

become ubiquitous thanks to the use of spreadsheets in every aspect of life from personal budget to Big Data – is the greatest takeaway for the readers. Scholars interested in digital humanities, media studies, media aesthetics, philosophy of knowledge, and aesthetics will find the art-knowledge connection very compelling. It will provoke other scholars to explore the relationship between data and art, and suggest newer, more imaginative ways of practising art. It might also provoke inquiries into what kinds of critiques of data and statistics can be grounded in scholarship and aesthetics rooted in the Global South. What have been the models of knowledge production in these regions? Do these models lend themselves to critique and praxis of art? How do the regions in the Global South engage with the Western notions of data as knowledge in themselves and as art? The legacy of the book lies in the opening up of such questions.

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THE CAMBRIDGE INTRODUCTION TO JACQUES LACAN. By Todd McGowan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025. 176 pp.

The book offers four interesting chapters that explore Lacan's theories, how he was received in critical theory circles, and a brief biography. McGowan makes sure to distinguish Lacan from the post-structuralist group, including Kristeva, Foucault, and Derrida, in all of his chapters. While these theorists share a critique of subjectivity as a dead end, the author argues that Lacan's novel contribution to theory lies in his integration of "the unconscious into [subjectivity] without eliminating the subject's freedom" (p. xiii). The book begins by contextualising Lacan in literary theory, followed by a short biography. The third chapter explores Lacan's work among his peers in theory, while the fourth chapter systematically explores Lacanian concepts, such as *Jouissance*, Drive, and the *Big Other*. The concluding chapter summarises what the author has debated throughout the book, and he restates his hypothesis at the beginning of the book: Lacan is distinguished from the post-structuralists since his theoretical discussions do not reduce or exclude the subject but rather allow us to articulate alternative understandings of it/ the subject (p. 162).

Chapter One, "Context," contextualises Lacan's theoretical discourses and debates by exploring the foundational influences on his thought, with special emphasis on Freud's psychoanalytic theories. It also puts Lacan on one side in conversation with Hegel, Kant, and Freud on the other, where psychoanalysis and subjectivity are the grey areas these theorists share (p. 14). The author argues that building on Freud's discovery of the unconscious, Lacan sought to develop and preserve its radical implications by stressing the unconscious as an agency that operates beyond conscious control. This distinctive contribution to literary theory offers an alternative rationale that cannot be fully integrated into conscious thought, according to McGowan's understanding of Lacan (p. 10). He adds that Lacan's work emerged as a response to the influences of psychoanalysis during the 1920s, when Freud introduced the structural model of the psyche (id, ego, and superego) to supplement the topographical model (conscious, preconscious, and unconscious). However, Lacan has accomplished an unprecedented achievement by "bringing the unconscious to the philosophy of the subject, Lacan accomplishes an advance in the understanding of subjectivity" (p.14).

In the second chapter, "Life," the author presents a narrative of Lacan's progress into the world of literary theory, specifically, the schools of psychoanalysis. The 1930s mark the birth of Lacan, the psychoanalytic theorist, after his critical analysis of the Papin Sisters' crime in his renowned work, "Motives of Paranoiac Crime: The Crime of the Papin Sisters," first published in *Le Minotaure* in 1933 (p. 24). Compared to the active resistance exemplified by Sartre, Lacan stands as a figure who

refuses heroism and resistance, thereby making him unlike his peers in France, including Camus, Sartre, and Ponty. However, the book records that Lacan found fertile soil in the seminars held by Kojève, who “provided Lacan with the tools to integrate Hegel’s thinking about subjectivity as an entity always divided and at odds with itself into psychoanalytic thought” (p. 26).

Chapter Three, “Reception,” traces how literary theorists and thinkers critiqued and received the works of Lacan, stressing how Lacan’s work differs from his peers in critical theory. It first explores the discussions generated by Lacan’s essay on “The Mirror Stage” of the self, where he condemns existentialism as a failure because “Sartrean existentialism links freedom to the independence of consciousness, but the role of the mirror stage in forming the ego reveals that this independence is not so independent at all” (p. 37). The chapter then contextualises the influence of Lacan on Copjec and Žižek, who have built on his theoretical work to produce further discussion, which the author terms “a corrective” that was urgently needed in theory.

The fourth chapter, which is the main part of the book, explores Lacan’s work through themes and terminology associated with his school of psychoanalysis. His early essays argue against the ego as a centre, emphasising its imaginary nature in a world of what he terms the Symbolic Order, which “does not bring objects into being, but it does provide access to them” (p. 48). This order, which includes language, laws, and social structures, mediates human interactions and shapes subjectivity as per the early essays in his theoretical work, which argues that the subject is but a product of the encounter between the human animal and the symbolic order, which eventually generates unconscious desires distinct from instincts or social determinations (p. 161). The writer also traces how Lacan’s emphasis on the symbolic order, which analyses subjectivity as a triad combining the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary, has led to his critique of social constructionism, which he argued oversimplifies the relationship between society and subjectivity (p. 55 & 141). He then illustrates and contextualises Lacanian terms, presenting their denotations and meanings in a short essay, including Lacan’s articulation of “desire, the real, the other, and enjoyment” among other common concepts. One of the key statements is McGowan’s reading of Lacan’s subjectivity, which emerges when signification fails, challenging the notion that individuals are entirely determined by their social context (p. 67 & 69).

The book concludes with a summary of what the author has sought to illustrate throughout, though it is unexpectedly short. The author takes us back to his first hypothesis but presents it in a rather succinct statement: “The discovery of the unconscious doesn’t eliminate the subject but allows us to understand it anew” (161). He also argues that although Lacan socialises the psychoanalytic project in order to establish his theory of subjectivity, which is: what does not belong to the social order of which it is a part. After Kant and Hegel, Lacan is one of the foremost thinkers of the subject, transforming their theories into his analyses and implications of the unconscious. To summarise what has been explored above, Lacan shows that the subject appears where the social order cannot make sense of it through his various concepts of the symbolic order and articulations of subjectivity (the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic).

In terms of academia and scholarship, this book is situated within the debates and discussions of literary theory, cultural studies, philosophy, criticism, and psychoanalysis. In this book, which is part of the Cambridge Introductions to Literature series, McGowan vows to clarify misunderstood critiques and difficult discussions articulated by Lacan, offering both an accessible introduction and a distinctive theoretical argument. Because the book summarises most key concepts by Lacan and contextualises these discussions within a broader philosophical and political framework, it stands as a significant asset to literary scholars working in theory, philosophy, and cultural studies. It is a feasible choice for university professors as part of course material and reading lists at both the graduate and undergraduate levels.