

An Interview with Catherine Malabou: Toward Epigenetic Philosophy

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C&C: Let us begin with what is perhaps a classical question on the relation between philosophy and science. Philosophy throughout its history and from its very beginning –seems to have (had) an intimate, yet intricate relation to science and scientificity. Some philosophers have argued that the very emergence of mathematics proved to be a constitutive reason for the emergence of philosophy itself (we can think of Althusser). According to others, the history of philosophy is fundamentally made of the failed attempts to constitute itself as a science in its own right (one can here think of Kant's famous claims in his first Critique, or Hegel, Husserl and others). What role would you assign to science at and for the very beginning and origin of philosophy? Is there a particular science which you would single out in its importance, a role for which mathematics may always have been a good candidate (maybe there are even different sciences that prove to play such a role historically)?

C.M. I think that the “classical question” on the relation between philosophy and science can be approached from three distinct angles, that do not have the same aim. First, from the *history of science* angle, second the *epistemological* angle, third from the *metaphysical* angle. History of science studies the constitution of the different fields of scientific knowledge according to the cultural criteria of a given historical period. This includes mentalities, religious and ideological context, as well as

the level of technological development of a given civilization. From that perspective, it is clear that the development of Greek mathematics and physics cannot be studied separately from that of philosophy. Such a study though does not seek to bring to light the foundational moment of these disciplines, that is their grounding principles. History of science is descriptive and non-normative, even if a genuinely good and helpful history of science cannot of course only be a narrative. Still, the “transcendental” perspective is absent from it.

The epistemological angle looks in three directions at the same time: first, it determines the constitution of the proper rationality inherent to each field, that is the specific conditions of its autonomy. Second, it studies its history and evolution, not in the sense of the aforementioned history of science point of view, but from the perspective of the construction of its internal truth and validity. Bachelard remains a model of that type of inquiry. He brought to light the idea that scientific progress is dialectical, that each new break out in the history of a particular science is a “no” to the previous one. For example, Lavoisier's chemistry is a “no” opposed to alchemy (*See La Philosophie du Non*). Epistemology is also, thirdly, a study of the scientific mind (*esprit scientifique*), that supposes the distinction between reason, opinion, and belief (see also Bachelard, *La Formation de l'esprit scientifique*).

Now, what about the metaphysical approach? It is of course

all contained in the prefix “meta”. Since Plato as we know, who however did not know the term metaphysics, philosophy has appeared as the knowledge of the first principles of every domain of rationality. Mathematics are still using “hypotheses”, as Socrates explains in the *Republic*, that is conditioned postulates, involving some empirical and sensuous elements, rather than philosophy (or “dialectics”) reasons out of pure idealization. I think this has remained true from Plato to Husserl, inspite of changes in method and definitions of the rational, and the passage from ideas to transcendental “idealities”.

Two radical breaks with such a vision appear 1) with analytic philosophy on the one hand, 2) with Heidegger in the continental European tradition. 1) Analytic philosophical approach proposes a definition of truth that pertains neither to history, epistemology and metaphysics. Propositional and modal logic, and is from that point of view, the linchpin between philosophy of science. 2) Heidegger on his side, against both analytic philosophers and philosophers like Cohen or Cassirer, claims for an autonomy of metaphysics, and consequently also of philosophy, from the scientific domain. More exactly, the task of philosophy is not to provide for the foundational apparatus of science any longer. Its task is not historical or epistemological either. It consists in bringing to light what the traditional relationship between metaphysics and science has precisely dismissed

and occulted, namely the definition and understanding of truth, not as “*adequatio*” but as “*aletheia*” or disclosure as Being. As we know, this break through started for an important part with the brilliant reading of Husserl 6th *Logic Research* and the “categorial intuition”, in which Heidegger shows that the important point in a proposition, an axiom, or a principle, is the value of the copula, of the *is*.

After Heidegger, the movement of deconstruction of metaphysics and *episteme* has become always more radical, as obvious in Derrida. Philosophers like Foucault are much more attentive to history of science and epistemology, but their main preoccupation is to situate the emergence and intentionalities of human sciences, like linguistics or psychology, and exhibit the biopolitical content of disciplines like biology or medicine, without touching mathematics of physics. Along with these moves, the philosophical discourse also changes. Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, to name but a few, engage a profound reflection on the relationship between philosophy and literature, that deeply modifies the language of philosophy.

Such changes of orientation have occurred in parallel with the explosion of the unity of science itself and its fragmentation in a plurality of fields irreducible to unity. The analogy of the “line” developed by Plato where each particular science finds itself situated in a hierarchy has of course become definitely obsolete.

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C&C: You argue that we should conceive of the rupture that happened in and with modern science as a total break with previous ideas of science or is there a continuity between the Greek and the modern worlds? Or is there rather a far-reaching transformation of something that is constitutive of scientific practice, so a transformation from below (as Jean-Claude Milner once argued that it is not that there is for example mathematization that emerges with modern science but that the very mathematical medium itself attains a different ontological status in modern science)? And if there is either what does this mean to do philosophy, even under changed historical or unchanging rather structural conditions?

C.M. Let me first turn toward the last part of your previous question, concerning the status of mathematics. As I just said, I am more in favor of break rather than continuity, even if both break and continuity have to be approached with care and caution (it is never as simple as “either/or”). Again, the dialectical model proposed by Bachelard is certainly the most satisfying when it comes to determine the value of transformations within a given scientific corpus. Transformation is always both a modification of the same form, and the emergence of a radical new form, what I have tried to conceptualize with “my” concept of plasticity. I don’t see why mathematics would escape this schema and line of development.

I am extremely doubtful about

what I would call the current dogmatic ontologization of mathematics. I certainly respect Milner’s or Badiou’s mathematical knowledge and skill. This said, no mathematical knowledge and skill should give way to the kind of sacralization of mathematical ideas that we are witnessing today.

I just said that continuity and rupture are always intertwined in a dialectical relationship. This is of course also valid for philosophy. If there is a new break today — that I will analyze further — with the deconstructive visions of the relationships between philosophy and science, there must be also a continuity with them! Many contemporary philosophers seem totally oblivious of deconstruction, which is ridiculous and dangerous, because there will of course and necessarily be a return of the repressed!!! The questions that should be addressed are, to name but a few: why still confer a privilege to mathematics today ? What is the legitimacy of such a gesture? What to do for example with current neurobiological assumptions according to which there are no mathematical essences, only adaptive truths (what is true is what is most beneficial), no a priori principles, etc? Mostly, what is the meaning of the current secret and insidious philosophical trend that tends, through the sacralization of mathematics, to reestablish the authority of metaphysics? As if nothing had happened in between Husserl’s time and ours?

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C&C: The very relation between philosophy and science – if there is one at all – raises profound questions for the practice of both, such as: What is the material status and what are the material effects of scientific knowledge for philosophy? Does philosophy need to integrate, mimic, repeat and maybe repeat but also transform scientific practice, that is: its proceedings, techniques, its knowledge in its very own form of practice? Is science about knowledge after all? And would as science not of knowledge but of truth just be another name for philosophy?

C.M. How can you say “if there is one at all”? Not only there is one, but this issue has been constantly orienting every philosophical practice since the beginning, even under the apparent contradictory form of its deconstruction. One of Derrida’s most important text, is it necessary to remind the reader of this, is his preface to Husserl’s *Origin of Geometry*. Be it in the form of an union, a cooperation, a hierarchization, a clarification or a divorce, philosophy cannot sustain itself without determining its own situation vis à vis science, and this has nothing to do with a mimicking. This is reciprocal, as sciences, be they “hard” or “human”, cannot but proceed from principles that contain concepts that have to be philosophically interrogated to the extent that they are not entirely objective, empirical or positive. Hence the concept of epigenesis at the heart of epigenetics, the concept of code at the heart of genetics, the

concept of the aleatory in physics, the concept of transfinite in mathematics, etc. It is definitely criminal to not introduce philosophy classes in scientific departments, and no genuine question of the meaning of scientificity of science in philosophy departments. This fosters an intolerable ignorance and blindness on both sides. Many of my colleagues philosophers don’t have a single clue about the current neurobiological revolution for example. To answer the last part of your question, yes, of course, science and philosophy constantly transform each other, modify their practices and orientations accordingly. How can we think that what is currently going on in neurology is not preparing a new definition of intelligence, spirit and the act of thinking? In reverse, how can neuroscientists deafen themselves to the necessary work of critique? What is a neurobiology with is not a critical neurobiology? We need a critique of neurobiological reason, we need a critical neuroscience, as well as a new modality of critique informed by neuroscience.

Truth does not belong to one or the other, to philosophy or science, but emerges from their interactions and conflicts.

C&C: Would you think or contend that scientificity is a general standard for thinking? If so, what to do with the revolutions or at least fundamental transformations that took place in the sciences (including for example the so called foundational crisis in mathematics and maybe could sometimes even be de-

scribed as inventions of new forms science, etc.)? Or, if not, what kind of concept of science can one – the scientist or the philosopher, or the latter or former as both – have?

C.M. I never said that “scientificity was a general standard for thinking”, for many reasons, but also for the very simple one that when someone uses a general standard as a principle of thinking, thinking disappears... The 20th century, it is true, had to deal with a severe challenging of foundations and grounding. The unifying principles of physics notably were thrown into question. The principle of conservation of energy, the principle of entropy, the principle of conservation of mass, etc, all of them were confronted with great difficulties. French mathematician Poincaré had little confidence in the nature of principles: they were constructed by physicists because they accommodate and take into account a large number of laws. Their objective value consists in forming a scientific convention, in other words in providing a firm foundation to the basis on which truth and falsehood (in the scientific meaning of the words) are separated. This demonstrates that truth and falsehood “the axioms of geometry are only definitions in disguise. What, then, are we to think of the question, Is Euclidian geometry true? It has no meaning. We might as well ask if the metric system is true, and if the old weights and measures are false... One geometry cannot be more true than another ; it can only be more convenient.”

By this, Poincaré does not mean that truth is a mere convention. In that sense, philosophy and science have something in common, which is that no new philosophy is more “true” than a previous one. Both philosophy and phscis for example concid with the dialectical movement of their own truth. Poincaré means that truth and falsehood are a matter of experiment. Experiment alone can challenge a principle. Experiment alone can foster the expression of a new principle. One might argue that this is the main difference between physics and philosophy. I am not so sure though. A philosophy that does not have a serious, rigorous experimental side, is not a philosophy. I know I will shock some of my readers, but I think this is also true for mathematics. Of course, we play here with different meanings of “principle” and “experiment”.

C&C : In “What Should We Do with Our Brain?”, you seem to suggest a renewal of ideology critique, if we are not misreading you: we live in a world in which we are constantly described, addressed and even interpellated to be flexible. Yet, what science tells us that we are essentially plastic – that is not only form receiving, but form giving – beings. This insight itself or as such is not yet political or politicized. It is a scientific claim. But if philosophy, that is in your case, you, takes up this scientifically provable statement it gains a political value if it is pitched against the ideology of flexibility: first we see that it is an ideology (an imaginary

representation of our real, plastic, conditions of existence) and second that it is an ideology which misrepresents what we are. So, we fell prey to a misunderstanding of ourselves. Science can clarify, can tell us more about ourselves, more about what we are, what we can do and thus we can only and for the first time truly raise the question what to do with what we are. And, it seems the task of philosophy in relating to science is, at least in the case, a fundamentally political one. Do you think that political question emerge within the very relation of the two (and the impact this can generate on not only how we understand the world but ourselves)?

C.M. The brain has always had a political signification, metaphorical perhaps, but still extremely pregnant. When you say of someone that this person is a brain, it refers to power. The brain is the organ of command, as you can also hear literally in the word cybernetics. I have argued in *What Should We Do With Our Brain* that this structure of command has changed. Instead of being a centralized organ of government, the brain now appears, in the light of the recent scientific discoveries, as a decentralized system, made of different points in a network that constantly interact but are not gathered in a single locus. The name of such a structure is “plastic organization”. It is striking to see how current capitalist management has used such a structure for its own sake by calling it “flexible” instead, thus inducing that all points in a network (meaning all

individuals involved in a labour process) are mobile, easily displaceable and exploitable. The issue of flexibility of labour is central in all economically advanced societies today. The substitution of flexibility for plasticity erases the notion of resistance. A plastic material is malleable, but resists deformation once shaped, like the marble that has become a sculpture. You are right to say that this flexibility/plasticity dialectics also concerns the vision that we have of ourselves. We do have to set up what our thresholds of resistance are in a world in which these thresholds are constantly blurred and denied. Undoubtedly, the brain is the main organ for such a resistance, it suffers from all transgressions of these thresholds (burn out phenomena, traumas, depression...) and that makes it difficult for us to know exactly what to do because the brain is invisible and its language has not yet been deciphered. Such a decoding process should be the task of psychoanalysis or neuro-psychoanalysis to come.

C&C: Currently new, especially philosophical positions emerged that all seem to concur about offering an adequate or more solid conceptualization of the relation between philosophy and science that seeks to overcome Heideggerian technology critique as well as what classically was addressed as mere positivism of science (*inter alia* in the tradition of the Frankfurt school and the like). We are thinking of phenomena that became prominent under labels (that almost

no one seems to like but everybody nonetheless uses) such a speculative realism or related strands as “accelerationism”. Would you be willing to give us a short “cognitive map” of the current situation as you see it and how you would situate yourself in it?

C.M. It is very clear that all interesting philosophical propositions today tend to break with the famous Heideggerian “Wissenhaft denkt nicht” proposition. Continental philosophy has been way behind scientific progress since at least fifty years and that is a shame. The critique of “positivism” has been a lazy pretext for ignoring the most important scientific discoveries of our time, and consequently also dismissing their philosophical impact.

To sketch the current “cognitive map” drawn by new philosophical approaches of the problem, I see four main trends or directions. First the mathematical trend, opened by Badiou and followed up by Meillassoux and his insistence on the transfinite in order to reelaborate the concept of contingency. Second, the new path opened by philosophy and physics: the materialist trend followed by people like Karen Barad or Jane Bennett (*Vibrant Matter*). Third the biological path with an insistence on epigenetics that I am myself following, and fourth what I would call the philosophy of the technopole, that includes reflections on digital technologies, IA, data science, accelerationism (Kittler, Stiegler, Land, ...).

C&C: You recently published a book on epigenesis. What got you into returning to this category or maybe rather question that as you show also occupied Kant (especially the Kant of the third Critique)?

C.M. What gave me the incentive to write *Before Tomorrow* was speculative realism’s rejection of all notion of transcendental. Speculative realism is an umbrella term, that subsumes many trends, even the OOO (Object Oriented Ontology) ones, but all of them share the same rejection of the transcendental, that is first of all of Kant’s philosophy, and the hegemony of criticism that for a long time has appeared as the only way to deal with metaphysical problems.

Before Tomorrow is for an essential part an answer to Meillassoux’s challenge: “The primary condition to the issue I intend to deal with here is the relinquishing of transcendentalism”. The transcendental is a logical barrier that is set up against the radical contingency of the world. The set of *a priori* laws, principles and categories brought to light in the *Critique of pure Reason* is supposed to guarantee the physical necessity and regularity of the world, according to well-known Kantian principle that the laws of nature are identical with the laws of our understanding. In reality, as Meillassoux argues, Kant was never able to deduce the transcendental, only to posit it. In that sense, the transcendental is itself contingent. Its only basis is the subject/object correlation. This correlation itself, correlation-

ism in general, is a very frail basis. How is it possible to advocate for the necessity of the world on such a ground, that cannot account for the nature of a world from which humanity is absent, and only deals with the finitude of our cognitive apparatus?

Reading Meillassoux made me aware of other attacks on the transcendental, coming from very different contexts, like Heidegger's, Foucault's philosophy, along with a whole range of continental philosophers. But also, in a radically different tradition, from contemporary neurobiologists.

The reasons for these attacks are of course different, but they all converge on one point: the transcendental is a rigid structure, that is not able to ground itself. Neurobiologists argue, following neo-Darwinian arguments, that what we currently consider *a priori* knowledge is only a result of a long evolution. It was an *a posteriori* acquisition in the first place, for our ancestors, that became *a priori* for us because it has been assimilated, simplified, and mastered.

My problem was not to save Kant by all means from these accusations, but simply to ask myself: to what extent can we philosophize without something like a transcendental structure, that is something that belongs to thinking only and cannot be derived from experience, time or history ?

I wanted to demonstrate that this element of pure thinking, pure logic, was not necessarily fixed and immutable, and I drew the energy

of such a demonstration in what Kant says in paragraph 27 of the first *Critique* when it comes to the deduction of categories. The categories are not innate, they are not derived from experience either, they are produced out of an epigenesis. Kant says "as it were, a system of epigenesis of pure reason".

It meant that there existed a space of transformability within the transcendental. Such a space is clearly explored in the third *Critique* with the analysis of teleology, biology and the living being. It is the space of life. I also argued that the third Critique had a retroactive transformative effect on the first one. This epigenetic effect constitutes the genuine deduction of the transcendental.

C&C: You added or coined a new term, which in your conceptualization, serves as a kind of additional, fourth element to the famous Lacanian triad (Real, Imaginary and Symbolic). You call this the *material*. This concept is informed by neurobiology, according to which a trauma or "new wounds" (brain damages, wounds, injuries) cannot be properly accounted for by psychoanalysis or at least according to their most influential model (Freud, Lacan). Neurobiological traumas are, in your understanding, exceed what Freud described as the dimension *beyond the pleasure principle* – since, as you claim, it is beyond that the Freudian 'beyond'. In this sense, you make a distinction between, we might say, material and psychic wounds. So, in your debate with Freudo-Lacanians, you

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emphasize the distinction between the materialist unconscious and the libidinal unconscious. You privilege the former, on the basis of which you unfold your theory of subjectivity (which is done though Hegelian reading of cognitive sciences) – maybe epitomized in your comments about the Alzheimer patients who clearly cannot be treated by psychoanalysis anymore. What precisely follows for you from the analysis of what you perceive as conceptual limitations of psychoanalysis? For the relation to science but also for the account of subjectivity (and maybe even for politics)?

C.M. Let me explain the basis of my approach to trauma. It started with an inquiry about Freud's notion of plasticity. Plasticity, for Freud, characterizes the indestructibility of our earliest psychic formations. This idea appears very in *Thoughts For The Times On War And Death*. In the development of the mind, Freud states, "every earlier stage persists alongside the later stage which has arisen from it; here succession also involves co-existence, although it is to the same materials that the whole series of transformations has applied. The earlier mental stage may not have manifested itself for years, but none the less it is so far present that it may at any time again become the mode of expression of the forces in the mind, and indeed the only one, as though all later developments had been annulled or undone. This extraordinary plasticity of mental developments is not unrestricted

as regards directions; it may be described as a special capacity for involution — for regression — since it may well happen that a later and higher state of development, once abandoned, cannot be reached again. But the primitive stages can always be re-established ; the primitive mind is, in the fullest meaning of the word, imperishable."¹

The "extraordinary plasticity" of mental developments is thus linked with the permanence of the form. Once formed, the psychic matter cannot go back to its previous state. We must remember that the word "plasticity" generally describes the nature of that which is plastic, being at once capable of receiving and of giving form. The psyche is plastic to the extent that it can receive the imprint and impose this earlier form upon most recent developments. But we also know that plasticity equally means the power to annihilate form. Plasticity may be used to describe the crystallization of form as well as the destruction of all form (as suggested by the term "plastic" for the bomb).

The impossibility of erasure or disappearance in mental life expresses equally the liveliness of the trace (the persistence of the form) as well as the inertia proper to the death drive (the destruction of the form). That is what appears in mental diseases: "What are called mental diseases inevitably produces an impression in the layman that intellectual and mental life have been destroyed. In reality,

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¹ Freud 1957, pp. 285-286.

the destruction only applies to later acquisitions and developments. The essence of mental disease lies in a return to earlier states of affective life and functioning.²

The impossibility of oblivion coincides with the inability to change, with the tendency to restore an earlier state of things, and with the deadly mechanism of the compulsion to repeat. We remember this passage from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in which Freud declares: "The elementary living entity would from its very beginning have had no wish to change; if conditions remained the same, it would do no more than constantly repeat the same course of life. (...) Every modification which is thus imposed upon the course of the organism's life is accepted by the conservative organic instinct and stored up for further repetition. Those instincts are therefore bound to give a deceptive appearance of being forces tending towards change and progress, whilst in fact they are merely seeking to reach an ancient goal by paths alike old and new."³ To say that the primitive mind is imperishable means both that the originary form of the psyche resists death and that it is the very expression of death. Preservation is thus the mark of vitality as well as the characteristic of inorganic passivity.

The "extraordinary plasticity" of mental developments thus maintains the psyche between life and death, between the emergence

and the destruction of form.

The interaction between life and death is then definitely plastic.

As I said, though, Freud seems to have a different view on that same interaction. Let's go back to the play between life drives and the death drive. In *Beyond the Pleasure principle*, Freud invokes Hering's theory. "According to E. Hering's theory, two kinds of processes are constantly at work in living substance, operating in contrary directions, one constructive or assimilatory and the other destructive or dissimilatory. (...) We venture to recognize in these two directions taken by the vital processes the activity of our two instinctual impulses, the life instincts and the death instincts."⁴

Eros, or the life drive, creates forms. The death drive destroys them. But this time, and this is what is very interesting for me, Freud declares that only the life drives are plastic, and he regards the death drive as elastic.

But, and such is the problem, if we closely read *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, we discover that only the life drives are eventually said to be plastic. The destructive tendency, the compulsion to repeat, the restoration of an earlier state of things are eventually driven out the field of plasticity.

It is noticeable that Freud never uses the words "plastic" or "plasticity" to characterize the work of the death drive. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the death drive appears as "a kind of organic

elasticity, or, to put it in another way, the expression of inertia inherent in organic life."⁵ Instead of a fascinating face to face between creative plasticity and destructive plasticity within the compulsion to repeat, we find a disappointing contrast between plasticity and elasticity. Life creates forms, death is a formless return to matter. Death is a levelling of all forms. A trauma does not create a psychic form.

Freud states however that the profound meaning of the death drive is the immanence of death to life. Death is not, or not only, an external threat, but it works within life. It means that life forms its own destruction: "The organism only wishes to die in its own fashion."⁶ The organism forms its own death. The return to inorganic matter is paradoxically the result of a formative process which is the formation of the organism's own death. But Freud curiously does not succeed in characterizing this formative or fashioning process. He never gives an example of it. Destructive plasticity is once again reduced to elasticity, that is to the formless and traceless return to the origin. There is eventually no plastic work of the death drive. There are no *forms of destruction*. The destructive instinct are not plastic at all.

If we are not able to prove that the destruction of form has and is a form, if form is always on the side of Eros and of pleasure, it becomes impossible to prove that there is

2 . *Ibid.*

3 Freud 1999, p. 38.

anything beyond the pleasure principle.

This is what I explained in *The New Wounded*. I argue about the "plasticity of the wound", in which every "destruction is a form that forms." "All suffering is formative of the identity that endures it".

C&C: Léon Chertok and Isabelle Stengers co-authored a book, which in English is translated as a critique of psychoanalytic reason. It seems to us that the book takes the cue from Chertok's thesis that psychoanalysis neglected hypnosis. They grant Freud the attempt of constructing a science in a domain which is that of irrationality: of desires, attitudes, complaints, and so on. According to them, "the "psychoanalytic reason" invented by Freud – that is, the articulation between psychoanalytic theory and practice – does not simply reproduce the model of other rational practices." Accordingly, Chertok and Stengers argue that the uniqueness of Freud relies on the fact that he operated under two imperatives: a) he created a practice which did not limit the making 'heart' just an object of science like any other, but it is far more complex, and b) he created a practice which attempts to understand and address the obstacles the heart poses to reason. Interestingly, they seem to agree with Althusser, who maintained that Freud's invention was of scientific nature. What place do you grant psychoanalysis? Is it a scientific discipline, or merely a theoretical orientation?

5 Freud, p. 36.

6 *Ibid.*, p.39.

C.M. We should be careful in distinguishing at least three approaches to the problem of the “scientificity” of psychoanalysis. First, that of the enemies of psychoanalysis: psychoanalysis is not a science because its results cannot be proved, and thus it does not answer the criteria of falsifiability (Popper). Second, that of Freud. I think of the famous passage of *Metapsychology* that affirms that yes, contrarily to what many people think, psychoanalysis is a scientific theory to the extent that the “hypothesis of the existence of the unconscious” has several empirical manifestations that can easily be turned into proofs. Such a debate remains at the level of objectivity and objectification. A third approach is the Lacanian one, that displaces the problem from objectification to subjectification. Let me quote Bruce Fink’s excellent analysis on that point:

“But is that the kind of scientificity [the ‘objective’ one] that psychoanalysis can hope to achieve or even wish to achieve? The *APA Monitor*, the main organ of the American Psychological Association, occasionally lists which aspects of Freud’s theories have been borne out by empirical research: of course, when we consider what they have reduced Freud’s theories to in order to test them, and then examine the research design they have come up with to test such watered-down theories, we may well wonder whether the supposed confirmations are of any more value than the alleged

refutations!”⁷ According to Lacan, this is not at all the kind of scientificity at which psychoanalysis must aim: to his mind, psychoanalysis is not currently a science, and it is not by going in that direction that it will become one. “It is not what is measured in science that is important, contrary to what people think”.⁸ Psychoanalysis is not a science if we hear by that a mode of objective validation, but it still promotes a concept of truth if by this we mean what makes sense for a subject. And this cannot be “measured”, only interpreted. It seems difficult to me to go beyond Lacan’s contention on that point. I don’t think it reduces psychoanalysis to a “theoretical orientation” only, but more generally and ambitiously, it defines it as a science that resists its own categorization as a science precisely. What in science escapes science, that is its subjective side.

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7 Fink 2004, p.127

8 Lacan 1999, pp116-128

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