

# On Dead Subjects: A Rejoinder to Lundberg on (a) Psychoanalytic Rhetoric

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Owing to a longstanding commitment to the autonomous, self-transparent subject, many roads have not been taken in rhetorical studies. Our present conversation about Lacanian psychoanalysis represents one of those roads, which is the most radical route stemming from the little traveled thoroughfare of the “rhetoric of the interior.”<sup>1</sup> Insofar as its central category is the dynamic unconscious, psychoanalysis in general represents a theory of an inside or interiority that has largely been ignored, and sometimes attacked, in favor or defense of surfaces and exteriorities (e.g., fantasy themes and rhetorical visions, rational argument in ideal speech situations, and so on).<sup>2</sup> Despite the pioneering work on Jung and mythic criticism by Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz, despite articulate calls for psychoanalytic research by Barbara Biesecker, Michael J. Hyde, and Loyd S. Pettegrew, and despite the remarkable, interdisciplinary work of Henry Krips, among NCA-style rhetorical studies scholars,<sup>3</sup> psychoanalysis has been the place of dead roads, indeed, the place of dead subjects.<sup>4</sup>

Christian Lundberg’s welcome and insightful critique of “Refitting Fantasy” ought to be read as a road sign of sorts, indicating not only an exciting route for research, but also the number of places it might go. In general, Lundberg argues that a critical perspective that begins in the imaginary overlooks the master’s focus on the Symbolic order, thereby missing the true locus of rhetoric in Lacan’s work (principally, “tropology”). Further, Lundberg argues that a critical attention to fantasies is limited to discrete texts and intersubjective encounters, thereby avoiding an opportunity to do true Lacanian rhetorical criticism.<sup>5</sup> The consequence of an approach focused on the criticism of (pre-)conscious and unconscious fantasies, he implies, is twofold. First, it promotes a perspective akin to the project of “ego-psychology” and, thus, relies on the “naive psychologism of solely intersubjectively mediated accounts of subject formation,”<sup>6</sup> which bars scholars from the pursuit of a deeper, more

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sweeping, and radical theoretical program. Second, such an approach relies on a Žižekian reading of Lacan that summons the demons of decontextualized appropriation, which unfortunately permits us to carry on with business as usual. I confess that, insofar as we pursue different goals, Lundberg is dead-on. In my rejoinder to this critique, however, I first wish to address an important road block that Lacanian psychoanalysis (or psychoanalysis in general for that matter) deploys to prevent us from moving forward too quickly: namely, its occultic prose, which is often dismissed as “psychobabble.”<sup>7</sup> Then I move to a discussion of ego-psychology and how Lundberg’s useful clarifications highlight the ego of fantasy and the subject of the fundamental fantasy. I conclude by characterizing the task of integrating psychoanalysis and rhetorical theory as a kind of critical necromancy.

### *Translation Trouble*

[Lacan] wants to write in such a way that we either crawl right up into his head or belly or anus (we can probably take our pick) and follow his every theoretical gyration, or we throw his book down in disgust within a few minutes, which is, in fact, what happens with a great many readers: They read him either for years or not at all. Bruce Fink<sup>8</sup>

Angered by the “mystification, deliberately obscure language, [and] confused concepts” associated with “postmodern” thinkers, and troubled by what he perceived to be a lack of rigor and the sloppy application of scientific concepts “in certain precincts of the humanities,”<sup>9</sup> Alan Sokal composed a parodic essay of non-sense in which he touted the leftist political implications of the concept of quantum gravity.<sup>10</sup> He submitted the essay to the editors of the cultural studies journal, *Social Text*, which unwittingly published it as a sincere stab at cultural theory by an outsider.<sup>11</sup> Ever since this prank was revealed in the pages of *Lingua Franca* and subsequently on the front page of *The New York Times*, academics in the humanities have been called on to justify the use of specialized jargon to multiple audiences within and outside the academy.<sup>12</sup> Among the many responses, three well-rehearsed and interrelated claims were common: (1) Jargon is a kind of shorthand for complex ideas;<sup>13</sup> (2) Occultic prose is the product of a confrontation with the ineffability of human experience;<sup>14</sup> and (3) Difficult language “defamiliarizes” readers, making new ways of thinking and being-in-the-world possible.<sup>15</sup> All three claims have been dismissed by critics as rationalizations for sloppy writing and confused thinking.<sup>16</sup>

In general terms, Lacan’s rhetoric confronts the ineffable (the Real) and is a shorthand and a defamiliarizing agent, thereby tempting dismissal. His rhetoric is designed to disrupt automatic thinking and to challenge the defenses of the ego or Self, which runs interference for the structuring of the symbolic. In other words, Lacan’s difficult prose is tied directly to his theories. A brief and admittedly incomplete sketch of his theory of language helps to explain why he is so hard to read.

Against Freud’s assertion that the unconscious is characterized by the absence of language or representation (for him, it only consists of “thing-presentations”), Lacan asserts that the unconscious is a “chain of signifiers,” insofar as words

sometimes function as material objects in dreams.<sup>17</sup> This implies that the unconscious is not “inside,” but rather, is “out there,” meaning that the subject of the unconscious is radically exterior.<sup>18</sup> The signifiers of this seemingly interiorized exteriority are active agents that “cut” into whatever is not already structured, thus giving rise to meaning. The reason there is a “chain” of signifiers is because the cut of the signifier only yields meaning differentially; signifiers mean only in relation to other signifiers. The consequences of this structuralist understanding of language are many, but two seem more important here: First, all meaning is determined contextually and changes in *every* context, regardless of what we might call denotation. Meaning moves; meaning production is a creative, never-ending process.<sup>19</sup> Second, the “world in which we speak and in which we live is no ‘brute’ reality; it is already mediated and structured by the signifiers of language, which allow it to appear as a meaningful and differentiated environment.”<sup>20</sup> To say that the subject “is a subject only by a signifier and to another signifier,” is to specify the subject of the unconscious as a production of language.<sup>21</sup> In other words, for Lacan, the psychoanalytic subject does not have agency (this is a fantasy of the mirror stage Self); rather, the signifier or “letter” does.<sup>22</sup> In the second seminar, for example, Lacan notes that the

concrete universal discourse, which has been unfolding since the beginning of time, is what has truly been said or rather really been said—to fix our ideas, we can get to that point. The subject locates himself as such in relation to that, he is inscribed in it, that is how he is already determined, by a determination belonging to a totally different register from that of the determination of the real, of the material metabolisms which caused him to come forth into this semblance of existence which is life. His function, in so far as he continues this discourse, is to rediscover his place in it, not simply as orator, but here and now, as entirely determined by it.<sup>23</sup>

I am suggesting that Lacan’s understanding of language and the agency of the signifier is *one* of the reasons for his deliberately occultic prose. If unsettling the Self or ego as an illusion of self-transparency and self-certainty is a goal, and if meaning is always a contextual relation, then it would make sense that what Lacan “means” is often (un)decidedly elusive. Further complicating this unsettling effect is that, as with any thinker, Lacan’s focus and interests shifted over the course of some thirty years, and his corpus reflects many changes and differing presentational contexts.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, my original essay, Lundberg’s response, and this rejoinder are, in a sense, unavoidably misleading, which complicates (as opposed to refutes) Lundberg’s suggestion that I have misrepresented Lacan. For example, Lundberg takes me to task for risking the conflation of reality and the “Real” by comparing the Real to what Bales termed “naked nature.” Although Lundberg’s definition of the Real as “simply unsymbolizable excess ... [that is] generated by a failure in the Symbolic order” is one of the most lucid definitions of the category I have yet to read, the term nevertheless also connotes matter in Lacan’s work, “implying a material substrate underlying the imaginary and the symbolic.”<sup>25</sup> In other words, the Real seems deliberately indeterminate as a naïve, “objective,” material reality on the one hand (e.g., the “material metabolisms” Lacan mentions above), and as a gap in the

Symbolic on the other.<sup>26</sup> The same shift of meaning holds for my characterization of the “mirror stage” as the “emergence of the imago or spectral self,”<sup>27</sup> which I have characterized elsewhere as “both a stage of development and an order of the psyche which is shared socially.”<sup>28</sup> Lundberg implies that mine is a “genetic” description that tempts essentialism and masculinism and argues for reading “stage” as a performativity metaphor. I embrace such a reading of the mirror stage, but we should not forget that Lacan originally described this performance as an event that first occurs between six and eighteen months of age.<sup>29</sup> Finally, Lundberg catches me sliding between the little other, as a specific other, and the big Other (A), as the Symbolic itself. I agree that the distinction between the big Other and the little other is very important,<sup>30</sup> but I disagree that my characterization of a specific other as Other is strictly inconsistent with such a distinction. The Other means much more than the Symbolic: it is also the unconscious and, secondarily, *can be* a specific other or person insofar as she represents the order of language and the law. For example, while certainly “epiphenomenal in some sense,” one’s mother, or as I have suggested previously, one’s teacher, one’s preacher, one’s analyst, or one’s psychic can stand in for the big Other.

Given the way in which Lacan’s meaning shifts depending on historical and conceptual contexts, it is not surprising that he has been accused of “superficial erudition and manipulating meaningless sentences.”<sup>31</sup> To engage Lacan’s work is to contend with his parodied and frequently bemoaned “writerly” style, which, in keeping with his theory of language and the subject, often proceeds in baffling declarations lacking demonstration.<sup>32</sup> Many readers consequently react defensively, hastily concluding that it must be nonsense. “No one likes to feel stupid,” admit Jason Glynos and Yannis Stavrakakis, and it is a “very rare person . . . who, having struggled to make sense of Lacan’s *Écrits*, has not entertained such thoughts of vulnerability.”<sup>33</sup> Working beyond the normal, defensive responses we all have to feeling vulnerable, however, is precisely what Lacanian rhetoric promotes. Reading Lacan reminds me, in a way, of my first year in graduate school, when I quickly learned that I was no longer among the “smart kids” in class: Lacan’s rhetoric tells us on many levels that we are not as smart as we like to believe—that the signifier, in a sense, outwits us.<sup>34</sup> Training by means of the humiliation of the word, to borrow a phrase from another Jacques,<sup>35</sup> is the function of Lacan’s challenging rhetoric and, consequently, working with his words commands patience, if not a sense of humor and humility.<sup>36</sup>

The relational effects of Lacan’s occultic prose on the reader therefore pose a significant challenge to folks like Lundberg and me, who would like to recommend Lacanian psychoanalysis for the business of cultural or rhetorical criticism: how does one *translate* a theoretical perspective that resists the reader into a context within which readers are not expecting resistance?<sup>37</sup> How does one recommend a thinker whose work, to pick an orifice at Fink’s behest, will be dismissed by many as incomprehensible shit? Indeed, when translating between two different idioms, won’t one get it both coming and going?<sup>38</sup> One answer to these and similar questions is to risk objection and create the opportunity for scholarly production by taking the

beginning step, allowing for like-minded others to proclaim, “Actually, I believe it’s more complicated than that.”<sup>39</sup> Saying this is, after all, what we do for a living. Achieving a space for Lacanian conversation in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* is (apparently) better done by introducing a “Lacanian approach” to criticism that may be (a/o)pposed to clinical analysis, showing the relevance of Lacanian concepts to everyday culture and life. Slavoj Žižek’s many brilliant and entertaining applications of Lacanian psychoanalysis to the objects of popular culture blazed this path.<sup>40</sup> Because I am committed to criticism (as well as materialism),<sup>41</sup> I believe that Žižek’s approach to Lacan is a good model.<sup>42</sup> The case I am making here, then, is the same one that Lundberg has made, only from the side of critical application instead of theoretical elaboration: The “price” one pays for appropriating Lacan in the work of criticism is failing to be Lacanian in the strict sense of the term (in my view, being labeled a psychoanalytic critic is better).<sup>43</sup> We fans of Lacan, or of any thinker associated with a “post” face the challenge of translation without doing damage to the goal of theory (e.g., an “analytic engagement with the conditions of the production of subjectivity and knowledge”).<sup>44</sup> For Lundberg, damage to a Lacanian project entails the promotion of ego-psychology and the pursuit of adaptation, to which I now turn.

### *Adaptation Trouble*

During the many years in which Lacan elaborated and refined his theories, he often attacked three brands of psychoanalytic practice: the Kleinian approach associated with the work of Melanie Klein; the object-relations approach of the British school of psychoanalysis associated with the work of Ronald Fairbairn, W.W. Winnicott, and Michael Balint; and ego-psychology associated with the work of Anna Freud, Heinz Hartman, Ernst Kris, and Rudolf Lowenstein.<sup>45</sup> Lacan argued that all three approaches betrayed the fundamental contribution of psychoanalysis, the discovery of a dynamic unconscious, in favor of a project that adapts the ego to a suitable love object or to “reality.”

Ego-psychology began with Anna Freud’s attempt to simplify her father’s complex and seemingly contradictory statements about the ego by arguing that the primary topography (unconscious, preconscious, conscious) was superseded by the secondary topography (id, ego, superego).<sup>46</sup> Hartman’s extension of that project led to a reductive focus on the ego and the conflation of the unconscious with the id in the service of adaptation, which was premised on the *biologically based* notion that all living organisms “adapt” to their environments for survival. Ego-psychology, thus, is premised on the idea that neuroses are the result of maladaptive behavior, and the goal of analysis is to help fashion a “conflict-free ego sphere” through “reality mastery” (analogously, object-relations theory pursues a harmonious relationship between the subject and an appropriate object).<sup>47</sup> Lacan, however, objected to “anything which progresses through adaptation” for a number of reasons:<sup>48</sup> (1) As the mirror stage explains, the ego is radically alienated from the biological, and any psychical harmony with the natural world is impossible; (2) There is no “adaptation”

to reality insofar as the Symbolic *is* reality (the problem is that we're too well adapted!); and (3) The goal of adaptation turns analysis into a method of social control.<sup>49</sup> Fundamentally, Lundberg's critique of "Refitting Fantasy" is that it promotes squaring the ego with some primordial reality, thereby overlooking "reality" as a symbolic production and turning criticism into a kind of narcissistic enterprise.<sup>50</sup>

Where I resist Lundberg's reading is precisely in terms of (dis)agreement: to claim that fantasies and their analyses truck in the Imaginary is not the same thing as the promotion of ego-psychology but, rather, an admission of the primacy of the Symbolic.<sup>51</sup> In addition to the inevitable difficulties that result from translation or attempts at popularization, I admit that part of the conceptual difficulty for me concerns the number of meanings in play when discussing Lacan's theory of the subject vis-à-vis the Symbolic: there is "agency," which only belongs to the signifier;<sup>52</sup> there is the signifier, which represents the subject for another signifier, but which cannot signify the subject; there is the "ego" (or the Self), which is strictly distinct from the subject; there is the psychoanalytic subject or the analysand, the specific other on the couch; there is the barred subject (\$), alternately the subject that can never coincide with itself and the subject that is split between the conscious and the unconscious; and there is the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the statement.<sup>53</sup> Ultimately, however, Lacan says that his subject is the subject of the unconscious (in both the sense of topic and a unique entity), which appears only as it fades.<sup>54</sup> In other words, there are many aspects of the subject in Lacan's corpus, and one needs to be careful to distinguish among them to maintain a "rigorous" fidelity to the master's cavities.

Insofar as Lundberg isolates the subject as a "kind of negativity, or as a gap between the fantasy of the pre-given subject" and the order of language,<sup>55</sup> then one possible reading is that we are dealing with the barred subject (\$) that appears in Lacan's infamous "graph of desire," as well as the subject divided between the conscious and unconscious.<sup>56</sup> In response to Lundberg's call for a discussion of symbolic entry as the primary referent of the fundamental fantasy, let me briefly describe both senses of the barred subject, and then connect these to the phantasmic.

The first sense of the barred subject is that the subject is divided between the conscious and the unconscious and that the latter is "structured like a language."<sup>57</sup> This first sense is homologous to the conscious Self, including an identification with the *image* of one's body (imago), and the subject produced by the Symbolic. The second sense refers to this "pre-given" subject. Prior to its entry into the Symbolic, this pre-given subject refers to the being of biological needs or to what Lacan termed the "floodtide of pre-text" or "the reality that is imagined in the ethnological schema of the return of need."<sup>58</sup> The positing of a pre-symbolic being of needs is one of the main reasons that the Real has connotations of brute reality, such as biology. Insofar as the being of needs must express those needs in language, language comes to dominate and manipulate the body and its needs like an alien parasite (for example, the pleasure we take in the variety of foods available to us is not reducible to biological need).<sup>59</sup> The barred subject, then, is a subject that can never coincide with

itself as a mythically “pure” biological being of needs, or realize the unconscious outside of speech; the slash through the pre-given subject (S) represents that it is alienated from itself (§).<sup>60</sup> In this context, “the mirror-stage and the imaginary have to provide an answer to the ‘primordial discord’ between the subject and its body.”<sup>61</sup> This answer is fantasy.

Lundberg’s stress on the subject of the unconscious or Symbolic order does not necessarily change our understanding of fantasy; rather, it highlights that it is an illusion of the Self or ego that is structured by the fundamental fantasy. Fantasies are *narratives*, and the fundamental fantasy is a *structure*. Put differently, the fantasy of communication that animates one’s belief that John Edward is talking to our dead Uncle Burke is actually the barred subject’s desire “to be made whole by the Symbolic order, not to be disfigured by our entry into speech.”<sup>62</sup> Fantasy (e.g., readers enjoy my rejoinders) is to ego as the fundamental fantasy ( $\$ \diamond a$ ) is to the subject of the unconscious. Although space limits doing so here, one can take this understanding a step beyond the “Refitting Fantasy” essay by describing how the (a) in the fundamental fantasy is really a “positive consistency” that resides “outside the big Other,” especially insofar as one does not wish to ignore Lacan’s later, untranslated remarks on fantasy.<sup>63</sup> The upshot of this move, Žižek explains, is that

fantasy does not mean that when I desire a strawberry cake and cannot get it in reality, I fantasize about eating it; the problem is, rather, *how do I know that I desire a strawberry cake in the first place? This is what fantasy tells me.*<sup>64</sup>

Traversing the fantasy entails realizing that “the support of me (the subject) is purely phantasmic.”<sup>65</sup>

Whether or not we choose to develop the notion of the fundamental fantasy in terms of its positive consistency for the subject (which, incidentally, is not an interpretive project at all), my point is that insofar as the Imaginary is structured by the Symbolic,<sup>66</sup> an analysis of fantasies is always already a symbolic project. Where Lundberg and I seem to differ, then, pertains to the locus of rhetorical criticism: does criticism concern the fantasies of rhetorical agency, or does it concern the subject of rhetoric, that is to say, tropology and the subject of the unconscious? I think both loci are correct and that moving from one place to the other *is* the project of traversal in our disciplinary context.<sup>67</sup>

### *Conclusion: On Rhetorical Necromancy, or, the Haunted Place between Analysis and Criticism*

You can believe me when I tell you that we do not enjoy giving an impression of being members of a secret society and of practicing a mystical science. Yet we have been obliged to recognize and express as our conviction that no one has a right to join in a discussion of psycho-analysis who has not had particular experiences which can only be obtained by being analyzed oneself. Sigmund Freud<sup>68</sup>

At the end of a well-known attempt to square theory with clinical practice, Freud recounts the recurring dream of a man who had nursed his father through a “painful

mortal illness.” In the dream “his father was alive once more and ... he was talking to him [the son] in his usual way. But he felt it exceedingly painful that his father had really died, only without knowing it.” Freud interprets this dream as a kind of self-reproach, the result of the anxiety the man felt about wishing for his father to pass away (thereby relieving him of his watch), and the fear that the father might have discovered this wish.<sup>69</sup> Lacan uses this story as an allegory for the “subject’s relation to the signifier,” meaning that, like the dead father, the subject does not know that it is dead, nor does it wish to.<sup>70</sup>

What does recognizing the dead father portend for rhetorical studies? How do we embrace the dead subject (theory) while hailing its rhetoric as a symptom worthy of study (criticism)? When I said that rhetorical scholars should recognize that talking to the dead is what we do, I tried to hint at an answer to these difficult questions. With this statement I was not simply specifying the fantasy between others or the ego and ego-ideal, nor merely advocating the analysis of imaginary structures, but also pointing to how ironically difficult it is for us rhetoricians to recognize the agency of the signifier: criticism *is* the symptom of a dead subject who/that does not know it is dead, who/that keeps offering itself as the object of the desire of the Other. In other words, in order to traverse the Imaginary to confront the Symbolic, which would, in some sense, radically transform rhetorical criticism as it is often taught, we have to work through the trauma of the death of the Great Orator, if not the Virtuoso Critic. Although other disciplines in the humanities worked through the melancholia of the “crisis of agency” ages ago, only presently has there been a resurgence of interest in mourning the loss in NCA-style rhetorical studies.

I have tried to suggest that, although some are electing to bypass the project of theorizing a subject of interiority by getting down to Deleuzian grooves, for those of us “sophisticated modernists” interested in subjectivity and agency (indeed, *identity*), psychoanalysis of *any* variety lends itself nicely to reckoning with contemporary passings in a manner that preserves rhetorical criticism as a dialectical project.<sup>71</sup> Yet to avoid the place of dead roads, we must be careful to consider the rhetoric of psychoanalysis, resisting, for example, the temptation to present Lacan’s many concepts as having a stable meaning independent of this or that context, or as composing a system that can be mastered in a single journal article or forum essay (this is, I think, the well-taken *sub-jecta* and teaching of Lundberg’s critique).<sup>72</sup> Our prelude to traversing the Imaginary to confront the Symbolic, in other words, is the challenge of translation without adaptation.

Ultimately, we must remember that, like Freud, Lacan developed his theories over the course of many years, changing his mind and amending and elaborating his conceptual repertoire, primarily as a consequence of his experiences *in clinical practice*. I am suggesting that there is a homology between rhetorical theory and psychoanalytic theory and rhetorical criticism and clinical analysis. Reckoning with the Symbolic as a theoretical project requires the insights of practical application in criticism, but such a reckoning is also a two-step process that mirrors the work of analysis, from the ego to the subject of the unconscious, from the Imaginary to the Symbolic, from criticism to analysis, from the phantasmic to the tropological, from

melancholia to mourning. Unquestionably, the patron saint of the Symbolic is the figure of Lacan, the Master of undoing. The patron saint of the Imaginary is the dead father, who haunts in more ways than one.<sup>73</sup> Lacan is not the dead father. Insofar as most of us are *not* in analysis, however, we have a lot of challenging territory to map and explore before giving up the ghost.

## Notes

- [1] See Thomas S. Frenzt, "Reconstructing a Rhetoric of the Interior," *Communication Monographs* 60 (1993): 83–90. I say "radical" because the Lacanian innovation is that the interior is an exteriority, about which more below.
- [2] For a description of our preference for surfaces, see Joshua Gunn and Barry Brummett, "Popular Communication After Globalization," *Journal of Communication* (forthcoming December 2004). Apart from the literature for and against "fantasy theme analysis," for attacks see Donald G. Ellis, "Post-Structuralism and Language: Non-Sense," *Communication Monographs* 58 (1991): 213–24, esp. 217–8; Kenneth Rufo, "The Mirror in *The Matrix* of Media Ecology," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20 (2003): 117–41; and Kenneth Rufo, review of *On Belief*, by Slavoj Žižek, *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89 (2003): 374–76.
- [3] See Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frenzt, *Projecting the Shadow: The Cyborg Hero in American Film* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Barbara Biesecker, "Rhetorical Studies and the 'New' Psychoanalysis: What's the Real Problem? or Framing the Problem of the Real," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 84 (1998): 222–39; Michael J. Hyde, "Jacques Lacan's Psychoanalytic Theory of Speech and Language," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 (1980): 96–114; Loyd S. Pettegrew, "Psychoanalytic Theory: A Neglected Rhetorical Dimension," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 10 (1977): 46–59; and Henry Krips, *Fetish: An Erotics of Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999). Also see Douglas Thomas, "Burke, Nietzsche, and Lacan: Three Perspectives on the Rhetoric of Order," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 79 (1993): 336–56. This is not true, of course, for rhetoricians in English departments, who have explored psychoanalysis fruitfully. See James V. Catano, *Ragged Dicks: Masculinity, Steel, and the Rhetoric of the Self-Made Man* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001); David Metzger, *The Lost Cause of Rhetoric: The Relation of Rhetoric and Geometry in Aristotle and Lacan* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995); and Ellen Quandahl, "'More Than Lessons in How to Read': Burke, Freud, and the Resources of Symbolic Transformation," *College English* 63 (2001): 633–54.
- [4] William S. Burroughs's hilarious and horrific novel about Kim Carson, the (final) frontier, and space stations is an apt allegory for infighting over the frontier of the unconscious in the history of psychoanalysis; *The Place of Dead Roads* (New York: Henry Hold and Company, 1983).
- [5] Christian Lundberg, "The Royal Road Not Taken: Joshua Gunn's 'Refitting Fantasy: Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity, and Talking to the Dead' and Lacan's Symbolic Order," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90 (2004): 495–500.
- [6] Lundberg, "The Royal Road," 499.
- [7] I use the term "occultic" to specify the discriminating function of difficult language (e.g., the creation of insiders and outsiders), in distinction from the "occult," which connotes secrecy about magical knowledge. For a great musical explication of "psychobabble," listen to Eric Woolfson and Alan Parsons, "Psychobabble." Performed by the Alan Parsons Project, on *Eye in the Sky*, Arista, 1982 (compact disk). Also hear Eric Woolfson's soundtrack to the film *Freudiana*, performed by Franke Howard, Kiki Dee, Eric Woolfson, Chris Rainbow, Alan Parsons, John Miles, and Marti Webb, EMI, 1999 (compact disk).

- [8] Bruce Fink, *Lacan to the Letter: Reading Écrits Closely* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 65.
- [9] Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science* (New York: Picador, 1998), xi.
- [10] Alan Sokal, "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," *Social Text* 46/47 (1996): 217–52.
- [11] See Bruce Robbins and Andrew Ross, "Response: Mystery Science Theater," *Lingua Franca* (July–August 1996), in *The Sokal Hoax: The Shame That Shook the Academy*, ed. by the editors of *Lingua Franca* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 54–8.
- [12] Alan Sokal, "Revelation: A Physicist Experiments with Cultural Studies," *Lingua Franca* (May–June 1996), in *The Sokal Hoax*, 49–53; and Janny Scott, "Postmodern Gravity Deconstructed, Slyly," *New York Times*, May 18, 1996, in *The Sokal Hoax*, 76–8.
- [13] See Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), esp. 30–2.
- [14] See Joshua Gunn, "An Occult Poetics, or, the Secret Rhetoric of Religion," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 34 (2004): 29–54; and Richard Rorty, "Deconstruction and Circumvention," in his *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers, Volume 2* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 85–106.
- [15] See Judith Butler, "Changing the Subject: Judith Butler's Politics of Radical Resignification," interview by Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham, *JAC* 20 (2000): 727–65; and Michael Warner, "Styles of Intellectual Publics," in his *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 125–58.
- [16] See Martha Nussbaum, "The Professor of Parody," *The New Republic*, February 22, 1999, 37–45.
- [17] Philippe Van Haute, *Against Adaptation: Lacan's "Subversion of the Subject": A Close Reading* (New York: Other Press, 2002), 3–7; Jacques Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 286.
- [18] This means that the "rhetoric of the interior" becomes shorthand for a psychoanalytic project that ironically rejects the inside/outside binary. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York: Verso, 1997), 3–7; and Paul Verhaeghe, "Lacan's Answer to the Classical Mind/Body Deadlock: Retracing Freud's *Beyond*," in *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 109–39.
- [19] This is what I would call a "poetics." See Van Haute, *Against Adaptation*, 12.
- [20] Van Haute, *Against Adaptation*, 10–11.
- [21] Jacques Lacan, "The Rat in the Maze," in *Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972–1973* (hereafter S20), ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 142.
- [22] Also see Jacques Lacan, "The Purloined Letter," in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955* (hereafter S2), ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988), 191–205.
- [23] Jacques Lacan, "Where is Speech? Where is Language?" in S2, 283.
- [24] As David Macey has argued, the attempt of Lacan's intellectual heir, Jacques-Alain Miller, to decontextualize the thousands of pages of material that compose *Écrits* such that "the concepts of the late 1960s appear to exist in the texts written before the Second World War" has contributed to a familiar, "stark dilemma" confronting new readers: "total acceptance or total rejection." See David Macey, *Lacan in Contexts* (New York: Verso, 1988), 11, ix. One way to account for the differences between Lundberg's and my approach is in terms of my tendency to lean on the early seminars (which are more concerned with the Imaginary) and his preference for the later Lacan.
- [25] Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1966), 160.

- [26] For another example, see Jacques Lacan, "On Creation *Ex Nihilo*," in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 118. Žižek and others often have dealt with this difficulty by referring to first, second, and third "period" Lacan. See Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), 131–3, 153–99.
- [27] Joshua Gunn, "Refitting Fantasy: Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity, and Talking to the Dead," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90 (2004): 9.
- [28] Joshua Gunn, "Refiguring Fantasy: Imagination and Its Decline in U.S. Rhetorical Studies," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89 (2003): 43.
- [29] Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Écrits*, 3.
- [30] This is especially the case in the work of analysis, in which "the analyst concretely intervenes in the dialectic of analysis by playing dead ... either by his silence where he is the Other with a capital O, or by canceling out his own resistance where he is the other with a lowercase o. In both cases, and via symbolic and imaginary effects, respectively, he makes death present. Still, he must recognize and therefore distinguish his action in each of these two registers..." Jacques Lacan, "The Freudian Thing or the Meaning of the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis," in *Écrits*, 132.
- [31] Sokal and Bricmont, *Fashionable Nonsense*, 36.
- [32] Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, 130–1.
- [33] Jason Glynos and Yannis Stavrakakis, "Postures and Impostures: On Lacan's Style and Use of Mathematical Science," *American Imago* 58 (2001): 685–6.
- [34] I am speaking here of the ego, not intelligence.
- [35] Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1985).
- [36] Consider Lacan on his style: "Writing is in fact distinguished by a prevalence of the text ... which allows for the kind of tightening up that must, to my taste, leave the reader no other way out than the way in, which I prefer to be difficult." Jacques Lacan, "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud," in *Écrits*, 138; and "The bar [which represents the split of the subject], like everything else that is written, is based only on the following—what is written is not to be understood. That is why you are not obliged to understand my writings. If you don't understand them, so much the better—that will give you the opportunity to explain them." Jacques Lacan, "The Function of the Written," in *S20*, 34.
- [37] The problem is perhaps one particular to the English-speaking West. Bruce Fink notes that "what works in France—talking over the heads of one's audience and seducing them into doing background reading on the authors and technical terms mentioned—does not work quite as well in the English-speaking world. Lacan could easily assume that his faithful seminar public ... would go to the library or bookstore and 'bone up' ..." *Lacan to the Letter*, 130.
- [38] For the "coming," see Ernest G. Bormann, John F. Cragan, and Donald C. Shields, "Defending Symbolic Convergence Theory From an Imaginary Gunn," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89 (2003): 366–773.
- [39] Warner, "Styles of Intellectual Publics," 148.
- [40] Lundberg implies that Žižek's reading of Lacan is problematic because of "Marxist tendencies to ground Lacanian interpretation in the material structures of the Imaginary," citing the work of Gilbert Chatian [*sic*] as detailing "the opposition to Žižek's Marxist reading of Lacan" (p. 500, note 2). In personal communication, however, Professor Chaitin noted: "I'm afraid that I cannot take credit for ... an argument against Žižek's alleged Marxist read of Lacan. Nor would I wish to do so. Although I air a few minor disagreements with Žižek in my article, 'Lacan with Adorno?,' they are not directed against Marxism, and in general I admire his work and say so in print, as in *Rhetoric and Culture*." See Gilbert D. Chaitin, *Rhetoric and Culture in Lacan* (New York: Cambridge University

- Press, 1996), esp. 243–53; and Gilbert D. Chaitin, “Adorno with Lacan? The Question of Fascist Rationalism,” in *Future Crossings: Literature Between Philosophy and Cultural Studies*, ed. Krzysztof Ziarek and Seamus Deane (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 221–48.
- [41] The work of reconciling materialism with the psychoanalytic Real is already underway; see Dana Cloud, “*The Matrix* and Rhetoric’s Desertion of the Real,” unpublished manuscript.
- [42] Although primary sources should always be at the center of one’s understanding of this or that thinker, I do not recommend reading Lacan outside of a seminar or a reading group or without the help of secondary sources, and I bemoan the intellectual conceit often heard about the work of folks like Stephen Best and Douglas Kellner: “read this, and then burn it.” Blind adherence to primary sources may work for some, but for the rest of us “worker bees and ants,” to borrow a phrase from Rorty, I recommend: Bruce Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); and Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992). Van Haute’s *Against Adaptation* can be fruitfully read along side Lacan’s notorious essay, “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,” in *Écrits*, 281–312.
- [43] This is precisely why Lacan writes as he does: to resist appropriation and to encourage thinking through his cavities.
- [44] Lundberg, “The Royal Road Not Taken,” 500.
- [45] See Bruce Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, 38–62; and Melanie Klein, *Selected Melanie Klein*, ed. Juliet Mitchell (London: Free Press, 1987).
- [46] Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*, trans. Cecil Baines (New York: International Universities Press, 1946), esp. 4–6.
- [47] Heinz Hartmann, *Ego Psychology and the Problem of Adaptation*, trans. David Rapaport (New York: International Universities Press, 1958), 22.
- [48] Jacques Lacan, “The Circuit,” in S2, 86.
- [49] “The point is not to adapt him to it [reality],” says Lacan, “but to show him that he is only too well adapted to it, since he assists in its very fabrication.” Jacques Lacan, “The Direction of Treatment and the Principles of Its Power,” in *Écrits*, 225. Also see Lacan’s discussion of the “biological gap” in “A, m, a, S,” in S2, 322–3; and Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary*, 4–5.
- [50] This is also the charge that many use to dismiss psychoanalytic criticism: who or what gives one the authority or power to interpret what is motivating a person? Further, doesn’t psychoanalytic interpretation shield criticism from the critic’s unconscious motives and ideological commitments? In its opposition to adaptation, the Lacanian response asks these very same questions of ego-psychology.
- [51] Other, less meaningful resistances concern the suggestion that my project is to feature “the agent’s relation to the text as a kind of fantasy or fiction.” My argument, however, is that agency as we tend to think of it (not necessarily as Lacan thinks of it) *is composed of fantasies or internalized narratives*. In this respect my position is more similar to that of Deleuze-inspired scholarship than familiar modernities: the subject is a “fold” of the exterior (the Symbolic). Another is that I have framed psychoanalysis to “critique poststructuralism’s tendency to dissolve text and subject in the play of semiosis or the micro-analytics of power.” Rather, I have tried to suggest that psychoanalysis acknowledges the radical contingency of social reality and offers an explanation of how rhetorical agency nevertheless exists. Psychoanalysis teaches us why we do not need to be afraid of the posts, but can embrace them as complex understandings of social reality. In other words, the psychoanalytic subject explains the possibility of agency *despite* the truths of poststructuralism, posthumanism, postmodernism, and so on.
- [52] Lacan, “Where is Speech?” in S2, 283.
- [53] For a helpful taxonomy of the many “subjects” in Lacan, see Francis M. Moran, *Subject and*

- Agency in Psychoanalysis: Which Is to Be Master?* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 120–47.
- [54] See Mladen Dolar’s discussion of this fading in terms of the forced choice between “being” and “thought” in “Cogito as the Subject of the Unconscious,” in *Sic 2: Cogito and the Unconscious*, ed. Slavoj Žižek and Renata Salecl (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 11–40.
- [55] Lundberg, “The Royal Road,” 497.
- [56] See Jacques Lacan, “The Subversion of the Subject,” in *Écrits*, 291.
- [57] Jacques Lacan, “The Hysteric’s Question,” in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses, 1955–1956*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), 167.
- [58] Lacan, “The Subversion of the Subject,” in *Écrits*, 292.
- [59] See Van Haute, *Against Adaptation*, 25.
- [60] This presents some vexing problems regarding performativity, the body, and inscription. See Judith Butler, “How Can I Deny That These Hands and This Body Are Mine?” in *Material Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory*, ed. Thom Cohen, Barbara Cohen, J. Hillis Miller, and Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 254–73.
- [61] Van Haute, *Against Adaptation*, 91.
- [62] Lundberg, “The Royal Road,” 498.
- [63] Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, 46. This is the seminar of 1966–1967, *La logique du fantasme*, on which Žižek’s Lacanian theory of fantasy as the “support of reality” rests. Also see Dolar, “Cogito,” 26.
- [64] Žižek, *The Plague*, 9.
- [65] Žižek, *The Plague*, 10.
- [66] “In man, the imaginary relation has deviated, insofar as that is where the gap is produced whereby death makes itself felt.” Jacques Lacan, “Some Questions for the Teacher,” in *S2*, 210.
- [67] The difficulty here is an ethical one: justice. Understanding the subject as an imaginary, narrative consistency (rhetorical agency) does not need to lead the dissolution of a political subject. There must remain *some positive consistency* to the subject to maintain an “answerability” to others; there is some element of the self that is not *wholly Other*. See Mindy Fenske, “The Aesthetic of the Unfinished: Ethics and Performance,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 24 (2004): 1–19; and Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters* (New York: Routledge, 2003), esp. 65–82.
- [68] Sigmund Freud, “The Dissection of the Psychological Personality,” in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1965), 87.
- [69] Sigmund Freud, “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XII*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1958), 225.
- [70] Lacan, “The Subversion of the Subject,” in *Écrits*, 288–9. Also see Van Haute, *Against Adaptation*, 57.
- [71] Edward Schiappa, “Sophisticated Modernism and the Continuing Importance of Argument Evaluation,” in *Arguing Communication and Culture*, vol. 1, ed. G. Thomas Goodnight (Washington, DC: National Communication Association, 2002), 51–58.
- [72] Fink notes: “To Lacan’s mind, a teaching worthy of the name must not end with the creation of a perfect, complete system; after all, there is no such thing. A genuine teaching continues to evolve, to call itself into question, to forge new concepts. In a word, we can adopt an obsessive stance and say that Lacan is avoiding giving us the (anal) gift we want so that we can size him up and see if he is worthy or not; or we can adopt a more hysterical stance—one perhaps closer to Lacan’s own—and say that Lacan himself does not view his texts as constituting any kind of finished theory or system.” *Lacan to the Letter*, 66–7.
- [73] For example, see Carole Blair, Julie R. Brown, and Leslie A. Baxter, “Disciplining the Feminine,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 80 (1994): 383–409.