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Anxiety and Aporia: Or, What, for Lacan, Makes Deconstruction Reassuring?

Clark Buckner

Abstract *While originally Lacan seconds Heidegger's contention that 'anxiety has no object', in the early 1960s, he dismisses his own earlier position as a childish reassurance and argues, to the contrary, that 'anxiety is not without an object'. With particular attention to his use of the double negative, 'not without', this essay examines this turning point in Lacan's thinking in order to explain the opposition between his psychoanalytic critical theory and Derrida's deconstruction. The arguments that Lacan brings to bear on his work of the 1950s closely approximate those that Derrida levels against Heidegger in the formulation of his own concept of 'the aporia of the impossible'. Indeed, as commentators often emphasise, the formal logic of Lacan's later thinking is strictly isomorphic with Derrida's philosophy; and their respective concepts of anxiety and aporia are frequently misconstrued, accordingly, as simply identical. However, insofar as Lacan discerns a content in this formal negativity, contesting the idealism of his earlier theory and reasserting the materialist objectivity of the Freudian 'lost object,' as intractably Real, the two do not coincide. On the contrary, Lacan's repudiation of Heidegger's concept of anxiety extends equally to Derrida's aporia, as if, for Derrida, Heidegger's existential phenomenology were not reassuring enough.*

Introduction

In his work of the 1950s, Lacan follows Heidegger in distinguishing anxiety from fear as having no object; however, in his 1962–1963 seminar, he scathingly repudiates his own earlier position. Lacan contends,

Anxiety, we have always been taught, is a fear without an object. A chant in which, we could say here, another discourse already announces itself, a chant which however scientific it may be is close to that of the child who reassures himself. For the truth that I am enunciating for you, I formulate in the following way: '[Anxiety] is not without an object'. (Lacan, Sem X: 30.1.63)

What does Lacan mean in the peculiar use of this double-negative, 'not without an object?' How does he rethink the absence in anxiety? And how

does Lacan's revision of his concept of anxiety clarify *the opposition between psychoanalysis and Jacques Derrida's deconstruction?*

In Derrida's work, to deconstruct is to subvert the logic of a system by revealing its organising principles to presuppose the phenomena that they justify and explain, what Derrida calls finding 'the supplement at the origin' (Derrida 1976: 313). However, through his deconstructions, Derrida does not merely dismiss his objects of study as fallacious. Instead, he reveals how their seeming coherence is predicated upon a differential under-determination, which both disturbs and makes possible their proper functioning. In this regard, Derrida develops upon the classical philosophies of originary difference, formulated in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most immediately marrying Martin Heidegger's concept of Being and Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of the signifier. At the same time, however, Derrida critically redoubles the negativity in these classical philosophies, arguing that, just as self-identity is conditioned by difference, difference cannot be conceived independently from identity. And he conceives the negativity in his philosophy, in terms of the irreducible mutual inclusion of these contrary conditions as what he calls the aporetic undecidability of *différance*.

When denouncing the contention that 'anxiety has no object' as a childish consolation, Lacan might therefore be misconstrued as primarily contesting the persistent, albeit indirect, privileging of self-presence in his earlier theory, redoubling the negativity of anxiety's objectlessness and, so, conceiving psychoanalysis essentially as another variation on the same critical praxis as Derrida's deconstruction. Indeed, on the basis of their isomorphism, several recent commentators have equated Derrida's and Lacan's theories (see Hurst 2008; Lewis 2008). Others correlate the normativity of Lacan's critical theory with deconstruction's 'ethics of hospitality' (see Critchley 1999). And, in political philosophy, the concept of antagonism central to Radical Democracy suffers from a still inadequately clarified conflation of Derrida's concept of the impossible and Lacan's concept of the Real (see Stavrakakis 1999). However, what motivates Lacan's revision of his critical theory is not primarily his persistent, albeit indirect privileging of presence, but rather the *idealism* of his concept of absence. In opposition to it, he asserts the *materialism* of the visceral disturbance in the void of the Freudian lost object. And, whereas Derrida conceives *différance* as the fathomless *withdrawal* of an aporetic undecidability, Lacan contends that it is the overwhelming *proximity* of this Real of *jouissance* that renders it impossible to determinately locate, subverting the opposition between near and far, presence and absence.

In his very insistence on the subversive trembling provoked by the undecidability of *différance*, from a Lacanian vantage, Derrida thus abstracts and neutralises the affective force and material recalcitrance of the strife in experience. He preserves and defends the coherence of the symbolic in his very concept of its radically aporetic underdetermination. He maintains the vantage of the desiring subject through his very repudiation of conscious autonomy. And his concept of absence proves to be as repressive as the philosophical over-valorisation of presence.

This essay makes the point through a close study of Derrida's and Lacan's respective critical revisions of Heidegger's concept of anxiety. By focusing specifically on Lacan's concept of *absence as the material recalcitrance of an*

unbearable enjoyment, which imposes itself with an overwhelming proximity, the essay aims to clarify how the Real of *jouissance* provides an avenue to traverse the opposition between autonomous self-presence and heteronomous under-determination, which frames the debates between deconstructionists and their reactionary critics, and in this way the essay aims to further the *renaissance* of Lacanian critical theory – spearheaded by Slavoj Žižek, among others – as an antidote to these sterile debates and their stifling influence in Continental philosophy.

Anxiety has no object

In his early magnum opus *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1962) famously initiates the project of restoring the question of the meaning of Being that orients and sustains his entire philosophical career. While the ontological question was seminal to Western philosophy in its ancient Greek origins, Heidegger argues that it was obscured almost as soon as it appeared, insofar as it was formulated – and so implicitly answered in advance – with reference to an ontic being. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger accordingly reasserts the ‘ontological distinction’ between Being and beings, by conceiving Being instead as a dynamic process of coming-to-be and passing-away, grounded in the structures and dynamics of existence. Heidegger’s philosophical project elaborates upon the critique of objectivism that his mentor Edmund Husserl first formulated in response to the rise of psychologism. As characteristic of nineteenth century, ideological positivism – which, of course, still persists in both popular and professional guises – psychologism argues that, because science and logic belong to consciousness, their principles ought to be explicable as elements of psychology. Echoing Kant’s critique of empiricism, Husserl contends that the problem of psychologism reveals the need for a broader suspension of theoretical presuppositions, which he develops as a methodological ‘epoché’. And he calls for a renewed investigation of experience, in light of this cultivated naïveté, as registered by his famous call ‘to the things themselves’. Specifically, Husserl insists upon suspending the presupposition of ‘third-person’ objectivity as the standard of knowledge, instead proposing to analyse experience from a first-person, phenomenological perspective which he insists is not merely relative in its subjectivity but rather defined by consistent structures and dynamics. For Husserl, consciousness is always *about* something and, in this dynamic relating, plays a role in constituting its object. Against the objectivist reification of both subject and object in psychologism, Husserl thus conceives knowledge as a process which he works to clarify with particular attention to this conscious *intentionality*.

While Heidegger adopts Husserl’s phenomenological method as his own, in *Being and Time*, he also implicitly criticises his continued emphasis upon disinterested knowledge, by posing the question of the meaning of Being to ‘*Dasein*’, as the being for whom ‘in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it’ (Heidegger 1962: 32). *Dasein* is a vernacular German expression that means ‘existence’ and translates literally as ‘being’ (*sein*) ‘there’ (*da*). Rather than an abstract philosophical problem, the question of the meaning of being is, according to Heidegger, a question raised by everyone as part and parcel of being alive. Indeed, as Heidegger conceives it, *Dasein*’s interpretive

understanding contributes fundamentally to what he calls its 'being-in-the-world'. According to Heidegger, things first appear as the things they are, within the framework of their use; and he conceives the world, accordingly, as a referential context, held together by the interpretive understanding integral to *Dasein's* projects. Expositing Heidegger's own example, Charles Spinosa explains, '[The craftsman] understands nothing, not even himself, independently of everything else in the shop that has some role in pursuing his occupation, his involved activity' (Spinosa 2005: 486). According to Heidegger, the question of the meaning of Being is thus inherent to *Dasein's* everyday being-in-the-world. For the most part, however, *Dasein* takes up and does things in a generic manner, alienating its existence, and the questioning that it entails, in the objectivity of what Heidegger calls '*das Man*'. Elaborating Husserl's critique of psychologism in existential terms, Heidegger argues that, as *das Man*, *Dasein* takes its self and its world to be immediately given, inhibiting the constitutive dynamism of its existence, by effectively reducing experience to the vague formlessness of a cliché. And, as the normative fulcrum in his existential phenomenology – which also presents an existential revision of Husserl's concept of the epoché – Heidegger contends that what wrenches *Dasein* from this everyday objectivism of *das Man* is anxiety.

Whereas fear pertains to something potentially detrimental, Heidegger argues that anxiety has no object. What provokes anxiety is indeterminate. It is hard to pin down, seemingly emanating from everywhere and nowhere. While initially formulated privatively, Heidegger affirms this lack of an object as a positive, existential aspect of anxiety, which brings to light the defining horizon of *Dasein's* potentiality – as the nullity that circumscribes the world in its projective understanding. And, when further clarifying the nothing and nowhere of anxiety, he explains it accordingly in terms of the radical finitude of *Dasein's* being-towards-death. In different ways, throughout our lives, we experience the deaths of others. However, the existential significance of death precludes reduction to such an objective concern. To the contrary, Heidegger contends that, 'death is in every case mine' (Heidegger 1962: 284). And, as a correlate to this radical singularity, it must be understood not as a matter of fact, but rather as a dynamic relation integral to the constitution of *Dasein's* existence. According to Heidegger, *Dasein* anticipates death as a possibility. However, death gives *Dasein* nothing to be actualised; nothing, which *Dasein* as actual could itself possibly be. Instead, death is 'the measureless impossibility of existence . . . It is the possibility of the impossibility of every way of comporting oneself towards anything, or every way of existing' (Heidegger 1962: 307). According to Heidegger, in the nothing and nowhere of anxiety, *Dasein* thus confronts the uncanny groundlessness that renders existence metaphysically contingent and epistemologically uncertain. And he conceives it accordingly as opening up the possibility of more fully assuming responsibility for the burden of existence in the authenticity of what he calls resoluteness.

What, then, is the relationship between Heidegger's existential phenomenology and Lacanian psychoanalysis? How, specifically, does Lacan come to equate Heidegger's and Freud's respective concepts of anxiety? And on what basis does he initially second Heidegger's notion that anxiety has no object?

The symbolic object of desire

While Lacan's teaching first and foremost concerns the practice and transmission of psychoanalysis in a manner consistent with Derrida's deconstruction he draws upon the accomplishments of structuralism to reformulate Freud's concept of Oedipal conflict in terms of the subject's originary sundering by the signifier. Specifically, Lacan conceives neurotic suffering as the legacy of an infantile over-identification with the father, as literally embodying the object of the mother's desire, and so both rivalling the child for her affections and, in this same capacity, providing a template for its burgeoning ego. In his theory of the three registers of experience, Lacan conceives such seemingly self-present identities as *imaginary*, and he argues that they come to be constituted within a context of *symbolic* relations whose differential under-determination they simultaneously occlude. According to Lacan, the infant's over-identification with its father thus obfuscates his primarily symbolic function as representative of the differential negativity that informs the (m)Other's relationship to the broader social order and constitutes her desire, on the basis of this originary absence, as primordially wanting. Insofar as Lacan conceives unconscious conflict in terms of the opposition between the reifying identifications of the imaginary and the differential under-determination of the symbolic, the defining terms in his critical theory essentially correspond to Heidegger's concept of the ontological difference. And, while Lacan conceives the differential systems of language and society as radically subverting the self-possessed ego, in his work of the 1950s he explicitly appeals to Heidegger's existential phenomenology to rethink subjectivity as the locus of conflict engendered by the originary negativity of the symbolic.

Developmentally, Lacan conceives this process in terms of the dialectics of need, demand and desire. Even before the infant's inchoate cries are given explicit verbal expression in its caretaker's replies, Lacan contends that the infant, its needs and the objects that satisfy those needs undergo symbolisation through the periodic presence and absence of this attentive (m)Other. The cornerstone of this process is the originary experience of frustration that, Lacan contends, institutes the (m)Other as the primary symbolic identification in the infant's psyche and establishes the terms through which its needs first come to be articulated. In this regard, the exchange between (m)Other and child is not intersubjective. The (m)Other's agency is not that of one among other individuals in the framework of a broader situation but rather defines the parameters of the infant's experience. While distinct in his appeal to the heteronomous, almost mechanical, structures of language, Lacan thus accounts for the development of the world as a referential context, which Heidegger explains as *the worldhood of the world*. Through their exchange within the symbolic order instituted by the authority of the (m)Other, objects take on determinate contours as objects, for the first time, as objects of demand. Their qualities as objects are effects of their symbolic articulation as gifts in this exchange. Do they merit love or hate? Are they pleasurable or repulsive?

While objects are thus first constituted in their concrete particularity and granted a place in the world through their inclusion within the framework of this symbolic exchange, they are simultaneously subjected to systematic nullification. Through the articulation of the infant's needs as demands, the objects

that satisfy its physical dependencies come to stand in (as signifiers) for its mother's love (as signified). However, the (m)Other's love is not itself an object that she has available to bestow upon her child, but rather an absence, registered for the child in the experience of primordial frustration. It cannot be articulated within the exchange between mother and child because it institutes and sustains their relationship. As a result, not only do need and demand fail to correspond adequately to one another, they stand in an inverse relationship. The more the need articulated in demand is satisfied, the further effaced is the love that it is meant to express. And the primordial frustration through which the child's needs first come to be articulated qualifies its burgeoning desire for its (m)Other's love as inherently conflicted.

In a manner consistent with Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*, Lacan thus conceives the subject as the locus of a question. However, he understands this self-reflection as not only heteronomously engendered but also as formulated in relationship to this originary alterity. And, rather than detached, he conceives it as a belligerent demand for the proof of love: 'What do *you* (the Other) want from me?' The subject's existential pursuit takes the form of a neurotic complaint, predicated upon the assumption that the (m)Other indeed wants something. And, although it already is comprised of both symbolic and imaginary dimensions, the whole economy of demand is qualified as imaginary in the immediacy of the one-to-one relationship between (m)Other and child, accounting for what Freud calls the primary processes of the unconscious.

Accordingly, the subject's symbolic inscription depends upon the further, secondary repression, provided by the intervention of the father, whose castrating 'no' effects the exchange between (m)Other and child as a whole, triangulating the deadlock of their give-and-take in relationship to the symbolic phallus and introducing the infant, for the first time, to the register of desire. Taken at face value, Lacan's concept of symbolic castration evokes loss. However, castration is first and foremost empowering as an authorising nomination that secures the child a place in the social order. And, in Lacan's thinking, the phallus, too, is first a symbol that only secondarily maps onto the body. While the child suffers its (m)Other's authority as tyrannically fickle, the play of presence and absence in her coming and going – and, above all, her refusal of the infant's aspiration to be the object of her demand – are points of principle, definitive of not only her commitment to the child's father but her own constitutive inscription within the broader social order. As Lacan understands it, castration thus corresponds to the infant's primordial frustration insofar as it is originally symbolic. Correlative to regulating the (m)Other's coming and going, castration marks the disjunction between nature and culture, which distinguishes desire from the reflexive gratification of instinct as the subject's originary point of entry into history. Rather than symptomatic of a loss, the lack of castration is thus characteristic of the authority that it grants when establishing a place for the child in society, and it also accounts for the primarily symbolic nature of the phallus. Like the monarch's sceptre, a diploma, or a title, the phallus functions normatively as the limiting condition of the infant's engagement with the world, not by supplanting the (m)Other's absence with a substantial self-presence but rather by originally defining the terms of its articulation, localising it, and giving it a

minimal consistency. The defining feature of the phallus is its *emptiness* as the metaphorical division that institutes and sustains the metonymic play of signifiers and social relationships. And its meaning is established only indirectly through the shifting network of signifiers that it organises.

In a manner also consistent with Heidegger's concept of *Dasein's* constitutive division, the symbolic lack of castration paradoxically informs the propensity to reify its own originary negativity in the imaginary register of demand: by instituting the division from the immediacy of the natural world that inflects the satisfaction of the infant's needs with the significance of an appeal for something qualitatively distinct, and establishes the objects of need as inevitable surrogates for this categorically outstanding remainder. While thus presenting a structural fault in the constitution of desire, however, this reification of the (m)Other's lack also plays an integral role in its development through the rivalry of Oedipal conflict. As the basis for assuming its symbolic castration, the infant first identifies with the father as an alter ego in the economy of its demand for the (m)Other's love. The give and take of the struggle to be the object of her desire comes to be complicated by competition with the father over who has what it takes to be loved. Here the symbolic phallus indeed gets mapped onto the body of the father and the threat of castration takes on its significance as an experience of loss, strictly correlative to the infant's sense of inadequacy. However, this competition with the father also introduces the possibility of its own overcoming, providing the basis for the child to assume the lack of castration as an empowering, albeit inevitably conditional, emancipation from the whole economy of demand. The rivalrous identification with the imaginary of his ego (as ideal ego) comes to be supplanted by a symbolic identification with his values (as ego ideal), as the child adopts the law as its own and assumes its social position.

Anxiety is not without an object

In his work of the 1950s, Lacan accordingly conceives anxiety as having no object, insofar as it confronts the reified ego with the differential void of the symbolic. And, in a manner similarly consistent with Heidegger's existential phenomenology, he understands anxiety as awakening the subject to the possibility of more fully assuming responsibility for its constitutive castration. At the same time, Lacan thus establishes the grounds for the arguments that Derrida levels against him. At the core of his critique in 'The *Facteur* of Truth', Derrida (1967) takes issue specifically with Lacan's concept of the symbolic phallus. In the very purity of its negativity, Derrida contends, the differential underdetermination of the symbolic stands too categorically opposed to the imaginary reification of identity and so itself collapses into the self-presence of a closed circuit. When inaugurating the subject's desire, the absence confronted in the (m)Other's demand sets the subject on a course for which it simultaneously serves as the end. The assumption of castration is the arrival at this *telos*, which sublates the desire of the (m)Other in the symbolic phallus. Of course, the subject never entirely takes responsibility for its castration, having assumed a debt (for something it didn't do) that must be paid (with something it doesn't

have). Nevertheless, Derrida contends, the phallic circumscription of lack provides a balance for this psychical accounting. While repudiating the purported self-identity of the imaginary ego, according to Derrida, Lacan thus preserves and restores the subject's self-presence in the propriety of symbolic castration and in the closed circuit of the trajectory that it circumscribes. What remains to be considered, Derrida contends, is the complication between the symbolic conditions of imaginary self-identity and the reification that qualifies the genesis and structure of the symbolic, revealing the differential underdetermination of experience to be radically aporetic, in the undecidability of this irreducible mutual qualification.

In the subsequent revision of his critical theory, is Lacan's self-criticism therefore consistent with the arguments that Derrida levels against him? Does Lacan's later theory fall into line with Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence? And, if so, is it therefore reasonable to equate the two?

Indeed, when revising his work of the 1950s, Lacan seconds Derrida's contention that his original concept of the symbolic is too pure in its differential negativity. He comes to understand the symbolic and the imaginary as irreducibly complicated, and he conceives this complication to be characteristic of a radical disturbance in the constitution of experience. However, at stake in Lacan's revision of his critical theory is not primarily the dialectics of identity and difference, but rather the *idealism* of his earlier concept of absence. And, in opposition to it, he reasserts the affective excitation and material recalcitrance of the Freudian lost object, insisting in answer to the suggestion that, for the psychoanalyst, life is but a dream: 'No praxis is more oriented toward that which, at the heart of experience, is the kernel of the Real' (Lacan 1978: 53).

Despite the seemingly exhaustive interpretation of their symptoms, Lacan's analysands too often remained enthralled to their suffering. Contrary to his earlier conclusions, their unconscious conflicts could not therefore be explained as merely misconstruing the primordial absence of the symbolic as an imaginary demand for something actual. Instead, they betrayed the excess of a further conflicted satisfaction, prompting Lacan to see the constitutive lack of desire as itself rent by a paradoxically unbearable ecstasy, which he calls *jouissance*. In English, the French word *jouissance* translates simply as 'enjoyment'. However, in Lacan's thinking, *jouissance* exceeds the opposition between pleasure and displeasure that Freud originally conceives as regulating psychical life. Indeed, Lacan postulates it as 'beyond the pleasure principle' in order to account for what Freud, too, comes to see as the disturbing excitation that both exceeds and requires its homeostatic regulation. Accordingly, *jouissance* never manifests itself directly. In fact, it only exists as this aberration in the economy of pleasure and displeasure, necessary to account for the conflicted satisfaction in neurotic suffering. As a gratification in repulsive horror, or rather, a horrified repulsion in gratification, *jouissance* thus amounts to a paradoxical pleasure-in-displeasure; and, in this way, it also accounts for what Freud posits as the self-destructive tendency in this 'beyond'. In fact, it is perhaps best understood as a hypothetical frenzy in which the subject succumbs to the unbearable ecstasy of an overwhelming enjoyment. As destructive, it entails neither simple aggression nor the existential anticipation of being-towards-death but rather the excess in desire that contravenes the very aspirations of desire.

In his work of the mid-1950s, Lacan explicitly conceives the symbolic order as a 'restricted economy', explaining the symbolic phallus as an instantiation of what he calls the Name-of-the-Father. As early as his 1958–1959 seminar, however, Lacan registers the force of this *jouissance* in his critical theory, by repudiating this structural guarantee of the symbolic order, arguing that 'there is no Other of the Other' and conceiving the sundering of the symbolic as itself implicated in, and so complicated by, the distinctions that it institutes and sustains. In the absence of the Name-of-the-Father, the phallus is not categorically distinguished from the other signifiers in the symbolic order. The determination of the social order is radically contingent: the principles that found it, in each case, are fundamentally marked by their historical specificity, and the order they institute remains conditional, a fragile and ultimately fleeting organisation of social relationships. Insofar as it originates from the order it finds, the symbolic phallus bears the imaginary qualifications of the context from which it emerges. And the delimitation of the symbolic order is riddled with gaps and inconsistencies, which register the intrusion of what Lacan previously had categorically distinguished from it as Real.

When he first formulates his theory of the three registers of experience, Lacan defines the Real essentially as that which 'resists symbolization' (Lacan 1988: 66). And, insofar as he treats it at all, he does so indirectly in opposition to his accounts of the imaginary and symbolic. When critically revising his theory, however, Lacan contends that the subject has an originary relationship to the Real, which manifests itself as a disruptive excess within the symbolic mediation of experience. Of course, in so doing, Lacan does not therefore renounce his concept of language's role in the genesis and structure of subjectivity. On the contrary, he contends that the Real 'only presents itself to the extent that it becomes word' (Lacan 1992: 55). However, it does so as a disturbance in the symbolic, paradigmatically registered by the lacuna of a silence. According to Lacan, the Real does not therefore exist as immediately given, either in actuality or as a primordial stoff beyond the limits of experience. To the contrary, he contends that the Real is 'not nothing, but literally is not. It is characterised by its absence, its strangeness' (Lacan 1992: 63).

While the Real only exists as the disturbance of a remainder *in* the symbolic, which Lacan calls the object (a), contrary to the all-too-common assumption it is not therefore a remainder *of* the symbolic. To make the point, Lacan postulates a cut in the Real that is logically prior to and different from the cut of symbolic castration. Emphasising the distinction, he contrasts this cut to the infant's subsequent separation from its mother in weaning, by comparing it instead with separation from the enveloping placenta that sustained it *in utero*. 'The cut involved', he contends, 'is not that between the child and the mother' (Lacan Sem. X: 23.1.63). This later division registers the intervention of the father insofar as he qualifies the mother's coming and going as originally symbolic. However, when separating from the placenta, the infant undergoes a division from the formlessness of organic life, which precedes and conditions this symbolic sundering. While the placenta is conjoined to the mother, Lacan furthermore emphasises its intermediary status as a parasite that does not in fact belong to her body. The Oedipal conflicts in the subject's

symbolic inscription are thus mapped onto the infantile organism, as already marked by this logically prior division, and, insofar as they intersect with the organism at the breast rather than the placenta, they do not directly sublimate the cut in the Real. Instead, the sundering of the symbolic remains eccentric to this prior separation, powerless to redeem the loss it institutes and so subject to its relentless disturbance. As a result, the object lost in the genesis of subjectivity is not only categorically lost, it also is never entirely lost, stuck to one's heel with the nagging insistence of a compulsion.

Whereas previously he explained anxiety in terms of the subject's confrontation with the lack of symbolic castration, Lacan accordingly comes to conceive it instead as symptomatic of the *excessive proximity* of this remainder in the Real, as the object of the Other's *jouissance*, suffered as the gratification of a visceral excitation, before and beyond the institution of the symbolic. 'Anxiety', he writes, 'is not the signal of a lack but of . . . the absence of this support of the lack' (Lacan Sem. X: 05.12.62). As explained by his postulate of a cut in the Real, prior to the sundering of the symbolic, *the Other indeed wants something*. No longer is it delimited by the pure lack of a differential principle, whose formal negativity sustains the metonymy of desire, holding open the, always outstanding, promise of the possible. As a qualifying condition of its organising principles, the Other instead exploits the subject for its own enjoyment, reaching into its 'skin' at the very moment of its genesis as a parasite that it never will be able to purge. According to Lacan, what causes anxiety is not, therefore, the phenomenological underdetermination of experience, as 'having no object', but rather the imposing presence of the Other's *jouissance*, which, in the very fabric of the subject's constitution, threatens to engulf it as an object of enjoyment. On the contrary, Lacan contends, '[the] possibility of absence is what gives presence its security' (Lacan Sem. X: 05.12.62).

Accordingly, when revising his critical theory, Lacan no longer takes the two poles of need and desire – as presence and absence – to frame the dialectics of demand. Instead, he conceives these dialectics in terms of the opposition between *jouissance* and desire, as *distinct forms of absence*. Given its corporeal excess, *jouissance* precludes determinate localisation. While it appears only in the gaps and inconsistencies in experience, its absence is suffered as the visceral insistence of an overwhelming proximity which ultimately threatens to dissolve the boundaries of experience. By contrast, the absence of desire is a lack, defined as such in relationship to the symbolic phallus. While determining the absence of desire in relationship to the presence of a symbol might seem to compromise its distance, Lacan argues, on the contrary, that the phallus first institutes and sustains it, precisely by circumscribing its boundaries. In contradistinction to the imposing excess of *jouissance*, the symbolic phallus thus makes possible the homeostatic regulation that constitutes satisfaction and disappointment as pleasurable and unpleasurable: not by grounding it on a self-present principle, but rather by opening the space necessary for the wax and wane of desire.

The plural logic of the aporia

Accounting for the double negative of his assertion that 'anxiety is not without an object', Lacan's concept of the Real of *jouissance* thus explains his dismissal

of Heidegger's contrary contention as a 'childish consolation'. Insofar as he conceives anxiety as confronting *Dasein* only with the phenomenological under-determination of experience, Heidegger dispels its visceral, affective excitation, abstracting its dissolution of the world's boundaries as evidence merely of the formal negativity, which conditions any positive determination of the actual, and denying its imposing proximity by explaining it rather as symptomatic of the radically groundless withdrawal of *Dasein's* being-towards-death. At the same time, Heidegger denies the material recalcitrance of the Real by abstracting the intractable obstacle of its 'impossibility' as evidence only of the contingency of existence, and elevating its disturbance of the actual to a guarantee of *Dasein's* potentiality. Finally, by explaining the confrontation with this phenomenological under-determination as existentially challenging, Heidegger celebrates as ethically courageous the assumption of lack that Lacan conceives as a reassuring source of stability. In this regard, Heidegger presupposes the accomplishment of the fantasy frame that Lacan contends mitigates the Real of *jouissance*, instituting the symbolic division necessary to give order to experience and holding open the possibility of desire. Specifically, in his theory of *Dasein's* being-towards-death, Heidegger stages the subject's symbolic castration, nullifying the imaginary reification of the ego in order to affirm the lack of desire as if it were fundamental, in the comforting security of Being's differential negativity.

So what then is the place of anxiety in Derrida's philosophy? At times, Derrida appeals to it to describe the subversive force of his theory, while at other times he criticises it as integrally bound up with the humanist valorisation of self-presence. How are we to understand this ambivalence? And is Derrida's critique of the concept consistent with, or contrary to, Lacan's?

As a paradoxical testimony to his debt to Heidegger, in the development of his philosophy, Derrida brings the force of Heidegger's thinking to bear on his own work: both by criticising his continuing direct over-valorisation of self-presence, and by redoubling the negativity in his concept of the differential underdetermination of identity. And, in *Aporias*, Derrida brings both these strategies to bear specifically upon the question concerning the fate of anxiety in deconstruction, through a sustained meditation on the intersection of death and language, which radicalises Heidegger's concept of the impossible possibility of death in Derrida's own concept of the aporia of the impossible. Orienting his reflections, Derrida asks, 'Is my death possible? Can we understand this question? Can I myself pose it? Am I allowed to talk about my death? What does the syntagm "my death" mean? And why this expression, the syntagm "my death"?' (Derrida 1993: 21–22). To address these questions, Derrida first juxtaposes Heidegger's existential analytic and the histories of death written by Philippe Ariès and Michel Vovelle, arguing that these discourses entail 'an irreducible double inclusion', in which each both presupposes and entails the other (Derrida 1993: 80). Studying the diversity in cultural practices related to death and dying depends upon a definition of death that is beyond the scope of the historian's discipline; and Ariès ultimately defers addressing these considerations as 'metaphysical', essentially corroborating Heidegger's assertion of the ontic and ontological priority of the existential analytic. At the same time, however, Ariès' appeal to 'metaphysics' inadvertently problematises this disciplinary hierarchy by calling

attention to the need within Heidegger's own study for grounding, which it cannot but presuppose. While Ariès equates 'metaphysics' with philosophy, for Heidegger the 'metaphysics of death' belongs alongside its history as another discourse, dependent upon the elucidation of *Being and Time*. Questions belonging to the 'metaphysics of death' entail considerations of what lies beyond life and death, including questions of survival and immortality. And, although Heidegger does not dismiss these concerns outright, he contends that their proper formulation depends upon a prior exposition of the limiting conditions of experience – qualifying them specifically as undecidable prior to the accomplishment of the existential analytic.

Despite deferring these questions as contingent upon completing his study, however, Derrida argues that Heidegger's existential analytic presupposes such a metaphysical decision, insofar as it rests upon the axiom that 'one can only start from here' (Derrida 1993: 53). When resolving to begin 'here', Heidegger exercises philosophical modesty by refraining from speculatively positing principles beyond the limits of experience. Nevertheless, Derrida contends that Heidegger's determination of his starting point implicitly depends upon the speculation from which he purportedly refrains. Beginning 'here' requires distinguishing the 'here' from the 'beyond'. And, while maintaining the deferential position on 'this side' of the divide, the concept of finitude is no less metaphysical than eternity. Accordingly, Derrida contends, Heidegger makes a decision at the outset of his analysis that, by his own admission, depends upon the clarification that it promises to provide. Given this contradiction, Derrida argues that Heidegger's analysis reveals itself to be implicated in not only 'the metaphysics of death' but any and all of the variously ontic discourses that it serves to ground. And, while cultural studies of death, like Ariès', depend upon 'the powerful and universal delimitation' of the existential analytic, Derrida contends that *Being and Time*, therefore, must also be read 'as a small, late document' in 'the huge archive where the memory of death in Christian Europe is being accumulated' (Derrida 1993: 80–81).

The second deconstruction that Derrida undertakes, in *Aporias*, departs from Diderot's reflections on the limits of truth and the brevity of life in the work of Seneca. In their work, Derrida discerns a pluralistic 'rhetoric of borders', which he captures in the phrase 'il y va d'un certain pas' (Derrida 1993: 6). On account of the polyvalence of the French word *pas*, which connotes both 'not' and 'step', the sentence has multiple meanings, which qualify it as distinctly French. Any translation of the phrase into another language would fail to grasp the connotations that inflect the expression, even if they don't pertain to the immediate context of its use. In Derrida's terms, translation is 'supplementary' – a derivative second-order form of representation, which is constitutively marked by its distance from what it conveys. But does this opposition between the translation and the original, in fact, hold? Like a translation, Derrida argues that the original French expression is inherently incomplete. Any of its distinct possible uses generates residual remainders, which evoke other possible meanings. Belonging to language entails a fundamental expropriation – the division of the signifier, which renders one non-identical to oneself, always already alien in one's very belonging. While the originary translation in language thus subverts the opposition between the original

and its representation, still more importantly for Derrida's analysis, it disproves his hypothesis of an indefinitely pluralistic rhetoric of borders, by revealing the diversity of signifying contexts to be predicated upon this universal non-belonging, even as it problematises any such universality.

As Derrida conceives it, the universality of Heidegger's existential analytic is thus complicated by the various, particular histories of death that it simultaneously serves to ground; while the plurality of particular rhetorics of borders presupposes the expropriation of language, the universality of which it nevertheless qualifies. And, abstracting from these analyses, Derrida formalises the indeterminate dialectic, internal to each and in their relationship to one another, as what he calls 'the plural logic of the aporia'. The impasse of aporia, he contends, assumes three distinct forms: impermeability, indeterminacy and impossibility. The first is defined by the impassability of the fixed obstacle: Heidegger's being-towards-death and the impossible condition of *Dasein's* possibility. The second is defined by an indeterminate plurality too limitless to locate: the postulate of a rhetoric of borders as an impasse that cannot be crossed because it cannot be specified. The third aporia articulates the indeterminate dialectic of the mutual implication of the other two and redoubles their negativity. In it, the impasse is not confronted either as a fixed barrier or as an indefinite slippage. Instead, the impasse is altogether occluded. In this aporia of the impossible, Derrida argues, 'there is no longer any problem' (Derrida 1993: 12), not because solutions have been found but rather because, in a state that he nevertheless describes as paralysing,

we are exposed, absolutely without protection, without problem, and without prosthesis, without possible substitution, singularly exposed in our absolute and absolutely naked uniqueness, that is to say, disarmed, delivered to the other, incapable even of sheltering ourselves behind what could still protect the interiority of a secret. (Derrida 1993: 12)

Aporia has no object

In each of their critical revisions of Heidegger's concept of anxiety, both Derrida and Lacan retain his account of its formal phenomenology as a 'sinking away', which dissolves the boundaries of the world, revealing the groundless ground of existence (Heidegger 1962: 232). Furthermore, Derrida and Lacan both redouble the critical negativity in Heidegger's philosophy by conceiving the differential under-determination of identity as irreducibly complicated by the objectivist reduction of absence to presence. Indeed, the conceptual logics in Derrida's and Lacan's respective theories are isomorphic: as juxtapositions of the synchronic division of metaphor and the diachronic deferral of metonymy, Lacan's concept of the irreducible mutual inclusion of the symbolic and the imaginary formally corresponds to Derrida's deconstruction of the decisive impermeability of being-towards-death and the indefinite plurality of the rhetoric of borders. And, as theories of the radical alterity that inform this irreducible mutual inclusion, Lacan's

concept of *jouissance* as Real corresponds to Derrida's concept of the aporia of the impossible.

As the point of his opposition to Heidegger, however, Lacan conceives the sinking away of the world in anxiety as symptomatic of an affective, visceral excitation, the unbearable enjoyment of which threatens to overwhelm the subject in the vertiginous insistence of its imposing proximity. By contrast, in his revision of Heidegger's concept of anxiety, Derrida criticises the delimitation of negativity in his philosophy, but he does not take issue with the *idealism* of his concept of absence or otherwise address the *content* that Lacan discerns in the formal under-determination of experience. Instead, Derrida's critique of Heidegger remains squarely within the phenomenological critique of objectivism, further complicating the opposition between the apparent self-presence of immediately given objects and the dynamic under-determination that conditions and so qualifies their purported self-identity. Indeed, Derrida explains the aporia of the impossible as a strictly 'formal negativity' (Derrida 1993: 19).

Despite the isomorphism of their theories, Derrida's account of the constitutive conflicts in experience thus remains predicated upon an abstraction and neutralisation of the irrationality that compels Lacan's self-criticism. And Derrida's deconstruction proves to be equally repressive as the philosophical over-valorisation of self-presence that he opposes. Because Lacan contends that the symbolic phallus institutes this reassuring lack of desire as 'having no object', one might protest that, like Derrida, Lacan's critique of Heidegger primarily concerns the persistent, albeit indirect, privileging of presence in his philosophy. Indeed, Lacan argues that, as Real, *jouissance* precludes the reduction of experience to a self-present ground. However, the force of its disturbance is not equivalent to this phenomenological under-determination but rather lies in its affective excitation as a conflicted satisfaction. In this regard, Lacan's concept stands equally opposed to any merely formal concept of absence, such as Derrida's, even if it radically subverts both the direct and indirect valorisation of presence. On the other hand, one might protest that, insofar as Derrida redoubles the critical negativity in Heidegger's existential phenomenology, the aporia of the impossible, too, is "'not without an object'". However, in Lacan's terms, Derrida's concept of the ineluctable hypostatisation of difference is only imaginary; and while Lacan, too, repudiates the simple disjunction between the imaginary and the symbolic, he furthermore conceives the silence of the object (a) as an idiotic ecstasy and argues that the material recalcitrance of the impasse it presents is Real. So that, despite his insistence on the unavoidable objectification of difference, insofar as Derrida explains this complication as merely undecidable, his concept of the aporia still 'has no object'.

When one goes beyond the isomorphism of Lacan's and Derrida's theories and instead attends to the concrete terms of their critical revisions of Heidegger's concept of anxiety, this disjunction immediately becomes clear. Whereas Lacan critically revises Heidegger's contention that 'anxiety has no object', by preserving the concept of anxiety and restoring its recalcitrant, affective insistence as 'not without an object', on the contrary, Derrida relinquishes the concept of anxiety while retaining Heidegger's notion of the impossible possibility of experience as 'having no object'. Despite their

common critique of any simple disjunction between inside and out, near and far, presence and absence, Lacan thus conceives the Real of *jouissance* as the ontological closure of an overwhelming affective proximity while Derrida conceives the aporia of the impossible as the ontological openness of a radical phenomenological withdrawal. That is, Lacan conceives the radical alterity that conditions and qualifies experience as *an impasse more objective than the mere actuality* and he articulates it accordingly with grammatical substantives: anxiety, *jouissance*, the Real; whereas Derrida, on the contrary, conceives this alterity as the unfathomable void, born of the paradoxes it engenders, and he articulates it accordingly using only grammatical privatives: un-decidability, a-poria, im-possibility.

As argued previously about Heidegger, Derrida thus presupposes the accomplishment of the fantasy frame that, according to Lacan, mitigates the *jouissance* in anxiety. Indeed, despite his insistence on its subversive force, from a Lacanian vantage, Derrida's concept of the aporetic undecidability of *différance* implicitly maintains the fundamental coherence of the symbolic, by abstracting the impasse of the Real *in* the symbolic as if it were symptomatic only of the aporetic underdetermination of the symbolic. Levelling this argument, of course, does not merely turn the tables on Derrida, and so essentially extend his own philosophical project. While Derrida conceives the ideological guarantee of the symbolic as reducing its differential under-determination to the self-presence of an imaginary identity, Lacan argues that the ideological guarantee of the symbolic lies rather in the idealist abstraction of the Real strife of *jouissance* as the lack of a merely formal, phenomenological withdrawal. So that, in his very insistence on the radically aporetic under-determination of the symbolic, Derrida implicitly denies the Real's interruption of its scope and function as if it were merely cause for wonder. At the same time, in the fantasy frame that informs his philosophy, Derrida implicitly presupposes and preserves the position of the desiring subject. Of course, as distinct from Lacan, Derrida repudiates any appeal to the subject as reducing the differential under-determination of experience to the full presence of self-consciousness. The question accordingly arises: from what vantage does Derrida level his deconstruction? According to Derrida, deconstruction always develops from within the texts that it takes as its objects. However, insofar as the aporetic undecidability that orients his critical praxis is characterised by the formal, phenomenological lack of the symbolic, Derrida implicitly articulates his analysis from the vantage of the desiring subject, sustaining critical reflection in the face of this fathomless void. Indeed, Derrida explicitly equates the differential under-determination in deconstruction with Husserl's concept of the 'epoché' (Derrida 1993: 20). While he exploits the subject's neurotic suffering in the obsessional insistence of his questioning, Derrida thus simultaneously disavows the force of the drive that compels these conflicts precisely by abstracting them as cause for further consideration. And, in this way, Derrida obscures the more problematic subject of the unconscious which Lacan conceives as strictly correlative to the strife-laden affect in the incoherence of the symbolic.

In this regard, Lacan's critique of Heidegger's concept of anxiety as a childish consolation not only extends equally to Derrida's concept of the aporia of the impossible, it furthermore suggests that, for Derrida, Heidegger's

philosophy is *not reassuring enough*. While implicitly registering the Real of *jouissance*, in his critique of Heidegger's persistent objectivism, Derrida's redoubling of his critical negativity only serves to reinforce the fantasy frame of Heidegger's philosophy, routing out the residual, direct or indirect valorisation of presence as the occasion again to insist upon its differential under-determination, as if this still more rigorous and aporetically complex staging of symbolic castration were ethically courageous rather than a source of security.

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