

Lacanian Psychoanalysis and the Logic of the Cut

Introduction

Psychoanalysis is a practice of speech between at least two people (which does not mean two subjects as two people can embody more than two subjectivities). The cut is an important driving force of this speech practice. If we ask, what psychoanalysis has contributed to speech as an intersubjective process, one possible answer would be, that it has specifically drawn our attention to how the words of one person can cut back and forth into the words of the other. Outside of the psychoanalytic context, when we speak, we are often oblivious of the fact that interruption is intrinsic to speech as a social activity. We are sometimes stopped by our interlocutor as we speak. Generally, when our listener cuts into our speech, it is time for a turnaround. In other words, the cut beckons the listener's desire to turn into a speaker. If one cuts too much into our speech in a social conversation, we might even judge the person to be 'rude.' For the analyst though, cutting is strictly professional. More importantly, when the analyst cuts into the speech of the analysand, it is not necessary that they do so with a desire to speak, just in order to turn the table. In non-psychoanalytic conversations, cutting might trigger a shift in desire from listening to speaking. Differently put, when one cuts, it might be that he or she does not want to listen anymore and wants to take over the conversation as a speaker. In psychoanalysis on the other hand, cutting is not so much the power of taking over, as it is an effort to express what is heard through speech.

When the analyst cuts, it is typically driven by a desire to reproduce some important words that the analysand has just spoken. In Jacques Lacan's experimental introduction of 'variable sessions' that could last from 1 minute to 40 minutes, the idea was to radicalize the mechanism of the cut where the analyst would stamp the symptomatic speech of the analysand at its exact moment of utterance. As we can understand, cut is a moment of temporal scansion in psychoanalysis. It is a way of logicizing time in the clinic. If 'free-association' is the fundamental method of analysis, the cut is what steers this associative chain of signifiers. When does the analyst cut? This question is perhaps as important as asking, why does the analyst cut? Cut divides speech, time, as well as the speaking-subject as a body on which words have effects. It is not for nothing that Lacan pursues cut in relation to both time and space as his teaching progresses. He comes up with the theory of 'logical time'

that situates cut as scansion in inter-subjective psychic temporality. As he goes on, the interest in cut finds a spatial expression in the elaboration of psyche in terms of curved spaces. In the topological phase of his teaching, Lacan re-engages with cut as a geometric operation to cut an infinite straight line and make and remake psychic knots. Here cut becomes the complement of splice where the analyst cuts in order to splice the subjective registers (Real-Symbolic-Imaginary) of the analysand's unconscious.

Coming back to cut in psychoanalytic speech act, sometimes, it is a way of pointing out how the analysand's speech has drifted from one matter to another. On occasions, it creates room for questions that the analyst needs to ask about the rationale behind the metonymic shift from one topic to another: "Why did you start talking about your father from discussing the share market?" There are some cuts that come with questions. Others come with strong 'constructions' such as 'I think, there is a part of you that admonishes your father for obsessing with share markets and not giving enough family time to you and your brother.' There are cuts, so strong that the analyst finds in it, the apposite moment to close the session. In such cases, the analyst may not attempt even an interpretation of the words just spoken. The cut is made to speak in itself and for itself. The analyst may simply say: 'You have just said ... and this might be a good note to end today's session.' The cut can thus be accompanied by re-iteration, question(s), construction, interpretation and closure. Unlike non-psychoanalytic dialogue, in the clinic, the cut is a spoken extension of listening. It speaks as it hears and thus the little letters of speech arrive at their destination.

The cut, as Lacan never stops insisting, is the foundation of psychoanalytic interpretation. It is symbolic of what the Lacan of *Écrits* calls the analyst's "positive nonaction" and according to him, this nonaction targets "the ortho-dramatization of the patient's subjectivity" (184). How does the patient or the analysand dramatize his or her subjectivity through speech? Lacan's enigmatic adjectival prefix 'ortho' might imply 'orthographic' which evokes writing in speech. Lacanian analysis is perhaps premised on the point that in speech, there is writing. This writing, which the later-Lacan would support with the formalization of mathematical inscription, has something to do with the Real as the unspeakable. What the signifier speaks at the level of its content is more in tune with the semantics of the Imaginary-Symbolic complex but what the signifier's body communicates through its syntactical form is the Real letter. Cut can be placed at this level as a way of inscribing the Real letter that breaks into the Symbolic. The interruptive dynamic of the cut ensures that it is only a part of the Real that can somehow be situated in speech as the rest dissipates. Seen in this way, the cut that takes its momentum from the crack between the

signifier and the signified, becomes an orthographic modality to formalize a fragment of the Real. In *Seminar XXV*, on 20.12.1977, Lacan reflects:

The analyst, for his part, slices (*tranche*). What he says is a cut, namely, has some of the characteristics of writing, except for the fact that in his case he equivocates in the orthography. He writes differently so that thanks to the orthography, to a different way of writing, he makes ring out something other than what is said, than what is said with the intention of saying [...]

The analyst punctuates the analysand's speech by inscribing into its logic. As Lacan implies above, the cut induces a break with intention-driven conscious thinking and opens up the unconscious, at odds with the Symbolic. The cut-interpretation allows the analysand to see how the cut re-frames the entire signifying chain from the vantage of the Real. As Lacan puts it, "The cut made by the signifying chain is the only cut that verifies the structure of the subject as a discontinuity in the real" (*Écrits* 678).

In both culture and clinic, the cut can perhaps be considered the most abiding contribution of Lacanian psychoanalysis. While the philosophical culture in the wake of Lacanianism continues to grapple with the split subject, the clinical process cannot function without the dynamic of the cut as a curious slip-bridge between the analysand and the analyst. Lacan, in the classical period of his teaching, fashions this split subject from Freud's late thoughts on *spaltung* and the ego. The logic of the cut is not only a question of psychoanalytic technique but it also expands itself in the domain of the subject. Cut is intrinsic to the experience of castration and hence important in any discussion of anxiety. It is noteworthy that Freud's incomplete essay on splitting ('Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence') contains a case of castration anxiety and Lacan comes back again and again to the notion of the cut in his seminar on anxiety. If we follow the Borromean knot of the subject in Lacan's late teaching, subjectivity is formalized as a series of cuts and splices among the three orders of Symbolic, Imaginary and Real. The cut materializes the subject as a divided being in the Real. This is not to say that the cut is only subjective and does not have much to do with the object. For Lacan, cut is a logical function that materializes what he calls 'objectality' in *Seminar X*. The function of the cut determines the partial nature of the drive-objects and echoes the cuts on the body, ranging from the eyes to the anus. Lacan thus puts the cut at the heart of his discussions of drive, desire and the *object a* as the object-cause of

desire. He formulates that “objectality is the correlate to a pathos of the cut” (*Seminar X* 214).

The twofold entry of language for the subject (language’s incidence, which would go on to be named ‘lalangue’ in the late teachings) and the subject’s subsequent entry into the linguistic order frame the notion of the signifying cut. The incidence of language on the body is incidental in the sense that we can only know it in a retroactive way through a historical reconstruction. The cut that marks this incidence is thus at the originary point of subjective history. ‘Lalangue’ is spoken by the cut or better still, it is the language of the cut that allows the speaking-being to articulate *jouissance*. When one cuts away from the Imaginary trappings of language in all its semantic growth, we are left with ‘lalangue.’ Stated differently, ‘lalangue’ is the product of a cut where cut is a movement away from meaning towards *jouissance*. On the other hand, the originary cut is the initiation into the meaning-making process. It has an interesting homology with the bar of repression between the signifier and the signified as a written entity in speech. It would not be difficult to draw a line from the logical function of the cut to the Real logic of sexual non-relation in the final teachings of Lacan. If the signifying cut of language creates a divided subject of *jouissance*, this cut is co-extensive to the cut between the sexes where cut means (among other things) the non-relation of two *jouissances* (phallic and non-phallic *jouissances*). We can therefore observe a link between these two irremediable cuts of the Real: the cut that divides the subject *vis-a-vis* language and the cut that prevents sexual relation between the subject and the Other.

In *Seminar V*, Lacan would go on to define clinical work as a ‘dismembering’/ ‘dénombrément’ playing on the etymology of the word analysis, describing it as the work of an expert cook who knows how to ‘cut along the joints’/ ‘couper dans les articulations.’ As Lacan highlighted, this cut is an act with a logic of its own and the ‘cut-interpretation’ shares properties of writing and works on the way the unconscious is inscribed in speech. In fact, in *Seminar XI*, the ‘true function’ of the unconscious would be formulated in its ‘profound, initial, inaugural, relation’ to the *Unbegriff*, the non-concept/one-concept of the cut. The Lacanian cut in contradistinction to the lack that triggers desire and the hole that speaks the Real then undergoes numerous slices and paradigms in different contexts across the various stages of his teaching. The cut anchors the essential topological move of translating inside into outside and vice versa in figures like the Torus or the Klein Bottle until cutting and splicing become the mainstay of the Borromean clinic from around *Seminar XX*. The infinite straight lines, cut and spliced in order to produce the Brunnian Link of the Borromean chain,

talk back to the signifying chain of associating signifiers through metonymy and referring to meaning-construction through metaphor in Lacan's late teaching. Thus, one could argue that the cut and the twist around a hole that lead to the Borromean knotting support the Real of this structure in Lacan's thinking. We could contend that the logic of the cut in Lacan's final teachings becomes a logic of negotiating Symbolic lack with the 'true hole' of the Real.

In this volume, we explore diverse ways in which this logic of the cut resonates with other Lacanian concepts as well as trajectories and issues endemic to psychoanalysis. How do we read Lacan's reference to anatomy which, as he himself pointed out, has an etymological relation with cutting? Does Lacan's recourse to topological operations underpin a new reading of Freudian drives with important additions like the scopic and the invocatory, both of which rely on anatomic cuts? How does the cut provide the *τόπος* for both fantasy and desire? How does the cut thus evoke a new purchase on the body as material for *jouissance* in the late teachings? If psychoanalysis is an 'autism of the two' and not a dialogue proper, how does cut interact with the transferential opening of the unconscious? What does Lacan's late notion of mathematical and logical writing as mark-making and numbering suggest about the changing dimension of the cut, now becoming strokes of inscription and erasure? How do we see this divisive logic in relation to Lacan's reflections on negation in logic, especially the double-negation of what doesn't stop not being written in the Real? Not that we have all the answers in the present issue but we think it is important to ask questions, we may not necessarily be able to answer. The articles in this issue ask their own questions. While they answer some, others might remain unanswered. It is in this cut of the unknown which may become known in the future or better still, establish itself as the unknowable, that our epistemic efforts are invested in.

Tadej Troha's article, 'The Freudian Cut' returns to Freud in order to theorize the cut from within Freudian psychoanalysis. The author close-reads somewhat neglected moments of great significance in Freud's texts to situate the psychoanalytic act as a way of intervening into the irreversible. For Troha, the cut is a mechanism that inscribes this paradox of intervention, vis-a-vis the irreversible. Can the psychoanalytic cut reverse the irreversible? Troha reads the trajectory of Freudian psychoanalysis in terms of 'disposition'--a term he carefully excavates from Freud. 'Disposition' which is minimally different from 'constitution,' implies how cut interrupts the assumed determinism of the irreversible as a logic of contingency. The piece makes an express contribution to the complex paradox of the Freudian cut by articulating how the cut opens the space where "once again there was no cut yet." Alex Ling's piece, titled 'Cinematic Logic and the Function of the Cut' engages with

the psychoanalytic notion by relating it to the actual technique of cutting that constitutes the cinematic medium. He takes up the cut in the context of Lacan's mathematical representation of fantasy and offers intricate readings of shapes and objects, not to mention the signifying cut of language, in films of Alfred Hitchcock and David Lynch. The author treats the latter's cinema as a creative re-making of the former where the logic of cinematic cut is further refined in the process. From *Psycho* and *Vertigo* to *Lost Highway*, Ling traces the contours of a cut that moves from identifying with the Imaginary to a more radical identification with the Real. The cut identifies with the cut as the medium expresses itself on screen. How does the cut focus on the void in cinema, in all its topological moves, across curved surfaces? The article helps us think through the aesthetic implications of psychoanalytic cut. Llewellyn Brown's essay, 'The monad and the cut in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*' extends the psychoanalytic cut by mapping it on to theatre. The author zooms in on Samuel Beckett's iconic play to ground the idea in an interface of psychoanalysis and literature. Instead of forwarding the critical commonplace that Beckett's aesthetic is one of subtraction and cutting, Brown focuses on the monad-like uniformity in the enclosed world of the play. This monad-like self-enclosure is interrupted by the signifier that comes and goes in a complex intercutting movement between Hamm and Clov. Brown navigates through important Lacanian ideas and allows us to make interesting theoretical connections between cut and gaze on the one hand, and cut and 'lalangue' on the other. Through the *jouissance* of the cut in the Real, Brown is able to re-signify the Beckettian vision of the human condition as an interruptive gesture of pain.

But if the cut is also the cut of the paternal function, what are the implications of a sexual relation uncut by the Name-of-the-Father? Sigi Jöttkandt's "Nabokov, Cinemathomme" rereads Vladimir Nabokov's *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (1969) to argue how the incestuous love affair between Van and Ada at the center of the novel with its disruptive temporal frames could provide a window of possibility of a *jouissance* uncut by the paternal function. Despite Nabokov's lifelong aversion to Freudian psychoanalysis even to the notion of unconscious formations, can his literary text unconsciously herald the grounding of a "wild psychoanalysis"? Jöttkandt analyzes several instances of Nabokov's experiment with the pluperfect tense demarcating how understanding of a past event dawns on the characters that foreshadows in some ways the Lacanian notion of "logical time" that by questioning linearity of traditional narratives argues for a case of anticipated certainty. In *Ada*, "incest" becomes a peculiarly potent transgressive means to stage a literary-cinematic fantasy that can resist death itself, "that freezes narrative's temporality with the stasis of the cinematic image that

cannot age.” In fact, Jöttkandt shows how Nabokov goes further still. Nabokov’s literary-cinematic device that undercuts space-time, provides an analytic model for the twenty-first century post-Symbolic analytic situation (and its new symptomatology) one that is marked by an acute incursion of the Imaginary epitomized, Jöttkandt feels, by the current climate of “Trumpism.” In that case, could this new model of “lettrocality” that brings literary writing closer to letteral inscription provide psychoanalysis with a unique Nabokovian *sinthome*, or better still, a *cinét-homme*? Jöttkandt tantalizingly asks.

While the cut might dismember or separate, its history in psychoanalytic thought is not without some elective affinities. Despite his self-professed hostility to Freudian psychoanalysis, Martin Heidegger was on amicable terms with Jacques Lacan with Lacan having gone so far as to translate Heidegger’s essay on “Logos” for the psychoanalytic journal *La Psychanalyse* in 1956. While Lacan’s debt to Heidegger in his early seminars and writings is well-known, what relations and contrasts can be retraced between the two thinkers as they both diverge from previous theorizations of subjectivity in Western thought? Eric VanLieshout’s “Heidegger Contra Lacan: The Cut and the Development of Two Theories of Subjectivity” grapples with this question and argues how both Heidegger’s analytic of *Dasein* in *Being and Time* (1927) and one of Lacan’s earliest rigorous examinations of the subject of the unconscious in *The Formations of the Unconscious* (1957-1958) offer divergent theories of a subject split, cut out of its surroundings. VanLieshout claims that it was only with Heidegger’s rethinking of the question of being that Western philosophy properly responded to the Freudian *Spaltung*. While *Dasein* is always already “cleaved off from a ‘there’ as ‘not-there,’” it is also, as Derrida observes in his recently translated seminar on Heidegger (2016), the first properly historical subject. VanLieshout notes that the Lacanian departure from traditional notions of a self-enclosed, “knowing” subject is on a different register since psychoanalysis seeks to lead the subject back to its “signifying dependence.” But as VanLieshout demonstrates by closely reading these two texts by Heidegger and Lacan, the ultimate contrast between *Dasein* and the subject of the unconscious lies in their radically divergent relation with the cut that language brings into play in the subject. The barred subject it seems, experiences at least one extra split within itself. One is reminded of Lacan’s continued critique of a totalizable, *soi-même* subject in his later seminars, for instance in *The Logic of Phantasy* (1966-1967) where he would reformulate the Cartesian cogito with a further twist as “Either I am not thinking or I am not”/ “Ou je ne pense pas ou je ne suis pas.”

Janet Haney, in her piece on the cut, expounds on how the cut is instrumental in “bringing the subject back to the opacity of his *jouissance*.” (*Psychoanalytical Notebooks* No.

2, 1999, 15) The cut, in its clinical role of liberating *parole*, “to teach the analysand to give his own speech its true meaning”, (*Seminar I*, 278) has been illustrated with examples highlighting its clinical functioning. The cut, where we confront the real of the encounter, the opacity of *jouissance*, also orients us towards desire, or at the least makes available a choice. Speaking about her own experience as an analysand as well, she highlights how the cut produces new signifiers, orienting the symptom. But what then of a cut which is not directed by a clinical orientation? A ‘coupure sauvage’? Her article moves on to read the cut of Brexit, as a cut on a body-politic, which affects the mental lives of its citizens, liberating speech, while at the same time forcing them to encounter *jouissance* and the death drive. And in the *après-coup* of the cut? A call for a new symptomization of *jouissance*.

The clinical engagement with the cut is carried forward by Alejandro Olivos’ reading of the cut through his clinical work with children and their families. Psychoanalysis is always complicated by institutional structures, which come with their own set of demands. His essay engages with the cut in the session while working in such an institutional structure for children, which includes a set of pre-existing conditions as well as the presence of the parents. The *troumatisme*, or encountering the *sinthome* in the trou or hole of parental misunderstanding, is where he tries to locate the cut in the familial structure. Encountering this misunderstanding has a certain clinical import for the autistic child, and it is here his work is situated, in examining the fundamental misunderstanding, at the level of the familial logic that frames the autistic child in his clinic.

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