#### Their fantasies of effectiveness lead to serial policy failure and the continuation of exploitation through corporate control. Only our analysis can expose the imaginary longings of the political psyche – this is a pre-requisite to any effective form of policymaking.

Fotaki 10 (Marianna Fotaki is a Professor of Business Ethics at Warwick Business School and a visiting professor at The University of Manchester, “Why do public policies fail so often? Exploring health policy-making as an imaginary and symbolic construction”, Organization) AqN recut OL

The origins of the ‘choice for all’ fantasy, and every other fantasy, are to be found in the need of the subject to be ‘recognized’ in the symbolic Other in order to exist. Let us not forget that the motivation and impetus for the Lacanian subject is always the desire to retrieve the illusory unity that has been sacrificed upon entry into the symbolic order via language. Language operates by signifying the object in its absence and this is why desire always contains loss within it. Without this loss of the sense of a unified identity and the fantasy it gives rise to, there would be no signification and no symbolic life. In other words, social reality is structured by our imaginary misperceptions, as well as our unsymbolizable unconscious longings, which have been given up (repressed) into the unconscious in the socialization process. Such is, for example, the fantasy of effective policy, of purposeful organization and of harmonious society—all stemming from an impossible desire for unity. The Lacanian perspective unveils the imaginary nature of such strivings which underpins various social and political projects, including idealistic and idealized public policies and dismisses them as vain attempts to counteract our ontological and temporal finitude as human beings. It also reveals why these unacknowledged imaginary and symbolic functions are indispensable for bringing policies to life, even if they cannot be achieved. Such is the example of pursuing ‘Choice for All’ (see Milburn, 2003; Reid, 2003) in a public health system with finite resources and tangible opportunity costs. It offers a stark testimony of the impossibility of realizing the policy objectives it proclaims, despite or perhaps because of its universalistic (and omnipotent) aspirations. Satisfaction of all individual wants will not be possible without limiting someone else’s access to resources and therefore options. This contravenes the founding collectivist principles of the NHS of offering equal access to all according to need. The attempt to attain the fantasy of the impossible can also explain policy recycling and repetition of the same ideas, despite many documented failures. However, the desire to attain the lost part of the self, which is the Lacanian objet petit á, and which in the case of (freedom of) patient choice stands in for freedom from the bounds of the human predicament, instigates the articulation of such and other improbable policies, only if and when the opportune moment arrives. Political expediency, a shift in dominant societal discourses and other massive social changes can all prompt such a move. Once policy makers are implicitly entrusted with formulating aspirational rather than realizable policies, their unworkable aspects are then further reinforced by psychological processes such as organizational defences in health settings. These involve separating off and denying unwanted reality (Heginbotham, 1999; Obholzer and Zagier-Roberts, 1994; Vince and Broussine, 1996). The illusory nature of many public health policies is evidenced whenever they are being formulated in denial of their contextual reality. An idealistic policy such as Choice for All must not be tested against reality and must therefore remain exterior to the organizations that will implement it. Socially sanctioned defensive reactions such as splitting between the idealized policy and its imperfect implementation, and the projection of blame onto various organizational members, are hence employed to protect against discarding this illusion. Object relations theorists came up with various elaborate theories on how social institutions enact psychodynamic mechanisms to defend individuals and groups from existential anxieties (see De Board, 1978; Obholzer, 1994).6 I have also suggested, that health policy must be idealistic to fulfil the impossible goal of the health care system, namely to defend us against the anxiety about disease and dying, a defence it can never fully accomplish (Fotaki, 2006). Although such defences might be necessary to keep destructive fears of annihilation at bay, at the same time they act as a dysfunctional barrier against attaining awareness of our own constructs and ultimately against our attempts to acknowledge fantasy and to survive its failure. To sum up, Kleinian analysis suggests how splits between policy design and organizational reality operate to ‘protect’ us from coming to terms with unrealistic policies, but the Lacanian conception of subjectivity explains why policies are designed in such way and why the splits are there in the first place. In a Lacanian perspective, while the policy tool can be seen to act as a defence against societal anxieties, these anxieties are not simply generated by the health risks themselves, but are sites in which the already existing (subjective) anxiety is expressed collectively. Put differently, we are all anxious anyway as, for Lacan, anxiety is the fear ‘of the lack of lack’ and this is why these symbolic manifestations of extant general anxiety float from one public issue to another, as was helpfully put by one reviewer.7 This leads me now to the central claim I make in this article, namely, that the imaginary construction of policy-making, if unacknowledged, leads to multiple splits and ultimately underscores its failure. The example of patient choice is so evidently suffused with unrealizable promises, as is chosen to highlight the undesirable effects of unrecognized fantasies in the policy-making process and the difficulty of translating value driven statements into organizational realities. The use of abstract economic models simplifying human decisions and devoiding them of real life messiness, and the Labour government’s belated enchantment with the market and competition (Le Grand, 2006; Le Grand and Dixon, 2006) to solve the insoluble efficiency/equity dilemma, ensures that policy formulation is distanced from organizational reality. When such realization of an intrinsic conflict between fantasy and reality and the potential for failure is absent from policy making, defensive mechanisms (projection and splitting) cascade down into health care organizations. These are necessary in order to maintain the splits between a good policy and the flawed implementation should the policy fail, as it must, and for apportioning the blame towards those who must be held responsible for policy failure. Politicians blame health professionals for not meeting their impossible ideals, insisting that more managers are required in order to police their choices. Various groups of health professionals are pitted against each other (doctors versus managers or doctors versus nurses for example) as they are simultaneously idealized and denigrated, offering protection against the inevitability of failure of the unworkable policies while better policies are awaited in the future. Clearly, the process of articulating impossible policies and the difficulties involved in implementing them are all underscored by the idealization and defences around working in health care, as the seminal work of Menzies (1960) has illustrated. The alleged beneficiaries of policies are subject to idealization too: patient choice is after all introduced in the name of empowering the deserving users of services against the dominance of all-powerful professionals who do not always have their patents’ best interest in mind.8 Yet those who do not accept responsibilities for their health related choices are exempted from the category of deserving users as they are stigmatized and refused treatment (see the example of obese patients and smokers turned down by some health authorities in England—BBC, 2005). Inherent in New Labour’s project of modernization is the assumption that the modern citizen should be both managerial and entrepreneurial (Scourfield, 2007). The price of greater autonomy and involvement is that users must assume active responsibility for these activities, both for carrying them out and for their outcomes. This new form of ‘responsibilization’ corresponds to the new ways in which the governed are encouraged to act freely and rationally while conducting themselves in accordance with the appropriate (or approved) model of action (Burchell, 1993: 276, cited in Scourfield, 2007). Their subordinated citizenship then becomes doubly underlined by their ‘choice’ to have services arranged for them, while they are required to acquire the flexibility of ‘the person’ (Scourfield, 2007). Choice and independence are powerful concepts but dependency and interdependency are part of all our lives, for some of us more than others. It is clear that such policies invariably ignore the reality of non-uniform patients, who are themselves fragmented and divided subjects; more so in times of dislocation and stress Scourfield (2007) reminds us. But the Lacanian analysis of policy making does not simply suggest that the glorification of choice would not have been possible in the absence of an underlying fantasy. It gives us conceptual tools to explore how the inherent idealization involved in articulating aspirational policy objectives such as Choice for All, for example, might enable policy capture by powerful political groups and/ or organized interests for their own ideological and political ends. This is because various (conscious and less conscious) forms of political exploitation are more likely to occur when policy content coheres with the imaginary longings of the psyche. The desire for unity in the subject may be more easily written into political projects, especially when it is being translated into the language of the alleged wants of the disembodied and idealized patient and/or user of health care desiring the abstract notion of ‘choice’. Because choice for all could mean anything and appeal to everybody, it can be easily used as a vehicle to articulate the concerns of a particular segment of society (mostly the vocal and educated middle-classes). In reality, however, patient choice more often than not implies the co-option of calls for greater user empowerment into the neoliberal discourse of greater responsibility. This serves as an excuse for policies that are aimed at the retrenchment of the welfare state and the transfer of public responsibilities to the individual. Similarly, the discourse of inefficiency and irresponsiveness in public services is employed to legitimize managerialism as the sole remedy for these ills. However, this reframes the value of professional ethos and expertise by relegating them to the category of secondary attributes in order to establish neo-Taylorist methods of work as an uncontested norm for every professional group in the NHS (Newman et al., 2008).

#### The aff’s obsession with avoiding extinction assuming all solvency is another link

McGowan 13 Todd McGowan, 2013, “Enjoying What We Don’t Have: The Political Project of Psychoanalysis,” University of Nebraska Press/Lincoln and London,

Those who emphasize the importance of death at the expense of life do so because death is the source of value. The fact that life has an end, that we do not have an infinite amount of time to experience every possibility, means that we must value some things above others. Death creates hierar- chies of value, and these hierarchies are not only vehicles for oppression but the pathways through which what we do matters at all. Without the value that death provides, neither love nor ice cream nor friendship nor anything that we enjoy would have any special worth whatsoever. Having an infinite amount of time, we would have no incentive to opt for these experiences rather than other ones. We would be left unable to enjoy what seems to make life most worth living. Even though enjoyment itself is an experience of the infinite, an experi- ence of transcending the limits that regulate everyday activity, it nonetheless depends on the limits of finitude. When one enjoys, one accesses the infinite as a finite subject, and it is this contrast that renders enjoyment enjoyable. Without the limits of finitude, our experience of the infinite would become as tedious as our everyday lives (and in fact would become our everyday experience). Finitude provides the punctuation through which the infinite emerges as such. The struggle to assert the importance of death — the act of being in love with death, as bin Laden claims that the Muslim youths are — is a mode of avowing one’s allegiance to the infinite enjoyment that death doesn’t extinguish but instead spawns.6 This is exactly why Martin Heidegger attacks what he sees as our modern inauthentic relationship to death. In Being and Time Heidegger sees our individual death as an absolute limit that has the effect of creating value for us. As he puts it, “With death, Dasein stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-for-being. This is a possibility in which the issue is nothing less than Dasein’s Being-in-the-world.”7 Without the anticipation of our own death, we flit through the world and fail to take up fully an attitude of care, the attitude most appropriate for our mode of being, according to Heidegger. Nothing really matters to those who have not recognized the approach of their own death. By depriving us of an authentic relationship to death, an ideology that proclaims life as the only value creates a valueless world where nothing matters to us. But of course the partisans of life are not actually eliminating death itself. They simply privilege life over death and see the world in terms of life rather than death, which would seem to leave the value-creating power of death intact. But this is not what happens. By privileging life and seeing death only in terms of life, we change the way we experience the world. Without the mediation that death provides, the system of pure life becomes a system utterly bereft of value.8 We can see this in the two great systems of modernity — science and capitalism. Both modern science and capitalism are systems structured around pure life.9 Neither recognizes any ontological limit but instead continually embarks on a project of constant change and expansion. The scientific quest for knowledge about the world moves forward without regard for humanitarian or ethical concerns, which is why ethicists incessantly try to reconcile scientific discoveries with morality after the fact. After sci- entists develop the ability to clone, for instance, we realize what cloning portends for our sense of identity and attempt to police the practice. After Oppenheimer helps to develop the atomic bomb, he addresses the world with pronouncements of its evil. But this rearguard action has nothing to do with science as such. Oppenheimer the humanist is not Oppenheimer the scientist.10 The same dynamic is visible with capitalism. As an economic system, it promotes constant evolution and change just as life itself does. Nothing can remain the same within the capitalist world because the production of value depends on the creation of the new commodity, and even the old commodities must be constantly given new forms or renewed in some way.11 Capitalism produces crises not because it can’t produce enough — crises of scarcity dominate the history of the noncapitalist world, not the capitalist one — but because it produces too much. The crisis of capitalism is always a crisis of overproduction. The capitalist economy suffocates from too much life, from excess, not from scarcity or death. Both science and capital- ism move forward without any acknowledged limit, which is why they are synonymous with modernity.12 Modernity emerges with the bracketing of death’s finitude and the belief that there is no barrier to human possibility.13 The problem with the exclusive focus on life at the expense of death is that it never finds enough life and thus remains perpetually dissatisfied. The limit of this project is, paradoxically, its own infinitude. It evokes what Hegel calls the bad infinite — an infinite that is wrongly conceived as having no relation at all to the finite. We succumb to the bad infinite when we pursue an unattainable object and fail to see that the only possible satisfaction rests in the pursuit itself. The bad infinite — the infinite of modernity — depends on a fundamental misrecognition. We continue on this path only as long as we believe that we might attain the final piece of the puzzle, and yet this piece is constitutively denied us by the structure of the system itself. We seek the commodity that would finally bring us complete satisfaction, but dissatisfaction is built into the commodity structure, just as obsoles- cence is built into the very fabric of our cars and computers. Like capital- ism, scientific inquiry cannot find a final answer: beneath atomic theory we find string theory, and beneath string theory we find something else. In both cases, the system prevents us from recognizing where our satisfac- tion lies; it diverts our focus away from our activity and onto the goal that we pursue. In this way, modernity produces the dissatisfaction that keeps it going. But it also produces another form of dissatisfaction that wants to arrest its forward movement. The further the project of modernity moves in the direction of life, the more forcefully the specter of fundamentalism will make its presence felt. The exclusive focus on life has the effect of producing eruptions of death. As the life-affirming logic of science and capitalism structures all societ- ies to an increasing extent, the space for the creation of value disappears. Modernity attempts to construct a symbolic space where there is no place for death and the limit that death represents. As opposed to the closed world of traditional society, modernity opens up an infinite universe.14 But this infinite universe is established through the repression of finitude. Explosions of fundamentalist violence represent the return of what modernity’s symbolic structure cannot accommodate. As Lacan puts it in his seminar on psychosis, “Whatever is refused in the symbolic order, in the sense of Verwerfung, reappears in the real.”15 Fundamentalist violence is blowback not simply in response to imperialist aggression, as the leftist common sense would have it. This violence marks the return of what modernity necessarily forecloses.

#### Language is fundamentally incomplete- there is always a gap in understanding and communicating needs. Subjectivity exists in the symbolic and is constituted by the existence within language and the immovable existence of the Lack, the inability to communicate needs due to the gap between signifiers and the signified. The Lack generates drives toward desires that we can never reach. Thus, the ROTB is to traverse the fantasy – that means exposing drives. Ruti 1

Ruti, Mari. “The Fall of Fantasies: A Lacanian Reading of Lack.” Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association, vol. 56, no. 2, June 2008, pp. 483–508, doi:10.1177/0003065108319687. OL

One of Lacan’s greatest innovations was to connect the subject’s con- stitutive negativity to language—to collective structures of signification and meaning production—in ways that provide a pioneering hypothesis of why and how lack comes to motivate the subject’s behavior in the world. Lacan explains that the subject’s sense of lack results from the processes of language acquisition that socialize the human infant into cultural systems of meaning—what Lacan calls the symbolic order (or “the Other”). Lacan proposes that prior to language acquisition, the child is not yet fully capable of differentiating between herself and the people and objects that surround her. She consequently possesses neither an inner life nor a social awareness. For these to emerge—for the child to enter a fully human existence—she needs to undergo a course of separa- tion that teaches her to recognize herself as distinct from the world. Freud theorized this course of separation in terms of the oedipus complex as a mechanism that severs the child’s dependence on her surroundings by forcing her to confront the painful fact that certain objects—most notably the mother or the father—remain erotically forbidden. Lacan in turn emphasizes that it is by internalizing the significatory codes of the sociosymbolic world that the child becomes aware of cultural interdic- tions and comes to regard herself as a discrete entity. In Lacanian terms, the process of internalizing the codes of language brings the child’s psychic life into being, making her capable of produc- ing meaning. The same way as the oedipus complex transforms the child from a creature ruled by primordial drives to one who enacts desire in culturally intelligible ways, language acquisition inserts the child into the world of collective rules and regulations (the world of the symbolic Other). This process is necessary not only because it teaches the child to conduct herself as a social and intersubjective entity, but also because it gives rise to more complex and advanced levels of internal organization. But it can also be coercive in the sense that it initiates the child into nor- mative—and frequently quite unequal and repressive—collective struc- tures, punishing all attempts to deviate from what the cultural order deems right and proper. In other words, it carries the force of prohibition, giving the child her first bitter taste of wanting what she cannot have. As a consequence, it generates lack—the relentless sense of incompleteness that characterizes human existence—as the melancholy underside of social subjectivity. Although most psychoanalytic approaches recognize the child’s sep- aration from her caretakers and the surrounding world as a pivotal moment of subject formation, they do not necessarily see lack as an inevitable corollary of this moment. For many of them, the child emerges from the process of individuation feeling wounded or insecure only if something about this process goes awry—as, for instance, when the parents for one reason or another fail to fully facilitate the child’s transi- tion to social subjectivity. What makes Lacan distinctive—and what makes his theory disagreeable to some—is that he believes the child’s awareness of lack and longing to be inescapable; it is, in a sense, the price the child pays for being able to enter the social realm of meanings and values. The signifier, insofar as it carries cultural prohibition, forces the child to realize that she is not invincible, that she operates within a social world that is much more powerful than she could ever be, and that there are parts of that world that she does not have access to. In this fashion, the signifier dispels the child’s primordial impression of being at one with the world, causing an irreparable inner rift or division; the very develop- mental course that empowers the child to materialize as a psychically autonomous entity is also what makes her feel lacking and self-alienated. That is, while language initiates an indispensable process of character formation, it also causes a kind of symbolic castration. What is lost in this process—what drains into the void of being—is the subject’s fantasy of self-sufficiency. This unfortunate event, Lacan suggests, is what the subject spends the rest of her life working through.4 Language generates lack. Lack in turn generates desire. While it is common to assume that desire is what is most “natural” about our lives, Lacan reveals the exact opposite, namely, that desire is a product of cul- ture—a function of the ways in which the signifiers of the social order cut into the child’s biological constitution. Indeed, a great deal has been made of the fact that, in Lacanian terms, desire emerges through the mortification and subordination of the body and of its unmediated enjoyment. The signi- fier violates—mutilates and dismembers—the body as a “thing,” as a spon- taneous nexus of drives that struggles for viability and fullness of being beyond the symbolic system into which it is inserted. As Slavoj Zˇizˇek (1992) explains: “Word is murder of a thing, not only in the elementary sense of implying its absence—by naming a thing, we treat it as absent, as dead, although it is still present—but above all in the sense of its radical *dissection:* the word ‘quarters’ the thing . . .” (p. 51).5 The signifier thus carves out the body in specific ways in order to give rise to a particular form of subjectivity and desire. It is in this sense that the subject is vulner- able to what Lacan calls the “agency of the signifier.” The course of indi- viduation initiated by the signifier may be necessary for the subject’s ability to orient herself in the world, but it simultaneously colonizes the presym- bolic body in ways that evacuate the body of its enjoyment. Lacan hence underscores that it is only when the body’s immediate enjoyment is sacrificed to the signifier that subjectivity as a site of social energy and desire comes into being. This privileging of the “passion of the signifier” (Lacan 1966b, p. 578) over the passion of the body is undoubtedly problematic in light of the denigration of the body—and particularly of fem- ininity as what always carries the indelible trace of the body—that has char- acterized Western thought at least since Plato and Aristotle.6 Yet Lacan also presents a poignant insight into the nature of subjectivity when he suggests that it is insofar as the signifier causes the subject to desire that she is com- pelled to turn outward—that she is persuaded to care about the contours and unfolding of the surrounding world.7 After all, without desire, the subject would have little curiosity regarding the things, objects, and beings that inhabit and make up the world. In this sense, it is precisely the subject’s per- sistent awareness of being less than fully realized that allows her to approach the world as a space of possibility. That is, it is only insofar as the subject experiences herself as needing something from the world that she has a con- ception of the world as a place that can potentially meet her yearnings and that might accordingly have something valuable to offer. In this manner, lack gives rise to a self that is open to—and ravenous for—the world. Because the world is filled with marvelous objects that entice the subject’s desire—because the world, though certainly full of limitations and deprivations, is also brimming with possibilities—the subject is compelled to reach beyond her solipsistic universe; she is given the gift of attentiveness. This turning outward is, moreover, not limited to an encounter with already existing objects, but entails the strong aspiration to bring new objects into being. Precisely because the subject can never attain a state of wholeness, she is driven to look for substitutes that might compen- sate for her sense of lack; she is motivated to invent objects and figures of meaning that can, momentarily at least, ease and contain the discomfort of alienation. In this paradoxical sense, rather than robbing the subject of inner richness and vitality, lack is the underpinning of everything that is potentially innovative about human life. Indeed, it is possible to envision the intricate productions and fabrications of the human psyche as vehicles through which the foundational lack of existence assumes a positive and tangible form. This in turn suggests that the subject’s ability to dwell within lack without seek- ing to close it—her ability to tarry with the negative, to express the matter in Zˇ izˇ ekian/Hegelian terms—is indispensable for her psychic aliveness. As a matter of fact, such tarrying with the negative could be argued to be the great- est of human achievements, for it transforms the terrors and midnights of the spirit into symbolic formations, imaginative undertakings, and sites of deli- cate beauty that make the world the absorbing and spellbinding place that it—in its most auspicious moments, at least—can be. The subject’s repeated attempts to fill the void within her being thus give rise to a whole host of creative endeavors. Or in more Lacanian terms, because the subject can never repossess the blissful state of pleni- tude that she imagines having lost, because the subject cannot attain what Lacan calls the Thing—the primordial object that promises unmediated enjoyment—she is driven to look for surrogates that might compensate for her lack. As Lacan observes in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959– 1960), the Thing—which inevitably remains obscure and unattainable— can be brought to life only through a series of substitutes. “If the Thing were not fundamentally veiled,” Lacan explains, “we wouldn’t be in the kind of relationship to it that obliges us, as the whole of psychic life is obliged, to encircle it or bypass it in order to conceive it” (p. 118). Precisely because the Thing is irrevocably lost, because it cannot be res- urrected in any immediate form, the subject scurries from signifier to sig- nifier to embody it obliquely. Like a potter who creates a vase around emptiness, “creates it, just like the mythical creator, *ex nihilo*, starting with a hole” (p. 121), the subject fashions a signifier, or an elaborate string or sequence of signifiers, from the void of her being.8 Lacan emphasizes that emptiness and fullness—the void of the vase and the possibility of filling it—are introduced to the world simultaneously (p. 120). In short, it is because we lack that we are prompted to create, and it is through our creative activity that we manage, in an always nec- essarily precarious manner, to withstand our lack. On this view, the sig- nifier is not merely what mortifies the body, but also what empowers the subject to move to an existential space beyond mortification by granting her the gift of creativity. In this context, it is important to specify that the translation of lack into creativity is not a matter of dialectical redemption in the sense of giv- ing the subject the ability to turn negativity into a definitive form of posi- tivity. The subject’s attempts to name her lack are transient at best, giving her access to no permanent meaning, no solid identity, no unitary narra- tive of self-actualization. Any fleeting state of fullness or positivity that the subject may be able to attain must always in the end dissolve back into negativity; any endeavor to erase lack only gives rise to new instances of lack. This implies that the process of filling lack must of necessity be con- tinually renewed. It cannot be brought to an end for the simple reason that the subject can never forge an object or a representation that would once and for all seal this lack. However, far from being a hindrance to existen- tial vitality, this intrinsic impossibility—the fact that every attempt to redeem lack unavoidably falls short of its mark—is what allows us, over and again, to take up the endless process of signifying beauty. As Kaja Silverman (2000) advances, “Our capacity to signify beauty has no limits. It is born of a loss which can never be adequately named, and whose con- sequence is, quite simply, the human imperative to engage in a ceaseless signification. It is finally this never-ending symbolization that the world wants from us” (p. 146). Lacan’s rendering of the subject’s relationship to the signifier is there- fore complex in the sense that although he consistently accentuates the subject’s relative helplessness vis-à-vis the larger systems of signification that envelop her, he at the same time suggests that it is only by virtue of her membership in the symbolic order that the subject possesses the capacity to make meaning in the first place. The symbolic, in other words, is not merely (or even primarily) a hegemonic structure that coerces the subject into its law, but also—as I have endeavored to illustrate—the foundation of her creative potentialities.9 Lacan in fact insists that though the subject can never master the signifier—let alone the signified—she enjoys a certain degree of imaginative leeway with respect to it. He describes this imaginative leeway as the subject’s capacity to make use of the “poetic function” of language (1966b, p. 264)—the fact that language by definition perpetuates the radical slipperiness, multiplicity, and poly- valence of meaning. The same way that Heidegger (1971) connects cre- ativity to the individual’s ability to dwell in the world in poetic rather than merely instrumental ways, Lacan envisions creativity in terms of the subject’s capacity to take a poetic approach to the world—an approach that is content to play with meaning without attempting to arrest it in unequivocal or transparent definitions.

#### This causes a psychic repression of the subject. They destroy the possibility for politics, ethics, and the value of life – controls the internal link to all other impacts.

Ruti ‘14 [mari, English, Toronto, Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society (2014) 19, 297–314)]

On the other hand, Lacan – again like Marcuse – recognizes that the symbolic order is repressive beyond the demands of subject formation, that it includes forms of violence that exceed the ubiquitous violence of the signifier. Indeed, even the violence of the signifier is not equally distributed, so that some of us are much more vulnerable to its injurious effects than others (consider, for instance, hate speech). Lacan does not necessarily talk about the unequal distribution of resources in the manner Marcuse does, but there is no doubt that his analysis of symbolic law as the Law of the Father elucidates a historically specific, deeply heteropatriarchal and hierarchical organization of social life. In point of fact, one reason I have taken a detour through Marcuse is to illustrate the obvious ways in which Lacan’s portraiture of the symbolic mirrors that of Marcuse’s explicitly historical account: what Marcuse calls “the performance principle,” Lacan calls the “service of goods.” Both thinkers identify the underpinnings of a social order dominated by the ideal of productivity – an ideal that is, moreover, placed in direct opposition to the pleasure principle. Both emphasize that the dominant morality of this symbolic – what Lacan calls “the morality of the master” – measures the merit of lives based on largely pragmatic criteria. And both acknowledge that the model citizen of this symbolic is a subject who shows up at work reliably every morning, performs its duties with a degree of diligence, does not let its desires get the better of its productivity, and seeks satisfaction (“enjoys”) in moderate, socially sanctioned ways. “Part of the world has resolutely turned in the directions of the service of goods,” Lacan writes, “thereby rejecting everything that has to do with the relationship of man to desire” (318). This, he adds, “is what is known as the postrevolutionary perspective” (318). In other words, the service of goods reflects the mindset of the levelheaded utilitarian subject who has deemed revolutionary change to be unrealistic. Lacan is here referring to the kind of depoliticization that is arguably the hallmark of Western subjectivity under capitalism. Lacan’s point is by no means, as critics such as Butler have suggested, that a different kind of symbolic is intrinsically impossible but rather that the configuration of subjectivity that Western modernity has produced – a subjectivity that has been subjected to a particular form of surplus-repression (the performance principle, the service of goods) – makes it virtually impossible for us to entertain the idea that the symbolic could be organized differently, that it could be centered around a different version of the reality principle. As Marcuse remarks, one reason the performance principle is so powerful is that it has managed to convince us that all alternatives to it are either utopian or otherwise unpalatable. Yet, for Marcuse, the fact that this principle has been so successful also points to the possibility of transcending it. As he states, “The very progress of civilization under the performance principle has attained a level of productivity at which the social demands upon instinctual energy to be spent in alienated labor could be considerably reduced. Consequently, the continued repressive organization of the instincts seems to be necessitated less by the ‘struggle for existence’ than by the interest in prolonging this struggle – by the interest in domination” (pp. 129–130). This is to say that there is really nothing besides social power that keeps us invested in the notion that our welfare demands relentless toil. The performance principle has outlived its usefulness in the sense that our collective productivity these days surpasses what is necessary for the provision of food, clothing, housing, and other basic amenities. The fact that these amenities have not yet reached all corners of the world, or even all corners of our own society (the homeless, innercity dwellers, etc.), is a function of domination (the unequal distribution of resources) rather than of any deficiencies of productivity. As a result, in Marcuse’s view, all we would need to do to bring about a more “non-repressive civilization” (p. 134) would be to refuse the parameters of the current symbolic; even something as simple as reducing the length of the working day would immediately realign our priorities, perhaps even impacting the very organization of our psychic lives. Our standard of living might drop somewhat, but we might also learn to assess the value of our lives according to other, less performance-oriented, measurements. Psychoanalysis, particularly Lacanian analysis, does not have a normative goal; it does not seek to tell us how we should desire but merely to explore the idiosyncratic contours of our desire. But this does not change the fact that Lacan, at least as a theorist, was exasperated by people’s inability to make their way out of the maze of the master’s morality, including its performance principle; he was frustrated by individuals who were so out of touch with the truth of their desire that they were willing to sacrifice this desire for the sake of social conformity and that they were, furthermore, willing to do so to the point of self-betrayal. As he explains, “What I call ‘giving ground relative to one’s desire’ is always accompanied in the destiny of the subject by some betrayal – you will observe it in every case and should note its importance. Either the subject betrays his own way, betrays himself, and the result is significant for him, or, more simply, he tolerates the fact that someone with whom he has more or less vowed to do something betrays his hope and doesn’t do for him what their pact entailed” (p. 321). Such a betrayal invariably results in the reassertion of the status quo, sending the subject back to the service of goods, what Lacan in this context calls “the common path” (p. 321). And given that desire, for Lacan, is “the metonymy of our being” (p. 321), betraying it in this way leads to the kind of psychic death that extinguishes the subject’s sense of agency. To use Lacan’s wording, “Doing things in the name of the good, and even more in the name of the good of the other, is something that is far from protecting us not only from guilt but also from all kinds of inner catastrophes” (p. 319). It is precisely such inner catastrophes that Lacanian clinical practice was designed to counter, though it may be Julia Kristeva – rather than Lacan himself – who has most clearly developed this interpretation of analytic work. Kristeva depicts psychoanalysis as a means of restoring the subject’s psychic aliveness, as an explicit revolt against the numbing impact of what she calls “the society of the spectacle” (2002, p. 4). This society of the spectacle – of technology, image, and speed – shares many parallels with Adorno’s “culture industry”: a flattened surface of the life world, a constriction of psychic space, a death of critical thought, the worship of efficiency over intellectual curiosity, and the incapacity to revolt. Against this backdrop, psychoanalysis – along with art, writing, and some forms of religious experience – offers, for Kristeva, a gateway to revolt, a way of resurrecting “the life of the mind” (a phrase Kristeva borrows from Hannah Arendt) through ongoing questioning, interrogation, and psychic recreation. “Freud founded psychoanalysis as an invitation to anamnesis in the goal of a rebirth, that is, a psychical restructuring,” Kristeva writes: “Through a narrative of free association and in the regenerative revolt against the old law (familial taboos, superego, ideals, oedipal or narcissistic limits, etc.) comes the singular autonomy of each, as well as a renewed link with the other” (2002, p. 8). In the context of my overall argument in this essay, it is worth stressing that it is “the desire of the subject” that, in Kristeva’s view, reserves a place “for initiative, autonomy” (2002, p. 11). This is in part because the “Freudian journey into the night of desire was followed by attention to the capacity to think: never one without the other” (2010, p. 41). In other words, the exploration of desire, in psychoanalysis, is akin to the critical (or at least curious) movement of thought – the very movement that Arendt also saw as vital to the life of the mind. This is why psychoanalysis has, Kristeva asserts, “the (unique?) privilege today of accompanying the emergence of new capacities of thinking/representing/thinking, beyond the frequent and increasingly noticeable disasters of psychosomatic space – capacities that are so many new bodies and new lives” (2010, pp. 41–42). Kristeva therefore draws the same link between desire and autonomy (in this instance, the capacity for critical thought) as Lacan does. Furthermore, to translate Kristeva’s point into Marcuse’s terminology, one might say that psychoanalysis, at least the kind of analysis that refuses to uphold social adaptation as a therapeutic goal, presents the possibility of sidestepping, or at the very least diminishing, the effects of surplus-repression. This, in turn, creates space for the truth of the subject’s desire in the Lacanian sense. This does not mean that repression as such is defeated. Quite the contrary, as we will see shortly, the truth of the subject’s desire is inextricable from the primary (constitutive) repression that accompanies subject formation. But as I have already suggested, the lifting of surplus-repression renders the imprint of primary repression more clearly discernable, for when surplus-repression is removed, what remains are the always highly singular outlines of primary repression. And if Lacan – like Marcuse – sought to remove surplus-repression, it was because he understood that it was on the level of primary repression (fundamental fantasies) that one could find the most basic building blocks of the subject’s psychic destiny; primary repression was the layer of psychic life that expressed something essential about the distinctive ways in which the pleasure principle, in the subject’s life, had become bound up with the repetition compulsion. This is why Lacan states, “If analysis has a meaning, desire is nothing other than that which supports an unconscious theme, the very articulation of that which roots us in a particular destiny, and that destiny demands insistently that the debt be paid, and desire keeps coming back, keeps returning, and situates us once again in a given track, the track of something that is specifically our business” (p. 319).According to Lacan, analysis aims to enable us to understand something about the eccentric specificity (or truth) of our most fundamental desire as well as about the track of destiny that this desire carves out for us (and that is therefore “specifically our business”). If it is indeed the case, as I have conceded, that most of us tend to be alienated from our desire, Lacanian analysis strives to undo this alienation by familiarizing us with the truth of this desire. This process entails, among other things, recognizing that the destiny we owe to this desire can never be definitively overcome, that the debt of desire can never be fully redeemed (for how are we to compensate the signifier for having brought us into being as subjects of desire?). Our destiny – which might initially coincide quite seamlessly with our repetition compulsion – consists of recurring efforts to pay off this debt, which is why it keeps ushering us to the same track of desire, the same nexus of psychic conundrums, our unconscious hope being that if we wear out the track of our desire by incessant reiteration, one day we might be able to absolve ourselves of our debt. But since we cannot, the only thing to be done is to “own” our destiny even as we might seek to mitigate its more painful dimensions. That is, the only way to arrive at the kind of psychic rebirth Kristeva is talking about is to take full responsibility for our (unconsciously generated) destiny. In the ethical act, our impulse is to embrace this destiny wholesale regardless of consequences (this is one way to understand what it means to plunge into the jouissance of the real). In analysis, the exploration of our destiny is more gradual, more self-reflexive. But in both cases, the point is not to obliterate our foundational destiny (or fundamental fantasies) but merely to elaborate it in more satisfying directions, away from the incapacitating effects of the repetition compulsion and toward the rewards of subjective autonomy. And, if we are to achieve this goal, nothing is more important than staying faithful to the truth of desire that, on the most elementary level, determines our destiny.

#### And the repetition of drives makes life the enemy and reifies the aff impact of extinction

Themi 08 (Tim, Prof @ Deakin U, “How Lacan’s Ethics Might Improve Our Understanding of Nietzsche’s Critique of Platonism: The Neurosis & Nihilism of a ‘Life’ Against Life,” *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 4.1-2, 2008) SJBE, recut from Harvard BoSu

For to circle in too close to the Thing which is ethically forbidden by our reality principles––yet too the real truth of much desire––does hardly give us pleasure at all but anguish of the heaviest kind. Even if done so only as a thought experiment; as a free-association. So go there we generally don’t, and our ‘realities’ reflect as much. But henceforth when desire builds up, damns and flares return of the Thing: this is how Lacan specifically characterises the move we might make that goes beyond the pleasure principle, whose other name for Freud is ‘death-drive’. There where there is no, not pleasure yet jouissance in the transgression that the Thing would bring, a jouissance of transgression which Lacan suggests is the most direct satisfaction of a drive humanly possible[48]. But it’s also one perhaps unconsciously masochistic, that which Freud writes up as being only preliminarily sadistic, in eventually expressing itself as an “unconscious need for punishment”[49]. And if indeed we are feeling guilty, then we may yet still seek to pay the price. Why? For unknowingly possessing and inadvertently re-accessing this Thing in our real, beyond the pleasure-reality principle, our moral transgressions casting shadow long into the unconscious we know next to nothing about, and refuse even to acknowledge.¶ Could it not be thusly then that our time is behind now a sadomasochistic, wilfully ignorant drive towards death for nigh the entire species? Such punishment would too overly suffice, to be sure, for even a two-millennium length in repression…¶ But with our advancements in technological power outmatching by far any correlative advance in the awareness gained as a whole of our prehistoric Thing within: the great 21st century ecological disaster that too many academics and activists now increasingly predict, seems more than just a little possible. But to this increasingly macabre scenario, we must also add the renewed proliferation of nuclear weapons which occurs, no less, amidst a world where vital resources for energy and democracy are wearing thin[50]. For just such reasons, wilful ignorance of the Thing now bares results which Lacan’s Ethics reveals as far too terrifyingly possible to rationally accept; given that we have the Thing armed to the teeth now from that primitive id-like part of the brain, with no Sovereign Good, and all the way into a nuclear age.¶ CONCLUSION: THE NEUROSIS & NIHILISM OF A ‘LIFE’ AGAINST LIFE.¶ This is why Lacan proposes that his enquiry into ethics must be one to go “more deeply into the notion of the real”(LE:11). Further into what he would rather call the real, given that previous notions of ‘nature’ have been too far ‘different’––from being far too Platonic––than his own; and because it’s the very exclusions in these previous notions which upon return, as return of excess, are yielding our most tragic problems.¶ Today when faced with problems of the magnitude of global warming––a special but by no means solo case of adverse environment change at present due to our physical treatment of the planet––we often think the answer is to be more moral, more good, and we are thankful when exponents of the Good in some way bring attention to the problem. However, the idea of the Good as introduced by Plato, and nigh all of its descendants whether secular, rationalist, religious or not, continue to predicate themselves on a radically false picture of the human-condition: if not still of the entire cosmos––which only then lines itself up aside of an age-old repression, a repression of das Ding, that Freudian Thing in our inner real which, when it returns after being disavowed and denied in the name of the Good too long, is even more devastating.¶ Presently we are accelerating along the path of what Lacan discloses as our civilisation’s “race towards destruction”, a “massive destruction”, “a resurgence of savagery”, snaking the paths traced out before us by the centuries long dominion of Western morality [51]; and the nihilism detected by Nietzsche before the turn of the 20th has never threatened to reach such the grand finale. But what I would have us take from this enquiry here is that this is not because we aren’t in accordance enough with a moral ideal of the Sovereign good, but rather, it’s because we aren’t in accordance enough with a proper understanding of the real. It’s because we still at some level think that being more moral, in accordance with the Good’s inherited repressive structures towards our drives, desire, and truthfulness about the real, is actually the answer to––rather than the source of––our most tragic problems.¶ The goal here is by no means then to encourage all to let their Things run wild––which would probably be nothing short of an instant conflagration––but this is why and precisely why we must desist from deluding ourselves under the tightening grip of a Sovereign Good, for this is precisely the move which cuts the Thing loose after pressing down for far too long, a slippery hand’s palming on the coils of a spring, forever readying the subsequent explosion. For when that which is really real––as opposed to what Christian-Platonism falsely called the ‘real’––is forced from mind, it can’t really disappear because it is real, and it tends to end up only in our gun-sights as an imaginary overlaying of an external other, when the signifier ‘enmity’ appears. The earth itself can even seem like the enemy after while, one which like Plato in his Phaedo, we might think then to escape from “as if from a prison”, and especially from “the bonds of the body”, in the hope that we may live one day without the earthly altogether[52]. Following such negations to their logical conclusion, life itself becomes enemy too, for as being made up of the earthly and organic, life could never be free of what it is in essence. And what is the death-drive Freud tells from the start, if not to return us sundry to that dust-bowl of the inorganic; as per that “second death”[53] fantasm Lacan salvages from the Monstre de Sade, which wills to go beyond the destruction of mere beings, by destroying too the principle from which fresh sets could emerge. Such negative devaluations of our earthly, organic life though are really of our own construction: as de Sade, like any pervert, is only the mirror which shows expressed what Platonic-neurotics are but hide inside––a cess-pit of loathing contempt for life, built up from the unconscious and disowned, distorted and damned up, built up, instinctual-ideational elements of their own subjective psyches, phobically ferocious of that Thingly real lying not so dormant, and readying within…¶ But is it now still possible as Nietzsche teaches to say ‘Yes’ to the real of nature both without and within––to return to it!––even though it is more frightful and we are less guaranteed protection of it than the Platonic history of metaphysicians taught? For with the further disclosures of The Ethics of Psychoanalysis––Lacan’s following up and extension of the meta-ethical implications of Freud: perhaps even Nietzsche, our great intellectual übermensch, may too have bitten off more snake-head than he could chew? From certain moments in Nietzsche’s texts we can perhaps interpret that he may have had this Thing in his sights, but saw nothing much to come of it, so instead, elected to turn away, though not without some perhaps hinted at self-amusement.[54]¶ But with psychoanalysis, rightly or wrongly, such truths are out. It doesn’t seem all positive at first, and perhaps it never entirely will. But we must not let this deeper disclosure desist us now from the core Nietzschean project of locating and overcoming the nihilism which begs us to take cover in idealising fictions, as if life as life is not worth living. Not because nihilism and the annihilation of the species is wrong in the sense of being immoral, but rather because it is bad art, mediocre art, and the ‘knowledge’ claims it trumpets on should only make us flare. If we are at our full intellectual and creative will to power, we can only consider such cultural-civil regressions as we saw on display with that whole propaganda comedy that surrounded the war for more oil in Iraq as infantile; the hapless results of sibling rivalries gone too far astray. But we must also resist being caught up in the imaginary of those who would only re-preach to us now of a return to the Good, who would only redeploy such versions of nihilism’s precursory defensive fictions, the pernicious ones, which would only then re-falsify our data, and leave us disappointed when the truth then re-emerges. Doing more harm than good does Platonism in the end by leaving us untrained for the real, with the habit instead to take some truth as ‘error’, and error as ‘truth’––as ‘real’––to the point even of epistemic dysfunction. Take the grotesque intellectual poverty of that whole Christian middle-ages for example, whence put into relation with the heights of Aristotle and his fellow Greeks, as Augustine and Aquinas amplified some of the worst bits of Platonism, and threw the rest into abyss.¶ The overcoming of the moralising good of Christian-Platonism though does by no means imply then a subsequent affirmation of all that brutal Roman like greed, slavery, decadence, circus-bread corruption and mindless colonial expansion that we’ve heard all about, and are hardly so free of with our corporate today––just ask a Latin-American for instance![55] For it is possible within the perspectives opened up by Nietzsche, Freud, Lacan, as Silvia Ons puts it, to view a social-historical or individual neurosis of any kind: including the expressed acted-out, perverse-sadistic form that escapes when the Good is temporarily loosed of its repressive grip––and say to the would be Platonist: ‘No, not that, that’s not a cure, that’s a mirage; that’s sheer fantasy, resentment, spite; that’s not a cure it will only make things worse; worse in a different way, but worse nonetheless!’¶ By greater mindfulness then, with guided affirmation towards even that fearsome Freudian Thing that The Ethics of Psychoanalysis has us find now in our inner natures: we can eventually again say ‘Yes’-to-life in such the way that it overcomes the nihilism of not caring too much whether we as individuals or species live or die, whether we as culture or civilisation advance or decline. But we can only do this with fullest efficacy by freeing ourselves of all that wasted neurosis sickness that feels it must deny our Thing like aspect of the real: because from all those Christian-Platonic prejudices of the Good, it has been taught that such ‘things’ are too far beneath it. We must continue instead to train ourselves to stare the real directly in the face, without flinching, and that’s all we can do at least to start. For unless we can continue to utilise, sublimate, enjoy and get a positive, well-guided jouissance out of all aspects of life––including that Freudian Ding in our real––then the chances are we’re going to be at least in part, happy enough in no longer living it: offering not even a puff of genuine political praxis! We either face up to the death-drive snaking long beneath the dank, hidden history of the un-real, anti-real Good of Platonism––or let the disowned, un-understood drive resurge of its own volition until it accidentally finishes us!

And the alt solves case bc we explain root cause, means any risk of a link means you negate

#### The alternative is to embrace the Lack. Instead of lying and painting fantasies of creating a whole subject, we must accept our status as in a state of perpetual lacking. Acknowledge its existence in order to understand how it affects our actions is a prerequisite to action. All perms are incoherent because it’s a sequencing question, since if we don’t first embrace the lack, all attempt to fill the lack fail. Ruti 2

Ruti, Mari. "Winnicott with Lacan: Living Creatively in a Postmodern World." American Imago, vol. 67 no. 3, 2010, p. 353-374. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/aim.2010.0016.

Let us consider Lacan first.1 As we know, Lacan’s theory of subject formation is premised on the notion of foundational lack or alienation. The transition from the Imaginary to the Symbolic—from preoedipal drives to the collective social space of signification and meaning production—is, for Lacan, a process of primordial wounding in the sense that the subject is gradually brought face to face with its own lack. While the internalization of the signifier brings the subject into existence as a creature of desire (thereby giving it access to a fully “human” existence), it simultaneously reveals that the surrounding world is much larger and more powerful than any individual subject could ever be—that the self is always merely a minor participant in a system of signification that operates quite independently of its “private” passions and preoccupations. In this manner, the signifier shatters the fantasies of omnipotence and wholeness that characterize the emerging ego of the mirror stage. One could, then, say that, in the Lacanian scenario, we purchase our social subjectivity at the price of narcissistic injury in the sense that we become culturally intelligible beings only insofar as we learn to love ourselves a bit less. It is worth noting right away that one of the things that drives a wedge between Lacan and Winnicott is that while Winnicott regards the ego as what allows the subject to enter into an increasingly complex relationship to the world, Lacan associates it primarily with narcissistic and overconfident fan- tasies that lend an illusory consistency to the subject’s psychic life. Lacan explains that the subject’s realization that it is not synonymous with the world, but rather a frail and faltering creature that needs continuously to negotiate its position in the world, introduces an apprehensive state of want and restless- ness that it finds difficult to tolerate and that it consequently endeavors to cover over by fantasy formations. In other words, because lack is devastating to admit to—because the subject experiences it as a debilitating wound—it is disposed to seek solace in fantasies that allow it to mask and ignore the reality of this lack. Such fantasies alleviate anxiety and fend off the threat of fragmentation because they enable the subject to consider itself as more unified and complete than it actually is; by concealing the traumatic split, tear, or rift within the subject’s psychic life, they render its identity (seemingly) reli- able and immediately readable. As a result, they all too easily lead the subject to believe that it can come to know itself in a definitive fashion, thereby preventing it from recognizing that “knowing” one version of itself may well function as a defense against other, perhaps less reassuring, versions. One consequence of the subject’s dependence on such ego- gratifying fantasies is that they mislead it to seek self-fulfillment through the famous *objet petit a*—the object cause of desire that the subject believes will return to it the precious sense of whole- ness that it imagines having lost.2 In this scenario, the subject searches for meaning outside of itself, in an object of desire that seems to contain the enigmatic *objet a*. Lacan’s goal, in this context, is to enable the subject to perceive that this fantasmatic quest for secure foundations is a waste of its psychic energies. His aim is to convince the subject that the *objet a* will never give it the meaning of its existence, but will, instead, lead it down an ever-widening spiral of existential deadends. How, then, does the Lacanian subject find meaning in its life? Lacan’s answer is that it is only by accepting lack as a precondition of its existence—by welcoming and embracing the primordial wound inflicted by the signifier—that the subject can begin to weave the threads of its life into an existentially evocative tapestry. It is, in other words, only by exchanging its ego for language, its narcissistic fantasies for the meaning mak- ing capacities of the signifier, that the subject can begin to ask constructive questions about its life.3 For Lacan, there are of course no definitive answers to these questions. But this does not lessen the value of being able to ask them. The fact that there is no stable truth of being does not prevent the subject from actively and imaginatively participating in the production of meaning. Lacan implies that it is precisely because the subject can never attain the truth of its being—because it can never achieve a state of transparent wholeness—that it is driven to look for substitutes that might compensate for its sense of lack; it is motivated to invent figures of meaning that can, momentarily at least, ease and contain the discomfort of alienation. In this paradoxical sense, rather than robbing the subject of its in- ner richness, lack is the underpinning of everything that is potentially innovative about human life.4 Indeed, it is possible to envision the intricate productions and fabrications of the human psyche as vehicles through which the foundational lack of existence assumes a positive and tangible form. This in turn suggests that the subject’s ability to dwell within lack without seeking to close it is indispensable for its psychic vitality. As a matter of fact, such dwelling within lack could be argued to be the greatest of human achievements, for it transforms the terrors and midnights of the spirit into symbolic formations, imaginative undertakings, and sites of delicate beauty that make the world the absorbing and spellbinding place that it—in its most auspicious moments at least—can be. It is thus because the subject lacks that it is prompted to create, and it is through its creative activity that it manages, in an always necessarily precarious manner, to withstand its lack. In this context, it is important to specify that the translation of lack into creativity is not a matter of dialectical redemption in the sense of giving the subject the ability to turn negativity into a definitive form of positivity. The subject’s attempts to name its lack are transient at best, giving it access to no permanent meaning, no solid identity, no unitary narrative of subjective constitution. Any fleeting state of fullness or positivity that the subject may be able to attain must always in the end dissolve back into negativity; any endeavor to erase lack only gives rise to new instances of lack. This implies that the process of filling lack must by necessity be continually renewed. It cannot be brought to an end for the simple reason that the subject can never forge an object or a representation that would once and for all seal this lack. However, far from being a hindrance to existential vitality, this intrinsic impossibility—the fact that every attempt to redeem lack unavoidably falls short of its mark—is what allows us, over and again, to take up the endless process of signification. From this point of view, lack serves as a fertile kind of emptiness that keeps our subjectivities mobile. Lacan’s rendering of the subject’s relation to the signifier is therefore complex in the sense that although he consistently accentuates the subject’s relative helplessness vis-à-vis the larger systems of signification that envelop it, he at the same time sug- gests that it is only by virtue of its membership in the Symbolic order that the subject possesses the capacity to make meaning in the first place. The Symbolic, in other words, is not merely (or even primarily) a hegemonic structure that coerces the subject into its law, but also—as I have endeavored to illustrate—the foundation of its creative potentialities. *Lacan in fact insists that though the subject can never master the signifier—let alone the signified—it enjoys a certain degree of imaginative leeway with respect to the signifier. He describes this imagina- tive leeway as the subject’s capacity to make use of the “poetic function” of language (1953, 264)—the fact that language by definition perpetuates the radical slipperiness, multiplicity, and polyvalence of meaning*. In the same way that Heidegger (1971) connects creativity to the individual’s ability to dwell in the world in poetic rather than merely instrumental ways, Lacan envisions creativity in terms of the subject’s capacity to take a poetic approach to the world—an approach that is content to play with meaning without attempting to arrest it in unequivocal or transparent definitions. The fact that (the early) Lacan views the subject’s main existential task to be to come to terms with its lack explains in part why he tends to be so brutally dismissive of ego psychol- ogy. If Lacan criticizes the attempts of ego psychologists to shore up the subject’s ego, it is because he believes that they have gotten things entirely backwards: instead of helping the subject accept lack as constitutive of subjectivity, they intensify its existential confusion by reinforcing its narcissistic fanta- sies. Lacan contends that such an approach is fundamentally flawed in the sense that it hastens to close prematurely the void within the subject’s being rather than to foster the psychic and creative possibilities that arise from its capacity to experience this void. It promises the end of alienation instead of teach- ing the subject to live resourcefully with this alienation. Such a promise, Lacan suggests, is always deceptive and hollow, in the final analysis leaving the subject worse off than before. The “solution” that ego psychology offers to the subject’s sense of lack is therefore, for Lacan, merely the highest manifestation of the problem. It impedes, rather than advances, the subject’s potential for creative living.