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Book Review Essay: Psychoanalysis and Culture, Then and Now: A Review of "Freud and Psychoanalysis: Six Introductory Lectures" by John Forrester and "Self Study: Notes on the Schizoid Condition" by David Kishik

Review of *Freud and Psychoanalysis: Six Introductory Lectures* by John Forrester, Polity Press, 2023, 224 pp. and

of *Self Study: Notes on the Schizoid Condition* by David Kishik, ICI Berlin Press, 182 pp.

What does it mean for psychoanalysis to be proclaimed "back"? The past nine or so months have seen articles published in The New York Times, The New Yorker, New York Magazine, The New Statesman, and other journals about the apparent resurgence of psychoanalysis in America, often among left-leaning Gen Z-ers; meanwhile, Todd Haynes is evidently planning a 12-hour biopic about Freud, and Anthony Hopkins plays him, in old age, in Freud's Last Session, coming out this winter. Given the signifiers dominating the titles of the periodicals publishing articles about it, one question to ask might be how to distinguish what is new versus what is old in the psychoanalysis that has apparently reemerged (and how much of that reemergence is located particularly in New York). According to Hannah Zeavin (2023) in the Chronicle of Higher Education, there is no particular data to suggest (or any actual suggestion in these essays) that there are actually more analysands out there than previously—that is, no indication that more people are entering psychoanalysis proper (however that is defined) than before. Rather, as she writes, the implication of these pieces is that there is something new about "the kinds of people—young, influential, creative—gravitating to psychoanalysis today." Artists, academics, podcasters, writers, filmmakers, often young, sometimes with platforms from which to proclaim their enthusiasms—these are the people cited as entering both analysis and analytic training today, and disseminating their learnings. This raises plenty of questions, both about what's going on in the culture writ large that demands (or desires) this kind of resurgence, and also about the implications for the field itself: its contours, its interests, its institutions, its transmission, its politics.

Into this atmosphere comes John Forrester's Freud and Psychoanalysis: Six Introductory Lectures (2023), a collection of Forrester's lectures to undergraduate students published this year (Forrester had been lecturing on Freud annually since 1974, and the lectures collected in this book are reconstructions of those that he delivered in 2012; he died in 2015). Forrester, a historian and philosopher of science as well as of psychoanalysis, is interested throughout his (lucid, often colloquial, always broad-minded) lectures in the development of psychoanalysis as a discourse, a practice, and a field of thought: its relationship to medical and scientific disciplines, its evolution as a theory and as an international movement, the history of its

institutionalization, its dissemination into popular culture, its relationship to other social, intellectual and political movements. Thus Forrester charts the möbius strip of psychoanalysis in culture: the internal formations of psychoanalysis as a theory and a practice and its relationship to and emergence in the outside world, as well as the entwinement of internal and external factors and contexts.

This mapping is indispensable for anyone interested in the history and cultural impact of psychoanalysis, as well as in the question of the emergence and shape of psychoanalysis in different historical epochs and locations. It is an effort that further brings to mind analogies between the circumstances of the birth of psychoanalysis and its resurgence today that Forrester, lecturing a decade ago, couldn't necessarily have predicted. Among these are the idea, as he elaborates it, that psychoanalysis first emerged around the collective confrontation with death and trauma that came with the two world wars and the pandemic of the Spanish flu, with the analogy to the global situation today clear; as well, that it was implicated in larger social shifts after World War I, including a widespread crisis within the institution of the family and of marriage. Again, the parallel with today is clear, though the shakeup around the family, marriage, divorce, sexuality, gender expression, and the like that we are now privy to has more complicated causes than the post-war dearth of men that Forrester cites as the motivating factor in the twentieth-century social upheaval. Forrester further claims (citing Ernest Gellner) that psychoanalysis emerged and gained popularity in the twentieth century in part because that era was "marked not by human confrontations with nature as in earlier periods, but with other human beings—though," he adds, "perhaps we are returning to a version of the first now" (p. 175). Given the acceleration of the climate crisis in the past decade, it is a good time to interrogate what this particularly apocalyptic moment is asking of psychoanalysis, as well as who is doing the asking. (Like today, the early transmitters of psychoanalysis to the broader culture were, in Forrester's words, "influential 'seedbed' groups—writers, avant-garde artists and intellectuals, magazine editors, chattering Bohemians, café circles," [p. 124], as well as "confidential network[s] of patients" [p. 123].)

Like Freud's (1915-17) own Introductory Lectures to Psychoanalysis, these lectures are for the benefit of curious newcomers, perhaps indeed for future analysands, though Forrester, while clearly a pursuer of things psychoanalytic, is—with his agnostic eye and democratic skepticism—hardly a proselytizer. In any case perhaps more than anything the lectures document one way that, and one space in which, psychoanalysis enters culture and becomes disseminated (via talks by an influential thinker in a university)—that is, they serve as an example of the mechanism that they are asking about.

So, why might it be important for psychoanalysts to read this book? Presumably, we already know a good deal about the theories of sexuality and dream interpretation, and have probably already salivated over the various internecine battles, that Forrester rehearses; we have likely watched the movies (Spellbound, etc.) that he cites as documents of psychoanalysis' influence in and introduction to popular culture; maybe we have the New Yorker cartoons about psychoanalysis that he mentions up on our refrigerators. (Or maybe that's just me.) Forrester's book will not teach a psychoanalyst anything new about her practice. But, it will put her in a readerly position—that of the undergraduate, the analysand, the psychoanalytic naïf—that it may be important for psychoanalysts to be reminded of. In fact I think it is increasingly important for psychoanalysts to reencounter this stance, and that it is from the position of the one not necessarily in the know that it may be best for us to take on the question, which a reading of Forrester brings us to, of the place of psychoanalysis in culture today, as well as that of what is being demanded of psychoanalysis now and how we can best position ourselves with respect to the cultural atmosphere in which we are located. In other words I think it is time for us to return to, and take seriously, the question of the place of psychoanalysis in culture, and that we might have to do it with new eyes, or with the eyes of the new, in order to best make sense of our contemporary role.

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In Does the Woman Exist?: From Freud's Hysteric to Lacan's Feminine, Paul Verhaeghe (1999) suggests that the birth of psychoanalysis was a result of the increasing volubility of hysteria as a subjective and social phenomenon: that psychoanalysis came to be in the space opened by the cries of the nineteenth-century hysterics. To Verhaeghe, following Lacan, this is part of hysteria's ruse, to present itself as a mystery (specifically a mystery about femininity and sexuality) to be deciphered and to thereby create a master to elude: as Lacan says, "the hysteric wants a master over whom she can reign" (Lacan, 2007, p. 129). Thus psychoanalysis, as a field that attempts to answer the riddle of hysteria, has at times fallen into the discourse of mastery that has been demanded of it, presenting itself as a field of knowledge and expertise (about the body, sexuality, development, suffering) that, according to Verhaeghe, is bound to be impotent on its own terms. Maybe it was necessary, at the beginning, that psychoanalysis fashion itself as a field of knowledge and expertise, that it legitimize itself by way of or alongside medicine and biology or at least at times take up the epistemological positioning of these fields—at the very least this trend likely had something to do with Freud's overdetermined desire for social legitimacy.

Yet in certain strains of Freud's writing, perhaps especially at the beginning of his work and then periodically throughout his career, psychoanalytic theory has taken on other discursive positions beyond that of the master, as Verhaeghe points to; at its best, psychoanalysis counters—or at least offers other options beyond—discourses of mastery. If it came to be around the demands of the nineteenth-century hysterics, and if it sometimes answered those demands by taking on the position of knowledge that hysteria both invites and abhors, then it also offers other possibilities; it is capable of answering to cultural and public desire rather than to demand.

In many ways, I believe that we are living in a hystericized culture. Old forms of cultural certainty—about gender, sexuality, difference (sexual, racial, class), the body—are falling by the wayside; protest is returning as a social mode; traditional institutions of knowledge and authority (the university and government among them) are in crisis; younger generations are increasingly aware that identity is a contingent thing. In at least certain pockets of culture (and in ways that play out quite differently on the right and left of the political spectrum), we are coming to know something of the insight that embodied life is inherently conflictual and strange, that no governing body, language included, can sufficiently account for the waywardness and varieties of human desire.

In fact I believe we are located within a particularly fertile juncture in the intertwining relation between psychoanalysis and culture: after hysteria taught early psychoanalysis about desire, psychoanalysis then made a theory of these teachings and re-infused them back into popular discourse, which has taken them up in various ways and also by way of (and in the popularization of the ideas of) other fields (gender, queer, and trans studies among them, which all needed psychoanalysis for their foundation and yet tend to remain ambivalent about its claims, often for good reason). Perhaps then we are now entering a next dialectical turn, whereby contemporary hysteria, informed as it is by psychoanalytic ideas as they became dissolved into certain cultural assumptions, is again coming to address psychoanalysis, and we again have something new to learn. Perhaps it is time to begin again.

Thus in this atmosphere, psychoanalysis, to the extent that it has been re-invoked, has a responsibility to meet culture where it is, and I think that what is crucial here is that it take up this opportunity without falling into discourses of mastery, as it has at times been wont to do. I think it is crucial that it offer itself as what it essentially is, that is, as a not-knowing practice devoted to the radical singularity of every speaking being, a way of listening to the aporias of languaged and of embodied life. In a way, however much popular discourses surrounding sexuality and the body have come to know something about the polymorphousness of desire, I believe that what has not been sufficiently picked up is the idea of radical singularity that psychoanalysis promotes, and the long, difficult, self-constructive work that is its practice. That is, I think that what psychoanalysis now primarily has to offer, and what is radical about its vocation at this point, is not so much the content of its theory but the method of its practice, which then informs the radical possibilities of its theorizing—and that this is what might provide an orienting point to an increasingly hystericized culture that is suffering in new ways, and is apparently once again seeking out psychoanalysis.

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What then are the modes and genres of articulation by which psychoanalysis might best transmit itself today? How might we present ourselves to a culture that is evidently returning to us its ear—how can we engage the desire that has come once again to address us? What discursive positions might be best to take on in our public pronouncements? How should we speak and write? I think we have an opportunity here.

Forrester (2023) writes that

> The counterpart to the project of the indefinite riches of the "wholly interesting life" that psychoanalysis offers the individual is the figure of the late twentieth-century analyst: sober and conservative, entirely uninteresting in the inner life he or she leads, a blank screen, so ill-defined that it has proved infinitely tempting to novelists and filmmakers as a face-savingly flexible plot device. For the patient, analysis offers a Socratic journey, infinite depth, passion and complexity; in contrast, the analyst offers up to the patient and to the ambient culture an unruffled surface, uncannily calm and infuriatingly deficient of engagement in life's passions. (p. 116)

It's not entirely clear where Forrester is getting this picture of the twentieth-century analyst; if anything, it seems to be culled from the novels and films that serve as its proof. But it's likely not unrelated to the writerly positioning and discursive modes of twentieth-century psychoanalytic theorizing. Forrester casts his eye over some of the major post-Freudian figures of twentieth-century psychoanalysis in several national traditions—Winnicott, Klein, Lacan, the ego psychologists—whose styles, and whose methods of engaging with the public, were of course varied. But I would like to wager that the forms of theory-making that dominated twentieth-century psychoanalysis (as well as other fields in critical theory, and bound up in various scholarly conventions) are no longer appropriate—that the position of the removed purveyor of psychoanalytic knowledge, however it was incarnated by these thinkers and their disciples, is no longer going to fly. (This is not to say that this position is by any means uniform, and if anything Lacan, for one, furnished us with a vocabulary by which to critique it. But this is the point: psychoanalysis inherently offers a critique of any claims to being master of one's own house, or being outside of the scene of one's own articulation. I just think we sometimes forget to practice what we preach.)

So, now, in the twenty-first century, why not flip the script that Forrester points to? Even then the unruffled surface was infuriating; at this point, it might be frankly untenable. Why not offer ourselves precisely in our own depth, passion, and complexity? In our intoxication with psychoanalysis and with what it has done for us? Why not lean into the Lacanian notion that the motor of an analysis is the analyst's desire—why not present to the potential analysands who are our readers, listeners, and students, first and foremost, not our knowledge about, but our desire for, psychoanalysis? Both are always happening at once, of course, but why not tip the scales, or shift the frame? Why not fall more on the side of what we all know, which is that any analyst was at one point, and is in perpetuity, an analysand, living out the passions of their own analytic adventure? In the age of Google, there's no such thing as a blank screen anyway, and in any case it's not totally clear that that figure was anything more than a cultural artefact in the first place, a way of justifying analysts' own resistances. Why not put ourselves more on the line?

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In the last ten or so years, autotheory has gained increasing traction as a narrative genre. Popularized by Paul Preciado's (2013) Testo Junkie and Maggie Nelson's (2015) The Argonauts, autotheory (which Preciado calls "a theory of the self, a self-theory") takes seriously the inter-imbrication of life and text, as well as the transferential aspects of both reading and writing: its effect rides on the ways it bares the device, and makes manifest the stakes, of the activity of theory-making. Autotheoretical texts put desire on display, and they

make desire the center of the act of transmission, with the understanding that it is in witnessing the desire of another speaking subject that one's own comes to life, and that it is by way of the flourishing of desire that change occurs. In this sense, in maintaining always the rigor of the writer's particular desire, autotheory wagers that the more precise the specification, the wider the opening. Thus the intervention of autotheory marks an important moment in the breakdown of the dichotomy between theory and self-writing that has reigned in the critical humanities in the past few decades; in fact in combining autobiography with high theory, autotheory is reviving the so-called "personal" precisely in the context of the kind of theory from which it was banished in the 1960s and 70s—at the same time that it shifts the status, structure, and stakes of the selfhood it purports to document. Arguably, its emergence, popularity, and impact are bound up with what I am identifying as the contemporary brand of cultural hysteria, which puts to question conventional notions of authority, the idea that there is any well-grounded outside to stand on in theory as much as anywhere else.

It's no coincidence then that many autotheoretical works find themselves in (often ambivalent) dialogue with psychoanalysis, a field that began with an adventure of autotheory (in Freud's self-analysis) but that then has so often forgotten that narrative, epistemological and ethical position. Many canonical autotheoretical works (Nelson, Preciado, and Kris Kraus among others) both pay homage to and resist psychoanalytic insights, and my sense is that, to the extent that autotheory can be canonized into a distinct set of more or less contemporary texts, its argument with psychoanalysis concerns psychoanalysis as a field—a set of institutional arrangements that regulates its own possibilities for thinking—and as a body of thought: its claims to knowledge at different eras and in various of its sub-fields about human subjectivity and sex. These arguments are undoubtedly well-founded. But it is also precisely the autotheoretical position that may allow us to see what is most radical about psychoanalysis as a discourse and a cultural intervention, which is that, in that it understands articulation—from both sides of the couch—as essentially performative, psychoanalysis troubles any easy relationship to knowledge and self-knowledge.

In other words it seems to me that contemporary autotheoretical writers, to the extent that they engage psychoanalysis and sometimes critique it, are picking up on precisely the places that our theory-making has come to betray our practice: the places that we refuse to avow that theory, like any articulation, is castrated, and that the theorist, like any speaker, is spoken as she speaks, shot through with the theory she produces. That is, the places at which we forget our own autotheoretical foundations. Like psychoanalysis at the time of its birth, autotheory has come to articulate and make part of its practice a truth about language that we all know but find it difficult to engage. Thus I believe that it is imperative that psychoanalysts take this genre seriously and find a way to learn from it, or to re-learn itself by way of it. And that we even consider taking up its ethic, if we can be so bold, in our own writing and speaking—in order to transmit the experience of psychoanalysis to a wider audience; to correct the conventional image of the analyst that was from another era anyway; and to return ourselves to our own potentially forgotten origins.

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David's Kishik's (2023) recent Self-Study: Notes on the Schizoid Condition bills itself as a work of "auto-philosophy," and it pays homage to the likes of Nelson and Sheila Heti, two autotheoretical (or autofictional) writers who are clearly cherished textual friends. These gestures, so common to autotheoretical works that tend to map the history of their own influence, then run counter to the main thrust of the book, which is to articulate contemporary culture's, and Kishik's own, so-called schizoid condition. In other words autotheoretical texts are inherently social, and socializing; they take intertextuality seriously; they reach for and promote other texts both as a gesture of love and as a making-manifest of the mechanisms of theory production; they perform (and often invent) their own citation practices, in order to put on stage the workings of influence, as well as the life of texts in the author's thinking, living, history, and body. Indeed the very project of theorizing the self is inherently self-displacing as much as (or rather than) self-centering: the implicit claim of authotheory is that one can best articulate oneself precisely by way of a circuit out, both

toward other writers and toward some Other that is denoted Theory. One question raised immediately in this book, then—which employs the desirous, intensely related autotheoretical mode to document states of isolation—is whether the form matches the content, or the claim; that is, whether the writing is best understood as a manifestation of the schizoid condition, or its cure. Kishik's writing, as he says, is "both the cause and effect of…[his] loneliness" (p. 12); and yet it also "doubles as therapy sessions on a budget" (p. 2).

Thus psychoanalysis, as both theory and practice, is one of Kishik's prime interlocutors. Along with his two first intellectual loves (Agamben and Wittgenstein, who, we learn in an astounding moment that isn't plumbed, share their birthdays with Kishik's father and mother respectively), and in numbered fragments that blend reference to philosophical and theoretical texts with musings on his life and previous work, Kishik focuses primarily on W.R.D. Fairbarn and Harry Guntrip as theorists of the schizoid state. As he writes, it was his own self-education in schizoid ways of being by reading these thinkers, and his subsequent self-diagnosis as schizoid, that sent him back into therapy after it had stalled: an apparently schizoid act (solitary reading, in retreat) that returned him to dialogue.

Much of the book shunts back and forth between these two positions (isolated and related), or between associating these two positions with the task at hand, whether that task is philosophy, critical theory, self-analysis, or writing. The "relational turn in philosophy, following the one in psychoanalysis" (Kishik, 2023, p. 31) is at stake as much as is the more recent antisocial turn in critical theory (particularly in queer and black studies); the schizoid seems to stand for both the foundation of the subject in relation and a particular difficulty with this position. To both Fairbairn and Guntrip, in Kishik's telling, what is originary to the human subject is relations: Guntrip claims that "at bottom we seek persons, not pleasures"; Fairbairn helps Kishik proclaim himself someone "whose central problem is an inability to 'maintain the integrity and wholeness of his experience of himself within his necessary relations with others, and is forced to fragment himself' in order to keep these relations alive" (p. 39). Fragmentation and retreat are paradoxical forms of keeping up relations, the best a schizoid can do. The schizoid further testifies to the extent to which the human person originates in weakness rather than aggression: "human beings are violable long before they are violent" (p. 48). In his very difficulty with relations, the schizoid marks their influence.

Where the schizoid is located, and who exactly he is, is a question here: he is Kishik, the apparently shut-in scholar who notes (or performs) his own general lack of social engagement; but he is also all of us, or at least all of us who can afford to seek isolation, especially in, like, a neo-liberal capitalist society, as well as in a post- or mid-pandemic world when we're all invited into this position anyway. Thus schizoid is "a widespread way of living that intersects with the standard fare of social identities" (Kishik, 2023, p. 56); once again, the schizoid condition is, paradoxically, a social condition. Freud, the poet of the pleasure principle, aggression, and the drive (and so-called one-person psychology, ugh), rubs Kishik the wrong way; as he says, "the Freudian stance can't integrate that in the beginning was a relation" (p. 38). In this sense Kishik places himself in a lineage of autotheoretical writers (Nelson, Heti, and Alison Bechdel among them) who, with their often constitutional interest in writing as a figure for, and method for staging questions of, biological reproduction (and Kishik is no exception here, as his book is among other things a meditation on his and his wife's choice not to have children), seem to prefer object relations to Freudian theory.

It's not my job to adjudicate preferences, but at least in Kishik's case I'm not sure this is fair to Freud, since what more testifies to origination in relation than the theory of the drive? Kishik seems fonder of Lacan, though if anything Lacan's intervention was to return us to the dialectics of the Freudian text, where we are always located at the juncture of inside and outside. Lacan reveals the möbius strip at work in the Freudian conception of the unconscious, and it is here that I think autotheory is wrong to forget Freud, who wasn't always his best self as a writer but who, after all, initiated an entire discursive field with an autotheoretical adventure, his own self-study.

It also seems to me that Freud the paradoxicalist may be helpful in parsing some of the—let's say—conflicts of Kishik's text, which express themselves at places where its content can sometimes contradict its form: schizoids, as he says in a moment self-theorizing, "rarely give or receive recognition" (Kishik, 2023, p. 58),

yet his text is essentially made up of citations, and what is citation if not the gift of recognition? This tension is further felt especially around the text's central confession: "it is about time to call a spade a spade" (p. 100), he says at one point, before admitting that he and his wife, object of the book's most ardent professions and long a devoted partner, are polyamorous. In part this admission is an element of the book's project—or rather part of the project of Kishik's five-part book series, of which Self-Study, published last, is "either volume five or zero" (p. 109)—to "imagine a form of life" (the title of the series): polyamory being a form of life that, according to Kishik, deserves more philosophical play. This is fine, of course, but it calls into question some of Kishik's self-interpretations, such as that his wife's extraordinary qualities are part of what accounts for his schizoid position in life ("Hence my limited capacity to be with others who are not her," he writes, asking, "if I were with someone more mundane, would I seek more external stimuli?" [p. 105]). This funny tribute attaching schizoidism to exclusive love then becomes even more suspect when it becomes clear that he does in fact seek a good amount of external stimuli and, well, others (it's suggested that he's more of a polyamorous adventurer than she is), which turns the screw a bit. By my lights, you need some good old-fashioned Freudian conflict theory to see your way around here.

As well, I think we need some Freudian pessimism, or at least realism, which might counter the utopianism underlying the book's various melancholias, including its self-diagnosis (not that a text isn't entitled to these). Fairbairn apparently imagines "integrity and wholeness" (p. 39) to be possible for a human subject, hence the schizoid's fragmentation; similarly, the fragmented form of Kishik's book may in some way speak to a utopic vision of an integrated book project perpetually to come. He ends the book grumpily renouncing most of his former endeavors (philosophy, his previous work, reading and writing generally—he even considers resigning from his job) maybe because such a thing ends up feeling so out of reach. This is charming, but it makes me want to prescribe some Freudian ordinary unhappiness and insist that every book project, like every body and every relationship (polyamorous or not), is merely soldered together.

I'll call a spade a spade then and say that I don't actually think Kishik is the schizoid he bills himself as. But of course diagnosis isn't the point. What am I doing, playing analyst to Kishik's analysand, as though I'm not also the one being analyzed? If anything, I may have allowed myself to get too seduced by the hysterical question that lies at the center of this text (what am I, anyway?) as well as of so many works of autotheory, which confound generic expectations and conventions. You see how hard we have to work to avoid mastery? This is the complex dance with psychoanalysis that autotheory invites precisely by imbricating psychoanalysis within itself, as much as autotheory is also one of the agents transmitting psychoanalysis to a broader readership today. We should take it seriously for this reason at least, but also for the ways that it does what psychoanalysis also does, in evoking a transference and making the reader take on, witness, and, one hopes, admit her position in the scene—in denuding the reader precisely by way of denuding the author (I have never felt myself to be more of a Freudian than when reading this book, for better or worse; that is, the book clarified something of my own attachment to and identification with psychoanalysis). The postscript to Forrester's book, written by its editor (and his wife), quotes another one of his writings, in which he writes that according to psychoanalysis, "everyone has an inner life and the right, if not always the chutzpah, to share it." Kishik, and his autotheoretical genre, have this chutzpah in spades, so to speak, and I think there's a lot that psychoanalysts can do with it.

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Kishik is originally from Israel, and he tells us that he finished Self-Study in Tel Aviv, where he also finished writing his first book. Self-Study came out this past March, and it feels prescient now, to the extent that one through-line that the text follows, however lightly, is a question of Israel's own "paranoid-schizoid position" as a modern state:

My sister once said that Hitler clearly won by instilling in the minds of the survivors and their descendants, our family included, this gnawing sense of nothingness. It made me think of how Israel is constituted by this

destitution, by doing everything so the Jewish people will "never again" be nothing, above all by bullying and erasing the Palestinian people. So what is really fueling this historically deep and infinitely complex regional conflict: mutual hatred or a shared ontological insecurity? Anger or hunger? But is there anything special about this case? Can any modern state ever rise above what Klein calls its paranoid-schizoid position? (Kishik, 2023, p. 60)

Needless to say, Jewishness, Naziism, and the Holocaust are presences in Forrester's (2023) book as well, as a survey of the cultural origins and influences of psychoanalysis. Forrester writes that "psychoanalysis as a whole has often been criticized for its lack of political engagement—its focus on navel-gazing" (p.92); Kishik (2023) similarly, in reference to other recent crises, writes that "in the midst of a plague, with a political society in shambles, witnessing upheavals left and right, facing the misery and injustice of this world, I have chosen to spend such critical moments gazing at my own navel" (p. 73). But I wonder if this self-criticism (resonant with the opprobrium so often levied at psychoanalysis) does a disservice to the political impact of Kishik's own discursive positioning, and the political position—that is, the view on Palestinian oppression—which it (among other things) arguably allows; to the political implications of psychoanalysis; and, frankly, to navel-gazing. The navel of course is the site of our origins-in-relation, the place at which the subject's circuit toward the Other is memorialized; in psychoanalysis, the navel of the dream—where interpretation fails because, as the place of transmission, it is the place of language itself—is a privileged location.

In other words I would like to flip the valence of the invective (which may be misogynistic anyway) and suggest that both autotheory and psychoanalysis are navel-gazing practices precisely in that they insist on the subject as a dialectical effect of the Other, and they make that truth—that möbius strip of subjectivity—manifest. This is also the political offering of both discourses: an orientation toward alterity both within and without; an insistence that the subject can only articulate, and position, itself ethically if it does so as part of a project of facing, accounting for, and honoring that which is outside. As we are witnessing one of the worst identitarian conflicts and humanitarian crises of our era, taking place in the geographical navel of so much of our global modern self-conception—as our field, as is true of so many others, is being convulsed in ways that undoubtedly have to do with the changing politics, and changing stance toward political engagement, of those entering it—we would do well to remember the ethics of alterity to which both autotheory and psychoanalysis (and psychoanalysis by way of autotheory) point. The rigor and difficulty of these ethics may be what psychoanalysis most has to offer contemporary culture.

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