

“Affects Are Signifiers: The Infinite Judgment of a Lacanian Affective Neuroscience”
Adrian Johnston

An irony acutely painful to partisans of psychoanalysis is that, over the course of the past several decades up through the present, Freud repeatedly has been pronounced dead and buried right at the moment when the life sciences are coming to confirm many of his core discoveries and insights—a moment of scientific vindication he anticipates starting with his earliest (proto-)psychoanalytic writings.¹ The time of Freud’s apparent defeat is precisely the time of his actual triumph. A little over a century ago, in the context of turn-of-the-century Europe, Freud is forced to argue fiercely against a deeply entrenched, widespread tendency to equate the mental with the conscious, a tendency responsible for some of the resistance to his central, fundamental *Ur*-concept of the unconscious. Today, the assertion that not all of mental life is conscious is not only uncontroversial—every branch of non-psychoanalytic psychology and neuroscience accepts as an empirically well-established truth the fact that the vast majority of mental life transpires below the threshold of explicit conscious awareness.² Nobody worth mentioning nowadays bickers about whether significant portions of the cognitive, emotional, and motivational processes of the brain and/or mind unfold in non-conscious ways. Furthermore, a number of eminent, leading figures in the neurosciences have no problems whatsoever with acknowledging the existence of the psychoanalytic unconscious as a crucial, influential sub-sector of the broader category of the non-

¹ (Adrian Johnston, “The Weakness of Nature: Hegel, Freud, Lacan, and Negativity Materialized,” *Hegel and the Infinite: Into the Twenty-First Century* [ed. Clayton Crockett, Creston Davis, and Slavoj Žižek], New York: Columbia University Press, 2009 [forthcoming])

² (Jean-Pierre Changeux, *The Physiology of Truth: Neuroscience and Human Knowledge* [trans. M.B. DeBevoise], Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004, pg. 81-82)
(Benjamin Libet, *Mind Time: The Temporal Factor in Consciousness*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004, pg. 28, 56, 66-67, 70-72, 107-109, 120-122, 208)
(Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thomspson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991, pg. 48-51)

conscious. And, additionally—this additional observation ought to alleviate a typical Freudian-Lacanian worry aroused whenever anything having to do with the natural sciences is put forward as potentially relevant to psychoanalysis—contemporary neuroscientific investigations are far from pointing in the direction of a vulgar mechanistic materialism crudely reducing nurture to nature, the more-than-biological to pure biology alone. If anything, the neurosciences arguably are generating out of themselves a spontaneous dialectical materialism of a non-reductive sort in which the notions and distinctions underpinning debates between already recognized varieties of naturalism and anti-naturalism are being subverted and/or sublated in various yet-to-be-adequately-appreciated fashions.³

³ (Adrian Johnston, “What Matter(s) in Ontology: Alain Badiou, the Hebb-Event, and Materialism Split from Within,” *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 13, no. 3, April 2008, pg. 28-44)
 (Adrian Johnston, “Conflicted Matter: Jacques Lacan and the Challenge of Secularizing Materialism,” *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, no. 19, Spring 2008, pg. 177-182)
 (Adrian Johnston, “Slavoj Žižek’s Hegelian Reformation: Giving a Hearing to *The Parallax View*,” *Diacritics*, vol. 37, no. 1, Spring 2007, pg. 4-14, 16-17)
 (Johnston, “The Weakness of Nature”)
 (Changeux, *The Physiology of Truth*, pg. 33, 207-208)
 (Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain*, New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2003, pg. 162-164, 173-174)
 (Douglas Hofstadter, *I am a strange loop*, New York: Basic Books, 2007, pg. 31)
 (Eric R. Kandel, “Psychotherapy and the Single Synapse: The Impact of Psychiatric Thought on Neurobiologic Research,” *Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis, and the New Biology of Mind*, Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Publishing, Inc., 2005, pg. 21)
 (Eric R. Kandel, “A New Intellectual Framework for Psychiatry,” *Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis, and the New Biology of Mind*, pg. 42-43, 47)
 (Eric R. Kandel, “Biology and the Future of Psychoanalysis: A New Intellectual Framework for Psychiatry Revisited,” *Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis, and the New Biology of Mind*, pg. 94, 97-98)
 (Joseph LeDoux, *Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are*, New York: Penguin Books, 2002, pg. 2-3, 5, 12, 20, 66-67)
 (Libet, *Mind Time*, pg. 5)
 (Catherine Malabou, *Que faire de notre cerveau?*, Paris: Bayard, 2004, pg. 27-28, 30-31, 84-85, 156, 161-163)
 (Catherine Malabou, *La plasticité au soir de l’écriture: Dialectique, destruction, déconstruction*, Paris: Éditions Léo Scheer, 2005, pg. 19)
 (Thomas Metzinger, *Being No One: The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003, pg. 115)
 (Lesley Rogers, *Sexing the Brain*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2001, pg. 2-3, 5, 20, 23-24, 47-48, 68, 97-98)
 (Mark Solms and Oliver Turnbull, *The Brain and the Inner World: An Introduction to the Neuroscience of Subjective Experience*, New York: Other Press, 2002, pg. 64, 218, 244, 271-272)

Jaak Panksepp's *Affective Neuroscience*, a comprehensive overview of research into the emotional dimensions of both human and animal brains, provides a number of points of departure for the endeavor to entwine together the neurosciences, Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis, and the specific metapsychological perspectives on affective life outlined by preceding portions of this project.⁴ The fact that Panksepp refuses to limit his discussion of the emotional brain to human brains alone is based on a conviction of his that likely would ruffle more than a few Lacanian feathers: He insists that human and non-human mammals share a great deal in common in terms of basic brain structures and functions, including emotional configurations and dynamics at various neural levels (especially at the most primitive levels of evolutionarily conserved neuroanatomy).⁵ Panksepp hypothesizes that evolution has wired into the archaic base of the mammalian central nervous system a fixed set of seven rudimentary, elementary emotions and corresponding experiential tonalities. His taxonomy of the "major 'Blue-Ribbon, Grade A' emotional systems of the mammalian brain"⁶ identifies four such systems (labeled "SEEKING" ["stimulus-bound appetitive behavior and self-stimulation"], "PANIC" ["stimulus-bound distress vocalization and social attachment"], "RAGE" ["stimulus-bound biting and affective attack"], and "FEAR" ["stimulus-bound flight and escape behaviors"]⁷) plus, in mammals particularly, the three additional systems (labeled "LUST," "CARE," and "PLAY"⁸). These seven emotions and their accompanying tones

⁴ (Adrian Johnston, "Misfelt Feelings: Psychoanalysis, Neuroscience, Philosophy, and Unconscious Affect," in Catherine Malabou and Adrian Johnston, *Auto-affection and Emotional Life: Psychoanalysis and Neurology*, New York: Columbia University Press [under review])

⁵ (Jaak Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, pg. 4, 10, 43, 47, 50-51, 56, 77, 79, 122-123, 325-330)

⁶ (Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, pg. 52)

⁷ (Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, pg. 52-54)

⁸ (Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, pg. 54)

of feeling are depicted as the primary colors of mammals' multi-hued affective lives⁹ (Mark Solms and co-author Oliver Turnbull, in their sizable manifesto for a non-Lacanian neuro-psychoanalysis *The Brain and the Inner World*, adopt Panksepp's hypothesis concerning "basic emotions"¹⁰). Panksepp maintains that human beings are just as moved as non-human mammals by this set of foundational emotional elements. In this vein, Antonio Damasio, surveying a similar emotional landscape of primary affective phenomena, observes that the evolution sculpted brain certainly looks as though it's much more prone to pain over pleasure—"There seem to be far more varieties of negative than positive emotions."¹¹ It would not be inappropriate to call to mind, in association with this, the textual detail that the early Freud, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, originally christened the fundamental law of psychological life the "unpleasure principle" (later to be designated with the more familiar phrase "pleasure principle") so as to emphasize the avoidance of pain and suffering as the primary tendency of the psyche (instead of emphasizing the "positive" side of this principle, that is, the tendency to pursue ecstasy, gratification, joy, satisfaction, and so on).¹²

Joseph LeDoux, in his treatment of affective neuroscience, similarly proposes that, "brain evolution is basically conservative."¹³ LeDoux, like Panksepp, sees human affective life as resting on a base, shared with other mammals, of primitive emotional reactions and repertoires installed by ancient, long-gone evolutionary contexts and challenges. It should be noted here that the "conservative" lingering-on of out-of-date

⁹ (Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, pg. 47)

¹⁰ (Solms and Turnbull, *The Brain and the Inner World*, pg. 112-133, 277-278)

¹¹ (Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, New York: Avon Books, Inc., 1994, pg. 267)

¹² (*SE* 5: 600-604)

¹³ (Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996, pg. 123)

neural machinery and programs is precisely part of what produces some of the tensions characteristic of the peculiarities distinguishing the unique “human condition” of such concern to psychoanalysis. That is to say, it would be mistaken to respond to the neuroscientific account of the persistence of evolutionarily archaic emotional systems hard-wired into humans’ brains with a Lacanian anti-naturalism going so far as to deny (at this juncture, quite untenably, not only theoretically, but empirically too) that speaking subjects, thanks to the “castrating” intervention of symbolic orders, retain any significant links with their material/physical bodies as analyzed specifically by the life sciences (this response, often voiced by Lacanians and like-minded theorists, posits an always-already complete denaturalization as essential to the existence of subjectivity proper). As partial rather than complete, the denaturalization that befalls those submitted to socio-symbolic subjectification splits human subjects between, as it were, nature and anti-nature, failing fully to liquidate the former retroactively and without remainder; the antagonisms and discrepancies between natural and anti-natural residues embedded as strata and currents tensely cohabitating within the psychical apparatus contribute to the splitting (*Spaltung*) central to the barred subject (\$).¹⁴ Moreover, returning to Panksepp and LeDoux, neither of these researchers, despite their understandable insistence on the reality of basic emotional systems in the brains of all mammals alike, advance a naturalism according to which humans are nothing more than highly elaborate animal organisms whose sentiments and subjectivity can be entirely explained away through

¹⁴ (Johnston, “Misfelt Feelings”)
 (Adrian Johnston, “The Misfeeling of What Happens: Slavoj Žižek, Antonio Damasio, and a Materialist Account of Affects,” *Subjectivity*, 2009 [forthcoming])

appeals to the secular god of Evolution-with-a-capital-E, an incarnation of Nature as really-existent big Other.¹⁵

In light of this project's version of neuro-psychoanalysis, LeDoux's work on the brain is appealing for several reasons. Apart from generally being sympathetic to psychoanalysis insofar as he both admits the existence of the analytic unconscious as well as highlights the significant role of language in the neuro-mental lives of human subjects, LeDoux claims again and again that, apropos affective phenomena, conscious awareness is the exception rather than the rule¹⁶ (Panksepp concurs,¹⁷ likewise asserting that, "Most of emotional processing, as of every other psychobehavioral process, is done at an unconscious level"¹⁸). And, in line with an established consensus in the neurosciences, he is adamant that a dialectic between genetic nature and epigenetic nurture shapes emotional and other brain functions such that neither a simplistic biologism nor an equally unsophisticated social constructivism can offer remotely plausible explanations for affects (and many other things) in human beings.¹⁹ The potentials of LeDoux's neuroscientific delineations of human emotional life for a Freudian-Lacanian neuro-psychoanalytic metapsychology of affect are manifest in the closing pages of his book

The Emotional Brain:

...consciousness is neither the prerequisite to nor the same thing as the capacity to think and reason. An animal can solve lots of problems without being overtly conscious of what it is doing and why it is doing it. Obviously, consciousness elevates thinking to a new level, but it

¹⁵ (Johnston, "Conflicted Matter," pg. 177-181, 187-188)

(Johnston, "The Weakness of Nature")

(Johnston, "Misfelt Feelings")

(Johnston, "The Misfeeling of What Happens")

¹⁶ (LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain*, pg. 17-18, 20, 33-34, 40-41, 64-66, 71, 161, 203)

¹⁷ (Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, pg. 34)

¹⁸ (Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, pg. 28)

¹⁹ (LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain*, pg. 137)

isn't the same thing as thinking.²⁰

After these statements echoing Freud's century-old gesture of decoupling thinking from consciousness—the psychoanalytic unconscious involves forms of thinking minus an accompanying reflexive self-awareness (i.e., “I think without thinking that I think”)—LeDoux proceeds to discuss affective phenomena:

Emotional feelings result when we become consciously aware that an emotion system of the brain is active. Any organism that has consciousness also has feelings. However, feelings will be different in a brain that can classify the world linguistically and categorize experiences in words than in a brain that cannot. The difference between fear, anxiety, terror, apprehension, and the like would not be possible without language. At the same time, none of these words would have any point if it were not for the existence of an underlying emotion system that generates the brain states and bodily expressions to which these words apply. Emotions evolved not as conscious feelings, linguistically differentiated or otherwise, but as brain states and bodily responses. The brain states and bodily responses are the fundamental facts of an emotion, and the conscious feelings are the frills that have added icing to the emotional cake.²¹

LeDoux's dialectical model has it that the initial impetus and “oomph” underlying affective life originates with and arises from evolutionarily primal/primary corporeal emotions of a fundamental and foundational nature (i.e., emotions as identified by Panksepp in his seven-category taxonomy). However, in the exceptional animals that are human beings as *parlêtres*, the energetic, vital flows of these old mammalian juices run smack into language, being channeled through the mediating networks of the linguistic-representational structures constitutive of speaking subjectivities. Such structures then come to exert a reciprocal counter-influence on these archaic influences, refracting, for instance, the effects of the FEAR and PANIC systems into a much more fine-grained spectrum of feelings (i.e., “fear, anxiety, terror, apprehension, and the like”—Damasio, in

²⁰ (LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain*, pg. 302)

²¹ (LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain*, pg. 302)

Descartes' Error, similarly distinguishes between “primary emotions” and “secondary emotions”²²). However, a pressing question must be posed at this juncture: Do these thus-refracted feelings react *après-coup* on their emotional bases, dialectically transforming their corporeal causes/sources—and, if so, to what extent?

Despite elsewhere indicating that he indeed would at least admit and entertain the possibility of linguistic-representational nurture reflexively altering embodied emotional nature in a thoroughly dialectical fashion, LeDoux, at the very end of the last block quotation in the paragraph immediately above, seems to risk regressing back to a non-dialectical position according to which alterations to affective life wrought by the non/not-entirely-natural dimensions determinative of humanity’s distinguishing peculiarities are reduced to an ineffectual secondary status as mere window dressing arrayed around the fringes of a fixed bio-material ground (“the conscious feelings are the frills that have added icing to the emotional cake”). This moment in LeDoux’s reflections represents a naturalist tendency within even the most non-reductive neuroscientific materialisms (that of not only LeDoux, but of Damasio too) warranting Lacan-inspired criticisms such as those Žižek levels against Damasio and LeDoux in *The Parallax View*. Also, this same moment in the concluding pages of *The Emotional Brain* overlooks something *The Parallax View* rightly and insightfully highlights, namely, that the gap between the biological and the more-than-biological comes to function as itself an affective factor, rather than affective phenomena falling exclusively on one side or the other of this gap (i.e., as either emotions of a biological nature or feelings of a more-than-biological nurture).²³

²² (Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, pg. 134, 149-150)

²³ (Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006, pg. 222-231)

Returning to more empirical terrain, examining Panksepp's work in greater depth promises to be fruitful. Several times, he stresses that neuroplasticity holds for emotional systems as much as for other components of human neuroanatomy.²⁴ Related to this, he (like both Damasio and LeDoux²⁵) grants that cognitive mediations and modulations, involving complex symbolic and linguistic representational constellations, play significant roles in coloring and inflecting affective phenomena in human life;²⁶ a two-way street of dialectical/reciprocal co-determination connects cognition and emotion for beings with highly developed cerebral cortices in addition to other, "lower" neural components left over from archaic evolutionary histories and shared with various animal organisms.²⁷ Panksepp goes so far as to argue, as regards humans, that, "one can never capture innate emotional dynamics in their pure form, except perhaps when they are aroused artificially by direct stimulation of brain areas where those operating systems are most concentrated."²⁸ Reiterating this argument later, he states:

It is becoming increasingly clear that humans have as many instinctual operating systems in their brains as other mammals. However, in mature humans such instinctual processes may be difficult to observe because they are no longer expressed directly in adult behavior but instead are filtered and modified by higher cognitive activity. Thus, in adult humans, many instincts manifest themselves only as subtle psychological tendencies, such as subjective feeling states, which provide internal guidance to behavior. The reason many scholars who know little about modern brain research are still willing to assert that human behavior is not controlled by instinctual processes is because many of our operating

(Johnston, "Misfelt Feelings")

(Johnston, "The Misfeeling of What Happens")

²⁴ (Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, pg. 16-17, 27)

²⁵ (Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, pg. 130, 149-150, 159, 163-164, 185, 187-188)

(Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1999, pg. 35, 57, 218-219, 311)

(Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza*, pg. 71-72, 78-79)

(LeDoux, *Synaptic Self*, pg. 197-198, 203-204)

²⁶ (Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, pg. 21, 72)

²⁷ (Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, pg. 26-27, 31, 33-34, 37)

²⁸ (Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, pg. 26)

systems are in fact very ‘open’ and hence very prone to be modified by the vast layers of cognitive and affective complexity that learning permits. Still, the failure of psychology to deal effectively with the nature of the many instinctual systems of human and animal brains remains one of the great failings of the discipline. The converse could be said for neuroscience.²⁹

A number of comments are called for here. To begin with, starting with the second half of the above quotation, Panksepp accurately and succinctly diagnoses the parallel shortcomings of “psychology” (as associated with nurture-centric constructivism) and “neuroscience” (as associated with nature-centric biologism) with respect to the (obsolete) naturalism-versus-anti-naturalism debate. In Panksepp’s view, the plasticity of the human central nervous system, a plasticity affecting its emotional structures and dynamics, consists of the intertwining of inflexible “closed” and flexible “open” neural systems (i.e., on the one hand, those systems rigidly wired by genetics to produce relatively invariant patterns of cognition and comportment, and, on the other hand, those systems fluidly wired to be rewired by epigenetic accidents, contingencies, variables, and so on).³⁰

In response to Panksepp, someone with Hegelian and/or psychoanalytic leanings might be inclined to retort that the purportedly epistemological inaccessibility of brute, raw instinctual emotions is not strictly and solely epistemological. Shouldn’t Panksepp’s spontaneous Kantianism, in which “pure” instinctual emotions are treated as thinkable-yet-unknowable noumenal things-in-themselves that exist beyond the epistemologically accessible affective phenomena “filtered and modified by higher cognitive activity,” be

²⁹ (Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, pg. 122)

³⁰ (Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, pg. 39, 301, 334, 352)

(Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic* [trans. Lisabeth During], New York: Routledge, 2005, pg. 8-9)

(Malabou, *Que faire de notre cerveau?*, pg. 15-17, 29-30, 40, 65-66, 145-146)

(Malabou, *La plasticité au soir de l’écriture*, pg. 21, 25-26, 110-111)

met with a Hegelianism speculating that this ostensible epistemological inaccessibility already directly discloses the “Thing itself,” the ontological Real supposedly barred by subjective reflection? In other words, certain versions of Hegelian philosophy and/or Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalytic metapsychology would insist that the general absence of brute, raw instinctual emotions in the manifestations of specifically human existence testifies to the thoroughgoing dialectical digestion of the natural by the more-than-natural, rather than being reflective of a noumenal-phenomenal split between these two dimensions depicted as separate and distinct realms of a neatly partitioned, two-tiered reality, one inaccessible (i.e., the natural/biological), the other accessible (i.e., the more-than-natural/biological). Gérard Pommier, whose Lacanian glosses on the neurosciences will be addressed in more detail below, appears to adopt a stance along these lines, maintaining that, “Once the entry into speech has been accomplished, ‘pure sensation’ becomes that from which we exile ourselves.”³¹ He adds that conceding this necessitates abandoning the “myth of an original paradise, that of our improbable animality.”³²

Of course, to be perfectly honest and exact, portraying Panksepp as a spontaneous Kantian treating basic emotions (i.e., his seven “primary colors” of mammalian affective life) as akin to the notorious *Ding an sich* is far from fair. His denial of epistemological access to these emotional fundamentals is not without qualification (by contrast with Kant’s unqualified denial of access to the noumenal realm lying forever beyond “the limits of possible experience”). Panksepp posits that there are exceptional circumstances in which these primal constituents of human bodily being come to light in their undiluted immediacy. However, he stresses the artificiality of these circumstances; in addition to

³¹ (Gérard Pommier, *Comment les neurosciences démontrent la psychanalyse*, Paris: Flammarion, 2004, pg. 142)

³² (Pommier, *Comment les neurosciences démontrent la psychanalyse*, pg. 142)

the experimental tools and techniques of the laboratory which he has in mind, one might also imagine, taking into account psychoanalytic and socio-political considerations, brutal ordeals and overwhelming traumas as excessive “limit experiences” violently unleashing unprocessed corporeal intensities pitilessly reducing those who suffer these experiences to the dehumanized state of naked animality, of convulsing, writhing flesh. This precise qualification noted by Panksepp signals an inversion which itself arguably is constitutive of the human condition: the reversal of the respective positions/roles of, so to speak, first and second natures (or, Žižek’s “life 1.0” and “life 2.0”³³), a reversal in which the secondary becomes the primary and vice versa.

Such an inversion can be clarified further through reference to Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer*. Therein, Agamben examines the distinction, rooted in the language of ancient Greece, between “*zoē*, which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods), and *bios*, which indicated the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group.”³⁴ Without getting bogged down in what would be, in the present context, a tangential exegesis of Agamben’s genealogy of the *zoē-bios* distinction in relation to structures of political sovereignty (a genealogy inspired by both Nietzsche and Foucault and particularly indebted to the latter’s concept of “bio-power”³⁵), it suffices here to draw attention to his contention that, in the always-already established individual and group forms/ways of life into which humans are

³³ (Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, London: Verso, 2008, pg. 440)

³⁴ (Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* [trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen], Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, pg. 1)

³⁵ (Michel Foucault, “*Society must be defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976* [ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana; trans. David Macey], New York: Picador, 2003, pg. 240-247, 249-250, 253)

(Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pg. 4-5, 148, 165, 179)

thrown (i.e., *bios*), *zoē* as “bare life” is “produced” instead of being given.³⁶ As he puts it in *State of Exception*:

There are not *first* life as a natural biological given and anomie as the state of nature, and *then* their implication in law through the state of exception. On the contrary, the very possibility of distinguishing life and law, anomie and *nomos*, coincides with their articulation in the biopolitical machine. Bare life is a product of the machine and not something that preexists it...³⁷

In other words, in tandem with his rejection of standard, traditional “state of nature” narratives about humanity’s transition from pre-socio-historical *zoē* red in tooth and nail to the socio-historical *bios* of the *polis* as established on the basis of a “social contract,”³⁸ Agamben proposes that humans are, at a default level, beings of *bios* (i.e., life organized and embellished by more-than-biological languages, institutions, practices, etc.) rather than creatures of *zoē*. Put differently, although the bare life that is *zoē* often is imagined as a first nature ontogenetically and phylogenetically preceding *bios* as the second nature of a non-bare life clothed by the artificial fabrications of language, society, and history, Agamben’s remarks correctly point out that exceptional “artificial” means (for him, the means are actions taken by sovereign power with respect to the subject-bodies it rules over) are necessary to strip away the default second-nature-become-first-nature that is *bios*; in the inverted world of human life, *zoē* is correspondingly a first-nature-become-secondary, an exception to the rule of *bios* that appears, in Agambenian parlance, exclusively in the unusual emergencies provoking legal-political “states of exception.”³⁹

³⁶ (Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pg. 83)

³⁷ (Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* [trans. Kevin Attell], Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, pg. 87-88)

³⁸ (Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pg. 35, 37, 105-106, 109)

³⁹ (Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pg. 17-19, 24-25, 37, 83, 105)

(Agamben, *State of Exception*, pg. 1, 4-6, 14, 24, 26, 31, 35, 38-39, 50-51, 69-70)

Circumnavigating back to Panksepp and neuroscientific matters, a combination of Agamben's handling of the *zoē-bios* distinction with this project's neither-naturalist-nor-anti-naturalist position as centered on a hypothesized failed dialectic of incomplete denaturalization as constitutive of human forms of subjectivity⁴⁰ enables the following to be said apropos a Lacan-influenced neuro-psychoanalytic metapsychology of affect: In human beings, the *zoē* of bare emotional life—this life doesn't disappear with the advent of the *bios* of feelings and the array of their accompanying conditions of possibility, being only partially eclipsed and absorbed by the mediating matrices giving shape to *bios*—is fractured into un-sublated brute, raw basic emotions (which manifest themselves solely in rare, extreme conditions) and sublated feelings as socio-symbolically translated emotions (or even as affective states aroused by the gap between emotions and feelings). In Žižek's parlance, the "life 1.0" of *zoē*, although inverted into the produced exception instead of the given rule in the never-finished denaturalizations brought about by subjectification, resists being taken up without remainder into the non/not-wholly-natural defiles of *bios* as "life 2.0." The "updates" don't erase entirely the earlier versions, with bugs, glitches, and loopholes being generated by the un-synthesized layering of these materialized temporal-historical strata.

Panksepp is careful to stipulate that, despite their interpenetrating mutual entanglements, cognitive and emotional aspects of the human central nervous system nonetheless remain somewhat distinct and distinguishable.⁴¹ One shouldn't sloppily lump them together into a muddy mess through an inelegantly quick-and-easy pseudo-dialectical approach that simply blurs the lines of conceptual demarcations in its haste to

⁴⁰ (Johnston, "Misfelt Feelings")
 (Johnston, "The Misfeeling of What Happens")
⁴¹ (Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, pg. 39, 69)

unite with what is imagined to be reality's subtle shades of grey. For Panksepp, the differences between cognition and emotion are at least as important to keep in view as the fact of their reciprocal, entwined relatedness insofar as these differences are the sites of palpable tensions between conflicting components and tendencies of subjects' incompletely integrated, hodge-podge brains.⁴² He claims that, although the affective lives of human beings are substantially inflected by cognitive (i.e., cultural, ideational, linguistic, representational, social, symbolic, etc.) mediations, the compelling, gripping, potent pulsations of emotional phenomena issue forth from a comparatively ancient, primitive neural base.⁴³ Furthermore, he maintains that an imbalance obtains between cognition and emotion as unequal partners in mental life—"emotions and regulatory feelings have stronger effects on cognitions than the other way around."⁴⁴ In terms of the calibration constitutive of (neuro)plasticity between open flexibility and closed inflexibility, Panksepp stresses that a certain degree of genetic closure at the level of basic emotional systems (deposited in brains over the course of the old, slow-moving currents of evolutionary times) sets limiting boundaries to the bandwidths of possible epigenetic openness to denaturalizing alterations of affective spectrums (alterations unfolding at temporal rhythms and rates of comparatively much faster speeds than natural-*qua*-evolutionary times)—"the ability of the human cortex to think and to fantasize, and thereby to pursue many unique paths of human cultural evolution, can

⁴² (David J. Linden, *The Accidental Mind: How Brain Evolution Has Given Us Love, Memory, Dreams, and God*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007, pg. 6, 2-3, 5-7, 21-24, 26, 245-246)

⁴³ (Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, pg. 42-43, 301)

⁴⁴ (Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, pg. 166)

dilute, mold, modify, and focus the dictates of these systems, but it cannot eliminate them”⁴⁵ (Damasio too argues for a similar perspective⁴⁶).

Segueing into a space of overlap between the neurosciences and Lacanian metapsychology, not only is the human brain a concrete, bio-material point of condensation for the only partially compatible temporal tracks of non-human evolutionary phylogenesis and human socio-historical phylogenesis—as psychoanalysis starting with Freud repeatedly contends, various streams and sedimentations of subjective ontogenesis generate out of themselves, as a cacophonous ensemble, disharmonies and clashes as the conflicts around which psychical subjects are structured. Lacan’s distinction between *lalangue* and *la langue* is quite relevant in the context of the current analysis.⁴⁷ Pommier says something seemingly odd that sounds less strange once one appreciates select details of Lacan’s rich, multi-faceted treatment of language—

“neuroscientists forget... speech... the support of which, far from being spiritual, is also

⁴⁵ (Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, pg. 51)

⁴⁶ (Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*, pg. 128)

⁴⁷ (Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XIX: Le savoir du psychanalyste, 1971-1972* [unpublished typescript], sessions of November 4th, 1971, December 2nd, 1971)
 (Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: Encore, 1972-1973* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Bruce Fink], New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998, pg. 138-139)
 (Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXI: Les non-dupes errent, 1973-1974* [unpublished typescript], sessions of January 8th, 1974, June 11th, 1974)
 (Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIII: Le sinthome, 1975-1976* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller], Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005, pg. 117)
 (Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIV: L’insu que sait de l’une-bévue, s’aile à mourre, 1976-1977* [unpublished typescript], session of April 19th, 1977)
 (Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXV: Le moment de conclure, 1977-1978* [unpublished typescript], sessions of November 15th, 1977, April 11th, 1978)
 (Jacques Lacan, “Television” [trans. Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson], *Television/A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment* [ed. Joan Copjec], New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1990, pg. 9-10)
 (Jacques Lacan, “Alla Scuola Freudiana: Conférence à Milan, March 30th, 1974, <http://www.ecole-lacanienne.net/pastoutlacan70.php>)
 (Jacques Lacan, “Conférence à Genève sur «Le symptôme»,” October 4th, 1975, <http://www.ecole-lacanienne.net/pastoutlacan70.php>)
 (Jacques Lacan, “Conférences et entretiens dans des universités nord-américaines: Columbia University Auditorium School of International Affairs,” December 1st, 1975, *Scilicet*, no. 6/7, 1976, pg. 47)

material.”⁴⁸ The oddness has to do with the fact that ample neuroscientific attention has been paid to language, at least in the Lacanian sense of *la langue* as referring to the natural languages usually acquired by children and employed by linguistically competent members of given groups of language-users. Pommier’s insistence on the material dimension of “speech” (*la parole*) is crucial here: When it comes to both the spoken and the written, Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalytic metapsychology is at least as concerned with materiality as with meaning. The primary process mentation of *lalangue*, as a *jouis-sens* playing with phonemes and graphemes, flows through sounds and images in ways unconstrained by secondary process mentation’s concerns to obey the constraining rules of a language’s (as *une langue*) syntax and semantics so as to succeed at producing intersubjectively recognizable conventional significance. An analyst, in listening to an analysand’s speech, should be as attentive to the murmurings of meaningless *lalangue* as to the meaningful utterances of *la langue* as spoken by the (self-)conscious speaker on the couch. When Lacan draws attention to the material signifier (as different from the sign), this is part of what’s at stake.⁴⁹ This is one of the two fundamental aspects of language

⁴⁸ (Pommier, *Comment les neurosciences démontrent la psychanalyse*, pg. 18)

⁴⁹ (Adrian Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008, pg. 87-90)

(Johnston, “Slavoj Žižek’s Hegelian Reformation,” pg. 9)

(Adrian Johnston, *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009 [forthcoming])

(Jacques Lacan, “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis,” *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* [trans. Bruce Fink], New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006, pg. 248)

(Jacques Lacan, “The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power,” *Écrits*, pg. 496)

(Jacques Lacan, “*Discours de Rome*,” *Autres écrits* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller], Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2001, pg. 137-138)

(Jacques Lacan, “*Problèmes cruciaux pour la psychanalyse: Compte rendu du Séminaire 1964-1965*,” *Autres écrits*, pg. 199)

(Jacques Lacan, “*Petit discours à l’ORTF*,” *Autres écrits*, pg. 224)

(Jacques Lacan, Of Structure as an Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever,” *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man* [ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato], Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970, pg. 187)

(Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud’s Papers on Technique, 1953-1954* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. John Forrester], New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1988, pg. 244)

that Pommier sees the neurosciences as overlooking (the other being the links between language and Otherness as understood in Lacanian theory, a topic to be taken up shortly).

As regards *lalangue* as distinct from *la langue*, neuroscientist Jean-Pierre Changeux, who Pommier cites in beginning to weave a neuro-psychoanalytic perspective on language,⁵⁰ touches upon infantile babbling (with which *lalangue* is associated) in a neurological account of language acquisition.⁵¹ One of Changeux's key theses is his assertion that, "To learn is to eliminate."⁵² He hypothesizes that the developing brain learns numerous things of various sorts through playing "cognitive games." These games involve the brain spontaneously generating "pre-representations," an activity which could be described as a process of actively fantasizing, imagining, or hallucinating at the surrounding world, concocting "hypotheses" projected upon enveloping environs.⁵³ In terms of language learning specifically—it ought to be noted in passing that Changeux sympathetically refers to the Saussurian structural linguistics dear to Lacan and Lacanians in his reflections on language⁵⁴—this means that infantile babbling is a sort of game playing in which a gurgling multitude of sounds are automatically experimented

(Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Sylvana Tomaselli], New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1988, pg. 82)

(Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses, 1955-1956* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Russell Grigg], New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993, pg. 32)

(Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre IX: L'identification, 1961-1962* [unpublished typescript], session of January 10th, 1962)

(Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XIV: La logique du fantasme, 1966-1967* [unpublished typescript], session of February 1st, 1967)

(Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVI: D'un Autre à l'autre, 1968-1969* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller], Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006, pg. 88-90)

(Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIV*, session of April 19th, 1977)

⁵⁰ (Pommier, *Comment les neurosciences démontrent la psychanalyse*, pg. 23-24)

⁵¹ (Changeux, *The Physiology of Truth*, pg. 201-202)

⁵² (Jean-Pierre Changeux, *Neuronal Man: The Biology of Mind* [trans. Laurence Garey], Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, pg. 246-249)

(Changeux, *The Physiology of Truth*, pg. 61-62)

⁵³ (Changeux, *The Physiology of Truth*, pg. 58, 60-62, 64)

⁵⁴ (Changeux, *The Physiology of Truth*, pg. 113-114, 118)

with by the young subject-to-be. Through interactions with the environment, especially the social milieu of language-using adult others, the infant is prompted to pare down the proliferating plethora of noises of its baby tongue (i.e., *lalangue*) so as to give voice to the narrower set of well-ordered phonemes recognized by the mother tongue (i.e., *la langue*) into which he/she is being inducted. In other words, early childhood language acquisition isn't so much a matter of building up *une langue*—it's more a matter of tearing down and eliminating (or, more accurately, attempting to eliminate) the nonsensical meanderings and ramblings of *lalangue*, of the cognitive games *jouis-sens* plays with the vocal apparatus. *La langue* is what remains of *lalangue* after contextually imposed “symbolic castration” by the trans-subjective Other and inter-subjective others of the linguistic universes into which the child is inserted has been undergone. Apropos neurology, Changeux's theory of learning reflects what LeDoux characterizes as the “use it or lose it” doctrine of neural “selectionism.” According to this doctrine, the initial “exuberance” of an infant's neural networks—there are more synaptic connections present in early stages of development than will be needed later by the more mature organism—is pruned down through “subtraction,” through the exchanges between organism and environment determining which connections will be used (and, hence, will be kept) and which ones won't be used (and, hence, will be allowed to wither away).⁵⁵ Changeux describes this selectionist process as “the epigenetic stabilization of common neural networks”⁵⁶ (i.e., a social dynamic mobilizing mirror neurons in which the language-supporting structures of the young child's brain are sculpted through pruning to

⁵⁵ (LeDoux, *Synaptic Self*, pg. 72-74)

⁵⁶ (Changeux, *The Physiology of Truth*, pg. 114)

be more or less sufficiently similar, for purposes of acculturation and socialization, to his/her older fluent socio-symbolic others⁵⁷).

Pommier recapitulates everything summarized in the preceding paragraph.⁵⁸ The Lacanian supplement he adds to the neuroscientific theories is an emphasis on the irreducible role of inter-subjective and trans-subjective variables (i.e., Imaginary little-others and Symbolic big-O Others) in the genesis of socio-symbolic subjectivity in the young subject-to-be. Pommier adamantly maintains that spontaneous endogenous developments within the physiological systems of the nascent *parlêtre* don't account for language acquisition and the subjectification it brings with it. That is to say, the eliminations and selections imposed on the child's neural networks—these eliminations and selections are pruning processes through which the wild thickets of *lalangue*'s *jouis-sens*-laden babblings (i.e., primary processes) are trimmed down into the narrower confines of recognizably meaningful forms of *une langue* (i.e., secondary processes)—are imposed thanks to the interactive interventions of significant (and signifying) others actively engaging with the child. For Pommier, “the signification of sounds depends on a sense given by an exterior authority: it breaks with the organicist model of auto-organization. This rupture with organizational self-sufficiency distinguishes itself from the muscular model. Organicism cannot render an account of neuronal modeling, since the only efficacious sonorities are those that signify something for the Other.”⁵⁹ He quickly proceeds to link this with a more general theme emerging from the life sciences and philosophical interpretations of them: The plastic human brain in particular is genetically destined to be turned over to shaping vicissitudes far from entirely governed

⁵⁷ (Changeux, *The Physiology of Truth*, pg. 113, 129, 132, 140-141, 201-202)

⁵⁸ (Pommier, *Comment les neurosciences démontrent la psychanalyse*, pg. 24-28, 45-47)

⁵⁹ (Pommier, *Comment les neurosciences démontrent la psychanalyse*, pg. 27)

by evolutionary-genetic influences alone, naturally pre-programmed by genetics to be non-naturally reprogrammed by epigenetics—in short, hard-wired to be rewired.⁶⁰ As Pommier puts it regarding the Lacanian Other as the locus of epigenetic factors of a symbolico-linguistic sort, “It is henceforth innate that it wouldn’t be innate”⁶¹; or, as fellow Lacanian neuro-sympathizers François Ansermet and Pierre Magistretti articulate the same idea, it is “as though, when all is said and done, the individual were to appear genetically determined not to be genetically determined.”⁶²

To make one last fast-and-loose reference to Žižek’s contrast between life 1.0 and life 2.0, an argument parallel to the one articulated above apropos the simultaneously/neither-natural-and/nor-anti-natural layering of life 1.0 and life 2.0 can and should be made with regard to a Lacanian neuro-psychoanalytic recasting of the distinction between *lalangue* and *la langue*: Just as life 1.0 isn’t entirely erased after-the-fact of the genesis of life 2.0, *lalangue* (here analogous to life 1.0) likewise lingers on as indelible traces of primary process *jouis-sens* infused within and between the secondary process matrices of *la langue* (here analogous to life 2.0). Of course, such a claim is

⁶⁰ (Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology*, pg. 106-111, 114-115, 172-173, 200, 204-205, 208, 277-278)

(Johnston, “What Matter(s) in Ontology,” pg. 33-34)

(Johnston, “Slavoj Žižek’s Hegelian Reformation,” pg. 16)

(Johnston, “Conflicted Matter,” pg. 177-181)

(Johnston, “The Weakness of Nature”)

(François Ansermet, “*Des neurosciences aux logosciences*,” *Qui sont vos psychanalystes?* [ed. Nathalie Georges, Jacques-Alain Miller, and Nathalie Marchaison], Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002, pg. 377-378, 383)

(François Ansermet and Pierre Magistretti, *Biology of Freedom: Neural Plasticity, Experience, and the Unconscious* [trans. Susan Fairfield], New York: Other Press, 2007, pg. xvi, 8, 10, 239)

(Changeux, *The Physiology of Truth*, pg. 152-153)

(Daniel Dennett, *Freedom Evolves*, New York: Viking, 2003, pg. 90-91, 93)

(LeDoux, *Synaptic Self*, pg. 8-9, 20, 91, 296)

(Malabou, *Que faire de notre cerveau?*, pg. 7-8, 14-17, 20-23, 31-32, 84-85)

(Malabou, *La plasticité au soir de l’écriture*, pg. 112)

(Solms and Turnbull, *The Brain and the Inner World*, pg. 220)

(Žižek, *The Parallax View*, pg. 213-214)

⁶¹ (Pommier, *Comment les neurosciences démontrent la psychanalyse*, pg. 27)

⁶² (Ansermet and Magistretti, *Biology of Freedom*, pg. 8)

merely in good keeping with Freudian orthodoxy insofar as psychoanalysis, despite certain common misunderstandings, isn't a developmental psychology, at least not in any straightforward sense. More precisely, due to what Freud characterizes as the "timelessness" of the unconscious,⁶³ prior phases of ontogenetic development (i.e., past periods of psychological experience and structure) are not eliminated and replaced by subsequent phases of development. Instead, the effects of the passage of time on the psyche involve the cumulative sedimentation of interacting layers, rather than successive demolitions of the old by the new (this point being illustrated by him with that image of the city of Rome in which all of the strata of its historical development are preserved side by side, sandwiched together).⁶⁴ But, what relevance does this have for a Freudian-Lacanian neuro-psychoanalysis of affective life?

The socio-symbolically subjectified *parlêtre* comes to (in)consist as, so to speak, a sort of Tower of Babel cobbled together out of a jumble mixing together flows and assemblages of both "immature" *lalangue* (which, as suffused with *jouis-sens*, is neither strictly affective-energetic nor signifying-structural) and "mature" *la langue*. Additionally, the affect languages of the latter (i.e., the words and phrases of natural languages designating emotions and feelings) are notoriously ambiguous and vague. In fact, one of the most familiar ways in which people arrive at a palpable awareness of the limits of language is when they experience the clumsy, clunky inadequacy of their mother tongues in trying to express linguistically the subtle nuances and fine-grained hues of fluid affective phenomena. The combination of affectively influential (yet consciously difficult to recognize) associations at the level of *lalangue* with the superimposed level of

⁶³ (SE 14: 187)

⁶⁴ (SE 21: 69-71)

the inelegant affect languages of *la langue* makes for a confusing and dizzyingly disorienting intra-psychical/subjective cacophony of tongues, a multi-voiced soliloquy that sometimes loudly clamors and sometimes softly murmurs. Consequently, knowing how, what, and/or why one feels what one feels can be nearly impossible in certain instances. With this in mind, the time is ripe to circumnavigate back to the neuroscience of the emotional brain.

Panksepp mentions the complications considerations of language introduce into the heart of affective neuroscience. From his perspective, the key problem here is one of constructing an accurate taxonomy of affects: How should primary and secondary emotions, various feeling states, and related phenomena be classified—and with what linguistic labels?⁶⁵ Panksepp directly evinces the concern that the affect vocabularies of natural languages are too equivocal and imprecise to furnish affective neuroscience with concept-terms of sufficient clarity and distinctness to carve with rigorous representational precision the realities of the emotional brain at, as it were, its real joints. This is the exact juncture at which a genuinely Hegelian gesture with respect to Panksepp's neuroscience of affects is both possible and productive, a gesture mobilizing the interrelated life-scientific facts/notions of neuroplasticity and epigenetics⁶⁶ (it's no accident that Catherine Malabou's philosophically fruitful turn to the neurosciences is initially motivated by her sophisticated appreciation of the role of plasticity in Hegel's anthropology⁶⁷). The Hegel-style move to be made in this context is to assert that the difficulty of naming affective phenomena is not external to the thing itself. Worded differently, the ambiguities, vagueness, equivocations, and imprecision of the inmixed affect languages

⁶⁵ (Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, pg. 47, 52, 149, 302, 318-319)

⁶⁶ (Changeux, *The Physiology of Truth*, pg. 37, 39)

⁶⁷ (Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, pg. 8-9, 73-74, 192-193)

of both *lalangue* and *les langues* don't remain neatly confined to a separate representational outside (say, scientific discourses supposedly apart from their objects of investigation) without effects on neurologically grounded emotional being. Or, put in yet other terms, the uncertainties Panksepp highlights as raising doubts about any taxonomy in affective neuroscience aren't (just) indicative of purely epistemological-representational inadequacies internal to scientific discourses—these uncertainties reflect the uncertainties of affective life in and of itself, a life in which felt feelings circulate amongst a much vaster range of unfelt and misfelt feelings.

This Hegelian maneuver *vis-à-vis* Panksepp is justified for a number of reasons. To begin with, neuroplasticity is now a well-established, undisputed matter of scientific fact. Part of what the side of plasticity involving flexibility and malleability entails is the brain's genetically dictated openness to epigenetic dictates.⁶⁸ In Lacanian eyes, symbolic orders constitute one of the most (if not the most) significant sources of epigenetic factors influential in the vicissitudes of ontogenetic subject-formation. The physiologically and psychologically momentous period of language acquisition is a time during which (in Lacanese) *lalangue* is affected by *la langue* (an affecting for which neuroplasticity is one of the crucial contingent-yet-*apriori* material conditions of its very possibility).⁶⁹ This transition into linguistically mediated subjectivity, the time of becoming a speaking subject *qua* \$, is a passage through which the exogenous imposition of language as *la langue* becomes metabolized by the living being undergoing this, digested and thereby appropriated as endogenous (i.e., subjectified insofar as subjectification arises from

⁶⁸ (Changeux, *The Physiology of Truth*, pg. 184-185)

(Rogers, *Sexing the Brain*, pg. 21-22)

(Keith E. Stanovich, *The Robot's Rebellion: Finding Meaning in the Age of Darwin*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, pg. 82, 201-202)

⁶⁹ (Changeux, *The Physiology of Truth*, pg. 62)

introjections of little-o others and internalizations of symbolic orders as big Others). Obviously, one sizable sector of the language or languages thus identified with consists of vocabularies for affective phenomena. Once created on these platforms and in these ways, the *parlêtre*, the speaking subject who speaks to him/her-self and others about, among other things, affective phenomena using hazy and inexact affect vocabularies, is auto-affecting, an auto-affection that (re)acts on the neural foundations participating in its generation. Furthermore, it's worth remembering at this point that the contemporary sciences of the brain emphasize the co-penetrating entanglements of the cognitive and emotional systems of the massively interconnected human central nervous system (or, translated in Lacan's terminology, signifiers and affects aren't, in actuality if not in theory, cleanly partitioned and independent in relation to each other). This means that the cognitive dimension of affect language gets woven into the emotional dimension of affects themselves, setting in motion an oscillating, back-and-forth dialectic of mutual, two-way modulation between affects and signifiers (LeDoux draws attention to this in less technical terms⁷⁰). Consequently, the reflexive auto-affective dynamics of the *parlêtre qua* \$, dynamics in which the confusing muddiness of the emotional lexicons of overlapping *lalangue* and *la langue* swirls about, results in fuzzy and imprecise affect vocabularies literally bedding down in the brain itself, rewiring and sculpting this groundless neural ground. Hence, Panksepp's lack of Hegelian sensibilities when considering the linguistic naming and representation of emotions and feelings is an instructive example of what Pommier might mean when he accuses neuroscientists of "forgetting" the issue of language (particularly language as understood in Lacanian

⁷⁰ (LeDoux, *Synaptic Self*, pg. 203-204)

psychoanalytic theory).⁷¹ This also lends illustrative support to Pommier's contention that, "more and more of the numerous results of the neurosciences are illegible without psychoanalysis."⁷²

A similar absence of Hegelian finesse afflicts the non-Lacanian neuro-psychoanalysis advocated by Solms. Appealing to Spinoza, he and his collaborators proclaim "dual-aspect monism" to be the ontological framework through which their particular version of the synthesis of the neurosciences and psychoanalysis approaches the central matter of the mind-body relationship.⁷³ This Spinozist framework maintains too sharp a demarcating line of non-dialectical distinction between mental and physical "attributes" (the presupposed monistic ontological underbelly posited here remains epistemologically inaccessible, a noumenal substratum *an sich*).⁷⁴ A philosophical paradigm sharply partitioning mind and body as separate and autonomous "aspects" is in danger of theoretically blinding its adherents to, among other things, precisely the phenomena brought out in stark relief through the immediately preceding Hegelian critique of Panksepp: Theoretically postulating the mental-subjective and the physical-objective as independent angles of stratified refraction appears not to allow for taking into account the full extent of the consequences of linguistic mediation (including the mediations of affect languages) on subjects emerging out of plastic neural systems sustaining both auto- and hetero-affectations.

⁷¹ (Pommier, *Comment les neurosciences démontrent la psychanalyse*, pg. 18)

⁷² (Pommier, *Comment les neurosciences démontrent la psychanalyse*, pg. 17)

⁷³ (Karen Kaplan-Solms and Mark Solms, *Clinical Studies in Neuro-Psychoanalysis: Introduction to a Depth Neuropsychology*, New York: Other Press, 2002 [second edition], pg. 250-251, 255) (Solms and Turnbull, *The Brain and the Inner World*, pg. 54-56, 72, 78)

⁷⁴ (Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology*, pg. 275-280)

These dangers and difficulties aside, Solms and Turnbull helpfully highlight a number of interesting sites of overlap between psychoanalysis and the neurosciences. In particular, they emphasize, resonating with earlier discussions above, the many important roles of neurologically hard-wired “blanks” in the human brain, namely, hard-wired absences of hard-wiring. Such pre-programmed openings, as openings for reprogramming, are, in their view, crucial conditions for the potential eventual genesis of the forms of subjectivity familiar to quotidian experience generally and psychoanalytic clinical practice specifically. Appropriating Panksepp’s taxonomy of the evolutionarily primary basic emotion systems shared in common between humans and other mammals, Solms and Turnbull associate the SEEKING system with the Freudian notion of the id-level seat of the drives, the motivational foundations of the libidinal economy. In so doing, they claim that Freud’s central thesis regarding the “object-less” status of the drives⁷⁵ is vindicated by the neuroscientific discovery that the SEEKING system acquires its orienting coordinates (i.e., what specifically, in terms of objects and states of affairs, is craved, desired, wanted, etc.) exclusively over time through experience, learning, and so on.⁷⁶

Apart from the SEEKING system, Solms and Turnbull, when addressing as a whole Panksepp’s overall taxonomic schema for the evolutionary foundations of the emotional brain, are anxious to underscore that adopting this schema isn’t tantamount to capitulating to a reductive naturalism and/or mechanistic materialism eliminating much of what a psychoanalytic approach would wish to conserve (in relation to this, one could

⁷⁵ (SE 7: 147-148)

(SE 14: 122-123)

(Adrian Johnston, *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005, pg. 20-21, 168)

⁷⁶ (Solms and Turnbull, *The Brain and the Inner World*, pg. 118-119, 122-123)

maintain that Freud never repudiated without reservations the neurosciences *tout court*, only the reductive/mechanistic versions of them prevalent at the time, versions centered on establishing neuro-anatomical localizations of mental processes rather than appreciating these processes as involving dynamics distributed across multiple neural networks and sub-systems⁷⁷). While admitting that the genetically shaped brain is hardly a *tabula rasa* to be overwritten by epigenetic variables—this empiricist-style (*à la* Locke and Hume) image of the brain is empirically quite false⁷⁸—Solms and Turnbull nonetheless repeatedly stress (much more so than Panksepp) that the human brain’s various blanks are the plastic openings through which the unique complexities of a human subject’s life trace the idiosyncratic contours of a person’s absolutely singular brain.⁷⁹ One can’t help but hear echoes of the original French title of the Lacanian neuro-psychoanalytic book by Ansermet and Magistretti: “To each his own brain.”

In a strangely neglected book (*La causalité psychique: Entre nature et culture* [1995]), ex/post-Lacanian analyst André Green directly confronts some of the challenging, vexing issues haunting any effort to bring together psychoanalysis and the neurosciences (borrowing David Chalmer’s phrase, one could credit Green with tackling head-on the neuro-psychoanalytic version of the “hard problem” around which mind-body debates in Anglo-American analytic philosophy of mind circles orbit). Green touches on a number of claims and topics dealt with previously here: the significant

⁷⁷ (Kaplan-Solms and Solms, *Clinical Studies in Neuro-Psychoanalysis*, pg. 18-23, 43, 55)
(Ansermet and Magistretti, *The Biology of Freedom*, pg. 216)

⁷⁸ (Changeux, *The Physiology of Truth*, pg. 8-9, 23, 25, 28, 32-33, 36, 246, 247)
(Metzinger, *Being No One*, pg. 51)

(Johnston, “What Matter(s) in Ontology,” pg. 35)

⁷⁹ (Solms and Turnbull, *The Brain and the Inner World*, pg. 120, 133-134, 277-278)

influence of language as a higher order cognitive function on the embodied psyche⁸⁰; the contextual mediation of the brain as dependent for its structures and dynamics on its particular physical and cultural-symbolic environs⁸¹; the inseparable entanglement of nature and nurture in human subjects, to the point of the difference often being indiscernible for all intents and purposes⁸²; the biologically inborn incompleteness of human beings as naturally destining humans to socio-sexual denaturalization⁸³; the drive-level intersections at which soma and psyche are soldered to each other while nonetheless remaining relatively distinct from one another.⁸⁴ For anyone acquainted with Lacan's writings, the title of Green's book is likely to call to mind the 1946 *écrit* "Presentation on Psychological Causality." Therein, Lacan speaks of "the intersection of the biological and the social."⁸⁵ He proceeds to remark that, "man is far more than his body, even though he can know [*savoir*] nothing more about his being."⁸⁶ Lest this remark be mistaken for marking an abrupt break with anything biological, Lacan, consonant with other contemporaneous lines of his own thought expressed elsewhere,⁸⁷ hints a page later

⁸⁰ (André Green, *La causalité psychique: Entre nature et culture*, Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 1995, pg. 43)

⁸¹ (Green, *La causalité psychique*, pg. 45)

⁸² (Green, *La causalité psychique*, pg. 118, 252, 290-291)

⁸³ (Green, *La causalité psychique*, pg. 279)

⁸⁴ (Green, *La causalité psychique*, pg. 289-290)

⁸⁵ (Jacques Lacan, "Presentation on Psychological Causality," *Écrits*, pg. 150)

⁸⁶ (Lacan, "Presentation on Psychological Causality," pg. 153)

⁸⁷ (Jacques Lacan, "*Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l'individu: Essai d'analyse d'une fonction en psychologie*," *Autres écrits*, pg. 33-34)

(Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," *Écrits*, pg. 77-78)

(Jacques Lacan, "Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis," *Écrits*, pg. 92)

(Jacques Lacan, "Some Reflections on the Ego," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, no. 34, 1953, pg. 13)

(Johnston, "The Weakness of Nature")

at the relevance of psychoanalytic insights and concepts for the life sciences.⁸⁸ These 1946 indications audibly reverberate in Green's 1995 book.

When it comes to what “causes” human subjects to be what they are, Green insists again and again that the psychical causality isolated and explained exclusively by psychoanalysis is neither natural nor cultural.⁸⁹ He identifies the Freudian id as “the genuine intercessor between the brain and the psyche.”⁹⁰ Emergentism also is alluded to by Green⁹¹—“psychical causality is that which *emerges* from the relations between nature and culture.”⁹² Thus-constituted, ontogenetically-emergent subjects, as loci of convergence for a vast multitude of overdetermining vectors of “natural” and “cultural” influences, are therefore, in part, incredibly dense condensations of “hypercomplexity.”⁹³ Both the theory and practice of analysis allegedly address themselves to this hypercomplexity, attending, through free association, to the irrational reason and illogical logics arising out of beings situated at the multifaceted intersections of so many converging (and frequently conflicting) forces and factors.⁹⁴

Despite displaying the gesture of reaching out a little bit to the natural sciences, Green ends up unfortunately perpetuating the inaccurate image of these disciplines as essentially hostile to any non-scientific (read “anti-reductive”) explanatory discourse such as psychoanalysis.⁹⁵ Situating analysis with respect to the post-Enlightenment tension between science and religion, Green depicts analysis as sharing religions’ ostensibly warranted worries regarding the reductive tendencies of the natural sciences

⁸⁸ (Lacan, “Presentation on Psychical Causality,” pg. 154)

⁸⁹ (Green, *La causalité psychique*, pg. 14, 252, 292, 298)

⁹⁰ (Green, *La causalité psychique*, pg. 21)

⁹¹ (Green, *La causalité psychique*, pg. 124-125, 239-240)

⁹² (Green, *La causalité psychique*, pg. 124)

⁹³ (Green, *La causalité psychique*, pg. 126, 292)

⁹⁴ (Green, *La causalité psychique*, pg. 87-89, 104, 303)

⁹⁵ (Green, *La causalité psychique*, pg. 252)

and their institutional and ideological offshoots. However, in supposed solidarity with the sciences, the Freudian field is said to be adamantly materialist. And yet, Green's analytic "materialism" refuses to ground the psyche in the brain.⁹⁶ Instead, with a nod to certain religious ideas, he "pleads for a 'laicized' soul that we designate as such in order to oppose it to cerebral machinery, which is nothing but a pale caricature of that which is the psyche."⁹⁷ He immediately warns one not to "confound this psyche with the religious soul of a divine essence."⁹⁸ Nonetheless, he subsequently resumes flirting with religiosity, laying out a tacitly Hegelian vision of psychoanalysis as raising the truth of religious anti-reductionism (as opposed to the purportedly reductive mechanistic materialism of the sciences, including the neurosciences) to the dignity of its secular, demystified Notion.⁹⁹

By contrast with Green's compromise position between religion and science, what if, reenacting the uncompromising Leninist stance of 1908's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, one objects that this psyche *qua* secularized soul really isn't all that secular minus a scientific explanation of how this entity escaping the jurisdiction of scientific explanation emerges from the lone immanent material ground(s) of concern to the sciences (similarly, one could treat the choice between religion and science as a Badiouian "point," that is, a fundamental, unavoidable choice between two mutually exclusive alternatives in which no viable third way is possible¹⁰⁰). This isn't to plead, against Green, in favor of a science-fetishizing reductivism. Rather, this is to insist that

⁹⁶ (Green, *La causalité psychique*, pg. 85)

⁹⁷ (Green, *La causalité psychique*, pg. 223)

⁹⁸ (Green, *La causalité psychique*, pg. 223)

⁹⁹ (Green, *La causalité psychique*, pg. 254)

¹⁰⁰ (Alain Badiou, *Logiques des mondes: L'être et l'événement*, 2, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006, pg. 96, 426-427, 438-439, 442-443, 459, 461, 601, 612, 614)

any materialism worthy of the title—a materialism entirely divorced from the natural sciences (i.e., a staunchly anti-naturalist materialism) is materialist in name only—must perform, in order to be truly materialist yet simultaneously non-reductive, a sort of theoretical jujitsu trick, namely, a vaguely Gödelian-style in/de-completion of the natural sciences. Playing off an irreducible non-natural subject, portrayed as a mystery utterly inexplicable in natural scientific terms, against the fictional straw man caricature of a neuronal machine governed exclusively by the blind mechanisms of evolution and genetics merely reinstates a version of those dualisms that rightly are so anathema to the tradition of authentic materialism. When it comes to the subjects of concern to psychoanalysis (i.e., human beings as speaking subjects), the real challenge actually is to pinpoint and link up two parallel, complementary nodes of explanatory incompleteness within scientific and psychoanalytic discourses. A properly formulated neuro-psychoanalysis does precisely this: It engages in the double move of, one, supplementing Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis with a naturalist/biological account of the material underpinnings of denaturalized/more-than-biological subjectivity and, two, supplementing the neurosciences with a rich, sophisticated metapsychological theory of subjects whose geneses, although tied to brains, involve much more than bare anatomy and biology (these emergent subjects also come to have significant repercussions for the bio-material bases that are the necessary-but-not-sufficient aleatory conditions of possibility for their very existences). One can and should strive to develop a scientifically informed (although not purely and strictly scientific) account of how humans defying and escaping explanatory encapsulation by the sciences become what they are. Correlatively, a materialist psychoanalysis must be (as Lacan would put it) not

without its scientific reasons, all the while simultaneously maintaining itself as a specific discipline whose objects of inquiry cannot be collapsed into subject-less material being(s).¹⁰¹

As regards Green specifically, of even greater interest in connection with outlining a neuro-psychoanalytic metapsychology of affect is an early essay by him, entitled “The Logic of Lacan’s *objet (a)* and Freudian Theory: Convergences and Questions,” written under the influence of Lacan and published in 1966 in the third issue of the influential journal *Cahiers pour l’Analyse*. Therein, in a subsection of his essay on “The Problem of the Distinction between the Representative of Drive and the Affect,” he addresses the relations between, on the one hand, Freud’s *Vorstellung* and Lacan’s signifier, and, on the other hand, affective phenomena as distinct from such ideational representations and their logics/structures. Speaking of the later Freud, Green enigmatically proposes that, “*the affect takes on the status of signifier.*”¹⁰² To Lacanian ears, this sounds puzzling, to the point of perhaps sounding paradoxical and/or self-contradictory insofar as Lacan tirelessly insists on the difference-in-kind separating affects and signifiers. A few paragraphs later, Green seems to reinstate Lacan’s distinction between signifier and affect by claiming that the latter, unlike the former, is non-combinatory—“*The specificity of affect is that it cannot enter into combination.*”¹⁰³ Unlike Lacan, the early Green, in line with Freud,¹⁰⁴ allows for the possibility of affects

¹⁰¹ (Johnston, “Conflicted Matter,” pg. 167-168, 174-176, 178-182, 187-188)

(Johnston, “What Matter(s) in Ontology,” pg. 38-42, 44)

¹⁰² (André Green, “The Logic of Lacan’s *objet (a)* and Freudian Theory: Convergences and Questions” [trans. Kimberly Kleinert and Beryl Schlossman], *Interpreting Lacan* [ed. Joseph H. Smith and William Kerrigan], New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, pg. 180)

¹⁰³ (Green, “The Logic of Lacan’s *objet (a)* and Freudian Theory,” pg. 181)

¹⁰⁴ (*SE* 9: 123)

(*SE* 19: 26-27, 35, 166)

(*SE* 22: 109)

succumbing to repression.¹⁰⁵ But, in Green's view, whereas repressed signifiers *qua* *Vorstellungen* come to light only through indirect, winding webs of associative combinations involving multiple ideational representations of the same type, repressed affects "can be expressed directly—that is, without passing through the connecting links of the preconscious."¹⁰⁶ One of the guiding assumptions apparently steering Green's proposals is the notion that affective phenomena, by contrast with linguistic-symbolic signifiers as structured ideational representations, enjoy a non-relational self-sufficiency, an immediate identity-to-self as samenesses, by contrast with the mediated non-self-identity of signifiers as (to quote Saussure) "differences *without positive terms*."¹⁰⁷

The final move to be made, the explication of which will occupy the remainder of what follows below, can be introduced through reference to Green's 1966 text. In terms of this reference, it consists of rejecting his manners of maintaining a clear contrast between affects and signifiers as a consequence of putting a new twist on his suggestion that "*the affect takes on the status of signifier*." This proposition can be twisted into the ultimate infinite judgment of a Lacan-inflected neuro-psychoanalysis: Affects are signifiers. Interestingly, both Lacanian psychoanalysis and affective neuroscience seem to concur that this equation is problematic, if not nonsensically impossible. Empirical studies of the brain have uncovered evidence supporting the Freudian-Lacanian thesis regarding the distinction between emotional affects and cognitive representations.¹⁰⁸

However, one should bear in mind that the neurosciences also often simultaneously

(Johnston, "Misfelt Feelings")

¹⁰⁵ (Green, "The Logic of Lacan's *objet (a)* and Freudian Theory," pg. 180-181)

¹⁰⁶ (Green, "The Logic of Lacan's *objet (a)* and Freudian Theory," pg. 181)

¹⁰⁷ (Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* [ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, in collaboration with Albert Riedlinger; trans. Wade Baskin], New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966, pg. 120)

¹⁰⁸ (LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain*, pg. 299)

(Solms and Turnbull, *The Brain and the Inner World*, pg. 34)

maintain that, in most real-time brain processes, emotions and cognitions, although neurologically distinguishable, are *de facto* indistinguishable insofar as they are inextricably intertwined in lived reality. Apropos Lacan, one of the best ways to secure a grip on the nature of and justifications for his fashion of differentiating between signifiers and affects is to turn to the topic of deception.

For Lacan, both signifiers and affects are deceptive. But, they each deceive, according to him, in fundamentally different-in-kind ways. Going through Lacan's corpus and cataloguing the numerous forms of deception engendered by signifiers detailed therein would be a daunting, protracted task (one not to be undertaken here). Žižek, for instance, often draws attention to the title of Lacan's twenty-first seminar of 1973-1974: *Les non-dupes errant* ("the non-dupes err"—roughly homophonous with *le Nom-du-Père* [the Name-of-the-Father]). Succinctly summarized, the Name-of-the-Father, as the master signifier (S_1) underpinning the symbolic order as the universe of other signifiers (S_2), is a bluff, fake, fiction, illusion, myth, semblance, and so on¹⁰⁹; the entire Symbolic big Other constitutes a fantasmatic "virtual reality" not entirely governed by what is presumed to be actual, factual concrete being.¹¹⁰ The late Lacan, in the twenty-fourth seminar, goes so far as to declare that, "the symbolic tells nothing but lies."¹¹¹ And yet, as Žižek, following Lacan, is fond of reminding his readers, he/she who refuses to be "taken in" by the trickery of the signifier-mediated virtual reality of the

¹⁰⁹ (Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Dennis Porter], New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992, pg. 181) (Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVIII: D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant, 1971* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller], Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006, pg. 15)

(Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIII*, pg. 121)

¹¹⁰ (Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre X: L'angoisse, 1962-1963* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller], Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004, pg. 91-95)

(Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVIII*, pg. 164-165)

¹¹¹ (Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIV*, session of February 15th, 1977)

symbolic order—such a cynical nominalist, empiricist, and/or positivist “non-dupe” stubbornly sticks to beliefs in absolutely singular and unique entities, conceptually unprocessed raw perceptual experience, and/or brute facts-in-themselves wholly independent of socio-symbolic mediation—errs most, losing contact with those abstractions that, in the topsy-turvy mediated world of human existence, arguably are more concrete than the (imagined) concrete itself.¹¹² Near the end of his life, Lacan counts himself amongst the dupes (who presumably don’t err).¹¹³ One contextually appropriate manner of fleshing out what is meant here involves referring back to the preceding Hegelian critique of Panksepp’s handling of the issue of linguistic labeling in constructing a taxonomy of emotion systems in the brain: Those who cling to the conviction that clear-cut affective distinctions dwell in the posited extra-representational concrete real of the central nervous system entirely apart from the hazy, murky representational fuzziness of abstract affect languages are the ones who err, both theoretically and empirically—the vagaries of affect languages are not without their impacts on the emotional brain itself. That is to say, the “lies” of “inaccurate” emotional

¹¹² (Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXI*, sessions of November 13th, 1973, December 11th, 1973, January 8th, 1974, January 15th, 1974)

(Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXII: R.S.I., 1974-1975* [unpublished typescript], sessions of November 19th, 1974, December 17th, 1974)

(Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters*, London: Verso, 1996, pg. 206)

(Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, London: Verso, 1999, pg. 323)

(Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute—or, Why is the Christian legacy worth fighting for?*, London: Verso, 2000, pg. 127-128)

(Slavoj Žižek, “Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence,” in Slavoj Žižek, Eric L. Santner, and Kenneth Reinhard, *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, pg. 179)

(Slavoj Žižek, “Author’s afterword: Where do we stand today?,” *The Universal Exception: Selected Writings, Volume Two* [ed. Rex Butler and Scott Stephens], London: Continuum, 2006, pg. 304-305)

¹¹³ (Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXVII: Dissolution, 1979-1980* [unpublished typescript], session of January 15th, 1980)

terminology in natural languages become the (partial) truths of affective life *an sich*, right down to its material roots.

In the sixteenth seminar, Lacan distinguishes between “dupery” (*duperie*) and “deception” (*tromperie*). The latter implies a standard of representational accuracy or faithfulness *vis-à-vis* an extra-representational point of reference. Degrees of deception, in Lacan’s specific sense, are measured according to the criteria of a correspondence theory of truth. As he rightly observes, psychoanalysis is not at all invested in a correspondence theory of truth (at least as it’s commonly construed). Analysts aren’t (or shouldn’t be) preoccupied with speculations about the representational veracity of, say, childhood memories or depictions of recent events transpiring outside the four walls of the analytic consulting room. One could say that analysis concerns itself more with a coherence theory of truth, with the consistencies (and inconsistencies) of the networks of associative connections internal to the webs of analysands’ monologues; whether the nodes in these networks are realistic renditions or fictitious fantasies is both unknowable within the framework of an analysis as well as unimportant to its progress. But, psychoanalysis indeed is very interested in dupery, specifically, “the dupery of consciousness.” Lacan defines a dupe as “someone who someone else exploits.” Consciousness is duped to the extent that it’s “exploited” (i.e., pushed around, manipulated, etc.) by those signifiers forming symptomatic formations of the unconscious generating perturbations within the narrow, restricted field of self-awareness.¹¹⁴

As regards the topic of affect in psychoanalysis, Lacan appears to maintain that affects deceive whereas signifiers dupe. Generally speaking, he reduces affects to felt

¹¹⁴ (Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVI*, pg. 208)

feelings (i.e., Freudian *Empfindungen*¹¹⁵) and characterizes such consciously registered sentiments (or “*senti-ments*”¹¹⁶) as either opaque signals confusedly gesturing at a reality of a different order than their own (i.e., the unconscious “other scene” composed of signifiers as non-affective ideational representations [*Vorstellungen*]) or the red herrings of “*affectuations*”¹¹⁷ concealing repressed signifying structures. In a sense, Lacan judges affects according to a correspondence theory of truth, albeit one internal to the (in)coherent “psychical reality” of the *parlêtre* talking on the couch: The relative truth or falsity, honesty or dishonesty, of affects (as felt feelings) is measured against the standards of signifiers (as different-in-kind from feelings).

Another angle of approach to these issues is to observe that, from Lacan’s perspective, signifiers and affects both can be misleading, although they mislead in utterly distinct modes. In this view, affects tend to mislead at the level of why they are, but not what they are. When one feels angry, sad, and so on, what’s misleading is not the phenomenal feel of the feeling per se, but, rather, the true (unfeeling) causes, logics, objects, and reasons (all situated within non-affective representational registers) responsible for the emergence in conscious experience of the feeling state in question—and this insofar as Lacan regularly argues that affects, limited to the status of felt feelings and nothing more, are only ever displaced within consciousness along unfurling chains of signifiers, some of which are repressed/unconscious in ways that affects, according to him, cannot be repressed/unconscious.¹¹⁸ Lacan’s psychoanalytic appropriation of

¹¹⁵ (Johnston, “Misfelt Feelings”)

¹¹⁶ (Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIII*, pg. 66)

¹¹⁷ (Jacques Lacan, “*La mort est du domaine de la foi*,” October 13th, 1972, <http://www.ecole-lacanienne.net/pastoutlacan70.php>)

¹¹⁸ (Jacques Lacan, “In Memory of Ernest Jones: On His Theory of Symbolism,” *Écrits*, pg. 598) (Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre VI: Le désir et son interprétation, 1958-1959* [unpublished typescript], session of November 26th, 1958)

Saussurian linguistics combines, among other things, Saussure's definition of the signifier as a purely differential entity determined by its relations with other such entities with Freud's psychoanalytic thesis that representational contents and associative connections in mental life can be unconscious (for Lacan, these contents are signifiers and these connections are their relations). One implication of this, in terms of the modes in which signifiers and affects can be misleading, is that, unlike affects, signifiers can and do mislead even as to what they are—if a signifier is what it is by virtue of the sum total of its differential relations with other signifiers, and if repression and related defense mechanisms delineated by psychoanalysis are able to render one or more of these other signifiers unconscious, then consciousness can be misled about what a given signifier is if some of this signifier's co-determining relations with repressed other signifiers are unknown to this same consciousness. The entire preceding project, especially through its return to the fine-grained textual details of Freud's discussions of affective phenomena and explorations of current affective neuroscience,¹¹⁹ undermines this Lacanian fashion of differentiating between affects and signifiers. In the combined lights of Freud and the neurosciences, if the term "affect" refers to much more than just consciously felt feelings (i.e., Freudian *Empfindungen*, as distinct from *Affekte* and *Gefühle*), then a very disturbing, unsettling truth reveals itself: Affects can and do mislead not only at the level of why they are, but what they are, how they feel.

(Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, pg. 102-103)

(Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre X*, pg. 23-24)

(Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, 1964* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Alan Sheridan], New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977, pg. 216-217)

(Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIII*, pg. 149)

(Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXVII*, session of March 18th, 1980)

(Lacan, "Television," pg. 20)

¹¹⁹ (Johnston, "Misfelt Feelings")

In a Hegelian-style formulation, perhaps it could be said that the distinction between affects and signifiers is a distinction internal to the category of the signifier itself. With respect to Lacan, this formulation isn't as objectionable as it might seem at first glance. To cut a long story short, Lacan's signifier isn't necessarily a unit of language as per linguistics. Rather, anything can be a signifier if its status and functions rely upon its positions in constellations of synchronic systems and diachronic dynamics in which spatial and temporal differences are decisive; other materials besides the phonetic and graphic materials of natural languages can and do operate as signifiers as defined by both Lacan and various versions of a post-Saussurian general semiotics.¹²⁰ But, one lingering, nagging question remains: If affects can be signifiers given that the category of signifier is a formal rather than a substantial category, then what are affects? During his television appearance, Lacan, in response to Jacques-Alain Miller drawing attention to the word "unconscious," says regarding this key word for psychoanalysis:

—Freud didn't find a better one, and there's no need to go back on it. The disadvantage of this word is that it is negative, which allows one to assume anything at all in the world about it, plus everything else as well. Why not? To that which goes unnoticed, the word *everywhere* applies just as well as *nowhere*.¹²¹

If, as these observations indicate, the problem with the word "unconscious" is that it's a negative term ("un-") for a positive "x"—Lacan immediately adds, "It is nonetheless a very precise thing"¹²²—the problem with the word "affect" might be the exact opposite: It's a positive term for a negative "x," for the absence of a coherent concept referring, in a precise one-to-one correspondence, to a clearly identifiable set of phenomena. Even drawing boundary lines circumscribing a general domain that would be the realm of the

¹²⁰ (Johnston, *Time Driven*, pg. 300-315)

¹²¹ (Lacan, "Television," pg. 5)

¹²² (Lacan, "Television," pg. 5)

affects proper (as manifestly distinct from other things) is incredibly tricky and uncertain. And yet, just as Lacan chooses not to jettison the word “unconscious” despite its noted drawbacks, maybe the fuzzy word “affect” ought to be retained precisely because the realities it designates are themselves fuzzy. If “affect” is indeed a positive term for a negative “x,” this negativity isn’t merely epistemological-representational (i.e., a deficiency or lack at the level of the concept alone). Redeploying the distinctions between emotions and various shades and sorts of feelings uncovered by recent affective neuroscience, perhaps the term “affect” should be retained precisely to designate the uniquely human de-synchronizations between emotions and feelings (as per Damasio’s distinction between emotion and feeling¹²³) and amongst feelings themselves, namely, the actual, palpable absences of synchronous harmonies afflicting the bodies, brains, and psyches of partially denaturalized subjects of signifiers. For such subjects, affective life must be lived under the permanent shadow of doubts about passions and sentiments as anything but self-evident, self-transparent, and self-sufficient experiences. Reflexive self-consciousness, thanks to the reflexivity of feeling itself, never will seize upon solid guarantees vouching for the ultimate, final truths of why it feels, how it feels, or even what it feels. A lot can happen in the gaps between feelings and the feelings of feelings. Armed with the combined resources of its Freudian foundations and the rapidly accumulating findings of the neurosciences, the time is ripe for Lacanian explorations of this terrain that no longer justifiably can be neglected.

¹²³ (Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*, pg. 139, 143, 145-146, 159)
 (Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, pg. 11, 20-22, 36-37, 42-43, 279-281, 283-284)
 (Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza*, pg. 7, 27-29, 30, 55, 60-61, 79-80, 85-86, 88, 91, 101)
 (Johnston, “Misfelt Feelings”)