



Umbr(a): Writing

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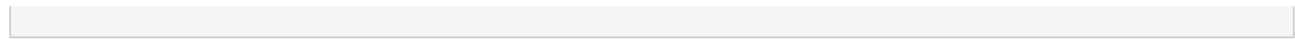
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The present issue of *Umbr(a)* aims to provide a space for the elaboration of the often-uninterrogated relation between writing and psychoanalysis. For, inasmuch as psychoanalysis is inextricably linked to the speaking subject, it nevertheless finds its origins and future firmly grounded in writing. Every psychoanalyst whose training is informed by Freud's writing, every psychoanalytic critic who takes writing as his object of study, and anyone in any discipline who reads or writes in the name of psychoanalysis must eventually account for the following -- deceptively simple -- question: If psychoanalysis can rightly be called the talking cure, then why should it have anything at all to say about writing? The answer to this question will dictate not only why psychoanalysis can be brought to bear upon the question of writing -- what, for example, characterizes writing as distinct from speech or even the mark -- but also what psychoanalysis enables one to think about writing, as distinct from any other possible discipline, method, or apparatus. Or, to put it another way, when choosing to bring the concepts, structures, and operations of psychoanalysis to bear upon writing, one must be prepared to account not only for the choice of psychoanalysis -- Why psychoanalysis? -- but also for the admissibility and relevance of the object -- Why writing?

Indeed, if there is anything that makes psychoanalysis today uniquely situated to approach the question of writing it is the way in which it inherits -- in a structurally irrevocable way -- the distinction between speech and writing. Writing has been fundamentally, but almost paradoxically, implicated in psychoanalysis from the very outset. Freud became convinced of the existence of the unconscious through direct and repeated experience of its manifestations in the speech and acts of his analysands. However, in order for his singular discovery to be useful and convincing to others who had not had the benefit of direct experience he was compelled to write. This point cannot be emphasized enough: Psychoanalysis, as it exists today, is a direct consequence of the manner in which Freud translated and transmitted his clinical experience through the fundamentally incompatible register of writing. In his case histories, for example, Freud makes it abundantly clear that what he has written is by no means a wholly accurate or linear representation of the course of the analysis in question. What the reader experiences will not be identical to what Freud experienced. Yet Freud nevertheless writes with the expectation of producing the same effect in his reader: a repetition of his inaugural experience of the unconscious. As readers of Freud, we inherit a very specific relation to repetition, and that repetition cannot be unbound from the writing of which it is a consequence. In this sense, Freud's writing has served, and continues to serve, as the base case for a peculiar sort of mathematical induction. Every reader must repeat the discovery of the unconscious and reinvent psychoanalysis, as if for the first time, while being constrained by nothing but the economy of Freud's writing. This is the Freudian wager: that the psychoanalysis we invent by reading what he has written will be, somehow, the same psychoanalysis.

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