

Editorial

# Co-Implications: Rethinking the Relationship Between Psychoanalysis, Literature, and Philosophy

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Psychoanalysis, literature, and philosophy—these practices and disciplines are linked by a dual paradigm of affinity and asymmetry.

By way of introducing this Special Issue of *Humanities* on psychoanalysis, literature, and philosophy, we might ask whether the intersection of these three fields does not give the appearance of being in Lacanian terms a Borromean knot in which philosophy assumes the place of the symbolic, literature that of the imaginary, and psychoanalysis the enigmatic space of the real. Yet insofar as such a schematic view presents itself all too easily and neatly, we wish to suggest that, for readers who care about the fates of these particular fields of study, a key task of contemporary criticism is to remap their relation to each other outside the boundaries in which they have been conventionally framed. The aim of recontextualizing them in our view should be to expose the blind spots of each discourse without positioning any of them as a metalanguage, which is to say, as a key to explaining the others.

Speaking in particular about psychoanalysis and literature, Shoshana Felman attempts to reframe their relationship in terms of a certain *pli* or fold, advocating a shift from simple forms of reduction or application to more complex modes of interweaving and *interimplication*. “Since literature and psychoanalysis are different from each other”, she writes, “but, at the same time, they are also ‘enfolded within’ each other, since they are, as it were, at the same time outside and inside each other, we might say that they compromise, each in its turn, the interiority of the other. The cultural division, in other words, of scholarly ‘disciplines’ of research is by no means a natural geography: there are no natural boundaries between literature and psychoanalysis which clearly define and distinguish them” (Felman 1982). In an attempt to grasp the reciprocal and inseparable implications between psychoanalysis and literature Felman goes on to suggest that, “in the same way that psychoanalysis points to the unconscious of literature, literature, in its turn, is the unconscious of psychoanalysis” (*Ibid.*, p. 10).

The thorny question posed by the relationship between literature and psychoanalysis—but also between literature, psychoanalysis, and philosophy—is that of boundaries: where we set them, and how we represent them to ourselves. As philosophy has understood since the beginnings of Western metaphysics, literature—like psychoanalysis—challenges any notion of identity or sovereignty. Both literature and the unconscious constantly challenge the possibility of stable, identifiable determinations. In this respect, literature and psychoanalysis, by different and equally circuitous routes, disturb and question philosophical discourse.

The authors of the essays discussed herein approach all three disciplines as subjects rather than objects, situating their encounters as concretely as possible within the search for new, singular meanings and potential reinterpretations. In the spirit of pragmatism, we will follow Adam Phillips’s suggestion that to reflect on psychoanalysis, literature, and



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philosophy helps us understand what kind of conversations we crave that can lead us to the lives we want. In this sense, our contributors do not aim to produce commentaries of one discipline on another but rather to highlight the converging lines of inquiry that may result in experimental changes in perspective.

It is with this project in mind that we ask what new ideas, approaches, and concepts have emerged in the last few decades in response to contemporary intertwinings of psycho-affective and socio-political forces. From the emergence of new family structures to a resistance to heteronormativity, psychoanalysis today confronts fundamentally different historical conditions than it did at its origin and so must account for new and unfamiliar psychic processes and impulses. Certainly, the discipline faces a social environment in which elements of the unconscious are no longer repressed but rather directly constituted and expressed through an incessant relation to the media. There are also signs that psychoanalysis may be evolving in response to the renewed attention that academia and the culture at large have dedicated to gender and race. The latter is a non-traditional category of interpretation in psychoanalysis yet plays an increasingly important role in defining the intersectional spaces within the psychoanalytic field in which ethical and political demands for justice may be articulated and heard. If the concept of intersectionality currently provides the hegemonic lens through which feminists and queer theorists have assessed difference in terms of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, the notion surely finds more immediately applicable models of enactment in the legal and juridical domain than in the singular vicissitudes of sexuality, phantasy, and desire. Yet it is precisely the resistance of our psychic states and processes to practical instrumentalization that makes the project of an intersectional psychoanalysis both profoundly challenging and potentially liberating.

Although Freud devoted both implicit and explicit attention to questions of race in his reflections on Jewish identity, other pivotal figures in the development of psychoanalytic theory such as Jacques Lacan and Melanie Klein by and large tended to avoid considerations of ethnicity and race.<sup>1</sup> More recently, however, works by Anne Anlin Cheng, David Eng, Shinhee Han, Sheldon George, Derek Hook, Donald Moss, and Hannah Zeavin have drawn attention to the racial dimensions of the psychoanalytic enterprise and have invoked Freudian, Lacanian, and Kleinian concepts to reflect on how race might and should be viewed as central to psychic functioning. Even the editors of the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* (JAPA) have dedicated a recent issue to the topic of race and psychoanalysis. Cheng's investigation of race as a melancholic identification predicated on loss in the context of Asian Americans' pursuit of "the American dream" brilliantly exemplifies this new mode of psychoanalytic scholarship. George and Hook's volume, *Lacan and Race: Racism, Identity, and Psychoanalytic Theory* (2021), has initiated a much-needed reflection on racism as a form of enjoyment and race as an object of the drive. Critical interventions such as these are redefining the very possibilities of the discipline, and some of the essays in our volume such as Domietta Torlasco's "For a Psychoanalysis of the Flesh" situate themselves in this new wave of psychoanalytic writings. Focusing on the flesh, Torlasco seeks to make space not only for Merleau Ponty's groundbreaking philosophical reframing of the term but crucially for Octavia E. Butler's novel, *Kindred*, and Hortense Spiller's historically situated, racialized reinterpretation of the concept as well. By addressing in the question of race one of the most obstinate blind spots in psychoanalysis, Torlasco hopes that "the flesh might enable us to think Being outside the parameters not only of the proprietorial self but also of psychoanalysis' decentered, split (European) subject".

Turning to the problem of gender, it is worth noting that psychoanalytic theory lately seems less prone than in the past to embrace the presumption of gender binarism as a norm. In this sense, contemporary philosophical reflection on this topic by thinkers ranging from Judith Butler to Paul Preciado has generated a productive challenge to the discipline of psychoanalysis, which as a result appears to be becoming more layered and inclusive. As Preciado rightly points out, Lacan to some extent denaturalized sexual difference through his structuralist and linguistic approach to the unconscious, even if, ultimately, he proved unprepared to take the epistemological revolution he set in motion to its logical conclusion

in political terms. However, subsequent psychoanalytic theorists from Jean Laplanche to Patricia Gherovici, the latter of whom has recently embraced a new epistemology of sexual difference beyond gender binarism, have problematized questions of sexual identity and orientation as Lacan himself was not ready to do. The plurality of gender is the new assumption. In Laplanche's theory of seduction, we no longer find a foundational oedipal narrative that culminates in symbolic castration but instead only the scene of the adult's seduction of the child; gender at this point becomes a secondary concern. In Gherovici's psychoanalytic approach to transsexuality, she offers a new perspective on gender, sexuality, and sexual difference, historicizing the necessity of a change in our thinking.

These new psychoanalytic theories respond not to fashionable cultural subcurrents but rather to the necessary work of self-examination by central figures within the field. If it is true, as Lacanian theory suggests, that the individual's psychic and sexual life are fundamentally informed by social relations, a cultural shift needs not only to be acknowledged but also to be accompanied by psychoanalytic theory. These changes are not without consequences for a new reflection on the relationship between literature, psychoanalysis, and philosophy. For example, it is interesting to observe that, in a paradoxical way, recent psychoanalytic theory has found itself having to disavow its traditional invocation of literary models and references. The myth of Oedipus, and its equation with gender normativity, can no longer be regarded dogmatically as a source of truth that continually gives rise to new concepts and symbolic productions. The rootedness of today's unconscious in mass media and the constant digital flux of desires and drives make it difficult for psychoanalysis to look at literature as a paradigm or even a common ingredient of the psyche. We can simply no longer take for granted that literature plays an architectonic role in psychoanalysis and instead must reckon with a more complex and fluid dynamic between the two discourses.

In his essay "The Purloined Letters of Eisabeth Bishop", Axel Nesme explores such a dynamic. Examining several poems by Bishop in conjunction with the Lacanian concept of the letter, he argues that the poetic signifier hovers between meaning and enjoyment. In Bishop's poems, letters are occasionally elided, displaced, or misplaced, resulting in moments of semblance, eliciting an emotion that is close to *jouissance*. While Lacan's concept of the letter is used to clarify Bishop's poetic strategy with respect to the signifier, Bishop in turn sheds new light on the Lacanian dialectic of the "littoral/littéral". Nesme shows how, according to Lacan, modern literature resorts to equivocation and meaninglessness in order to foreground the object of enjoyment to which the letter is linked.

And what of the relation between psychoanalysis and philosophy? Certainly, a touchstone in debates between the two has been the influential readings of Poe's "The Purloined Letter" by Derrida and Lacan. In his essay, "Is a Purloined Letter just Writing? Burrowing in the Lacan-Derrida Archive", Jean-Michael Rabaté reviews those debates through the lens of new critical readings of the two thinkers, their fascinating sequence of exchanges on Poe, and the way these exchanges have come to allegorize the very relation between philosophy and psychoanalysis. At stake here is not only the relation between these two disciplines or their respective readings of a particular literary text but the status of the literary, the literal, and the letter within them. As Rabaté demonstrates, such debates in no way leave the literary itself intact. In order to chart this shift and extend the question of the letter and its (non-)arrival, he moves from the text central to these debates, "The Purloined Letter", to Kafka's famously undelivered "Letter to the Father" and eventually to his unfinished story, "The Burrow". Through this sequence of readings culminating in "The Burrow", Rabaté not only intensifies the dialectic between destiny and detours in literature and life but incisively redefines the paradoxical space between psychoanalysis and deconstruction as a dis-place that is constantly "underground and overground, rebuilt and unbuilt".

As is known, such displacements had already been set in motion within psychoanalysis and are perhaps most evident in the pains Freud took to distance himself from any totalizing intellectual system or, as he put it, *Weltanschauung*. They are also in evidence in Lacan's perpetual flirtation with linguistics, structuralism, and Hegelian and Heideggerian philosophy. In the current moment, it seems all the more urgent to pursue this

movement of self-exposure and -displacement. New debates and interrogatory exchanges need to be established between psychoanalysis and the more politically urgent branches of philosophical thought, in particular critical race theory and gender studies.

In moving forward, it might at the same time be helpful to look back, however quickly, at some of the more prominent critical efforts of recent decades to negotiate the interdisciplinary encounters among philosophy, psychoanalysis, and literature. In Felman's pathbreaking introduction to the 1977 collection *Psychoanalysis and the Question of Literature* referred to above, she forcefully contended that there is no master-slave relationship between psychoanalysis and literature, as the second discipline cannot be regarded as a means of legitimating the truth of the first. Instead, the goal of such an encounter would always be to deconstruct the very philosophical dialectic of master-slave itself. As noted above, the aim of the critic for Felman should be to pursue the *co-implication* of psychoanalysis and literature, their mutual unsettling and respective displacement; for only in this way can we maintain ourselves—precariously and each time anew—in the complex folds of the interdisciplinary.

By way of contrast, Harold Bloom tended to exalt in magniloquent tones the primacy of Shakespearean readings of Freud at the expense of what had become for him, in the milieu of English literary criticism, the stupefying cliché of Freudian readings of Shakespeare. We may well wonder today, however, if this jeering gesture of reversal is not itself too facile to help with the large set of social, cultural, and political questions that psychoanalysis must now confront. To avoid the formulaic quality of many literary readers' borrowings from psychoanalysis, Bloom celebrated the poetic complexity of irony and metaphor as critical ideals yet ultimately wound up demonstrating little real engagement with psychoanalytic concepts beyond his own reductive applications of Freud's notions of the Oedipus complex and the dream-work.<sup>2</sup> The contributors to this issue have opted instead for the riskier venture of pursuing genuinely interdisciplinary encounters at a time when our cultural and political conditions are radically changed. Of particular note in this regard are the contributions by Dominik Zechner and Ilit Ferber, the first dealing with the question of institutional violence, the second with lament and revenge as potential, if generally opposed, responses to suffering.

Zechner's essay, "Törleß and the Scene of Reading", takes as its point of departure Robert Musil's first novel, *The Confusions of Young Törless*, published in 1906. The institutional violence at its center is most explicitly expressed in the torturous acts directed against the pupil Basini. In the sadism directed against him, Rudiger Campe writes, we observe a "return of the kind of foundational violence that marks the ground of the institution as such". Carl Niekirk, on the other hand, argues that this sadistic disposition is contrasted by Törless' identification with the victim, indicating "a foundational masochism in Törless' attitude". Rather than viewing this violence as something intersubjective (that is, as sadistic or masochistic), Zechner surprisingly locates it in scenes of reading. Inspired by his math teacher, Törless acquires a copy of one of Immanuel Kant's major works which we are led to believe is the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Despite his initial fascination, the scene of attempting to read the book, however, tilts into one of suffering: "But filled as it was with parentheses and footnotes, he couldn't understand a word, and when he conscientiously followed the sentence with his eyes, he felt as though an old, bony hand was twisting his brain out of his head". The act of reading Kant itself becomes a masochistic procedure and thus constitutes the place of a textual meditation on the physical violence whose depiction dominates the novel. Furthermore, Törless' scene of reading points us back to Freud's essay, "The Economic Problem of Masochism" (1906), in which Kant's categorical imperative is introduced as the epitome of what Freud terms "moral masochism"—an idea Lacan would pick up and revise in his seminal essay, "Kant avec Sade" (1963).

Ferber's contribution, "Pain's Echo: Lament and Revenge in Ovid's 'Procne and Philomela'", approaches questions of revenge and lament as two responses to acts of wrongdoing and loss through a critical reexamination of Ovid's story of Philomela and Procne. The reading of Ovid is itself introduced by a consideration of philosophical and

psychoanalytic perspectives and their shared tendency to view revenge and lament as complete opposites: revenge is considered active and violent whereas lament is passive and paralyzed. Ferber's reading of Ovid seeks to demonstrate the "co-implication" of these seemingly opposed responses to unimaginable suffering. Initially, Philomela appears as the passive, lamenting sister and Procne as the angry, vengeful one. Nevertheless, as the narrative unfolds, the roles of the sisters change. Through the characters of Philomela and Procne, Ovid presents a compelling account in which these two responses can be seen as mirror images of the same phenomenon rather than diametrically opposed binaries.

In one of Jacques Derrida's most beautiful essays, "Psychoanalysis Searches for the States of its Soul", which he first delivered as a paper at the États généraux de la Psychanalyse in 2000, he assigned to psychoanalysis the impossible task of investigating the scope of cruelty, sovereignty, and resistance beyond the single individual. Although he viewed the psychoanalytic revolution as irreversible, Derrida pointed out that, like all other languages, analytic discourse itself is mortal, especially if it is unable to voice the need for an investigation of the drive to power and its implications for ethics, rights, and politics. Following Derrida's lead, we may feel all the more aware of the mortality of psychoanalysis in light of two specific challenges now faced by the discipline: the one coming from the new political and philosophical demands of the current day and the other arising from its methodological commitment to what one of our contributors, Samuel Weber, would define as singularity. More than simply a concern for the individual subject per se, this keyword in Weber's thinking corresponds to the very nature of psychoanalytic inquiry as aporetic and resistant to the pull of generalization. The aporetic capacity of the unconscious to allow both A and non-A to coexist, as in Freud's notion of ambivalence, works for Weber against the temptation of universalizing claims to which philosophy, as we know, has often succumbed. In Weber's eyes, for example, the resistance of psychoanalysis to a strong definition of the subject—which, we should recall, is a notion that in Freud's theory does not even properly exist—undercuts our contemporary culture's demands for stability and normalization.

In his contribution, "Reconsidering Freud's Uncanny: The Coppola Perspective", Weber returns to a notion he had already discussed at length in his pathbreaking 1973 article, "The Sideshow, or: Remarks on a Canny Moment". In this return, the focus shifts from a structural reading of Freud inspired by Lacan to an approach mediated by Heidegger and his own meditations on the uncanny in *Being and Time*. While one might be tempted to view this shift as a move from psychoanalysis to philosophy, it is E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman" that still remains the primary focus. As such, it marks a privileged site of "co-implication", a place where psychoanalysis, philosophy, and literature are made to unsettle and displace one another. In this context, it is telling that Weber lays particular stress on the perspectival and relational experience of the recognition of mortality. For him, this experience of the uncanny, far from being simply attached to an object or a subject, decisively and dramatically challenges what he calls "the mono-theological identity paradigm" that is grounded on the denial of differential relationships which dominates the western tradition.

While some critics might still regard the uncanny as a minor concept that is not on the same level of importance as the more ambitious metapsychological notions of psychoanalytic theory, we would assert, following Weber, that it is often from this minor, problematic starting point that psychoanalysis finds resonances with literature and philosophy. Our challenge in this sense is to open the intimacy of the psychoanalytic space to the literary and philosophical world while following an aporetic itinerary that advances from particular to particular.

To advance in such a manner is perhaps nothing more or less than to engage in concrete acts of translation. Not only do all of the essays collected in this issue engage in such acts but they reflect, each in their own way, on their failures and misfires. Viewing failure not merely as incidental or avoidable but as constitutive of translation, they revise the very notion of a speech act, reinscribing it within a more general—and not just analytic—theory

of the parapraxis, *Fehlleistung* or *acte manqué*. They ask, in short, where such parapraxes might lead, what other voices they might let slip, and what other perspectives on inter- and perlocutionary acts of language they might offer. In raising these questions, they also lead one to ask about the remains of translation, about the “not yet” and “never to be” translated. Indeed, one of the most consequential intersections between psychoanalysis and literature is translation. For Jean Laplanche, the unconscious is of the order of the “not translated”, which covers the “not yet translated” but also the “not translatable”: “It is the ‘has not been translated’ in the prior messages that had to be integrated. It is not exactly the ‘to be translated’; it is something that comes from the first attempts to give an interpretation of the message from outside [...]. The past is not something established as a text, but it’s something enigmatic” (Laplanche 1992). According to Laplanche, the unconscious is an unfinished business, awaiting the possibility of translation, reading, actualization, and becoming. Laplanche interprets Freud’s discovery as the intuition of a theory he calls ‘traductive’, a theory of the aftermath process that Laplanche regrets he didn’t elaborate further: “The major reason for the fallout of this traductive theory is, I would say, the very absence of the notion of a ‘to be translated’; for there to be translation, there must indeed be a ‘to be translated’ which can only be conceived, in our view, in an opening from the outset of the human being onto and through the enigma of the other” (Laplanche 2006).

In “Making Words: The Unconscious in Translation: Philosophical, Psychoanalytical, and Philological Approaches”, Judith Kasper revisits the concept of the untranslatable (*intraduisible*) coined by Barbara Cassin through the lens of the notion of equivocity as defined by Jacques Lacan: a dimension in the to-and-fro between the languages. In order to illustrate her point, Kasper discusses two clinical instances in which translation—or what she calls “the border traffic of signifiers”—plays a key role in elucidating the enigma of psychic movement. Interlingual equivocity amounts to something that not only falls between languages but literally befalls the speaking subject. Homophonic translation, as Kasper argues, is not a mere intellectual process but an experience that implies the body and the drives and points to the Lacanian notion of *lalangue*. Homophones, on which puns are based, turn out to be inseparable from a psychoanalytic conception of translation.

In her essay “Joking Around, Seriously: Freud, Derrida and the Irrepressible Wit of Heinrich Heine”, Elisabeth Rottenberg reads the relationship among literature, philosophy, and psychoanalysis through the lens of three representative figures: Harry (“Heinrich”) Heine, Jackie (“Jacques”) Derrida, and Sigismund (“Sigmund”) Freud and the relationship of each to Jewish wit. That such wit is, as Rottenberg’s title suggests, “irrepressible” requires her, first, to follow how jokes provide necessarily indirect access to repressed material and, secondly, to approach each of the figures in question through the filter of the others. Thus, she reads Freud through Derrida, examining the former’s analysis of the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) through the latter’s “analysis of Freud’s analysis” in his seminar *Life Death* (2020). Here, the question of pleasure and its beyond is posed by Derrida as an imagined response by Freud to his detractors, to those would-be critics who will (and did) decry the idea of a death drive: “Screw you all”, Derrida imagines Freud saying, “[*allez-vous faire foutre*], I myself am rather pleased with this, the beyond of pleasure, that’s my pleasure [*tel est mon bon plaisir*]; the hypothesis of the death drive—that’s what I like, that’s what interests me”. Here, it is significant that Freud’s own explorations of the aggressive drive conceived of as “the derivative and the main representative of the death drive” are linked to Heine’s own aggressive remarks about the Christian injunction to forgive one’s enemies. “One must, it is true”, Heine remarks, “forgive one’s enemies—but not before they have been hanged”. As this complex chain of references suggests, Heine is anything but the ultimate source of “irrepressible wit” (as the contribution’s title might suggest). Instead, he is to be viewed as an unwitting participant in a series of exchanges among literature, philosophy, and psychoanalysis that turn around questions of forgiveness, aggression, and pleasure. Whereas Freud’s *Jokes* was written in 1905 in the shadow and on the basis of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, another notion of pleasure and a certain beyond of pleasure began to emerge around 1920. To trace this emergence, which is tellingly less a scientific

discovery than a story of infectious captivation, Rottenberg reads it through the relationship of Derrida, Freud, and Heine. That such captivation is intimately linked to questions of translation—and above all to the translation of seemingly stable Freudian concepts such as the Ego and the Id—is suggested by the vexed scene of translation involving the Stracheys and Ernst Jones with which the essay concludes.

Many of the issues addressed in this Special Issue come together in Alexandra Richter's concluding essay, "To Speak with the Other—To Let the Other Speak: Paul Celan's Poetry and the Hermeneutical Challenge of *Mitsprechen*". Its focus on questions of untranslatability is no doubt most apparent in the difficulties one has rendering the title word *Mitsprechen*. Used by Celan to describe the peculiar multi-voiced—and more than voiced—dialogue in which his work is engaged, its all too literal translation as "with-speaking" is meant to serve as a provocation that seeks to retain and underscore the foreignness of the concept not just in English but in the original German. A scandal of translation, it moreover accentuates how voices in Celan's poetry actively participate in a dialogue that goes beyond traditional hermeneutic frameworks. Here one might speak again in pointedly literalizing terms of the "col-loquy" in which these voices are engaged. Distinct from a conventional sense of dialogue, this col-loquy, this speaking with or together, challenges the separation between author and interpreter, rendering the traditional concept of intertextuality inadequate. The poem, according to Celan, gives voice to human destinies, making texts audible as the voices of others.

This vocal dimension of Celan's poetry has prompted extensive discussion among philosophers, particularly in France. Influenced by German phenomenology and hermeneutics, Levinas, Blanchot, and Derrida critically examine the ethical implications of speaking "about" the other. Challenging traditional hermeneutical practices, they emphasize the responsibility of interpreters to respect the unique and untranslatable character of individual voices. This critique, drawing on alternative Jewish perspectives on being-in-the-world and alterity, extends to Protestant categories of interpretation. Richter explores the problems inherent in speaking "for" or "in the name of" others, especially in the context of interpreting Celan's work, raising questions about maintaining the fundamental difference and distance that otherness implies. The discussion concludes by highlighting Werner Hamacher's formulation of a new philology influenced by the critiques of Blanchot, Levinas, and Derrida, that disrupts hermeneutical violence and offers an alternative way of addressing the particular challenges posed by Celan's poetry.

It seems to us that the aspiration behind this issue is that, through philosophy and literature, psychoanalysis ultimately may find a productive relationship to the present moment, to our ethical and political actuality. To advance just, intersectional claims in the psychoanalytic field require us to consider the distance between philosophical generality and psychoanalytic particularity. Such attention to the distance between the disciplines must not be an alibi that we invoke to resist the present but rather a challenge to our imaginative and clinical habits. As Freud maintained, psychoanalysis in this sense should not be perceived as a narcissistic blow to the integrity of our cultural Ego but as a necessary tool to reflect in full awareness on our present (and future) forms of life.<sup>3</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Regarding Freud's reflections on race, see (Gilman 1993).

<sup>2</sup> A notable exception is perhaps Bloom's essay, "Freud: Frontier Concepts, Jewishness, and Interpretation" in *American Imago*, Spring 1991, 48:1, pp. 135–52.

<sup>3</sup> For a cogent analysis of why psychoanalysis should not be considered as a kind of Copernican Revolution, see (Lear 2017).

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