“What is 'Pataphysics?’ asks the cover of the Evergreen Review in 1960. Alfred Jarry defines 'pataphysics this way: “[’]Pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments.”

The prefix pata, a symbiosis of meta and para, achieves a lettric instance of liminality that “extend(s) as far beyond metaphysics as the latter extends beyond physics.” Jarry emphasizes that the neologism 'pataphysique should be written with an apostrophe at its beginning to avoid punning on the word — puns such as patte à physique, which means “the flair of physics.” Christian Bök details several other potential puns, such as épatée physique (“astounded physics”), pas ta physique (“not your physics”), and

1 The Evergreen Review dedicated a special issue to 'pataphysics in 1960. Jarry’s pseudoscience caused such a groundswell of interest in France that the Collège de 'Pataphysique was formed in 1948.
3 Ibid., 21.
4 Ibid., 119.
puns on Jarry’s iconic Father Ubu: “Ubu, for example, is a slapstick comedian (pataud physique) of unhealthy obesity (pâteux physique),” and so on. Pataphysics emphasizes wordplay and stylistic invention through a philological aphasia that reveals what is concealed within language; for this reason, it is already so closely linked to etymology and philology that, as James Zetzel asserts, any philology is already pataphilology. Zetzel points out that according to Martianus Capella the god Mercury marries a mortal woman named Philology; but he reconfigures this marriage as a love triangle, since Zetzel situates Philology as a twinned being composed of both philology and pataphilology or “Mistress Grammar.”

This essay will link pataphysical linguistic experiments to the punning style so frequently employed by Jacques Lacan in both Écrits (1966) and his spoken seminar. Such a collision will suggest that Lacan’s approach to the unconscious is pataphysical and his approach to language is pataphilological. Lacanian psychoanalysis is notable in part because of its varied influences and its links to the avant-garde. Certainly, Heidegger and Freud are often highlighted as sources for Lacan’s thinking, but the French avant-garde of the twentieth century is also a tremendously rich resource for Lacan’s vision of psychoanalysis: Salvador Dalí, André Breton, Raymond Queneau, François le Lionnais, and many other avant-gardists are both friends of Lacan and influences for his thinking (both Raymond Queneau and François le Lionnais were members of the Collège de ’Pataphysique). Suffice it to say, Dadaism and Surrealism are dominant influences on Lacan’s thinking — Dalí’s paranoiac-critical method forms the basis of Lacan’s theory of paranoia that he develops in his doctoral dissertation (as I will discuss momentarily) — and there is no way to consider his psychoanalytical formulations as distinct from an underlying

absurdist tradition. However, even if Lacan is directly linked to a canonical absurdism, then how is he connected to 'pataphysics? Behind surrealism and dadaism lurks 'pataphysics, and even though Lacan does not discuss Jarry in depth, 'pataphysics offers a fruitful approach to apprehending the lucid in the ludic or the surd in the absurd (\textit{ab} means “away” and \textit{surdus} means “indistinct,” “harsh-sounding,” “deaf,” or “out of tune”). The absurd is an intensification of the surd—an intensification of the harsh-sounding. \textit{Surdus} designates a deafness to reason and is, by necessity, signified by an “out-of-tuneness.” I claim that this “out-of-tuneness” requires what Lacan calls a “third ear”\textsuperscript{7} to find the sound in the din or the din in the sound. This third ear analysis of the soundings of the absurd is important because it will highlight the ontic ground of Lacan’s thought and will clarify his overall psychoanalytical project. Such “clarity” will result in a restituating of the barred subject to its anterior iteration as the ‘\textit{pataphysical subject}.

\textbf{Sources and Resources}

Both Jarry and Lacan share many influences: they were both inspired by the symbolist poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé—Jarry’s Dr. Faustroll has an edition of Mallarmé’s \textit{Verse and Prose} on his bookshelf\textsuperscript{8}—and, furthermore, Jarry attended Mallarmé’s funeral.\textsuperscript{9} Lacan’s interest in language is inspired by both Mallarmé and James Joyce; Lacan famously attended the first reading of \textit{Ulysses} in 1921. However, the piece of writing that Lacan submits to the James Joyce colloquium in 1978 suggests that the self-proclaimed linkage to Joyce may be more of an unconscious desire than an accurate genealogy:

\textsuperscript{8} Jarry, \textit{Exploits and Opinions of Doctor Faustroll, Pataphysician}, 11.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 124
Joyce the Symptom to be understood as *Jésus la caille* (Jesus the quail): it’s his name. Could people expect anything else omme (of me, though in French it sounds like *emoi*, emotion)? I name (which in French sounds like *jeune homme*, young man). If that sounds like “young man,” that’s a consequence I’d say just one thing about. We’re men (*sommes hommes*, phonetically “somzoms”).

LOM (i.e., *l’homme*=man): in French that says what it means. You only need to write it phonetically: faunetically he’s *eaubscéne* (=obscene). Write it “eaub-,” with the *eau* as in *beau* (beautiful), to recall that the beautiful is not otherwise.⁠¹⁰

After this point, Lacan’s note becomes both ’pataphilological and untranslatable:

> Hissecroibeau à écrire comme l’hessecabeau sans lequel hi-hannappat qui soit ding! d’nom dhom. LOM se lomellise à qui mieux mieux. Mouille, lui dit-on, faut le faire; car sans mouiller pas d’hessecabeau.⁠¹¹

This moment is akin to an instance of the “melting” of language that occurs in *Finnegans Wake*. If, as Lacan argues, a “letter always arrives at its destination,”¹² then I would suggest that the address of Lacan’s letter was not the Joyce colloquium, but the Collège de ’Pataphysique. Lacan is, in his brief letter on Joyce filled with its malleable French, writing to a tradition of French literary composition that predates Joyce. Even though Lacan never explicitly mentions ’pataphysics, he is keenly aware of Jarry’s presence in the French literary canon. In *Écrits*, Lacan mentions Jarry at key points. From the “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’”: “Caught in the act of unduly imputing to me a transgression of the Kantian critique, the subject, who was well-

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⁠¹¹ Ibid.

meaning in mentioning my text, is not Father Ubu and does not persist.”13 From “The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power”: “One can perceive here a sort of involuntary humor, which is what makes the example so valuable. It would have delighted Jarry.”14 From “Kant with Sade”: “At the risk of some irreverence, let me, in turn, illustrate the flaw in it with a maxim by Father Ubu that I have modified slightly: ‘Long live Poland, for if there were no Poland, there would be no Poles.’”15

The most telling example of Lacan’s appreciation of Jarry’s wordplay is when he considers Jarry’s use of merdre at the opening of Ubu Roi:

I will illustrate it (the split in the subject) in its greatest opacity with the genius that guided Jarry in his find: the condensation of a simple supplementary phoneme in the illustrious interjection “merdre.” This is the kind of refined triviality we see in slips of the tongue, flights of fancy, and poetry—a single letter was enough to give the most vulgar French exclamation (merde: shit) the ejaculatory value, verging on the sublime, of the place it occupies in the epic of Ubu: that of the Word from before the beginning. Imagine what we could do with two letters! For the spelling, Meirdre, gematrially offers us everything promising man will ever hear in his history, and Mairdre is an anagram of the verb on which “admirable” is based.16

David Macey contextualizes Lacan’s interest in playful and absurdist etymologies by pointing out that “as Lacan abandons linguistics for linguisterie, a note of parody is introduced: Saussure’s langue becomes lalangue as the article is condensed with

13 Ibid., 33.
14 Ibid., 509.
15 Ibid., 647. Lacan is adding “Long live Poland” to Jarry’s original: “Because if there weren’t any Poland, there wouldn’t be any Poles!” From Alfred Jarry, Ubu Roi, translated by Beverly Keith and G. Legman (New York: Dover, 2003), 73.
the noun to produce an onomatopoeic effect and as linguistic scientificity gives way to splutter.”  

Jarry’s experimentation with the French language (which can be seen in relation to Mallarmé) anticipates Lacan’s future fascination with linguisterie and lalangue. As registered in his consideration of Jarry’s merdre neologism, Lacan situates neologistic puns as the material instances acting, in language, as equivalents of a barring or splitting procedure that occurs in subjectivity. The neologism and the ’pataphysical pun symbolize an event of rupture: they each signify the tattooing procedures of the signifier and the lack-in-being that signifies the subject as requiring a suturing object, which can be understood as the originary lost object or the objet petit a.

The ancient Greek word for “symbol” — sumbolon — designates a token, or one half of a broken piece of pottery or coin that registers an economic relationship between two citizens: each individual held half of the broken token, with one half signifying a payment owing from that holder to the other. The uniqueness of the word sumbolon is that it paradoxically refers to a singular concept through reference to two fragmented parts; conceptually, the sumbolon exists as a whole, while its material referents (i.e., the tokens) remain fragmented. The etymology of “symbol” speaks to the ways in which every etymology is only ever a part-story or fragment that does not capture a word-in-itself or language-in-itself.

As I have argued elsewhere, an etym — my term for the atom of language — is a model of etymological agency in which language adopts a surprisingly vitalist form and Lacan’s puns function as etymistic bombs: they are linguistic instances of the rupture of the signifier that reflect the schism that grounds
the barred subject. Put differently, at the limits of language the unconscious begins to reveal itself. This framework or schema links Lacanian psychoanalysis with 'pataphysics and points to closely interrelated goals regarding language. However, I am not the first person to argue for a link between 'pataphysics and psychoanalysis: Sylvain-Christian David insists that a connection exists between 'pataphysics and psychoanalysis in his article that associates Jarry and Freud to Gustav Fechner’s psychophysics. David writes that “[t]he title of book II of Faustroll (where theoretical temptation shows itself strongest), Elements of ‘Pataphysics echoes the famous Elements of Psychophysics of Fechner.” David suggests such a linkage, but does not include the work of Lacan. This paper will address this lack.

Paranoia and the Formation of the Subject

Dalí read Lacan’s doctoral thesis Of Paranoiac Psychosis in Its Relationships to Personality (De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité) in 1933. The thesis left an impression on Dalí, even though he had already used paranoia to formulate his theory of surrealist artistic production called “the paranoiac-critic method,” which he initially theorizes in “L’Ane pourri” or “The Rotten Donkey,” an article Lacan had read. The two men, both prominent figures of the surrealist movement, shared a similar interest: Dalí linked paranoia to artistic production and Lacan to its foundational relationship for subjectivity.


Dalí describes to André Parinaud the importance of Lacan’s dissertation: “Lacan threw a scientific light on a phenomenon that is obscure to most of our contemporaries — the expression: paranoia — and gave it its true significance.”23 The emphasis Dalí mentions in terms of “the expression” — that is, the significance of the word “paranoia” — is a point that Lacan returns to in his first contribution to *Minotaure*:

However, some of these forms of lived experience, called “morbid,” present themselves as particularly fertile modes of symbolic expression, which, though irrational in their very foundation of being, are nonetheless provided with an intentionally eminent signification and feature an elevated tension during communication. They (these morbid forms of lived experience) meet in the psychoses, which I have studied particularly, by conserving the originary and etymologically satisfactory label of “paranoia.”24

Lacan’s emphasis on the “etymological satisfaction” of the word “paranoia” hints at the later emphasis he will place on the signifier in terms of the productive powers of the symbolic order and its effects on subject-formation. The very word “paranoia” as that which is *para* or “beside” *nous* or “mind” indicates that the experience of paranoia presents a kind of doubling of consciousness. In other words, paranoia situates the subject as a subject that is apart from itself, observing the other that exists

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inside the self and creating absurdist narratives in the frightening absence of knowledge about this other. Two minds exist in the paranoiac relationship, but these minds are closely linked through processes of surveillance instead of identity—a heightened surveillance of the other.

In Lacan’s second contribution to *Minotaure*, he focuses on the impact of paranoia in the brutal murders committed by the Papin sisters. Lacan situates his reading of the Papin crime through his earlier case study of Aimée, which grounds his 1932 dissertation:

Affective ambivalence towards the older sister dictates the *auto-punitif* behavior of the “Aimée case.” During its course, Aimée deliriously transfers her loving hatred onto several successive individuals, it is by an effort to liberate her from her primary fixation, but this effort is aborted: each of the persecutors is none other than a new image, always a prisoner of narcissism, of this sister whom the patient creates as her ideal.

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25 On February 2, 1933, Christine and Léa Papin, maids for the Lancelin family, murdered Madame Lancelin and her daughter. Monsieur Lancelin returned home to find his wife and daughter beaten unrecognizably and the two Papin sisters naked in bed together upstairs.

26 On April 10, 1931, Marguerite Pantaine—Lacan later calls her “Aimée” in his dissertation—attempted to murder the actress Huguette Duflos outside the Théâtre Saint-Georges with a kitchen knife. Pantaine attempted to murder Duflos because she felt, in her delusional state, that the actress was persecuting her. Perhaps ironically, the play that Duflos was to star in on the night of the attempted murder was *Tout va bien* or “Everything’s Fine” by Henri Jeanson. Lacan began meeting with Pantaine for his dissertation on June 18, 1931.

The surrealists interpreted the Papin murders through the logic of Dalí’s paranoiac-critic method, while the French media tended to consider the murders as exemplary instances of class struggle—the sisters worked as maids for “bourgeoisie” landowners—and the press tended towards a “sentimental Marxism”\(^{28}\) in response to these murders. This response was so embedded in French media that the American journalist Janet Flanner writes, in her *Paris Journal*, that “it was not a murder but a revolution,” or, at the very least, a “minor revolution.”\(^{29}\) This response to the situation delimits the plenitude of the murders to two dominant interpretations that act as apologies for the Papins’ choices to murder their employer’s wife and daughter: either their behavior is linked to an underlying paranoia or their behavior is the expression of a lived micro-revolution—a harbinger of the “upcoming” Marxist revolution. Both interpretations are severely limited and do not consider the murder victims or the experience of Monsieur Lancelin. Nonetheless, the event itself highlights the sociocultural similarities between Lacan and surrealism; both Lacan and the surrealist movement privileged a “paranoid interpretation” of the Papin crimes.

Like surrealism, Lacan also has ties to dadaism and some aspects of his personality mirror a dadaist impulse. Roudinesco supports this point and pays particular attention to Lacan’s third journey to America in 1975: “Summoning up the surrealist and nihilist ways of his youth,” she writes, “he challenged the New World with puns, wordplay, and rages.”\(^{30}\) Lacan’s puns and aphorisms can be taken many ways: at an absurdist level, in which case his puns can be negated in much the same manner as Chomsky negates them (after seeing Lacan speak at MIT, Chomsky concluded that Lacan was “a madman”\(^{31}\)), or, at the


\(^{29}\) Quoted in ibid., 181.


\(^{31}\) From ibid., 379. Chomsky was responding to Lacan’s claim that “[w]e think we think with our brains; personally, I think with my feet. That’s the only way I really come into contact with anything solid. I do occasionally think
level of a latent meaning that must be discovered through hermeneutical exegesis, which is the approach of Lacanian theorists like Jacques-Alain Miller, Slavoj Žižek, Bruce Fink, Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, and others. Almost as if supporting Chomsky’s assessment of his own mental health, Lacan suggests that his provocative lecturing style adopts a pose of psychosis because “[p]sychotherapy is an attempt at rigor […] and in this sense I would say I’m a psychotic, for the sole reason that I’ve always tried to be rigorous.”

One of the techniques typically deployed by dadaists is to embrace the ludic and “mad” aspects of life and portray this madness through art, but this “madness” is playful — it represents a childlike mischievousness as well — and this trickster quality can be seen in Lacan’s decision to publish his psychological articles on paranoia in a surrealist journal and also in the appearance of his name in the table of contents: in the first issue he appears as “Dr. Lacan.” Every other contributor’s name features both first and last name without a prefix. Whether this was his decision or the decision of the editor (André Breton) is unimportant because its appearance in Minotaure reads as absurdist.

This dadaistic tendency presents itself even at the beginning of his career before he was a licensed psychoanalyst: Lacan later conceals Marguerite Pantaine’s identity behind the pseudonym “Aimée,” but after he publishes his dissertation on her case, Marguerite declines treatment from Lacan because “she found Lacan too attractive and too much of a clown to be trusted.”

Almost as if agreeing with Pantaine, David Macey points out that “Lacan’s style can overlap with a popular ludism.” What do these ludic and “clownish” qualities in Lacan’s behavior indicate, and where are the ludic and clownish aspects of Lacanian psychoanalysis? The answer to this question can be found at the

with my forehead, when I bang into something. But I’ve seen enough electroencephalograms to know there’s not the slightest trace of a thought in the brain.” Recounted in ibid., 378–79.

32 Quoted in ibid., 376.
33 Quoted in ibid., 51.
34 Macey, Lacan in Contexts, 57.
ground of Lacanian psychoanalysis—a ground that is structured by ’pataphysics and ’pataphilology.

’Pataphysical Mathematics, Lacanian Mathemes, and the Planet Borromeo

Lacan’s transition from surrealism to mathematical theory can be discovered in his interest in what he calls “mathemes.” The mathemes—a pun on Levi-Strauss’s mythemes—develop as a syntax or sign system that can apprehend the logic of the unconscious. The mathemes address two problems for Lacan: 1) they allude to a larger pedagogical apparatus that can assist in the training of future analysts, and 2) they depict a unique and idiosyncratic notation that symbolizes the complexity of Lacanian psychoanalysis. When related to ’pataphysics, the mathemes metaphorically connote “exceptions” to normative mathematics and to the functionality of the symptoms of the unconscious. The idea of the “exception” is vital to Jarry’s configuration of ’pataphysics because it links to an imaginary dimension that exists alongside our own in an alternate reality called “ethernity.” Christian Bök describes “ethernity” as the space “where the reference of a sign does not describe, but conjures, the existence of the real through the ur of simulation.”35 Much like mathematicians who frequently use imaginary “spaces” to articulate mathematical problems—such as Hamiltonian space in quantum mechanics or phase space in chaos theory—Lacan depicts the spatiality and functionality of the unconscious through a topological space that allows him to model and predict the behavior of the symptom, the subject, and the signifier. The Lacanian signifier exists in a space of eternity—a space of ’pataphysical exceptionality—and the psychoanalytical clinic, for Lacan, is a ’pataphilological laboratory of lalangue and mathemes.

The most infamous topological tool in Lacan’s ’pataphysical toolkit is the Borromean knot. The Borromean knot resides

35 Bök, ’Pataphysics, 34–35.
in an ethernity of symptomaticity and subjectivity—the site of collision between the conscious and the unconscious—as a topological object that presents and represents the dynamism of subjectivity and the chaotic weaving and interweaving of the real, imaginary, and symbolic orders. This abyssal event horizon—this Borromean black hole that lurks at the center of ethernity—produces what Lacan calls the *sinthome*, which is the exterior, fourth ring that contains the other three rings (of the symbolic, imaginary, and real) and makes them coherent. Lacan’s choice of the word *sinthome* adopts an arcane spelling of “symptom,” a decision likely adapted from Heidegger who begins to write *Sein* as *Seyn* (its arcane form) in the mid-1930s.

The *sinthome* acts as Lacan’s triumphant conclusion to the foundational structure of paranoia or neurosis. If paranoia situates the basis of subjectivity in his early writings from 1932 and 1933, then it is not until the late 1970s that Lacan’s privileging of paranoia is clarified: the fourth ring of the *sinthome* maintains the coherency of the other rings by preventing them from floating freely in the wild wastes of ethernity. The *sinthome* speaks through *lalangue*, and this level of linguistic manipulation is essential to understanding the ways in which ‘*pataphysics* and ‘*pataphilology* act as the grounds of Lacan’s lettric experimentation. However, the linkage between Lacan’s unique appraisal of linguistics and the linguistics practiced by ‘*pataphysicians* is also found in Lacan’s idiosyncratic mathematics. Jarry’s Dr. Faustroll regularly employs an absurdist mathematics, such as when he calculates the surface of God.\(^\text{36}\) For both Lacan and ‘*pataphysics* in general, it is impossible to separate the mathematical from the linguistic.

Lacan’s mathemes imply the “edges” or “exceptions” that exist in the subject. They refer to the functionality of the unconscious, a functionality that cannot be proven or adequately located. The pure abstraction of the unconscious registers it as a kind of ethereal or hauntological exception to the material world. Because the unconscious cannot be sited, it is best understood as either a

presence, an absence, an absent-presence, a present-absence, or an absurd space. Why? Because the unconscious is intrinsically noisy, and its noise is disruptive of the normative patterns of the sonic. The unconscious clangs, bangs, and stammers in the background of the conscious, registering either a kind of existential nihilism (because it points to the pure constructivity of the conscious and the complexity of free will), or an absurdity of existence (because of its illogical and irrational manifestations). As a concept, the unconscious exists apart from and outside of any definition of the logical or the rational; it therefore registers an alternative history of narrativity and pattern recognition. To that end, it is a parasite on the head of hegemony — a ‘patasite of pure disruption, dislocation, and disorientation.

Jason Glynos and Yannis Stavrakakis point out that Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont — in their attack on the use of mathematics in “postmodern” French philosophy37 — find fault with the “manifest irrelevance” of the mathemes.38 However, Lacan would likely find the “manifest irrelevance” of the mathemes an asset to his version of psychoanalysis. Lacan himself asks: “[H]asn’t the role of psychoanalysts so far been to give themselves over to meaningless enterprises?”39 If this claim is correct — or as “correct” as a ’pataphysical assertion can be — then how can Lacanian concepts be understood in relation to a direct acknowledgement of their intrinsic relationship to an absurdist tradition of French thought? I do not have the space here to explore the absurdist ground(s) of every Lacanian concept, but, to that end, I will focus on one concept above others: the barred subject. However, I will not consider the barred subject directly. In a sense, any direct apprehension of the barred sub-

ject is prone to failure because its very “presence” is predicated on a foundational lack-in-being, but I will approach this aporetic concept rather obliquely, i.e., not as a phenomenal category, but as an epiphenomenal category. I will consider the barred subject through its mirror image or inverted existence that can be found in eternity — an imaginary dimension in which the barred subject is 'pataphysical.

The 'Pataphysical Subject

What is the 'pataphysical subject? Sylvain-Christian David claims: “What is being played out from Ubu to Faustroll is none other than a process of method which stages, on the scene of the writing, a new subject.” David later calls this “new subject” the sujet de la [']pataphysique or the “pataphysical subject,” which signifies a subjectivity that exists beyond both physics and metaphysics as a pata construction to every other definition of subjectivity. The 'pataphysical subject exists in eternity as an absurdist incarnation of the barred subject. This 'pataphysical subject is the result of an implicit emphasis of the ludic over the lucid. In 'pataphysics, the signifier is a grapheme of experimental potential and its laboratory is the printed page.

The dyad of barred subject/'pataphysical subject contains a variety of competitions: presence and absence, rationality and irrationality, reality and surreality. As mentioned earlier, 'pataphysics emphasizes the exceptional that is outside of normative rationality and reality. To stress this dynamic, I would emphasize that metaphysics is to phenomenology what 'pataphysics is to epiphenomenology. Where phenomenology situates a subject’s apprehension — as cognitive and perceptual — of a world of objects, epiphenomenology highlights the phenomena that

41 Ibid.
exist apart from traditional phenomena. In spatial terms, the 'pataphysical gradually transitions beyond the metaphysical. The epiphenomenological is beyond and outside of that which is apprehended by the barred subject; therefore, the epiphenomenological is only perceivable by the 'pataphysical subject. This notion of epiphenomena is not only dimensional but also linguistic, because certain words and textual limit experiences register as exceptional instances of writing or speaking. For example, linguistic epiphenomena manifest, according to psychoanalysis, as representations of the unconscious: parapraxes or slips of the tongue or the schizophrenic in(ter)ventions of psychotic patients indicate a slippage into lalangue.

In his survey of 'pataphysics, Christian Bök argues that there are four epistemic phases in the history of the conflict between science (noetics) and poetry (poetics), a conflict that focuses on the ability to speak the “truth”:

the animatismic phase, whose truth involves interpreting signs through an act of exegesis; the mechanismic phase, whose truth involves disquisiting signs through an act of mathesis; the organismic phase, whose truth involves implementing signs through an act of anamnesis; and the cyborganismic phase, whose truth involves deregulating signs through an act of catamnesis.

Bök clarifies this fantastical teleology when he insists that “the life sciences, for example, have progressed from the biomagy of animatism, through the biotaxy of mechanism, through the biology of organism, to the bionics of cyborganism.” I would take his argument further and claim that his four phases can also be considered the four phases that organize — or self-organize — the development of a 'pataphysical subject. In the following table, I adapt Bök's schema for the purposes of explicating a 'pataphysical subject:

42 Bök, 'Pataphysics, 17.
43 Ibid.
What Bök calls the “animatismic phase” would designate the psychic arrangement of the mythological associations of animatism through the exegetical effects of the sign, once it has withdrawn from a world of practice. In this understanding of the animatistic, there is an essential endowment of certain powers that ground the ’pataphysical subject, an endowment that designates the ’pataphysical subject as being constructed by language itself. In the animatistic phase, reality would be rendered as a representation-machine — and a doubled representation-machine in ethernity — that would be given meaning through the direct exegesis of the sign by way of the magical entification of the grapheme and the phoneme. Language would be subject to a process of biomagy during the animatistic phase. As well, the exegesis of the animatistic phase would imply the existence and necessity of an other (as found in Lacan’s mirror stage) where the ’pataphysical subject would be made aware of itself to itself by virtue of the fact that there would be a semblant acting as an iteration or reflection of itself and to itself. In other words, the ’pataphysical subject would be double in and of itself and move beyond the doubling that would be already present, i.e., the doubling that is already (and intrinsically) present in the barred subject.

Bök’s “mechanistic phase” would designate a psychic practice of learning that occurs via mathesis, and these learned tasks would permit a more manageable navigation of reality. The mechanistic necessarily builds on the animatistic like layers of snow and complements the biomagical qualities of

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<th>Epistemic phase of either noetics/poetics or the ’pataphysical subject</th>
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the animatistic by mechanizing these earlier representational processes. The mechanistic phase points to the origins of technology while the mathetic function relates to an education that properly integrates the 'pataphysical subject in ethernity.

What Bök calls the “organismic phase” would situate the resulting psychic matrix of the subject’s habitude and habituation in its ecosystem or environment. During this stage, the 'pataphysical subject would be “constructed” as an effect of parasitic invasion: language would implement itself inside its host—it would suture onto the “walls” of the subject’s speech centers—and this siting of the embedded language-parasite would likewise require an anamnestic function (of remembering) to ground its own self-organization. Remarking is essential—as opposed to a form of forgetting—because the subject must, by necessity, recall the illusion of its own fantasmatic coherency. The fantasy of the subject’s own existence as a holistic totality structures the misrecognition of both the subject as a subject (in a reality-construction) and the subject’s iterative manifestations in ethernity as a 'pataphysical subject.

Finally, Bök’s “cyborganismic phase” would locate the futurity of the 'pataphysical subject, a futurity that occurs at the terminus of the posthuman when the full status of the technological has taken hold. This situation calls for the deregulation of the anthropocentric sign and the emergence of a new cyborg-sign. Psychoanalysis would have little merits in the treatment of the cyborg unconscious, thereby requiring 'pataphysics to take over the work of the clinic. After being repressed for so long, 'pataphysics would be the only applicable discourse that could potentially heal the symptoms of the cyborg unconscious. The catamnestic function of the cyborganismic acts as the historical record of the patient after the onset of illness, which is, in this case, subjectivity itself (“subjectivity” is to be understood here as the result of the various infections created by postmodernism and poststructuralism).

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44 I explore the idea of a language-parasite and a 'patasite versus a parasite in Language Parasites: Of Phorontology (Earth: punctum books, 2017).
Extending this schema from Bök’s original context of the shared history of noetics and poetics to the evolution of the ’pataphysical subject, the totality of the above table presents the various generations of specific aspects of this subject: the ’pataphysical subject moves through an animatismic phase of exegetical interpretation; it transitions to the mechanismic phase that disquisits signs through mathesis; it progresses to the organismic phase that implements new signs through anamnesis; and, finally, it finds its apotheosis in the cyborganic phase that deregulates signs through catamnesis. The transition moves toward the presentation of the illness of the sign, an illness that signals the necessity to transit from reality to complete eternity.

However, I should point out that each of these “phases” registers as differing perspectives of the same underlying subject position: the contemporary situation of the iterations of subjectivity find themselves mirrored in the absurdity of the ’pataphysical subject. Put differently, living in the contemporary and technologized Western world is patently absurd. As humans limp into the early part of the twenty-first century, we have ignored many of the absurd “truths” (or upcoming problems that register as repressed “truths”) of our existence as a species, i.e., we appear to be heading towards an ecological catastrophe that certain powerful factions of Western governments feel compelled to call “a hoax”; access to clean water is a serious concern; having enough arable soil for growing crops to feed a multiplying population is a high-priority problem; fascism appears to be re-emerging in world politics; talk of nuclear re-armament is rearing its head again; race relations and gender relations appear to be halting their forward momentum; the cure for the common cold is nowhere in sight; and there are many other examples of the absurdity of our contemporary situation. I call these examples “absurd” because these problems were not supposed to be concerns in the twenty-first century. The Jetsons promised robots and spaceships. Where are my robots and spaceships?

Taking the science fiction of the past hundred years into account, we should now be — as a species — flying into the future
with rocket packs and flying cars. Instead, our forward momentum has been halted because of the peristaltic cyclings of human invention and intervention. Humanity progresses in bursts and convulsions as the heaves of technological vomit strike the floor of history. Now, we are stagnating in a stage of dry heaving. 'Pataphysics calls attention to these absurd situations by calling out to activists living in reality and asks them to construct prospective ethernities that can help us escape the seemingly imminent event of the total extinction of the human race. Let us escape on this 'pataphysical spaceship together. This proposal is not a socialist daydream or a fascist’s nightmare. We need creative thinking. We need new subjects and new identities that can engage exterior “realities” or “ethernities” in creatively novel and ethical ways.

**Floating in Ethernity**

'Pataphysics presents the absurdity of existence while psychoanalysis attempts to interpret this same absurdity through the “logic” of the symptom or *sinthome*. Where 'pataphysics reveals the absurd through parody, psychoanalysis reveals the absurd through pathology. Therefore, if the absurd, as a symptom of the ludic, lurks behind the barred subject, then the ludic becomes surprisingly lucid. In this case, the absurd becomes constitutive of a new realism: *if the conscious is phenomenal, then the unconscious is epiphenomenal*. If this situation is true, then it demands a study of the exceptional. This study of the exceptions that result from the theorization of a 'pataphysical subject require a consideration of both the expected results (as phenomena) and the excepted results (as epiphenomena). Such an understanding of 'pataphysical subjectivity necessitates asking the question of what is exceptional in psychoanalysis. The obvious answer to this question would site the symptom as the exception of apparently “healthy” psychic processes. In this schema, the symptom is the exception of both the barred subject and the symptom. Obviously, when considering the various transits and transitions between reality and eth-
ernity, a variety of proliferating states and stages emerge—these states and stages present an overall picture of pure complexity because the necessity of epiphenomena is often unconsidered by normative models of physics and rationality. 'Pataphysics rejects the standard models and logic of physics in order to engage in the surrational. In the surrational, the phenomenal has no purchase on the epiphenomenal, which leads to the development of epiphenomenology (as opposed to phenomenology), an approach that provides different and bizarre theories for all entities (known and unknown) that exist beyond the narrow confines of the “human.”

'Pataphysics coalesces the noetic and the poetic in order to interrogate the meaning that exists in the imaginary topos of eternity. Eternity exists (or ek-sists) beyond and beside (pata) traditional “reality.” I would go further and argue that the Lacanian real only exists in eternity because, as Lacan maintains, “[t]he real is not of this world.”\(^{45}\) Luke Thurston points out that Lacan’s theorization of the Borromean knot encompasses that which is of the world and also that which is not of the world.\(^{46}\) David Macey claims that Lacan’s teaching, “with its dénouement in an unworldly Real, its interstellar mission to la planète Borromée,”\(^{47}\) requires contextualization. I would insist that Lacan’s mission to the “Planet Borromeo” can only be accomplished in a spaceship that has been built by ’pataphysicians while being accompanied by his fellow spacemen (such as le Lionnais, Queneau, and Dr. Faustroll).

If nothing else, psychoanalysis has demonstrated that certain words can become trapped in the psyche and these trapped signs can produce considerable distress. Suzanne Hommel, one of Lacan’s patients in 1974, recounts that she experienced persecution at the hands of Gestapo. In her analysis, Lacan treated her illness as being partly caused by the word “Gestapo” (as a


\(^{46}\) Ibid., 318.

plea) and so he reached across to her and caressed her cheek. Lacan heard the phrase *geste à peau* (or “touch the skin”) and deployed a gentle and curative gesture. Hommel describes this moment as the turning point of her analysis.\(^{48}\) This “cure” could only be permitted by Lacan adopting the guise of a ’pataphilologist, which would render him as a pataphilological psychoanalyst. His “aberrant” relationship to language and his willingness to engage in a critical and clinical embrace of the absurdities of existence positions him as one of the foremost ’pataphysicians of French twentieth-century thought.