

# Who was Oscar Masotta?

## Psychoanalysis in Argentina

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As Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's sardonic detective Pepe Carvalho ruefully observed, in a dictionary of Argentine clichés, psychoanalysis would have a crucial place, along with 'tango and the disappeared'.<sup>1</sup> 'One' knows that along with Paris, Buenos Aires is one of the centres of psychoanalytic practice, and one of the leading training centres for Lacanians. What is less well known is how this state of affairs came to be historically, and how it connects with the wider history of philosophy in Argentina, more especially with the extensive influence of Sartre there in the 1950s. One way of mapping this field is to look at the work of a maverick figure within Argentine letters, Oscar Masotta, whose intellectual trajectory shifts from a domesticated Sartrean position to exegesis of Lacan's work within the context of a specifically Argentine concern with influence, modernization and praxis.

Oscar Masotta (1930–1979) has become the *fons et origo* of Lacanian analysis in Argentina. A recent volume on him in the series *Founders of Argentine Psychoanalysis* by the appropriately named publishing house Capital Intellectual in 2009, with the subtitle 'A Legend at the Crossroads of Knowledge(s)', bears the signs of this legacy and its repetitive figuration.<sup>2</sup> Yet this later role as Lacan's epigone overwrites and distorts an intellectual trajectory, which has little parallel in the anglophone world. Masotta was emblematic of the sorts of response that a whole generation of Argentine intellectuals made to the extended crisis of hegemony that characterized the years between Perón's fall from power in 1955 and the return of the military in much bloodier and determined guise in 1976. Nevertheless, though constantly republished, in fact his work has had little philosophical impact, even as his figure has grown ever more mythified. He is thus a cultural symptom whose writings may be read as forms of reading from the periphery. The continuity in Masotta's work has to do with a constant, if never systematically articulated, problematic of freedom and authority, which finds shifting conceptual approaches whose very production act out their thematic.

The argument of this article is that Masotta's trajectory from Sartrean literary analysis to Lacanian exegesis exemplifies the dilemmas of a peripheral intelligentsia in relation to metropolitan theoretical production. Philosophical shifts on this reading are symptomatic rather than purely conceptual. I try to demonstrate this thesis by reading Masotta's early writings with their indebtedness to Sartre, then a pivotal text where the ideas of betrayal and fidelity are foregrounded, and lastly the work on Lacan with its preoccupations with transmission and rivalry. The choice of themes constantly refers back to Masotta's own existential and historical position and maps out a particular instance of intellectual dependency. I close with some more general remarks on the position of Lacanian analysis in Argentina now.

### Early writings and commitment

Masotta was a new kind of Argentine intellectual. He did not belong to the aesthetic modernists associated with the long-lived journal *Sur* (1931–70), whose massive influence in Argentina lay partly in their connections with the European avant-garde and the work of translation that *Sur* financed and disseminated, but also in the autonomy that Victoria Ocampo's wealth granted to the journal and its wider cultural activities.<sup>3</sup> Nor was he a tenured journalist or academic. In a sense, he was precariously situated as a jobbing hack: his only claim to attention was prestige. In Beatriz Sarlo's description, 'This is a new type of intellectual different from those before, initially because there is a change in what could be called "beacon authors" and in terms of cultural models. Oscar Masotta was typical of this moment.'<sup>4</sup> Masotta produces his own voice and discursive position, a form of address in which he himself becomes an 'beacon author', an authoritative voice, in the construction of a new public. His lack of specialization and his facility at producing a distinctive form of writing, the critical essay/review in which he would sum up and evaluate a theoretical problematic – an author, a body of work, an extant position

– established him as an arbiter of intellectual fashion within the restricted audience of Buenos Aires.

In the 1950s the philosophical establishment in Argentina had opened to Heideggerian and Schelerian influences which challenged a neo-Kantian domination. Irrespective of these philosophical positions, however, Argentine philosophy was notable for its academicism, a high-minded retreat from the interventionist demotic vulgarity of Peronism.<sup>5</sup> It was the field of literary analysis that revealed an avid desire to think the situation of Argentine society and politics and the ethical position of subjects caught between populism and an intransigent bourgeoisie. The journal *Contorno* was in the van of this development. Founded in 1952 by the author David Viñas and his critic brother Ismael, *Contorno*, which is the Spanish translation of Sartre's term of art 'situation', saw itself as providing a space where the dilemmas of the new intelligentsia could be thrashed out. It involved a number of figures who would later dominate their respective fields: literary critic Noé Jitrik, historian Tulio Halperín Donghi and significant figures like Marxist psychoanalyst León Rozitchner, whom I return to below, and the less well-known Ramón Alcalde, anthropologist and Marxist. In its short life (1952–57) it explored new forms of literary criticism, new forms of literary value and their relation to the dramatic political landscape of Perón and coup. Opposing the cultural populism of Perón's regime it nevertheless refused to accommodate to the elitism that it saw in *Sur* and the politics of cultural value espoused by the traditionalist defenders of the 1955 coup. Disseminating Sartrean thought, *Contorno* also privileged the Sartrean notion of commitment, the willed engagement in a political field, where the intellectuals are distanced from the agent of history, the proletariat. Sartre's *What is Literature?* is a master text for analysing the political and intellectual fields of 1950s Argentina.<sup>6</sup>

Masotta contributed to a special issue of *Contorno* on Peronism with the seminal article 'Sur or Colonialist Anti-Peronism' (1956). Masotta took the journal to task for its endorsement of the September coup and the military's assault on the trade unions. *Sur* invokes an aesthetics of the spirit that justifies the suppression of the spirit's other, the mass, the vulgar – the *demos* who were the object of the coup. *Sur* thus repeats the gesture of colonialism valorizing the 'home of the spirit' in Europe, and subordinating Argentine culture to European models. For Masotta the derogation of the masses in liberal thought reveals the political task of committed writing, the promotion of the 'culture of the proletariat' which will end the dominance of bourgeois

categories, implanted in proletarian consciousness.<sup>7</sup> Gramscian without referring to Gramsci,<sup>8</sup> Masotta develops and generalizes Sartre's idea of 'committed literature' to the creation of a new class culture. *Sur*'s form of address is a 'shout' or a 'prayer'. Both forms occlude the response of the other. The 'shout' imposes a monological voice, drowning out the subordinated subject's own voice, and forcibly seizing the other, and wounding it. The 'prayer' insinuates itself into the subject's consciousness. The other – the mass, the subaltern – is reduced to an object. The liberal intelligentsia thus remains on the side of 'conquest and [evangelical] mission' imposing a culture. The counter-position is that of the 'committed intellectual'; as Sartre would have it: 'one freedom addressing another'. The unresolved problem here is the gap between intellectual and mass, but for Masotta too the problem is that of the status of the intellectual.

One solution is to make the intellectual into a bearer of a truth that originates elsewhere, and here Masotta paradoxically repeats *Sur*'s gesture even as he attacks it. The intellectual, whilst committed to 'creating the culture' of the proletariat, finds the sources of that culture in Europe. So, making a metaphysical destiny out of a social contingency, Masotta performs this ex-centricity by adopting a mode of address from a posited European outside. He becomes the bearer of the European message and in a slew of articles he proffers the central tenets of Sartre, Blanchot or Merleau-Ponty. Separated from institutional authority and from the working class, legitimacy is found within a textual form of will to mastery. So, the essays after the assault on *Sur* have an extraordinary ambition: in the compass of some ten or twelve pages Masotta attempts not merely to précis, but to adjudicate, complex philosophical themes and disputes, as in the essays on Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Daniel Lagache, and the discussion of Sartre and Marxism which he writes in 1959 and 1960. This mastery-effect is undoubtedly *the* main intention of the texts, since the very range and condensation militate against their use value as exegesis: they are excessive, becoming unreadable, yet in their unreadability effect a certain prestige.

Knowledge is performed. But this mastery is exercised in a particular position in relation to text and audience: Masotta stands between the original and the public, disseminating a version or interpretation of a text that originates elsewhere, and depends upon the ignorance of the audience. Masotta exists outside both text and public<sup>9</sup> – he is not an original author, nor is he a simple representative of the audience that he addresses and makes possible for the text to address.

His textual position is both dominant and precarious. He must keep writing commentaries in order to be at all, since he insistently refrains from producing a more substantial *œuvre*. Given the relatively small circulation of the journals in which he was writing at this time and the novelty of the material he discusses, the question of readership arises. In a sense, Masotta is writing to produce an audience that can read him. In another sense, his very textual strategies militate against anyone reading him critically – that is, being able to assess his full range of reference. This ambiguity inherent in the model of the audience implied in his texts reinforces his position of being both outside and between: outside the Argentine cultural space, since he is always intellectually in France or Europe and between that other space and Argentina, mediating this space for an Argentine audience, whose cultural competence in part depends upon his mediation.

However, these exegetical essays do *point towards* a theory of the subject. Masotta's reflections on Merleau-Ponty yield his own version of a Sartrean ontology of freedom. Masotta writes that the I or ego is always more than the given: 'I can never explain my acts on the basis of who I am ... I do not know who I am.' I cannot explain myself through my character, nor my character through this alienated 'I'. It is always possible to realize an *epoche*, a bracketing, which would reveal the true sources of the self: consciousness, that nothingness which is a 'monstrous spontaneity', the experience of which gives us a 'vertigo of possibility'. For Masotta, this *epoche* is a form of ascesis, 'purifying', and is the basis of an (undeveloped) ethics: 'through this [*epoche*] I break with the ties that I maintain to myself and to the others ... and it is given to me to glimpse the translucent sheet of my consciousness in which the truth of my own life is reflected.'<sup>10</sup> This ethical possibility is democratic: 'it has ceased to be the privilege of the philosopher to become an act that can take place in everyday life.'<sup>11</sup> Consciousness here transcends the limitations of the given I to engage in possibilities beyond the merely determined. The self as freedom, as undetermined possibility, the monstrous spontaneity that emerges from nothingness is the cipher of an intellectual seemingly unfixed by theoretical or sociological determinations.

However, this emphasis on 'possibility' runs up against the demand for 'commitment' and led to conflict with David Viñas. In a polemical review of the latter's novel *An Everyday God*, Masotta distances himself from 'committing oneself'. Throwing oneself into the world reveals that the self encountered is not one's own, but 'tied to others'. Masotta sees this alienation of self in the other – which for Viñas could be seen as the positive mark of a new community – as a 'truncated dialectic', lacking the next moment of recuperation of the self:

the task would have to consist in recuperation, in throwing oneself into a project of disalienation, in seeking out through the misunderstanding of the world and the intertwining of selves the fissure that would mark the difference between my own self and the egos of the others.'<sup>12</sup>

The fissure of possibility precisely opens up 'everydayness', which is no longer something we must submerge ourselves in (as Masotta claims that Viñas counsels) but a movement from detotalization to totalization, a movement through the tension of particular and universal, individual and society, and the politics of the everyday



Daniel Santoro, *Captive Victory, or The Peronist Raid*, 2009.

and the politics of history. Masotta's invocation of a dialectic of disalienation then becomes both an ethical strategy, as in his notion of an ethical *epoche*, and a reflection on politics and the politics of literature.

Criticism reveals commitment but also its obverse – rejection and betrayal. The dialectic between them and the dialectic of vanguard and mass within the national is played out in the most accomplished text

of Masotta's early period, *Sex and Betrayal* (1961), his study of the Argentine novelist Roberto Arlt. Arlt was an author whose reputation had begun to be re-evaluated in part because of work by *Contorno*. Their special issue on his work, number 2, May 1954, attempted to reinstate both Arlt's subject matter – the world of the 1920s Buenos Aires lower middle classes and lumpenproletariat – and his much-criticized style (his 'bad' Spanish), seeing them as both a faithful representation of Argentine reality and a critique of that reality – a rebellion against it and a search of redemption. Masotta's move was to read Arlt through the categories of Sartre's *Saint Genet*, notably 'evil', 'bad faith' and 'betrayal'. Arlt must be read in terms of a Sartrean conception of the whole, where life, politics and art are interrelated, and this reveals that Arlt's writing is characterized by an interpenetration of the social and the metaphysical. Masotta's self-assigned task will be to investigate the origin and structure of this 'metaphysical realism'.

The result is the revelation of a self that is abject and that seeks evil as an expression of freedom. But this freedom is caught up in the machinery of power and is a relay of the generalized exploitation of everyone in society. Fundamentally, solidarity is only negative: the mutual betrayal of all by all in the service of social domination. Masotta sees this impossibility of community – the mutual repulsion of humiliated subjects – as Arlt's key discovery, disinterring the morality of society by illustrating its underside. By presenting these subjectivities in their silent self-alienation, Arlt gives us an inverted image of society as it is. But it is just this society that makes the former possible: the anti-society is the truth of society. They become as they are through society and then repeat what they are. But this is just to be what it is in essence to be in society. 'Humiliation' is what it means to belong to middle-class society.

The struggle against 'humiliation' involves the dialectic of evil. The assertion of freedom requires that the recognition of similarity with the other be consciously rejected, that he/she be betrayed. In Masotta's account of Arlt, a certain fidelity to self demands the betrayal of the other, but this fidelity through betrayal is also a betrayal of self, as Arlt's protagonist surrenders himself to the Big Other (one might say) of the system. The metaphysics of existentialism are being mobilized as social anatomy. In pursuit of evil as autonomy, Arlt's anti-hero ends up performing evil as the essence of middle-class belonging, which is precisely the betrayal of all by all. Arlt thus reveals the moral hypocrisy of bourgeois society, but also how the gesture of rejection is itself defeated. The machinery of bourgeois society

functions according to the following sinister logic: self-assertion is self-sacrifice and submission. Arlt's petty-bourgeois judge the other as lacking, and in doing so they introject this failure pointing the finger at their own guilt. I recognize the other's failure and in that image I recognize myself: the body of the other which I condemn is precisely what I am: the middle class is the lumpenproletariat. Masotta calls this a 'delirium of identification' and it leads Arlt's characters to the murder of the other as a perverse assertion of self: if my body is the other's, and that other is irredeemably corrupt, then I free myself from it and my own by its physical annihilation. Masotta concludes that Arlt's characters pass from alienation to alienation, attempting to escape the body by becoming mere consciousness: the world is split between the poverty of those become consciousness and the poverty of those who are condemned to live as bodies.

What Masotta develops here, then, is an account of the subject alienated in class society, whose very freedom functions as a necessary link in the deterministic reproduction of society. He reads Arlt as giving a fictional representation of the social in which cynicism, hypocrisy and betrayal are the crucial vectors of an autonomized totality. Literature is thus the site both of social and philosophical investigation – Arlt's fictions are veridical in some sense, and his characters reveal truths about the constitution of the subject – and of a work of commentary that reveals a critical stance towards literature and society as such. In reading Arlt, Masotta shows what authentic criticism might be and what such criticism entails politically.

Arlt is a means through which to address the situation of the middle-class intellectual and the playing out of those questions of authority, fidelity and commitment that seem definitional for Masotta. The slippage between commentator, writer and character yield the very 'delirium of identification' that Masotta finds central to the experience of the self in Arlt's fictions. It is as though an acute self-consciousness of writer as reader and committed intellectual is registered within Masotta's text as a constant pull to transform analysis into self-analysis. In fact, Masotta is astute enough to perceive this reflexivity, and one of his most revelatory essays is titled 'Roberto Arlt, Myself', written some eight years after *Sex and Betrayal*, as a foreword to a new edition of the latter text.<sup>13</sup> A retrospective judgement on his book, the essay is also an account of what the book unleashed, and becomes a narrative of Masotta's breakdown after the death of his father and his reconstruction as a jobbing intellectual preoccupied with money and position. Rather than merely treating

Arlt in the way Sartre analyses Genet in *Saint Genet*, *Sex and Betrayal* reveals the social preconditions of its own production. Writing the book reveals for him the ‘meaning of existence of the class I belonged to’, which is precisely ‘betrayal’. Like Arlt’s characters Masotta judges the world by acting out a form of projection – he signals betrayal through a form of betrayal, a betrayal of his previous self as a particular form of intellectual, the committed writer of the Sartrean kind. Coming from the same milieu as Arlt, he uses Sartrean ideas to write on Arlt, but, he says, in the tones of Merleau-Ponty. A certain alienating identification (with the Merleau-Ponty ‘who I was not’) already counterpoints the projective identification with Arlt: ‘we had emerged from the same stock’.<sup>14</sup> But the fracture of his ‘illness and death’ forces him to forget ‘Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, and ... ideas and politics of commitment and the ideas I had forged about myself’ and drives him to look for a psychoanalyst. His recovery means he has to make money, and he appears to himself more ‘a character out of Arlt’ than himself, but ‘who was I?’, a question that repeats through the essay.<sup>15</sup> What is clear is that his intellectual agenda has changed: there had been ‘a certain shipwreck of phenomenology’. Masotta had discovered new models, ‘Lévi-Strauss and Lacan’, and abandoned ‘Sartrean ... positions’. Yet the essay finishes not with an argument but with a montage of anxious preoccupations: language, image, class, paternity – all suffused with the lack of mastery that the breakdown indicates, and that the abandonment of Sartre symbolizes.

### Reading Lacan in Buenos Aires

Abandoning Sartre is the betrayal of a particular ethical ideal, and the eruption of an identificatory dilemma. Masotta’s first lecture on Lacan and its subsequent publication<sup>16</sup> are both an attempt to develop a psychology which has a place for the unconscious and a search for a new intellectual lineage. It is the beginnings of an attempt to regain a vanished mastery precisely by subtending himself to a master. The Lacan lecture was the fruit of reading a small section of Lacan’s work, and shows a hybrid character in which Sartrean concepts sit athwart a handful of Lacanian notions. It produces an interesting figure that perhaps brings out Lacan’s phenomenological antecedents, and less consonant with the French Lacan of the mid-1960s. Despite Masotta’s own claims to belong to the *avant garde*, in fact his reading of Lacan has an *arrière garde* quality, which registers Buenos Aires’ relation to ‘Europe’.

Psychoanalysis had a singular history in Argentina. A native school of social psychology under the

auspices of José Ingenieros and José Ramos Mejía had blocked the conduits that might have naturalized Freud in the pampas, and, as Hugo Vezzetti has pointed out, the figures that introduced Freud into Argentina in the 1930s were eccentric – positivist psychiatrists like Gregorio Berman, communist intellectuals like Aníbal Ponce, as well as fascist-leaning intellectuals like Pizarro Crespo. It is only in 1942 that a branch of the International Psychoanalytic Association was founded by a mix of European émigrés such as Marie Langer and Angel Gama and Argentine psychiatrists such as Enrique Pichon-Rivière and Arnoldo Raskovsky. Backing Klein in the postwar ‘Controversial discussions’, the Argentine Psychoanalytic Association (APA) organizes its work through a Kleinian optic, but remains institutionally unanchored. Peronist and post-Peronist legislation restricted psychoanalytic practice to the medical sphere, curtailing its practice, but also emphasizing its local connections with medicine. The APA becomes a region of medicine. Some APA members take up an anti-Peronist politics, pathologizing populism (witness Langer’s pinioning of popular fantasies about Eva Perón to a Kleinian politics of envy and revenge), whilst others shift to the left whilst emphasizing a group perspective in analytic practice – like Pichon Rivière. On the whole, then, in the period of Masotta’s engagements with psychoanalysis, the discipline is a recent import into Argentina and one with a conservative bent, but it too was struggling to legitimize itself and during the 1960s its meagre institutional implantation is threatened by professional developments within the university (the rise of psychology) and by the claims for lay analysis that Masotta was advancing.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, ‘Jacques Lacan or the Unconscious and the Foundations of Philosophy’ is written in a particular context in 1959. It sees Lacan within a philosophical tradition that stems from but supersedes Sartre, and in stressing the philosophical moment precisely bids against a medical version of Freud. But it is not Lacanian, and Lacan is only ‘the head of the most interesting sector of contemporary French psychoanalysis’.<sup>18</sup> For Masotta Lacan’s central idea is the radical opacity of the subject; yet the lecture/article merely introduces a small number of Lacanian notions, notably the ‘Other’, ‘signifier’, ‘bar’, ‘Phallus’ and the Lacanian inflections of Freudian notions such as the Oedipus complex and the unconscious, and Hegelian notions such as ‘desire’. In fact the Lacanian sources that Masotta quotes are quite meagre: two essays that would later be collected in *Écrits*, ‘Le stade du miroir’ (1949) and ‘L’aggressivité en psychoanalyse’

(1948), a shorthand resumé of Lacan's Seminar on 'The Formations of the Unconscious' taken by Pontalis (given in 1957), and 'L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient, ou La raison depuis Freud' (1957), all published in French in professional journals, obtained through Pichon-Rivière. Masotta claims to take on a 'work of decoding', but his decipherment is a repetition of the moment of exegesis he mastered in his 'phenomenological period'. A logic of condensation is at work in a section in which Masotta Lacanizes Freud by conflating the lexicons of the two thinkers.<sup>19</sup> Through a discussion of Freud's second topography and the death drive, Masotta links Lacan, Hegel and the repetition compulsion with Sartre's notion of a 'temporalizing' moment of childhood sexuality, connecting it to an unreferenced comment of Merleau-Ponty on Freud about 'spiritual automata', and then to Lacan's notion of the 'insistence of the signifying chain'. Theoretical differences are erased in a relentless expository drive. Airy claim replaces argument: there is a relation between 'structuralism, Marxism and psychoanalysis'. Becoming the Sartre of *Critique of Dialectical Reason* Masotta looks for a 'modality of totalizing intuition' relating phenomenology to structural coding. Masotta claims that 'phenomenology, structuralism and Marxism converge in Lacan', although this figure looks more like Sartre than the oracular prophet of Seminar X. Chiding Lacan for his failure to pursue his analysis of aggressivity into a discussion of class struggle (unlike Sartre) Masotta finishes the essay with a theoretical conflation of Sartre and Lacan, where the latter's famous mirror phase now is read as an instance of the Sartrean project, the project forward to self-unity and the projection towards the other – a reading at odds with Lacan's own discussion of misrecognition, but very much in keeping with the concepts that emerge from the reading of Arlt.

Masotta thus approaches Lacan, but reads him through Sartre. Yet this prismatic isomorphy reveals a similarity between Sartre and Lacan, which is lost in the later contentions between 'existentialism' and psychoanalysis and has until recently been largely written out of subsequent genealogies of Lacanian thought. Centrally, the notion of an unconscious which should mark a radical difference between Sartre and Freud–Lacan is underdeveloped in Masotta's account. But this also points to the problematic question of the unconscious in Lacan. Masotta on the margins sees a connection that the centre occludes and reveals the hidden dialogue that exists between Lacan and Sartre,<sup>20</sup> but in his rush to embrace Lacan he cannot explicitly acknowledge it. It is the denial of this dialogue and

hence the final abandonment of his early work (and allegiances) that leads to a firmer position as Lacanian exegete, as we shall see in Masotta's account of Lacan's seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'. But the disavowal of this creative hybridization also devalues the position of the peripheral reader inasmuch as it places him/her in a position of repetition of the centre, even as such iteration opens up to unwilling novelty.

Masotta's work until the mid-1960s reveals two axes. First, there is the close reading of texts – foreign and Argentine – which generates a conceptual language that might give an account of the specificities of an Argentine reality. Second, this process of reading produces an existential and professional identity that was always threatened with dissolution because of its conjunctural illegitimacy (a predicament common to the intellectuals of contemporary Argentina) and was consonant with the general lack of models that Aricó notes in a 'generation without teachers'.<sup>21</sup> Such questions of identity underpin much of Lacan's work..

Lacan's early essay 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I' (1949) is one of the best-known and most commonly referenced of all Lacan's works in the anglophone world. The version we have dates from 1949, and shows all the marks of Lacan's Hegelian borrowings from Kojève's 1930s' seminar on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and their grafting onto Freud's account of narcissism, developed in his 1914 essay 'On Narcissism: An Introduction'.<sup>22</sup> Narcissism is the investment of libido in the ego as opposed to anaclitic attachment where libido is invested in objects. For Lacan this moment of libidinal investment becomes that of identification with the specular image of the mirror stage: the subject 'assumes' the image, recognizing himself in it and appropriating the image as his own. But Lacan stresses that this is a misidentification, a misrecognition since the unity of the subject is false, but it is foundational for the idea of totality.<sup>23</sup>

In an article published in the previous year, 'Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis' (1948), Lacan had linked narcissism with aggressivity, since the erotic attachment of the subject to the image is accompanied by the fear of dissolution and fragmentation, which are produced as the after-effect of illusory wholeness. This aggressivity was exacerbated by the recognition of the other as a *semblant*, another self, contending for the same objects in the world. Narcissism or imaginary identification, then, is intimately tied up with rivalry. The mirror stage is the site of what Freud had called 'primary identification' and gives rise to the ideal ego. For Freud this desired image was the positive pole of identification in the resolution of the Oedipal

crisis. For Lacan, however, this image is necessarily illusory, presenting a false unity, and constituting an irredeemable alienation.

But Lacan also develops a notion of symbolic identification, elaborated through a reading of Freud's 'The Ego and the Id' and 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego', where the notion of narcissism is worked and reworked.<sup>24</sup> Symbolic identification is initially identification with the father but slowly modulates into an identification with a signifier. Even so, as Evans points out, symbolic identification is still based in the imaginary, modelled on primary identification. It is only symbolic in that it completes the subject's passage into the symbolic.<sup>25</sup> What is crucial is that symbolic identification transcends the aggressivity inherent in primary identification.

Lacan thus moves from a Hegelian-influenced account of imaginary identification as alienated misrecognition to an idea of symbolic identification in which the subject now identifies as a signifier within the symbolic order. This changed view of identification corresponds to the incorporation of structuralist theories of language which Lacan made during the 1950s. But as if in accordance with Freud's own account of the ego, which becomes an accumulation of 'abandoned identifications',<sup>26</sup> Lacan's theory preserves his former position as a structurally subordinate moment of a new configuration. Phenomenology is maintained within a new theory as a moment of the production of error. Lacan's own theory registers the philosophical incorporations that have been made in order to arrive at his distinctive account of the subject. The account that Lacan then develops of the symbolic register and the logic of the signifier also is a move to step outside the play of the imaginary and the irresolvable specular game of transferential identifications. It is the assertion of the place of a certain theory against the conflictual coordinates of previous psychoanalysis buttressed by a theory of the Name-of-the-Father, which becomes a stand-in for Lacan's own authority.

In his engagement with Lacan's texts Masotta unconsciously recapitulates their philosophical trajectory, even as his development seems to illustrate Lacan's own theory. In his 1976 introduction to his *Lacanian Essays*, Masotta says that his first essay on Lacan was not merely an introduction to Lacanian ideas but was also an occasion in which 'we wanted to free ourselves from the influence that had been exercised on us by French phenomenology'.<sup>27</sup> This is a *post facto* redescription. In fact, there was a hybridizing of phenomenological ideas with those of Lacan's, an enterprise not that alien to Lacan's own construction

of theory through incorporation. But whereas Lacan assembles ideas, Masotta seems driven to accept or reject *images* of systems seen as complete wholes, and perceives himself to be doing this even when he is not. So Sartre seems to be abandoned, even when he is preserved. Masotta performs himself in yielding to the dominance of the signifier, but in fact he seems to be acting out various imaginary identifications. And what's more he remains attached to the *image* as a site of truth, inasmuch as it accounts for violence, the theme that will return in the writings of the 1970s. This disjuncture between signifier and image, between theory and narcissism, haunts all of Masotta's Lacanian work, and is the site of multiple problematics. In the same 'Introduction' Masotta explicitly links class struggle and aggressivity, but can offer no articulation through Lacan's work. Some structure of disavowal is at work here,<sup>28</sup> since he returns to the theme after noting the 'irruption of fascism in South America' with the Chilean coup of 1973: 'what is the relation of the narcissism that theory speaks about with the function of narcissism in history.'<sup>29</sup> Identity, aggressivity, history: this disjunctive articulation plays out through the lectures on Lacan's 'Seminar on the Purloined Letter' and returns in Masotta's last lectures in Spain.

### Lacan purloined

Masotta gave a series of six lectures on Lacan's 'Seminar on the Purloined Letter' in July and August 1969 in the Instituto Torcuato di Tella.<sup>30</sup> The text is significant for a number of distinct reasons. It is his longest continuous work, some 150 pages, and in comparison to his other essays has a much more focused character.<sup>31</sup> Dedicated to an exposition of Lacan's seminar, it has a clear teaching purpose, and its rhetorical strategy seemingly aims at clarification rather than seduction through display. It is the transcript of a series of lectures rather than an essay as such. This is not unusual in itself: many of Masotta's works have their origin as papers written for presentation. But it marks an intensification of this stylistic development. Increasingly, Masotta's Lacanian contributions were to be marked by their oral origin and traces of voice.

This is clearly mimetic of Lacan's own seminar structure. Lacan's difficulty in writing<sup>32</sup> is well known, as is his reliance on transcripts, and many claims have been made about his style and his preference for oral presentation.<sup>33</sup> The spontaneous character of the production certainly suggests a certain free association, but also mimics a certain oracular quality, which may be an attempt precisely to defer meaning, to escape a

certain fixity<sup>34</sup> but certainly pushes them to aphoristic condensations, which require extensive gloss. The role of exegete then becomes crucial.

Masotta thus mimics but can only do so up to a point. For Lacan orality yields originality: signifying slippage is a means to creative speculation. For Masotta, however, the point is to transmit not to innovate. 'How to begin to talk about Lacan without *betraying* someone whose door is not easy to open and whose practice – the practice of his reading – constitutes the only means of access.' This opening of the first lecture in the series *Psychoanalysis and Structuralism* underscores 'betrayal' as the object of anxiety.<sup>35</sup> The 'Seminar on the Purloined Letter', from 1956, forms the introduction to the 1966 edition of *Écrits*.<sup>36</sup> It has the 'privilege' of opening the *Écrits*, Lacan says. For Derrida this privileged position binds the subsequent material together, but also fixes it, constrains it.<sup>37</sup> But Derrida suggests that in this 'binding', a fixing to the proper, theory reveals an untenable theory of truth.<sup>38</sup> Masotta thus chooses a text which is already privileged, and privileged in its thematization of the question of truth. The text also marks the transition from a literary truth to a psychoanalytic truth, or better the extraction of a psychoanalytic truth from a literary text, or, even better, the reduction of a literary text to its psychoanalytic structure. In one sense, then, Masotta's lectures are a reworking of his essay on Roberto Arlt's fictions, which elucidated their structure in terms of an existential psychoanalysis, but at one remove: it is a reading of a reading of a literary text.<sup>39</sup>

Masotta, then, gives an exposition of a text which is about the possibility of exposition, and his exposition is about the possibility of transmitting an account of Lacan's work which will not traduce that work. In Derrida's terms, Masotta is haunted by the possibility that such a 'proper' exposition is impossible, and that, therefore, his own role as exegete is sabotaged. Derrida argues that Lacan's text is inevitably tied to the slippage of the signifier in writing – dissemination. Masotta's reading is threatened by a doubled dissemination, and seeks in Lacan's own text the theory of truth that would stall such a slippage. The point of Derrida's critique is that Lacan's own theory is undermined by dissemination and that only an unwarranted privilege of the phallus can give the illusion of security. Masotta, in thrall to the Lacanian theory of truth as exposition – here used as a support for an exposition – is thus menaced by betrayal, by an inevitable disloyalty, structured by the very moment of language as such. The guarantee of security withdrawn, writing reverts to the contention of rivalrous claims, exactly the strange

logic of the lectures, which refer back to Lacan's own account of rivalry and identification. Thus the problematic that haunts the attempt at a non-disseminating dissemination of Lacan in Argentina is contained in the very text that Masotta undertakes to expound.<sup>40</sup> Philosophical impossibility threatens not merely exegesis but the social role of exegete: it is the return of social precariousness but now metaphysically constituted.

Lacan's seminar argues that Poe's story about the theft and recovery of a letter is illustrative: it reveals



Daniel Santoro. *Comparative Anatomy with a Lombrosian Analysis of Peronists and Anti-Peronists*, 2006.

the truth, which inheres within the text, and takes the form of a repeating structure, which the letter traverses. A compromising letter, addressed to the Queen, is stolen by the Minister whilst she gazes on helplessly. The Minister hides the letter and the Police are unable to find it. Arsène Dupin, Poe's detective, finds and replaces it. Lacan constructs these two moments in terms of a repeating triangle. For Lacan, the narrative reveals the workings of a general schema of transmission of the signifier, which passes through and transforms its bearers: 'the subject[s] must pass through the channels of the symbolic, but ... *model their very being* on the moment of the signifying chain that traverses them.'<sup>41</sup> An account of truth is concealed within the text, which is mimed by Dupin (and of course the Minister), who can see where (and what) the letter is. The letter, for Derrida, becomes the signified



of the text itself, the meaning of Poe's fiction. Dupin 'returns the letter to its proper course'<sup>42</sup> and knows 'his address, knows the law'.<sup>43</sup> There is a truth here: 'there is a proper itinerary ... that [the letter] returns to a determinable place that is always the same and that is *its own*'.<sup>44</sup> If the meaning of the letter is unknown, nevertheless 'the meaning of the letter and the sense of its itinerary are necessary, unique and determinable in truth, that is as truth'. The letter has its proper place, the place of castration. The unveiling of the veiling of Being, of truth as castration, brings the 'phallus, the signifier, the letter' back to 'their proper place'.<sup>45</sup> The phallus always remains in its place, guaranteeing the truth of discourse and 'Lacan is indeed proposing ... a discourse on the truth of the purloined letter as the truth of "The Purloined Letter"'.<sup>46</sup>

Dupin ambiguously operates as the analyst who sees the truth and the subject who is occupied by the truth, the letter. Masotta, of course, is also caught in this double bind. He identifies with Lacan identifying with Dupin, in that he sees and can articulate the truth of 'The Purloined Letter' and the Seminar on it. But he also bears the signifier, indeed has struggled to appropriate this signifier (the truth of psychoanalysis) from its rival claimants, and thereby acknowledges his own lack – of mastery. This lack parallels what the writing of doctrine constantly implies, that 'At the very moment one believes that by drawing triangles and circles, and by wielding the opposition imaginary/symbolic, one grasps "The Purloined Letter", at the very moment one reconstitutes the truth, the proper adequation, "The Purloined Letter" escapes'.<sup>47</sup>

Masotta's own reading of Lacan is thus caught in a strategy to maintain control even as his mastery is threatened by dissemination or by slippage into rivalry. We should recall the contested field that is *porteño* psychoanalysis and Lacan's heterodox status within it. Masotta had both to establish the authority of Lacan and to negate those who would judge Lacan as a deviation. So he began with a negation: Lacan does not read as a literary critic (and here we can see a gesture of dismissal of Masotta's own past and the tradition of *Contorno*), nor as a traditional psychoanalyst, here figured as Marie Bonaparte. Marie Bonaparte was the first to read Poe psychoanalytically<sup>48</sup> and Derrida will argue that her reading of the Poe story comes close to Lacan's with truth as castration, the castration of the mother and the phallus as the signifier of castration.<sup>49</sup> Bonaparte's name is effaced by Lacan but mentioned by Masotta only to be negated: she reads the same story but cannot see the truth. What is more, Bonaparte was instrumental in excluding Lacan from the Société

Psychoanalytique de Paris in 1953, a couple of years before Lacan gave the 'Seminar on the Purloined Letter'. The gesture of a theoretical rejection, made in the context of an institutional struggle, is repeated in Masotta's introduction to his own lectures and acts as further distancing of the Lacanian innovation from the Argentine Psychoanalytic Association, affiliated to the International Psychoanalytic Association, which is the body that excommunicated Lacan. This is the first mark of the curious game of doubles that haunts Masotta's text just as it haunts Lacan's.

Lacan's own seminar begins with a subordination of the imaginary to the symbolic and, as we saw above, Lacan's imaginary is based in misrecognition and aggressivity: my *semblant* is also my rival, and the object of aggression. As Masotta enacts an identification with Lacan, he must dismiss Lacan's own rivals. This rivalry will continue. The contention around legitimacy and truth can be seen to inform the doubled theft of the letter: the Minister, whose initial is D (though Lacan does not mention it), and Dupin both perceive and acquire the letter. Structurally homologous, they are rivals for possession of the signifier, rivals for possession of the truth. The figuring of the struggle between heterodox and orthodox is clear. But this rivalry is terminated by abandoning the imaginary for the symbolic and the establishment of the rule of the signifier and the law. Nevertheless the theme of identification and rivalry insists: at several points Masotta alludes to identification, and then retreats, saying that Lacan does not deal with the matter. But then Masotta must develop his account of the symbolic precisely by a detour through Lacan's two early essays on the mirror stage and by a long exposition of the Crebillon text that Dupin substitutes for the Queen's letter. This subordination of the imaginary to the symbolic is precisely achieved by the deployment of the truth of the phallus. The symbolic allows the substance of the theory to be perceived, and it is just this that the exposition requires for its own work to continue. Lacan's own account of the symbolic, then, and its perception as the fabula of Poe's tale, becomes the core of the truth that Masotta will transmit within his exposition of Lacan's exposition.

And here again is the anxiety of 'betrayal', a lack of fidelity. For Masotta recognizes that the signifier always betrays, 'becomes the vehicle for error, just where it sets itself up as an exhibition of the truth'. But nevertheless 'there *assuredly* exists [my stress] in the *Écrits* a model of all the intellectual labour required to give an account of the origin and articulation of the concepts generated by theory'.

Masotta's choice of text seems unconsciously over-determined precisely by his position as exegete: he requires a position that will allow him to interpret Lacan authoritatively for his audience. Lacan's own account of language – including necessarily the language of psychoanalysis – contains the possibility of slippage of meaning. Masotta therefore chooses that text which sets up a model for interpretation, which avoids just such an eventuality. But his textual practice is just such that he is haunted by the possibility of dissemination. The letter is that which keeps not only rivalry at bay, but also dissolution. We might say, then, that the cleaving to the symbolic enacted throughout Masotta's reading of Lacan's Seminar is an apotropaic gesture in the face of the implied struggle over the letter and the threat of fragmentation – and nullity – that is called up by the return to the imaginary. Interestingly, in one of the few extra-textual identifications Masotta identifies Dupin with a Kleinian analyst – the rival. The symbolic registers here the site of an ontological security, which Masotta occupies through his exposition of Lacan, and the prospective space of an institutional grounding.

Yet the paradox is that on the model developed within the Seminar, Masotta, as intermediary, is occupied by the letter, the signifier – Lacanian theory – yet can do no more than bear it, utterly incapable of manipulating it, since the signifier speaks the subject. And the dissemination which threatens any interpretation can only be vitiated by repeating the message to the letter – 'the laborious work of reading' or citation. The threat of the purloining of the text requires that the text be merely repeated, which gives rise to the threaded texts of the Lacanian schools, woven with quotations from Lacan's work and rarely engaged in a work of practical development.<sup>50</sup>

### Escaping the present

In 1974 Masotta felt so threatened by the deterioration in the political climate in Buenos Aires after Perón's death that he decided to leave Argentina – as it turned out, for good. Symptomatically, he did not go to live in Paris – as other Lacanians would, notably Juan David Nasío and Roberto Harari.<sup>51</sup> Rather he went to Spain, just then emerging from Franco's dictatorship and beginning to develop a psychoanalytic culture of its own. He reconstructed the same position in relation to the new field as he had to the old: that is, one of exegete–didact, who, standing outside the material and the audience, inducts the public into an understanding of Freud–Lacan, through his own exposition, re-establishing the tradition interrupted by the coup,

neatly expressed in the title of the posthumous collection *Readings of Psychoanalysis: Freud, Lacan*. He introduces Freud in 'simple words', avoiding technical terms, yet managing the 'difficult, no ... impossible' task of not banalizing the ideas.<sup>52</sup> The structure of didact–audience is replicated, and Masotta's authority re-established. His 'secondary labour', as Correias calls it, must go on elsewhere, universalizing a particular message.<sup>53</sup> But this labour requires a distance from both origin and audience: a moment of translation, and a moment of dependency, of borrowed authority. Had Masotta moved to France, he would have had to deal directly with the *École Freudienne*; rather than translating those ideas he would have had to translate himself into French and stand in direct relation of subordination to Lacan (or to his heirs). The letter would arrive at its destination, but could go no further.

Now, if exile is about loss and the melancholy of loss, since the lost object cannot be given up, the reconstruction of the same scene is an attempt at the hallucinatory disavowal of loss. Avoiding an explicit engagement with the reality of the dictatorship and with history, Masotta's repetitions of the structure of dependent authority in Argentina signal a true flight into denial.<sup>54</sup> The structure of the psychoanalytic didactic enterprise becomes a means to escape the present, since the interminable labour of exegesis stands in the place of explanation. Yet even here exegesis is symptomatic. In the *Readings* Masotta introduced a variable but defining list of Lacanian notions. Yet, insistently, he returns to the theme of narcissism, and the question of the double registers his insistent trope of rivalry, competition and legitimacy. This instance has a peculiarly personal staging. Masotta imagines being introduced to someone who 'knows Freud and Lacan' and comments that this would be 'terrible ... more than terrible'. Why? Because what relation would exist between 'someone called Masotta, teaching Freud and Lacan in Barcelona, and me? A scarifying relation.'<sup>55</sup> What would be terrible would be to meet someone who would be Masotta defined by knowing and being able to teach Freud and Lacan. Masotta is only himself in this function, but anyone else who has that function would be equivalent to him. The subsequent discussion of the double in literature (Poe, Dostoevsky, Dumas) pivots around the idea that the only thing to do with the double is 'kill him'.<sup>56</sup> In part this is the Lacanian theme of aggressivity and the threat of the other to unicity or individuality: interestingly Masotta replies to a question, half in jest, that 'There is only one Lacan...'<sup>57</sup>

As the discussion continues, Masotta returns to the staged encounter of narcissism and aggressivity of 'The

Purloined Letter' but explicitly ties it to the death drive. Aggressivity in the struggle over the image is now founded in the modulation of the death drive where aggression is directed at the other or at the self. Here a theory of violence is gestured at and then covered over. A complex linkage that might be forged between identity and its vicissitudes in doubling, and the death drive and its expression in the repetition compulsion, with both moments articulated around the question of violence, is lost.<sup>58</sup> However, in *The Drive Model*, delivered as a lecture in Galicia, Masotta discusses melancholy and the death drive, again reconstructing Freud's temporal development: for Masotta what is definitional of melancholy is that 'the melancholic cannot endure the other's character as other'.<sup>59</sup> Melancholy is linked to the presence of a hidden 'corpse', which haunts the self, and which stands in punishment, since this corpse has access to the powers of the death drive, as the superego does. The melancholic suffers from a sadistic insistence of the lost object which it cannot allow as other, but which asserts itself aggressively in being made the same. It is as though Masotta is condensing his situation as melancholic exile and the repetition of his existential position with regard to psychoanalysis with a demand for a theory that will account for the violence that shapes him, his exile and the political field he has abandoned. And this condensation strains the exegetical account, refocusing it on Lacan's contribution to the understanding of aggression is the 1949 text which in the orthodox canon is definitively superseded in Seminar II. Repetition and insistence are the phenomena that Lacan discusses here with regard to the 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', not the aggressivity of narcissism.<sup>60</sup> This rather is Masotta's repetition and reworking. The 'hidden corpse' is the Sartrean moment of violence and aggression worked through in the perpetual civil war that is society, but also the mourned moment of another place. *The Drive Model*, having reconstituted the machine of identifications, now yokes it to the machinery of repetition: what is in play in Freud's text, he says, is a drive to explain 'suffering, pain, self-punishment and sadism directed at the self, the persistence of failure, the refusal of success, the melancholy evocation of the disasters of the past ... in short the insistence of repetition'.<sup>61</sup> Here perhaps we have the *image* that emerges from one of Masotta's final readings: an evocation of the complex figure of the exiled 'beacon-author' in a text that returns to an origin that has always been a repetition.

Masotta's work marks the persistence of the theme of identity and legitimacy, which first found expression in the Sartrean notions that he expounded and used to

read the literature of Argentina, but which also gave body to his own position as an intellectual. Even as a Lacanian, he never fully inhabits Lacanian discourse, although he performs a set of identifications with and through Lacan. His attachment to Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, his stress on the notions of narcissism and the double, his inchoate but insistent theorizing of the *imaginary*, militate against his theoretical commitments as exegete and transmitter of Lacan, since his symbolic identity always threatens to regress to a specular one, even as his theoretical preferences pull Lacan back to a pre-linguistic, pre-Oedipal space. His glossing of the mirror stage through the concept of aggressivity, however, suggests that it is the question of violence that is signalled by the concern with narcissism, the question of social violence and its internal psychological correlates that he discerns in the fictions of Roberto Arlt. This violence over contested objects, over the nature of the social, found discursive expression in the writings of Sartre and it is their presence that returns in the late Masotta. He is unable to think beyond the Lacanian psychoanalysis to which he had committed his symbolic identity, but he nevertheless inflects his readings of Freud to maintain a subterranean link to the Sartre of contestation and struggle.

### Post-mortem memorial

Post-mortem (he died in exile in 1979) Masotta became a memorial and monument. From the precarious nomadism that characterized his life and thought, in death he became a foundation stone of Argentine Lacanianism, constantly invoked but rarely read. After the 1976 coup, many Lacanians went into exile, but many stayed, and at least one account argues that it was precisely the void left by the exile, disappearance and dismissal of more publicly committed analysts that allowed Lacanianism its access to institutional success.<sup>62</sup> What was more pertinent was the fact that Lacan's works found a more extensive distribution in the Argentina of the dictatorship and after, the very hermeticism and political scepticism of the later Lacan being an asset. The Lacanian bureaucracy also established a solid presence in Buenos Aires and Rosario. Argentine Lacanianism is an orthodoxy and its training procedures and educational methods have institutional weight and power. Lacanianism has become normalized as a moment of university and medical practice and as a therapeutic adjunct to middle-class life. Masotta, with his complex interaction with phenomenology, literature and psychoanalysis is reduced to a false unity, a gesture he himself anticipated in his specular identification with Lacan.

This mimicry is one solution to the problem of the relation of a self-constituted intellectual periphery to its supposed centre, a relation that marks a constant trope of Argentine culture through the twentieth century, and is manifest in *Sur*. We might consider this to be a form of colonialism at the level of theory, where the model of the intellectual, the conceptual apparatus and the problematic of theory are all produced elsewhere and transferred to the new terrain *as if the gap between origin and margin* did not exist. Masotta registered this problem in his critique of *Sur*, and his early work is partly an attempt to use Sartrean categories creatively. However, the transmission of Lacan was restricted to exegesis: producing an authoritative (and subsequently authorized) discourse, but never engaging with Argentine reality. The return of the repressed (Sartre), however, marks a stubborn refusal at the level of the unconscious to remain within the colonial role. Later Lacanianism, especially as deployed by Germán García (who has done most to canonize Masotta), is an extraordinarily powerful discursive apparatus, which like some enormous gravitational mass deforms the field of Argentine letters and philosophy. Lacan is a necessary point of reference and his ideas form cliché philosophemes reeled out on any and every occasion.<sup>63</sup> What it fails to do is think psychoanalysis in its articulation with philosophy and politics, since it always already privileges Lacanianism as some fundamental truth.

## Notes

1. Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, *The Buenos Aires Quintet*, trans. Nick Caistor, Serpents Tail, London, 2003.
2. Juan Andrade, *Oscar Masotta – una leyenda en el cruce de los saberes*, Capital Intelectual, Buenos Aires, 2009.
3. See John King, *Sur: A Study of the Argentine Literary Journal and its Role in the Development of a Culture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988.
4. Beatriz Sarlo, interview in J. King, *El di Tella y el desarrollo cultural argentino en la década del sesenta*, trans. Carlos Gardini, Ediciones de Arte Gagliamini, Buenos Aires, 1985, p. 303.
5. Gabriel D'Iorio, Preface to *Tierra y figura y otros escritos*, La Cuarentena, Buenos Aires, 2007.
6. See William Kutra, *Contorno: Literary Engagement in Post-Peronist Argentina*, Associated University Presses, London, 1988.
7. Oscar Masotta, 'Sur o el anti-peronismo colonialista' (1956), in Oscar Masotta, *Conciencia y estructura*, Jorge Álvarez, Buenos Aires, 1968, p. 112.
8. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1971, pp. 12–14.
9. 'They are going to call us translators', he says to Rosa Rodrigues, in Rodrigues de Andrade, *Puzzle Masotta: lo Imaginario*, Homo Sapiens, Rosario, 1997, p. 137.
10. Masotta, *Conciencia y estructura*, pp. 38–9.
11. Ibid., p. 39.
12. Ibid., p. 135.
13. In *Conciencia y estructura*, pp. 177–92.
14. Ibid., p. 181.
15. Ibid., p. 186.
16. 'Jacques Lacan y el inconciente en los fundamentos de la filosofía', was given as a lecture and then published in a revised form in *Pasado y Presente*.
17. See Mario Plotkin, *Freud in the Pampas*, Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 2001; my review, 'Objects of Analysis', *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2003; and also Hugo Vezzetti, *Las aventuras de Freud en el país de los argentinos: de José Ingenieros a Enrique Pichon Rivière*, Paidós, Buenos Aires, 1996.
18. 'Jacques Lacan o el inconsciente en los fundamentos de la filosofía' (1965), in Oscar Masotta, *Ensayos lacanianos* (1976), Anagrama, Buenos Aires, 1979.
19. He says where 'the Id finds its psychic representative, the Phallus is already there', bringing together in a highly condensed and questionable fashion Freud's Id and Lacan's signifier of difference; *ibid.*, p. 36.
20. Roudinesco comments that 'Lacan ... was a great reader of Sartre ... his own theory of the subject and his doctrine on freedom had been constructed in opposition to Sartre's arguments.' Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, trans. Barbar Bray, Columbia University Press, New York, 1997, p. 333. See also David Macey, *Lacan in Contexts*, Verso, London, 1988.
21. Aricó continues, 'no matter how bright the intellectual beacons that were taken as illuminating other realities were (Sartre, Gramsci, Marx...), at the local level this generation almost completely lacked models'. José Aricó, quoted in Oscar Terán, *Nuestros años sesenta*, Puntosur, Buenos Aires, 1980, p. 152.
22. Sigmund Freud, *Standard Edition*, vol. XIV, Hogarth Press, London, 1919, pp. 69ff.
23. Lacan (1949), in Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan Smith, Tavistock, London, 1977, p. 2; Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, Routledge, London, 1996, p. 81.
24. As discussed by Borch Jacobsen, *The Freudian Subject*, trans. Catherine Porter, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1986, sections 2 and 3.
25. Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, p. 81.
26. Freud, *Standard Edition*, vol. XIX, 1963.
27. Masotta, *Ensayos lacanianos*, p. 11.
28. Ibid., p. 12.
29. Ibid., p. 17.
30. This was a crucial site of intellectual activity in downtown Buenos Aires during the Onganía dictatorship (1966–70), when much university activity had been repressed. A multi-functional space – gallery, theatre, cinema, lecture hall – it serviced a new nomadic intelligentsia. See King, *Sur*.
31. It is thus as weighty in his œuvre as *Sex and Betrayal*, but lacks the halting character of that text.
32. See Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, ch. 25, where she discusses the difficulties that François Wahl, Lacan's editor, had with getting him to write; and Marcelle Marini, *Jacques Lacan: The French Context*, trans. Anne Tomiche, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1992, especially pp. 22–3.
33. See Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, Granta, London,

- 2006, p. 128. There is an interesting self-allegorical element here too: Derrida, the great writer with his meta-physical commitment to the un-working of writing, and Lacan, the charismatic *seminariste*, with his fear of the written, precisely as un-working.
34. Jacques Derrida, 'Le Facteur de la Verité', translated as 'The Purveyor of Truth' by Alan Bass, in John P. Muller and William J. Richardson, eds, *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida and Psychoanalytic Reading*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore MD, 1988.
  35. 'Psicoanálisis y estructuralismo' is the printed transcript of the lectures given at the Instituto di Tella, and forms part of Oscar Masotta, *Introducción a la lectura de Jacques Lacan* (1970), Corregidor, Buenos Aires, 1999, pp. 15–150; p. 15.
  36. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, Seuil, Paris, 1966.
  37. 'For the Love of Lacan', in Jacques Derrida, *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 1998, p. 49.
  38. Derrida, 'The Purveyor of Truth'.
  39. There may be another fact that determined the choice of the text, inasmuch as Borges had translated the Poe story 'The Purloined Letter' some years before, and had made significant alterations to the plot in his version (including the change of gender of one of the characters, which has interesting resonances with the issue of 'feminization' by the message), so that the question of translation and fidelity already surrounds the Poe text in its Argentine context. See Efrain Kristal, *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation*, Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville, 2005, pp. 61–7.
  40. The title of the volume in which the collected lectures was published, *Introducción a la lectura de Jacques Lacan*, carries another echo, that of Alexandre Kojève's lectures on Hegel in Paris in the 1930s: Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1948.
  41. Ibid., p. 43; my emphasis.
  42. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in Freud's Technique in Psychoanalysis, 1954–55*, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988.
  43. Derrida, 'The Purveyor of Truth', p. 186.
  44. Ibid.
  45. Ibid., p. 184.
  46. Ibid., p. 185.
  47. Ibid., p. 186.
  48. See Marie Bonaparte, *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, trans. John Rodker, Humanities Press, New York, 1971.
  49. Derrida, 'The Purveyor of Truth', p. 188.
  50. One has to be careful here: the period we are dealing with is the 1960s where only Lacan is privileged to innovate. Later, after the Master's death, other figures will claim a theoretical originality within the Lacanian school, notably Lacan's appointed heir, Jacques-Alain Miller.
  51. Nasó's work would be to fill out some of the lacunae in Lacan's work, and Harari would go on to be one of the more creative interpreters of Lacan's work, splitting his time between Paris and Rosario, Argentina. His recent work on Lacan shows an original development of the theory of the *sinthome*, which stands in tension with the orthodoxies of Argentina and France.
  52. Oscar Masotta, *Lecciones de introducción al psicoanálisis* (1977), Gedisa, Barcelona, 1996, p. 16.
  53. Carlos Correás, *Operación Masotta*, Interzona, Buenos Aires, 2007, p. 145.
  54. One can note that history *does* explicitly mark Masotta's texts but glancingly in the 'Report on the Buenos Aires School' there is a mention of 'bloody blows' (Masotta, *Ensayos lacanianos*, p. 239) and in an earlier text on 'Sigmund Freud and the Foundation of Psychoanalysis' (1973) there is a more poetic allusion 'the ink of our text is stained with the blood of a dead president' (*Ensayos lacanianos*, p. 194).
  55. Oscar Masotta, *Lecturas de psicoanálisis, Freud, Lacan*, Paidós, Buenos Aires, 1991, p. 165.
  56. Ibid., p. 166.
  57. Ibid., p. 198. But in Spanish this has the interesting echo of a sentimental commonplace 'there is only one mother', or 'you only have one mother'.
  58. This fusion of death drive and Lacanian aggressivity suppresses Lacan's reworking of the death drive as a function of the symbolic, and later as an aspect of all drives: it quite capriciously goes back to a pre-Lacanian Freud to emphasize a Lacanian motif.
  59. Oscar Masotta, *El modelo pulsional*, Catálogos, Buenos Aires, 1990, p. 70.
  60. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II*.
  61. Masotta, *El modelo pulsional*, p. 106.
  62. Plotkin, *Freud in the Pampas*; and Sergio Visakovsky, *El Lanús: memoria y política en la construcción de una tradición psiquiátrica*, Alianza, Buenos Aires, p. 202.
  63. Plotkin offers numerous examples in his edited collection *Argentina on the Couch*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 2003.

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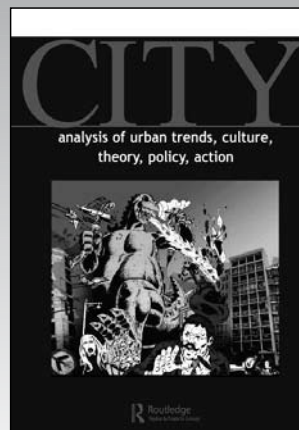
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