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THE ASSUMPTION OF DESIRE: KIERKEGAARD,  
LACAN, AND THE TRAUMA OF THE EUCHARIST

Despite flirting with a theological turn of phrase, the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan remained, as Freud was, a resolute atheist: "religion in all its forms consists of avoiding [the constitutive] emptiness of the subject."<sup>1</sup> In short, religion is, as it was for Freud, a social form of neurosis, a stop-gap to shore the subject up against the anxiety of the *real*. Notwithstanding this, I wish to suggest that Lacanian therapy has far more in common with the theology it disavows than it gives credit to, in particular the Eucharist. This is because I see the Eucharist akin to the transformative experience of Lacanian therapy, an analytic intervention which illuminates the analysand's past in new ways, so as to release her for action in the present.

In order to substantiate what at present constitutes a sketch of a more detailed work,<sup>2</sup> I need first to bring Lacan into proximity with theology. To do this I introduce the work of the Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard. However, this is no mere comparison. Rather, I suggest that Lacan's return to Freud is best construed as a return to Kierkegaard. I present my case through three points. First, I highlight the mutual ethics of desire in Kierkegaard and Lacan's work. Second, I turn to a consideration of the transformative action that takes place in analysis, showing how Lacan's understanding is indebted to theological accounts of *anamnesis*, articulated by Kierkegaard and mediated via Heidegger. In the third and final part I show not only how Lacan's return to Kierkegaard opens the door to a contemporary reinstatement of the doctrine of real presence but also that the Eucharist is best understood as the *traumatic* intervention of Christ into time, an intervention that transforms our desires towards the absolute, thereby qualifying the sacred Mass as a form of social-analysis.

### I. Lacan, Kierkegaard, and Desire

Designating Kierkegaard as Lacan's great mentor will no doubt appear at best a somewhat conflated claim, at worst simply wrong. To start with, one could object on the grounds that Lacan explicitly promoted his work in the very terms:

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1999), 130.

<sup>2</sup> M. Pound, *Theology, Psychoanalysis, Trauma* (London: SCM, 2007).

"*le retour á Freud*".<sup>3</sup> And while Lacan does make occasional reference to Kierkegaard, he does so almost exclusively in engagement with the Freudian concept of repetition, hardly enough to warrant the kind of revision I am claiming. Furthermore, there is the question of Lacan and Kierkegaard's philosophy. As David Crownfield suggests, the two are diametrically opposed.<sup>4</sup> What we find in Lacan is the subject both situated and created within the diffusion of language, a subject for whom there is no underlying self-identity and no basis for agency. By contrast, the Kierkegaardian subject is grounded in agency and affirmation. Finally, is not Lacan the affirmed atheist and Kierkegaard the fideist theologian who strove to revitalise Christian Denmark?

Despite such opposition I maintain that Lacan's work is best construed in terms of *le retour á Kierkegaard*. The possibility for dialogue has been due partly to the way I approach Lacan. Rather than treat him as a philosopher of difference, a sort of psychoanalytic supplement to Derrida, I treat him principally as a clinician. That is to say, I treat Lacan as someone whose thought is embodied in the clinical practice of psychoanalysis. This leads me to assert a sense of agency in Lacan's work that is missing in much philosophical treatment of him.<sup>5</sup>

Lacan's ethics are usually considered an ethics of desire where desire refers to lack. The argument goes something like this: when we enter the world of language and symbols a gap opens up between the speaking being (the *enunciator*) and the language spoken (the *enunciated*). This gap generates desire, the desire to fill the fundamental gap. However, the structural gap renders the satiation of desire impossible. An ethics of desire therefore means being reconciled to this perpetual state of non-fulfilment. Such a reading is not without basis in Lacan's work: "the symbol first manifests itself as the killing of the thing, and this death results in the endless perpetuation of the subject's desire".<sup>6</sup> However, this reading can be highly reductive. The ethics of analysis can easily become simply an awareness of our textual constitution and a resignation to the ceaseless play of language as we open up to desire and accept the constitutive lack of subjectivity.

Yet in his work on *Ethics*, Lacan says: the only thing one can be guilty of is "giving ground relative to one's desire".<sup>7</sup> Let us set this in a clinical context.

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<sup>3</sup> J. Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 401.

<sup>4</sup> David Crownfield, "Extraduction" in *Lacan and Theological Discourse*, ed. E. Wyschogrod, D. Crownfield, & C. Raschke (Albany: SUNY, 1989), 162.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Charles Winquist, "Lacan and Theology", in *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*, ed. P. Blond (London: Routledge 1998), 305-317; Mark C. Taylor, "Refusal of the Bar" in *Lacan and Theological Discourse*, ed. Edith Wyschogrod, David Crownfield, and Carl Raschke (Albany: SUNY, 1989), pp. 39-58.

<sup>6</sup> J. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. by Bruce Fink (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 101.

<sup>7</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, VII*, 321.

This example is taken from a Lacanian case study offered by Marie-Hélène Brousse:

A woman wants to have a baby, but she never finds herself in a relation conducive to her wish. She always ends up in abusive relationships. In analysis, it transpires that she can only remember her mother for one thing: saying “I’m going to kill you”. In subsequent relations she assumes the position of someone scorned, someone disappearing.<sup>8</sup>

Notice the context: the woman’s desire is to have a child but because she positions herself as vanishing she cannot settle into a relationship conducive to that end, i.e. bring forth life. In other words, she fails to assume her desire, the desire to have a baby.

Seen from this perspective a Lacanian ethics does not mean reconciling her to lack, but allowing her to take the risk – which includes the acceptance of failure – and find it in herself to initiate the act. For this reason Lacan says in *Seminar VII*: “the ethics to which psychoanalysis leads us [is] the relation between action and desire”.<sup>9</sup>

Such an ethic is not only a far cry from the usual construal of Lacan, it also brings Lacan into proximity with Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard’s pen was aimed at the Christian nominalists of nineteenth-century Copenhagen. People were calling themselves Christians, yet failing to manifest Christianity in existential terms, i.e. embodying Christian belief in action. This was the drive behind his rallying cries: “truth is subjectivity” and “action to subjectivity”.<sup>10</sup> According to Kierkegaard, Christians were tending towards an objective standpoint whereby Christianity was reflected upon “as an object to which the knower relates himself”; an approach characteristic of detached scientific observation, where what matters is discerning that the object of truth (Christianity) is precisely that, true.<sup>11</sup> By contrast, the subjective standpoint concerns one’s relation to the object of truth, or as Kierkegaard says: “the development of subjectivity consists precisely in this, that he, acting, works through himself in his thinking about his own existence, consequently that he actually thinks what is thought by actualising it”.<sup>12</sup>

It is not difficult to see Kierkegaard and Lacan’s shared concern that speech be related to action as the arbitrator of truth. In the final analysis, what counts for

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<sup>8</sup> Marie-Hélène Brousse, “The Drive (II),” in *Reading Seminar XI: Lacan’s Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. R. Feldstein, B. Fink & M. Jannus (Albany: SUNY, 1995), 101.

<sup>9</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, VII*, 313.

<sup>10</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by H. Hong & E. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 339.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 169.

Lacan is the concrete expression of desire, just as for Kierkegaard one's identification with Christianity only counts to the degree one remains existentially committed. One can strengthen this contention by way of *The Concept of Anxiety*.<sup>13</sup> Here, Kierkegaard seemingly anticipates Lacan by situating the bondage of sin as precisely the distance between speech and action. Sin is not hereditary and therefore deterministic – that being the case one could always evade responsibility for one's actions – rather, it is an existential category. Kierkegaard uses the image of two people concealed under a cloak in which one speaks and the other acts without any relation between the two. Likewise, in his Seminar on *Ethics*, Lacan says of the analytic process: 'it is a question of the relationship between action and desire, and of the former's fundamental failure to catch up with the latter.'<sup>14</sup> In other words, Lacan's account of neurosis amounts to a secular reading of sin, i.e. a life in which speech is unable to realise desire in decisive action. The difference of course is that for Kierkegaard desire remains wholly directed towards God.

The question remains: how does the analyst facilitate the analysand in her assumption of desire or in Kierkegaardian terms, how does one manifest Christianity as an existence? It is at this point I want to turn to the second part, arguing that the assumption of desire requires a dramatic form of intervention which allows a new perspective on one's identity and its formative influences, thereby releasing one for action in the present. To this end Lacan must, by way of Heidegger, *retour á Kierkegaard*.

## II. Time for Analysis

For Lacan transformative action is dependant on the restructuring of meaning through time, an approach he inherits from Kierkegaard, historically mediated through Heidegger. While bearing this important connection in mind, I want to begin by expanding on Heidegger and Lacan's understanding of time.

Heidegger had asked: "does not anxiety get constituted by a future? Certainly, but not by the inauthentic future of awaiting".<sup>15</sup> We are not simply anxious about what the future holds, rather:

anxiety brings one back to one's thrownness as something *possible* which *can be repeated*. And in this way it *also* reveals the possibility of an authentic potentiality-for-Being—a potentiality which must, in repeating, come back to its thrown "there", but come back as something future which comes towards [zukunftiges].<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> S. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. by R. Thomte & A. Anderson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 118-119.

<sup>14</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, VII*, 31.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 393.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 394.

Heidegger's point is that anxiety about the future bears down upon us to reveal the way we are already situated, the way we are already begun, part of a community, constituted by our heritage. In turn our heritage discloses future possibilities for the repetition thereof. For example: if my father was a carpenter it is part of my cultural heritage, it becomes a possibility that I may choose to repeat, actualising it in the present. Notice the temporal paradox: should I become a carpenter then I would repeat the past on the basis of it coming towards me from the future; I discover my potential coming back to me from the future and begin the process of *having been*. And herein lies the psychoanalytic point: one must return to one's past, challenging the way a particular set of signifiers have situated oneself, and open those signifiers up to the play of desire so they may return in terms of different future possibilities. As Lacan says:

what is realised in my history is neither the past definite as what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect as what has been in what I am, but the future anterior as what I will have been, given what I am in the process of becoming.<sup>17</sup>

And,

in psychoanalytic *anamnesis*, what is at stake is not reality, but truth, because the effect of full speech is to reorder past contingencies by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come, such as they are constituted by the scant freedom through which the subject makes them present.<sup>18</sup>

The analysand must learn to see the different potential for signification that past events are open to, recognising the ambiguity of all significations, and make a decision about how events return to her from the future (what Lacan calls the *moment of concluding*). The analysand must choose a different past to return to in the future, "reorder[ing] past contingencies by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come".<sup>19</sup> The subject becomes creative with her past in a way that presupposes the narrative that formed her. Through the decisions the subject makes about past signification, new perspectives open up which coterminously restructure the past, retroactively reconfiguring it, releasing the subject for action in the present. Notice the centrality that Lacan gives to *agency*: the analysand must make an existential decision about how signifiers return. This is not the subject resigned to flux, but one for whom the ambiguity of signification opens up new possibilities of signification, and the chance for existential affirmation of those signifiers.

To take the previous example of the woman wishing to have a child, the trouble arises because she is stuck at the level of signification: "I'm going to kill you"; yet as her analyst points out, the demand of the mother is quite simple: to be quiet.

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<sup>17</sup> Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, 84.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

However, it conforms to death as the object of the patient's fantasy. By opening up her mother's words to ambiguity, the analysand is opened up to creative possibilities; that is, assuming her desire. For this reason Lacan said, "to keep time with Freud requires one know how to take the clock apart".<sup>20</sup>

The question remains, where someone is stuck on past signification, how do you illuminate her past anew? In analysis it is recognised that one needs to induce a traumatic break in identity, a sudden rupture or intervention that gets beyond the neurosis to illuminate unconscious desire. At its most basic, it is the analyst's verbal interventions into the speech of the analysand that constitutes this break. A well placed word or sudden interjection can cause the analysand to recoil back onto the subtext of what she is saying, so she may hear herself anew and thereby open the door to retroactively reconfiguring the past.

In thinking through the role of the analytic intervention I want to return to Kierkegaard and explore his account of time and its relevance to the analytic intervention. My argument is that the role Kierkegaard assigns to Christ as God's intervention, and the subsequent bearing this has on time and temporality, makes Christ paradigmatic of the analytic intervention; a contention strengthened when one considers the mediating role Heidegger plays in Lacan's thought.

In *The Concept of Anxiety* Kierkegaard makes the distinction between Greek/pagan and Christian time. The pagan understanding of time is tied to a spatial awareness: time is conceptualised around the movement of an object through space. For example, Aristotle writes: "for it is by means of the body that is carried along that we become aware of the "before and after" in the motion."<sup>21</sup> As the object follows its course through space the area travelled becomes the past, the area yet to be travelled is the future, while the space occupied by the object is the present.

Now the problem arises because the distinction between the past, present, and future is implicit to time itself, they are divisions along an imagined line. But because the line is a constant succession, no present dividing line can ever gain a real "foothold" so to speak.<sup>22</sup> As soon as you introduce a line into the succession discriminating the tenses it appears behind you. And because no moment can be present, "there is in time neither present, nor past, nor future".<sup>23</sup> Thus in Greek/pagan time the present is only ever an abstract line drawn to divide, yet in the same moment it moves into the past because of the constant succession of time, and therefore ceases to be the present. This makes the present infinitely vanishing. At best one can say that time is constituted by a series of "nows", and

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>21</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, Book IV, 11, 219b.

<sup>22</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 85.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

for this reason Kierkegaard says “accordingly there is in [pagan] time neither present, nor past, nor future”.<sup>24</sup>

By contrast, Kierkegaard argues that Christian time is fashioned by the claim that the eternal *enters* time. However, and here is the crucial point, Kierkegaard says that while the eternal enters time, it is never fully integrated *into* time. Eternity causes a break in time yet is never fully subsumed. One way to read Kierkegaard is to say that the eternal manifests as a *trauma* within time: the eternal constitutes a dramatic break or disturbance in the temporal order, eternity being qualitatively different from time. And like a trauma, the break initiated by Christ leads to a certain impotency of language, a blind spot where words fail. One can speak of the contradiction, but one cannot mediate it in rational terms.

This constitutes one way to read Christology as outlined by the Chalcedonian (451) formulation of Christ as one person, two natures. The council sought to retain precisely the trauma of the eternal within time. In the Monophysitic and Nestorian heresies this traumatic element was gentrified. The Monophysitics made Christ wholly divine, whereas the Nestorians separated out Christ’s dual natures, to the extent that Mary was mother only of Christ’s humanity. By contrast the Council of Chalcedon maintains the eternal and temporal separate yet as one, i.e. it preserves the trauma of the eternal in time, making those early heresies a form of Christological neurosis!

Kierkegaard calls this decisive break “the instant” or “moment” (*Øiblikket*), “a blink of the eye”. And crucially it is this trauma which allows temporality to manifest. As Kierkegaard says: “The moment is that ambiguity in which time and eternity touch each other, and with this the concept of *temporality* is posited”.<sup>25</sup> But how exactly do we get from this dialectic of the eternal and temporal to time as tensed? When we cease to view time in spatial terms, and accept instead the constitutive conflicts of life, we make the dramatic shift from time as an intellectual problem to a problem of disposition. In other words, the kernel that resists integration into time encourages us to focus on time as an existential issue precisely because it precludes any objective rational mediation of time, be it a denial or otherwise. Consider for example Aristotle’s argument. For him to view time spatially he must implicitly occupy a transcendental position from which he can objectively look down upon it, a neutral point by which he can measure the succession. And because he is now divorced from time, his account lacks any existential concern, the anxiety of the future or regret of the past, there is and can only be the here and now.

This existential view of time is acute in Kierkegaard’s text. Consider for example Kierkegaard’s treatment of anxiety: “anxiety is freedom’s possibility”,<sup>26</sup> a response to the limitless possibilities that are open to us in our ability to shape

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 155.

our lives. In the task of becoming we can become anything, and while that responsibility can be daunting, it can also be exhilarating. Notice how anxiety is defined by properties of time. Anxiety relates to the way that different choices made in the present have an effect upon one's future. The future is not simply an abstract point in the yet-to-come of some succession that passes; rather, it is intimately connected with our present actions. The future bears down upon us calling us to account for the things we do now in the hope of future expectations. Kierkegaard also links anxiety to the past: He says: "if I am anxious about a past fortune (good or bad), then this is not because it is in the past but because it may be repeated".<sup>27</sup> That is to say, we become anxious about the past not because it is irretrievably lost, swept up in the moving succession, but precisely because it may return to us from the future.

Returning to Heidegger, one should note that in describing the transition *Dasein* makes from inauthenticity to authenticity, Heidegger employs the term *Augenblick*, thereby showing his debt to Kierkegaard, *Augenblick* being figuratively derived from *Øiets blik*, "a blink of the eye". The move to authenticity is sparked by a moment of vision, stimulated by encounter with one's mortality. In this 'instant' *Dasein* becomes resolute, taking its historicity seriously; the way we are already situated, the meaning our past confers upon our present and the future it carries us to. As Heidegger explains, one is no longer absorbed in "now-time"<sup>28</sup> with one moment following on from the next; rather one is existentially engaged in temporality which means taking one's historicity seriously.

From here it is a short step to Lacan who, with explicit reference to Heidegger, opposes any form of analysis that reduces experience to the "*hic et nunc*"<sup>29</sup> with the value of *anamnesis*, precisely because analysis requires an existential view of time, a view by which one can re-order past contingencies, conferring on past events the sense of "necessities to come".<sup>30</sup> Second, Lacan recognises that reordering the past requires a dramatic intervention, a traumatic intervention which illuminates the past anew. Bringing these strands together, it should become clear that: first, it was Kierkegaard who initially articulated how anxiety about the future was tied to the way the past comes towards us from the future;<sup>31</sup> second, one should note the influence that Kierkegaard's category of the instant [*Øiblikket*] has on Heidegger's term *Augenblick*; third, Kierkegaard shows how it was only with the event of the Incarnation that this consciousness of time arose, because only when the eternal enters time is there the decisive annulment or break in time, such that the tenses are established. In other words, only with the incarnation is temporality posited, and only in the incarnation are those same tenses given "simple continuity": the past redeems the present by arriving in the

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>28</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 474.

<sup>29</sup> Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, 46.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>31</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 91.



form of hope from the future.<sup>32</sup> It should by now be clear that Christ's intervention is the paradigm for the analytic intervention: a traumatic incursion which stimulates a subjective approach to time, and thus it is only subsequent to the Incarnation that there can be Lacanian analysis at all. This is not an obvious claim that simply gives testimony to two-thousand years of formative history, but a reference to the qualitative shift in consciousness that Christianity invites and is historically mediated to Lacan from Kierkegaard, through Heidegger.

### III. After Analysis

In this final section I want to extend the logic of trauma and time to the doctrine of real presence within the Eucharist and in doing so lay the foundations for the Eucharist as a form of social analysis. The basis for extending my argument thus far to the Eucharistic is the Catholic affirmation that the Eucharist *is* Christ, a view attributed to the early church although only formally ratified by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215): "His body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine".<sup>33</sup> This view would be reaffirmed at the Council of Trent (1545) and maintained to present day.

Of course, such continuity belies both the re-emergent disagreements that led to the need for formal ratification, and the epistemological shifts in understanding. Nonetheless, it suggests as a bare minimum a continuity in terms of seeking to maintain the identity of Christ with those sacramental elements, an identity beyond the stance of remembrance, and hence the logical step in my own work moving from Christ to the Eucharist. How then does that which I have outlined about Christ translate into eucharistic terms?

The identity of the transcendent in the Eucharist at the point of transubstantiation amounts to a form of intervention which opens the historicity of the subject. In other words, the Eucharist repeats the trauma of the incarnation. By way of comparison, consider how the doctrine of transubstantiation conforms to the Chalcedonian formulation of Christ's identity: on the one hand if the divine and the mundane are disjoined one would risk the eucharistic equivalent of the Nestorian heresy: impanation. The sacred host would be constituted in terms of two distinct and separate entities, a divine filling covered in a separate wrap of bread. Consequently the Eucharist would lack the participatory quality. As Catherine Pickstock says, "If the coincidence of the mystical and the real becomes fissured, the eucharistic signs [...] become [...] a matter of non-essential, *illustrative* signification which relies upon a non-participatory similitude between the bread and the Body and the wine and the Blood".<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, the affirmation by Aquinas that the bread is not wholly taken up into the divine but retains its "accidents" precludes the

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>33</sup> Norman Tanner (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. 1 (London: Sheed and Ward, 1990), 230.

<sup>34</sup> Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 254.

eucharistic equivalent of the Monophysitic heresy.<sup>35</sup> If the bread were wholly taken up into the divine then the Eucharist would fail to coincide with the historical temporality of the *ecclesia*.

Instead, one should assert that Christ's body is present in the bread as trauma, distinct yet inextricably joined. Christ's body is the traumatic kernel of the bread as his blood is of the wine. Put another way, through the celebration of the Eucharist the eternal enters time, what Kierkegaard defines in terms of "*Øiblikket*". And in that instant, confronted by the traumatic presence of the eternal in time, the tenses are brought into relief. From the perspective of the Eucharist, the past is not simply trailing behind, lost over one's shoulder; rather, one can re-member it, as Jean-Luc Marion says, with "eschatological patience".<sup>36</sup> That is to say, one makes an

appeal, in the name of a past event, to God, in order that he recall an engagement (a covenant) that determines the instant presently given to the believing community [...]. [T]he event remains less a past fact than a pledge given in the past in order, today still, to appeal to a future.<sup>37</sup>

The present becomes figured between the past promise and future expectation. The present is not self-sufficient with regard to the past, but takes its meaning from the past, which comes back from the future. Hence the Eucharist becomes the paradigm for every present, constantly ensuring against the reification of the "now" as an eternal present by situating the subject in a dynamic and existential history, allowing the subject to be received into the fullness of time. Thus, one could say in Lacanian terms that transubstantiation amounts to a form of analytic intervention, the sudden interjection of the Word which opens up the temporality of time. Indeed, it is only in neurosis that the subject is stuck in the "*hic et nunc*" rather than open to the temporal flow. And because the tenses are brought into relief, one can reaffirm past signification in terms of eschatological hope, or, as Lacan says, allow the past to pass "into the word [*verbe/logos*] [...] by which she relates in the present the origins of her own person".<sup>38</sup>

An acceptance of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist helps stimulate a subjective appropriation of truth, what I have defined in Lacanian terms as the assumption of desire. The interpretive moment of concluding in which the subject, desiring God, chooses to accept the objective presence of Christ within the Eucharist, stimulates the contact of desire and will: the two are fused together through the interpretive decision in which the desire for God manifests with ritual enactment. In this way the Eucharist is utterly transformative, marking the

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (London & New York: Blackfriars, 1964-1981), S.T. III, q. 75, a. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 173.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>38</sup> Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, 47.

point that one emerges as a subject through the act of choosing a particular set of constitutive signifiers in which to emerge.

Finally, the political implications of an ecclesial setting to analysis should not be lost. After all, as Elizabeth Danto has argued, far from being a Victorian practicing in the closeted world of the female bourgeoisie, Freud was a modernist, a social activist caught up the social democratic movement sweeping across Europe; and the newly discovered psychoanalysis was a crucial tool for social change. During the 1920s he and his first wave colleagues envisaged a new kind of community based on free clinics, clinics committed to helping the poor and disenfranchised, and cultivating good and productive individuals. Indeed, Anna Freud, Erik Erikson and Wilhelm Reich all made psychoanalysis accessible to farmers, office clerks, teachers, domestic servants, public school teachers and so on. But Freud's vision never took root, curtailed by a progression of policies that favoured private health care.<sup>39</sup>

To this extent the Eucharist is in a unique position to respond because as William Cavanaugh has argued, politics is not a science of the given, but a practice of the imagination; i.e. it establishes the conditions of possibilities for organising bodies. And the Eucharist is the privileged site of the Christian imagination; it offers alternative means to symbolically configure space, a different way of being with one another in the social sphere. Hence the Mass *is* political.<sup>40</sup>

In particular the Eucharist it has the power to challenge the private/public split that characterises modern liberalism because the constitutive trauma and assumption of desire establishes the subject within an existing ecclesial setting. In contrast to the private clinic, liturgy does not ordain individuals with their own private set of desires or self-contained spheres of power (the critique of ego-psychology). Indeed, such an individual can only be imagined within the narrative construction of secular politics because the secular conceives the individual as prior *to* society, and society merely a collection of pre-existing individuals with conflicting desires and competing interests. By contrast the ecclesial context of the Eucharist ensures a communal setting prior. Each individual is primarily a member of the socially enacted body of Christ, a participatory member in a context that refuses still to allow the subject to be finalised, complete, or whole, because the self is a never-ending task, repeated forwards in the constant re-staging of the crucifixion and beneficiary of love which always exceeds our capacity to understand. In other words, by situating analysis within the sociality of ecclesial worship Christianity is uniquely able to deliver on Freud's failed vision: to bring together the social and the private in the community, the necessary pre-condition of real therapy.

Such a view of the Eucharist should not be understood in terms of a necessary supplement to the harsh reality of secular pressures, but precisely an alternative

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<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth Danto, *Freud's Free Clinics: Psychoanalysis and Social Justice, 1918-1938* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2005).

<sup>40</sup> William Cavanaugh, *Theological Imagination* (London: T&T Clark, 2002).

site from which analytic methods can be developed into a form of collective analysis, a theological therapeutics where analysis itself can become a form of worship because it is figured through the liturgical reception of the Eucharist. Put another way, after analysis one may look to the church in its doctrinal, social, and performative functions to continually recreate through the sacred Mass the conditions for the assumption of desire.

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