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# l'inconscio estetico

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Chiara Agagiù  
Lucilla Albano  
Daniela Angelucci  
Nicola Copetti  
Claudio D'Aurizio  
Guy-Félix Duportail  
Giulio Forleo  
Giulia Guadagni  
Federico Leoni  
Chiara Mangiarotti  
Caterina Marino  
Fernando Muraca  
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Jacques Rancière  
Grazia Ripepi  
Rosamaria Salvatore  
Valentina Sirangelo  
Giovambattista Vaccaro

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# **L'inconscio. Rivista Italiana di Filosofia e Psicoanalisi**

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## *Anti-Oedipus* and Lacan.

### The question about the Real.

Giulia Guadagni

#### Introduction

The following paper focuses on Jacques Lacan's influence on *Anti-Oedipus* (and vice versa). Specifically it highlights how desiring-machines are related to Lacan's theory of desire, particularly to the *objet petit a*. In conclusion it affirms that what is philosophically most interesting about this topic is the authors' convergence in thinking the real. At a certain point of his teaching, the *objet petit a* led Lacan to theorize the unconscious as something *real*, not only linguistic. A posteriori he found himself to be much closer to Deleuze and Guattari's book than ever. This convergence is still pregnant for contemporary philosophical research about bodies.

The main topic relating Lacan to *Anti-Oedipus* is desire, which is of course one of the book's main topics at all<sup>1</sup>. Concerning desire, according to Deleuze and Guattari, there is no subject, absolutely no "I", there are only (plural) desiring-machines involved in production processes. They try to make the whole of idealistic categories end. No more cause/effect, subject/object, human being/nature: «Production as process [...] constitutes a cycle whose relationship to desire is that of an immanent principle» (Deleuze, Guattari, 1972, pp. 4-5).

#### 1. Freud's place in *Anti-Oedipus*

Summarizing shortly the authors' opinion, we could say that psychoanalysis serves capitalism in stopping desire, hiding and denying its productive nature. Actually their argumentation is more ambiguous. According to them, Freudian psychoanalysis has discovered the productivity of desire in productions of the unconscious (*ivi*, 24) but it has immediately hidden it behind Oedipus. Freudian unconscious produces lapsus, dreams, jokes, unexpectedly. It is a fabric<sup>2</sup>. Despite this, after finding this productive unconscious, Freud himself changed it into a representational one: an unconscious that expresses itself only in myths, tragedies and dreams (*ivi*, p. 24), that we need to

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<sup>1</sup> As Schuster underlines, «what Deleuze and Guattari call *desire* is referred to by Freud and Lacan as *drive*» (2016, p. 162).

<sup>2</sup> «the fabric of the dream» - as Freud writes in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899, p. 498).

interpret. Thus it becomes a theatrical unconscious, it works like a stage where preformed figures (Oedipus, Hamlet, mum, dad ect.) play their drama. The drama goes on, and we just need to interpret it.

Here, psychoanalysis encounters its limit (or lack of limit). Due to the recursive nature of language (words always lead to other words: what Lacan calls the signifying chain, cfr. 1955, 1957), interpretations can never end. The analysis itself can never end and it becomes like a trap for desire. Moreover, Freudian psychoanalysis interprets only by a daddy-mommy, oedipical frame - which is even worse. While - as Deleuze says in the *Abécédaire* - it is evident, especially in deliriums, that we do not refer to a familiar space, but to a political, geographical, collective one. The point for desire it is not our parents, and the unconscious is not a stage but a fabric.

And desire? Because of following a Platonic logic, we've always needed to choose among production and acquisition in interpreting desire (Deleuze, Guattari, 1972, p. 25). If desire is related to acquisition (we desire *something* we don't *have*, and we might catch it) it becomes lack: there is something lacking, so we desire it. Our relation to the world is never complete, never corresponding, never full (due to our speaking being - Lacan would say), so we desire to fulfill the gap between us and the world.

Among this theoretical position - according to Deleuze and Guattari - psychoanalysis managed to see desire as production: «Freud is thus the first to disengage desire itself» (*ivi*, 300). But, it is still production of fantasies. Therefore the mechanism does not change: desire is still missing the real object, and then it produces a fantasized one (*ibidem*). Freud himself has discovered the productivity of unconscious then, but he has immediately hidden it behind Oedipus, believing that human beings could only sublimate drives, in order to survive in society. So psychoanalysis serves capitalism making people suitable, adequate to it.

There is quite an ambivalence in Deleuze and Guattari's position on Freudian psychoanalysis. The same ambivalence that had emerged in Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*. There, Freud was contemporary belonging to the Hölderlin-Nerval-van Gogh-Nietzsche-Artaud series - those who made a dialogue with madness possible again - and to the Pinel-Esquirol-Janet-Bleuer one - those whom, while freeing the insane, started a new moral prisoning (Derrida, 1992). According to Derrida, Foucault's book shows well the division which characterized Freud's work. Actually, it is quite common to read a conflict between different parts of Freud's work. Usually, *Interpretation of Dreams, Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* and *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* are opposed to *Three Essays on The Theory of Sexuality* (cfr. Schuster, 2016, p. 47 sgg.).

Somehow, Deleuze and Guattari seem to follow the same foucauldian ambivalent interpretation of psychoanalysis, even if Freud is mostly condemned and blamed in *Anti-Oedipus*. The authors merely recognize their/our debt to him. They recognize



that he is somehow the ‘place’ from which they speak. They recognize that psychoanalysis – even in Freud’s books – carries a revolutionary force: their «critique of psychoanalysis is an immanent one. *Anti-Oedipus* is no “Black Book”» (*ivi*, p. 161). According to Schuster, psychoanalysis is revolutionary because it affirmed the continuity between normality and pathology, making possible to understand human existence by studying mental illness (*ivi*, pp. 29-30). In this perspective, what connects philosophy and psychoanalysis is the question: «What can the study of psychopathology teach us about the human condition?» (*ivi*, p. 29).

In this sense, *Anti-Oedipus* finds itself in a Freudian position. Despite this, blaming his oedipical, theatrical, repressive, absurd theory of unconscious, Deleuze and Guattari mostly make Freud belonging to the second of Foucauldian series, the Pinel-Esquiro-Janet-Bleuler one. Alongside the book they seem to try to «salvage [...] the Freudian notion of *Trieb* from its Oedipal domestication» (*ivi*, p. 161): to save Freud from Freud himself. Lacan occupies such a swinging position in *Anti-Oedipus* too. About him, the authors follow the same «logic of immanent critique» (*ivi*, p. 161).

## 2. Lacan’s swinging position

Desire, in Freudian psychoanalysis – according to Deleuze and Guattari – is lack. The unconscious only produces fantasized objects, because we’re always missing real ones. By contrast: «If desire produces, its product is real (*du réel*). [...] Desire does not lack anything. It does not lack its object. [...] Desire and its object are one and the same thing: the machine, as a machine of a machine. [...] The objective being of desire is the Real in and of itself» (Deleuze, Guattari, 1972, p. 26). Absolutely no theatrical thing, no oedipical frame, no interpretations needed.

Here we come to our ‘Lacan problem’. Let’s start saying that, alongside the book, Deleuze and Guattari only mention a few of his writings, most of which had been published in the *Écrits*, four years before *Anti-Oedipus*. Moreover they quote directly only one seminar: *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (1969-70). Therefore the Lacan they refer to seems to belong just to the early sixties. However, especially Guattari had been following Lacan’s lessons, and it is likely that both of them knew much more of his work than they directly refer to. Assuming this, throughout our argumentation, we will refer to other seminars they do not directly quote. Even more so we want to show a theoretical convergence that they probably wouldn’t have had totally endorsed.

While condemning Freud and psychoanalysis as we reminded, *Anti-Oedipus* continues pointing Lacan as an exception: «We owe to Jacques Lacan» (*ivi*, 38); «psychoanalysis most profound innovator» (*ivi*, 268). Especially, he is mentioned for his «admirable theory of desire» (*ivi*, 27), that concerning *objet petit a*. As the authors

write: «It is this entire reverse side of the structure that Lacan discovers with the ‘o’» he achieved (or tried to) «schizophrenizing the analytic field, instead of oedipalizing the psychotic field» (*ivi*, 309). So, in *Anti-Oedipus* Lacan is the one among psychoanalysts, who «saved psychoanalysis from the frenzied oedipalization» (*ivi*, 217).

So, considering the *objet petit a*, and moreover, changing the supremacy of Symbolic for that of the Real, Lacan has gone beyond the fantasized unconscious. But – the authors say – he oscillates between two different ideas of desire. The other one is that of the great Other, which brings us back to lack and signification. Due to the great Other, Lacan maintained the connection between desire, lack and law, which are two of the «three errors concerning desire» (*ivi*, 111). This swinging position is represented alongside the book. We shall summarize briefly what the great Other is and why – according to Deleuze and Guattari – it is to be condemned. We will move to *objet petit a* then, which leads to a convergence between *Anti-Oedipus* and Lacan.

Lacanian theorization of *objet petit a* actually made the three authors closer. But their proximity became even stronger after 1972, with the so-called Lacanian «pass to the Real» (Soler, 2009), which had just started at the time of *Anti-Oedipus* publication. Therefore, on one hand Deleuze and Guattari saw clearly a direction that could be interesting for them in Lacan’s teaching and writing, just as soon as this direction begun to be developed. On the other hand, after 1972, Lacan continued moving towards them himself. This reading hypothesis might surprise or even disappoint someone. It is quite common to highlight differences and contrasts between Lacan and the *Anti-Oedipus’* authors<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless we will try to demonstrate the reasons of this convergence hypothesis. Moreover we will try to show how this ‘convergence on the Real’ may be relevant for part of contemporary philosophy and psychoanalysis.

## 2.1 The great Other

Ever since the beginning of the ’50s, Lacan developed his theory of unconscious structured like a language. Language is a system that pre-exist individuals. Even more, it forms them. Lacan calls Symbolic the linguistic system on which society is based, that system founded on laws, rules, traditions etc. Symbolic forms individuals because we enter it even before birth, and we ‘become humans’ only by learning to speak (Lacan, 1953-1954). Even more, language does not depend on us, neither if we

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<sup>3</sup> E.g. Hallward assumes that even if in *Anti-Oedipus* there is quite a convergence between Lacan and Deleuze, after that they have been moving through a non absolute but essential divergence and incompatibility (2010, p. 34 sgg.). An opposite opinion is suggested by Chicchi (2014).

consider the entire of society. We – as speaking animals – cannot decide to get rid of it, and we do not control it. It is like language speaks alone, without and above us: *ça parle* – says Lacan. So, Symbolic is the most important among the three registers that form our conscious and unconscious life: the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real (Lacan, 1953-1954, Id. 1955). This is the so-called structuralist Lacanian period, about which Colette Soler says:

Psychoanalysis certainly *knows* no other subject than this non-incarnated subject [the structuralist one], the subject that is only “the navel” in the pure combinatory of the mathematics of the signifier, a navel that even logic cannot manage to eliminate. But this subject is not the object of psychoanalysis. The subject that psychoanalysis receives and deals with is the one who suffers (Soler, 2009, p. 5, my emphasis).

It is the embodied one then. Of course Lacan didn't mean to hide bodies, without which we could neither speak. But Symbolic could actually seem to be a non-incarnated system. According to Soler then, Lacan, as a psychoanalyst, has never been truly structuralist (*ibidem*) – supposing that a true structuralism has ever existed.

Anyway, the great Other is this structure of language that manifests itself in our individual life. It is what we implicitly refer to while speaking. The great Other represents this whole of our social, cultural, external references, which creates ourselves as individuals. The great Other is also like a third, we always refer to in speaking. According to Lacan, we never coincide with ourselves. Ourselves, or a private and personal myself, actually does not exist.

So, desire, is always the desire of the Other. It always passes through this third. The Other «represents the necessary deviation between desire and what is desired» (Cimatti, 2011, p. 127<sup>4</sup>). Of course this idea of desire is based on lack. What is lacking is exactly the coincidence between desired and what is desired. Moreover – as we said before – since desire follows the recursive nature of language, analysis can never end, because language never ends. Obviously this couldn't satisfy Deleuze and Guattari. But Lacan neither. So he moved on theorizing the *objet petit a*, that led him after to the Real and to real unconscious. Assuming that there is always something escaping Symbolic, Lacan partially changed his theory of desire, introducing the *jouissance* and this *objet petit a*, throughout which it might be possible to go beyond the recursive, infinite mechanism of language. This is what Deleuze and Guattari find interesting in his teaching in 1972.

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<sup>4</sup> For those book untranslated in English, it is always my translation.

## 2.2 From *objet petit a* to real unconscious

In recognizing Lacan as «psychoanalysis's most profound innovator» (Deleuze, Guattari, 1972, p. 268), for Deleuze and Guattari the point is yet the oedipal frame. Oedipus is the structure the reverse side of which Lacan has discovered. Lacan's credit lies on his trial to «carry it [Oedipus] to the point of its autocritique» (*ibidem*). Him too identifies the "I", as well as the «daddy-mommy» frame (*ivi*, p. 23) as imaginary. And imaginary is what the schizo «has long since ceased to believe in» (*ibidem*). The Oedipus' point of self-criticism according to them – is «the point where the structure [...] reveals its reverse side as a positive principle of nonconsistency that dissolves it, where desire is shifted into the order of production [reality], related to its molecular elements, and where it lacks nothing» (*ivi*, p. 311). This point is indeed Lacanian *objet petit a*. Moreover, referring to a 'reverse side' of the structure the authors seem to be pointing to Lacan's 17<sup>th</sup> seminar: *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (1969-1970). What is this *objet petit a* then?

*Objet petit a* is the «discourse's reject-producing effect» (Lacan, 1969-1970, p. 44). It is what remains outside signification, what cannot be assimilated by language. The Symbolic constitutes subjectivities, and there is no metalanguage (Lacan, 1972-1973, p. 107), which means that we cannot escape Symbolic. We can never fulfill the gap between ourselves and things, between knowledge and experience. But there is still something that flees from this mechanism. Firstly Lacan calls it *objet petit a*, which is paradoxical, because the *objet petit a* is properly inexpressible. Since it is what escapes from language, it is properly not representable.

In his 1969-70 seminar, Lacan presents his discourses theory, distinguishing the discourse of the Master, of the University, of the Hysteric and the discourse of the Analyst. In each of them the *objet petit a* («the cause of desire», Lacan, 1969-1970, p. 106) occupies a different place. In the discourse of the Analyst (which is the opposite of the Master's one) the *objet petit a* takes the agent place. Since the *objet petit a* is what Lacan calls *surplus jouissance*, in the Analyst's discourse the *jouissance*<sup>5</sup> is no more forbidden (as it was in the master's discourse).

It is exactly that reformulation of the desire theory which could interest Deleuze and Guattari. Due to his theorization of *objet petit a*, it is no more possible trying to bring back Lacan's teaching to a «familial and personological axis – whereas [he] assigns the cause of desire to a non-human 'object', heterogeneous to the person,

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<sup>5</sup> We are not translating the French word – following English editions of Lacanian books – because actually there isn't such a word in English. There is 'enjoyment', 'pleasure', 'delight', but none of them correspond to the French *jouissance* enough.

below the minimum conditions of identity, escaping the intersubjective coordinates as well as the world of meanings» (Deleuze, Guattari, 1972, p. 360).

Lacan's 17<sup>th</sup> seminar is quoted only once in *Anti-Oedipus*, there where the authors say he has probably tried to schizophrenize Oedipus instead of oedipalize the schizo:

Wouldn't it be better [...] - they ask - to schizophrenize the domain of the unconscious as well as the sociohistorical domain, so as to shatter the iron collar of Oedipus and rediscover everywhere the force of desiring-production; to renew, on the level of the Real, the tie between the analytic machine, desire, and production? For the unconscious itself is no more structural than personal, it does not symbolize any more than it imagines or represents; it engineers, it is machinic. Neither imaginary nor symbolic, [the unconscious] is the *Real in itself*, the "*impossible real*" and its production (*ivi*, p. 53, my emphasis).

Unconscious is neither imaginary nor symbolic: they're either anticipating Lacanian real unconscious, or Lacan will follow them in his definition. It is the "impossible real" and its production: they're quoting Lacan's 17<sup>th</sup> seminar: «the real [...] is radically distinguished from the symbolic and the imaginary - the real is the impossible [...] [it is the] logical obstacle of what, in the symbolic, declares itself to be impossible» (Lacan, 1969-70, p. 123). Despite the psychoanalyst has never gave up with Symbolic and Imaginary, always including them in the structure of unconscious, at a certain point he started insisting on Real. Why is Real impossible? Because as speaking beings such as we are, we can never reach it. It is always filtered by language. The Real - which is beyond language - is blocked for us somehow.

Nevertheless it is Real that the analysis aim to reach: «the Real can emerge in speech and limit the infinite drift of both deciphering and meaning» (Soler, 2009, p. 17). The only possibility for psychoanalysis not to be infinite, not to lose itself in the recursivity of language and in the infinity of interpretation, is aiming to reach the Real. Which is properly impossible.

After quite a long time insisting on the Real, Lacan came to mention a real unconscious:

Notons que la psychanalyse a, depuis qu'elle ex-siste, changé. Inventée par un solitaire, théoricien incontestable de l'inconscient (qui n'est ce qu'on croit, je dis: *l'inconscient, soit réel*, qu'à m'en croire) (Lacan, 2001, p. 571, my emphasis).

This is the perhaps the point of maximum convergence between Lacan and the *Anti-oedipus's* authors. Critics have been stressing a lot the relevance of Lacanian real unconscious in particular and Lacan's pass to Real in general, both psychoanalysts

(e.g. Miller 2006-2007, Soler 2009) and philosophes (e.g. Butler, 1993; Žižek, 2005; Cimatti, 2015; Ronchi, 2015).

Soler concentrates on the very beginning of Lacanian *Preface to the English-language Edition of Seminar XI*: «Quand l'esp d'un laps, soit puisque je n'écris qu'en français: l'espace d'un lapsus, n'a plus aucune portée de sens (ou interprétation), alors seulement on est sûr qu'on est dans l'inconscient» (Lacan, 2001, p. 571, my emphasis). She highlights that we can reach real unconscious at the end of an analysis, having passed through the linguistic one:

when the signifier - the One of a symptom - no longer carries *any meaning*, it is only then that we are sure that we are in the unconscious, the real unconscious, the enjoyed unconscious. [...] Lacan did not stop looking for a way to conceptualize what could stop the flow of analytic blah blah under transference, as well as the endlessness of deciphering which, in its recurrence, can always tolerate one more cipher (Soler, 2009, p. 38, my emphasis).

Miller too refers to the *l'esp d'un laps* as the Lacanian way to indicate the moment when «le lapsus, formation de l'inconscient, n'a plus aucune portée de sens ou d'interprétation. C'est alors qu'on peut parler de la sortie d'inconscient transférentiel» (Miller, 2006-2007, 10 January 2007, p. 2).

The real unconscious is somehow beyond language then, because while speaking we can only say a thing sacrificing its reality: «As soon as a thing is nominated, it loses its content, transferring to [...] sign's space» (Esposito, 2014, p. 54). The real unconscious, the one that can go further and elsewhere the theatrical-oedipal unconscious, is thus a singular, embodied one (Soler, 2009).

### **3. Conclusion: from real unconscious to bodies**

From a philosophical point of view, the real unconscious - generally, the Lacanian passage to the Real - encounters much interest too. We can understand why if we suppose that reaching the real unconscious (at the end of an analysis, according to Soler) means to reach our body, to incarnate symbolic (Cimatti, 2015, 128 sgg.). As Lacan says in his XX seminar: «the real [...] is the mystery of the speaking body, the mystery of the unconscious» (Lacan, 1972-1973, p. 131). The mystery of the unconscious is that part of human being which cannot be symbolized, or talked about. The part that resists, the reject - as Lacan called the *objet petit a*. If body is the place where to live that reject, real unconscious is that of a living body.

Part of contemporary philosophy – especially, but not only, the so called *Italian thought* – is strongly highlighting the role of the body<sup>6</sup>. We may say that it is the present point of view on human life. Both Deleuze and Lacan are important references for this debate. Throughout this paper we aimed to show how Lacan's influence on *Anti-Oedipus*, and vice versa, is one of the philosophical steps that led to this 'thinking the body'. This is perhaps the most interesting link between Deleuze and Guattari's desiring-machines, which produce the real, and Lacan's real unconscious. Beyond all discussion about the specific position occupied by Lacan in *Anti-Oedipus*, this is what came to present days from their encounter, since the point seems to be bodies today, bodies which may fulfill the gap between things and persons (Esposito, 2014). Trying to find Lacan's position in *Anti-Oedipus* then, brings us to body as one of the most pregnant questions for philosophy now.

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<sup>6</sup> We quote as examples Esposito (2014), Agamben (2014), Cimatti (2015), Fadini (2015).

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## **Abstract**

### ***Anti-Oedipus* and Lacan. The question about the Real**

This paper focuses on Lacan's influence on the book *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and schizophrenia* by Deleuze and Guattari. Since desire is the main topic which relates Lacan to *Anti-Oedipus*, we may ask: how are desiring-machines related to Lacan's desire theory, particularly to the *objet petit a*? We answer referring to some of his seminars, particularly that of 1969-70.

We conclude that what philosophically matters about this topic is the authors' convergence on the theme of the real. Specifically Deleuze and Guattari's desiring-machines and Lacan's real unconscious converge into the contemporary philosophical research about body.



**Keywords:** *Anti-Oedipus*, Lacan, desire, real, bodies