



OUR MASTER'S VOICE, THE PRACTICE OF MELANCHOLY, AND MINOR SCIENCES

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We're sitting in a small office, some 10 by 15 feet, located on the second floor of a converted home in the Bay Area in northern California. There are four of us, all men, three in their late forties and early fifties, with me some fifteen to twenty years their junior. We're reading from Jacques Lacan's *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1992). We take turns reading from the text, although Harry and I do most of the reading, since we are the two students in the room. Harry is a professor at a local parochial university and, like me, has enrolled in this psychoanalytic training program as part of a research program. For Harry, it is his interest in existentialism and its relation to Lacan's psychoanalytic apparatus; for me, it is my interest in the alternatives to dominant neuroscience in the twentieth century, one of which is psychoanalysis—born from [Sigmund Freud's \(1966\)](#) interest in neurophysiology in the late nineteenth century.¹ Our two teachers are therapists, both with long histories as professional psychiatrists in the United States and elsewhere. Nev is Syrian, and has taught at universities in the United States and Syria, but he has spent most of his time as a therapist in community health centers, paid by the state to consult with individuals on state support programs. It might seem strange for the state to pay a Lacanian analyst to serve such a function, but Nev wears multiple therapeutic hats, and in his professional life, Lacan has only a spectral presence; in his public persona, he is more likely to embrace cognitive behavioral therapy, in no small part because that is what is

expected of him by his peers and the state. Our other teacher, Arturo, practices psychoanalysis, and is a devout Lacanian; our meetings are held in his office, arranged in a mock psychoanalytic scheme, with a couch to lie on and a chair placed perpendicularly, so the analysand and the analyst cannot meet eyes. But during our seminars we sit on the bed as if a couch, which causes Harry and me to slouch, prop pillows behind us, and fidget as we try to stay comfortable. The prized spot is a love seat across from the bed, too small for two adult men, and whoever arrives first inevitably claims it to lounge in for the duration of the meeting. Arturo asks Harry and me to read, and only when I have a cold or Harry is absent do Nev or Arturo take turns. Throughout our reading, Arturo interrupts us to pose rhetorical questions, offer exegeses, and, in Arturo's words, "free associate."

We read one chapter each week, not prior to attending class, but in class. We sit together from 7 until 9 P.M. every Thursday, and take nine months to read Seminar VII, taking one week each month to read *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (Lacan 2007). This slow pace means that during the four-year training program, we will read eight books, the majority of Lacan's work translated into English. But there is no plan, and we do not read the books in chronological order—at the end of reading Seminars VII and XVII, we decide to read Seminars XI and XXI the following year. The pace is possibly meant to reproduce the actual pace of Lacan's seminars, although this is never explained. Our teachers expect that each week we encounter the text—and Lacanian thought—for the first time; again and again we return to first principles. It is almost as if we are *tabula rasae*, attending class each week to receive the wisdom of Lacan through our reading of his words. My frustration with our slow pace, with Arturo's incessant free association, is soon sublimated in my ethnographic curiosity: why are we learning Lacan the way we are? Is it that we are meant to be voicing Lacan, and, in so doing, becoming Lacanians? Why are these experts in this field enacting its reproduction in this particular way, and what kind of expert do they expect to make of me? I sit on the couch across from Harry, who is currently reading, and think of myself in that old RCA logo, Thomas Edison's dog, head cocked, listening to his master's voice on the phonograph player. Is Lacan my new master?

At first I am taken with this idea: that I am meant to be voicing Lacan, possessing myself with his language and thought. But I have adverse reactions. The more time I spend with Lacan, the more I return to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1983, 1987) critiques of his work. Instead, I begin to consider that this voicing, this revisiting of Lacan, constitutes a mourning practice, one partic-

ular to what [Deleuze and Guattari \(1986, 1987\)](#) call minor sciences. I have been drawn to their conceptualization of minor sciences and literatures through my work on alternatives to dominant American forms of neuroscience, in no small part because the category of minor science provides a means to think through knowledge production and practice and their relation to power; the concept of minor science provides a means to take seriously the expertise of those who are sometimes cast as nonexperts by those in power. Relegated to counterpunctual positions to dominant sciences, practitioners of minor sciences are characterized by the marginalization of their forms of knowledge production and practice. Because of the threat of their disappearance, minor sciences often struggle to assert their vitality against sciences that see them as sometimes intensely political, sometimes absurd. Those who identify with them rarely have interest in making a minor science a dominant one; rather, minor scientists are invested in their own perpetuation, in keeping the science alive, even if the science remains marginalized. While it may be possible for a minor science to attain a dominant position, it is unlikely, and most minor scientists conduct themselves with this unlikeliness in mind. More likely, minor scientists practice their minor sciences as experts in a field disavowed or discredited by those in power, and articulate their scientific conceptions of the world in comparative and sometimes conflicting fashion with dominant sciences.

As much as I am drawn to minor science as a rubric, I have also bastardized it. First, I collapse Deleuze and Guattari's conceptions of minor science and minor literature into one theoretical framework, working with the assumption that science is always a textual practice—science is also always literature ([Wolf-Meyer and Cochran, forthcoming](#)). Moreover, I am interested in further perverting the category of minor sciences, much as Deleuze has claimed to do to his philosophical forebears, by putting minor science into dialogue with psychoanalytic attention to mourning and melancholia. This is not because I assume a Freudian ontological position, but rather because Deleuze and Guattari are more interested in elaborating minor science and minor literature as theoretical schematics and only secondarily attend to them as the basis for subjectivity. The existentially neurotic Franz Kafka provides them with the embodiment of the minor litterateur, but focusing on these Lacanian practitioners as minor scientists shows how mourning and melancholia form part of their scientific and social practice. In this article, I first outline the relationship between mourning, melancholia, and minor sciences, which is exemplified in the Lacanian psychoanalytic group I participated in. I then turn to the pedagogical efforts of my Lacanian teachers. This is succeeded by a

discussion of how my Lacanian teachers systematically undermine the ability of Lacanian psychoanalysis to become something other than what it is—how they invest in its persistent marginalization. In so doing, I am interested in tracking three features of minor sciences as outlined by Deleuze and Guattari, namely, their eminently political nature, their challenging of dominant sciences through “improper” utilizations of language, and their disenfranchisement. I end by considering how the temporality of melancholia and its irresolution constitutes the ongoing practice of minor sciences, as emblemized by this particular group of psychoanalysts. Extrapolating from this case, I argue that minor sciences constitute themselves through their investment in inward-looking practice; that is, they come to constitute themselves for themselves, rather than for others, leading to their continued, if not perpetual, status as minor. The form that this melancholic practice took was an individual and collective investment in the *if only*; that is, if only psychoanalysis could be a dominant science, then the problems of individuals, institutions, and society could be fixed in ways in which contemporary neuroscience and psychiatry are ineffective. But this *if only* was nonspecific, serving as a generalized, vague form of melancholic longing.

The group I am discussing is quite small and idiosyncratic. In the Bay Area, there are other, larger groups of psychoanalysts, but I was drawn to this one for its less institutionalized status, its focus on Lacan, and the profile of its members, many of whom work in various kinds of psychiatric community outreach. This latter feature proved particularly attractive to me, as the broader project of this fieldwork focuses in part on Félix Guattari and Jean Oury’s experimental group home, La Borde, as an alternative model to conceptualize the care for neurological disability in contemporary North Atlantic societies (Genosko 2002; Guattari 1984). Psychoanalysis has a varied status throughout the United States and the world, with parts of Latin America and Europe still offering psychoanalytic forms of treatment for a variety of complaints (Lakoff 2005; Lloyd 2008). In the United States, psychoanalysis struggles to maintain itself as a robust clinical practice, as Kate Schechter (2014) has recently shown. I do not see this small group of Lacanians as representative of psychoanalysis in the United States or globally, but rather suggest that it represents a class of minor scientists who are disenfranchised from dominant scientific institutions through their practices and beliefs—in this case, both American psychiatry and neuroscience, and also more mainstream forms of psychoanalysis. This is due, in part, to the marginalized status of psychoanalysis in the United States, and is compounded by the tertiary place of Lacanian psychoanalytic practice in the country.²

MOURNING AND MINOR SCIENCES

Deleuze and Guattari outline their thinking about minor sciences and literatures throughout two texts, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. By way of a necessarily reductive summary, minor science possesses three qualities. First, minor science is deterritorialized, meaning it speaks from a field not its own. Instead, it stretches or bends the meanings of concepts of the field that it challenges, and often uses theories in “incorrect” or “unfair” ways from the point of view of the dominant position (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 108). The relationship between theory and evidence is not concretized in minor sciences insofar as the minor science’s theory signifies an impasse or gap in the dominant theory and intensifies it (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 26). This can be seen in the ways that the same language is used across psy-disciplines—*mind, brain, feeling*—to mean radically different things depending on the speaker and the scientific context. Deleuze and Guattari (1986, 26) construe this as variance in the “intensive utilization” of language. Second, minor sciences are intensely political (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 17). Through their posing of questions disruptive to dominant science, minor sciences politicize themselves through their very practice. This is not to say that they constitute resistant sciences, but rather that in their coexistence with dominant sciences they provide alternatives, escape plans, and countergenealogies that destabilize the objective and teleological status of dominant sciences. The third feature is that of “bachelorhood” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 71), the positioning of minor sciences as isolated, nomadic, and estranged—yet in waiting of eventual inheritance.

While this seemingly external position might exclude minor sciences from widespread adoption, it instead aids in the construction of their very powers. Minor sciences’ disenfranchisement frees their practitioners from the material and social constraints of the dominant sciences, even as they are exposed to risks beyond those of dominant sciences (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 368). The idea of minor science allows heterodoxy to proliferate, like parasites or symbiotes that feed off and feed on one another (Serres 2007). Rather than being pluralist, moreover, with the naive assumption that their practices are treated equally or that one scientific practice will eventually supplant the other, minor sciences are pneumatic in their operativity: they make manifest that pressures are always exerted between practices, communities of thought, and knowledge itself (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 486). Ruptures are always nearer at hand than might be expected from the position of dominant science; hence the frequent dismissal of the minor sciences by the scientific powers that be.

I generally agree with Deleuze and Guattari's outline of minor sciences, but I want to add one more feature, borrowed from and explanatory of the Lacanians I worked with, namely, the experiences of mourning and melancholy. In an essay titled "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud (1997) differentiates between mourning and melancholy, the first often interpreted as marked by its apparent teleological aspect, the second by its self-perpetuation. In pairing Deleuze and Guattari with Freud, I intend to expand them both—to add a feature to the lived practice of marginalized expertise in minor sciences, and also to expand ideas about mourning and melancholia beyond lost objects *qua* objects. For Freud, mourning and melancholia are idioms of grief, predicated on a lost object—a lover, a family member, a friend. The process of working through one's grief is fundamentally about reclaiming the investment placed in the object. Central to this process is the acceptance of the ambivalent role of the object, embracing both the positive and negative aspects of the relationship between the griever and the grieved (Freud 1997, 164). Mourning, in its normative course, results in the full return of this psychic investment, and relies on an embracing of ambivalence. Melancholia differs quite markedly. It is characterized by the inability to fully disinvest the griever in the relationship with the grieved. At its most intense, it can be marked by sadomasochism, with the griever harming himself or the other (or the memory of the object), potentially leading to suicide or the desecration of the object's memory (Freud 1997, 165). I find Deleuze and Guattari's conception of minor sciences helpful in identifying particular kinds of communities interested in knowledge production and practice, but their portrayal of a minoritarian figure is that of Franz Kafka, whose experiences are exemplary rather than generalizable. Attending to the affective states that Freud focuses on helps flesh out minor sciences, as well as highlighting a feature that dovetails with more general anthropological interests in expertise and the experience of loss.

Mourning, and to a lesser degree melancholia, have played significant roles in the anthropological study of death and ceremonial practice. Charles Briggs (2014) has recently suggested that mourning is not so much about its resolution, but instead about the complex social relations fostered through the act of loss and the interpellation of others into that loss, often through overt ceremonial practice. Mourning, going back to Freud, is characterized by a diminution of the world: the world is less due to the mourning individual's loss. For Briggs, by suturing mourning to ethnographic practice, we can build new social connections by drawing others in through the performative powers of mourning. In contrast, and as addressed by Thomas Blom Hansen (2012, 16–17), melancholia is characterized

by the diminution of the individual, characterized by self-reproachment and blame. Mourning, moreover, is specific in its association with a particular loss; melancholia is more diffuse, often incapable of specifying a particular loss, but instead characterized by longing.

Anthropologists have long focused on mourning instead of melancholia. Melancholia proves a difficult empirical experience to capture, although some anthropological studies of depression may approach it (Marlovits 2013; Martin 2007). Mourning, in contrast, is explicitly social, often enrolling others in relationships with the mourner that establish new investments for the mourner and for social others (Hollan 1995; O'Rourke 2007; Woodrick 1995). In the case of minor sciences, mourning and melancholia do not constitute separate processes, but rather two faces of the same coin: at the same time, sites like the seminar I participated in concentrated on mourning the now marginal status of psychoanalysis and served as a window onto the melancholic practices of individual participants. This mourning was not teleological; it did not seek its own end, allowing for new investments. Instead, it served as a form of group melancholia, enrolling others into a collective participation in conceptualizing Lacanian psychoanalysis in the United States as a resolutely and inevitably minor science. It also trafficked in anger and discontent, often projected at those in power, as well as at society more generally, which helped isolate this group of Lacanians and perpetuate their status as minor.

OUR MOURNING VOICES; OR, CITATION AS MELANCHOLIC PRACTICE

I sit next to Arturo, looking at his copy of *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (Lacan 1992). I have perched myself at the end of the long, uncomfortable mattress that doubles as a couch on seminar days, all the way at the end, next to Arturo's chair. As we converse and read from the text, I make a point of looking at each of the pages in Arturo's well-worn copy of *The Ethics*; they are frequently dog-eared, underlined throughout, and filled with marginalia—cluttered and defaced to the point of near illegibility. This might be one of the root causes of displacing the burden of reading the seminars aloud to other participants; but doing so also allows Arturo time to write in new marginalia, to re-underline particular parts of the text as it is being read. Many of the passages are underlined in pen or pencil, highlighted, and accompanied by marginalia. For a while, I try and copy his underlining, but, given the burden of reading and taking my own notes, I quickly begin to slip. My own copy of *The Ethics* is spartan in comparison: I read

it once as a graduate student in a seminar on psychoanalysis, and very little of Lacan's thought about the ethics of psychoanalysis seemed novel enough to warrant underlining. But Arturo's approach is Talmudic, and every rereading of Lacan provides a means to find new insights, new connections to the contemporary world, new opportunities for elaboration.

Here, I am interested in the intensive utilizations of language spawned by reading Lacan. These practices are not Lacan's: Lacan is circumspect in his own citations, often limited to a core of Continental thinkers whom he engages with, although he digresses often and refers obliquely to seminar participants, contemporary politics, and key psychoanalytic thinkers. Instead, the use of intensive language as readers, and especially by Arturo and Nev as instructors, link Lacan's thought to the present, thereby reviving what might otherwise be considered historical thought. On their face, these intensive utilizations of language work to enliven Lacan. But as a function of a minor science I see them as operating in a more destabilizing fashion, taking common terms and altering their definitions. Arturo especially, but Nev to a degree, uses the text at hand to free associate and reflect on words or ideas in the text and their resonance in their lives as practicing therapists. Glancing mention of a word or concept would often provoke a digression from textual exegesis to a more general conversation about Lacanian psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic concepts, or their recent everyday experiences. In so digressing, their intensive utilizations of language attempted to insinuate Lacanian thought into my and Harry's conceptions of the world.

Reading Lacan aloud gives me a sense of double vision, or, more appropriately, echolalia. I am very aware as I read that Lacan either read his lectures or improvised them (or, by all accounts, something in between), that they were transcribed by his students, then edited, translated into English, edited again, and now I am reading them. This long chain of mediation would seem to constitute an insurmountable barrier to actually voicing Lacan, to materially invoking his presence in our meetings. Add to this my intermittent colds, Nev frequently forgetting his glasses, Henry's occasional stutter, and the restaging of Lacan proves anything but graceful. The dramaturgy aside, the purpose of reading Lacan seems less about understanding Lacan and more about providing the basis for free association. Let me provide an example: we are reading from chapter four of *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, titled "Das Ding." Harry has taken on the reading duties for the second section of the chapter, and halfway through page 51, he is interrupted.

Harry: In other words, it is to the extent that the signifying structure imposes itself between perception and consciousness that the unconscious intervenes, that the pleasure principle intervenes. Yet it is no longer in the form of a *Gleichbesetzung* or the function of the maintenance of a certain investment, but insofar as it concerns the *Bahnungen*. The structure of accumulated experiences resides there and remains inscribed there.

Arturo: Wait, Harry. What is it that Lacan means here by “signifying structure?” Is he talking about the nature of reality? Is he asking us, “What the fuck is reality anyway?” Is there a psychic reality and another reality we cannot perceive? Are our moods and feelings hiding something? What we need to understand is that there is a productivity between the pleasure principle and the reality principle. We need to understand that the imaginary serves as a mechanism for reaching a zero level between reality and the symbolic. You cannot *not* go through the imaginary and symbolic. You *must* go through the symbolic to reach the unconscious, see?

Nev: But what’s the purpose of the good? The psychic? Reality? What’s the purpose? Civilization isn’t pedagogical, it isn’t there to teach us something. It’s just built up history that we live in. It’s the symbolic too. We must get through the symbolic to get to the psyche. But if you lead your patient away from civilization, then what does he have to hold onto? If it’s all a facade, that’s terrifying. This is the ethical quandary of psychoanalysis. Should you take away your patient’s security blanket to cure him?

Arturo: Yes, of course! This is the nature of the good that Lacan is pointing us towards! You must be functional, you must be normal! Let’s get you back to that. All this fucking reality that you hold onto, that’s the lie. You need to come to terms with your own being, with the kernel of your anxiety, of your fear, all that shit that makes you the human that you are—even if you’re all fucked up. That is what we are doing here, getting people into their shit. And it’s because psychoanalysts will do this that they are the ethical subjects, they are the ones who tear down society and say to a patient: “Look: the world fucked you up! It’s not you, it’s them!” All of Freud’s discontents are the ethical products of society, they’re the ones who stand apart and know that the edifice of society must be exposed for what it is—just bullshit! Psychoanalysis, now more than ever, stands against the state and its apparatuses. The state asks

“What do we do with all these discontents?” And psychoanalysis is there to say these are the state’s problems, and these are the psychopathologies. These are the things that are the *real* problems, and these are the things that are just a problem for the state. But this depends on our patients being ignorant of themselves. They know they have a problem, they know they need help. But they don’t know what the problem is. They don’t know that the problem is society. So they come to see us and we slowly show them how it *is* society. Society fucked you up! It fucked up your parents! And their parents! It’s been fucking people up for centuries!

It goes on for much longer, and strays even further from the text under scrutiny, as Nev suggests that the silence of a practiced psychoanalyst is the key to his or her ethical practice, and that it is precisely through silence that an individual patient can come to understand the edifice of society. It might seem that Nev and Arturo, especially, are angry about their marginalization, but their tone was less angry than emphatic, attempting to rally Harry and me to their position. Given that we only have two hours each week, and these interruptions are frequent and lengthy, it should come as little surprise that our progress through *The Ethics* moves very slowly.

Arturo uses Harry’s reading of “signifying structures” as the prompt for a digression that carries us from the nature of reality through civilization as a concept and ends with a consideration of the eminently political nature of psychoanalysis in contemporary society. Throughout, the intensive utilizations of language that Arturo employs work to attach everyday concepts like “reality” and “society” to psychoanalysis; in so doing, they recontextualize already existing language in ways that unsettle students’ assumptions about the world, colonizing it with Lacanian conceptions of the symbolic. More important, they work to extend our collective understanding of psychoanalysis in the contemporary moment to the level of necessity, that it is only psychoanalysis that can free us from the constraints of society. Moreover, the psychoanalyst is one of the very few positioned to help others extricate themselves from society’s hold. To accomplish this counterinterpellative feat, Arturo casts a net to capture the “discontents” (Freud 1961) that he associates with those drawn to psychoanalysis, potentially in tension with the Freudian understanding of discontent as the suffering of those who experience the friction between their biological instincts and the social repression of sexuality and murder. Freudian conceptions of the pathological individual become conflated with the ethical psychoanalyst, thereby colonizing Freud-

ian thought with Arturo's reading of Lacan. Arturo's and Nev's intensive utilizations of language work to deterritorialize both everyday understandings of particular terms and historically important psychoanalytic concepts.

Two additional features of Arturo's and Nev's interjections are worth focusing on here. First, the very structure of their interruptions and the length of their digressions mean that our collective work of mourning will be drawn out. Second, Arturo and Nev posit psychoanalysis as what we can now recognize as a minor science, an eminently political yet disenfranchised practice in relation to dominant practices associated with the state. In terms of the duration of our seminar, it is worth noting that *The Ethics* is just over three hundred pages in length, and with weekly meetings for forty weeks, sparing Christmas and New Year's, we need only read ten to fifteen pages each week to stay on schedule. So how else might two hours be filled than with discussion? But the presumption is that the students in the seminar are so novice as to be unable to participate in the conversation; instead, the burden of filling those two hours of course time is relegated to Arturo and Nev, who take the lead in showing the students what is important in the text, not by attending to it, but by moving from the text to everyday and theoretical contexts through their intensive utilizations of language. The purpose, then, is not just to extend our conversation, but to lead it in very particular ways that focus on the social life of Lacanian thought and the power of psychoanalysis; that is, they stress the liveliness and radical potential of psychoanalysis for us to embrace what they project as the political project of Lacan himself.

This extension of our consideration of *The Ethics* dovetails with the status of psychoanalysis as a minor science. The casting of psychoanalytic practice as ethically imperative in contemporary society is based on the assumption that it alone can successfully disabuse individuals of the conceits of civilization. Does it matter that those in a minor science make this claim to political power? For Deleuze and Guattari, it is unclear whence this claim arises. In any event, the practitioners of that science assume their political power and use it to guide their actions. In this case, Arturo and Nev act as if Lacanian psychoanalysis has the potential to radically remake the lives of individuals and society itself—if only it could achieve a more dominant position in society. This is one of the most recurrent themes in our discussions of the texts, as we return repeatedly to how psychoanalysis is marginalized as a set of theories and practices, and that it alone has the potential to see through “fucking reality” and remake society in line with the demands of civilization's discontents.

More often than he free associates with the texts, Nev is likely to use Arturo's metatextual flights to fuel his own reflections on the status of his practice. As mentioned above, Nev is employed in a community health clinic where he relies largely on cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) to treat individuals with complaints of addiction, domestic abuse, and neurotic tendencies. Additionally, he uses these opportunities to reflect on his experience as a psychoanalyst in Syria, which he often idealizes as outside of the neuroscientific paradigm he finds himself beholden to in his CBT practice. Nev speaks slowly; English is his second language, and he speaks it with a heavy accent. He is often self-conscious about his word choice, and will often pause to make sure he is selecting the right word. As he gathers momentum in his speech, he speaks with less precision.

This reminds me of a patient I saw this week, a woman. I was in my office, and she came in and slumped down in the chair. Shump! Into the chair. She sits with her chin resting on her chest. Her hair is messy, and down in her face. She doesn't make eye contact with me. So we sit there for a few minutes in silence. "Why are you here?," I ask her. She mumbles something. So we sit there quiet for a while. "Did your case worker send you to see me?" She mumbles something. We sit there quiet for a while. Finally, I say "I can only help you if you talk with me. Does your husband beat you? Are you addicted to heroin? Do you hit your kids? Don't you take showers? I don't know what your problem is unless you talk to me and tell me about it." So she slaps my desk. [*Nev slaps the arm of the chair he is sitting in.*] She tells me she lives in her car. She lost custody of her children, who now live with her husband, and he won't pay his support. So she sees her social worker because she wants to get the kids back, she wants to get the money from her husband, and she looks like a homeless person. And her social worker tells her, "You need to see a therapist," so she comes to see me. Does she want help? No. She just wants me to sit with her for an hour each week for ten weeks and tell her social worker that she's making progress. That she's getting her life together. And I tell her, "No. This is serious business. You come to see me, we do the work you need to do. Do you want your kids back? Then you get to work. You take this seriously." It makes me think of this, how Lacan discusses the work of psychoanalysis. I sit there in my office after she leaves, and I think how Lacan would do this. Not the CBT that I have to do at the clinic. Would he just sit there for the hour with her in silence? Would he just sit there for ten weeks in silence?

The standards are so different. But she's got to get her shit together. She wants her kids back, let's get to work, let's figure that out. Does Lacan have an answer for that? I don't know. But in ten weeks her social worker will call me, and should I talk about the symbolic order? No, I have to tell her that this patient is living in an apartment. Not in her car. I have to tell her she's got a job. That she's not anxious. Not depressed.

Nev is acutely aware of the marginalized position of his preferred form of psychiatric treatment, but he finds himself forced to obey the demands of the institution that he works for. His invocations of “work” and “serious business” index his willingness to use CBT and non-Lacanian forms of psychiatric treatment despite his preferences, but, at the same time, he invokes Lacan and psychoanalytic forms of practice to suggest his desire for the situation to be otherwise. At the heart of his displeasure lies the tension between the ethical practice that he sees psychoanalysis as embarking on and the expedient and state-sponsored practice of CBT and related treatments. Psychoanalysis, Nev suggests, would take longer than the woman's social worker would care for the treatment to take, in defiance of state mandates, but might also be more effective in its alleviation of the woman's concerns. This tension between what is and what could be, between what the state and society demand of Nev and what the scientific dominance of psychoanalysis in American society might offer is the melancholic experience of psychoanalysis as a minor science: Nev's experience of the ethical quandary he faces in his office presents him as an individual with the nonspecific future promised in the minor science of Lacanian psychoanalysis—things could be so different, for him, for individual patients, for society, *if only* psychoanalysis could move from being a bachelor minor science, perpetually in waiting, and ascend to a position of scientific dominance. Instead, Nev, his patients, and the science itself remain resolutely minor, and in part this is due to the very practices of the seminar we participate in.

DISENFRAICHISEMENT AND THE POLITICS OF MINORITY

About halfway through the lectures that comprise *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan (2007) opens the floor of the seminar to a question-and-answer period, reproduced as chapter 10. In the wake of the riots in France in 1968, Lacan takes the opportunity to think through the relationship between the university and society, juxtaposing it to the role of psychoanalysis and the analyst and patients and society. “What use has the university been?,” Lacan (2007, 148)

asks, positing that it has largely been reproductive in its aims, only reproducing social norms rather than critiquing them.

Arturo: Let me ask you this, since I have two university professors in the room: When was the last time someone talked about psychoanalysis at your university? When was the last time you taught a class about psychoanalysis? Do your psychology professors talk about Freud and Lacan?

Me: Me, personally? I haven't really had the opportunity to teach psychoanalytic concepts, mostly because I don't teach relevant classes, but other people at my university, in my department and elsewhere, teach classes on psychoanalysis. I know someone who teaches a class just on Freud to undergrads—

Harry: I teach a lot of Freud in my philosophy classes: *Civilization and Its Discontents*—

Arturo: Yes, but do you *teach* psychoanalysis or do you just teach this stuff as belonging to some dead guy, a history lesson? Lacan is pointing to the problem being that the university cannot embrace psychoanalysis because it is too radical—the university is too conservative. You teach everything like it is an animal in the zoo: you keep the dangerous stuff locked up! Students see Freud not as a scientist, not as the radical thinker he was, but as a castrated bull, a rhino without his horn!

Harry: I'm not sure that I agree. I mean, my students read Freud and it's like a, like a revelation to them. If I ask them what they know about Freud before we read any of his work, all they bring up, if they bring up anything at all, is the Oedipus complex. They just have no idea who he is these days. And so when we, when we read books like *Civilization*, they're just shocked at what he's talking about. It's not like they're going to become Freudians, but they start to see him as a philosopher, like the other philosophers we read.

Arturo: But that is precisely what I'm saying: he's just another historical figure, he has nothing to say about today. If you want to radicalize your students, you turn them into Freudians, into Lacanians! They will go home to their parents, and nothing will be the same—[*Harry and I laugh*]

Me: I'm not sure most parents would appreciate that—

Arturo: That's it exactly: you must produce students who parents will not appreciate. They will appreciate them in time because they will be their

own persons, they will be able to see through all the bullshit in front of them! That's what parents want, not regurgitators!

Like Nev's awareness of psychoanalysis' marginalization in relation to mainstream American psychiatry, Arturo points to how psychoanalysis has been marginalized within one of its other possible homes, the university. On the same occasion, later in the conversation, I argued that the university is the one home of Lacanian thought in the United States and that if one compiled the publications in any given year about Lacan, that most would be written by university professors, which Arturo dismissed. His desire was, much like Nev's previously, to displace contemporary science-based psychiatric practices in the form of classes taught in psychology departments, and, instead, to install curricula in psychoanalysis. Such an interest played on psychoanalysis as a minor science, with no true home in the contemporary American university; instead of being seen as a form of psychological theory and treatment, it is seen as, as Arturo argued, "just a way to interpret films and books."

Weeks later, we are reading the chapter "The Function of the Beautiful," which occurs about two-thirds of the way through *The Ethics*. Lacan (1992) is working in his lectures to separate the good from the beautiful, and, in so doing, sets up the structure of *jouissance* in everyday life. Lacan's (1992, 239–40) definition of the beautiful depends on a masochistic relation to the self, where one at once desires an object or individual but is simultaneously foreclosed from its absolute possession. This runs parallel to his conception of women as the object of sexual desire, in which they serve as a screen for male projections of desire, which in turn obscures women as individuals to men. Furthermore, because of the symbolic order of Western cultures, women are strangers to themselves, foreclosed from being subjects; they are always Other in the Masculine symbolic order. It is in this context that the following digression occurred:

Arturo: What does Lacan mean by the beautiful? Is it a beautiful woman? But my beautiful woman isn't yours, is it? Mine has a round butt, is not too tall. [*Harry and Nev laugh; Arturo remains serious.*] But we can all agree that women are beautiful. Even gay men believe women are beautiful. They don't want to fuck them, but they know they are beautiful. That's why some of them dress up as women. We live in a society where women are the most beautiful thing, and we want to possess them. Who hasn't fallen in love with a beautiful woman who only did us harm? She's so beautiful, but so fucked up. She ignores us, she doesn't call us back, she

looks at other men. But we do everything to make her happy. And we lie in bed in the middle of the night thinking “What the fuck am I doing to myself?” But *that* is the structure of the beautiful: it makes us do stupid things in order to attain it. It is *not* the good. The good is something we think about, and we think, “I should do this, I should not do that.” The beautiful is something we fixate on. It defies logic. It drags us along—

Nev: We all see those beautiful women on the street and our eyes follow them. There are all of the other women we don't even see, but then there is one with long hair and big eyes, and we follow her with our eyes. Other people are too—men and women! We would follow her all the way home if we could, but we have to go to work, we have to go shopping, we have to do good things.

Arturo: And this might make you think that the beautiful is evil, that it is something we should avoid. But Lacan's point is that you need both the good and the beautiful to get people to do anything. If you only had the good, you would have no means to motivate people—who does good work just because it is good? We do good work because it supports our beautiful family, we do it because it impresses beautiful women!

Harry: But this makes me think that beauty is a distraction—that it isn't what we really want, just what we're made to think that we want by society . . .

Arturo: Let me put it to you this way: if you could have everything you want, nothing would be beautiful. This is what Lacan calls permissive societies. If you can have anything you want, if you can fuck anyone you see, then none of it is pleasurable. *Jouissance* decreases in permissive societies. You need prohibitions to find pleasure. It might sound perverse, but you have better sex in a prohibitive society. This has to do with the relation between the id and the superego: desire needs to be mediated. Desire needs the symbolic. Why love your neighbor? You need the symbolic so you can think of this guy as your neighbor, and that you can think of that act as good—loving your neighbor is a good thing. But fucking his wife is prohibited! Which is why it's so tempting! Who doesn't want to fuck his neighbor's wife? Or, better yet, his daughter? She's the girl next door! But you cannot! It is against the law!

Nev: The law, it makes us crazy. We see something we want, but we can't have it. It is so close, but the law says “No!” And this makes us want to transgress the law. We want to break the law, so that we can get back

to pure pleasure. We want a natural high. But the law makes us crazy, it creates psychosis. And you see this in patients: they go off their meds because they want to be outside of the law. But then they exist in pure *jouissance*, they are psychotic. And what happens? They burn out, they go crazy, they die. And the analyst steps in to say, you must obey the law—you must be a patient and take your meds, you must come to your appointments.

Nev's and Arturo's portrayal of male desire polices who may belong to psychoanalysis as an analyst, both in their language but also in their tone, which is consistently emphatic in an evangelical fashion. Women have a troubled status in Lacan's work (Lacan 1998), and this may hinder participation by women in the training seminar (see Irigaray 1985). Moreover, that Nev is a divorcé and Arturo middle-aged and single may lend a particular edge to their assessment of gender and desire. Yet what occurs in the seminar is a policing of gender that reinforces existing disenfranchisement in Lacanian thought and practice, which focuses on heterosexual portrayals of women and homosexual male desire.³ Lacan's work slips between the symbolic and the material. He uses terms like *the Phallus* to denote symbolic forms, but in so doing, he also trades on cultural understandings of the male sex organ and its dominance as the positive basis for understanding sex, as women are known negatively through their castrated status. Similarly, what Nev and Arturo effect through their exegesis on beauty and sexual desire is a slippage between the beautiful as a concept and the experience of it in everyday life; while their language might be lewd or bordering on sexual harassment in the presence of a woman, that they partake in such digressions is facilitated by the virtual exclusion of women from the group. I can only imagine that a homosexual male would feel similarly excluded by such conversations. In both cases, the seminar helps reproduce a space and practice for men, particularly heterosexual men, who marginalize themselves through such linguistic productions.

These two cases, the discussion of the foreclosure of psychoanalysis from the modern university and the seminar's difficulty in integrating other subject positions, point to the ways that minor sciences perpetuate their marginalization, depending on melancholic practices to foster a collective desire for the *if only* promised to an ascending science. Arturo and Nev are able to insinuate Lacanian thought in my and Harry's everyday lives through their intensive utilizations of language, but they are also intensely critical of the institutional worlds they hope to colonize: the contemporary psychiatric clinic, the university, and society it-

self—all seem to be hostile to the elaboration of psychoanalytic practices. This perceived hostility is returned to the space of the seminar, characterizing participants as “discontents” outside of society who know the truth and can see through the symbolic edifice of the Masculine order. But only some individuals are recognized as subjects within this symbolic order, both by Lacan and by Arturo and Nev: men, and particularly heterosexual men. Women are left out: they can only be patients in need of clinical care. There may be ways forward for psychoanalysis in American society, but rather than pursue those routes, and rather than create a more ecumenical space within the seminar, Arturo and Nev, and Harry and I, become invested in perpetuating Lacanian psychoanalysis as a minor science, marginalized but in waiting for the opportunity to ascend to dominant status.

CONCLUSION

Anthropologists have often discussed mourning in the context of the loss of an individual, but mourning also undergirds other experiences of loss: the loss of power, the loss of cultural centrality. For some practitioners of minor sciences, like the Lacanian psychoanalysts I spent time with, the possibility of mourning proves vexed: they were never engaged in their science as a dominant science. Instead, they have only ever known it as a marginalized set of practices and thought. This produces a mourning of potentiality, a mourning that operates in the idiom of *if only*, which might be more properly characterized as a form of melancholia, except that rather than focusing on self-reproachment, it participates in a debasement of the world and an elevation of the individuals focused on the promotion of their minor scientific practice. By directing our ethnographic attention to the margins of contemporary scientific practice, by attending to science’s losers, the anthropology of science stands to enrich our understanding of the everyday lives and enculturation practices of scientists and the complex social fields in which science operates (Martin 1997)—both as an institutionalized form of power and as a set of marginalized expert practices. By adopting minor science as a frame to think about expertise and its practice among marginalized individuals and groups, what can be seen throughout contemporary society is that many scientific paradigms linger outside of dominant scientific institutions—as well as many scientists who continue to practice marginalized sciences, whether it be psychoanalysis or another historically disenfranchised practice.

About nine months after I finished my year of fieldwork with the Lacanians, I was retracing my commuting route on my way to the Oakland airport. I was struck, somewhere around Highway 92, with the old somatic feelings of being in

the training seminar. Fatigue, frustration, that feeling of pre-daydreaming, as if I am simply waiting for Lacan's text to be put before me, so that I can begin to wander in my attention. I get to the airport, rush through security, and sit down to begin to write this. Lacan's voice has long been washed away from my active memory—I no longer have immediate, adverse reactions to thinking about Lacanian psychoanalysis or that small office in which the seminar was held. Instead, like Nev, Lacan has become a spectral presence for me, haunting my writing about other minor sciences, particularly Guattari's experimental group analysis at La Borde outside of Paris, and I return to the space of mourning. Lacan and his successors do not need to be saved. If Arturo and Nev are representative of the status of Lacanian psychoanalysts in the United States, neither they nor the science itself are in need of saving. Like other minor sciences, relegated to the margins of thought, the ongoing existence and practice of Lacanian psychoanalysis deterritorializes the dominant sciences it stands in relation to, regardless of how widespread its practice is. Its mourning unsettles dominant sciences and their practitioners, as dominant scientists struggle with influences that are acephalous, spectral, and haunting, buried in minor sciences at their periphery. I write in airports, airplanes, in my hotel while I attend a conference, in an effort to shake myself free of this mourning of Lacan—but I know, somehow, that this mourning will never be complete. Psychoanalysis could be otherwise; it could be a dominant science again, full of other potentials than those embedded in contemporary neuroscience and psychiatry. This is the melancholia of minor sciences at work, unsettling me despite my best efforts; *if only* . . .

ABSTRACT

How do scientists and experts in marginal scientific fields think about themselves, their knowledge production, and their practices in relation to dominant sciences? In this article, drawing on fieldwork with a group of Lacanian psychoanalysts, I argue that what motivates much of the training, practice, and thought of some contemporary psychoanalysts is their place as practicing a minor science in relation to dominant forms of psychiatry and neuroscience in the United States. They are exemplary marginalized experts who articulate themselves and their work against mainstream forms of neuroscientific and psychiatric expertise. I adopt the concept of minor sciences from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who characterize them by their eminently political nature, their challenging of dominant sciences through intensive uses of language, and their disenfranchisement. Yet Deleuze and Guattari are relatively silent on the experiential qualities of practicing minor sciences. I turn to Sigmund Freud's distinction of mourning and melancholia in relationship to lost objects, suggesting that

one of the constituent components of minor sciences is a persistent state of melancholy related to the minor science's struggling for relevance. Drawing on my fieldwork with a Lacanian community and their interest in who and what belongs to psychoanalytic thought, what threats endanger the status of psychoanalysis, and what is at stake in keeping psychoanalysis alive in the United States, I suggest that the power of melancholia proves vital to keeping minor sciences alive for marginalized experts. [expertise; knowledge production; science; marginality; psychoanalysis; Jacques Lacan]

NOTES

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1. For a history of psychoanalysis and its relation to dominant neuroscientific trends in the United States, see [Zaretsky 2005](#) and [Schechter 2014](#). For a more general history of psychoanalysis and psychiatry, see [Rose 1990](#).
2. From 2003 to 2007, I conducted sustained ethnographic fieldwork with neuroscientists, psychiatrists, and clinicians interested in the brain. This led me to develop an interest in neurological pathologies and how they have been conceived throughout the twentieth century. In 2009, I began conducting research on alternative genealogies of the brain in the twentieth century, in part due to conversations I had with my neuroscientific and psychiatric interlocutors, many of whom were interested in unpopular or obscure texts and thinkers from the twentieth century. As part of this project, I enrolled in the Lacanian training seminar, which I participated in between 2009 and 2010. In parallel, I began research on special education facilities focused on neurological differences that were cast as disorders, even as I continued research with neuroscientists and psychiatrists. I was guided to study late twentieth-century psychoanalysis in part as a response to one of my psychiatric interlocutors, who, trained in the 1970s, claimed his education as the last of the hybrid approaches between psychoanalysis and scientifically focused modern psychiatry. In a conversation over lunch one day, he asked me "Whatever happened to psychoanalysis?" I offered an initial answer based on my familiarity with post-Lacanian thinkers, but the question lay dormant until I relocated to California and had the opportunity to enroll in the Lacanian training program I found there. My initial questions concerned ethics and neurological disability, but as I participated in the Lacanian training, my questions became more focused on psychoanalysis as a science and a set of practices that have largely been marginalized and rendered minor in the United States. In the larger version of this project, I consider Lacanian and post-Lacanian psychoanalysis alongside mid-twentieth-century cybernetics as outlined by Gregory Bateson and what I refer to as "materialist neuroscience," those neuroscientists who consider consciousness as an immanent effect of the functioning of the nervous system.
3. Desire, for Lacan, is predicated on fantasy as it applies to a particular object. But the object of desire is produced through the narcissistic attachment of the desirer to what he or she perceives the object as seeing in the desirer. That is, the desirer projects onto the object of desire a reflected fantasy that the desirer has the ability to fulfill a lack in the object of desire. This projection is fundamental in all desirous relationships, and in its most severe expressions can lead to what Lacan thinks of as pathologies associated with the sex drive resulting in perversion. Homosexual relationships are expressly con-

sidered a perversion in Lacan's thinking, but because of the structure of desire, heterosexual relationships are also prone to perversion and other psychotic forms. One of the practical implications for Lacan's conception of desire is that it forecloses participation by particular individuals—especially women and homosexuals—because it casts them negatively. For a concise discussion of desire in Lacan's thinking, see Žižek 1992. For an overview of homosexuality in psychoanalysis, including Lacan's perspective, see Dean and Lane 2001.

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