, is a limit which is reproduced (although incompletely) by its axiomatisation *within* (internal to) the territorialising operations of capital, in the form of an unclosed trace, hiding a kernel of alterity irreducible to the socius in which it appears:

But for capitalism it is a question of binding the schizophrenic charges and energies into a world axiomatic that always opposes the revolutionary potential of decoded flows with new interior limits. And it is impossible in such a *régime* to distinguish, even in two phases, between decoding *and* the axiomatization that comes to replace the vanished codes. The flows are decoded and axiomatized by capitalism at the same time. Hence schizophrenia is not the identity of capitalism, but on the contrary its difference, its divergence, and its death.” (ibid., p.283).

The socius binds itself to, by doubling, the movement intended to break through to the BwO, to pure multiplicity. This *reproduction of the limit* through the simultaneous denial and appropriation of the (scene of) limit as an internal

principle is identical in form to the process Freud described in constitution of the fetishist object. The fetish subjectivises and relativises the scene prior to the realisation that the mother has no phallus. But fetishist doubling indicates precisely how doubling operates through the creation and displacement of limits. The limit in fetishism is the introduction of the fact that the mother indeed *has no phallus* – the realisation that castration is a possibility. Fetishism is the unconscious *Verleugnung* (denial) of this limit (Freud, 1927). Fetishism preserves the possibility of the maternal phallus by doubling the scene prior to the attainment of the limit. Octave Mannoni (1982) described the fetishist process as one which could be spotted throughout analytic practice, by its characteristic nuance as opposed to the dogmatism of repression. Mannoni used the phrase *‘je sais bien mais quand même...’* [‘I know very well but nevertheless...’] to summarise the fetishist process. ‘I know very well that women have no phallus, but nevertheless I opt for a sexual object which allows me to not confront this realisation’. The trace of traumatic exteriority is inscribed as relativised interiority.

Thus Deleuze and Freud both express the operation of the inscription of a trace installed through limits that are ‘broken beyond’ yet displaced by reintroducing them into the system to which they appertain, either through axiomatized territorialisation (Deleuze) or fetishist *Verleugnung* (Freud). Returning to the position of alterity in Laplanche’s Generalised Theory of Seduction, which is that of an *étrangeté intérieure* – an internal/intimate foreignness entirely unassimilable to the subjective logic of the child. Laplanche’s *étrangeté intérieure* is an external multiplicity, the traumatic scene of parental unconscious sexuality, which recurs as an internalised, yet incongruent, parasite, a radical alterity lodged internally to the subject. Schizophrenia is nothing less than capitalism’s *étrangeté intérieure*, the intimate recurrence or trace of the doubled traumatic limit, the intimacy of multiplicity, of an irreducible alterity, incongruent with the *socius* to which it is forced to express itself. Schizophrenia is the *absolute limit* whose absoluteness is denied in its axiomatisation-integration as an internal scene. Schizophrenia-as-limit is doubled as an internal limit, the necessary anti-production of the BwO. Yet even in this denial it maintains a trace of multiplicity which it “reproduces by always displacing it” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013/1972, p.266). Capitalism’s absolute limit is doubled as an intimate alterity, the trace of absolute otherness which is known by its overcoded/axiomatized after-effects, by

its implication as irrupting desiring-production – capitalism’s decentring foreign body, the Copernicus of capital, the *étrangeté intérieure* of Laplanche. A fetishist operation identical in form, the inscription of an incomplete trace, is discernible between Deleuze and Laplanche (and Freud). With the example of trauma, the doubling of an absolute limit is, by analogy with Deleuze and Guattari, its recreation as an internal reminiscence.

There is an occasional apparently intentional complicity between Laplanche and Deleuze on the topic of traces of alterity, or more precisely the internal partial-inscription of an absolutely irreconcilable external scene. *Anti-Oedipus*, published 15 years before Laplanche’s *Nouveaux Fondements*, even preliminarily echoes some of the latter’s basic tenets, perhaps most strikingly an argument for the repression of the enigma of the parental unconscious as the first act of a subject in a social field. Deleuze and Guattari state that “it appears that, in the common social field, the first thing that the son represses, or has to repress, or tries to repress, is the unconscious of the father and the mother” (ibid., p316). This repression of the enigmatic meaning of the parent’s unconscious is precisely the act which installs the trace of a decentring otherness, an unassimilable alterity. A formal repression, preceding any material of repressed content (i.e. the formless alterity of the parental unconscious) is for Laplanche the installation of a trace, an internal foreignness (*étrangeté intérieure*) constitutive of a subject and an unconscious. This internal foreignness, the trace of an inconsistent multiplicity, can almost directly be transposed onto the subverted intensities of the plane of consistency (or Body without Organs) which subsist, in trace-form, in the structure of the socius, as seen in the following excerpt: “And what is this death that always arises from within, but that must arrive from without – and that, in the case of capitalism, rises with all the more power as one fails to see exactly what this outside is that will cause it to arrive?” (ibid., p301). For both Deleuze and Laplanche, alterity, the irreconcilable kernel of death, rises from within as a trace of its absolutely foreign, exterior function.

One of the principal theses of the *Anti-Oedipus* is of the secondariness, the partial translation, of the Oedipus over what is truly repressed – the desiring-machine of the unconscious, its irregular textual variation in the production and function of desire compared to its relativisation and structuration in the social body. The Oedipus was Freud’s attempt to translate the representable, to signify

the purely productive/machinal. Interestingly, however, precisely the same conclusion – of the secondariness of the Oedipus – is reached by Laplanche: “Moreover afterwardsness [l’après-coup]... (primary repression) requires a secondary repression. And it is precisely there that is situated the Oedipus, the castration complex and the formation of the superego” (Laplanche, 1987, p.134-135, own translation). Laplanche in fact composed a whole seminar dedicated to the logic of such afterwardsness, the retroaction of repression upon what is repressed (*Problématiques VI*, 2006).

Oedipus is the second repression; it is the consequence and displacement of the original repression of the enigmatic signifier. Oedipus is instituted in response to the failed translation of the trace of alterity lodged in the unconscious – it is a functional illusion transposed onto a zone of non-structural inconsistency. The formal structurality of the Oedipus, the evacuation of any articulable content or subjective triangulation between an actual father and a desired mother, as a method of framing subjecthood in the symbolic cleft installed by the discrepancy act of signification – in other words, the Oedipus as a convenient label for incomplete articulations of desire formulated by the retroaction of the signifier – is present in Lacan, in particular as Lionel Bailly describes Lacan’s position in relation to the Oedipus. Lacan’s non-literal interpretation of the Oedipus complex derives from the fact that “a real object with a known signifier must intervene to embody castration [symbolically mediated, i.e. structured, modes of enjoyment]. The father is symbolic; more precisely [...] the father is a metaphor” (Bailly, 2018, p.103). The ‘content’ of the Oedipus, its mythological formulations, is a supplement to its formal quality: the Oedipus is a conventional conceptualization of the linguistically structured modes of subjective articulation from which a subject can coherently be posited in a relation to the Other, or to the self-alienating impersonality of the social as such.

The treatment of multiplicity, which for Laplanche takes the form of an unassimilable alterity of the parental unconscious and for Deleuze and Guattari takes the form of a structurally inconsistent extension of differences and intensities, appears to equally well point towards an alterity sutured to a trace. The multiplicity, in other words, recurs as an internalized, relativized trace. In the internal re-inscription of an intensity or alterity which, in its formal ontological multiplicity, is irreducible to a subjective system it infiltrates, this



internal re-inscription functions as a trace which can only be contrasted to the logic to which it is inconsistent. It is a trace of something which does not correspond – a trace, in short of a radical alterity. That a trace, as the inscription of an ontological multiplicity irreducible to and inconsistent with the logic in which it appears, determines the possibility of a subject, meets its culmination in the mathematico-ontology of Badiou, for whom a subject is an operation of drawing the consequences of a trace of an inconsistent alterity (or multiplicity). This trace-subject relation will be the topic of the following chapter.

In summary, Laplanche and Deleuze collectively point towards a ‘logics of traces’, considered as always-already a trace, in which the function of alterity is inscribed in the internalized operations of traces. The trace is an internalized (partial) inscription of an external, inconsistent multiplicity/alterity. Interestingly, both of these positions originated (at least partially) from a frustration with Lacan’s linguistic-structural psychoanalysis. The intimacy of alterity within the trace (a trace of something inconsistent) was one of the features of Laplanche’s and Deleuze’s contributions to psychoanalysis. Must we, at this point, suppose that Lacan has failed in considering the constitutive role of alterity, of absolute otherness, in inscribing the subjects symbolic/structural position? The next section will argue the opposite – it will argue that the positions of Laplanche and Deleuze are in many ways already formulated by Lacan, but also that Lacan’s position, in which ‘*the Other invokes a lie as guarantee of the truth in which it subsists* [as a point towards which the unconscious is discursively oriented]’.

Additionally, as mentioned at the end of the previous sub-section, the connection between alterity and trace for Laplanche has an unresolved aspect. For the latter, the linguistic enigma of the *à traduire*, which institutes the unconscious by repression, maintains an ontologically *negative* description of the unconscious. Positive *material* (e.g. the Oedipus) is, as is often the case for Deleuze too, delegated to the function of retrospective illusion. In itself, the unconscious of Laplanche lacks the positive characteristics which would lend it material support for the operations of displacement and condensation, as well as a general range of unconscious formations. As we saw in the previous chapter, Lacan lends the paradoxical function of the unconscious a *material support* in the letter/signifier and its retroactive effect upon the signified. In order to maintain a fidelity to the necessity of *something material* in the unconscious, which nevertheless can be

comprehended from the perspective of a trace of alterity as its constituent, we will finish this chapter with a discussion of the dialectic of alterity in Lacan.

#### THE BIG OTHER AS A TRUTHFUL LIE

Laplanche's Generalised Theory of Seduction features the most direct attempt at a psychoanalytic model of the subject in which the trace of *Otherness* (in its most radical, unassimilable aspect, as an *étrangeté intérieure*) is seen as constitutive of, yet incongruent with, subjecthood itself. Laplanche procures a model of the subject as dependent on the trace of the *other* (the parental unconscious) – the subject is subject of a trace. Alongside each other, Deleuze and Laplanche posit the features of a trace which acts as an internal reproduction of an absolutely exterior scene of multiplicity or alterity.

There is still, however, the difficult question of a *work* of traces, a set of logics which determine the accordance and movements of traces within unconscious formations (those works discussed in the previous chapter). By such a work of traces, some determinate, positive content must be implied in the unconscious. The failure of the Laplanchean model was its failure to consider any *positive* set of relations based on the movement of traces. His unconscious is rather one of a constitutive negativity, a simple linguistic *failure* of translation. For Lacan unconscious formations in the form of traces (slips of the tongue, substitution of names etc.) receive support within the letter of the unconscious – the signifier and its retroaction upon the signified (1966a). The disjunctive inconsistencies which characterise the unconscious, especially in the Freudian *Arbeiten* and in its enigmatic formations, require precisely such a material support – and it is such a material support of the unconscious which is missing in Laplanche's account of the inseparability of a trace and a radical alterity.

It is, in turning to Lacan once again, that we find the possibility for a defence of psychoanalytic alterity coexisting with a functional theory of the works of traces and their clinical-unconscious relevance. Interestingly, this (nevertheless justified) Lacanian *Deus ex Machina* emerges precisely from that proposition which made Laplanche turn against Lacan: that *the unconscious is the discourse of the (big) Other*. Precisely what was meant by this probably changed over the course of Lacan's writings. However, we will here focus on the (big) Other, and its position in relation to the unconscious, as framed in *The Instance of the Letter in the*

*Unconscious.* Firstly, what exactly is this big Other?

The principal position of the big Other is that of a structural implication, a signifying mediator, of relations at the level of the Symbolic (the order, briefly, of the 'social-structural, as opposed to the Imaginary and the Real order). The big Other is that immaterial instance which registers the implication of speech beyond its immediate person-to-person relation. It is the indissociable inscription of speech within an encompassing social zone beyond any immediate interlocutor. The big Other is the experience of the social in itself, an anonymity of ungraspable alterity that intrudes in and decentres the subject's discursive relations. What the big Other testifies to is the necessity whereby the act of enunciation must be recognised in its excess over, and distinction from, the enunciated. In the act of enunciating, it is not simply the addressee that recognises the speaker, but the speaker's position is inscribed within the structural, discursive relations which permeate the social field. In this sense, the big Other is a linguistic support for a self-contradictory and incomplete subject – Lacan emphasises, even beginning in his Mirror Stage paper (1966b), the subject's constitutive alienation from itself, its division and perpetual failure to be entirely present to itself. The moment of subjectivity is that point from which I can no longer in truth utter that *I am what I am*. The internal disjunction of subjecthood, the failure of a fully constituted self-presence, is structurally supported by the unclosed signifying field which constantly refers to the deferred, and anonymous, register of an Other that is never present. The irreconcilable divide between signifier and signified, and the former's priority upon the latter, doubles the phenomenological disjunction constitutive of subjecthood.

Subject and social are, therefore, in a state of reciprocal determination – the failure of the one is doubled in the instability of the other, from which a mutual support emerges (Lacan, 1966c). And it is by the split between enunciation and enunciated, in the fact that I do not fully occupy the position from which I speak, that a symbolic register of intersubjective language determines the external relations of my speech. In other words, the constitutive failure of my speech is structurally perpetuated, and supported in its mediated meaning, by the big Other.

Lacan gives a useful example of this structural support of an internally inconsistent discursive field within the big Other in his seminar on *The Ethics of*

Psychoanalysis (2007). This example lies in the purpose of the Greek Chorus within tragedy and comedy. The Greek Chorus, like the big Other, allows for a symbolic activity through a subjective passivity. The tragedy of the staged events is not delivered to the audience in its direct immediacy. Instead, it finds a mediated expression by the response of the Chorus – the profound tragedy of the Three Theban Plays or the Orestia can, by its echo in the Chorus, be processed and inscribed socially *in absentia* of the direct engagement of the audience or the viewer. As the big Other, the Chorus registers the tragedy on behalf of a social and discursive field in which the play is staged, it acts in the symbolic place of the audience. The activity of being witness to tragedy is therefore accomplished passively, by the mediated register of the Chorus. In other words, the obscure signification of Oedipus, its failure to directly install a clear meaning in its audience, is subverted in the mediated symbolic tragedy of the play which is registered at the level of the big Other. The latter supports and inverts a relation of failed signification.

In *Subversion of the Subject and Dialectic of Desire*, Lacan describes the consequence of a subject's (imperfect yet unavoidable) articulation within the symbolic, as its speech's empty echo in the void of the big Other. The reception of speech by the big Other, its social-symbolic inscription, is its inversion and return; as much as speech finds its structural mediation in the big Other, any address to the big Other finds a silent inversion, the 'signifier of the lack of the Other' – a simple *Che vuoi?* ('What do you want?'). The absoluteness of the Other that colours the register of discourse and its social implications is so effective precisely because the Other is 'never there'. The Other as the immanence of the principle of sociality reveals a lack that conditions our social projects.

To address another via the big Other, as well as to address the big Other itself, is a process which inscribes the enunciation on a social-symbolic level, yet it is an affirmation of speech insofar as it shrouds it in a fog of obscurity. The big Other expresses itself in its negativity – it inverts a subject's address into the violent enigma of a '*Che vuoi?*' as only a *lack of the signifier of the Other* could do. It is in this inversion of expression which underlies the symbolic logic of the big Other, the lie or incoherence in our speech which is mediately revealed, that we can locate the reason for Romanticist poetry: when we express love, we do not merely *show* love, we *utter* it. The expression 'I love you' finds its place as much in the reception

of the other (our lover) as in the reception of the *Other*, and in this symbolic inscription, its directness, its immediacy is lost to the mediations of distortive echoes of the absent big Other. The failure of an expression of love to be reconciled with itself, the failure of its expression to be identical to its act of enunciation by a person, divides and defers its signification, inscribing this obscure phrase within the deviating and mediated moment of the big Other. *I love you*, but what this precisely means is lost at the moment of its utterance, it is lost to its linguistic mediation – realising the loss of love upon its expression, poetry's apparent circumlocution of the idea of love, is in fact its attempt to circumvent this hole nested in the utterance *I love you*. Such an internally inscribed disparity of speech's attempted immanence in relation to the other, its reversion into an empty echo within the impersonal alienation of the big Other (of sociality in its abstraction), leads Lacan to assert that love covers the absence of a sexual relation. Love is a reactive, internally incomplete act which supplements the gap of the Real in symbolic relations. In the symbolic order, the expression *I love you* can only be a miscarried utterance, a failed totality, by its disjunction in the big Other. Poetry attempts to reconstruct love according to a language which deviates from the immediate expression 'I love you'.

From the perspective of the big Other, Romanticist poetry is a response to the failure of this expression. Poetry affirms to the Other the impossibility of an immediate, self-present expression of love. If the act of the expression 'I love you' was identical to the content of this expression, if 'I love you' was a self-identical, entirely present and constituted utterance, we would not find the necessity of its mediated comprehension through poetry. The big Other is an empty implication, a structural mediator which registers the subject's self-disjunction inside speech – the reference point to all signification, through which an incomplete discourse necessarily is supported.

Hence, the proposition that *the unconscious is the discourse of the Other* is not a proposition that the unconscious is simply an extension of language – this proposition rather posits the function of the unconscious on the level of a constitutive disjunction, a series of inconsistencies. It places, in other words, the structural paradox of the unconscious, that it is known by its complete irreducibility to consciousness, alongside that splitting of discourse, the irreconcilable division between enunciating and enunciated, which characterises

the function of the big Other.

The alterity which we find in the unconscious (and as Laplanche began to coherently articulate, failing only to discern any *positive, material content* there) lies in the very alterity which determines the material instances of disjunction and inconsistency (of displacement and condensation). In other words, in the function of the trace we must understand its intimate complicity with, and even recreation of, an irreconcilable and external alterity. Deleuze and Laplanche's works are of extreme importance in illuminating a certain problematic, however the unique trace-unconscious-alterity connection cannot be thought, according to Laplanchean psychoanalysis, to produce any positive content. This failure, a purely *negative, disjunctive* unconscious (as an enigmatic *à traduire*) cannot be connected with those unconscious formations so common in dreams, jokes, and everyday psychopathology, as well as symptoms. From this deadlock one might return to Lacan, and his proposition that the unconscious is the discourse of the Other, to more coherently reconcile *alterity* and the *trace* in its unconscious formations. It will be suggested, therefore, that the big Other occupies a position of radical alterity in the unconscious, but that it does so in a way which recreates a constitutive disjunction in the subject, and in supplementing this disjunction with symbolic relations lends a material support to the unconscious formations characteristic of a logic of traces.

In Lacan's *The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious* he will go on to consider the function of the big Other in this unconscious letter. His description of the big Other clearly points towards its radical alterity, its *something which is me more than myself*. The Other mediates the division of subjecthood, by being the internally lodged counterpart to the subject's symbolic-structural orientation. The following passage gives one of Lacan's most interesting elaborations of his claims that *the unconscious is the discourse of the Other*:

Who is therefore this other to whom I am more attached than myself, since in the most assented heart of my identity to myself it is he that agitates me? His presence cannot be understood except as a second degree of alterity, which already situates him in a position of mediation in relation to my own division to myself as with a semblant. If I have said that the unconscious is the discourse of the Other with a big O, it is to indicate the beyond where the recognition of desire is tied to the desire of recognition. In other words, this other is the Other that even invokes my lie as guarantor of the truth in which it subsists. To which it is observed that it is with the apparition of language that the dimension of truth emerges. (Lacan, 1966b,

own translation)

That the unconscious is the discourse of the Other – this is not a proposition depicting the linguistic structure of the unconscious. Rather, it is a point on the alterity constitutive of the subject – this other to which I find myself more attached than myself. This is of an *Other* which animates me through my deferred relation to myself. The doubling of myself in relation to myself, in the simulacral self-relation of semblant-to-semblant – this is achieved by the mediating, intimate exteriority of the Other. The (divided) subject is, in mimicry of the division in speech between expression/expressed and signifier/signified, something exchanged through symbolic formations – it is the *product*, or what is concluded, from the miscarriages of discourse (as *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* [1969-70] suggests: the subject is what is exchanged between one signifier and another, insofar as this is a relationship which indirectly aims at what cannot be captured by discourse).

The big Other is the intersubjective *third*, the non-substantial implication, within which is recognized the interchangeability of the recognition of desire and the desire for recognition – as with our example of Romanticist poetry: insofar as we express a given desire (*to love*), in this very action we become passive observers to this utterance's inscription in an order which exceeds, which registers, the immediate relationship of oneself to one's lover. It is precisely in *being recognised*, in deviating from its direct goal and instead being registered as a social phenomenon, that desire is itself maintained. To recognise that we desire is in itself to desire the recognition of this desire in the symbolic, discursive field. In this sense, the deviation from an immediate object relation, the inscription of this relation, or the failure of this relation, into the substance of the social itself, *the big Other*, is a deviation, a falsity or lie, which constitutes the truth of our irreconcilable entanglement in social-structural processes. The subject, and its desire, *is* its symbolic determination – there is nothing behind the subject: it *is* its appearance as seen in social processes. As in the Hegelian formulation, *essence* is itself internally inscribed according to its negation-as-appearance. The finitude of appearance becomes reflected into essence itself, and thus essence and appearance form an internally receding identity though a reciprocally determined negation (Hegel, 2014/1812).

From this we get the proposition of the big Other whose lie acts as the

guarantee of the truth in which it subsists – it is the indefinite deferral of meaning, the irreconcilable enunciation/enunciated divide (dividing the subject into *that which speaks* and *that which was spoken*) that concretely posits us as social subjects – the perversion of the big Other, its falsity, is nothing but the lie in which the truth of the Symbolic subsists. The unconscious is this point of a perversion, a paradoxical and irreconcilable deviation, which cannot but reveal the truth of the subjective position of its possessor. In the formations of the unconscious, its unexplainable and enigmatic displacement and condensations, its perpetual trace-of-somethingness, through an unceasing movement of traces and deferrals, we gleam the truth of the subject as a divided symbolic subject. The trace, as a deferral and deviation, is *all there is* – the paradoxes of the unconscious point towards the nothingness behind them. The subject is internally divided, and this is a position matched by an inconsistent and incomplete discursive, symbolic field – the alterity of the big Other, its inescapable *otherness*, is a crucial component of the traces which constitute the truth of the subject precisely in disturbing its message.

But is this formula of *lie as truth* not unmistakably close to the Oedipus for Deleuze and Laplanche: the false translation screening the truth of the alterity of unconsciousness. In the *lie* of the Oedipus (its illusion as ‘secondary, displaced repression’ according to both Deleuze and Laplanche) we find the subsistence of the originary alterity, or enigma, constitutive of the subject. *L’Autre* is that which speaks in the incomplete expressions of the unconscious – it is failure, ‘*rature*’, which itself imposes the breach from which language floods in to remedy the deferral and hinderance of a fully constituted subject. An incompleteness, a failure or a *méprise*, divides the subject and installs a negative position for it within the symbolic order (Lacan, 1966b). This division or cleft is what subsists in the lie of the Other as the product of the unconscious. In the falsities of displacements and condensations (in slips of the tongue, erroneous recollections of names and memories etc.), in the trace as *lie*, that we find the original disjunction and alterity lodged in the unconscious. The deviation in a trace is inseparable from the indefinite self-deferral of the subject. The work of traces constituting the distortions and illusions of displacement and condensation points back to the original, ineradicable cleft marking the origin of the subject.

The subject *is* only insofar as it is marked by an insufficiency, and insofar as



it is propped up by the deviating pathways of a language which in itself doubles these deferrals and deviations. As a prerequisite, or foundation, to his later works, Lacan's *Mirror Stage* paper establishes an understanding of the internally installed division, the self-mediated alienation which constitutes the subject as a subject of the symbolic.

What this paper has attempted is a defence of a radical alterity as constitutive of a deferred, incomplete, subjecthood. Laplanche was a major contributor to this view. The enigmatic signifier and the *à traduire* of the unconscious is a trace of the radical alterity of the parental unconscious. In this sense, an internally lodged but foreign trace, an *étrangeté intérieure*, is constitutive of the indeterminate alienness of subjecthood. Deleuze contributed here by expanding on this formal operation characterised by reproducing and relativising (in the form of a trace) an absolute exterior multiplicity. The problem lay in understanding the connection between radical alterity and a series of unconscious *formations* – positive material processes such as those described by Freud under the categories of displacement and condensation. This was not possible in the negativity, non-substantiality, of the Laplanchean trace. Here Lacan's *big Other* pointed in the right direction. A certain reading of Lacan shows the constitutive function of the big Other as the mediator between a divided subject and a self-contradictory Symbolic through which the subject is articulated. In the *lie of the Other which reveals the truth in which it subsists*, we see a more concrete formulation of the Oedipus as it exists for Deleuze and Laplanche, in which a lie points towards the truth of a deferred and incomplete subject, a subject which is always *the trace of something*. In this understanding of the big Other, we understand the alterity and the truth revealed within the processes of displacement and condensation: the distortion or lie which points to the originary disjunction (i.e. the always-trace) of the subjective.

rafael.holmberg.21@ucl.ac.uk

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