

# The Lacanian Subject: Subject of Desire or the Subject of Drive?

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“The notion of the subject surely demands revision from the Freudian experience” – Jacques Lacan, *Seminar V*

## Abstract

This article reviews the concepts of Alienation and Separation as two distinct “logical moments” constitutive of subjectivity as theorized by Jacques Lacan. These logical moments, mediated by the materiality of language and enabling subjective orientations to the Other, are to be regarded as distinct psychical events that fundamentally structure a person's relation to the dimension of the Other, and without which linguistic subjectivity – becoming a subject of language – would not be possible. It is emphasized here that these events are by no means an inevitable sequence in a natural developmental teleology but are rather contingent occurrences related to *both* the underlying cognitive capacities of a young child *and* to the specific nature of the child – caregiver relationship. That is to say, there may be underlying cognitive-developmental issues at stake impeding the occurrence of Alienation and Separation as subjective psychical events in a caregiving environment where they would normally occur, just as much as there may be a disturbance in the child-caregiver relationship that objectively disrupts these occurrences from ever taking place. It should also be noted that Lacanian Psychoanalysis is a culturally specific discourse, responding to and intervening within specific cultural configurations – those of Western modernity in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The clinical practice of Lacanian Psychoanalysis advocates the production of a third moment of subjectivity, beyond Alienation and Separation, wherein subjectivity is finally construed with regard to objects of drive / *jouissance*, rather than the Other's demand or the Other's desire. This article limits itself to an overview of the first two moments of subjectivity, Alienation and Separation. The concept of Alienation in the Other's demand will be used as a way to clarify the clinical intervention made by Melanie Klein with the developmentally disordered Little Dick, described in her 1930 article, “The Importance of Symbol Formation in The Development of the Ego”.

## Introduction

Lacanian psychoanalysis defines subjectivity not as an innate or universal human condition but rather as a contingent possibility enabled by the effect of signification on the living organism.<sup>2</sup> It holds that the “subject of the signifier”, a subject divided between

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Colette Soler (1995) writes, “The Other as the locus of language – the Language and Psychoanalysis, 2014, 3 (1), 39-65  
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an Imaginary conscious intention and a Symbolically anchored unconscious desire / knowledge, is the result of two distinct events or “logical moments”<sup>3</sup> which may or may not transpire in an individual’s early life history: Alienation and Separation. The first of these moments, alienation, occurs at that incalculable instant when an infant accedes to the exigencies of communicating its bodily needs through a particular representational order – a mother tongue such as English, Spanish, or French. By agreeing to use this representational order a child becomes “eclipsed” by its signifiers and forfeits the possibility of an unmediated access to a supposedly original plenitude or unvarnished state of being.<sup>4</sup> Separation occurs at another indefinite instant, sometime after alienation, when a child implicitly accepts and suffers a second momentous indignity, this time the recognition that it is not the sole object of the Other’s desire. This discovery sets the child on a fateful expedition to unearth the agalma, the precious object of the Other’s desire, so that s/he might one day incarnate it and thus become its cause.<sup>5</sup> The rest of the journey entails living out in one way or another the buried treasure that was found – fantasy.<sup>6</sup>

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Other who speaks – precedes the subject and speaks about the subject before his birth. Thus the Other is the first cause of the subject. *The subject is not a substance; the subject is an effect of the signifier. The subject is represented by a signifier, and before the appearance of the signifier there is no subject.* But the fact that there is no subject does not mean that there is nothing, because you can have a living being, *but that living being becomes a subject only when a signifier represents him.* Thus prior to the appearance of the signifier, the subject is nothing” (p. 43).

<sup>3</sup> See Bruce Fink’s (1990) seminal article “Alienation and Separation: Logical Moments in Lacan’s Dialectic of Desire”.

<sup>4</sup> This is the neurotic’s myth of a child’s fall from grace, their expulsion from an Edenic world of pre-Symbolic bliss into the debased and disorganized universe of signification, where nothing is what it at first appears. I will discuss further along why Lacan regards this prelapsarian scenario as an unavoidable myth and that the fantasy of pre-Symbolic plenitude / fullness of enjoyment it presents is of course just that – a fantasy which smooths over irreconcilable antagonisms, not through Symbolic *resolution* a la Claude Levi-Strauss’ definition of myth, but by proposing an idealized pre-Symbolic past, a vanquishing of the Symbolic realm altogether in an Imaginary scenario of completion.

<sup>5</sup> Thus enters the father “figure” for Lacan, or, more precisely, the father *function*, the agency of separation between mother and child. Lacan holds that in Western cultures, the biological father is culturally mandated with the responsibility to interrupt the unmediated “dyadic” relation between mother and child. Whether Lacan’s assessment tacitly perpetuates the patriarchal conditions of subjectivity it purports to merely describe is a matter that is certainly open to, and has been, questioned.

<sup>6</sup> Fantasy understood in its Lacanian sense as an *interpretation* of the Other’s desire — an interpretation oriented just as much toward the conscious demand of the Other as the Other’s enigmatic (unconscious) desire. Fantasy, then, crucially enables a drive satisfaction of the subject while simultaneously providing / functioning as an answer to the Other’s desire — a compromise. The difficulty of altering a fantasy, of “traversing” it, has to do as much with re-interpreting the Other’s desire as preserving or maintaining the pittance of drive satisfaction that fantasy provides and ensures.

While this pithy narrative conveys a general sense of alienation and separation and is therefore not without its didactic use-value, the dynamic vicissitudes of alienation and separation, with their manifold twists and turns, is far from a simple linear progression or process of cognitive “development”.<sup>7</sup> Although it can be plausibly argued that the predominance of alienation and separation as two distinct logical moments in the constitution of subjectivity is largely superseded by Lacan’s final elaboration of the Borromean knot as a way to theorize the complex imbrications of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real dimensions of human psychological experience, I believe that the concepts of alienation and separation have an enduring relevance for any Lacanian theory of subjectivity.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, I wish to provide here an account of the Lacanian Subject as conceived of through Alienation and Separation and to explicate the two modalities of subjectivity that these logical operations engender: the Subject of Demand and the Subject of Desire. I will begin by examining Freud’s epistemological break and the destiny of a misrecognized notion.

### ***Drive: Freud’s Incredible Vanishing Concept***

The first mystery concerning Freud’s concept of drive is that it appears nowhere in the widely used *Standard Edition* of his writings. This, however, is not because it was never clearly formulated by Freud and requires retroactive reconstruction but is rather due to an inauspicious choice of translation committed by the English translator James Strachey – one that may have seemed harmless at the time but nevertheless set in motion the repression of a concept that provided a compelling account for why humanity is such a uniquely denatured species. Strachey, as one might have already guessed, is a *bete noir* of Lacanians for the following reason. Although Freud consistently distinguished between an innate, genetically pre-programmed animal *Instinkt* and a much more malleable *Trieb* which he used to designate the character of specifically human motivation, Strachey’s translation summarily dispensed with this distinction and rendered both terms using the English word “instinct”. Strachey justifies this choice of translation by contending that the existing English cognate “drive” for the German *Trieb* lacked any determinate meaning or even indeterminate connotations for usage as a term of psychology in the English language.<sup>9</sup> While this may certainly have been true at the time, the failure to nonetheless *forge* a distinction into English utterly obfuscated and almost consigned to oblivion one of Freud’s central interventions on the topic of human motivation.

Freud’s first sustained speculations on the nature of a uniquely human drive appear in his *Three Essays On The Theory Sexuality* published in 1905. Above all, these essays are preoccupied with accounting for the striking plasticity of erotic object choices among human beings. Near the end of this essay Freud (1989) remarks,

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<sup>7</sup> Alienation and Separation, in Lacan’s usage, are not “stages of development”, for example, along the lines of those delineated by Jean Piaget or Erik Erikson.

<sup>8</sup> And, moreover, retain inestimable clinical utility.

<sup>9</sup> See James Glogowski’s (1997) article “Remark Concerning the Drive” in the *Umbr(a)* issue *On The Drive*.

Experience of the cases that are considered abnormal has shown us that in them the sexual instinct and sexual object are merely soldered together— a fact which we have been in danger of overlooking in consequence of the uniformity of the normal picture, where the object appears to form part and parcel of the instinct. We are thus warned to loosen the bond that exists in our thoughts between instinct and object. *It seems probable that the sexual instinct is in the first instance independent of its object; nor is its origin likely to be due to its object's attractions.* (p. 246)

The groundbreaking implications of Freud's claim, namely that the sexual object choices of human beings obey a logic other than that regulated by the laws of evolutionary biology is to this day still militated against in some contemporary neo-positivist scientific circles. Freud contends that human sexuality is *not primarily* directed towards the reproduction of the species but *first and foremost* towards the satisfaction of independently operating drives embedded in relatively circumscribed erogenous zones (classically, the oral, anal, and genital "zones"). This notion no doubt proved anathema to the majority of scientifically minded people during Freud's own time, who, like today, attempted to rebuke his ideas by defending Darwin's evolutionary / functionalist theory as the incontrovertible account on matters of human sexual motivation. Indeed, Freud's propositions on the radically distinctive character of human sexuality are often dismissed, or, more likely, conspicuously overlooked on much the same evolutionary grounds.

Nonetheless, there are numerous intellectuals of various dispositions and allegiances who recognize in Freud's conception of human sexuality an unprecedented rupture that introduces a new set of epistemological coordinates for understanding both the human condition and the particularly fraught sexuality associated with it. Regarding Freud's intervention as nothing short of a world-historical Event, the philosopher Alain Badiou (2007, p. 74) remarks,

For Freud this sexuality is so insistently marked by its polymorphous perversity that any idea according to which sex is regulated by nature is immediately exposed as inconsistent. Freud is perfectly aware of his doctrine's disruptive potential, which is why he urges his pupils to accumulate their direct observations, so that in the coming controversies they will be armed with a vast empirical arsenal.

Even in Freud's triumphant disruptive gesture however, Badiou notes that he still sought legitimacy within the reigning hegemonic discourse of scientific empiricism. Also, as Adrian Johnston (2005) points out, the *Three Essays On The Theory of Sexuality*

continues to endorse an inherently conservative developmental-teleological trajectory of human sexual maturation in spite of its emphasis on the contingency of object choice since Freud concedes that the oral and anal drives of infancy come under the “tyranny” of the genital zone in “normal” / “mature” adult sexuality (p. 172). Thus Freud’s desire for the scientific and social respectability of psychoanalysis tended to domesticate the more iconoclastic implications of his drive theory by re-inscribing it into pre-existing paradigms of thought and conventional social mores. Ten years after the original publication of *Three Essays On The Theory of Sexuality* Freud (1989) returns to the topic of drive in his metapsychological paper, “Drives and Their Vicissitudes”. This paper contains Freud’s most comprehensive account of drive and definitively establishes it as a formal concept in psychoanalytic theory. It may come as some surprise therefore that Freud petitions for the necessary ambiguity of drive from the very beginning of this paper and refrains even from conferring upon it the minimal consistency of a preliminary definition. Instead, he treats his readers to an extended foray into the nature of scientific theory construction, emphasizing the impossibility of completely dispensing with pre-existing ideas or “conventional” concepts when initially collating empirical observations, even if these categories must be continuously modified to most adequately approximate the supposed immanent logic of the phenomena under consideration.<sup>10</sup> Now, with his audience duly prepared for a bit of haphazard groping in the dark, Freud goes on to propose an incisive distinction between a momentary physiological stimulus originating from the external world and something he tentatively qualifies as *Trieb* – a constant force clamoring for satisfaction that originates from within the organism itself. While stimulus and drive are not correlative, i.e., they are to be distinguished according to their topological orientation and temporal duration, Freud (1989) notes that what appears to constitute their common ground are the exigencies of the pleasure principle.

When we further find that the activity of even the most highly developed mental apparatus is subject to the pleasure principle, i.e. is automatically regulated by feelings belonging to the pleasure-unpleasure series, we can hardly reject the further hypothesis that these feelings reflect the manner in which the process of mastering stimuli takes place – certainly in the sense that unpleasurable feelings are connected with an

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<sup>10</sup> Freud (1989) offers these illuminating reflections on the process of scientific theory construction: “Even at the stage of description it is not possible to avoid applying certain abstract ideas to the material at hand, ideas derived from somewhere or other but certainly not from the new observations alone. Such ideas — which will later become the basic concepts of the science — are still more indispensable as the material is further worked over. They must at first necessarily possess some degree of indefiniteness; there can be no question of any clear delimitation of their content. So long as they remain in this condition, we come to an understanding about their meaning by making repeated reference to the material of observation from which they appear to have been derived, but upon which, in fact, they have been imposed” (p. 563).

increase and pleasurable feelings with a decrease of stimulus. We will, however, carefully preserve this assumption in its present highly indefinite form, until we succeed, if that is possible, in discovering what sort of relation exists between pleasure and unpleasure, on the one hand, and fluctuations in the amounts of stimulus affecting mental life, on the other. *It is certain that many very various relations of this kind, and not very simple ones, are possible.* (p. 566)

Whether an organism is impinged upon by an external stimulus or provoked from within by an internal drive, Freud postulates that in each case the pleasure principle will require a reduction in the tension or “pressure” that is disrupting its organic homeostasis. Curiously enough however, Freud is compelled to conclude his brief discussion on the universality of the pleasure principle with a very significant qualification. Regarding the apparently straightforward dynamics of pleasure and un-pleasure in their correspondence to states of lesser and greater tension Freud remarks, “It is certain that many very various relations of this kind, and not very simple ones, are possible”. Here, Freud surreptitiously calls into question the necessity of posing an inverse relation between pleasure and tension, be it from an external or internal source. Indeed, his central assumption that pleasure is only produced by a *decrease* in somatic-psychical tension is precisely the performed “conventional” concept of his drive theory that he already in “Drives and Their Vicissitudes” begins to interrogate.

Eventually, Freud (1989) reconsiders his most basic assumptions about the nature of human pleasure in his last great treatise on drive – *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*. He begins his exposition by concisely restating his prior hypothesis regarding the nature of the pleasure principle.

We have decided to relate pleasure and un-pleasure to the quantity of excitation that is present in the mind but is not in anyway ‘bound’; and to relate them in such a manner that un-pleasure corresponds to an *increase* in the quantity of excitation and pleasure to a *diminution*. What we are implying by this is not a simple relation between the strength of the feelings of pleasure and un-pleasure and the corresponding modifications in the quantity of excitation; least of all — in the view of all we have been taught by psycho-physiology — are we suggesting any direct proportional ratio: the factor that determines the feeling is probably the amount of increase or diminution in the quantity of excitation *in a given period of time.* (p. 595)

This succinct summary provides the necessary context for his ensuing departures. Freud postulates that the pleasure principle is challenged by two main sources of resistance: the impediments of external reality to the attainment of satisfaction and the ego's (internal) striving for self-preservation. Again, just as before, Freud sets up an opposition between external reality (corresponding to the external "stimulus" in "Drives and Their Vicissitudes") and internal reality (the force of ego-preservation as an internal drive). He emphasizes that these two sources of resistance are not alike, but neither do they constitute an easy diametric opposition. Freud argues that the resistance put up by external reality poses a contingent impasse that can be overcome by patience and calculation. External reality thus imposes the reality principle which is nothing more than a temporary rerouting or tempering of the pleasure principle.<sup>11</sup> The ego's predilection towards self-preservation, however, constitutes a necessary, unavoidable impasse to the pleasure principle, and it is here that a "beyond" of the pleasure principle is obscurely manifested. Freud writes,

In the course of things it happens again and again that individual instinct or parts of instincts turn out to be incompatible in their aims or demands with the remaining ones, which are able to combine into the inclusive unity of the ego. The former are then split off from this unity by the process of repression, held back at the lower levels of psychical development and cut off, to begin with, from the possibility of satisfaction. If they succeed subsequently, as can so easily happen with repressed sexual instincts, in struggling through, by roundabout paths, to a direct or to a substitutive satisfaction, *that event, which would in other cases have been an opportunity for pleasure, is felt by the ego as unpleasurable.* (p. 597)

Freud argues that some drives, presumably the ego-preservation drives, are incompatible with other drives, namely the sexual drives, and this causes an internal conflict that produces the ego as a (meta)psychological artifact and a source of repression. The above text suggests that the emergence of certain libidinally cathected drive representations into

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<sup>11</sup> "We know that the pleasure principle is proper to a primary method of working on the part of the mental apparatus, but that, from the point of view of the self-preservation of the organism among the difficulties of the external world, it is from the outset insufficient and even highly dangerous. Under the influence of the ego's instincts of self-preservation, the *pleasure principle* is replaced by the *reality principle*. This latter principle does not abandon the intention of ultimately attaining pleasure, but it nevertheless demands and carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of possibilities of attaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure" (p. 596).

consciousness is defended against even without the added “external” prohibition against sexual gratification imposed by the father. This is certainly not the commonly received image of Freud since we typically attribute resistance to sexual drive satisfaction as deriving from exposure to the father’s prohibition and / or identification with the ego-ideal – that is, resistance from some external source or agency and not immanent within the organism itself. A slightly closer and more adventurous reading of the above text however can extrapolate a much more fraught scenario. Notice that Freud says “individual instincts *or parts of instincts* turn out to be incompatible in their aims and demands with other instincts”. This speculation that “parts of instincts” may be incompatible with other “parts of instincts” is a subtle but important hint that Freud secretly entertains a different model of drive antagonism than the one he explicitly enumerates — one, perhaps, that he even defends himself against. The implicit drive theory suggested by the conflict between “parts of instincts” rather than, say, “whole instincts”, is the notion that ego-preservation does not originally constitute a discrete agency or force in its own right but is rather driven by the sexual drive itself. This suggests that the ego’s “drive” for self-preservation is a result of a *splitting* of the sexual drive, that it is a by-product or expression of a dehiscence immanent to the sexual drive. This extrapolated drive theory, which I claim is implicit in Freud’s text, would seem to be duly corroborated by the panoply of neurotic illnesses whose various repetitive symptoms often not only impede / replace the pursuit of direct sexual gratification, but even contravene, if not militate against the basic homeostatic requirements of the organism, such as attaining adequate nutrition and sleep, thereby increasing somatic-psychical “quantities of excitation” rather than relieving the organism of excess excitation in accordance with the standard pleasure principle. These speculations, however, still leave the cause of this splitting of the sexual drive a mystery, particularly if this splitting is construed as somehow an innate, natural propensity of human being rather than induced strictly by “external factors”.<sup>12</sup>

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud inches precipitously close to suggesting an immanent splitting of the sexual drive itself, but shirks back from this radical formulation to endorse a disappointingly conventional proto-mythical binary opposition between Eros (the life drive) and Thanatos (the death drive) in order to account for the twists and turns of drive. The surprising incongruence of the primary clinical evidence that Freud references in support of his new drive theory – war neurosis and children’s games – is symptomatic of the peculiar asymmetry between “self-preservation” and “sexuality”, “external” and “internal”, that he is attempting to delineate. Freud views a soldier’s re-living or re-experiencing of a traumatic event as an attempt to bind that trauma to some kind of (meaningful) representation, in Lacanian terms to Symbolize the Real, and thus retroactively preserve the ego / self that had been externally threatened. The *Fort / Da* game played by Freud’s grandson, in which the child represents his mother’s departures and arrivals in fantasy by hiding and retrieving a cotton ball, appears to Freud to have the very same goal of symbolizing a trauma after the fact and thus constituting an archaic form of the ego-preservation function. The primary difference between these two examples, of course, is that the soldier’s war trauma is a contingent trauma (external but unnecessary) while the frustration of the child by the mother’s increasing inaccessibility is a necessary trauma (external and necessary). The key question Freud pondered was why, even after a trauma is “bound” or “cathected” by representation, does it continue to

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<sup>12</sup> Such as the Law of the Father, Culture, etc.

be repeated via mental representations in a manner that still causes at least some amount, if not considerable, suffering? As I have suggested, one possible answer, implicit in Freud's thought, is that the impulse for self-preservation becomes, in a way, "sexualized", producing a uniquely human form of pleasure-in-pain (*jouissance*) derived from ego-preservation in the absence of any external threat – an immanent beyond of the pleasure principle. This depiction of the Freudian death drive distills the notion of internal drive conflict into a most condensed nodal point. The drive for ego-preservation / the death drive, is a concealed immanent split of the sexual drive / the life drive, which introduces a traumatic tendency of the ego's self-preservation (from the perspective of the organism and its homeostatic pleasure principle) as repetition gone awry. In order to further explicate the precise link between the ego and the death drive, I will now turn to Lacan's notions of Alienation and Separation as two logical moments in the constitution of subjectivity, specifically as a subject of language and the Other. I will illustrate these concepts with the help of an exemplary clinical case study by one of Lacan's most important psychoanalytic antecedents<sup>13</sup>, the child analyst Melanie Klein.

Klein's (1987) seminal 1930 paper, "The Importance of Symbol Formation in the Development of the Ego" presents the case and treatment of "little Dick", a four-year-old boy trapped in an autistic state of pre-subjective development. Upon initially observing Dick's behavior Klein was struck by his conspicuous lack of anxiety and apparent indifference toward the presence or absence of his mother or nurse. She also noted that Dick was oddly uninterested in his surrounding environment or in occupying himself with any play activities. Most remarkable, however, was the condition of Dick's basic motor skills, which were woefully underdeveloped for a child his age, as well as his patent inability to distinguish his own body from objects in his immediate vicinity. This last observation was dramatically confirmed by Dick's tendency to walk or run directly into both people and furniture, the difference between these not being evident to him, combined with his alarming insensitivity to the pain that must have resulted from these collisions. In short, it was all but apparent to Klein that Dick had no awareness of himself as an individual person defined by the limits of a unique spatio-temporal embodiment. From a Lacanian perspective however, what is undoubtedly the single most important factor of Dick's clinical picture, providing a key to decipher the logic of his manifest symptoms, is his particular way of using language. Klein's description of this bears quoting at length.

For the most part he simply strung sounds together in a meaningless way, and certain noises he constantly repeated. When he did speak he generally used his meager vocabulary incorrectly. *But it was not only that he was unable to make himself intelligible: he had no wish to do so. More than that one could see that Dick was*

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<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Melanie Klein's work is a major inspiration, if not a condition of possibility, for Lacan's own intellectual development. For a detailed account of the relation between Klein and Lacan see Kate Briggs (2002) "The Gift of Absence: Lacan on Sublimation and Feminine Sexuation".

*antagonistic to his mother, an attitude that expressed itself in the fact that he often did the very opposite of what was expected of him.* For instance, if she succeeded in getting him to say certain words after her, he often entirely altered them, though at other times he could pronounce the same words perfectly. Again, sometimes he would repeat the words correctly but would go on repeating them in an incessant mechanical way until everyone round him was sick and tired of them. *Both these modes of behavior are different from that of a neurotic child. When the neurotic child expresses opposition in the form of defiance and when he expresses obedience (even accompanied by an excess of anxiety) he does so with a certain understanding and some sort of reference to the thing or person concerned. But Dick's opposition and obedience lacked both affect and understanding.* Then too, when he hurt himself, he displayed very considerable insensitivity to pain and felt nothing of the desire, so universal with little children, to be comforted and petted. (p. 98)

Considering this description in tandem with further biographical information on Dick's family life provided by Klein, one can reasonably speculate that Dick's autism resulted from an early and profound emotional rejection by his mother. The possibility of a psychogenic etiology in *some* (i.e. *not all*) instances of childhood autism is supported by the pioneering work of Leo Kanner who first proposed the notion of early infantile autism in 1943. Kanner contended that the principle causal factor in psychogenic autism are emotionally frigid parents, "who are typically obsessed by details but lacking in feeling".<sup>14</sup> Klein documents that while Dick was given adequate attention and a live-in nurse routinely attended to his everyday needs, he was not provided with the heartfelt emotional warmth and tender affection that most healthy infants receive. An alternative way to frame Dick's predicament, introducing a more properly psychoanalytic assessment to his case, is that he did not occupy any place in his mother's desire.<sup>15</sup> From a Lacanian perspective, the result of this massive dearth in the Other's desire is that Dick either actively negated or was simply unable to register the dimension of the Other that his mother would have incarnated for him had her desire been in evidence through the tone of her voice, the feel of her touch, and the look of her gaze. The demands she issued to him, for instance to pronounce a certain word correctly, conveyed a lack of maternal warmth and desire for Dick, and almost seemed to provoke their own repudiation.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See Silvia Tendlarz (2003) *Childhood Psychosis: A Lacanian Perspective*

<sup>15</sup> Indeed, it is apparent from Klein's account that Dick's mother exhibited an overwhelming ambivalence towards Dick and often outwardly rejected him.

<sup>16</sup> Regarding the status of the Other in early infantile autism, Rosine Lefort (1994)

Dick's problem was likely not *initially* at the level of an organically disrupted cognitive development (although, of course, it is impossible to definitively rule that out) but rather an inability to establish a primary (yet by no means symmetrical, as I will show) transitive identification<sup>17</sup> with his mOther, premised upon a mutually shared and wholly amorphous desire, which would have provided the foundation for all future (inter)subjective possibilities defined as characteristic stances adopted towards the Other's enigmatic desire. Because of the impossibility for Dick to share in his mother's desire he was denied even the chance of attaining a rudimentary psychotic subject position wherein his entire body could have been metaphorically substituted as an answer to the Other's desire, thereby constituting a situation that could be accounted for in Lacanian terms as *total* alienation – such a metaphoric substitution could only have been possible had Dick been admitted entrance to the Other's desire in the first place. Instead, as child psychologist Silvia Tendlarz (2003) notes, “[autistic] children experience the external world as a threat from the start. Every action performed by someone else is perceived as an intrusion (and this would include feeding, looking after the child's body, or even the simple presence of someone else). One can explain Kanner's position from a Lacanian perspective: without the Symbolic order, care is experienced as an intrusion” (p. 9). Considering Dick's predicament, it is clear that he has not assented to becoming a subject of the Other's demand through which a Symbolic order is originally installed since he has been prevented from (and has thus rejected) taking up residence in the Other's desire.

### ***Structure of the Lacanian Subject I: Alienation, Demand, Drive***

A Subject of Demand in Lacanian theory is exemplified by an infant or child who has agreed, albeit tacitly, to an initial instance of alienation in the Symbolic order – the Other as an initially foreign medium of representation through which a child's physical needs are necessarily expressed and consequently distorted.<sup>18</sup> Typically, alienation is said to

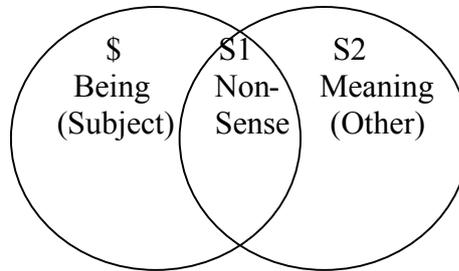
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writes, “What characterized Marie-Francoise's object relation was that there was no Other— indeed, there was no small other either — and that for her I was an object among the other objects. This does not mean that I was not in a way privileged... she distinguished me from the other objects by treating me in a special way: my privilege was to receive a series of monumental slaps... Such was the contact that Marie-Francoise had with me on September 30<sup>th</sup>, which concerned the muscular more than the scopic and which, in that sense, *aimed at destroying me rather than seeing me*” (p. 223).

<sup>17</sup> Rosine Lefort (1994) observes, “The Other could not be established as separate without Nadia's attempting to fulfill it — filling my mouth with the cracker or the toy car. The image of the Other she wanted to fulfill was also her own image: the sucking noises she made when she put some object or other into my mouth were evidence of this. To fulfill me in order to fulfill herself — that was transitivity in action, which is at the basis of the most archaic form of identification, where it is not just a question of consuming an object to be fulfilled *but also of the Other not suffering and not losing anything in the process: refusal that the Other be barred*” (p. 37).

<sup>18</sup> This distortion occurs since a child's cries, presumably indicating discomfort of some kind, must inevitably be given a specific interpretation by its parents, “Is she hungry, thirsty, hot, cold, tired, etc.?” This interpretation, leading to precise concrete

occur when a child “submits” to the domain of the Symbolic by acknowledging their name or some other word, as a signifier that represents them to the Other as the field or “locus” of all further signifiers. The logical operation of alienation is represented by the following diagram:



In alienation, the pre-Symbolic being of an infant is rendered asunder by signification and subsequently transfigured into a divided subject – a subject divided at the uncertain intersection between Being and Meaning. As Bruce Fink (1995) has emphasized however, alienation by itself only provides the psychical *condition of possibility* for a subject (p. 52). Since alienation is formulated in Lacanian theory as constituting a contingent but nevertheless *logical* moment (as opposed to an *empirical* event per se or even less to a cognitive “developmental stage” with all its implications of teleological necessity) that irrevocably structures the future possibilities of a child’s psychical experience, it is difficult if not impossible to objectively pinpoint its exact occurrence. The best one can do is to qualify its “ex-sistence” using the ambiguous future anterior tense which has the distinct advantage of reducing the connotations of an objectively observable empirical occurrence to its subjective logical effects – a child *will have been* alienated in so far as s/he testifies to or exhibits a certain relationship to the Other.<sup>19</sup> What then are the telltale signs of an alienated subject, for example, with regard to the case of Melanie Klein’s little Dick?

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actions to alleviate the child (and the parents), may be a more or less accurate interpretation of the child’s demand, nevertheless it is impossible to prove that it will be in perfect correspondence with his / her Real need.

<sup>19</sup> It is certainly legitimate to question why there appears to be such an overwhelming emphasis in Lacanian epistemology on these “logical moments” that ultimately engender specific subjective relations to the Other (i.e., obsessional neurosis, hysteria, phobia, the perversions / personality disorder, and the psychoses) at the seeming expense of any empirical or phenomenological inquiry. A possible Lacanian reply is that since the “object” of psychoanalytic inquiry is the unconscious, it is by definition impossible to study it somehow through direct inspection, intrinsically, or “in itself”, as a biologist studies a living system such as a cell. The existence of the unconscious cannot be definitively proven once and for all but only nominated in the mode of an ethical decision by acknowledging and remaining attentive to its effects. These effects must be read or interpreted, not primarily at the level of manifest behavior, but by attention to speech where the Other discourse of the unconscious can occasionally be heard.

Accepting alienation in the Symbolic order – and thus in the mOther’s demand – entails a basic willingness or ability to *recognize* her pronouncements as demands. To take the most paradigmatic example, an infant or young child who has passed through alienation will recognize its name being called (thus responding to a demand) by his mother or primary caregiver and will be able to call out to her with some variant of “Mama” in return. While this scenario presents the rather prosaic and seemingly inevitable picture of a mother-infant bond, it in fact presupposes that quite a significant and by no means biologically necessary transformation has occurred in the child’s psychical life. This is because the act of acknowledging the mother’s demands in the sense of an elementary self-reflexive re-cognition also implicitly involves inadvertently affirming a harsh reality – “I am a separate being from my mother, *and subject to her every whim*”. Thus even if a child who *has* undergone alienation refuses to comply with his mother’s demands, insisting that they are unfair or unjust – something of an inevitability it would seem from time to time – he nevertheless retains a fundamental awareness of himself as a separate individual upon whom demands are placed and who can in principle make demands on others (perhaps to demand that his mother reconsider or retract her own “exorbitant” demands). Indeed, the child who vehemently protests against and rejects the mother’s demands unwittingly demonstrates that he situates himself entirely with respect to them, that they are the disavowed condition of possibility<sup>20</sup> for all his ostensibly “autonomous” activities. As Melanie Klein (1987) observes, “When the neurotic child expresses opposition in the form of defiance and when he expresses obedience (even accompanied by an excess of anxiety) he does so with a certain understanding and some sort of reference to the thing or person concerned. But Dick’s opposition and obedience lacked both affect and understanding” (p. 98). The explicit rejection of the mother’s demand by the neurotic child in Klein’s example belies its more fundamental and implicit acceptance, a basic recognition that entails not only what Lacan calls alienation or, synonymously, an initial “splitting of the subject”<sup>21</sup>, but also what Freud originally referred to as “primary repression”.

In contrast to Klein’s neurotic child that exhibits both understanding and affect when he opposes the Other’s demand, Dick’s relation to demand is much more ambiguous. Sometimes he appears to violently reject it, but in a way that displays neither understanding nor affect. At other times he seems to grudgingly or gleefully accept it, yet again in manner that indicates he does not really comprehend what is at stake. While at a certain level Dick can vaguely intuit his mother’s demands (evidenced by his ability upon occasion to pronounce words correctly), he simply does not recognize them as demands addressed specifically to him *as a discrete individual* and thus conversely he cannot / will not recognize his mother as a *separate and distinct external locus* from where these demands are issued. Although Dick had reached the age of toddlerhood, his mal-adapted behavior and above all his use of language suggests that no instance of alienation had yet occurred which would have imposed a rudimentary Symbolic structuring upon his psychical experience of the world. In an important sense, the “psychical” dimension as such, the very division between “soma” and “psyche” has not yet occurred for Dick. A passing observer of Dick’s situation might very well assume he is suffering from some kind of innate cognitive deficit, perhaps genetic or a result of pre-natal / birth complications, but nevertheless a malfunction at the level of (neuro)biological

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<sup>20</sup> And simultaneously, of course, the condition of impossibility.

<sup>21</sup> With the caveat that this splitting is actually constitutive of the subject.

functioning. We know from Klein's case description, however, that there has been a marked disturbance in the relation between Dick and his mother due to the preponderance of her ambivalence and, indeed, her lack of desire for Dick.

Klein's (1987) speculations on the etiology of Dick's "arrested development" differ substantially from the notion of a primordial pre-egoic defense against a lack of maternal desire. Rather, she believed that the root cause of Dick's pathology stemmed from his nascent ego's inability to accommodate the anxiety aroused by unconscious sadistic fantasies directed against his mother's body and the imagined retaliations that would ensue from his father's penis as a result. Thus Klein's first intervention is to attempt to symbolize this supposedly repressed fantasy life to Dick and thereby render it accessible to his conscious awareness. She recounts,

When I showed him the toys I had put ready, he looked at them without the faintest interest. I took a big train and put it beside a smaller one and called them 'Daddy-train' and 'Dick-train'. Thereupon he picked up the train I called 'Dick' and made it roll to the window and said 'Station'. I explained: 'The station is mummy; Dick is going into mummy'. He left the train, ran into the space between the outer and inner doors of the room, shut himself in, saying 'dark' and ran out again directly. He went through this performance several times. I explained to him: 'It is dark inside mummy. Dick is inside dark mummy'. Meantime he picked up the train again, but soon ran back into the space between the doors. While I was saying that he was going into dark mummy, he said twice in a questioning way: 'Nurse?' I answered: 'Nurse is soon coming', and this he repeated and used the words later quite correctly, retaining them in his mind. The next time he came he behaved in just the same way. But this time he ran right out of the room into the dark entrance hall. He put the 'Dick' train there too and insisted on its staying there. He kept constantly asking: 'Nurse coming?' In the third analytic hour he behaved in the same way, except that besides running into the hall and between the doors, he also ran behind the chest of drawers. There he was seized by anxiety, and for the first time called me to him. Apprehension was now evident in the way in which he repeatedly asked for his nurse, and, when the hour was over, he

greeted her with quite unusual delight. *We see that simultaneously with the appearance of anxiety there had emerged a sense of dependence, first on me and then on the nurse, and at the same time he had begun to be interested in the words I used to soothe him and, contrary to his usual behavior, had repeated them and remembered them.* (p. 102)

Should we then take these remarkable changes as conclusive proof that Klein's theory of pre-Oedipal fantasy life is in fact correct? Klein's intervention clearly induces a momentous shift in Dick's subjective experience. While Klein was no doubt convinced by the veracity of her speculations given the remarkable progress of the therapy, an alternative explanation can be provided through a Lacanian perspective. From this vantage point it is crucial to examine exactly how the nature of Klein's symbolic intervention precipitates Dick as a subject of demand. Whereas before Dick behaved somewhat akin to a wind-up automaton exhibiting little or no sense of conscious volition, he is now capable of symbolizing his own experience to an Other (by repeatedly going into the closet and saying "dark"), making a demand on an Other (by asking for "Nurse?"), and exhibiting a simultaneous sense of anxiety and desire through his speech (desire for his nurse, anxiety at being away from her). It is especially notable that Dick's feeling of anxiety and his sense of dependence emerge together at the precise moment he is able to meaningfully represent himself to an Other and regard the Other's speech as constituting a message for him.

Let us take a more precise look at Klein's intervention. She begins by offering Dick two trains, distinguishing the larger one as "Daddy-train" and the smaller one as "Dick-train". Dick then proceeds to roll his train to the window where he proclaims the signifier "Station". Such a remark must have seemed of some significance to Klein (indeed, the Train / Station couplet was the only conceptual-verbal opposition Dick was capable of making) and she immediately seized the opportunity to graft an unadulterated Oedipal scenario upon a new Symbolic distinction that spontaneously emerged in the interstices between her own signifying designations (Dick-train / Daddy-Train) and Dick's original opposition (Train / Station). Notably, Klein's original signifying constellation Daddy-train / Dick-train made no impression upon Dick whatsoever, however, her improvised Dick-Train / Mummy-Station arrangement, taking a cue from Dick himself, produced dramatic results. Is this because "Mummy" is represented by the signifier "Station" in Dick's unconscious, as Klein implicitly suggests? What other possible explanation can be given for Dick's almost volatile reaction? Rather than viewing Klein's intervention as a successful analytic interpretation of an unconscious infantile fantasy (although that is not out of the question), it can *also* be understood as successfully inscribing a primordial Symbolic distinction between Dick and his first Other, thereby establishing a subject / Other division where such a division had not previously existed. In other words, from a Lacanian perspective Klein's intervention had the effect of alienating Dick in the Symbolic order and thereby producing him as a Subject of Demand — a subject capable of recognizing the Other's speech as a message specifically *for him* and of directing a demand back to the Other. The pertinent question to consider then is, why was Klein's

initial Daddy-Train / Dick-Train of no consequence to Dick's subjective positioning while her improvised Dick-Train / Mummy-Station makes of him a subject of demand?

Rosine Lefort's psychoanalytic work with psychotic and autistic children, documented with singular clarity in her pathbreaking (1994) study *Birth of The Other*, convincingly demonstrates through case material how the dimension or field of the Other as a subjective psychical experience can be established through a primordial signifying operation which produces the Other as a lacking, holed, or incomplete Other. She contends that what is at stake in constituting the Other is the capacity for the small subject to appropriate objects from the mOther's body so that it might plug up, that is, "repress", its own lack. Real objects of biological need are transformed into Symbolic objects of psychical demand to the extent that they are regarded by an incipient subject as originally belonging to the Other and constituting gifts from this Other. Such gifts are literally detached from or at least fantasmatically detachable parts of the mOther's body. In so far as these "objects" originate from the Other, they are "partial" objects instituting partial drives since they are objects that the Other has lost.<sup>22</sup> There can thus be no direct *relationship* with an Other *as such*, a whole or complete Other, but only a mediated relationship with a lacking Other which is mediated precisely by the partial objects that have been appropriated from the Other and render it lacking. The proto-Symbolic or representational valence of these objects<sup>23</sup> is originally that they indicate a loss or gift from the Other's domain. For an incipient subject the primordial signified of any object, what imbues this object with *semantic resonance* is that it represents a *loss / gift* from the Other. One can conclude that Meaning / Representation as such, *in its zero degree*, is consubstantial with loss – and not just any loss – but specifically the Other's loss.<sup>24</sup> Thus the very dimension of the Other is paradoxically established *at the moment when there is something missing from it* – something that has been appropriated by the subject. Conversely, the alienated subject, or the subject of drive, is established *at the moment when it returns the Other's loss or gift from itself back to the Other*.<sup>25</sup> Lefort's work is particularly compelling since she shows in a very bodily and visceral way how a literal piece or part of the Other establishes the dimension of the Other as a "place of lack" and therefore as a *locus of signification (the original meaning of which is loss itself)*. This is not to say, however, that the drive object is a signifier proper, an actual word that represents and sustains the dimension of the Other as a place of lack. What then of the signifier itself, as opposed to the object? If this account of the co-emergence of subject and Other through "object relations" is indeed viable, then what is the precise role of the Symbolic dimension that Klein has so emphatically demonstrated in the case of little Dick?

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<sup>22</sup> Lefort (1994) argues, "There is only one type of object: the drive object; it is an object that takes its place in a montage, the circuit of the drives, which absolutely implicates the Other and deprives the object of its Real dimension by marking it as a loss. *The drive object is an object that the subject recognizes as signifying a loss for the Other*". (p. 327)

<sup>23</sup> Their psychological as opposed to simply biological meaning.

<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that the drive object will become correlated not only with the Other's loss but also a sign of the Other's love.

<sup>25</sup> This complex operation of returning the object to the Other, which retroactively establishes the subject of drive, will be clarified shortly.

Lefort argues in her case study “Nadia, Or the Mirror” that the communicating of an original signifying opposition to a psychotic infant — “Nadia” / “Mama” — has the effect of producing this child as a subject of demand and enables her to adopt *three* distinctive subjective positions in relation to the Other whereas before none of these subject positions were possible. Lefort writes,

On December 10<sup>th</sup>, my calling her by her name had an effect of separation: she lost the inclusion through the eye, found my real body, and encountered in it the two sides of her true relation to me: that she could take in it the place of the metaphoric object, that is to say, the object that had fallen from it; or, by reversal, Nadia’s calling me “mama”, she could put this body at a signifying distance. In concrete terms this metaphor was the horror of being stuck to me, of being a part of my body, of being my breast; the metonymy, the signifying distance, was her foot that she held out to me, my hand that she took, her “mama” that she sent out as an echo of my calling her by name. From then on, the body of the Other that I was, was to be at the center of this pre-specular phase in two ways. On the one hand it was an object of contemplation; on the other, it was the carrier of objects *a*. In it, she was seeking both love and the drive object. She oscillated incessantly between her unconditional demand for love and the aggressivity that sought to take away the object from my body. *This oscillation can be described as ambivalence; her search for love put her in the position of making herself my object, a metaphorical position, and her quest for the object introduced her into the register of this object on my body, the signifier, the metonymic position.* (p. 66)

By Lefort imposing the signifying opposition “Nadia” / “Mama” between herself and Nadia, she is able to effectuate their separation from an impossible amorphous Real where *no-body* exists, just as Klein achieves with Dick. In order to maintain a consistent use of terminology, however, this first separation should be understood as a subject’s *Alienation* in the Symbolic, wherein a subject and Other are initially established. After a division between subject and Other has been installed by a signifying opposition where one signifier “Nadia” represents a subject to another signifier “Mama”, there is now a question of bodies and the objects those bodies lack. The signifying couplet S1 / S2 designates subject and Other but, crucially, also produces a remainder – *object a* – a lack that *has no proper, definite place in either subject or Other but circulates precariously*

*and indeterminately between the two.* This circulation of object *a* is potentially dangerous for the subject of demand and must be continuously negotiated until a provisional solution is found via the second “logical moment” in the constitution of subjectivity – Separation.

As Lefort describes, the first impulse of the nascent subject is to place itself in the metaphoric position, that is, to regard its entire body as the object of the Other’s lack, the object that is missing from the Other and that could possibly complete it. In other words, the subject situates itself as a sacrificial object of *love* for the mOther and attempts to make up for her loss by metaphorically substituting itself as representative of the totality of her lack or desire (which the child has identified with), thereby annihilating the subject / Other distinction that had recently come into being. Although definitively adopting the metaphoric position would indeed commit the subject to psychosis since the Symbolic Other – the Other of lack – is dissolved by this metaphorical stance, the very fact that a metaphoric position is available to the subject indicates that an initial phase of alienation has already occurred, albeit tenuously. The second position that Nadia adopts is to call out to her “Mama” and to offer her foot as a *sign of love*, rather than her whole body. Lefort qualifies both of these actions as metonymic in the sense that they preserve a “signifying distance” between subject and Other rather than collapsing it. Moreover, Nadia’s foot as object *a* can be understood as metonymic in so far as it offers a part of her to *represent* all of her as such – an operation that maintains her as a subject in the Symbolic (represented by S1 “Nadia” for S2 “Mama”) but, crucially, as a subject of lack, a subject without the object *a*. The third position Nadia begins experimenting, associated with nascent sexuality / aggression rather than love, is the appropriating of objects *a* from the body of the Other. This position has the benefit of allowing the subject access to the object of libidinal satisfaction but also proves to be a very tenuous position since the “completed” subject eventually inevitably slips back into being the metaphorical object of the Other’s lack or loss – a position that threatens subjectivity and the distinctive pleasure of the emerging self.<sup>26</sup> As Lefort shows, the distance opened up by the subject’s acceding to representation by a signifier can either be preserved and extended by a metonymic exchange of partial objects and the continued use of proper names, which serve to variously demarcate the domains of lacking subject and lacking Other, or it can be collapsed if the subject constitutes itself solely as an object of love that incarnates the Other’s loss or lack – the Other’s drive object.

In the analytic literature there is another better known case of a child newly constituted as a subject of demand – Freud’s grandson busily at play with his *Fort / Da* game famously observed and commented on by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Freud interprets his grandson’s game of throwing a cotton reel out of sight, saying *Fort* (Gone), and dragging it back to him, exclaiming *Da* (Here), as the child representing the comings and goings of his mother and attempting to achieve a fantasmatic sense of mastery over them. What complicates matters for Freud is his observation that the child would, “as a rule”, only play at the first half of the game and that the second half, which visibly brought the boy greater satisfaction, constituted the exception. Attempting to deduce the obscure motives for a game that would appear to cause his grandson more pain than it would pleasure, Freud (1989) speculates,

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<sup>26</sup> Here then would be the place to situate the sadistic pre-Oedipal fantasy life described by Klein, after the occurrence of Alienation.

At the outset he was in a *passive* situation — he was overpowered by the experience [of his mother's absence]; but, by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took on an *active* part. These efforts might be put down to an instinct for mastery that was acting independently of whether the memory was in itself pleasurable or not. (p. 600)

While Freud's interpretation of this game's underlying motive seems sensible enough and even intuitively correct, Lacan (1998) provides a different interpretation of the *Fort / Da* game in his *Seminar XI* that at first sight appears diametrically opposed to Freud's own.

When Freud grasps the repetition involved in the game played by his grandson, in the reiterated *fort-da*, he may indeed point out that the child makes up for the effect of his mother's disappearance by making himself the agent of it – but this phenomena is of secondary importance... For the game of the cotton reel is the subject's answer to what the mother's absence has created on the frontier of his domain – the edge of his cradle – namely, a *ditch*, around which one can only play at jumping. This reel is not the mother reduced to a little ball... it is a small part of the subject that detaches itself from him while still remaining his, still retained. (p. 62)

The question thus arises, how, if at all, are we to reconcile Freud's and Lacan's divergent interpretations of the *Fort / Da* game repeated so indefatigably by Freud's grandson? While Freud was convinced that the cotton reel represented the boy's mother, Lacan maintains that it is in fact a piece of the subject *himself* that he plays at detaching. Is Lacan's interpretation simply correct and Freud's wrong? If Lacan thought this was the case surely he would have been more vocal about it. Instead, he remarks rather off-handedly that the phenomena Freud observes "is of secondary importance".

The key to deciphering the basic compatibility of Freud's and Lacan's apparently contradictory interpretations of the *Fort / Da* game is to recognize that they constitute two distinct positions of the *metonymic activity* of a subject who has undergone an initial alienation in the Other's demand but has not yet achieved a durable separation through the Other's desire. Freud's interpretation that the cotton reel represents the boy's mother corresponds to the notion that, by fantasmatically representing her presence and absence, the boy is trying to control their occurrences in subjective fantasy, rather than be directly submitted to the exigencies of an unmitigated Real, the mother's actual departures and

arrivals. While he plays, as a rule, mostly at the *Fort* / Gone portion of the game, thereby himself controlling his mother's departures, he also occasionally indulges in the *Da* / Here part of the game, ostensibly taking the mother for himself as a partial object of gratification. Freud believes that the greater frequency of the *Fort* portion of the game is as an archaic manifestation of Thanatos or the death drive, a compulsive repetition that traumatizes the conscious self. Lacan's emphasis that the cotton reel is in fact a detachable part of the boy, however, allows his activity to be construed as *metonymically placating* the Other with something in his stead, a piece of him rather than all of him.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, what Lacan allows us to see very clearly in the example of the *Fort* / *Da* game is how the relinquishing of object *a*, the "piece" of Freud's grandson in the guise of a cotton reel, is linked with locating the signifier in the field of the Other – *Fort*. *Da* might then be understood as a signifier that represents the subject himself and his fantasmatic re-appropriation of the drive object from the Other's domain. The *Da* portion of the game is indulged in far less often by Freud's grandson as it would entail his disappearance as subject, since a subject in possession of the drive object is implicitly at risk of becoming the Other's "metaphorical" drive object. While the metonymic "gift" in the *Fort* portion of the game has the benefit of momentarily staying off the Other's implacable vortex and ensuring a place for the subject, it has the serious drawback of compelling the subject to sacrifice object *a*, the libidinal Thing that satisfies the subject's (sexual) drive. Lacan's interpretation shows us that Freud's grandchild, through his playing the *Fort* / *Da* game, preserves himself as subject in the Symbolic register only by for(t)feiting a piece of himself to the Other (*Fort*). Freud's observation that the greater frequency of *Fort* rather than *Da* is the manifestation of an archaic "death drive" beyond the pleasure principle can be interpreted as the traumatic *jouissance*, the pleasure-in-pain, that the subject experiences by *maintaining* himself as a subject of the signifier.<sup>28</sup>

As I have argued, a nascent subject can situate itself either in a metaphoric position as an archaic incarnation of the Other's drive object or metonymically sacrifice a piece of itself as the price for establishing / positioning itself in the Symbolic order. I also introduced *three* subtle yet important distinctions that exemplify a crucial *asymmetry*: the Other's metaphorical drive object / loss, the Other's metonymical drive object / loss, and the subject's metonymical drive object / loss. The asymmetry here is that while the Other can have both metaphorical and metonymic drive objects, the subject cannot *have* a drive object in the metaphoric position because it *is* the Other's drive object when in that position. With this asymmetry in mind, the logical moment of alienation can be framed as

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<sup>27</sup> Lacan (1998) states, "Through the function of the object *a* the subject separates himself off, ceases to be linked to the vacillation of being, in the sense that it forms the essence of alienation" (p. 258). I would argue that here Lacan is referring the metonymic activity of the subject relinquishing object *a* to the Other in order to sustain himself as a lacking subject of the signifier. This activity would cease, or at least temporarily suspend, the vacillation between *being* object *a* for the *Other* (love) or having object *a* for oneself (aggression / drive satisfaction), neither of which are sustainable positions.

<sup>28</sup> Lacan (1998) states, "The distinction between the life and death drive is true in as much as it manifests *two aspects of the drive*. But this is only on condition that one sees all the sexual drives as articulated at the level of signification in the unconscious, in as much as what they bring out is death— *death as signifier and nothing but signifier*, for can it be said that there is a being-for-death?" (p. 257)

the subject's *impossible choice* between *being* the Other's drive object or (retroactively) *having* had object *a* but relinquishing it in order to maintain the subject / Other boundary. This forced choice substantially rationalizes and clarifies the theoretical problematic introduced by Freud in *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*, although in a manner that is admittedly not immediately obvious. Freud's notions of Eros, love, and the pleasure principle can now be read as the metaphoric tendency of the subject to situate itself as the Other's drive object which leads towards an eradication of the subject / Other distinction. Conversely, his notions of Thanatos, death drive, and beyond the pleasure principle can be situated as the metonymic striving of the subject oriented towards preserving and consolidating the subject / Other boundary through remaining in the Symbolic and sacrificing the drive object. This application of Lacan's concept of alienation to Freud's myth of the timeless Eros / Thanatos antagonism is certainly counterintuitive – in this reading it is precisely the “death drive” which is the agency that preserves the ego or self! The death drive is thus intimately linked with repetition, a signifying repetition exemplified in the *Fort / Da* game of Freud's grandson that acts to preserve the nascent ego, even at the expense of the subject's drive satisfaction and biological need. Clearly, the choice of alienation as an impossible or forced choice in an important sense *remains impossible* until a further separation consolidates “what will have been”. Alienation can thus be succinctly described as an impossible choice between the metaphoric and the metonymic positions of the drive object / subject.

It is truly remarkable that after Klein's intervention, Dick engages in the very same “Gone” game immortalized by Freud's grandson. Klein (1987) relates,

During the third analytic hour, however, he also for the first time, looked at the toys with interest, in which an *aggressive tendency* was evident. He pointed to a little coal-cart and said: “Cut”. I gave him a pair of scissors, and he tried to scratch the little pieces of black wood which represented coal, but he could not hold the scissors. Acting on a glance which he gave me, I cut the pieces of wood out of the cart, whereupon he threw the damaged cart *and its contents* into a drawer and said, “Gone”.

(p. 103)

How can we understand Dick's demand for Klein to cut out a chunk of coal from the coal-cart combined with his ensuing impulse to dispose of *both* the cart and its contents into a drawer, exclaiming ‘Gone’? Considering the ambiguous parallax status of the drive object at the moment of alienation, we might presume that these two gestures of Dick correspond to his situating the object in metonymic and metaphoric positions. From one side of the partial object parallax, Dick's newly found aggression, related to his emergence as a proto-subject, compels him to metonymically appropriate a drive object – the coal – from the coal-cart that presumably represents his mother and thereby performing a subject / Other division. From the other side of this parallax however, Dick inverts / retracts his aggressive impulse and attempts to erase the division he has just

created by disposing both coal and coal-cart into a drawer where they hence disappear – a metaphorical gesture *par excellence* wherein the coal represents Dick as an object of sacrificial love that completes his mOther's loss. It is notable, however, that Dick does not enact this metaphorical operation by directly placing the coal back in the cart, but only indirectly by *representing* how this subject position entails a return to nothingness.<sup>29</sup> While Klein's treatment of little Dick brings him beyond the threshold of alienation, it is unclear if this alienation is consolidated by Lacan's second logical moment in the constitution of subjectivity – Separation.

### **Structure of the Lacanian Subject II: Separation, Fantasy, Desire**

As I have demonstrated, alienation in the Other's demand leaves the subject entirely at the mercy of an omnipotent / voracious lacking Other – omnipotent because it is regarded by the subject as lacking either the subject itself or the object *a* as what is “in the subject more than the subject”. Through a metonymic sacrificing of the drive object the subject attempts to maintain its autonomy, but at an unacceptable price, the relinquishing of object *a*. Re-appropriating object *a*, while (potentially) satisfying the subject's biological need and drive satisfaction<sup>30</sup>, always entails a risk of subjective aphanisis / annihilation since it will expose the subject again to a potentially voracious lacking Other. This situation is clearly not psychically sustainable, and Lacan explains that the Other's demand must be staved off in a more durable way. Following Freud, Lacan controversially claims that this separation is effectuated through the Oedipus complex, a heated rivalry with the child's father that subsides only with an eventual recognition of the father's dominance and his Law as reigning over both mother and child. Lacan's formalization of the Freudian Oedipus complex through a creative appropriation of Saussure's structural linguistics constitutes the very cornerstone of his psychoanalytic theory. Lacan presents an unprecedented analysis of the father's role in separating child from mother which highlights for the first time the fundamentally linguistic / Symbolic dimension involved in such a separation. Rather than positing the father as someone whose interventions in the mother-child relationship fulfills a natural role, Lacan denatured the Freudian father by distinguishing between its Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic components. The overarching question / theme I would like to explore in this section is: How does a subject's internalizing / identifying with the Name-of-the-Father effect a subject's separation, consolidate its alienation, inaugurate fantasy, and shelter the subject from the Other's demand by introducing it to the Other's desire?

As Lefort's example of Nadia illustrates, a nascent subject begins by considering itself metaphorically as the Other's loss or lack, and thus believes that it is the sole object of the Other's desire. Yet very rare is the mother who takes her child as the one and only object of her desire, and even if this happens, it is likely due to what she “sees in” her child – an element of her fantasy – above and beyond any direct satisfaction she attains with the child's body. Also, as Melanie Klein's case of little Dick aptly demonstrates, it is entirely possible for a mother to want nothing at all to do her child. This, however, is the exception rather than the rule, and has the likely effect of preventing alienation and thus

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<sup>29</sup> Perhaps indicative of a defensive tendency towards sacrificing his newly acquired autonomy.

<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that it is possible to achieve drive satisfaction without sustaining the body's biological needs — anorexia is a prominent example of this.

foreclosing the very condition of possibility for subjectivity. Most often an infant is compelled to join with the Other's lack, to be its drive object, or to maintain itself metonymically through identification with the signifier and the sacrificing of the drive object. Lacan, agreeing with Freud, holds that the child's father is the primary person who introduces an opening into the suffocating closer characteristic of the early mother-child relationship. He argues that in most Western patriarchal cultures, the biological father of the child is the person who is culturally mandated with the task of limiting a child's access to the realm of maternal enjoyment. In so far as this culture is patriarchal however, it is generally boys more than girls who receive the sharpest and most definitive separation.<sup>31</sup> Lacanian analysts as well as developmental psychologists believe that the kind of separation an infant or child experiences, the time when it occurs, and its affective intensity constitute crucial factors in a child's psychical development. Indeed, Lacan claims that the type of separation (or lack of separation) an infant undergoes determines the type of fundamental fantasy it will foment about its place or position with respect to the Other's desire. What Lacan insists upon is that separation should *not* be regarded first and foremost as an empirical occurrence but rather understood as a psychical event. This is not because the empirical occurrence of separation, the actual removal of a child from its mother's ministrations, is unimportant, but because it is only the subjective experience of psychical separation that induces the structuring effect that will impart a lasting shape to subjectivity.

In order to designate empirical from psychical separation Lacan carefully distinguishes between the Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic dimensions of the father. A Real father can be understood simply as the biological organism whose genetic information contributes to the production of a child. The Real father may henceforth abscond and never be seen or heard from again or alternatively remain present to raise his child – the point is that the Real father, while contributing to the production of a child, does not necessarily take on the paternal role of raising the child and becoming the major authority figure in its life. An Imaginary father, in comparison, corresponds more or less to the prototypical image of the Freudian father, the empirical authoritative father who is often viewed as a *rival* for the affections of the mother in a child's psychical experience. The Imaginary father is thus the jealous father, the father who is jealous of the mother-child intimacy, and the person who the child jealously imagines to unfairly deprive it of (maternal) enjoyment.<sup>32</sup> Finally, the Symbolic father is a unique signifier, typically the actual Name-of-the-Father in Western cultures, that provides a precise designation in language of what the mOther wants beyond her child, the "law" of her desire.<sup>33</sup> As Lacan emphasizes, the Name-of-

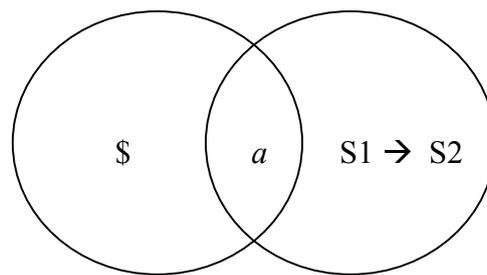
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<sup>31</sup> Bruce Fink (1997) notes, "Fathers... tend to view their sons as greater rivals for their mother's attention than their daughters, and are thus more vigilant in their efforts to separate son's from mothers than they are in their efforts to separate daughters from mothers. Indeed, they are often happy to let their daughters be a source of solace, consolations, and joy to the mother, sensing that the mother's relationship with her daughters makes up for certain inadequacies in the mother's relationship with her husband" (p. 257).

<sup>32</sup> Lorenzo Chiesa (2007) notes, "... by depriving the mother of the child *qua* phallus, the (imaginary) father also simultaneously dispels the child's mistaken belief that he is the only object of his mother's desire. For both mother and child, what is prohibited by the (imaginary) father is their incestuous relationship ('You will not sleep with your mother'; 'You will not re-integrate your offspring.')" (p. 76)

<sup>33</sup> The law of her desire both in the sense of how and what she desires as well what

the-Father, is an element of language that may very well *not* correspond to the child's actual father. Its importance has to do with the fact that this particular element of language, this signifier, is linked with a law or prohibition against the child's wish to conjoin its own lack with its mOther's (or vice versa), its alienating endeavor, albeit highly ambivalent, to be the sole object of the mother's love and desire. The Name-of-the-Father is thought of by Lacan to be a kind of metaphor since it is a replacement of one thing (the indeterminate Real of the mOther's desire) by something to which there is no previous (semantic) relation – a signifier that is meaningless at first but subsequently provides the condition of possibility for phallic meaning. The logical moment of Separation can be represented by the following diagram:



The concept of separation is best understood with reference to what has previously occurred in alienation. In alienation there is an opposition between two signifiers (“Fort” and “Da”, for example), an opposition which first establishes the fields of Other and subject. Signifier, subject, and object *a* are all present in the logical moment of alienation and the same goes for separation, however in separation these elements undergo a fundamental shift of configuration due to the re-structuring effect of the paternal metaphor or Name-of-the-Father. The first thing to notice about the diagram of separation is that it differs from alienation only in so far as object *a*, rather than S1, occupies the intersection between the subject and the Other. This is surprising, since what defines the logical moment of separation is the subject's encounter with the (Symbolic) Name-of-the-Father which substitutes for the (Real) Desire-of-the-Mother, instantiates a first transcendent law (that is, a law applying equally to mother and child). When interpreting the diagrams of alienation and separation, it is important to understand that S1 and S2 do not have the same status in each. In alienation, S1 corresponds to “Da”, the signifier representing the subject's metonymic (but nevertheless potentially dangerous) appropriation of object *a* from the Other, and S2 corresponds to “Fort”, the signifier in the field of the Other and the subject's relinquishing of the object *a*. In separation however, S1 designates the Name-of-the-Father while S2 represents all further signifiers, including all of the mOther's overt demands. What the diagram of separation depicts is a shift of S1 to the field of the Other, which now contains both S1 (the Name-of-the-Father as the Enigmatic Signifier of the Other's desire) and S2 (the mOther's demands as Imaginary signifieds, now interpreted with reference to S1 / the Name-of-the-Father), *and* the positioning / prohibiting of object *a* at the intersection between subject and Other, S1 providing a kind of barrier to object *a*. As such, object *a*, which was once a Real impossibility – the indeterminate metaphoric and metonymic positions of the subject in

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her desire submits or acquiesces to.

alienation – becomes Symbolically prohibited, and subsequently reimagined in a phallic way.

To give a similarly detailed account of Separation as I have tried with Alienation will not be possible here, but I will attempt a schematic outline of its major features. As I have mentioned, separation occurs when an alienated subject encounters the Name-of-the-Father as a unique signifier that reliably refers to some aspect of the mOther's desire that extends beyond the subject. In so far as this signifier designates the actual father or a father figure, it introduces a distinct Imaginary of what is being *signified* by the mOther's desire, and this Imaginary Lacan frankly relates to the image of the father as a "phallic Gestalt" because he possesses a penis. Thus Lacan distinguishes between the Symbolic phallus, which is the Name-of-the-Father as a signifier, and the imaginary phallus, which relates to the image of completion (from the child's perspective) of the father's "well-endowed" body and therefore to a certain signified of the mOther's desire. The logical point of separation, however, is that a child is prevented by the Name-of-the-Father from becoming the mOther's "phallus", the object that the child imagines to be her loss / lack / desire and thus the object that could complete her. As Bruce Fink (1995) notes, "While alienation is based on a very skewed kind of *either / or*, separation is based on a *neither / nor*" (p. 53). Fink continues,

This approximate gloss on separation posits that a rift is induced in the hypothetical mother-child unity due to the very nature of desire and that this rift leads to the advent of object *a*. Object *a* can be understood here as the remainder produced when the hypothetical unity breaks down, as a last trace of that unity, a last *reminder* thereof. By cleaving to that rem(a)inder, the split subject though expelled from the Other, can sustain the illusion of wholeness; by clinging to object *a* the subject is able to ignore his division. That is precisely what Lacan means by fantasy, and he formalizes it with the matheme  $\$ \diamond a$ , which is to be read: the divided subject in relation to object *a*. It is in the subject's complex relation to object *a* that he or she achieves a fantasmatic sense of wholeness, completeness, fulfillment, and well-being. (p. 53)

Here, Fink describes separation as the logical moment that produces object *a*. As my previous argument would imply however, this is not quite the case since object *a* as a paradoxical "object of lack" already shows up as the effect of a subject's alienation in the Symbolic order, but as a drive object rather than an object of desire. In alienation either the Other possessed the subject as drive object, completely ("metaphorically") or in part ("metonymically"), or the subject appropriated object *a* from the Other at risk of subjective aphanasis / fading. While the object *a* in alienation designates the subject's or Other's lack, it is an actual object that can be appropriated by *either* one, however in such

a way that creates an impossible situation for both. In separation however, *neither* the subject *nor* the Other can appropriate the object *a* due to the prohibition introduced by the Name-of-the-Father as the law of the Other's desire. The Name-of-the-Father can be understood as instituting a repression not of need by the Other's demand (which occurs in alienation), but of the Other's / subject's situation of mutually unsustainable demand by the Other's desire. In separation the subject is barred from being the sole object of the Other's desire and introduced not only to a signifier of the Other's desire but also to an imaginary / fantasmatic scenario of what that Other's desire might be – a fantasized scenario that imagines the subject's completion through appropriating that which causes the Other's desire.

## Conclusion

This article has attempted an overview of Lacan's concepts of Alienation (in the Other's Demand) and Separation (through the Other's Desire) in order to demonstrate their continuing theoretical and clinical relevance for psychoanalysis. These concepts, conceived of as logical moments mediated by language and imparting a structuring effect to subjectivity / psychological experience, were formalized by Lacan during his Seminar XI given in 1964, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Still today, they have the capacity to suggest and inform research regarding personality, psychopathology, and psychological structure. From a theoretical vantage point, the logical moment of Alienation may be seen as a hinge distinguishing autistic from psychotic subject positions, whereas Separation may be seen as a hinge distinguishing psychotic from perverse and neurotic subject positions. Recent work in theoretical psychology and psychiatry, such as that presented by Antoine Mooij in his 2012 book *Psychiatry as a Human Science: Phenomenological, Hermeneutical and Lacanian Perspectives*, shows the continuing relevance of the concept of subject positioning for an accounting of subjective psychological experience and its implications for therapeutic treatment.

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