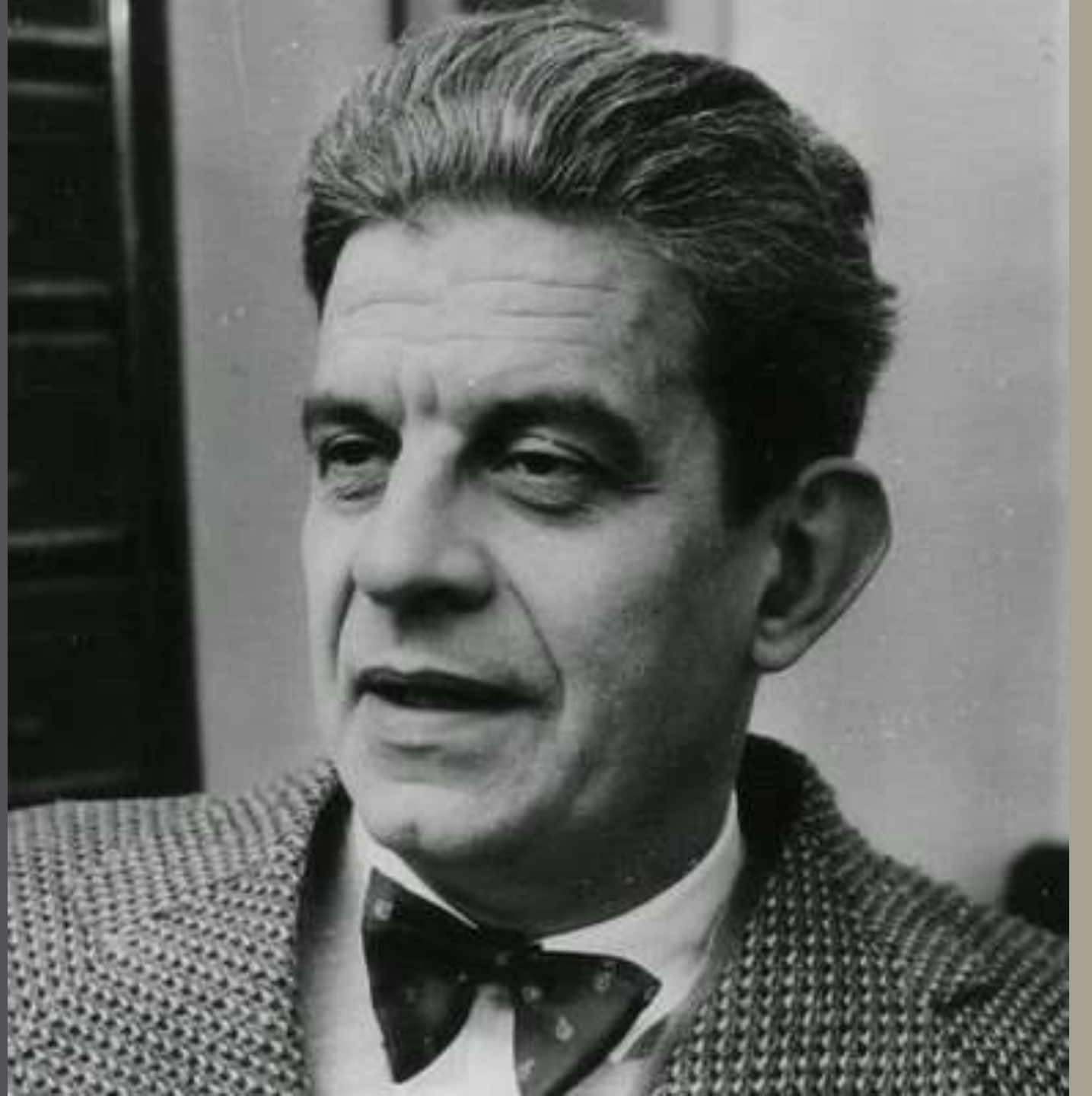


Society, Language, Difference

5. Lacan





We need some true wild cards, artists, people who never went to university and fought their way out of an appalling hell hole, weirdos from William Gibson novels like that girl hired by Bigend as a brand 'diviner' who feels sick at the sight of Tommy Hilfiger or that Chinese-Cuban free runner from a crime family hired by the KGB. If you want to figure out what characters around Putin might do, or how international criminal gangs might exploit holes in our border security, you don't want more Oxbridge English graduates who chat about Lacan at dinner parties with TV producers and spread fake news about fake news.

ALTHOUGH FOUCAULT REALLY JUST COMBINED TWO WORDS TOGETHER, SO MINE WAS BETTER.

YOU ADDED AN ACCENT MARK...

ACTUALLY...I DID HAVE ONE NEW TERM.

LET'S HEAR IT.

"META-METAPHYSICS". IT IS THE UNKNOWN METAPHYSICAL ASSUMPTIONS THAT YOU MAKE WHEN EVEN DESCRIBING A SYSTEM OF METAPHYSICS.

INTERESTING... ANYTHING ELSE?



YES ONE MORE, "META-METAETHICS". THIS IS THE UNKNOWN METAETHICAL ASSUMPTIONS YOU MAKE WHEN YOU DESCRIBE—

OKAY, SO...PRETTY MUCH THE SAME THING. I THINK WE GOT IT. EITHER WAY, IT IS A "YES" FROM ME. LACAN?

NOT ENOUGH PHALLIC REFERENCES FOR ME, IT'LL HAVE BE A "NO".

IT IS DOWN TO YOU, FOUCAULT.

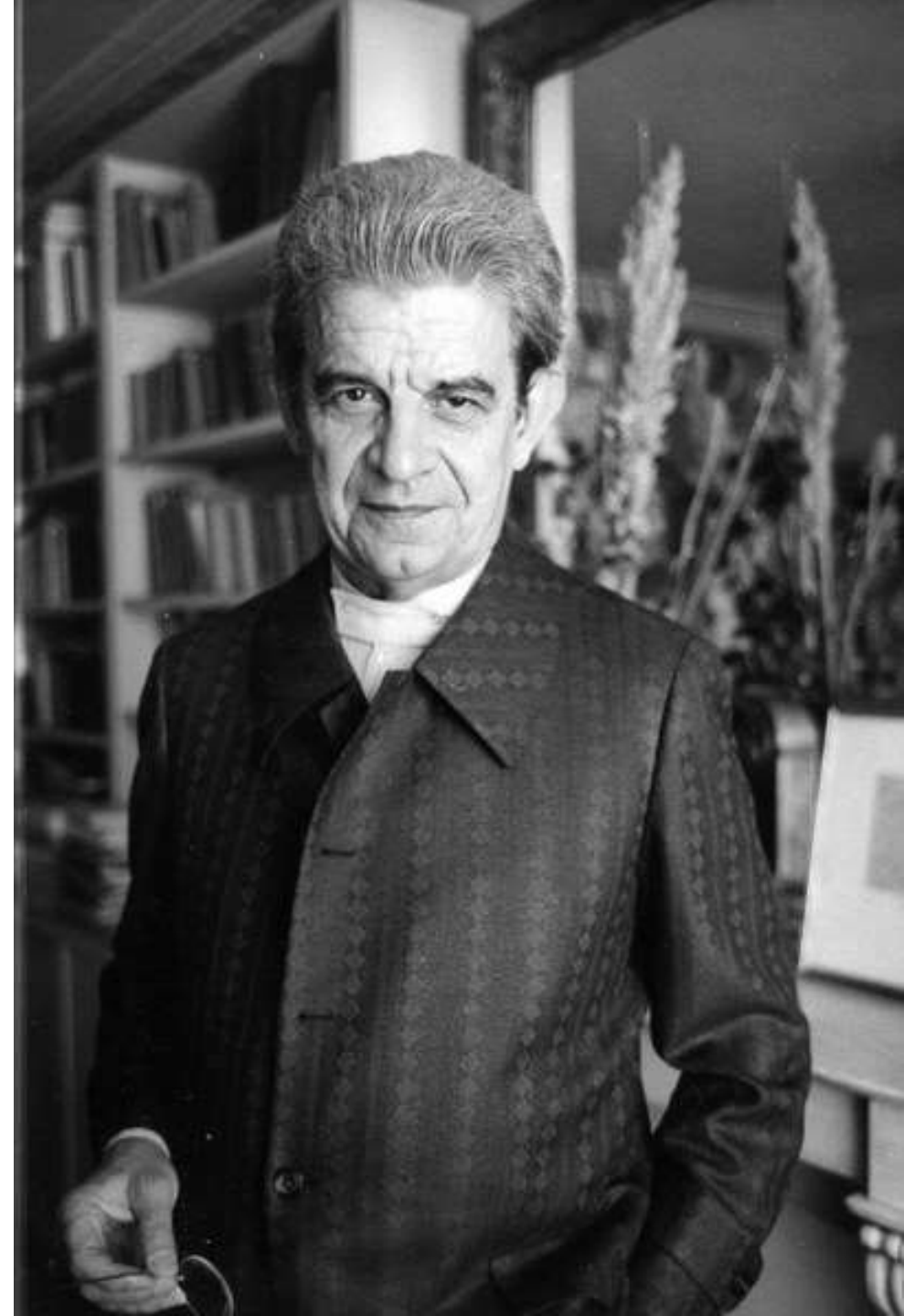
I AGREE WITH LACAN, YOU MUST INCORPORATE THE SEXUAL DRIVE IN YOUR META-METAPHYSICAL THEORIES TO SUCCEED. AND YOU'LL HAVE THAT CHANCE IN PARIS, IT'S A YES FROM ME!

‘I always speak the truth. Not the whole truth, because there’s no way to say it all.

Saying it all is literally impossible: words fail.

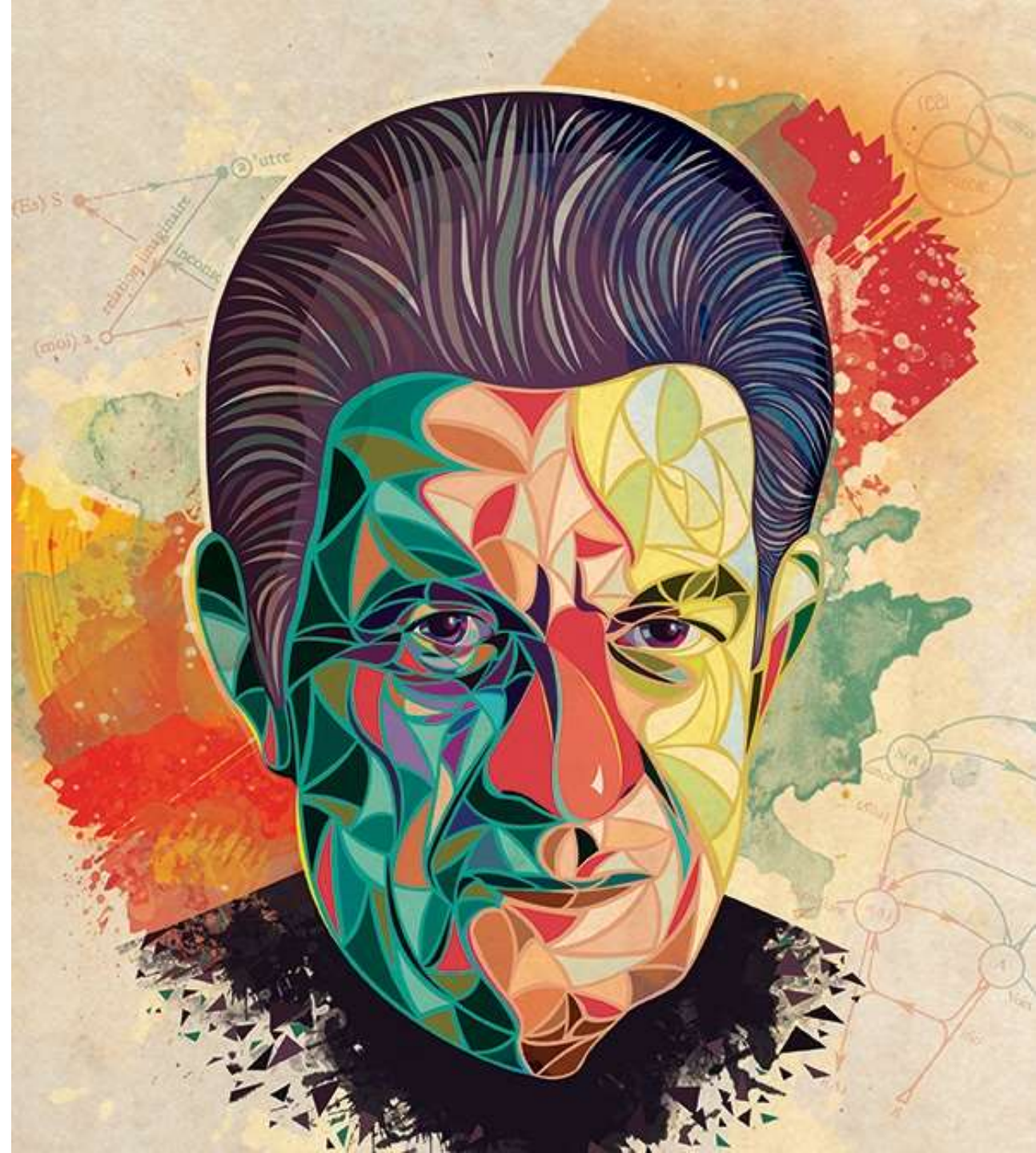
Yet it’s through this very impossibility that the truth holds on to the real.’

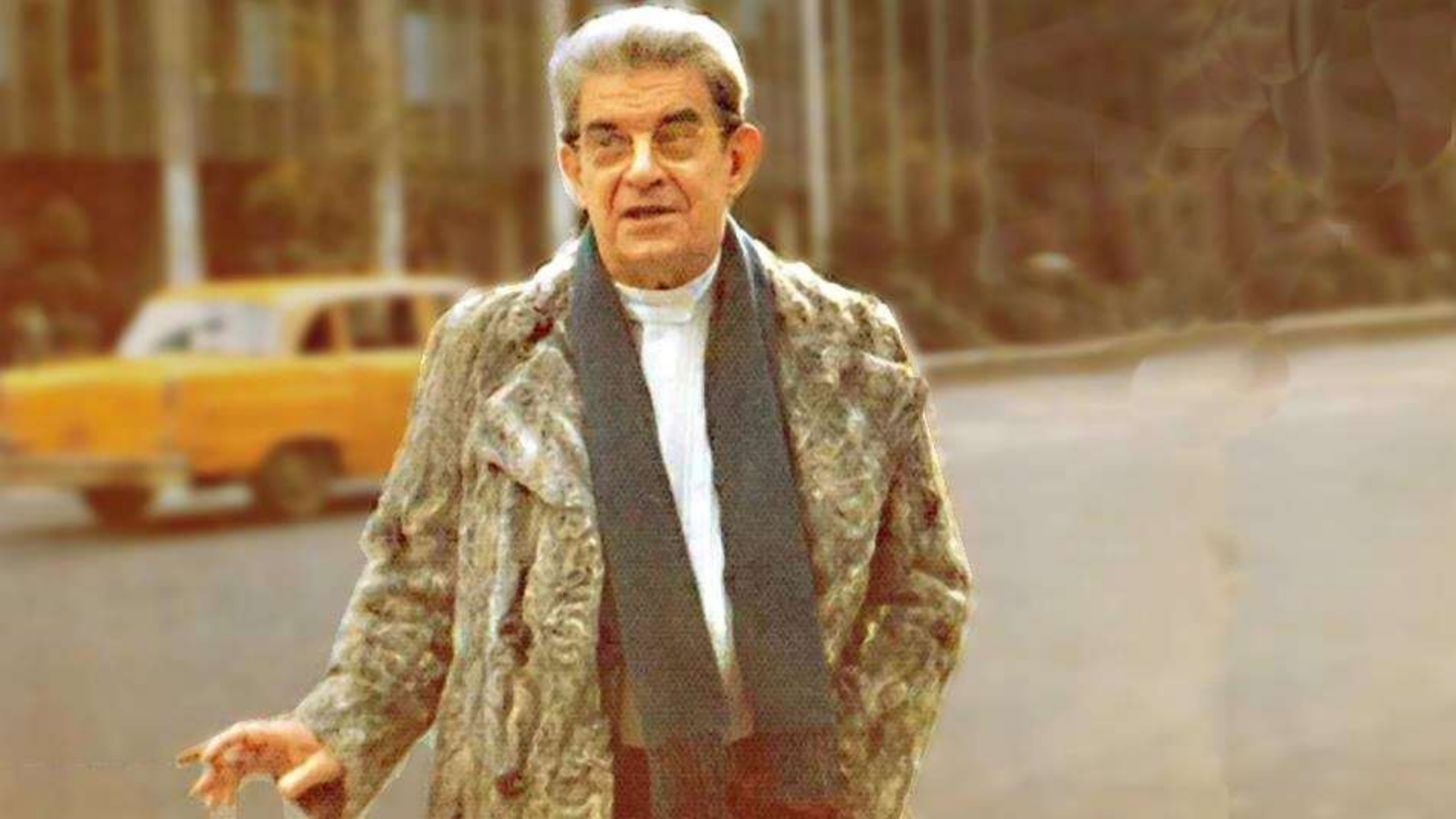
– Lacan, *Television*



Agenda

1. Introducing Jacques Lacan
2. Mirror stage
3. Decentred subjectivity
4. Three orders: the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic
5. Desire
6. Legacy





Introducing Jacques Lacan

- Born 13 April 1901 in Paris to a middle-class family – his father was a soap salesman, his mother an ardent Catholic; a Jesuit education
- Trains in medicine from 1920, and specifically psychiatry from 1927
- Member of Surrealist circles, writing in *Minotaure*, attends Joyce's reading of *Ulysses*, Picasso's personal physician
- “On Paranoiac Psychosis” (1932) popular with Dali and others
- Attends Kojève's seminars on Hegel



Introducing Lacan

- Joins the Société Psychoanalytique de Paris in 1934, marking a lifelong (rocky) relationship with Freudian psychoanalysis
- Begins weekly seminars for a 'return to Freud' in Paris from 1951
- ... First at Sainte-Anne Hospital (1953-64), then the École Normale Supérieure (1964-80)
- Banned from the International Psychoanalytical Association in 1962
- Wide range of interests beyond psychoanalysis: mathematics, game theory, literature, linguistics, and particularly the philosophy of Hegel, Heidegger, Sartre, Kant and Descartes





Key works and events

1936: Presents the “Mirror Stage” at the IPA Congress

1951: Weekly seminars in Paris until 1980

1953: Break from IPA, forms Société Française de Psychanalyse

1959-60: Seventh seminar on the Ethics of Psychoanalysis

1964: Seminars move to ENS; “Four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis”; quits the SFP and forms the *École Freudienne de Paris*

1966: *Écrits* published

1968: May uprisings; Lacan popular but students seek a ‘new master’

1980: dissolves his EFP, dying following year. ‘It is up to you to be Lacanians if you wish; I am Freudian’







Lacan's key ideas

- Mirror Phase
- Decentred subjectivity
- The three orders:
the imaginary, symbolic and
the real
- Desire is the desire of the
Other

2. The Mirror Stage

Where does
our earliest
sense of self
come from?



The Mirror Stage

- We are born relatively premature, weak and dependent
- From about 6 months, we discover ourselves in the mirror
- And identify with an image outside of ourselves, be it a real reflection or via the image of another child
- This is the fundamental moment of subjectivity, giving us a new mastery over our own body, and our sense of self as being something
- A viewed rooted in learning by imitation and mimicry

The Mirror Stage

‘The mirror stage is a phenomenon to which I assign a twofold value. In the first place, it has historical value as it marks a decisive turning-point in the mental development of the child.

In the second place, it typifies an essential libidinal relationship with the body image.’

- Lacan, “Some Reflections on the Ego”, 1953





3. Decentred Subjectivity

Mirror Stage – a split subjectivity

- For Sartre, consciousness as an active subject (the *for-itself*) strives to identify completely with itself as an object (the *in-itself*)...
- But it can't, because in projecting an object-like view of its 'self' or 'ego', it turns the living, active thinking subject into a frozen, undead form
- We are doomed to search for a sense of wholeness that eludes us
- To *Know thyself*, or to see ourselves as others see us, is impossible
- ... Because we can never be both subject and object at once



‘Man is only human to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him.

As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, it is this other that will remain the theme of his action.

It is on this other, it is on the recognition of this other, that his human value and reality depend. It is this other, in which the meaning of his life is condensed’

- Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*



Split subjectivity

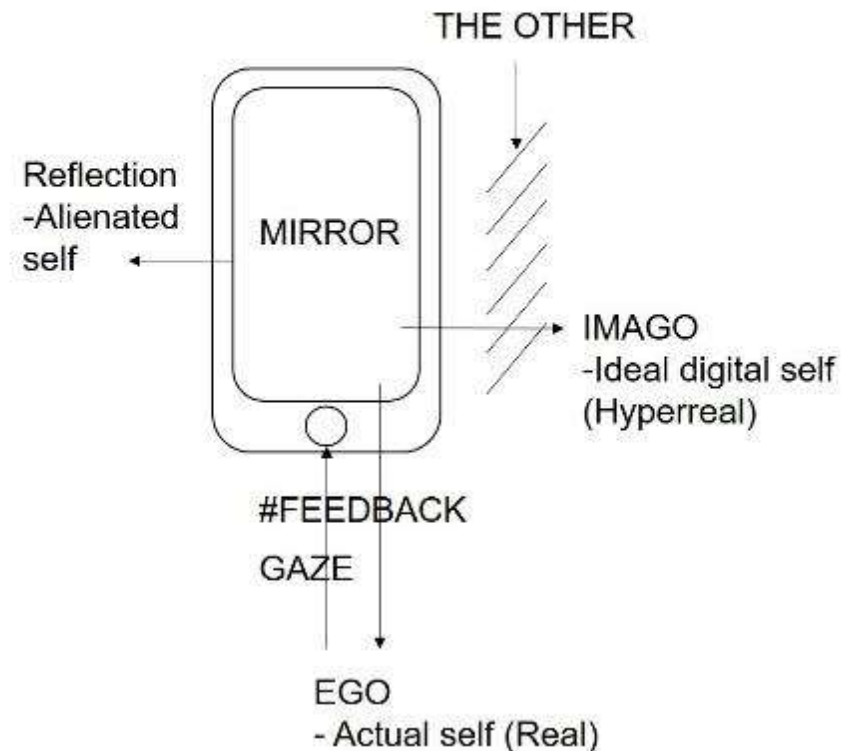
- In Hegel's master-slave struggle, subjectivity is split
- There is our own 'immediate self-consciousness', and the 'pure self-consciousness' of the Other, opposed to us
- But neither the master nor slave can be satisfied by this asymmetry
- Sartre and Lacan also reject the traditional Cartesian view of a coherent, singular Self, for one that is 'decentred'
- But whereas Sartre imbued this subjectivity with absolute freedom and rational consciousness, for Lacan our self is *socially determined*





‘Men ‘act’ and women ‘appear’. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at.’
 – John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*

Lacanian Mirror Stage applied to the iPhone



4. The Three Orders



Three Orders

- The Imaginary
- The Symbolic
- The Real

The Imaginary

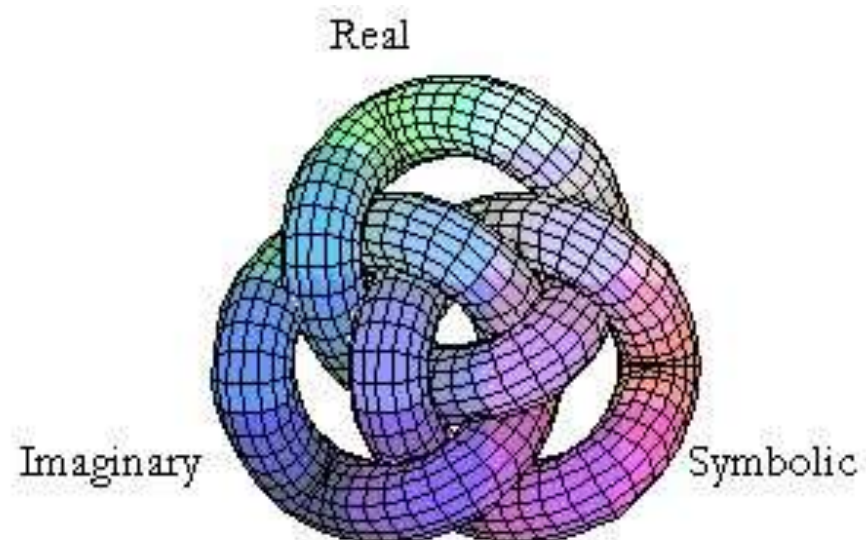
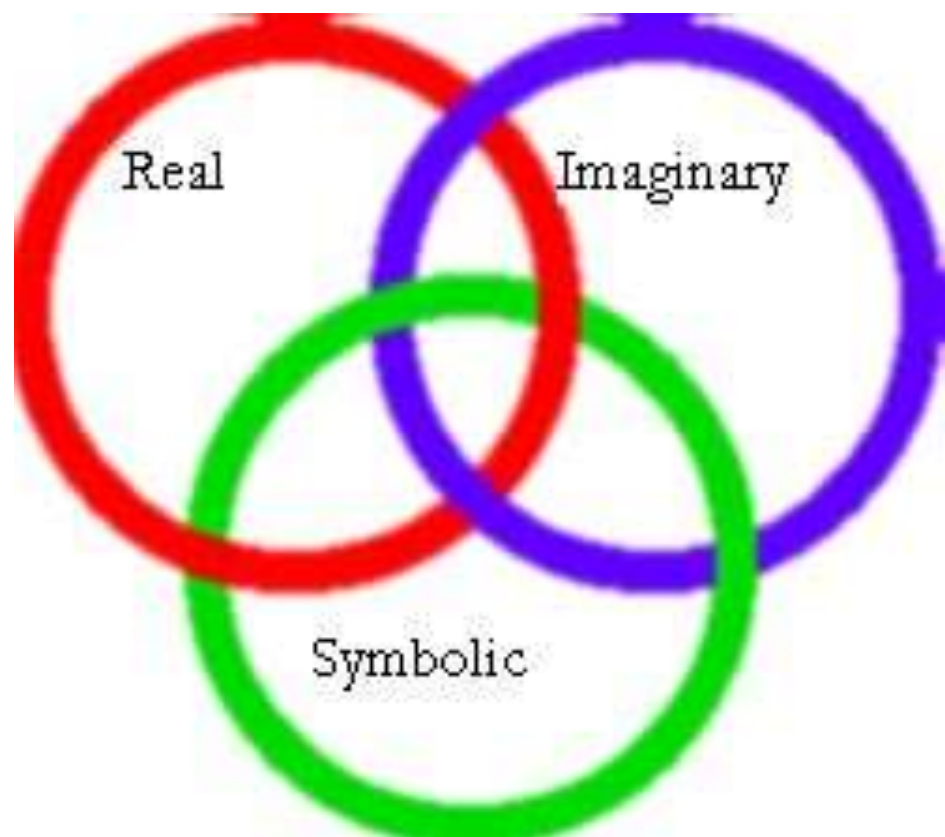
- The infant's identification with its own image takes place in the realm of **the imaginary**
- Our sensory world, of images perceived or imagined, conscious or unconscious
- Our identification with the mirror-image involves a process of alienation, which corresponds with the ego
- A body in pieces finds unity in the image of itself, as well as a split from the mother
- 'Alienation is constitutive of the imaginary order'
- The imaginary remains key to projection, identification, creativity

The Symbolic

- What gives an underlying sense of order or structure to the imaginary?
- From the 1950s, Lacan focuses on the **symbolic**, the social, cultural and linguistic networks into which a child is born
- Linguistics become key
- The symbolic is the domain of the signifier, or assigned meanings to otherwise arbitrary signs (belonging to the imaginary)
- The analyst thereby works in the realm of the symbolic, treating the unconscious as a kind of language

The symbolic or 'Big Other'

- The symbolic is incorporated in a second decisive event:
- The child perceives that there is an 'other' who receives the mother's attention – symbolically the father, or 'phallus'
- At first the child competes to be a sufficient love-object for the mother, but most eventually accept that this is not possible
- This 'father' (not biological) in turn introduces the 'law' (principles of language and moral prohibitions) into the child's consciousness
- Our sense of unity with the mother is interrupted, split, while this other is something we seek to reunify with



Making sense of the three orders

Reality is an amalgam of the imaginary and the symbolic

- *Imaginary* in that we are situated in our senses, with an ego rationalising our actions
- *Symbolic* in that most things around us have assigned meanings

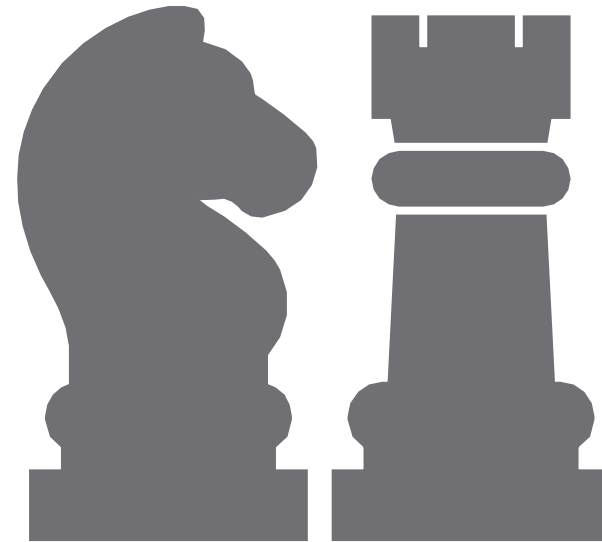


Making sense of the three orders

In chess, the rules we follow are the symbolic, e.g. a knight can only move a certain way.

The *imaginary* is how different pieces are characterised by names or image, e.g. we could imagine renaming the knight as a 'messenger', or placing him with the pawns.

The *real* is the complex set of circumstances that affect the game: the ability of the players, the unpredictable intrusions that might distract the player.





The Real

The last of the three orders, and the most difficult to define

It is not reality, but

- A primordial ‘state of nature’, a thing-in-itself
- A pre-linguistic, undifferentiated unity with the Mother
- A ‘pure plenitude’, with no subject-object divide

The Real

- The state of nature from which we have been forever severed by our entrance into language
- It is beyond the symbolic, but appears when the symbolic order is disrupted, e.g. traumatic experiences when life seems meaningless
- That which is excluded from our reality, of what is without meaning
- The 'real is impossible', for Lacan, because it cannot be expressed in language, as language is our separation from the real



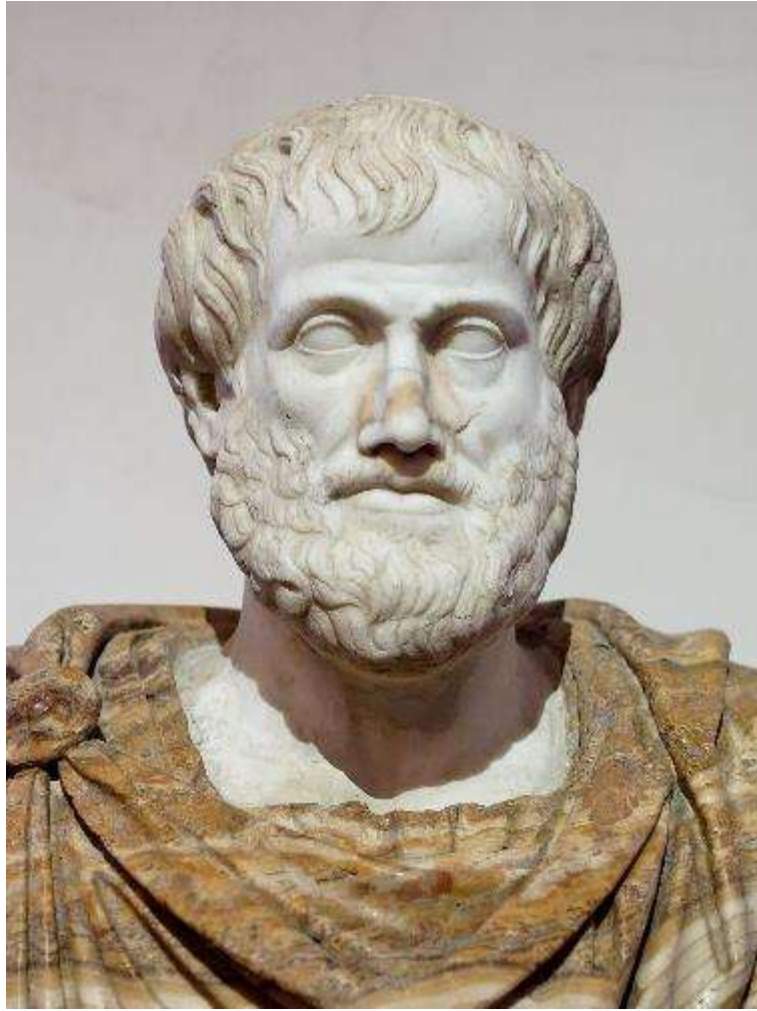
The ideal

- For Lacan, everyone lacks the phallus, and everyone seeks to become the phallus... a being-in-itself or full positivity is out of reach
- Children absorb the signifiers and values their parents impose on them
- Their identification with this becomes an ideal
- The **ideal ego** is the image the child assumed, becoming an idealised self-image – the way I'd like to be or be seen by others (imaginary)
- The **ego ideal** is the agency I try to impress with my ideal-ego; the symbolic point from which I observe and judge myself

5. Desire

Desire

- Lastly, for Lacan, desire is an unconscious, continuous force
- It can never find sufficient expression in the symbolic, and the subject cannot access full consciousness or satisfaction of desire
- The task of the analyst is help the analysand recognise their desire, and articulate it in speech
- ‘Have you acted in conformity with the desire that is in you?’



that the question is simplified. If you go and take a close look at it – and it's worth the trouble – you will see that Aristotle's morality is wholly founded on an order that is no doubt a tidied-up, ideal order. But it is nevertheless one that corresponds to the politics of his time, to the organization of the city. His morality is the morality of the master, created for the virtues of the master and linked to the order of powers. One shouldn't be contemptuous of the order of powers – these are not the comments of an anarchist – one simply needs to know their limit with relation to our field of inquiry.

As far as that which is of interest to us, namely, that which has to do with desire, to its array and disarray, so to speak, the position of power of any kind in all circumstances and in every case, whether historical or not, has always been the same.

What is Alexander's proclamation when he arrived in Persepolis or Hitler's when he arrived in Paris? The preamble isn't important: "I have come to liberate you from this or that." The essential point is "Carry on working. Work must go on." Which, of course, means: "Let it be clear to everyone that this is on no account the moment to express the least surge of desire."

The morality of power, of the service of goods, is as follows: "As far as desires are concerned, come back later. Make them wait."

It is worth recalling here the line of demarcation with reference to which the question of ethics is raised for us. It is also a line that marks an essential end in the development of philosophy.

Kant is the person I have in mind because he renders us the greatest service by introducing the topological milestone that distinguishes the moral phenomenon. And by that I mean the field that is of interest to moral judgment as such. It is a limited categorical opposition no doubt, purely ideal, but it was essential that someone someday articulate it by purifying it – catharsis – of all interest, which does not mean of the interests linked to mental pathology, to the *pathologisches*, but simply to sensible, vital human interests. For it to be valorized as the properly ethical field, none of our interests must be in any way involved.

A decisive step is taken there. Traditional morality concerned itself with what one was supposed to do "insofar as it is possible," as we say, and as we are forced to say. What needs to be unmasked here is the point on which that morality turns. And that is nothing less than the impossibility in which we recognize the topology of our desire. The breakthrough is achieved by Kant when he posits that the moral imperative is not concerned with what may or may not be done. To the extent that it imposes the necessity of a practical reason, obligation affirms an unconditional "Thou shalt." The importance of

Desire

- Desire is opposed to a traditional ethics linked with Aristotle, a middle-path of modesty that is founded on a morality of the master
- ‘Carry on working, work must go on’ – desire is deferred
- In attempting to purify ethics of hypothetical human interests, Kant places an infinite desire of the soul for an unrealised harmony with immortality, the ‘starry skies above and the moral law within’
- Something within human desire is presupposed to ‘book-keeping’ and guilt – attempting to assign a cause or meaning to desire
- Guilt is enveloped in this giving ground to desire, in opposition to the servicing of goods...



Ethics of psychoanalysis

- Creon and Antigone symbolise two different responses to desire
- Antigone is determined to bury the body of her brother Polynices
- Creon gives good reasons not to, but ultimately does not persuade her
- For the analyst, one can either solve problems and give the patient information, or one can assist them to give ground to their desire
- *But why does desire result in betrayal?*
- *Why would a science of desire be a misunderstanding?*

EVERYBODY'S TALKING ABOUT IT!

It's Terrific!

**ORSON
WELLES**

**CITIZEN
KANE**

The Mercury Actor

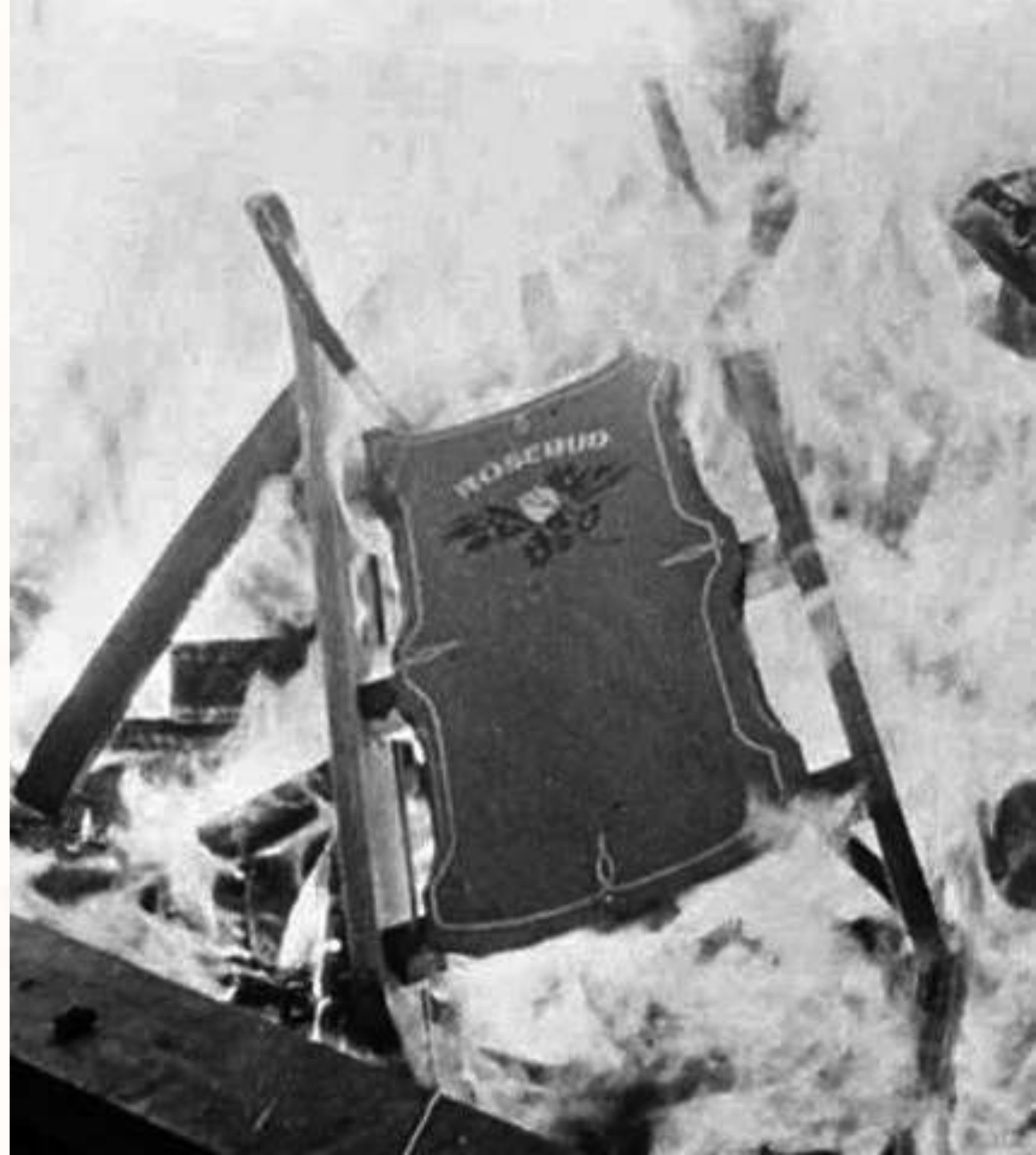
JOSEPH COTTEN

DOROTHY COMINGORE

EVERETT SLOANE

RAY COLLINS

CITIZIZEN KANE: ORSON WELLES



Desire, need and demand

- Desire is separate from the biological imperatives of need and demand
- ‘Man’s desire is desire of the Other’ (*Four Fundamental Concepts*)
- It is unconscious, and based on a lack, or absence
- The cause of desire is the object that can never be attained, the ***objet a*** – a lack which appears in the infant’s entry into the symbolic
- ‘That's what love is. It’s one’s own ego that one loves in love, one’s own ego made real on the imaginary level’ (*Freud's Papers*)
- Desire functions at the level of fantasy, caught between the *jouissance* of the animal drives (or unbearable stimulation), and the structure of the symbolic order

Rounding up

- ‘The laws of heaven in question are the laws of desire’
- While individual objects of desire provide partial gratification, they cannot adequately fulfil the basic motivational lack of desire
- It is also separate from conscious wishes
- Existence revealed by distortions, tics, slips, peculiar details
- A body of thought thereby dedicated to articulating what is unconscious, akin to his early Surrealism

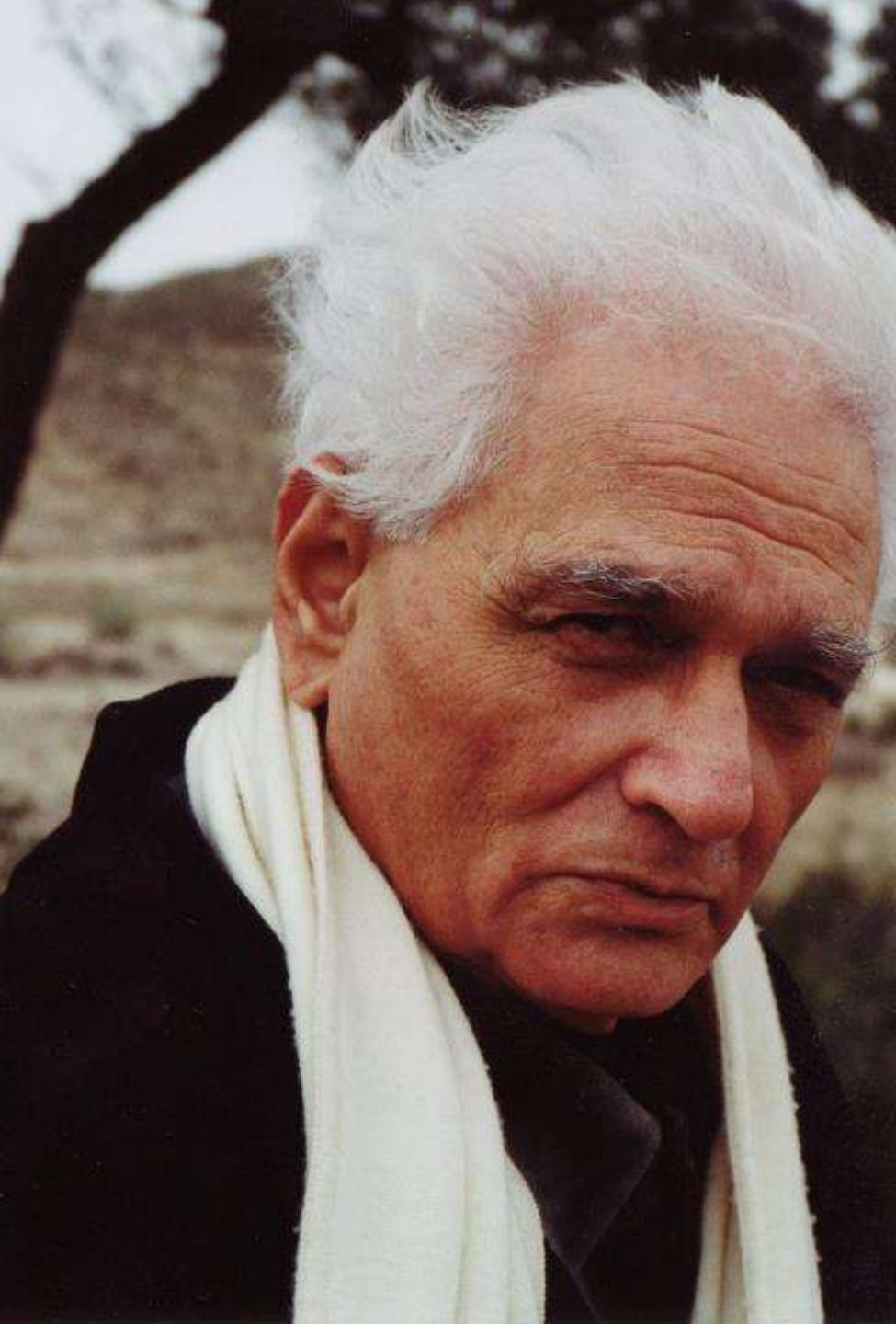
Rounding up

- But many have challenged Lacan's claim that the unconscious is structured like a language
- Documentation by case histories has been poor
- His writings often accused of vagueness, obscurity, meaninglessness
- Nor is there evidence of a mirror stage (e.g. Tallis on the blind)
- But the fundamental importance of desire, its alienation, will be key
- Subjectivity split, in process, and gendered by the symbolic will be taken up by Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous later

Discussion points

1. What makes Lacan's view of human psychology and development different from other views you've encountered?
2. What is the traditional moral view of desire, which Lacan associates with Aristotle and power?
3. What do you think Lacan is trying to demonstrate with the story of Antigone?
4. Is Lacan part of the problem, or the solution?

Monday 15th June – 6pm



Next week: Derrida

- *Of Grammatology* (1967)
- the very beginning, plus a section where he writes 'there is nothing outside the text'
- We'll also explore *differance* and *deconstruction*
- Interviews and more on Moodle