



ISSN: 2472 2472

Lacanian Psychoanalysis and the Social Sciences

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Abstract

This essay offers some coordinates for situating the Lacanian psychoanalytic orientation within qualitative social science research. It explores two phases of Lacan's teaching on the relationship between psychoanalysis and science: the 1960s and the 1970s. During the first phase (the 1960s), there seemed to exist a "narrow doorway" through which "psychoanalytic science" might be established. It was for this reason that Lacan marked a distinction between the "exact sciences" and the "conjectural sciences." However, this position was apparently overturned by Lacan during a second phase (the 1970s), when he claimed that psychoanalysis is not a science. Insights from these two periods are used to interrogate central topics within the field of qualitative social science methodologies. If Lacanian psychoanalysis is to secure a place for itself within social scientific research, it will require an extensive interrogation of the fundamental values and presuppositions of qualitative research (such as transferability/generalizability, sampling strategies and the idea of a "sample," and validity/triangulation).

The 1960s: Eclipsing the Truth as Cause

My research on the topic of the possible relationship between Lacanian psychoanalysis and the social sciences was inspired in part by Christian Dunker and Ian Parker's essay "How to Be Secretly Lacanian in Anti-Psychoanalytic Qualitative Research" (2009). Whereas Dunker and Parker aimed to find a way to covertly situate the Lacanian

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psychoanalytic orientation within the social sciences, the following essay aims to expose the fundamental incompatibility of Lacanian psychoanalysis and qualitative social science research. The strength of their essay was to demonstrate that various contemporary perspectives in the social sciences—especially feminist, Marxist, and post-structuralist—are in some respects indebted to psychoanalytic thought. This opens an important topic for Lacanians working within academia who are constantly confronted with the demand to secure research funding, teach survey courses in social science methodologies, legitimize psychoanalytic inquiry, and so on. Yet, we should be very careful not to respond so easily to these demands that we miss the fundamentally different points of departure of psychoanalysis and social scientific research.

I stumbled upon Dunker and Parker’s essay by accident while preparing to teach a course at the University of New Brunswick titled *Qualitative Research Methodologies in the Social Sciences*. An apparent dilemma presented itself: I was required to deliver a survey course on qualitative research to a wide range of students within the Department of Social Sciences without at the same time abandoning the Lacanian reference points that proved essential for my own intellectual and subjective orientation. These Lacanian reference points became indispensable for me after moving through two personal analyses and becoming fundamentally convinced that something like an unconscious exists. I felt compelled to examine some of the presuppositions of social scientific qualitative research, such as the conflation of knowledge with truth or power, the objectification or eradication of the subject, or in other words, the denial of the split subject within a system of signifiers, the refusal to acknowledge a latent discourse that propels the subject within language, and, finally, the wholesale rejection or avoidance of the topic of the unconscious. Desires and drives form the backdrop of subjective life. Thus, I returned to Lacan’s teaching to see if it could orient me.

During the 1960s, Lacan promoted a distinction within the general field of science between the “exact sciences” and the “conjectural sciences” (see Lacan, 1966/1989). Whereas the former precluded linguistic influence by foreclosing the dimension of the symbolic (e.g., signifiers) and, hence, abandoning the possible emergence of the category of the subject, the conjectural sciences have been intimately caught up with the logic of the signifier (whether its practitioners are aware of it or not). Put another way, the distinction was made to highlight the fact that, within the exact sciences, there is a foreclosure of the signifier, yet there is a space within the conjectural sciences where the signifier has been structurally integrated. In so many words, this is a distinction between psychotic (the former) and neurotic (the latter) constructions. The question we should ask ourselves is the following: What value was there in making such a distinction between “exact” and “conjectural” sciences if not to split the general field of science in order to preserve a space within it for psychoanalytic science? If psychoanalytic science can be situated within the conjectural sciences while not being reducible to the presuppositions

of that subfield, then we could make a similar claim about the situatedness of psychoanalysis within the subfield of the social sciences.

Freudian psychoanalysis was founded within the overarching paradigm of science and, hence, its concepts and technique were for a long time rendered through that prism. Lacan sought to remind us of this fact in “Science and Truth” (Lacan, 1966/1989). According to Lacan, the subject of science is also the subject of psychoanalysis, and their correlates are located through the certainty of conviction found in Descartes’ *cogito*. Like the Cartesian subject, the psychoanalytic subject is irreducible to knowledge, carved as it is out of knowledge through the method of radical doubt. Yet, a point of difference is discovered: Descartes displaced causality onto God. The subject of conjectural or social science also often attributes causality to metaphysical categories such as “humanity.” Within qualitative social science research, numerous constructs are defined according to the research setting and/or sample (e.g., “healthcare worker,” “street walker,” “university student,” and so on). Whereas the conjectural and social sciences discover the locus of the subject through these processes of displacement, psychoanalytic science continuously affirms the subject in its radical dimension of irreducibility. Moreover, it discovers that the subject is endlessly split by this irreducibility.

The category of the split subject is confirmed on a “daily basis” within the psychoanalytic clinic (Lacan, 1966/1989). The neurotic clinic provides evidence of this splitting as further proof of the existence of the unconscious. Similarly, the Freudian psychoanalyst takes as an elementary confirmation of these twin facts—the splitting of the subject as well as the unconscious, the latter being another word for such a splitting—the existence of “slips of the tongue” or various latent formations manifesting within the “dream-work.” In each case, confirmation of the subject of the unconscious surges forth through speech: the subject is split between its various conscious and intentional utterances and its unconscious determinations (which speak louder than the subject’s intentional statements). For this reason, psychoanalysis refuses the conflation of knowledge with truth, because the subject is not reducible to his or her statements but is rather split between the knowledge that it intends and the truth that it inevitably conveys. In the final instance, the subject is split between knowledge and truth, between its symptom and its cause, and the truth as cause pushes—often with a profound sense of urgency—the subject to endlessly form a couple with knowledge.

Psychoanalysis regularly confirms the existence of the subject in relation to its primary object, the phallus (which in Lacanian algebra is written ϕ [lower-case phi]). Lacan’s account of science compels him to focus not only on the subject but also on the objects of science, and these objects are different from the psychoanalytic object, written as $-\phi$ (minus phi). Lacan discovered here a fundamental misapprehension within the scientific paradigm. Another way of accounting for this misapprehension is to insist upon the fact that the subject and object are not two “ones” (“one” subject and “one” object). This subject exists in relation to the primordial object of the phallus according to a logic

of the “one” and its “other,” minus phi and the subject. The subject exists within the space of the lack of “one” object. Ostensibly, conjunctural and social sciences welcome the category of the subject, while there is a fundamental confusion in locating any subjective space within the exact sciences. We can see the implications of this in a recent debate between the popular American scientist Neil deGrasse Tyson and Richard Dawkins, in which Dawkins stated that scientists are completely baffled and can say nothing about consciousness. deGrasse Tyson responded, “There really is no such thing as consciousness at all” (Jacob, 2020). Can we not say something similar about the place of the subject within the sciences? In any case, we should be very suspicious of science’s welcome of the subject or of consciousness because the inclusion of any such category often implies a double deceit: the subject is never included as the space of lack within an object but is rather reduced to a “one” in relation to a succession of “ones” taken as objects.

The category of the subject is eclipsed within qualitative social scientific research at the very moment that the researcher introduces the concepts of a “sample,” “participants,” “respondents,” or anything similar. Subsequently, the speech of any such group reintroduces a problematic metaphysics. For example, qualitative healthcare research often reduces the subject to its social group or role of “healthcare worker,” research within the university reduces the subject to its group of “university students,” and so on. In this way, the subject is always introduced as an affirmative logic, as an object which may be grouped and counted and whose existence is defined according to its role, its overarching situation. In every case, the subject is affirmed as an astutely positioned object of knowledge: the subject offers insight into the scope of the researcher’s defined project. One qualitative researcher demonstrated this aspect of qualitative research very well when he wrote:

The subjects sampled must be able to inform important facets and perspectives related to the phenomenon being studied. For example, in a study looking at a professionalism intervention, representative participants could be considered by role (residents and faculty), perspective (those who approve/disapprove the intervention), experience level (junior and senior residents), and/or diversity (gender, ethnicity, other background) (Sargeant, 2012, p. 1)

Consequently, it becomes impossible for something like psychoanalytic “full speech” to exist, where by “full speech,” Lacan meant speech that locates the subject in relation to an articulation of his truth as cause. Empty speech, by contrast, prevails when the subject is reduced to his or her role, situated perspective, experience or skill, identity, etc. Cartesian subjectivity is irreducible to an empty speech situation since it consists of a negation or subtraction from knowledge. Lacan insisted that “the subject is internally excluded from its object” (Lacan, 1966/1989, p. 9). Psychoanalytic science functions within a framework irreducible to knowledge because it locates the subject as an internal

subtraction from any object of investigation, while qualitative research begins exclusively with the inverse proposition: the subject is embodied by his or her knowledge, identity, situatedness, and so on.

Qualitative research approaches the exact sciences at these fundamental points, and in doing so, it represses subjective lack and continuously displaces it onto the field of its objects. We cannot maintain the belief that qualitative research is, therefore, somehow outside the field of counting or succession. Lacan's distinction between the exact and conjectural sciences was inspired by Alexandre Koyre, whose epistemological interrogation of the paradigm of science—an interrogation of its empiricism and objectivity, both of which pin knowledge to truth—paved the way for a split within the scientific community. Lacan advanced this position a little by locating the function of this split in the signifier. The signifier, in relation to the subject, also opens up a split, and this was Descartes' important gesture: to demonstrate via radical doubt that knowledge is fundamentally dislodged from subjectivity and truth. Here, Lacan said, “[we can locate the] aftermath of a rejection of all knowledge... [which establishes] for the subject a certain anchoring in being” (Lacan, 1966/1989, p. 5). Thus, we find here the “narrow doorway” (as Lacan put it) through which the subject of science might exist beyond its reducibility to an object or “unit” of succession. I risk following the analogy: the subject stands in the doorway, unable to make a decision about which movement to make, backward toward knowledge or forward toward truth.

This split is not only produced by one signifier striving to represent the subject for another signifier, but also, more crucially, by way of the dislocation of knowledge from truth and being. The topology of the Möbius strip, also defined by its “inner eight,” was used by Lacan to accurately demonstrate this splitting. Lacan described it with unusual clarity: “This strip leads one to realize that the division where these two terms join together is not to be derived from a difference in origin” (Lacan, 1966/1989, p. 5). Although knowledge and truth have different origins (on the one side, there is something symbolic/imaginary and on the other, there is the real), they nonetheless connect up with one another when one walks along the surface of the inner eight. Thus, during any given instance, the subject is situated along either the path of knowledge or the path of truth, but through a passage, one can move from one to the other. Therefore, a paradoxical relationship between knowledge and truth exists, since the latter can also transform into the former (and vice versa) by passing around the non-orientable strip. Lacan famously demonstrated in his 11th seminar—through the two concentric circles of a Venn diagram—that meaning and being are mutually exclusive categories.

In any case, the conjectural and social sciences risk rushing back into the problematics of the exact sciences. Any definition of its object of study—any articulation of its concepts, knowledges, or descriptions—obscures the nature of the psychoanalytic object and its relation to the subject. This misapprehension of the object within the sciences takes on a distinctive form within the conjectural or social sciences: whereas the

social sciences foreground the principle of “reflexivity” (e.g., the awareness of one’s own situatedness as a researcher within the field of study and an admittance of inevitable bias on the part of the researcher), the exact sciences have only more recently come to recognize the importance of this principle. For example, Heisenberg’s “uncertainty principle,” which opens up the question of the adequacy of measurement and of subjective influence on the real, has perhaps fundamentally changed the future of scientific inquiry. Contemporary science strives ever more to demonstrate the influence of the researcher upon the objects of his or her research while also emphasizing the importance of pure symbolic formulae. We note this most obviously in the various nonsensical formulae of quantum physics which, for the Lacanian, can only appear as an integrally transmitted “*matheme*,” transmitted without knowledge and, therefore, without the imaginary. Lacan’s take on reflexivity was pronounced clearly during his 1960s seminars: “It is people’s lack of audacity and failure to locate the object that backfires [and this occurs because] one is always responsible for one’s position as subject” (Lacan, 1966/1989, p. 7).

Truth is always situated, returning to the locus of the subject. Yet, the fact that the truth is situated does not imply, as many contemporary critical, feminist, and post-structuralist qualitative researchers believe, that truth is not operative through a series of displacements. In other words, truth is not guaranteed by situating it within the concepts and categories of situated identities. What differentiates Georg Lukacs’s position on the “standpoint of the proletariat” from “standpoint feminisms” is the fact that the former is situated not according to an identity but rather according to the fact of the “otherness” of the proletariat in relation to the bourgeoisie and the capitalist class system. The misapprehension of the object within the social sciences is marked also by a mislocation of the subject: *objet petit a* animates all research within the conjectural and social sciences, whether the researcher is aware of this or not, and it is the task of psychoanalysis not to obscure this fact but to foreground it. Social science, by definition, always misses the “internal exclusion” of the subject within its object. While the exact sciences completely shirk responsibility for subject positions by neglecting the very category and basis of the subject as lack, psychoanalysis is constantly reminded of this truth: our task is to intervene in the foreclosure of subjectivity and to intervene in the misapprehension of the object by ourselves embodying the *objet petit a*. The social sciences must therefore exist somewhere between these two positions, as a missing and potentially perverse “third.”

Jacques-Alain Miller and Yves Duroux demonstrated that there is a primordial suturing of the subject within the domain of the sciences by turning to the “logician’s logic” presented within Gottlob Frege’s *The Foundations of Arithmetic* (1884/1960). Miller claimed that the “logician’s logic” sutures the subject to the chain of its discourse: “[S]uture [names] the general relation of lack to the structure of which it is an element inasmuch as it implies the position of taking-the-place-of” (Miller, 1977–1978/1966,).

Lack, which defines also the space of the subject, is sutured by the object or “unit” of number and perpetuated through an operation of “succession” (whereby succession names the process of counting). Lacan concluded that modern logic is “indisputably the consequence of an attempt to suture the subject of science” (Lacan, 1966/1989, p. 10). It would seem that the distinction between the “exact” and the “conjectural” sciences is made according to the absence or presence of the space of the subject, that is, of lack. When the space of the subject is lacking (e.g., when “lack” itself is “lacking”), a paranoid psychotic structure emerges, but when the space of the subject is sutured (yet preserved through endless displacements), a neurotic structure emerges. The latter structure of displacements opens psychoanalysis up to a traditional clinic of symptomology.

When the space of subjectivity is missing (when “lack itself is lacking”), there is no longer any space for the truth as cause. This is Lacan’s most notable suspicion of the exact sciences: Lacan’s separation of knowledge from truth indicates that the latter occupies an altogether different domain, the domain of “lack.” This domain is undoubtedly linked to causality. Truth is related to the object cause of the subject’s desire, and this object cause, when it does not appear as a mere objective semblance but rather in its truth, is the agent of a subject’s discourse. In striving to carve out a space for psychoanalysis within the sciences, Lacan stated that one must never “refuse to take on the question of truth as cause when your very careers are built upon it” (Lacan, 1966/1989, p. 17). Science, like religion, refuses to accept that knowledge arises as a consequence of its own cause, that it leans, fundamentally, upon its own cause. The scientist is like the cleric in shirking responsibility for his/her position as subject. Therefore, it becomes important to isolate the category of *cause* within the domain of science as well as psychoanalysis since it would appear that the discourse of science is closer than we might have imagined to the discourse of religion.

Psychoanalysis is alone in foregrounding the object cause of desire, *objet petit a*, as the agent of discourse. Lacan, like Freud before him, pointed out that we cannot make the same claim for science or religion. Freud attempted to demonstrate this in his *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1962), as well as his earlier *The Future of an Illusion* (1962b), in which religion takes on the form of an obsessional neurosis and functions through a series of symptomatic displacements. Thus, for the obsessional neurotic, there is an endless displacement of causality onto the Other (e.g., “God,” “the universe,” “matter,” and so on). These displacements are equally observable within social scientific discourse and within the method of Cartesian radical doubt. Indeed, we often forget that the entire method of radical doubt, introduced in the first meditation, was conceived as proof of the existence of God. Although science approaches paranoid psychosis by eradicating the cause and by submerging itself intimately within the real, religion quickly approaches obsessional neurosis by displacing the cause onto the Other (in the final instance, it is a displacement onto the signifier). Science and religion are therefore linked in their mutual eradication of truth as cause, while psychoanalysis, by diagnosing this

problem, returns the cause to its real as a challenge to the central signifier of any one of the names-of-the-father.

One of the greatest mystifications of the contemporary period is to present science and religion as two great opponents. Even in the university, one is tempted with the choice; on the one hand, there is the position of science, which is thought to be antagonistic to religious discourse, and on the other hand, there is the position of religion, which is conceived of as antagonistic to science. This again is a misapprehension: “one” confronts another “one.” This opens up a space for ostensibly critical scholarship that contends that “one” and “one” may hold hands in a greater unity, a “One.” Science and religion are capable of holding hands with one another. Those who situate themselves on this side of the fence imagine themselves to be taking a radical position, and they may be rewarded with large sums of grant money to conduct their research. Psychoanalysis, once again, stands alone. What science adds to the religious mindset is the fact of communicability or what I am tempted to call “transferability.” When science communicates knowledge of truth, it approaches not foreclosure but, rather, the line that separates the exact sciences from the conjectural, which means, in other words, that it moves closer to religion. The problem with all of this is that the discourses of science and religion have both changed a great deal since the 1960s. Not only has the intensional logic of category theory become popularized (against the temptation to remain within the parameters of extensional logic and set theory), but quantum physics has demonstrated that it can operate through the integral transmission of pure signifiers. Finally, science admits today that there is a locus of profound lack; there is, beyond lack, a space where language breaks down, becomes singular, where its babbling fades into the space of a black hole.

The 1970s: Scientific Fantasies and Psychoanalytic Delusions

I noticed during my research on the relationship between Lacanian psychoanalysis and science that the period of Lacan’s teaching in the 1970s was marked by a fundamental modification of his position. First, the phrase “psychoanalytic science” was dropped, implying that the two orientations should no longer be thought of in conjunction with one another. Lacan seemed to take a more hardline and definitive position by claiming that “psychoanalysis is not a science” (Lacan, 1977, p. 46). Moreover, Lacan no longer emphasized the debt that Freud owed to the scientific paradigm within which psychoanalytic science was formed, and he no longer pointed out that the correlate of the “subject of science” was both the Cartesian and the psychoanalytic subject. Science was now thought to be based upon a fantasy, while psychoanalysis was declared to be based upon a delusion. We should take note of this distinction because it seems to reverse his previous position of the 1960s, when science was thought to be a paranoid psychotic orientation, and psychoanalysis was thought to be an orientation around neuroses.

Whereas delusions are often associated with psychoses—although they are by no means exclusive to them—fantasies are often associated with neurotic defenses. Any differential diagnosis depends upon isolating the central mechanism and elementary processes that form a relationship with any name-of-the-father: delusion operates through certainty, expanding the scope of its foreclosure of the signifier, and fantasies function through a displacement of the lack introduced by a name-of-the-father.

Psychoanalysis now appears to be closer to psychoses, and science seems much more neurotic; hence, my confusion about the difference or consistency between Lacan's 1960s and 1970s positions on the relationship between psychoanalysis and science deepened. During the seminar of November 15, 1977, Lacan claimed that "the important thing is that science itself is only a phantasy and that the idea of an awakening is properly speaking unthinkable [for science]" (Lacan, 1977–78, p. 8). To be clear, an "awakening" was not thought to be a pleasant experience, since Lacan associates it with the intrusion of death. Lacan went so far as to claim that death is the only true awakening, a point affirmed by a former president of the World Association of Psychoanalysis, Eric Laurent. We might claim that the passage of the subject through the real constitutes an awakening from the pervasive dream of everyday life. Eric Laurent writes as follows:

[A]wakening is anything that is [a] breach, alteration, damage of the homeostasis of the pleasure principle that guarantees life. Any absolute disturbance of life, in this sense, is death. Absolute awakening is death. Meanwhile, the little, partial awakenings awaken us in as much as they are breaches of the homeostasis. The pleasure principle is also the principle of meaning. Partial awakenings occur when the barrier of meaning is broken through (Laurent, 2019, para. 6).

Science, because it is situated within the general scope of a fantasy, thinks itself to be awake to the real. It does this simply to perpetuate the displacements associated with its dream-work. I cannot help but find in these statements an analogy to the Quranic narrative of the seven sleepers of the cave: "And you would have thought them awake, whereas they were asleep" (The Holy Quran: 18:18). The Cartesian subject remains the correlate of science in the 1970s, but there is a shift in the basic understanding of science. Descartes's "bodies" or "extensions" are now considered fantasies since they produce a semblance of the sexual relationship. On the other hand, psychoanalysis remains committed to the principle of the lack of a sexual relationship. It seems to me that Lacan's understanding of science followed the contemporary logic, which foregrounds once again the symbolic (rather than eclipsing it); thus, Lacan's 1970s understanding of science is relegated to the "conjectural" domain since even the "exact sciences" had begun to take seriously the sort of positions outlined by Schrodinger and others. Lacan reaffirms the

science of language, once again giving it primacy over the logic of succession and the count.

The Cartesian concepts of extension, along with all of geometry handed down to us from Pythagoras and through Euclid's *Elements*, are also fantasies. Lacan argued that "geometry is woven by phantasies and in the same way the whole of science is" (Lacan, 1977–78, session 20.12.77, p. 2). It would seem that geometry misapprehends its objects through the construction of a fundamental "point." Indeed, the first element that begins Euclid's system of geometry is a point, defined in the following way: "[A] point is that which has no part." He continues: "[A] line is breadthless length." Finally, "the ends of a line are points" (Euclid's *Elements*). This self-enclosed system sutures the line and its points at the place of lack. Euclidian geometry motions, like Fregean algebra, against any admission of the lack of relation. In the final instance, science is based on fantasy because it begins with the assumption that it can be reasonable. Yet, from the standpoint of psychoanalysis, reason always exists upon shaky ground (Lacan, 1977–78). Psychoanalysis does not interpret in order to find reason amidst the chaos of the dream-work; rather, it interprets in order to bring the subject to the point of his or her split with knowledge or reason. Put another way, psychoanalysis forces a confrontation of the subject with the hole to force an awakening beyond reason, intelligibility, and meaning. We might therefore claim that the apparent split that occurs between Lacan's 1960s and 1970s teachings is the same split that occurs between the symbolic and hence interpretable unconscious and the real unconscious: the latter introduces a hole in the subject's innermost sense of life.

Another consideration has to do with the belief in "progress" in the sciences. Karl Popper demonstrated that the movement of progress within science depends essentially upon a logic of falsification. He wrote: "[T]here can be no ultimate statements in science which cannot be tested, and therefore none which cannot in principle be refuted by falsifying some of the conclusions which can be deduced from them" (Popper, 1959, p. 47). This logic of falsification was used also to launch an attack on the supposed metaphysical bases of both Marxism and psychoanalysis, since neither, according to Popper, can satisfy the scientific precept of falsifiability. Lacan reiterated this point: "Psychoanalysis is to be taken seriously even though it is not a science. It is even not a science in any way. Because the problem is, as someone called Karl Popper has superabundantly shown, that it is not a science because it is irrefutable" (Lacan, 1977–78, session 15.11.77, p. 1). It seems to me that this offers us a glimpse into the distinction that Lacan made between scientific fantasies and psychoanalytic delusions: whereas fantasies are based on falsifiable premises—indeed, they are, by definition, subject to processes of radical doubt, evidenced clearly by the obsessional fantasy—delusions are distinguished on the basis of the certainty of the subject's statements. Thus, delusions are irrefutable for subjects situated within their purview. Lacan's genius was to move away from the traditional view that delusions are to be measured in relation to an objective

reality and to insist on the fact that they are defined according to the subject's certainty (note: not his or her desire for certainty, but rather his or her insistent statements of certainty) as a consequence of the failure or foreclosure of a name-of-the-father.

Thus, if, as Popper argues, science depends upon falsifiability, then psychoanalytic delusions cannot be situated within that domain. Furthermore, for Lacan, science is distinguished from psychoanalysis because of its logic of succession. Lacan puts it like this: "As regards to what is involved in science, everything starts from numeration" (Lacan, 1977–78, session 10.12.77, p. 6). Science *counts* (or, put another way, geometry seeks extension from its elemental point), while psychoanalysis moves along the non-orientable surface of the Möbius strip. According to Lacan, "Science counts, it counts matter, but what does it count in this matter? Namely, if there were not the language that number already conveys, what meaning would it have to count?" (Lacan, 1974–75, p. 42). We can see the importance that Lacan gave to language over number (the latter being reducible to the former) and that the operations that are incorporated in a given language (e.g., metaphor/metonymy) are operative within the logician's logic through succession. In this way, science extracts "little bits of the real," implying, this time, that the symbolic has not collapsed in psychotic foreclosure. Rather, the subject's separation from the immersive real affords him or her some space for the extraction of little bits of knowledge concerning that real.

Lacan stated the following during the seminar of January 11, 1977:

Psychoanalysis ... is not a science. It does not have its status as a science and it can only wait for it, hope for it. But it is a delusion from which one is awaiting a science to be brought forth. It is a delusion that one is waiting to bring forth a science. One can wait for a long time ... simply because there is no progress and that what one is expecting is not necessarily what one is going to get. It is a scientific delusion therefore, and one is expecting that it will bring forth a science but that does not mean that analytic practice will ever bring forth this science. It is a science that has all the less chance of maturing because it is antinomical (Lacan, 1976–77, p. 46).

Lacan seems to speak of a possible psychoanalytic science here in the same way that he spoke about the exact sciences in the 1960s, thereby reversing his position. Yet, this is not a pure reversal because psychoanalysis, hoping to constitute itself as *the* science, begins with an antinomical point of departure: psychoanalysis can only hope to exist beyond the splitting of the subject that cuts him or her by way of knowledge and truth. From the beginning, there are contradictions; there is a splitting. Yet, it is only in the most recent of scientific inquiries that an apparent antinomical position begins to emerge. We see it

advanced further by Slavoj Žižek, whose recent philosophical work on Lacan argues that we should conceive of reality as fundamentally incomplete, in contradiction with itself; it is only because of this incompleteness of reality that we can posit the emergence of subjectivity (see Žižek, 2019).

Science, unlike psychoanalysis, forms itself on the basis of a belief in progress, and this belief constitutes its fantasy. What sort of progress does science suppose for itself? It is not exactly clear. On the one hand, it supposes progress or incremental advancement in knowledge (an argument shattered by Popper and others during the philosophical exploration of the concepts of “scientific revolutions” and “paradigm shifts”). On the other hand, it supposes progress in the manufacturing of ever more objects within the real. These objects of science are particularly interesting during the latest phase of science’s confluence with capitalism: the scientific object secures its place as a “gadget” or “lathouse.” These are objects designed precisely to be the object cause of the consumer’s desire. In any case, one of the ways we might think about the logic of science is to return to Frege’s *Foundations of Arithmetic* (1960). Frege described a “successor” function whose responsibility was to ensure the movement from one number to another. Perhaps what constitutes progress in a science is precisely this counting, this succession, which, every step of the way, renews the suturing that is its fundamental basis. This functions against its antinomical foundation since, in the first place, the number one is equal to the unit of zero, and this contradiction forms the basis for each succession. Yet, set theory demonstrates that this logic cannot be sustained except by making the contradiction an element of the set. Here again, we confront a black hole in the mathematical logic of the empty set.

Taking all of this into consideration, we should read the following statement by Lacan:

[L]ast time I spoke to you about something ... which is ... called a torus. This is what I wanted to indicate to you [by the allusive claim] that no result of science is a progress. Contrary to what is imagined, science goes round in circles, and we have no reason to think that the people who used flint-stone had any less science than us. Psychoanalysis notably is not a progress ... (Lacan, 1976–77, p. 12).

This “going round in circles,” demonstrated effectively in the logician’s logic, is exemplary also of the psychoanalytic drive. The drive, first explored by Freud in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920), has as its fundamental feature the endless circling around the elusive *objet petit a*. The boomerang of the drive is such that there is a constant return to its foundation without any engagement or change in its object or subjective position. On the other hand, psychoanalysis, which is not driven by the fantasy of progress (but rather by the delusion of its own particular argot) intervenes directly into

the circular trajectory of the drive. It does this by locating within the signifier a crystallization of *jouissance*, a metaphoric twisting of truth, and, perhaps most importantly, a radical kernel of nonsensical and non-assimilable *jouissance*.

Finally, a truly provocative statement that Lacan made in the late 1970s opens up the dimension of the delusion in relation to science:

What Freud enunciated and what I want to say is the following: that in no case is there an awakening. Science, for its part, can only be indirectly evoked on this occasion, since it is an awakening, but it is a difficult and suspect awakening. It is not sure that one is awake unless what is presented and represented has no kind of sense. Now everything that is enunciated up to the present as science is suspended on the idea of God. Science and religion go very well together. It's a *Dieu-lire!* [the literature translation is "God-Read," but in French, it sounds like "delirium."] But this does not presuppose any awakening. Luckily, there is a hole (Lacan, 1976–77, p. 125).

We have here the introduction of a minor concept, one that has not received a lot of attention in the teaching of Lacan but is now receiving some through the work of the World Association of Psychoanalysis: the concept of awakening. Put simply, an awakening is the moment when the real enters the scene by puncturing a hole in meaning and knowledge. It is in this sense that it is an intrusion of "death." An awakening always involves the dimension of the hole, or what Freud named the "navel of the dream." If, for Freud, there is never an awakening, then this was because one remains awake only to continue dreaming. It is within everyday waking life that we suppose ourselves to have a firm grasp on reality. Psychoanalysis teaches that we are all the more deceived by our fantasies, all the more duped, when we involve ourselves in waking life. Waking life is always a form of dupery, always a form of dreaming. This is why dreams themselves have always had a privileged place within psychoanalysis. They were the paradoxical gateway to truth, to minor awakenings.

The Lacan of the 1960s grouped together problematic fields by way of their avoidance of the truth as cause (e.g., science, religion, magic). However, the Lacan of the 1970s began to discuss their mutual "delirium:" science, religion, and psychoanalysis are all duped, are all products of a certain delirium. Although science has its fantasies, like religion, it also has its delusions. All except psychoanalysis avoid the truth as cause. Contemporary positions within science and negative theologians on "black holes" and so on demonstrate that psychoanalysis may not be alone in constituting itself on the basis of a hole. Yet, psychoanalysis offers the possibility of more profound (or, to put it in Lacanian language, *less suspect*) awakenings. The question we should ask ourselves today

is the following: to what extent can science and religion sustain themselves against the black hole without lapsing into suturing effects? Take, as an example, the scientific blockbuster film *Interstellar*, which was praised by scientists around the world for its cinematic investigations into such principles as time dilation and length contraction: within the black hole, the subject of the film nonetheless locates a means of communication by adjusting light and gravity. The black hole thus became another object among objects within space/time (rather than a fundamental challenge to scientific epistemology). Cinematic science here refuses antinomical foundations.

The 2020s: Validity and Transferability in Social Scientific Research

The social sciences are implicated in both “exact” and “conjectural” scientific orientations and, therefore, cannot be reduced easily to either. For example, quantitative research within the social sciences consists of a process of “counting matter.” On the other hand, within qualitative research and within theory work, there is a greater awareness of the function of language. Qualitative research is often defined as follows:

[I]nterpretations and generalizations ... not based on the frequency of occurrence of certain social phenomena but on a logic of generalizing from an individual case, whether this case is a personal biography, an organization or a particular milieu or social setting; this includes making microscopic and thick descriptions of the phenomena in which we are interested, likewise with the aim of generalizing from an individual case (Rosenthal, 2018, p. 13).

Thus, unlike “counting”—which is a process of securing probability, called “P values”—most qualitative research within the social sciences aims at generalizability or transferability. Put another way, qualitative research aims to generate findings that can be generalized or transferred rather than findings that are statistically significant probabilities of causality or correlation. I recall one professor in graduate school who taught us that all social science researchers must strive to demonstrate the BFD (“big fucking deal”) of research findings. This is what is at stake in social scientific research of all varieties. We strive toward significance in the form of probability of causality/correlation or else possibility of generalizability/transferability.

Transferability refers to the likelihood that findings from one research setting or case might be replicated in some way in another research setting or case. Generalizability has a much different goal of extrapolating from one setting or case to a wide variety or even a majority of cases within a larger context. In this way, generalizability tempts researchers toward quantitative research design logic by promoting sampling strategies,

and so on. It is by pursuing this strategy that we are guaranteed to lose insight into the *objet petit a* as object cause of desire by replacing it with other various objectifications or semblances. Lacan provided us with a word of caution in the 1960s: “[T]he opposition between the exact sciences and the conjectural sciences can no longer be sustained from the moment when conjecture is susceptible to an exact calculation” (Lacan, 1966, p. 863). No clearer warning has ever been issued to qualitative researchers. The tendency toward probability sampling, sampling strategies, and so on, moves precisely in this problematic direction of the exact sciences by reintroducing counting into the conjectural sciences.

Transferability is meant to rectify the problem of generalizability. Anti-positivist qualitative researchers generally prefer transferability as a goal over generalizability for precisely this reason: transferability apparently provides a limit to any such drifting back toward positivist assumptions within the social sciences. It thus aims to sustain and safeguard the split that exists between exact and conjectural sciences. Transferability focuses on porting concepts and rich textual and narrative data into other settings. For example, transferability within psychoanalytic case research might consist of finding high-level concepts within a single case and transferring them into others: could there be a coding operation that permits one to compare cases of obsessional neuroses? It seems to me that this effort is destined to failure precisely there where it intends to succeed: in the final instance, what transfers within psychoanalytic cases is not conceptual knowledge or rich textual detail (so-called “thick descriptions”) but rather a precise topological structure of the subject in relation to knowledge and truth. This is why the Möbius strip continues to be of importance for thinking about psychoanalysis in relation to the sciences.

Another dimension of transferability involves how it relates to the psychoanalytic concept of transference. In both cases, we are dealing with a technical concept having to do with a transferring of knowledge or concepts from one setting to another (or from one subject to another). Thus, transference, like transferability, is related once again to displacements against the intrusion of lack. Lacan stood firm in his conviction that transference always involves the establishment of knowledge: “As soon as the subject who is supposed to know exists somewhere ... there is transference” (Lacan, 1977, p. 232). Transference, therefore, implies that the subject counts yet again against the split that constitutes him or her. It was for this reason that Lacan claimed that any interpretation of the transference would constitute a major mistake in the technique of the clinic since it would only return the analysand to a consistency of knowledge (against the other side of the split, truth as cause). For this reason, we should distinguish between the goals of qualitative research and the goals of psychoanalytic technique; if the former is to be more closely aligned with the latter, it will have to resist the temptation toward the goal of transferability, which is, in the final instance, a goal of repeatability of concepts and knowledge within a new setting. Paradoxically, qualitative research is a more deceptive alignment with religion: it more deceptively secures the count once again.

We should ask ourselves about this hole within the singularity of the psychoanalytic case that sustains and indeed pushes the subject toward knowledge as truth. To put it a different way, where might we locate the truth as cause within qualitative research? Psychoanalytic work is distinguished from the entire project and orientation of the social sciences precisely in its attitude toward knowledge, interpretation, transference/transferability, truth, and the split subject. We see the problematic attitude toward knowledge accelerated most clearly in the qualitative research methodology of “grounded theory” since this is a methodology that aims to generate codes or knowledges of two or more orders (“open” and “axial” coding techniques) so that all knowledge is tightly “grounded” to the context from which it was inductively generated. Here, we can see how it is that by running away in haste from the positivist mindset, one only returns to it in a more deceptive way: qualitative research intends to eradicate the hole intruding into knowledge, thereby eradicating the very space for subjectivity.

If social science has its delusions—if it writes out the very fact of there being a split subject—then psychoanalytic social science (and psychoanalysis is indeed implicated in the social, since its basic position is that discourse is what constitutes a social link) aims to locate and confront the subject in his or her split between knowledge and truth, between the concepts that it generates and the hole that both sustains and threatens those very concepts. If psychoanalytic social science is to exist, particularly within the domain of qualitative research methodologies, then it must be grounded, with absolute conviction and certainty, in these fundamental precepts of the split and the hole. Psychoanalytic social science must remain committed, not to interpretation or the generation of concepts, but rather to a certain know-how *vis-à-vis* the subject’s fundamental delusions or fantasies. One of the names that Lacan gave to this fundamental anchoring point was the “sinthome.” The sinthome is something like a delusion linking the subject back to the social world without recourse to a master signifier, without recourse to a name-of-the-father. Maria do Rosario Barros has expressed it in the following way: “[O]ur hypothesis is that to go from delusion to [a] social bond requires the use of the sinthome as a singular way of including a hole in the [subject’s] invasive jouissance” (Barros, 2018, p. 14). Thus, when the “hole” appears to be sutured and when psychotic delusions present themselves, it is possible to reintroduce a hole in the form of the sinthome. This is especially important in interpretive social science research since the Thomas theorem, which states that a phenomenon defined as real is real in its consequences, continues to prevail. Incidentally, this theorem was generalized precisely from the experiences of a paranoid psychotic subject in the 1900s. Therefore, a hole is not only that which threatens all knowledge via the real, but it is also a requirement sustained through the know-how of a subject *vis-à-vis* the knotting together of his everyday world. In this case, the hole crystallizes some of the overwhelming *jouissance*

threatening the subject, providing the subject with the distance and splitting he would have received through the function of the name-of-the-father.

Another problematic assumption of qualitative research in the social sciences concerns the issue of validity. Within quantitative research, “validity” refers to the degree to which the “thing” that was intended to be measured was in fact measured. In this sense, we can see that “tightness” of knowledge to the real, as in qualitative “grounded research,” is the goal. The issue of validity in quantitative research is closely related to the issue of reliability, which concerns the accuracy of a given measurement, or in other words, the ability of a given measurement to actually capture what it intends to capture. It is possible for research to be high in reliability but low in validity (and vice versa). In anti-positivist or post-positivist qualitative research, validity is often exchanged for measures of “credibility” or “trustworthiness,” while reliability is often exchanged for measures of “dependability” or “confirmability.” Trustworthiness aims to triangulate the data extracted from a qualitative data set precisely by offering other avenues of validation (e.g., multiple methods of data extraction, multiple data sets or samples, or alternative theories or explanatory frameworks, etc). If, in the final instance, the results obtained are similar, then a higher degree of validity has been obtained. One of the popular forms of triangulation within qualitative research is referred to as a “member check-in,” which consists of sharing the knowledge obtained with the participants of the study from whom the data was extracted. In this case, we can find some security in the results when the members agree or trust that their own intentional speech was captured. The psychoanalytic orientation distrusts this approach and, indeed, distrusts most forms of trustworthiness because they inevitably miss the “subject of the enunciation.” Put another way, measures of trustworthiness miss the point at which speech, knowledge, or “data” says more than it intended.

The issue of “dependability” and/or “confirmability” within qualitative social science functions to secure knowledge to truth precisely through a repetition of the results. In this way, its aim is similar to the aim of any triangulation strategy: to locate a point of consistency or repeatability and to thus find what within the so-called anti-positivist method “counts.” We should for a moment return to the lesson that the Lacanians extracted from Frege: from the beginning, there was a suturing of a primordial contradiction, the equivalence of “one” to “zero” served as the point of departure for any “count” through the fantasy of consistency. It is from this groundwork that the entire scientific doctrine presents its fantasy of progress; similarly, it is from this fundamental deception that qualitative social science research renews the problem of the exact sciences (but this time in a much more deceptive form). The conjectural sciences, like qualitative social science, situates themselves within language precisely to demonstrate that it is not at all a language but a valid, transferable, credible, dependable, and confirmable enterprise. In this way, we can locate an important disavowal: if, for the Lacan of the 1960s, the exact sciences were structured like a paranoid psychosis because

they foreclosed the category of the subject, then, in the 1970s, the sciences seemed more like a neurosis because they renewed, endlessly, through various displacements in the “count,” the split of the subject. Between these two, we might now claim that the conjectural sciences and also qualitative social science seems torn between these two positions. The clinical name for such a structural position is perversion, and its fundamental operation is disavowal: “We know very well that qualitative research remains anchored to positivist assumptions, yet we continue to act as if it were not ...”

Perhaps, this was why the “narrow doorway” that science offered in the 1960s remained closed in the 1970s. In the 1960s, Lacan seemed to be hopeful that one day “psychoanalytic science” might exist, but he seemed to lose this hope in the 1970s, when he claimed that the two were impossible bedfellows. It is possible that another narrow doorway has opened in contemporary science, partly through quantum theory, but social science research has not yet gleaned this possibility. During the 1990s a new generation of social scientists rediscovered “theory” and “discourse” within qualitative research. We witnessed the rise of post-structuralist and feminist epistemologies, and these forced a reconsideration of the foundational presuppositions of social science research from the ground up. We rediscovered the symbolic. Consequently, we now live within a regime of social scientific discourse that welcomes the ideas of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, Dorothy Smith, and many others. However, it is not clear where Lacanian psychoanalysis enters, and perhaps this is the point: it is not a discourse that enters the doorway, and neither is it a discourse that remains in the doorway, split between one side and the other. Rather, it is a discourse that discovers the topological space within which these interventions have been received.

Whereas qualitative research methodology textbooks now leave room for “theory work” as much as for “discourse analysis,” psychoanalysis silently sits behind these discursive couches and interjects every so often with “hmm.” The new and wider flexibility of the social sciences—as well as the new forms of legitimization and funding opportunities for conjectural efforts—has in fact created new obstacles for the introduction of psychoanalytic thinking. This may seem paradoxical for some readers because of the close relationship of psychoanalytic thought with the project of deconstruction. However, it is possible that these new developments have only renewed a fundamental deception—a suturing mechanism—through which the subject as lack becomes increasingly obscured by the identitarian pretensions of today’s radical post-structuralist and feminist theories. It shall be our task to once again locate a social science research program which does not foreclosure the topological considerations of Jacques Lacan and the succession of the Freudian tradition.

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