

Reason Split into Rationalism and Empiricism: Divergent Traditions on the Borderline

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Introduction

Divisions between binary terms always sooner or later return, like the repressed, in displaced shapes within each of the terms of the given opposition. In accordance with this structural necessity, modern reason splits at its inception—which replays ancient models in displaced forms—into *rationalist* and *empiricist* methodologies.¹ We see progressively in this Special Issue that splitting—often regarded as the fundamental defensive mechanism of the “borderline”—belongs to the structure of reason itself; reason, or mental health, is always already carried beyond its edge by this splitting that constitutes it. The dispute between the rationalist and empiricist approaches—which is certainly one of the principal forms such splitting takes, and which organizes Western philosophical discussion from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries—is still very much with us, and not just in the standard undergraduate modern philosophical history course “From Descartes to Kant.” The dispute persists despite Kant’s valiant and radically rigorous attempt to put an end to it during the late Enlightenment, an attempt that, in his own way, Freud renews, as I will suggest below. Indeed, this dispute still powerfully determines (and obscures), as I would like to begin to show here, the polemics between different schools of psychoanalytic thought and treatment, notably but of course not exclusively where the question of the “borderline” comes up.

The factual presence of this methodological differentiation tends, however, to receive insufficient critical attention. This is because we often prefer for various reasons—philosophical ignorance, the ease of *ad hominem* rhetoric, vaguely patriotic or disciplinary provinciality—to use national terms (“French” or “Anglo-American”) and authorial names (“Freudian,” “Kleinian,” “Lacanian,” “Jungian”²), or strictly psychoanalytic school terminology (like “drive-theory” vs. “object relations”) to characterize different approaches in the psychoanalytic field, rather than more general or philosophical, epistemological paradigms. But these paradigms lurk hidden behind or

within national designations (and hence authorial names) because epistemological ideologies (and their textual traditions) set down deep roots in national discourses. This is why it is crucial to look beyond proper names and national identifications to unearth the role played by these epistemological paradigms in the structuring of psychoanalytic thought. For only such a work of philosophico-historical memory can enable us to take critical distance from the polemical claims of some—and perhaps all—of the sub-traditions within psychoanalysis. To understand methodological dogmas both in their one-sided arbitrariness (which may, however, also be inescapable) and in their entanglement in a discursive project to externalize and control the irrational (both as madness and as faith) is to increase one's capacity to resist, at least to some extent, the irrationality of these presuppositions and the polemics that they dictate. Such resistance remains desirable, even as—and precisely because—the desire that subtends it is no doubt “guilty” of a certain participation in madness: it is madness to resist (the madness of method).

The tensions between French, specifically Lacanian psychoanalysis, and Anglo-American, ego-psychological and/or object relations psychoanalysis often take the form of mutual disdain or indifference, needless to say. Yet these tensions cast their shadow on any contemporary involvement in psychoanalytic theory, especially from the standpoint of the humanities, and also more narrowly concerning the question of the “borderline” posed here. It is on these tensions—against the background of the Freudian text (which is linguistically and culturally neither French nor English, as one knows but perhaps insufficiently reflects upon)—that I will try to throw here some *preliminary* methodological-historical light to supplement and frame the reading of the essays in this section.

Because the Lacanian tradition develops within a French milieu, it is not surprising that Lacan should have repeatedly—and across his entire career—articulated his understanding of Freud's invention in terms of Descartes' philosophy.³ (On the other hand, this was not inevitable, for there *are* of course non-Lacanian analysts in France like André Green, and Lacanian-influenced analysts who are also tied to Anglo-American—and in particular object-relations focused—analytic traditions, such as Julia Kristeva, who has made the most of the “borderline” category, specifically in terms of

“abjection,” as I discuss in passing below.) The rationalist tendency of the French tradition descending from Descartes marks Lacan’s thought not only through this specific extensive dialogue with Descartes (a complex topic we can only note here without exploring in the extensive detail it deserves), but in general through the theoreticist and philosophical leanings of Lacan’s thought, through his interest in mathematical and logical models, and through his very theory of the object *a* as self-given internally through the fundamental fantasy.⁴ In Lacan’s multiple approaches to Descartes’ famous phrase “I think, therefore I am”—always in tension with Lacan’s interest in Heidegger—the enduring stress is on the attempt to avoid the substantiation of the subject, as is reflected in the rift Lacan always establishes between the “I think” and the “I am,” or thinking and being, subjectivity and substantiality.⁵ Nonetheless, Lacan repeatedly insists on an intimate connection between Cartesian rationalism and the Freudian subject.⁶

From the perspective of this rationalist tradition, an empiricist’s dependence on sense perception as origin of all knowledge appears to be based on a kind of irrational (and as it were Lutheran or Calvinist) faith, faith in the unmediated data of sense and the immediate givenness of the natural object. This faith amounts, further, for the rationalist tradition, to a kind of madness, stupidity, or naïveté (various names for irrationality), although people—even rationalists—don’t always say directly what they mean. From this (French) rationalist perspective, rooted in the self-certainty of the cogito established by the path of radical doubt, the unreliability of the senses—a kind of imaginary function—was already established at the very outset of the Cartesian path of radical doubt in the *Meditations*. Moreover, the questionable character of immediately given nature has been reinforced in the French tradition by innumerable neoclassical and post-neoclassical developments, from the French gardening tradition to the decadence of the late nineteenth century—according to which (as the great French writer Oscar Wilde insisted) nature imitates art, and not the other way around—to the structuralist revolution.⁷ It should hardly be surprising that in such a context the realism, naturalism, and pragmatism of ego-psychology would have become the target of a sustained critique by Lacan and his followers. Not that Lacanianism is wrong to articulate this critique, but simply that the critique is rooted in the self-evidences of a finite (though grand)

methodological and national tradition, and a specific notion of truth as self-certainty (or self-experience), that are posed against another, complementary but incompatible, tradition and truth-concept.

The empiricist tradition in turn since Locke, Berkeley, and Hume—so deeply rooted in our Anglo-American consciousness that we can barely imagine any sane alternative to this very general approach—regards given, perceptible, objective reality as the touchstone of true knowledge qua correspondence. For this tradition, the rationalist reliance on innate ideas is tantamount to basing reason on faith in a revelation. It means remaining dependent on traditional dogmas (in an implicitly catholicizing mode), dogmas that do not qualify as “science” worthy of the public, common sphere. To be “reasonable” means, for an empiricist, to be “in touch with reality,” as we say colloquially in English and thereby incontrovertibly demand. It means: to have a firm grasp on the objects in one’s environment. Accordingly, for Anglo-American analysis, Freud’s “reality-ego” takes on great prominence, and mental health appears as a practical adaptation to what is. From this perspective, to oppose or question the primacy of reality—as Lacan does, for example, in the programmatic address from 1936, “Beyond the Reality Principle” (*Écrits* 58-74)—appears either mad, or stupid, or at best naïve, like an outdated religion, although here too people—in this case, empiricists—do not always say precisely what they mean. Increasingly philosophy itself—unless, say, as philosophy of science or pragmatically oriented ethics—appears as (practically, e.g. clinically) beside the point, an anachronistic attempt to imagine how one would like things to be, at a time when science is there to help us figure out how things actually are. Theoreticism becomes a luxury of the upper classes and others with continental European pretensions, like French neo-classical theater quaintly irrelevant or even morally-politically reprehensible, whereas case studies and empirical research—on mother-child interactions, or primate attachments, or neurophysiology for those who are really up to date—are where “the rubber hits the road.” This perspective, too, is not entirely wrong, but it is one-sided at best, and only a particular cultural and philosophical reality *constitutes* the empiricist approaches for which reality is the only thing there is, i.e. the only ontological modality worth taking seriously.

In sum, each of the two basic forms of “reason”—rationalist and empiricist—labels its methodological opposite “unreason,” one-sidedly and arbitrarily, before it even approaches the thematic (i.e. post-methodological) question of the essences of unreason and reason, thereby committing a massive *petitio principii* that goes largely unnoticed within each tradition. Indeed, one can go further to argue that these positions are not simply opposed but that, as in the Kantian dialectic (and not by chance), they immanently switch places without being *aufgehoben* (Hegelian-style) into a higher unity.⁸ Lacan’s critique of “adaptation,” for example, indicts ego-psychology for being so firmly committed to the recognition of reality that it fails to recognize the reality of changing social mores, and of legitimate subjective push-back, and so of the *necessity* of the alteration of these mores under the pressure of social movements and individual desires.⁹ This Lacanian critique—which amounts to the suggestion that ego-psychology fails to recognize and to think the Real itself—thereby invokes a version of the very principle of reality against the ego-psychologist’s own commitment to it.

Conversely, when ego-psychology questions Lacanian rationalism from an empiricist/realist point of view, it does so necessarily, if perhaps often implicitly, in the name of rationality, in the face of the apparent *irrationalism* implied by Lacanian rationalism. For example, the theory of the “borderline” personality itself will necessarily question the felt dogmatism (and hence irrationality) of the insistence on the three nosological categories (i.e. neurosis, psychosis, and perversion) as sacrosanct. Likewise, Anglo-American analysis will question the apparent irrationalism entailed in the paradoxical or self-contradictory, seemingly pessimistic Lacanian insistence that the subject must find a way of mediating between the social bond and the unbound drives, between which from a Lacanian point of view there can be, at the same time, no real mediation. It is not, after all, only Hegel who believes that the real is the rational, the rational real. The two principal methodological perspectives of modern reason are bound up with one another, then, in a mutually constitutive structure, even as they remain mutually opposed.

But where is Freud in this politico-epistemological dialectic? Although I cannot demonstrate but only adumbrate this here, I want to suggest that Freud’s texts are situated at approximately the point where this dialectic becomes aware of itself as a

dialectic. In contrast to the Anglo-American (predominantly empiricist) and Lacanian (strongly rationalist) traditions, Freud's texts are closely bound up with the Kantian tradition. This is partly due to Freud's belonging to a German-language culture, but more directly due to the fact that he trained in the years when neo-Kantianism was prominent, and still more directly due to the fact that his philosophical teacher and mentor, Franz Brentano, developed his philosophical psychology within this neo-Kantian milieu, even if he tilted it in the direction of empirical studies. In a broadly post-Kantian tradition, Freud sees the dialectical opposition and intertwinement of empiricism and rationalism, and tries to reach beyond this dialectic by situating and relativizing these tendencies within a larger metapsychological and diagnostic structure. Freud pursues in the metapsychology a mapping of the conditions of the possibility of the experience of desire (as *Lust*, *Unlust*, *Wunsch*, *Triebregung*, etc.). The various patterns of desire, or diagnostic categories ("subjective structures" as Lacan will call them), are rooted in differential interrelations of the Freudian "faculties"—or "psychic instances." These "psychic instances," then, serve as "transcendental" aprioris (whose constitution is now, however, unlike in Kant, part of a genetic narrative). Freud alludes indirectly to the analogy between his intervention and Kant's when he speaks of his "Copernican Revolution," echoing Kant's claim to having accomplished such a revolution. And when he describes the "critical" instance of the superego as a "categorical imperative," he indicates thereby that Kant is an important and problematic figure in his own philosophical-methodological conscience.¹⁰

We cannot, of course, detail here the complexities involved in the philosophico-historically mediated displacement from the transcendental epistemic faculties of understanding, reason, and reflexive judgment (the latter combining unifying subsumption under a concept with the infinite multiplication of conceptual possibilities) into the transcendental-historical psychosexual faculties of ego, superego, and id (whose two principles are those of erotic unification and deathly division).¹¹ It is nonetheless useful for the "borderlines" discussion to recall that the Kantian understanding (*Verstand*) serves legitimately only as an instrument for the *empirical* grasp of objects, as a scientific-technical faculty, and that the Freudian reality-ego resembles it functionally in this regard. The *rationalist* faculty in Kant, in turn, is of course reason (*Vernunft*) itself,

whose use Kant ultimately sanctions only in an ethical sense (for where reason posits objects in a “speculative” mode, it becomes unreason, i.e. pure madness). The corresponding rationalist instance in Freud is the superego, the potential for whose fanatical madness consists in its drivenness by the id, whose eroto-thanatological energy cannot distinguish between production and destruction.

Finally, however, both Kant and Freud try to envision paradoxical limit-experiences—experiences of that which, properly speaking, cannot be experienced—in order to formulate a kind of minimal synthesis of the subject otherwise split between its rationalism and empiricism. Kant construes the (negative) unification of the empirical and rational faculties (or discourses), *Verstand* and *Vernunft*—as the opening essay by Alexander Mathäs discussed—in the aesthetic sphere in terms of *sublimity*, an experience in which a nonpresentable object presents itself. Freud, for his part, phrases such a (negative) unification of the split subject in his account of the *uncanny*—which the essay above by Samuel Weber thematizes in relation to anxiety—as the aesthetics of the return of the repressed. For the uncanny is the paradoxical intrusion into reality of what is not of the order of reality, the experience of what cannot be an object of experience, the experience of the impossible (which Lacan will call the Real). In Kant, the sublime operates this negative unification of the faculties as a manifestation of *reflexive judgment* (which in turn remains split between teleological objectivity and aesthetic subjectivity), in accordance with the Enlightenment desire to establish critical judgment as the original or central principle of the human. In Freud, one might argue, the uncanny operates the negative unification of ego and superego (as objective and subjective, real and unreal), qua manifestation of the id (split between eros and thanatos), in line with the late nineteenth century understanding of desire (or will) as the origin or essence of the human. The “borderline”—like the very movement (if not the specific contents) of dialectics, perhaps—is epistemically uncanny in this sense, as the site of the interpenetration of “madness”—a “negativity,” as Derrida had said, or a limitless hallucinated voice, as the GIFRIC analysts argue, that cannot be represented—and “reason”—or the regime of representation itself: the limit between limits and unlimitation. Nathanael, in Hoffmann’s tale “The Sandman,” would be the “borderline” par excellence.

But as I indicated above, Freud does not just root the two methods of modern reason—i.e. the opposition between reason and unreason as this opposition recurs *within* reason—in “psychic instances” (or psychoanalytic “faculties”). Rather, and thereby, he implies a “diagnosis” of each method. That is, he redefines the opposed methods diagnostically *as* subjective structures—one as *neurosis* and one as *psychosis*. We can glimpse this twofold diagnosis of epistemology (including the epistemology of diagnosis) by looking at Freud’s definitions of these two terms, and of the “borderline” area that lies between them, in the essay entitled “Neurosis and Psychosis” from 1924 (Freud, III, 331-37).

Taking as our point of departure the essay “Neurosis and Psychosis,” we find that reason and unreason, science and religion (or philosophy), and hence empiricism and rationalism are initially split between, or distributed across, the neurotic and the psychotic positions.¹² The neurotic assumes—excessively—the limits of reality and represses the impulses from the id, giving rise to inhibitions and limitations of all sorts. The neurotic is, as it were, subjected to and identified with, an overactive and domineering reality-ego. The positivist scientist fits well into this category, despite Freud’s attempt to accommodate his own work to the model of positive science. Indeed, Freud questions in many ways the limitations of science, for example, when as psychiatry it denies any meaning to dreams, thereby implying that his own “science” will have to exceed this mechanical-objectivist model.¹³ The psychotic, in turn, suppresses or denies limits represented by external reality, like an “ought” with no relation to an “is” (Kantian practical reason), producing a loss of reality, a limitless void into which the id-impulses have the opportunity, and also the misfortune, to expand.¹⁴ The psychotic is the rationalist whose pure reason has not yet been subjected to any critique, which is why Freud tends to associate philosophy (as a rationalism) with psychosis.

But Freud does not stop here. He goes on to describe two more structures that comprise, on my reading, the double limit between neurosis and psychosis. First, he considers the structure that lies between these two, neurosis and psychosis, a structure he designates as the “narcissistic psychoneuroses.” The “narcissistic” position lies between the other two because here neither reality-ego nor id is suppressed, but rather the superego, which conflicts with reality, on the one hand, and

the drives, on the other, while representing the interests of both in an obscure fashion. The “narcissistic psychoneurosis,” which like melancholy struggles with internalized but unmourned others, recognizes reality and desire but tries to shut out any sense of its own inadequacy or limitation, as in the grandiosity of the current “narcissistic personality disorder” type. But if narcissism tries to suppress the superego—which mediates the relationship between reality-ego and id, or between reality and drive, unifying them while it negates each—then narcissism both suppresses reality and drive (which the superego represents) and affirms them (because the superego also negates both of them). Indeed, because the superego is turned against itself (suppressing what it enables), to suppress the superego is also to affirm it (and the superego returns in pathological narcissism as a persecutorial Other). Such, it would seem, is the complexity of the narcissistic position.

Not surprisingly, however, this narcissistic *Mittelglied* (or *intermediate member*—a Kantian expression for the faculty of reflexive judgment) is doubled—like all borders as they are drawn—by a second intermediate category between neurosis and psychosis, this time the category of health (“ohne Erkrankung” [336]). How should we understand this doubling more precisely? If, as I have been suggesting, the opposition between neurosis and psychosis recapitulates that between reason and madness (albeit *within* the realm of madness in the modern form of mere mental illness), then the border between neurosis and psychosis will be doubled in the *specific* sense that one of its manifestations will have to be on the side of reason (or mental health), while the other remains on the side of madness (or mental illness). The double of narcissism will be the mental health, or rationality, with which psychoanalysis itself, here in Freud’s text, will want to identify itself, and in which it will want to identify its own methodological basis.

So how does the healthy self (i.e. the healthy ego as a synthetic site of identity rather than as a reality-ego) mediate between the demands of reality, superego, and drive? Oddly, Freud says, by dividing and deforming itself, becoming inconsistent (and in this sense irrational), in a manner that Freud sees as analogous to the “sexual perversions” (337). The “ego can then avoid a break in any direction [that is, with reality, id, or superego] in that it deforms itself, accepts losses of its unity [*Einbußen an seiner Einheitlichkeit*], even divides and splits itself [*sich zerklüftet und zerteilt*]. Thereby

appear the inconsistencies, twistedness, and foolishness of humans in a light similar to their sexual perversions, through assumption of which they of course spare themselves repressions [*rückten die Inkonsequenzen, Verschrobenheiten und Narrheiten der Menschen in ein ähnliches Licht wie ihre sexuellen Perversionen, durch deren Annahme sie sich ja Verdrängungen ersparen*]” (336-7). Narcissism—whose conflict with, and attempted suppression of, the superego involved a complex combination of breaks with, and accommodations to, the three instances of reality-ego, drives, and superego itself—is doubled by, or haunts, mental health (or the standpoint of the end of analysis), which in turn resembles perversion.¹⁵

If the analytical position is to be “critical”—not (of course) in the sense of a superego discourse but in the sense of a position that would relativize the (neurotic) reality-ego of the empiricist as well as the (superegoic and delusional) theoreticism of speculative rationalism, then it will have to do two things. It will have to bracket the “thing” in itself—mourning its loss—and it will have to come to terms with a certain fragmentation and even foolishness [Freud spoke of *Narrheiten*] that bring it into an uncanny—or sublime—resemblance to the “narcissistic psycho-neuroses.” Some such worrisome but intriguing (provisional) conclusion seems unavoidable if we pursue the methodological-diagnostic implications of Freud’s text on “Neurosis and Psychosis.” And are not the Kantian renunciation of things-in-themselves, as well as analytic disengagement, somewhat reminiscent of a narcissistic withdrawal into the self? Or do we have to overcome our tendency to distinguish between a reasonable distance from others and pathological self-involvement? And would such an overcoming be possible? In any case, if in Freud’s search for a position outside of (neurotic) empiricism and (psychotic) rationalism the tension between narcissism and mental health goes unresolved, one needs to ask: what are the equivalent “borderline” tensions in the Anglo-American and French-Lacanian traditions? Or do these traditions manage to avoid such irresolution? In the remainder of this Introduction, I will focus only on the unresolved tensions *between* these two traditions in their respective approaches to the “borderline,” indicating the unresolved tensions *within* each tradition only in endnotes and in passing.

Let us consider first what I am characterizing as the empiricist tradition. How does the theory of the "borderline" look in Anglo-American psychoanalysis? While there exists of course significant variation within this discourse, from Melanie Klein to Wilfred Bion to Heinz Kohut to Peter Fonagy, in the current context it will have to suffice to recall the outlines of Otto Kernberg's important ego-psychological-object-relations theory of the borderline (already discussed critically above in Juliet F. MacCannell's piece)—which came to prominence in the 1970s, incorporated much of the work since the 1940s and 1950s on this topic, and functions today still as a standard point of reference.¹⁶ For the sake of space, I will further skip over Kernberg's descriptive account of the diverse and complex set of potential symptomatic manifestations of the "borderline personality organization" (except to note here in passing that they include "polymorphous perverse sexual trends" [286]), and focus on his structural analysis, and in particular the "specific defensive operations" (299ff) of the borderline.

At the center of these operations is splitting.¹⁷ Neurosis and psychosis split apart on the site of splitting. Kernberg determines the context of the discussion of splitting and subordinate defenses in the borderline by means of the notion of the "internalization of object relationships." This internalization requires on the one hand the *differentiation* between self- and object-images, and on the other hand the *integration* or *synthesis* of infantile "all-good" (libidinally invested) and "all-bad" (aggressively invested) images of both the self and other objects into "total object and self representations" (301). This latter, synthetic work, which constitutes the integrated subject, retroactively or supplementarily shores up the former work of the differentiation between self and object images. For the synthesis of "all-good" and "all-bad" objects minimizes the need for projective mechanisms, which lead to an interlacing of the paranoid self with a persecutorial other. There is, to be sure, a "normal" splitting of "internalized object relations into 'good' and 'bad'," which is due, during the first year or so of life, to the "lack of integrative capacity of the ego" prior to the mirror stage. But this "normal" splitting mechanism is replaced, as the ego develops in cognitive-synthetic capacity, by "higher level defensive operations" (299) connected with repression. When this does not occur, however, the persistent prominence of splitting

in later years leads to the characteristic (Eriksonian) “identity diffusion” (300) of the borderline, and the “sudden and complete reversals of all feelings and conceptualizations about a particular person” characteristic of this type of personality organization. As one of Harold Searles' patients illustrates so laconically: “I can't tell you how much I love you or how much of a shit I think you are” (Searles 500).

The persistent splitting entails, in turn, other defensive mechanisms. These include first of all “primitive idealization.” This is “the tendency to see some external objects arbitrarily as totally good, in order to make sure that they can protect one against the ‘bad’ objects, [a condition] in which there is no real regard for the ideal object, but a simple need for it as a protection against a surrounding world of dangerous objects” (303). The flip side of idealization is “projective identification”: the externalization of “all-bad, aggressive self and object images,” images the borderline then feels s/he has to “attack and control” (304). “Denial” is further entailed by the splitting, because one split-off state or aspect of the self necessarily denies the existence of its opposite, and therefore its loss of that opposite. And finally, the borderline fantasizes his or her own “omnipotence” in identification with the “all-good” images, concomitant with the “devaluation” of those people and aspects of the world and self that are identified with the “all-bad” projections and introjections. The result of this process of splitting and its attendant defense mechanisms is a limited “superego integration” apparently akin to what Freud meant by the conflict between ego and superego in the “narcissistic psychoneuroses,” and to the problems of the “borderline” with the superego that Cantin will point out in her essay as well. This produces the “characterological traits” of the lack of capacity for “empathy with others” (309), the “exploitativeness,” and the “narcissism” often seen as part of the borderline picture.¹⁸ The genetic correlative of this structure is for Kernberg the pregenital and especially oral aggression that, due to any number of factors concerning nature or nurture, has become and remained in some sense excessive.¹⁹

Before considering briefly the sense in which Kernberg's approach to the borderline is an empiricist one, let us consider the example of a Lacanian approach provided in this Special Issue. The article by Lucie Cantin, one of the three senior analysts at GIFRIC, on “The Borderline, or the Impossibility of Producing a Negotiable

Form in the Social Bond for the Return of the Censored,” argues in Lacanian terms that the “borderline personality” finds itself within the subjective structure of neurosis, but at a slight distance from hysteria, as an extreme variant. Such an approach is characteristic on the one hand not only of the Lacanian tripartite nosology—neurosis, psychosis, perversion—but further of the rationalist/structuralist epistemology that subtends it. If it is not so much the phenomena that dominate the categories, but the categories (as a “logic”) that dominate phenomena, then how can there be a phenomenon that appears as midway between two constitutive structural categories, and the reality of which would have the power to exceed the reach of, and even potentially to place into question, the legitimacy of those categories themselves? A logic cannot be empirically contradicted. And yet, on the other hand, the GIFRIC approach is characterized by a frequent and emphatic reference to *experience*, and it therefore includes an empiricist but not scientific moment, for the reference to experience concerns subjective experience that is explicitly nonverifiable. In accordance with this responsiveness to the empirical, Cantin does provide here a specific metapsychological account of the “borderline” as distinct from the hysteric (as Bergeron broaches a specific account of autism in her contribution above).

For Cantin, then, the “borderline” is best characterized in terms of “the failed experience of an internal limit in the subject with regard to the management of the censored. . . *jouissance*.” Cantin, who has worked closely together in GIFRIC with Apollon and Bergeron for many years, presents this view of the “borderline” here in terms of a metapsychological account of “development” that is consistent with those provided in the essays by her colleagues. In the case of the “borderline,” the failure of the limit is situated in the Oedipal moment, the phallic phase, when the subject otherwise enters the social bond by constituting itself as “an object worthy of love and recognition by others.” This imaginary constitution is that of the “fantasy of seduction,” one of the three primary fantasies of Freudian provenience, along with the fantasies of castration and the primal scene. This fantasy of seduction establishes a mediation (however problematic and provisional) between the unbound libido of the drives and the superegoic injunction to *jouissance*, on the one hand, and the social order itself, on the other. In terms of the Freud of “Neurosis and Psychosis,” the fantasy of seduction

mediates between id and superego, on the one hand, and reality-ego, on the other. For Cantin, in the hysteric the fantasy of seduction has failed subsequent to its initial installation, whereas in the “borderline” the fantasy of seduction is never installed or established in the first place. In the “borderline,” what is lacking is the “installation of the primacy of the symbolic over the drive,” a primacy that would limit the invasive presence of the superego (like a primal scene of oral engulfment), enabling the subject to seek its own path in the social-symbolic space for the satisfaction of its drives. But as Cantin conceives the fantasy of seduction here as a temporary and illusory solution, and as she conceives of its failure as inevitable, the lack of any synthesized total object here in the “borderline” is linked to what Cantin considers a universal human condition, rather than simply an error or failing.²⁰

How, then, do these two positions on the “borderline”—the one emerging from Anglo-American ego-psychology and object relations, the other from French Lacanian thought (but in a practice-context that is North American)—relate to one another? On the one hand, Kernberg’s ego-psychological and object-relations approach to the subject or psyche is not merely empiricist and scientific in orientation and self-conception. Beyond this, and above all, it works with a model of the psyche as an empiricist being. That is, it doesn’t merely *proceed* empirically; it assumes that *any* subject whatsoever essentially proceeds in such a manner. The focus on the “internalization of object relations” makes this clear. Further, the fact that psychosis is determined by the failure to distinguish between two different types of objects (self and other objects), while the “borderline” is determined as the failure to synthesize the “total object” out of “all-good” and “all-bad” objects, a failure to be a realist, as it were, underlines the empiricist conception of the subject once again.

In contrast, Cantin’s approach is primarily marked by the rationalist tradition, again not as opposed to irrationalism or to romanticism but as opposed to empirical science. In place of the inadequate internalization of object relations, she focuses on the failure to construct a *fantasy* of oneself as an object of love, i.e. a more or less purely *interior* operation. Further, the understanding of the effects of this failure as a “failed installation of the primacy of the symbolic over the logic of the drive” presupposes a view of the subject as constituted by language, the structuralist version of *logos* as

thought, rather than principally as a perceiver of given referents or objects in the world. And finally, the ultimate horizon of Cantin's analysis—the "impossible" object *a* as an object constituted (or "posited") in a fundamental fantasy and endlessly pursued in a world that cannot empirically contain it—emphasizes the distance from an Anglo-American-style empiricism.

These two different views of the subject remain, of course, radically opposed to one another. The empiricist view takes the neurotic (perhaps unwittingly) as its normative model for the subject in general, while the rationalist view models its norm upon the psychotic (according to Freud, as we saw above, and avowedly in the case of the GIFRIC orientation, which was adapted from Lacan and mediated through years of work with psychotics at the Psychoanalytic Center for the Treatment of the Psychoses). And yet one can see how the two descriptions of the "borderline" might be referring to the same population—or aspect of human subjectivity—and one can even indicate the point at which it is possible to begin to translate the two descriptions into one another's idioms, if only ultimately to see more clearly where the translation breaks down.

Where Kernberg speaks of the failure to establish the *difference* between self and other objects, and of the failure to establish the *identity* between all-good and all-bad self and other objects, the fact that the latter failure (supposedly characteristic of "borderlines") ensures the former one (supposedly characteristic of psychosis), even on Kernberg's own account, threatens the very distinction between psychosis and the "borderline" that it is supposed to enable. But even more importantly this fact underlines the mutually dependent *unity* of the two tasks, the task of the *differentiation* of self and world and the task of the *identificatory synthesis* of total (or what we might call ambivalent/ambiguous, mediocre, or castrated) "objects."

From a Lacanian viewpoint, however, these tasks would be seen as accomplished, however tentatively, only by the inscription or insertion of the subject in the *symbolic order*, as the order of language, exactly the point of transition in the phallic phase where Cantin situated a glitch—even if one connected to universal humanity—in the development of the "borderline." For according to Roman Jakobson (whom, as one knows, Lacan followed in his structuralist phase, as registered in such essays as "The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud" in *Écrits*), language

has two aspects, namely metaphor and metonymy, or (in more logical terms) identity and difference. And it is only the mastery of the play (or game) of identity and difference that could tame the imaginary dynamics of “all-good” and “all-bad” and advance the subject in its constitution as a subject of lack.

In short, one crucial point of translation between Kernberg (and Anglo-American object-relations theory more generally) and Lacan would be the passage between the themes of the subject-object distinction (including the transitional objects of Winnicott) and the constitution of whole objects (including the Kleinian shift from paranoid-schizoid to depressive phase, in which loss is mourned), on the one hand, and the theme of the installation of the symbolic order through the traumatic learning of language, on the other hand.²¹ The divergence between the accounts of the subject’s relation to identity and difference offered by the Anglo-American and French-Lacanian psychoanalytic traditions becomes less opaque when we understand this divergence in terms of the philosophical-methodological traditions or ideologies that overdetermine it. This divergence cannot, therefore, be adjudicated except by reference to those traditions and their—at least initially—equal claims on our attention.

In addition to this divergence, as we have seen in passing, each of these analytic approaches to the “borderline” is divided internally by polemical oppositions that recapitulate the tension in Freud between narcissism and mental health. In the Anglo-American world, the Kernberg-Kohut debate over “borderline” vs. “narcissism” is one major instance of such an opposition. Within the Lacanian world, the difference between the assimilation of the “borderline” to neurosis and its assimilation to perversion provides an important example. Whether it is possible to overcome such a division in the name of a unified “critical” position for psychoanalysis, or whether the enduringly “critical” condition of psychoanalysis requires such internal differentiation and instability, is a question that will have to remain open here.

* * *

The Issue closes with the essay by Michael Stern on “The Face as Fingerprint: Mediation, Silence, and the Question of Identity in Ingmar Bergman’s *Persona*.” Like the opening piece by Mathäs, this essay addresses analysis consciously from just outside the border of analytic discourse per se, and like that piece, this one also thematizes

narcissism, here primarily through a close reading of Bergman's film. After preparing his reading of the film with discussions of narrative theory, contemporary performance art, and masked ritual, Stern reads the film as an illustration of what can happen when a person speaks to a silent other. In the film, as one may recall, a famous actress—a “borderline”? a “hysteric”? a “sadist”?—withdraws into an enduring silence, and is cared for, throughout one summer, at a beach house by a young and increasingly loquacious nurse, who gradually falls into a desperately amorous identification with the actress (the nurse becoming the patient and the patient functioning like a silent analyst), and then violently wrenches herself free of this identification at the film's conclusion. Stern implicitly or discreetly reads this structure as a negative or critical model for the psychoanalytic situation, in which the silent “analyst” (here, the sick actress) drives the patient (the nurse) almost completely insane. Stern's emphasis, which begins with the argument that “subjectivity has a narrative component that becomes short circuited in the face of an unresponsive silence,” is thus counterposed to the Lacanian emphasis on the narrative as an imaginary ego-narrative that needs to be dismantled in order for the unconscious to be accessible. In contrast to the latter orientation, Stern suggests that analytical silence/absence can function as a “seduction” into an alienating identification with the silent figure of the analyst. A more dialogical stance would conduce, Stern argues, to a more positive and emancipatory process of mutual narrative construction, the interplay of identity and difference between two or more speakers. The essay's argument implies, in other words, that the Lacanian (or classical Freudian) positioning of the analyst as absent or silent Other may not be able to avoid the counterproductive development of an alienating identification of the analysand with the analyst. In this sense, Stern's essay could be aligned on the one hand with the Foucauldian skepticism about the analytical situation as potentially repressive, and on the other hand with recent Anglo-American interrelational models in psychoanalysis. Such models share with his approach the desire to provide the dialogicity that classical Freudian analysis, as well as Lacan's “return to Freud,” both avoid because these latter discourses argue that, to the contrary, such dialogicity shores up the narcissistic ego, rather than opening it onto what it excludes. Since Stern's approach to dialogue does not exclude disagreement or conflict from dialogue itself, however, his essay ultimately argues for

the dialogue between dialogism and its refusal, perhaps akin to the questioning of the non-dialogue between Lacanian and Anglo-American analysis that I have broached here.

* * *

As I hope to have suggested, and as I think the essays in this Special Issue support, the necessary “framework” for critical reflection on the borderlines of the “borderline” today begins with the historical and philosophical examination of the split between reason and unreason, including (but not exclusively) the neoclassical version of this split. In order to orient oneself discursively and methodologically, one must consider further, against this background, the historical and theoretical *limits* of the modern opposition of “science” to the “non-scientific” (as faith, art, or persuasion through rhetoric), and the role played by the division of philosophical science into empiricism and rationalism in the constitution of diverse psychoanalytic traditions (and anti- or non-analytic ones as well, for that matter). Only within such a conceptual “framework” can one begin to grasp the ways in which discourses on the “borderline” are engaged in the attempt to determine where they themselves stand, and where they fall.

¹ Leibniz' attempt to answer Locke point by point in the *New Essays* provides a glimpse into this neoclassical debate as it moves toward its climax in Kant. The analogy Leibniz draws (43) between modern rationalism and Plato, on the one hand, and between modern empiricism and Aristotle, on the other hand, provides the point of departure for the linkage of the modern debate with its ancient and medieval predecessors.

² For an informative and interesting anthology of essays on "borderlines" from Jungian perspectives, see Nathan Schwartz-Salant and Murray Stein.

³ See Baas and Zaloszcyc for a detailed interpretation of Lacan's involvement with, and displacement of, Cartesian thinking, especially in the Seminar XI on the *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, a seminar held in the same year in which Derrida's critique of Foucault's reading of Descartes was published. Balmès details the tensions in Lacan's simultaneous references to Heidegger and Descartes, especially in the chapter on "Heidegger et/ou Descartes," 129-36.

⁴ The extremely complex and extensive topic of Lacan's relationship with philosophy, including his relationship with Cartesian thought, is summarized admirably by Charles Shepherdson in "Lacan and Philosophy." As Shepherdson further reminds us, Foucault's engagement with Descartes in *History of Madness* is extended in the section on "The Cogito and the Unthought" of *The Order of Things*, where Foucault takes up Lacan's approach to Descartes and generalizes it as the "modern cogito."

⁵ In *Tarrying with the Negative*, Žižek develops two different forms of the Lacanian trope on Descartes, "I am not where I think": namely, "I think, therefore it ex-sists" (which he associates with the feminine "not-all") and "I am, therefore it thinks" (which he connects to the masculine principle of "universality"). This development follows Žižek's interpretation of Kant's mathematical antinomies in terms of femininity and of his dynamic antinomies in terms of masculinity. In the more recent *Ticklish Subject*, Žižek devotes the entire book to the project of reasserting the Cartesian subject, as against what he—not wrongly—takes to be its quasi-ubiquitous rejection by a large number of contemporary directions in thought.

⁶ On the connection between the Cartesian tradition and the mathematical formalism that Lacan increasingly stressed over the course of his career, see Bernard Burgoyne. On the importance of Koyré's reading of Descartes for Lacan, see especially 79-83.

⁷ It is certainly not by chance—though it is wonderful—that the address of the École de la Cause Freudienne in Paris is currently 1, rue Huysmans, while that of the Collège international de philosophie is 1, rue Descartes.

⁸ The Kantian "transcendental dialectic," perhaps most obviously the section on the "antinomies," in the *Critique of Pure Reason* precisely and explicitly plays out the tension and reversals of position between the empiricist and rationalist positions, who appear there in their guise as skepticism (since by this point empiricism seems to have led irrevocably to Hume) and dogmatism (which refers to the innatism and metaphysics of the rationalists).

⁹ See Philippe Van Haute.

¹⁰ It is for example significant that (in the 18th of the “Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis,” *Studienausgabe* I, 283), when Freud speaks of his work as extending the narcissistic wounding of the human being that had begun with Copernicus and then been exacerbated by Darwin, this point follows his explanation of the symptom as having its origin (*Woher*) in “impressions” (*Eindrücke*) and its purpose (*Wozu*) in an “endopsychic process,” in short, his explanation of the symptom as an appearance combining, in a Kantian manner, external (empirical) givens with internal (rational-irrational) conditions. On the “categorical imperative” as superego, see “Das Ich und das Es,” *Studienausgabe*, III, 302, 315, and “Das ökonomische Problem des Masochismus,” *Studienausgabe*, III, 351. On the “categorical imperative” as a “taboo,” see the Preface to “Totem und Tabu,” *Studienausgabe*, IX, 292. If Freud both distorts and adopts a “critical” attitude toward the (Kantian) “critical” superego, he also—through this very “critique”—follows in many respects its Enlightenment dictates.

¹¹ For a work that carries out with creative boldness and a rare clarity and rigor the examination of the relationship between Freudian-Lacanian metapsychology and Kantian transcendental critique, see Cutrofello. If, as Cutrofello argues, psychoanalysis seeks “analytic a posteriori” judgements, then in this paradox would be located the tension between rational and empirical that, I am suggesting, tends to be softened somewhat by Lacan, on the one hand, and Anglo-American ego-psychology/object relations, on the other hand.

¹² In “The Finitude of Method: Mourning Theory from the New Criticism to the New Vitalism” (forthcoming in *Comparative Literature Journal*), I establish certain affinities between rationalism and obsessive-compulsive and melancholic patterns, on the one hand, and between empiricism and hysterical and manic modes, on the other hand. Such an approach to epistemology is consistent with the one we find in Freud here to the degree that, *within* neurosis, the opposition between neurosis and psychosis repeats itself in displaced form: obsessional ideas share with psychosis delusional cognition, while hysteria shares with neurosis generally the distancing from conscious cognition that characterizes repression. Melancholy and mania are the two forms of the incomplete mourning that characterizes for Freud the border between neurosis and psychosis (see below), and hence they necessarily distribute themselves across its abyss *within* neurosis as well. —On the Lacanian linkage of Cartesian rationalism with obsessive-compulsive patterns, a linkage that philosophically upgrades the latter rather than psychologically downgrading the former, see Žižek, *Tarrying*, 69ff.

¹³ See, for example, the criticisms of scientific theories of dream in chapter two on the “method” of the interpretation of dreams, in *Traumdeutung* (*Studienausgabe* II, 117), and the same argument that recurs in “Der Wahn und die Träume in W. Jensens *Gradiva*” (*Studienausgabe* X, 13-14ff).

¹⁴ The neurotic position in Freud is thus akin to the one of observational science as oriented by the mother tongue, while the psychotic position would be one that is, as it were, overwhelmingly devoted to listening to the interior voice of the Other, according to the schematization of these distinctions in the essays by the GIFRIC analysts

represented in this Issue. Foucault himself speaks of this opposition between limits and unlimitation in more philosophico-historical terms in “Preface to Transgression,” where the “limitless reign of the limit” is said to impose itself after the “death of God.”

¹⁵ Cf. “The Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defense” from 1938 (*Studienausgabe III*, 390-7) in which Freud portrays fetishism as a combination of, on the one hand, the renunciation of the id and the denial of the reality of castration, and on the other hand, the refusal to do either of these things: “The child does however neither one, or rather, he does both at once, which comes down to the same” (391). The resultant tear in the ego (*eines Einrisses im Ich*, 391-2) remains here in an uncertain relationship with the losses of unity (*Einbußen an seiner Einheitlichkeit*, 336) that the healthy person accepts according to Freud in the essay on “Neurosis and Psychosis.” The resemblance and distance in Freud between mental health and perversion, on the one hand, and narcissism, on the other hand, is perhaps very close to the resemblance and distance that Lacan explores between the discourse of the analyst and its flip side, the discourse of the master, in *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*.

¹⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, references are to Kernberg, “Borderline Personality Organization.”

¹⁷ This view is, of course, not specific to Kernberg alone but represents a consensus view of the borderline personality organization, at least in an object-relations influenced discourse. See, for example, J.H. Rey, 206ff, and Fonagy et al, 364-5 passim, and the various essays in Stone, ed., *Essential Papers*.

¹⁸ Here is one of the most prominent and interesting places where the doubling of the “borderline” category by “narcissism” becomes the center of a debate within Anglo-American psychoanalysis, specifically between Kernberg and Heinz Kohut. Kernberg prefers the term “borderline” to the term “narcissism” for this personality structure midway between neurosis and psychosis, and in fact sees “narcissism” as a variant of “borderline” pathology, where the “pathological grandiose self” of the narcissistic personality “compensates for lack of integration of the normal self-concept which is part of the underlying borderline personality organization” (*Borderline Conditions* 266). While I must defer for another occasion detailed discussion of this debate, let me suggest here the following irony. Namely, the Kernberg-Kohut debate arguably plays out this doubling in a way that recapitulates *within* the Anglo-American psychoanalytic discourse, and in displacement, the debate between rationalist-structuralist and empiricist-ego-psychological positions. Thus, for example, in “Clinical Problems of the Narcissistic Personality” (*Borderline Conditions* 263-314), Kernberg—who seems to have little affection for Lacan, but ironically resembles him here, specifically the position Lacan developed in “Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis” in *Écrits*—recalls, against Kohut: that one cannot separate the libidinal and aggressive aspects of narcissism; that one cannot study narcissism without studying object relationships because investment in self and in objects occur simultaneously and influence each other; and that pathological narcissism cannot be seen as a mere fixation of infantile narcissism (which implies an understanding of “development” as potentially containing radical breaks). That narcissism qua disorder should be thus naturalized by Kohut, while Kernberg recognizes its aberrant character,

recalls (at least from one perspective) the naturalization of the ego by ego-psychology, and its positioning as alienated and illusory from the Lacanian perspective.

¹⁹ In terms of the history of secularization and of the privatization of religion, it is as if for the subject on the edge between reason and unreason, the void of internal value is driven to swallow and destroy the absolute or objective value found (but also not found) on the outside.

²⁰ It would be instructive, although this exceeds the scope of the present introduction, to compare/contrast Cantin's approach with the discussion of the "borderline" by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection*, where Kristeva takes Louis Ferdinand Céline as her main illustration, and also with Serge André's detailed reading of Céline in terms of perversion in *L'imposture perverse*. For Kristeva the abject is the (primarily repressed) space between subject and object, and abjection our (universal) experience of belonging to that space. Kristeva mobilizes the figure of abjection and the borderline states it names as a way of characterizing a level of all human experience that becomes particularly manifest in certain individuals. Neither neurosis nor psychosis (and thus beyond the unconscious [6-7]), the borderline state of abjection is akin both to problematic narcissism—"a kind of narcissistic crisis" (14) and to perversion: "The abject is related to perversion. The sense of abjection that I experience is anchored in the superego. The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, rule, or law, but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts" (15). As a French-Bulgarian analyst with both Lacanian and object-relations interests, Kristeva's theory of the abject needs to be read as the attempt to synthesize these traditions. More specifically with relation to Lacan's œuvre, and as I hope to explore further elsewhere, this theory of the abject constitutes her detailed answer to his seminar from 1956-7, *La relation d'objet*, especially his analysis of phobia and perversion there. Serge André's illuminating account of Céline (from 1993) in terms of Lacan's theory of perversion, together with Kristeva's characterization of abjection as akin to perversion (from 1991), as well as Kernberg's attempts—to my mind only partially successful—to distinguish between perversion and "borderline" conditions in *Aggression in Personality Disorders and Perversions* (1992), leave to further research the resolution or clarification of the tension between the assimilation of the "borderline" to an exacerbation of the hysterical failure of the seduction-fantasy, on the one hand, and its assimilation to the disavowal of castration, on the other hand.

²¹ Michael Rustin summarizes the object-relations theory of the "borderline" usefully as the "recognition that patients can become paralyzed in a psychic borderland between paranoid-schizoid and depressive modes of functioning" (*Reason and Unreason*, 129). Note also that the position articulated by Peter Fonagy et al on "borderline" states as based on a failure of "mentalization" is a more cognitive-informed approach to the "same" question of the accession to the symbolic order that Cantin thematizes, and that Fonagy even phrases this accession in terms of "symbolization" (377 passim). Thanks to both Sander Gilman and Ralph Beaumont for pointing me to the important works of Fonagy et al.

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