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LACAN ON PARANOIAC KNOWLEDGE

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For Lacan, all knowledge is imbued with paranoia. Although this claim was largely unarticulated by Lacan himself, I attempt to give conceptual clarity to the epistemological process of paranoiac knowledge situated in Lacan's three contexts of being. Developmentally, knowledge is paranoiac because it is acquired through our *imaginary* relation to the other as a primordial misidentification or illusory self-recognition of autonomy, control, and mastery, thus leading to persecutory anxiety and self-alienation. Secondarily, through the *symbolic* structures of language and speech, desire is foisted upon us as a foreboding demand threatening to invade and destroy our uniquely subjective inner experiences. And finally, the process of knowing itself is paranoiac because it horrifically confronts the *real,* namely, the unknown. Through our examination of a clinical case study, paranoiac knowledge manifests itself as the desire not to know.

If you were to randomly open any text of Lacan's and begin to read, you might immediately think that the man is mad. In a word, his writing is psychotic: it is fragmentary, chaotic, and at times incoherent. First of all, his style of spoken discourse, given in lecture format before appearing in print, is infamously troublesome. Second, his fragmented texts obstinately oppose conforming to formal articulate systematization. As a result, Lacan is not very accessible, either as a stylist or a theoretician. For these reasons he invites controversy and is often misinterpreted.[1]

Because Lacan was a fearsome polemicist, radical eccentric, and unorthodox practitioner bordering on the scandalous, within mainstream psychoanalysis, his name has

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[1]From his *Seminar* on the psychoses, Lacan (1955–1956/1993a) says,

> I'm not surprised that my discourse may have created a certain margin of misunderstanding. . . . I would say that it is with a deliberate, if not entirely deliberated, intention that I pursue this discourse in such a way as to offer you the opportunity to not quite understand. (p. 164)

become a dirty word. Although Lacan was hailed as the "master" by his adherents, vociferous criticism of the "French Freud" mounted vast condemnation for his exploitation of psychoanalytic technique labeled as manipulative, abusive, unethical, and perverted. It comes as no surprise that he would be inevitably blamed for the suicide of some of his analysands, thus leading to his eventual expulsion from the psychoanalytic community (Haddad, 1981; Lacan, 1964/1981a). Although the recognized genius that often accompanies his legend has by no means vanished from academic circles, due to the arcane and inconsistent nature of his writings, Lacan's theoretical *oeuvre* has been dismissed by some as a "delusion" (Roustang, 1990).

It is rather ironic that Lacan's theoretical innovations are sometimes characterized by the language of the psychoses, for his theory of knowledge is tinged with psychotic hermeneutics. "Paranoia" is derived from the Greek, *para*—outside of or beside—as in "*beside* oneself"—and mind (*nous, vóos*), thus beyond intelligible thought (*noēsis*), hence madness. It can also be said that Lacan's splintered, disparate, and often implicit theoretical structure personifies his very notion of desire: desire is beyond structure, beyond words—it is merely the unutterable, ineffable. That which remains nameless, indescribable—unknown—is surely that which haunts us; and it is ominous precisely because it is alien.

Like Lacan's conception of the *real,* which has no formal text, his comments on paranoiac knowledge are limited to only a few fragments in his *Écrits* and his *Seminars,* thus lacking clarification and systematic rigor. Because his scant remarks on the subject have genuine theoretical and clinical value, it is my intention to provide a conceptual model explicating the scope, breadth, and process of paranoiac knowledge, thus showing how Lacan's insights have clinical utility. By way of illustration, I examine a case of paranoia.

Prolegomena to Lacan's System: The Relation Between Knowledge and Paranoia

Lacan is very difficult to understand, which makes the interpreter's task ever so daunting. Such difficulty is in no doubt why, in part, most psychoanalytic clinicians in North America remain confused about—if not oblivious to—his theoretical visions. Even worse, there is no unified agreement among Lacanians on how we should interpret Lacan. His invented jargon is highly esoteric, drawing on and reappropriating concepts from many different fields of study including philosophy, anthropology, semiotics, and mathematics, and thus can evoke both admiration and dismissal. Here I am reminded of a decorative centerpiece: it's nice to look at, but no one dares to touch it. The confusional aspects of Lacan's discourse become particularly vexing when Lacan himself declares that he is intentionally trying to confound the very audience who seeks to understand him (Lacan, 1955–1956/1993a, p. 164). For these reasons, Lacan's technical jargon cannot be converted easily into a user-friendly guide. Moreover, many of his concepts have multiple meanings that even oppose each other when viewed from different contexts within his system. Although I attempt to mitigate some of the confusion surrounding his discourse, it is necessary for me, throughout this project, to retain much of his technical language, without which many of his theoretical distinctions would go unrecognized.

It is not necessary to adopt Lacan's entire system, which is neither essential nor desirable, in order to appreciate what he has to offer to our topic at hand. In fact, many of Lacan's positions—such as the decentering of subjectivity for the reification of lan-

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guage—radically oppose contemporary psychoanalytic thought to the degree that Lacan becomes essentially incompatible. Notwithstanding, with the ever-increasing linguistic turn in psychoanalysis, Lacan becomes an important figure to engage. Because language is a necessary condition (albeit not a sufficient one) for conceptual thought, comprehension, and meaning to manifest (see Frie, 1997; Mills, 1999), human knowledge is linguistically mediated. But the epistemological question—that is, the origin of knowledge—requires us to consider prelinguistic development, intrapsychic and interpersonal experience, and the extra- or nonlinguistic processes that permeate psychic reality, such as the constitutional pressures of the drives (*Triebe*) and affective states (from the monstrous to the sublime) that remain linguistically foreclosed as unformulated unconscious experience. When these aspects of human life are broadly considered, it becomes easier to see how our linguistic–epistemological dependency has paranoiac a priori conditions. From Freud to Klein and Lacan, knowledge is a dialectical enterprise that stands in relation to fear—to the horror of possibility—the possibility of the *not:* negation, conflict, and suffering saturate our very beings, beings whose self-identities are linguistically constructed.

The relation between knowledge and paranoia is a fundamental one, and perhaps nowhere do we see this dynamic more poignantly realized than in childhood. From the "psychotic-like" universe of the newborn infant (e.g., see Klein, 1946); to the relational deficiencies and selfobject failures that impede the process of human attachment; to the primal scene and/or subsequent anxieties that characterize the oedipal period, leading to the inherent rivalry, competition, and overt aggression of even our most sublimated object relations—fear, trepidation, and dread hover over the very process of knowing itself. What is paranoid is that which stands in relation to opposition, hence that which is alien to the self. Paranoia is not simply that which is beyond the rational mind, but it is a generic process of *noēsis*—"I take thought, I perceive, I intellectually grasp, I apprehend," and hence have *apprehension* for what I encounter in consciousness. With qualitative degrees of difference, we are all paranoid simply because others hurt us, a lesson we learn in early childhood. Others hurt us with their knowledge, with what they say, as do we. And we hurt knowing. "What will the Other do next?" We are both pacified yet cower in extreme trembling over what we may and may not know—what we may and may not find out; and this is why our relation to knowledge is fundamentally paranoiac.

For Aristotle (1958), "all men by nature desire to know" (p. 108). This philosophic attitude is kindled by our educational systems perhaps informing the popular adage, "knowledge is power." But whose? There is no doubt that the acquisition of knowledge involves a power differential, but what if knowledge itself is seen as too powerful because it threatens our psychic integrity? In the gathering of knowledge there is simultaneously a covering-over, a blinding to what one is exposed to; moreover, an erasure. I ~~know~~ (No)! Unequivocally, there are things we desire to know nothing about at all; hence the psychoanalytic attitude places unconscious defense—negation/denial and repression—in the foreground of human knowledge, the desire not to know.

When we engage epistemology—the question and meaning of knowledge—we are intimately confronted with paranoia. For example, there is nothing more disturbing when after a lifetime of successful inquiry into a particular field of study it may be entirely debunked by the simple, arrogant question: "How do you know?" Uncertainty, doubt, ambiguity, hesitation, insecurity—anxiety!: the process of knowing exposes us all to immense discomfort. And any epistemological claim is equally a metaphysical one. Metaphysics deals with first principles, the fundamental, ultimate questions that preoccupy our collective humanity: "What is real? Why do I exist? Will I *really* die?" Metaphysics is

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paranoia—and we are all terrified by its questions: “Is there God, freedom, agency, immortality?” *Is? Why? Why not? Yes but why?!* When the potential meaning and quality of one’s personal existence hinge on the response to these questions, it is no wonder why most theists say only God is omniscient. And although Freud (1927/1961b) tells us that the very concept of God is an illusory derivative of the oedipal situation—a wish to be rescued and comforted from the anxieties of childhood helplessness, He—our exalted Father in the sky—is *always* watching, judging. Knowing this, the true believer has every reason to be petrified. For those in prayer or in the madhouse, I can think of no greater paranoia.

Three Realms of Being

Human knowledge is paranoiac—it torments, persecutes, *cuts*. This is essentially what Lacan (1953–1954/1988c) means when he says “my knowledge started off from paranoiac knowledge” (p. 163), because there are “paranoid affinities between all knowledge of objects as such” (Lacan, 1955–1956/1993c, p. 39). In order to understand what Lacan means, it is necessary to provide a preliminary overview of his ontological treatment of the human condition which he situates in three realms or contexts of being, namely, the *imaginary, symbolic,* and real. By closely examining a few of Lacan’s key works, it becomes increasingly clear that aggressivity suffuses the very fabric of human knowledge, a paranoiac residue of the dialectic of desire.

It may be useful to think of three main periods that characterize Lacan’s work. Although his early period (1932–1948) focused on the role of the imago, his middle period (1948–1960) concentrated on the nature of language that subordinated the world of images to linguistic structures and practices. During his late period (1960–1980), Lacan was preoccupied with a formal systematization of psychoanalysis via logic and mathematics that sought to provide a coherent explanatory framework involving the three realms or registers of mental life. As a cursory definition, we might say that the imaginary (*imaginaire*) is the realm of illusion, of fantasy, belonging to the sensuous world of perception. In contrast, the symbolic (*symbolique*) is the formal organization of psychic life that is structured through language and linguistic internalizations, thus becoming the ground of the subject; while the real (*réel*) remains foreclosed from epistemic awareness within the abyss of unconscious desire. The real is delimited—the *Ding-an-sich:* it remains the mysterious beyond, the heart of desire.[2] For Lacan, desire is persecutory by virtue of

[2]The real surfaces as the third order, standing in juxtaposition to the imaginary and the symbolic, intimately intertwined yet beyond the previous domains. The real has no formal text, it is deliberately undecided. It is neither symbolic nor imaginary, rather it remains foreclosed from the analytic experience which relies on speech. The real is the domain of the unconscious, that realm of psychic territory we can never know as such in itself; it remains beyond the epistemic limitations of the symbolic, yet is disclosed in every utterance. We may say that the real is the seat of desire whereas the imaginary and symbolic orders devolve into it. The real is the presupposed psychical reality, the raw substrate of the subject awaiting structure through linguistic acquisitions. Lacan’s notion of the real should not be confused with “reality,” which is in some ways knowable (at least theoretically), yet the subject of desire may only suppose the real—the *Ding-an-sich*—as reality for the subject is merely phantasmatic. For Lacan, “the real is the impossible,” it is the realm of the unthinkable, the unimaginable; and this is precisely why the real cannot be penetrated by imagination or the senses. The real is that which is missing in the symbolic order, that which is untouchable, indescribable by language, yet “the ineliminable residue of all articulation” (Lacan, 1977d, p. x).

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belonging to the Other, first originating in a specular imago, then constituted through the domain of language and speech.

According to Malcolm Bowie (1991), the imaginary, symbolic, and the real are not mental entities, rather they are *orders* that serve to position the individual within a field that traverses and intersects her. The word *order* suggests a number of important connotations for Lacan. Analogous to botanical or zoological taxonomy, (a) there is a hierarchical arrangement of classes whereby (b) internal principles of similarity and congruence govern membership in each class. Furthermore, (c) higher levels of classification have superior cognitive status, suggesting that (d) a series of commands or orders are being issued from some undetected source—presumably the real—the night of the mind. No limitations are placed on the Lacanian orders; they may be used to explain any form of human condition from the most banal mental mechanism to the most severe forms of psychopathology. Within the three Lacanian orders, each perspective is realized from its own unique vantage point, revealing an insight into psychic organization that forecloses the others, yet envelopes them. However, by themselves, each fails to fully represent and articulate the greater dynamic complexity that characterizes the parallel processes and temporal unification of the three orders.

As multiple processes, the Lacanian three orders are not stable, fixed entities; rather, they are under the constant pressure of evolution, vacillating between antithetical movements of progression and regression, construction and decay. The three orders pressurize each other constantly, having short-term moratoriums. In other words, the three orders are in conflict with each other and, when operative, attempt to exert their own unique influence over the other orders. This in turn creates overdetermined and multiple, dynamic levels of psychic reality. In their dialectical transitions, each order encroaches on the other—the symbolic defining and organizing the imaginary, the imaginary hallucinating the real. Furthermore, the real always wedges its way through the gaps of conscious intentionality, giving desire a voice through the medium of perception and speech. At any given moment we live in all three realms of being, each operative and dynamic within their own orders parallel to each other, yet they are integrative, structured, and complex. Although the real is the most obscure concept for Lacan, it reintroduces a vibrant theoretical life to psychoanalytic inquiry that underscores the primacy of an unconscious ontology which Freud was so instrumental to advance. Despite its mysterious appeal shrouded in inconceivability, the real is the reverberation of its own truth disclosed on its own terms and understood through its own language, the idiom of desire.

Through the Looking Glass

Lacan's inaugural theory of the self was formally introduced in 1936 to the 14th International Psychoanalytic Congress and published the following year under the title "The Looking-Glass Phase" (Lacan, 1936/1977f). This single contribution launched a radical new portrait of ego formation in psychoanalytic thought. One reason why his theory is so radical and controversial is that, for Lacan, the ego, with qualifications, does not exist—at least not in the ordinary sense psychoanalysis has come to view the notion. The ego is a mistake (*méconnaissance*), thus it is merely an illusory projection of autonomy and control. In other words, the ego (*moi, Ich*) or "I" is merely a *wish*—itself the product of social construction.

At this point, it may be useful to distinguish between what Lacan means by the self, the ego, and the subject. The "self," "ego," or "I," which is used synonymously throughout

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much of Lacan's writings, is typically equated with our conscious perceptions and definitions of ourselves. Therefore, when Lacan (1955–1956/1993c) says that "meaning is imaginary" (p. 65), he is saying that our ego is conceptually bound to our conscious self-*image* or self-representations. The term *subject,* on the other hand, always refers to the unconscious—that which is alien and lies outside of conscious self-awareness. Lacan, as does Freud, privileges the unconscious over the conscious ego, and hence emphasizes that all foreign desires, thoughts, parapraxes, and so on, which slip out during acts of speech are tantamount to revealed id (*Es*) processes (Fink, 1997). However, Lacan does not make the distinction between the conscious and unconscious portions of the ego as Freud (1923/1961a) does, nor is he inclined to attribute "agency" to the unconscious, even though he concedes we have a tendency to attribute subjectivity to it. Although Freud (1933/1964, p. 6) spoke of the trichotomy of the psyche or "soul" (*Seele*)—not the "mental apparatus" which is a mistranslation—as the temporal unification of the dynamic processes that constitute psychic life, Lacan makes the unconscious subject completely nonpersonal. For our purposes here, however, it may be less confusing if we think of the subject as the whole human being composed of both conscious and unconscious organizations.

The mirror stage is the initial point of self-discovery, hence the dawn of the nascent ego insofar as the "I" is discovered in the eyes of the other. From the recognition of the self through the looking glass, or through another as its metaphorical representation, the emergence of self-consciousness is constituted in and through alienation. Taken over from Hegel's (1807/1977) theory of desire and recognition, Lacan (1953–1954/1988c) states that "the original, specular foundation of the relation to the other, in so far as it is rooted in the imaginary, [is] the first alienation of desire" (p. 176). In the realm of the imaginary, the budding ego first recognizes itself in an object outside of itself, in the mirror image of the other. This illusory order is the initial constitution of the self, as the first matrix of the ego, which is the psychically formative period that occurs between the ages of 6 to 18 months of infancy.

Through Kojève, Lacan was deeply influenced by Hegel, especially by his lordship and bondage chapter outlined in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hegel, 1807/1977). For Hegel, one's sense of self is contingent on the recognition of the other, and this contingency itself fosters a paranoid dynamic. We all seek recognition, this is a basic human need. The ego is affirmed by the other, but not at first. There is originally the experience of inequality, whether this be the child's relation to the parent or the servant's relation to the master. Ultimately the desire for recognition becomes a fundamental battle for dominance and validation in which each subject struggles to overcome the objectification of the other. From this standpoint, the sense of one's fundamental contingency on recognition is basically paranoiac and may regress to that paranoid state whenever one becomes acutely aware of that contingency.

Drawing on the ethological research of Tinbergen and Lorenz regarding the perceptual functions of animal behavior, and on Freud's thesis of identification, Lacan emphasizes the organizing function of the imago as the perceptual *Gestalten* that forms the most elemental contours of psychical structure. For Lacan, as for Hegel, the initial recognition of the "I" does not entail the subject's awareness of itself as a fully self-conscious agent. This is a developmental achievement mediated by its burgeoning modes of identification. For Lacan (1936/1977f), however, this primordial form of identification "situates the agency of the ego . . . in a fictional direction" (p. 2), namely, in the gaze of the other, which gives the illusory semblance of self. In other words, images symbolize, reflect the "I," and thus resemble a constituted self that are the initial stimuli for ego boundaries and

body differentiation to be forged. The mirror phase is therefore the world of perception, forever cast under the penumbra of the imaginary.

As early as his essay on "The Mirror Stage" (Lacan, 1936/1977f), Lacan's mature theory of desire is already implicit, it is already prepared. The mirror experience functions as the coming into being of identity, the initial formation of the self—a self that is dialectically and intersubjectively constructed through desire, as the relation of being to *lack* (*manque*). Lacan emphasizes the "internal thrust" of desire within the presupposed subject, yet desire is always *caused* or given over, through internalization, by the Other. As a result, desire is always characterized by absence and incompleteness. Such void, such hole in being clamors in "anticipation" for presence, for fulfillment of its lack, facilitated by the parental imagoes that the premature ego identifies with, thus giving an illusory sense of totality and completeness. We may say that such illusory completeness is fantasized, hallucinated *as* reality, thus the fulfillment of a wish. However, the dislocated images mirrored in the other subjected to the illusion of cohesiveness of identity are in fact *defensive* processes enacted to ward off fragmentation anxiety: the genesis of ego development is the life of desire.

The Other as Persecutory

Lost in its alienation, the Lacanian subject discovers itself in the imaginary, recovered through the mediation of the other, giving itself meaning through the symbolic, struggling on the threshold of the real. But for Lacan (1936/1977f), there can never be an absolute self, no autonomous "I" or transcendental ego that exists apart from the Other; the "I" is always linked "to socially elaborated situations" (p. 5) mediated by linguistic structures ontologically constituted a priori within its social facticity. Thus the *I* is the *Other*.

It is through the image of the other that the infant comes to grasp awareness of its own corporeal integrity and seize the first measure of control over its body movements. The imago serves as an "alter ego," an organizing, stabilizing function which coordinates cohesiveness out of internal chaos and provides homogeneity out of primal discord. Through the imaginary, the ego is no more than a return of an image to itself. The paradoxical structure of the imaginary is therefore the polarity between alienation and recognition. Lacan sees recognition as the recovery of the alienated image facilitated through the mirroring of the other. As the subject finds or recognizes itself through an image (insofar as recognition is the misrecognition of its autonomous ego as an illusory mastery), it is concurrently confronted with its own alienated and alienating image; hence this process becomes an aggressive relation.

Lacan describes the degree of "aggressive disintegration" that torments the inchoate ego in "the form of disjointed limbs, or of those organs represented in exoscopy, growing wings and taking up arms for intestinal persecutions" (Lacan, 1936/1977f, p. 4). The persecutory fantasies that accompany early ego development may indeed take the form of "images of castration, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open of the body, in short, the . . . *imagos of the fragmented body*" (Lacan, 1948/1977b, p. 11). Feldstein (1996) notes that the imago allows the infant to elide a fundamental rupture in which "anxiety-producing images of the fragmented body are disavowed because such untotalizable self-differences could give rise to paranoid perceptions; . . . [thus] paranoia is related to the mirror-stage attempt to manufacture a future-perfect mastery" (p. 135). It becomes essential for the ego to split, compartmentalize, and/or project its negative introjects from its internal experiences and internalize soothing

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ministrations in order to defend against such hostile intrusions. Thus, the stabilizing and "fixating" quality of the positive imago serves a cohesive function. As the imago (accompanied by maternal ministrations and validating presentations) helps constitute the burgeoning "I," the salutary power of the specular image becomes a unifying and integrating activity.

The organizing and synthesizing functions internalized over maturation become unifying yet mobile fixtures of the child's inner representational world. Such internalizations are fortified through ongoing identifications that provide the illusion of self-cohesion which further serve to ward off primordial anxiety associated with fragmentation, decomposition, and loss of undifferentiated bliss with the imago. This is also a prevalent theme for Klein (1946) and post-Kleinians (Bion, 1959/1988; Segal, 1957): ego organization is besieged by the horrors of persecutory–annihilation anxiety. Unlike Klein, however, the self is the introjection of the other, not the projection of the self discovered in the other. For Lacan, the self is causally given over by the other; thus the self is the other internalized in all its variegated forms.

Given the plethora of images and fantasies that populate the early stages of the imaginary, it becomes increasingly clearer to see how the other becomes a persecutory object. The other, and particularly the other's desire, is always a potential threat to the subject because it is an alien force that stands in firm opposition to the subject, an antithesis that evokes rivalry and competition. This is why Lacan (1955–1956/1993c) says that "all human knowledge stems from the dialectic of jealousy, which is a primordial manifestation of communication" (p. 39). The subject first encounters the other as *opposition*—an opposition that *desires*. As such, the other is in possession of something the subject lacks. We are jealous of what the other has which naturally evokes feelings of rivalry, competition, and envy. This naturally leads Lacan to conclude that "the object of human interest is the object of the other's desire" (Lacan, 1955–1956/1993c, p. 39). What the subject desires in otherness is the other's desire, thus bringing about a primordial confrontation with death: in opposition there is always the possibility of being annulled. "The dialectic of the unconscious always implies struggle, the impossibility of coexistence with the other [is] one of its possibilities" (Lacan, 1955–1956/1993c, p. 40). Whether the other is the object of desire that enjoys a degree of liberty which the subject lacks, or whether the other is the symbolic order imposing an austere reality on the subject's inner world through the violation and demands of speech, the acquisition of knowledge becomes a paranoiac enterprise.

Aggressivity and Identification

Within the initial phases of the imaginary, aggressivity becomes paramount for Lacan. The image as an alienating presence may be an ominous, rivalrous threat that the subject fears as dangerous. Although the imago may be a validating-soothing-sustaining introject that provides the self with illusory stability, it may also become colored by the projection of one's own innate destructive impulses organized in one's paranoiac relation to the imago. The doubling function of the imaginary, as the medium for both self-recognition and self-alienation, serves as the initial developmental impetus behind the dialectical unfolding of desire.

The interface between identification, aggression, and the captivation of the specular imago in the imaginary register serves paradoxical functions. For Lacan, the "captation" of the mirror image is both entrancing and intrusive; it fascinates yet it captures. As the image of oneself is given over by the other, there is a new psychical action, that of

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identification, which for Lacan is the moment of the inception of the ego. While Freud (1921/1955b, 1933/1964) envisions identification as the development of an emotional bond with a significant figure, Lacan focuses on the dialectical capacity to form judgments of identity and difference. Through identification, the baby finds the image a captivating albeit imprisoning force chained to the pull of the imaginary. For Lacan, this incarcerating point of attraction implies that the ego momentarily becomes fixed and static. Unconscious fantasy systems largely serve a defensive function in the preoedipal child, fueling illusory misrecognitions as a way of fending off the aggressive violation of the imago's encroachment.[3]

There is an a priori manifestation of destruction within the imaginary order: aggressivity is ontologically constituted within any dyadic relation. The imaginary capture of the mirror is mired in destruction, for as Lacan emphasizes, any imaginary relation generates rivalry and conflict. Recall that what we identify in opposition is the other's desire which we long to possess. Identification therefore generates an ambivalent tension between possession and lack. Identification with a rival evokes the dialectic of presence and absence, mastery and servitude; thus the initial point of confrontation entails the recognition of what one has not yet procured or mastered. For example, we may say that the mother's image is castrating because it is more powerful. Fear, dread, or shame may be evoked by a simple look: the other's desire is exposed through a gaze. Thus, the boundary of the imaginary becomes difference. For Lacan, this dual relation between the infant–mother dyad encases desire within an interminable narcissistic battlefield.

It is important to note that aggressivity and aggression are not the same. For Lacan, aggression is a derivative of the death drive (*Todestrieb*) while aggressivity is the acting out of aggression through the symbolic and imaginary orders. Following Freud (1920/1955a), aggressivity is both the deflection of self-destruction and a defensive, protective reaction to an external threat. Lacan (1948/1977b) shows that aggressivity is immured within the structures of subjectivity "by its very constitution" (p. 9) and avouches that "aggressivity in experience is given to us as intended aggression and as an image of corporeal dislocation" (p. 10). As we have said, imagoes can be noxious and disfiguring, thus leading to fragmentation and a fracturing of the body. The ego attempts to fantasize the illusion of mastery and unity in the face of these dislocated and contrary experiences characteristic of the child's fragmented bodily states which are displaced as aggressivity directed toward others. Richard Boothby (1991) argues that

> aggressivity is a drive toward violation of the imaginary form of the body that models the ego. It is because aggressivity represents a will to rebellion against the imago that aggressivity is specifically linked in fantasy to violations of the bodily integrity. (p. 39)

Thus, for Lacan (1966), "the notion of aggressivity corresponds . . . to the splitting of the subject against himself" (p. 344). Such "dehiscence" in the nascent ego gives rise to persecutory anxiety, hence the origins of knowledge are paranoiac in their "most general structure."

What I have called paranoiac knowledge is shown, therefore, to correspond in its more-or-less archaic forms to certain critical moments that mark the history of man's

[3]This view must be contrasted to the pleasant, soothing presence of the imago, and particularly the maternal imago, that is gradually internalized by the child, thus becoming a stabilizing and cohesive function informing psychic structure (e.g., see the various development models of Bowlby, 1980; Klein, 1946, 1957/1975; Kohut, 1978; Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975; Mitchell, 1988; Stern, 1985).

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mental genesis, each representing a stage in objectifying identification (Lacan, 1948/1977b, p. 17).

Knowledge—the other's knowledge—is always lurking with pernicious intent to get in and *kill* the ego. The objects of identification are inherently baneful: they eviscerate desire simply because they are the other's desire. As the child's identificatory powers increase, so does the capacity for aggressivity. When the burgeoning ego identifies with the other's desire, it models the other and hence enters into an aggressive rivalry over the object of the other's desire. Following Hegel (1807/1977), Lacan (1953–1954/1988c) sees this process as a competition for recognition:

> The subject's desire can only be confirmed in this relation through a competition, through an absolute rivalry with the other, in view of the object towards which it is directed. And each time we get close, in a given subject, to this primitive alienation, the most radical aggression arises—the desire for the disappearance of the other. (p. 170)

Lee (1990) aptly tells us that "aggression directed toward others is found at the very center of the *moi's* structure, as it comes into being through the dialectic of the child's narcissistic identifications with various visual images" (p. 27). Such identification, says Lacan (1948/1977b), is also an

> erotic relation, in which the human individual fixes upon himself an image that alienates him from himself, that are to be found the energy and the form on which this organization of the passions that he will call his ego is based. (p. 19)

For Lacan, the aggressivity injected into the very process of ego identification itself "determines the awakening of his desire for the object of the other's desire" (1948/1977b, p. 19). Lacan essentializes aggression as an ontologically indispensable psychic process that infuses narcissistic ego development. Aggressivity breaches the margin of libidinal self-investment as it falls on the fringe of self-destruction. Such "narcissistic suicidal aggression" operative with the formation of the ego is due to the alienated and lethal assault of the imago which unleashes a violence on the subject to the point of self-extinction. As the other, *objet a* (sometimes referred to as *objet-petit-a*) is the signifier of desire; thus the subject is an-*other* plundered by the object's desire. Bowie (1991) explains that "the original act of identification is the original narcissistic declaration too; into the very constitution of the ego its destruction is already woven; the only escape from alienation is an aggravation of the alienated state" (p. 34).

For Freud, narcissistic object-choice is the process of conversion (*Umwandlung*) of aggressivity into love, a process that hinges on the repression of the drive toward aggression in the face of socialization and object attachment. For Lacan, this two-phase process is compressed into one: narcissism and aggressivity are correlatives. Julien (1994) expatiates on this claim:

> Narcissism, in which the image of one's own body is sustained by the image of the other, in fact introduces a *tension:* the other in his image both attracts and rejects me. I am indeed nothing but the other, yet at the same time, he remains *alienus,* a stranger. This other who is myself is other than myself. (p. 34)

As the ego is formally laid down in the imaginary relations of the mirror stage, aggressivity is embedded in love by virtue of this dual relationship. Duality implies difference, exclusion, antithesis. My desire is *their* desire!—it is already tainted with ugliness. A fundamental dichotomy is already constituted by this a priori relation, a rigid *either/or* leading to what Lacan calls the "fraternal complex": *either* I kill the other *or* the

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other will kill me. As the immature ego is imperiled by perceived hostile and persecutory advances by the other's desire, the child is immersed in a destructive reality which it must endeavor to deflect, project, and keep at bay. At the same time aggressivity contaminates the inner I; the ego is subjected to its own libidinal and relational strivings to attach to an ideal love object. From a Kleinian perspective, the oscillation between ideal and persecutory object relations is further enhanced during the depressive position. As paranoid anxiety gradually devolves into (yet remains subsumed within) depressive anxiety, the ego is besmirched by fears of destruction and loss of love. This is very much in keeping with Lacan's position: the ego's ambitendent, aggressive-erotic structure is the narcissistic foundation for *jouissance*—the realm of excess—desire's pleasures in death.[4]

For Lacan, death plays a pivotal role in the organization of the psyche: "aggressivity gnaws away, undermines, disintegrates; it castrates; it leads to death" (Lacan, 1948/1977b, p. 10). Schneiderman (1983) suggests that desire itself is the desire for death, one that is "cultivated to the extent that death is kept at a distance" (p. 74). The pleasure of death is not to be experienced as a real death, rather as the euphoria of *jouissance,* the pleasure of its sublimation. This sublimation, however, is not bound to the homeostatic laws that govern the pleasure principle; rather it exceeds it. We might say that death satisfies desire, but only if it is sustained, prolonged. Death is only satisfying if it is protracted. The pleasure of death, hence the process of death, makes the experience of satisfaction satisfying.

Boothby (1991) cogently shows that Lacan's treatment of the death drive is pivotal in his theoretical innovations that intimately link death with the functions of speech, language, and desire. As Lacan (1954–1955/1988a) states, "the death instinct is only the mask of the symbolic order" (p. 326). Thus, the death drive hides behind the veil of speech. Language castrates *jouissance,* it alienates desire from satisfaction and thus introduces a division within the subject, leaving a palpable void (Ragland, 1995). Lacan's repositioning of death provides us with a hermeneutics of unconscious desire. With reference to Freud, Lacan (1958/1977c) suggests that "life . . . has only one meaning, that in which desire is borne by death" (p. 277). Desire is the spawn of intrusion, violation, and laceration from the Other—speech and language are by nature aggressive; they *cut*.

The *De*structure of Language

As we have seen, Lacan's developmental picture of the ego is clearly imbued with a negative dialectic: imagoes are alien and threatening, identification is formed in relation to lack, object relations are primarily aggressive and rivalrous, and desire is always imposed. From this account, the ego is vigilant and suspicious; hence it takes a paranoid relation toward the world at large which becomes unconsciously fortified. But when the ego acquires language, paranoia takes a symbolic turn signified through the demands of speech. The notion of the symbolic order of mental functioning came to the fore during

[4]Eros has many faces, even in death. There is a perverse pleasure in death; for Freud, the fusion of libido within self-destruction, for Lacan, the experience of *jouissance*. Unfortunately there is no adequate translation of this word in English. *Enjoyment* is suffused in its meaning but does not convey the sexual connotations retained in French. In one sense, *jouissance* denotes the intense pleasure of orgasm; *jouir* is slang for "to come." However, pleasure does not quite capture its precise meaning for the residues of death are encrusted in its essence. Therefore, we may say that *jouissance* is pleasure in the realm of excess: "[it] is the essence or quality that gives one's life its value" (Ragland, 1995, p. 87).

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the Rome Report.[5] Developed by Saussure and Jakobson, and taken over by Lévi-Strauss's formalization of the elementary structure of kinship with its reliance on Jakobson's binarism, Lacan's (1977d) emphasis on symbols refers not to icons or stylized figurations, but rather to signifiers that he extends into a general definition with differential elements; in themselves without meaning, signifiers acquire value only in their mutual relations which form a closed order (p. ix). Language lends structure to the psyche, thus it is the symbolic that gives order to the subject. In fact, for Lacan, the subject is ultimately *determined* by the symbolic function of signifiers, speech, and language. The relationship between the imaginary and the symbolic is contrasted by the experiences of the ego and its images on the one hand, and the fortification of linguistic attributions on the other. We are thrown into the realm of the symbolic: language is already constituted a priori within a preexisting social ontology, predefined, predetermined. Lacan (1957/1977a) tells us: "language and its structure exist prior to the moment at which each subject at a certain point in his mental development makes his entry into it" (p. 148). Symbolization attempts to give desire structure and order. Submitted to its systemic facticity, desire is molded by linguistic ontological pressures.

The introduction of the symbolic category marks a radical departure from Freud's metapsychology, indeed a rewriting of the structure of the psyche. Borne out in "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud," Lacan (1957/1977a) deliberately refigures Saussurian linguistics, insinuating the radical claim that not only is the unconscious structured like a language, but the unconscious *is* language (also see Lacan, 1955–1956/1993c, pp. 11, 119, 166). For Lacan, the unconscious is not just conceived metaphorically as language, it is literally the Letter, thus the signifier. He states: "But how are we to take this 'letter' here? Quite simply, literally . . . the unconscious is the whole structure of language" (Lacan, 1957/1977a, p. 147). More specifically, letters (words) function as an infinite deferral within the signifying chain. This infinity in the link of signifiers shares affinities with Freud's concept of primary process thinking: signifiers break through obstacles, they know no limits, there is merely a constant flow. The agency (*instance, Instanz*) of the letter suggests that there is an authority to language, indeed an "insistence." Furthermore, Lacan's reference to "reason since Freud" refers to what reason has become since Freud's contributions due to his insistence on the agency of the unconscious; hence the unconscious is our reason why the illusory is our consciousness.

The symbolic order was important to Lacan precisely because it was inclusive and versatile, capable of referring to an entire range of signifying practices (Bowie, 1991; Fink, 1995; Marcelle, 1992). Due to its coherence and malleability, the symbolic category links the world of the unconscious to the structures of speech, and thus even more broadly to a social linguistic ontology. Although repression is the prototype of the unconscious for Freud (1923/1961a, p. 15), language is the *sine qua non* of Lacan's new symbolic science.

Lacan's admiration of the symbolic is clearly contrasted to his derisive view of the Imaginary.[6] The symbolic is the seat of motion and heterogeneity, thus transcending the

[5]"The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis" was delivered to the Rome Congress held at the Istituto di Psicologia della Università di Roma, 1953, September 26–27.

[6]For Lacan, the implications of the imaginary are often pejorative, suggesting that the subject seeks to remove itself from the flux of becoming by reducing itself to the stagnant aura of illusion. Although Lacan introduced some positive valence to the imaginary in later theoretical postulations, it largely remains a negative construct. It may be argued, however, that we can never escape the captivating presence of the imaginary. After all, it is the world of perception and fantasy, of wish and defense. We can never transcend the illusory.

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field of illusory similarity: opposition and difference are firmly retained. The symbolic gives rise to the subject distinct from the imaginary ego, as an order of being that is always intermittent and disjoined (Bowie, 1991). Thus the symbolic is characterized by the ontology of absence, negativity, and nothingness. The relation between absence and presence, vacuity and abundance, accents the power of signification. Lack has as much signifying potency as excess, and none may operate alone without evoking antithesis. For Lacan (1953/1977e, 1957/1977a, 1960/1977g), the signification of lack parallels castration, as the "Name-of-the-Father" is the symbol for an authority that is both punitive and legislative. As the "paternal metaphor" that inheres in symbolization, lack is given significance in relation to otherness structured in symbolic opposition to the subject. Without such dialectical positionality, desire would succumb to a psychotic universe imprisoned within an absence of signification.

The imaginary is determined by signifiers, thus language is crucial in the construction of identity (Sarup, 1992). For Lacan, words are interpreted and given meaning retroactively; the behavior and verbal communication of another is always in need of interpretation, refracted through language. Lacan (1960/1977g) emphasizes the interpersonal demand for recognition that operates within the dialectic of desire. Within contemporary psychoanalysis, Kohut (1971, 1977, 1984) has made the need for validation and recognition the pinnacle motive force of desire: the subject craves attunement and mirroring from its selfobject milieu. Although Lacan's (1953/1977e, 1958/1977c) mature period deifies the symbolic at the expense of decentering the subject, his approach nevertheless underscores the "lack of being" that characterizes desire, the "want-to-be" (*manque-à-être*) that characterizes the dialectic of recognition (Lacan, 1958/1977c, pp. 259, 274).

Although Lacan (1964/1981d, 1964/1981e) says that "the unconscious is structured like a language" (1964/1981d, p.149; 1964/1981e, p. 203), language itself can be dialectically destructive: the symbolic has the capacity to *destructure* as it imposes order and meaning. The symbolic is an imposition, it places a demand on the subject. Language by its very nature is assaultive: through distinctions, disjunctives, and classifications it makes exclusions and omissions, thus dividing particulars from universals as it discriminates, separates, and categorizes. The order and structure of the letter as an insistence is only possible in the wake of disorder and destruction that is determined by its dialectical relation. The metonymy of what *is* is defined by what it is *not*. Language breaks up meaning and fractures it through negation, an act of destructuring based on engagement with opposition. Although the symbolic order frames, composes, and constructs, it can conversely displace one meaning for another.

The very structure and imposition of the symbolic can geld and dismember. Words take on signifying functions that activate cognitive, affective, and fantasy systems which rip through the very core of our being. Speech—the spoken word—is the medium of caustic oral aggression which can be so acerbic and devaluing that it may scar one's self-concept and inner representational world. Negation—"No!"—by its very definition and execution introduces lack, absence, and deprivation. This is why so often we see conflicted individuals fixate on what was said or unsaid by others, thus assuming obsessional forms and repetitions. The perseveration of thought affixed to lack can be a living hell. Speech creates psychic pain through the affliction of desire and lack, as does silence—a poignant withholding. This may be why we all have "paranoid affinities" in relation to how the other uses language and speech: we fear evaluation and judgment—the other's desire, hence the unknown.

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The Desire Not to Know

We have shown that the paranoiac process of acquiring knowledge has its genesis in the imaginary, first as the subject's misidentification with its alienated image in the reflection of the other, and second as the fundamental distortion and miscognition of external objects (also see Muller & Richardson, 1982). Human knowledge is paranoiac because the subject projects its imaginary ego properties into objects which become distorted and perceived as fixed entities that terrorize the subject with persecutory anxiety in the form of the other's desire. Although the terrifying part-object experiences of the dislocated body arise in the imaginary, the symbolic register introduces another form of fragmentation. Desire and speech by their very nature impose a command. Knowledge is saturated with paranoia because it threatens to invade the subject, and it is precisely this knowledge that must be defended against as the desire not to know.

Interpreting Lacan, Bruce Fink (1997) tells us that just as patients do not possess a genuine desire for change, they further lack a genuine desire for self-knowledge. Although people may show interest in knowing why their lives and interpersonal relationships are unsatisfactory, and specifically what keeps interfering with their adjustment and happiness, Lacan (1955–1956/1993b) suggests that there is a more fundamental unconscious wish not to know any of those things. "The subject's entire subsequent development shows that he wants to know nothing about it" (Lacan, 1955–1956/1993b, p. 12). In *Encore,* Lacan (1972–1973/1998) further adds that "the unconscious is the fact that being, by speaking, enjoys, and . . . wants to know nothing more about it," that is, "know nothing about it at all" (pp. 104–105). This is why patients often resist therapy and avoid the process of self-examination and change. They have no desire to know the root of their symptoms or neurotic mechanisms, what functions their defenses serve, and why they are instituted in the first place. This is why Lacan says that patients do not want to give up their symptoms because they provide familiarity and meaning: we enjoy our symptoms too much! (Žižek, 1992). This is the insidious structure of *jouissance,* namely, pleasure in pain, or the satisfaction individuals find in dissatisfaction to the point that they wish not to give it up. As Ragland (1995) asserts, "the inertia of *jouissance* . . . makes a person's love of his or her symptoms greater than any desire to change them" (p. 85). From this standpoint, the unconscious is first and foremost sadomasochistic: it inflicts a perverse pleasure through suffering at its own hands.

There is a self-destructive element to the enjoyment of symptoms, a revelry in the realm of excess to the point that truth or knowledge must be suspended, disavowed, or denied. This is why Lacan thinks that all knowledge of objects as such becomes tainted with paranoia: they threaten the subject's *jouissance,* and thus must be defended against as the desire not to know. So we may see how Lacan's theoretical insights have clinical applicability, let us now turn our attention to a case of paranoia.

The Case of Mrs. Z

The patient is a 48-year-old White woman with a presenting clinical picture of paranoid agitation, domestic violence, and suicidal gestures in response to her suspicion that her husband was having an extramarital affair. She was voluntarily admitted to an inpatient psychiatry unit of a general hospital after she was found intoxicated standing in the rain nude for approximately 2 hours. Upon confronting her husband about the alleged affair, Mrs. Z had reportedly slapped and hit him and then set a blanket on fire in the upstairs

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bedroom of their house before running outside in the cold with no clothes on, refusing to come back inside, saying she would rather die. She deliberately tried to hide from a small neighborhood search party but was eventually located and brought to Emergency by the police. This was the patient's first hospitalization and she had no previous psychiatric history.

Mrs. Z has been married to her husband for 23 years and has a 20-year-old daughter who recently got married and moved out of the home. Following her daughter's marriage, the patient was removing something from her husband's car when she noticed that there was a crack in the upholstery of the driver's seat. Apparently the seat was splitting at the seam in the upper right-hand corner, yet she paid it little attention. A week had passed when she noticed that the rip in the seam had widened, and with panic she immediately fantasized that her husband was having vigorous sexual relations with another woman in the car, thus causing damage to the seat. Upon having this fantasy, Mrs. Z reported that she recalled an event that took place approximately 4 months prior to her daughter's wedding, when she thought she smelled perfume on her husband's shirt while doing the laundry, something she dismissed at the time. This recollection further revived a painful 20-year-old memory of when her husband blurted out another woman's name during intercourse, leaving an unabated narcissistic injury; yet he assured her at the time his slip was only a fantasy and that he had never been unfaithful, an explanation which she believed.

After discovering the torn seat for the second time, Mrs. Z's suspicions started to assume more paranoid qualities, thus producing obsessional preoccupations that her husband was cheating on her each day as he went to work. She started checking and cleaning the car every night as he returned home hoping *not* to find evidence to corroborate her intuitions. One evening, however, she found a small piece of wire fencing underneath the passenger's front seat and concluded that someone had been in the car. When she asked her husband to explain how it got there, he could not, only suggesting that she must have overlooked the object when she previously vacuumed the car.

The patient now started to record the gas mileage each day as her husband drove to and from work. She had already driven the same route he normally took and recorded the mileage so she could have a baseline for comparison. When the mileage on the odometer proved to be significantly higher than expected on his next return from work, she confronted her husband on the discrepancy and accused him of having an affair. He vociferously denied any such thing and told the patient that she was paranoid. Mrs. Z admitted that although she had little proof at the time, she thought her husband was lying because he could not look her directly in the eye.

Convinced of her husband's infidelity, Mrs. Z purchased a voice-activated tape recorder and secretly concealed it in her husband's car. Upon returning from work that evening, the patient retrieved the tape recorder from the car and listened to the tape in its entirety. Initially the tape played back familiar sounds of a moving car on the road, conveying common traffic noises and music from the radio. After approximately 20 min of listening to the tape, Mrs. Z reported that she began to feel foolish that she had mistrusted her husband. But just as she was ready to turn off the tape, she reportedly began to hear her husband converse with another woman. The conversation soon led to passion as she heard the couple engage in the act of sexual relations.

Mrs. Z immediately confronted her husband on the affair, which he flatly denied. When she then produced the tape recorder and explained how she had hidden it in the car, recording his entire drive to work, he supposedly became frantic and disoriented. But when she played the section of the tape of the man conversing with the woman, he

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emphatically stated, “That’s not my voice!” Steadfastly denying that he was the one on the tape, the husband conjectured that someone from work must be stealing his car during the day, driving to some undisclosed location to have sex with some woman, and then returning the car before he gets off from work. At first Mrs. Z could not believe his story, but he assured her that he was not the man on the tape. Because the sound of the recording was crude, she had reason to doubt her previous assessment. Furthermore, he informed the patient that someone could have had access to his car unbeknownst to him because he routinely leaves his keys on a hook at the office so as not to lose them before he takes the company truck to the construction site each morning. However, he could not explain why two strangers would do such a thing or what possible motives they could have. He could think of no one at work with whom he had conflict or who would be inclined to take his car.

Wanting to believe her husband, Mrs. Z accepted his story and tried to convince herself that someone was playing a prank on them. It is during this time that she began abusing alcohol on a daily basis in order to cope. A few days had passed before she secretly resumed planting the tape recorder in the car. When she listened to the tape the second time, however, she suspected that the tape had been tampered with or changed. Over the days that followed, the patient was convinced that someone was removing the tape recorder, changing the tape from side A to side B, and replacing it in its original position with an altered recording. In desperation, she confided in her daughter and other family members that her husband was having an affair, but he had convinced them that she was mistaken. Mrs. Z had continued to hide the tape recorder in the car for some time and reportedly recorded another discussion between a man and a woman. Maintaining his innocence, the husband speculated that the strangers must have made a duplicate set of keys to the car, as he no longer left his keys hanging publicly on a hook in the office for people to take at their leisure.

The couple maintained this charade for a few more weeks, first getting an antitheft device—“The Club”—and securing it to the wheel when her husband was away from his car at work, and then installing an elaborate car-alarm system. These protective devices were to no avail, because the alleged “strangers” were still apparently taking the car. When Mrs. Z heard once more what she perceived to be her husband’s voice on the tape conversing with another woman, she became increasingly more accusatory, volatile, and inebriated on a regular basis. The patient began to secretly follow her husband to work to spy, watching to see if he would deviate from his route or if she could catch the culprits. After a few days of observing nothing unusual, she began to suspect that her husband knew that he was being followed and the car observed. Around this time, the patient reported that she started noticing objects in the house missing, and that dish towels were being removed from the kitchen drawer but returned days later folded incorrectly. Her family was convinced that she was “crazy.” Her paranoia was either due to an overly active imagination or alcohol, and her drunkenness was simply a means of “getting attention.”

Although the complexities of this case are by no means exhausted in this short description, we may nevertheless see how the patient’s discovery of her husband’s transgressions was tinged with paranoia. Even during her hospitalization, the patient was struggling with accepting the realization of his infidelity which persecuted her as paranoiac knowledge. She did not wish to know, and the desire not to know marked by a disavowal of the evidence at hand was experienced as a persecutory assault on her psychic integrity. Lurking in the shadows, this knowledge stalked her, prowling in the recesses of

her mind in the form of fixed repetitions and fantasies, thus leading to obsessional cycles of fear, dread, anxiety, and rage—violating her self-cohesion.

In discussing a case of hysteria, Freud (Freud & Breuer, 1893–1895/1955) referred to the "blindness of the seeing eye" as not wanting to know (p. 117, footnote 1). But Mrs. Z's desire not to know was not merely a desire to remain ignorant of her husband's deeds, it was a desire not to know *his* desire. As Lacan (1959–1960/1992a) puts it, "the moving force of paranoia is essentially the rejection of a certain support in the symbolic order" (p. 54)—she could not accept his desire, hence his demand. The need to mobilize specific defensive maneuvers designed to deny the possibility of the truth in the service of self-deception was exacerbated by the acute nature of her paranoiac intrusions: she was painfully exposed to the other's desire. In his lecture, "The See-Saw of Desire," Lacan (1953–1954/1988c) writes:

> What is ignorance? Certainly it is a dialectical notion, since it is within the perspective of truth that it is constituted as such. If the subject does not refer himself to the truth, there is no ignorance. If the subject doesn't begin to ask himself the question what is and what is not, there is no reason for there to be a true and a false, nor even, beyond that, reality and appearance. (p. 167)

The structure of human knowledge is paranoid for the simple reason that it is constituted in dialectical relation to truth: To know or not to know?—that is the question. In either instance, there is an apprehension to knowing because of the possibility of being subjected to a painful realization: in this case, the other's desire. She *sees,* she *saw*—hence "See-Saw," and this must be negated. Having knowledge or not is in relation to presence and lack. Paranoia is a reaction to anxiety generated in response to desire as demand and/or in relation to absence.

Mrs. Z knew the truth but it had to be disavowed; she so desperately wanted to remain ignorant of the affair that she inverted and displaced the truth through the mechanism of misrecognition. In the most general sense, she became lost in the imaginary and could not see the real for what it was. Lacan (1953–1954/1988c) asserts:

> Misrecognition represents a certain organization of affirmations and negations, to which the subject is attached. Hence it cannot not be conceived without correlative knowledge. If the subject is capable of misrecognizing something, he surely must know what this function has operated upon. There must be, behind his misrecognition, a kind of knowledge of what there is to misrecognize. (p. 167)

The patient's misrecognition is a function of her desire not to know what she knows. She is "attached" to her own wish. What she wishes to know is a symptom of her misrecognition, namely that her husband could not be guilty of desiring another woman. In fact, her self-deception was so entrenched that she had reportedly taken the tapes to a private investigator for a voice analysis, the results of which were still pending during her hospitalization. Because her husband denied that the voice on the tape was his, yet had no explanation to account for the alleged incidents, the patient felt this was the only way to reconcile the situation. Lacan (1953–1954/1988c) adds, "[s]he misrecognizes, or refuses to recognize . . . but everything in the way [s]he behaves indicates that [s]he knows that there is something that [s]he doesn't want to recognize" (p. 167). What Mrs. Z refused to recognize was her husband's desire. "The delusional intuition is a full phenomenon that has an overflowing, inundating character for the subject" (Lacan, 1955–1956/1993c, p. 33). She so badly wanted to believe the untruth that she set out to prove him innocent: "The voice analysis will exonerate him!" she exclaimed. During her hospitalization she

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had still hoped that the voice match would come back negative, which would prove in her mind that unidentified strangers were the offenders, yet as Lacan informs us, deep down she had already recognized the truth which she so despairingly wanted not to believe. But as Lacan (1959–1960/1992b) says elsewhere, "nothing is more ambiguous than belief" (p. 171). He further states: "At the basis of paranoia itself, which nevertheless seems to be animated by belief, there reigns the phenomenon of the *Unglauben* (disbelief)" (Lacan, 1964/1981b, p. 238). If the voice analysis exonerated her husband, her paranoia would be confirmed only on the condition that it was not him, a wishful expression of her desire not to know. But if the results were inconclusive, she would continue to be plagued by suspicion, mistrust, and doubt.

Mrs. Z's misrecognition was maintained through periods of "transitivism," what Lacan refers to as moments of "see-sawing" in which the subject takes the other's actions (or thoughts) to be equivalent with her own. The patient's husband did not want her to know and he deliberately and calculatingly lied to cover up his deed and desire. Through projective identification, she identified with his desire, which she introjected and made her own. "He would not do such a thing because he loves only me. He would not hurt me!" Wanting to accept his story—his lie—she misrecognized his original desire for his counterintention, namely his reparatory, secondary wish for her not to know the truth. But all his reassurances and pleading could not stave off what she had already affirmed yet negated. She recognized his desire for what it was—"this other negates [me], literally kills [me]" (Lacan, 1955–1956/1993a, p. 209): It gnawed on her as a slow emotional torture. Forced on her as a savage assault, violence and self-abuse was her only recourse—the destructive affliction of the other's desire.

Concluding Reflections

Whether paranoiac acquisitions arise in the fragmented images and dissociated impulses that characterize the experience of the incipient ego, in the imaginary relations governing fantasy, wish, conflict, and defense, or in our confrontation with the Other, the epistemic–phenomenological process of "knowing" is dynamically informed by unconscious paranoiac pressures. This is most evident when we confront the other's desire. As Hegel articulated nearly 200 years ago, the desire for recognition produces a primordial confrontation leading to "the desire for the disappearance of the other" (Lacan, 1953–1954/1988c, p. 170). When we encounter impasse from the affliction of others, we simply wish for them to vanish. Desire is a demand to which we yield or that we oppose. Language imposes itself on us as demand to which we are enslaved, thus explaining in part why we fear knowing anything beyond our immediate control. Whether constructed or discovered, the process of examining what *is* and what is *not*—being and nothingness—is driven by paranoia—itself the dialectic of being in relation to lack.

But paranoiac knowledge is not merely a fear of the unknown, it is a trepidation of knowing a particular truth that the subject may find horrific. Whether knowing elicits revulsion, shame, envy, or hate, it is the other's desire that is revealed in relation to our own. The juxtaposition of what is known to what is concealed always evokes the affirmation–negation contrast. As Lacan (1955–1956/1993c) says, "paranoid knowledge is knowledge founded on the rivalry of jealousy" (p. 39) due to the subject's realization of lack in relation to the object of the other's desire. "This defines, within the speech relationship, something that originates somewhere else—this is exactly the distinction between the imaginary and the real" (Lacan, 1955–1956/1993c, p. 39). The object of

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otherness is a primitive alienation which we wish to possess and is thus the object of a primary identification. For Lacan, desire originates from the outside—*it* speaks. This is why he says that when the other talks about himself, he speaks to us about something that has spoken to him.

But we may ask, What part of the subject speaks from within? Analysis tells us the unconscious—the realm beyond conceptualization, namely, the real. In the imaginary and symbolic domains, we are bombarded by alienation, opposition, and demand, but *the unconscious is the house of being,* and our relation to the real is a self-relation we know very little about. "The unconscious is something that speaks within the subject, beyond the subject, and even when the subject doesn't know it, and that says more about him than he believes" (Lacan, 1955–1956/1993c, p. 41). Here we may say that the unconscious is even more alienating than the imaginary, because we are ultimately estranged from ourselves—from our own inner world. Elsewhere Lacan (1964/1981c) says: "In the unconscious there is a corpus of knowledge (*un savoir*), which must in no way be conceived as knowledge to be completed, to be closed" (p. 134). Therefore, the goal of psychoanalysis may be said to be the creative discovery of ἀλήθεια. Truth is a process of disclosedness or unconcealment, a process which may never be completely actualized.

We have an ambivalent relation to the unconscious—the desire to know is opposed by the desire to remain oblivious. For Lacan, the real is that place of limit—that which is lacking in the symbolic order: it is truly most horrific by the mere fact that it can never be known in itself. There is ultimately no safety in the unknown, and that is why the phenomenology of the lived experience carries with it the paranoiac residue of the uncertainty of the life within. The imaginary and symbolic orders interpenetrate the real, which in turn inform how the unconscious interpenetrates consciousness. Consciousness becomes an appearance, an illusory articulation of what cannot be rightfully articulated. This is why consciousness can only reveal through images and symbolization the differentiated and modified forms of unconscious reality. For Lacan (1954–1955/1988b), objects that terrify us, such as

> the anxiety-provoking apparition of an image . . . summarize what we can call the revelation of that which is least penetrable in the real, of the real lacking any possible mediation, of the ultimate real, of the essential object which isn't an object any longer, but this something faced with which all words cease and all categories fail, the object of anxiety *par excellence.* (p. 164)

The real resists articulation because it is simply "the impossible," thus subjecting consciousness to the paranoid abyss of the ineffable. Freud (1900/1953) was the first to insist on the primacy of the underworld: "The unconscious is the true psychical reality; *in its innermost nature it is as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world*" (p. 613). And just as the nature of symptoms have a sense (Freud, 1916–1917/1963), Lacan emphasizes the primal communication of the real as that indescribable language, that which is *paranoos,* thus beyond mind (*vóoς*). It is not "I" who speaks; rather, it speaks in me.

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