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An Animated Intro to the Ideas of Jacques Lacan, "the Greatest French Psychoanalyst of the 20th Century"

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You may still suffer from painful memories of having had to read [Jacques Lacan](#) in school, but look past all that verbiage about, say, desire's "frenzied mocking of the abyss of the infinite, the secret collusion with which it envelops the pleasure of knowing and of dominating with jouissance," and you can find real insights into humanity. The [animated primer from Alain de Botton's *School of Life*](#) just above will give you a clear sense a much clearer sense than any you might get from Lacan's own prose of what "the greatest French psychoanalyst of the 20th century" understood about us all.

This video, as well as Lacan's entry in [The Book of Life](#), breaks the man's thought down into three parts. First, identity : following his fascination with the distinctively human experience of recognizing one's own image, Lacan ultimately suggests that "we accept that other people simply won't ever experience us the way we experience ourselves ; that we will be almost entirely misunderstood - and will in turn deeply misunderstand." Second, love : though given to grand statements such as "Men and women don't exist," Lacan comprehended "the extent to which we don't truly comprehend our lovers and simply peg a range of fantasies drawn from childhood experiences to their physical forms," which supports the eminently practical advice "not to be upset when we don't feel a perfect rapport with someone who initially seemed a soulmate."

The third part deals with the arena in which Lacan's writings remain most often considered : politics. He came into his own as an international "intellectual celebrity" in the 1960s, the time of "the sexual revolution, great interest in communism, and lots of protests." But he actually took a dimmer view of all that agitation than many, telling those student protesters chomping at the bit to remake society that "What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a new master. You will get one." He saw early on what we still see in every election cycle : that "we desire to have someone else in charge who can make everything OK, someone who is, in a sense, an ideal parent - and we bring this peculiar-sounding bit of our psychological fantasies into the way we navigate politics."

You can watch Lacan engaging with one particularly rebellious student in [a 1972 video we featured a few years ago](#), and you can see [an hourlong lecture he delivered at the Catholic University of Louvain](#) that same year in [this video](#) we posted before that. Empowered by the kind of overview of Lacan's ideas that the *School of Life* has put together, you can better confront his famously (or infamously) elaborate rhetoric and judge for yourself whether to consider him a thinker who "made some extremely useful additions to our understanding of ourselves" or, in [the judgment of Noam Chomsky](#), a mere practitioner of empty "posturing." But then, having lived a life that, as de Botton puts it, mixed "intellectual truth with worldly success," can't he be both ?

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Based in Seoul, [Colin Marshall](#) writes and broadcasts on cities, language, and style. He's at work on a book about Los Angeles, [A Los Angeles Primer](#), the video series [The City in Cinema](#), the crowdfunded journalism project [Where Is the City of the Future ?](#), and the Los Angeles Review of Books' [Korea Blog](#). Follow him on Twitter at [@colinmarshall](#) or on [Facebook](#) [k](#).

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