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Jacques Lacan’s Paper Machines
From Tropology to Topology, from Mythological Time to Cybernetic Tempor(e)ality in Lacanian Theory

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(1) If psychoanalysis always aims for the conditions of articulation rather than what is articulated, this presupposes a peculiar archaeological potential. In this respect not only did Freud and Lacan provide the general semiotics of the symptom, but also excavated the conditions which are essentially non-signifiable in their nature. I suggest that Lacanian theory concerns the whole spectrum of signification from notation (Real) through graphic polyphony/algorithmization (Imaginary) to the binary (Symbolic). If it is correct, then following Nina Ort’s reappropriation of psycho-semiotics, signification can never fully get rid of the Real. It also means that in order to reflect on what happens in non-symbolized processes, Lacanian theory has to transpose itself into a state of psychosis. This results in psychosis-semiosis, with which psychoanalysis can simultaneously compute the structure and algorithm of signification (just like in Freud’s, both the stimulus and its conditions are written into memory).

(2) The non-signifiable factors of signification can be posed as medial a priori, if the shifts in registers, following Friedrich Kittler, are conceived as shifts in media technologies. For Lacanian theory to successfully reflect on the different aspects of the subject (shifter and fader), or on the dynamics of jouissance (master and slave), it cannot be satisfied with producing chiasmatic structures (as does [post-]structuralism, starting with Lévi-Strauss’s theorem of reciprocity). I will argue that psychoanalysis requires media states – which have become plausible only after techniques of writings executed by e.g. Maxwell’s equations or Planck’s constant – to produce constellations that can adequately enact the rifts and passages between the three registers.

(3) Postulating a factor as preceding another (e.g. primal scene), and investigating the stage of shifts between registers both require acts that have to do with temporalization. I suppose that a number of themes in Lacan’s oeuvre oppose the idea of synchronicity that was much praised by structuralism. I argue that concepts like myth and castration, by producing a complex temporal constellation with the entanglement of diachronic and synchronic factors, indeed become time-critical in their operations. Following Wolfgang Ernst, I assume that they produce temporeality whenever the inherent, processual time of their interactions are implemented in the Real, with which they recursively provide the temporal pattern for the Symbolic, and scansion its advent.
(4) In order to capture (temporal) processes that are not limited to the Symbolic, psychoanalysis has to rely on constructing models. These can be diagrammatic (Freud’s memory diagram, or Lacan’s 1-2-3 net), optical (Freud’s neurons, or Lacan’s mirrors), or topological (Freud’s mystic writing pad, or Lacan’s torus). I suggest that these models are neither static, nor detached from one another: they can mediate when they are transcribed, and during this operation they are beginning to show processual convergence with non-psychoanalytical ones.