From the very beginning, psychoanalytical practice and theory have focused on the structure and function of language as well as on the effects of speaking. While already the “cathartic method” (Freud/Breuer) was based on the idea that the articulation of traumatic events in the “talking cure” is able to purge affects and to heal bodily symptoms, psychoanalysis, to this day, and more than any other intellectual endeavor, adheres to the thesis of an irreducible being of language and speech (Sprechwesen) on which it has to concentrate its work.

The effectiveness of speaking in the cure, the pictographic script of the dream, the linguistic determination of hysterical symptoms, language as the medium of memory, language as the most important manifestation of the structures which determine or even constitute a subject, and the telling of the case history itself as therapy – in all of these areas the clinic is shaped by instances of language and speech. “Whether it sees itself as an instrument of healing, of training, or exploration in depth”, as Lacan puts it, “psychoanalysis has only one medium: the patient’s speech.” While Lacan refers here to the practice, which only takes place in and as the speaking of a singular being, the question is at the same time how this speaking is theoretically conceived: of which languages psychoanalysis makes use and by which languages it is traversed in its attempt to give an account of this speaking. Additionally, the recourse to language and to speech in general does not yet explain how linguistic matter is determined. Is it possible to distinguish psychoanalytical theories according to their underlying concept of language? Are basic assumptions about the ‘being’ of language decisive for how the relationship of psychoanalytical theory and practice is conceived?

On the one hand, it is obvious that psychoanalysis owes its development and permanent existence to a critical debate with the natural sciences (particularly with biology and neurology) and with their idioms. On the other hand, it is irrefutable that not only it integrates a number of other languages in addition to constituting its own, but it also crucially draws upon non-scientific knowledge, which is historically structured and which requires correspondent understanding. In Freud’s writing, this
manifests itself in a strong relation to the languages of literature, in what he calls the “figurative language specific to depth psychology”, in his constructions of figures who constitute history (Moses, the primal horde, patricide), and the narratives and conjectures about their meaning. Important psychoanalytic concepts are drawn on literary borrowings (“sadism”, “masochism”, “narcissism”, “Oedipus complex”, “cathartic method”); Freud’s case histories make use of literary ways of representation. “Local diagnosis and electrical reaction lead nowhere in the study of hysteria”, Freud writes in the Studies on Hysteria, “whereas a detailed description of psychic processes, such as we are accustomed to in the works of writers, enables me, with the use of a few psychological formulae, to obtain at least some kind of insight into the course of hysteria.” While Freud’s case histories read, as he remarked himself, “like novellas”, tragedy, romance, poetry and the joke as literary genres form, not only in Freud’s psychoanalytic writing, the understanding and depiction of psychic processes (“Triebchicksal”, “the family romance of the neurotic”, Moses and Monotheism as “historical novel” etc.). Furthermore, the myriad of literary quotes, which permeate Freud’s psychoanalytical texts as more than a plain embellishment, and the possibility to read The Interpretation of Dreams not merely as a theoretical tract, but also as Freud’s autobiography, highlight the importance of literary fabric in the process of weaving psychoanalytical texts. If these, especially with regard to their literary elements, are texts in the strong sense of the term (that is, a text irreducible to a preceding reality to which it would refer and subsequently only represent), the question concerning the relationship between psychoanalytical theory and practice could also be formulated as the question concerning the relationship between literacy and orality: How does the elaboration of psychoanalytical theory as text and writing relate to a practice which very often resists its written fixation and communication, as for example in the form of clinic case studies?

Freud became a “founder of discoursivity” (Foucault) due to a particular terminology and writing style, which can only partially be translated into other languages and cannot be reduced to a couple of tenets and theorems. “The initiation of a discursive practice,” Foucault writes, “unlike the founding of a science, overshadows and is necessarily detached from its later developments and transformations. As a consequence, we define the theoretical validity of a statement with respect to the work of the initiator, whereas in the case of Galileo or Newton, it is based on the structural and intrinsic norms established in cosmology or physics. Stated schematically, the work of these initiators is not situated in relation to a science or in the space it defines; rather, it is science or discursive practice that relates to their works as the primary points of reference. In keeping with this distinction, we can understand why it is inevitable that practitioners of such discourses must “return to the origin” (“What is an Author?” p. 134)

Jacques Lacan’s important innovation in the field of psychoanalysis thus adhered to the idea of “return[ing] to Freud.” On the one hand that meant once again working through the founding texts. On the other hand, it required their ‘translation’ into other languages: Initially into French, then into the language of structural linguistics (which Freud did not know yet), logic, mathematics, topology and knot theory, as well as into the texts and languages of philosophy. What survives in Lacan is that the recourse to the language(s) of literature is essential for the development of theory (cf. e.g. his reading of Hamlet in Seminar VI or later references to Joyce). For him, this recourse grants access to the unconscious, functions as a model for clinical work, and helps in the extraction of psychoanalytical categories (e.g. the sinthome based on Finnegans Wake). “C’est du français que je vous cause, et j’espère bien: pas du chagrin...” – it will have to be assessed how to get to the bottom of the (national language and stylistic) dimensions of such a pun from Lacan’s Radiophonie. Furthermore, it needs to be scrutinized what kind of overall role ‘personal style’ plays in the development and conveyance of theory. (How) can one conceptually grasp the specific tension of

1 Fate of the drive. The Standard Edition loses this ‘tragic’ connotation by rendering „Tribe und Triebchicksale“ as „Instincts and their Vicissitudes“.
psychoanalysis, not just in the case of Lacan, between the ‘return to the founding texts’ and their ‘original translation’ into other national languages and languages of theory, other idioms and ‘styles’ (modes of speaking and writing)?

Undoubtedly, the linguistic turn of the 20th century and, connected to it, the conjuncture of structuralism are particularly significant concerning the question of (the) languages of psychoanalysis, its discursivity and its translatability or untranslatability into other idioms (biological, neurological, psychological, philosophical). Without the incorporation of central terms of structural linguistics into psychoanalysis, Lacan’s “return to Freud” is as impossible to conceive as the formulation that the unconscious is “structured like a language.” For Lacan, a language of psychoanalysis on the border with linguistics emerged between the transforming adoption of central terminology (“signifier”, “structure” etc.) and a serious, yet ironizing, distance (“linguisterie”). This does not mean, though, that the psychoanalytical concept of language is identical with the linguistic (or Saussurean) one or that the languages of psychoanalysis would be adequately defined by determining the origin of central terms. Based on Saussure, yet differently to (structural) linguistics, Lacan highlights language as something that is essentially unconscious and continually left to disappearance, occultation, repression, and censorship. One has to forget language acquisition in order to acquire language; linguistic structure has to be latent in order to enable speech; repeatability, citation, inauthenticity, ambiguity, each has to be dismissed so that a speech act can be perceived ‘seriously’. Can one determine language thus only as its own withdrawal/revocation/denial? What is left from structuralism for psychoanalysis?

The adherence to language enables psychoanalysis to articulate itself outside the discourse of the natural sciences. The “figurative language specific to depth psychology” does not only act as a stand-in where scientific terminology is void or fails. It is also a crucial element of an epistemological setting, which has to be understood according to its own logic, without drawing on scientific quantification and formation of hypotheses. In addition, Bion’s transformation of the Kleinian tradition, for example, cannot be conceived without an idiosyncratic recourse to the linguistic theory of logical positivism. At the same time, dictionaries, lexica and translations of psychoanalysis and its theories carry out a standardization of psychoanalytical terminologies, which, in turn, react upon the practice.

Regarding the essence of language, however, the field of psychoanalysis is meanwhile characterized by diverging tendencies. Theories that assume a non-linguistic, affective or emotional core of the psychic, something that is in conflict with its necessary symbolization, formalize their practice in a different manner than those which understand the unconscious as something comparable to a structured language, and which therefore treat the subject as constituted by signifiers. On the basis of these two strands, it is also possible to locate contrary tendencies with regard to the connection to other fields of knowledge. Thus, the symbolic-theoretical approach can commit itself – sometimes slightly carelessly – to neuro-scientific endeavors, which aspire to account for the complex of the affective-emotional in a positivistic manner. Yet, it can also lead to the creation of a candid psychoanalytical theory, for example in the works of W. Bion, which focuses on the resistance of the unconscious against its psychic and theoretical symbolization. But also for forms of psychoanalysis that are particularly based on Lacan and understand the subject as a symbolic being constituted by signifiers, the field is not homogeneous. On this side, a close conjunction of the ‘unconscious which is structured like a language’ with the ‘sciences of the symbolic’ (anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, sociology etc.) is opposed by the theory and practice of a “real unconscious”, who considers the symbolic more as a neutral sphere.

One question that needs to be answered is how the different assumptions of the unconscious impinge on the languages of the schools and their institutions; yet, it also needs to be accounted for how the languages of the respective schools have an effect on the assumption of the unconscious.
When Freud says that it is neither possible to describe, nor even to perceive unconscious processes without the “figurative language specific to depth psychology” (Beyond the Pleasure Principle), this refers to a practice that is dependent on its theorization. Yet, conversely, it also means that the formation of meta-psychological terms can only be conceived as the formalization of a particular and limitedly generalizable psychoanalytical practice and experience. Paradoxically, the non-transferability of the practice is thus contingent upon an irreducible occurrence of transference to which analysands and analysts are equally bound. If one takes this specific relationship of psychoanalytic theory and practice seriously, then it follows that, for psychoanalysis, there is neither a meta-theory nor a meta-language, and thus no unifying paradigm, as it has been (at least) postulated and demanded for the natural sciences. What seems to be constitutive of psychoanalytical theory and practice is rather an irreducible multilingualism, and thus an inevitable and interminable dispute over its foundations and its independence. Isn’t the question about the “finite” or “infinite” analysis also the question about the ‘finiteness’ or ‘infiniteness’ of its theory?

Possible range of topics and questions for the conference (without any claim of completeness):

Concerning the relationship between theory and practice:
How can one define more closely the special status of languages of theory in psychoanalysis, given their dependency on a personal, yet possibly also on a time- and culture-specific practice? Is there a form of ‘transmission’ in theory? And if there is, what kind of speech or language is needed for it? Or does theory serve merely for the institution of a “social” place for psychoanalytical practice, which then, more radically, forms an idiom, a special language?

Concerning the relationship of formalized languages and literature (with regard to psychoanalysis):
What is the role of formalized languages in psychoanalysis (Lacan, Bion, Matte-Blanco) on the one hand, and literary genres (myth, drama, novella, tragedy, and poetry as models of a verbalization of psychoanalytical practice) on the other? Is there a sort of tension between these two poles? Is Freud’s “figurative language specific to depth psychology” itself a literary language? If this is the case, how does it have an effect on the conceptualization in and after Freud? What does a certain ‘end of literature’ or, at least, an end of its symbolic and societal importance mean to its status as a point of reference of psychoanalysis?

‘Styles’ of Psychoanalysis, dictionaries and signifiers:
What does it mean for psychoanalytical theory and practice not only to deal with concepts, but first of all with signifiers? What does respond to this difficulty? Is the huge importance of style in psychoanalysis (provided that the manner of the conjunctions, the ‘knottedness’ of speech, comes to the fore in ‘style’) also an answer to this problem? What does that exactly mean? What determines a style? (How) can one distinguish styles in psychoanalysis? What does a ‘style’ mean concerning the question of translatability / untranslatability of psychoanalytical terminologies and idioms into one another (beyond the borders of national languages or within it)? Furthermore, once again, what does this mean concerning the question of formalization? Which role do the many different dictionaries play in this context, which have been noticeably published lately, and which show that something does not stop to not write itself here?

Historicity of language and of linguistics:
What remains of (or returns from) structuralism? What has changed concerning the relationship of language and subject compared to Freud’s period and the course of the 20th century? Are subjects
constituted differently in our age of ubiquitous multifunctional, multisensory (visual, audio and touch) media? Does a psychosis affected by Ego-Shooter experience show other symptoms than, for example, the delusions of Schreber, which were hugely inspired by texts and institution of the 19th century? In case of such changes, what does that mean for psychoanalysis?

Language and body, language and affect:
How do psychoanalytical theories determine the relationship between language and body, and language and affect? In what way can psychoanalysis, without giving up its specificity, benefit and learn from recent theories and philosophical approaches (affect theory, new materialism), which do not take ‘representation’, ‘sign’, ‘code’ as their starting point but ‘affect’, ‘movement’, ‘encounter’/‘coincidence’, from which they then develop their concept of language? Such theories, like psychoanalysis itself, question the separation into scientific realism and social constructivism – how can psychoanalysis conceptualize with and through them its clinic, but also language and sexuality?

Modalities, dispositifs, requirements for the possibility and impossibility of speech acts, statements and interpretations:
Performativity, theatricality, witnessing, testimony – speaking/speech are not only put into language (as a structure) – but also, and perhaps even more, enabled and made impossible through requirements which can reach from local, singular events to (quasi-)transcendental a prioris. How does psychoanalysis, which constitutes its own idiosyncratic dispositif (of speech/speaking), conceptualize the contingency and necessity of its clinic (in case it takes place in this dispositif)? And what does it add to a philosophy and a theory of language, which are able to confer to psychoanalytic practice the dignity of a true problem?

Voice, blow, stroke: objeux, abjects, achoses of language:
On the margin or at the bottom of language, speech and writing lies something that does not belong to them as an element or can be abstracted from them as structure: The laughing at the end of a joke, the stroke which turns a letter into graphic art, or a voice in which, in the act of speaking, screaming reverberates. Psychoanalysis, which pays evenly suspended attention to all of this, adds the remnants of concrete matter to the thinking of language and thus deprives it of the possibility of objectification. What is left to do for the theory of language then?