

G É R A R D W A J C M A N

Translated by Ron Estes, Jr.

INTIMATE EXTORTED, INTIMATE EXPOSED

I t is justifiable to say that Freud revolutionized the inner feeling [*sens intime*].¹ This is why, in a book on windows, I attempted to define the conditions of possibility of this subjective kernel that we call the intimate.² I began with the hypothesis that the intimate is neither a transparent notion nor a given, but that it has a distinctive structure and a history: in other words, there hasn't always been an intimate, nor will it necessarily always exist. By treating the fundamental psychological concept of our innermost selves as a topological problem, I finished by circumscribing the intimate as a site, in essence both architectural and scopic: that is, that part of space where the subject can feel shielded from the gaze of the Other.

On the one hand, this is not a positive definition of what constitutes the intimate nature of the intimate. Instead, it tries to define its condition of possibility and necessity. The intimate is a space *qua* internal exclusion, an island, where the subject escapes from even the supposition of being watched. This is what we at times call the "at-home." This space can be interior and subjective, just as it can take the form of a physical site. Moreover, the existence of the one ensures the existence of the other. Thus the architecture of a given period appears, as it were, as the decipherable symptom of the state of the intimate in this period. This, for example, is how the modern usage of glass in architecture should be interpreted. While it is in essence architectural, the site of the intimate doesn't necessarily take an architectural form. Everyone knows that one can feel at home in different ways—in a crowd (why not?), in a hotel, in the middle of nature. The fact that it goes without saying that one can feel at home in the home of the Other shows that we need to nuance our understanding of the nature of the intimate.

On the other hand, I'm making the gaze of the Other—that is, an exterior gaze—the very heart of the question of the intimate. This supposes, in the Other, an implacable and limitless desire to see. We must start from this point: that the Other is animated

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² Gérard Wajcman, *Fenêtre, chroniques du regard et de l'in-time* (Paris: Verdier, 2004).

by an absolute will to see everything; that prior to everything, there is the presence of an irreducible and insatiable gaze. If the preexistence of a gaze is a given, the fundamental question—the only one really—is henceforth to know if there exists for the subject a space where he can avoid the panoptic eye of the Other, this Gorgon eye which never sleeps or blinks. At one time this gaze was that of God. Formerly transcendent, He has become immanent, has entered into the world, and the modern subject is subjected to the incessant and excessive desire for visibility that animates every power and saturates our societies. We want to see and know everything.

This brings us to consider that, beyond political, economic, or other questions raised by the idea of *mondialisation*, of globalization, there exists an aspect, a profound consequence that, it seems to me, we have failed to take entirely into account. Globalization also means that, from now on, not a single square inch of the planet can escape the gaze of the master.

The question of the intimate must be seen against this background. From this perspective, the political stakes and topicality of the intimate take shape. If what matters is to pose the question of a politics of the subject, it can be framed like this: in a world dedicated to global visibility, the intimate is, for each subject, the possibility of concealment [*la possibilité du caché*].

The intimate, this possibility of concealment, must be defended.

It could be that, for one reason or another, there is no place for the subject to conceal himself or feel himself concealed, no place to escape from the supposition or conviction that he is being watched. Beyond the realm of politics, one can hear in this contemporary global concern its clinical echo. We live in paranoid times and should not be surprised if certain subjects claim—as did a certain patient cited by Lacan—*io sono sempre vista*, I am always being watched. In truth, the impossibility of concealment furnishes us with a certain idea of hell: a place where the subject would be incessantly seen. This is the direction in which the hypermodern world is moving.



I have thus formulated the hypothesis of a historical birth of the intimate. The intimate, in the modern sense of a psychological interiority, was born in the Renaissance. By situating the intimate historically, I have tried to highlight the fact that it took shape in an unexpected place—not within the domain of the law (where the idea of the “private” was in part elaborated), nor in philosophy, but in art. While architecture played a key role, it was not the first place the intimate was conceived of and thought out. Rather, it was painting. Painting, “the flower of all art,” as Alberti called it, became a model for all other arts—architecture included—in particular with the invention of geometrical perspective. In a single stroke: the intimate was born with the advent of the modern painting, defined by Alberti as an “open window.” Expanding the dimensions of this idea, I contend that modern painting, in the same gesture, gave birth to the Cartesian notion that henceforth man had the right to gaze upon the world. It also defined the intimate as the one site in the world where man

could hold himself apart from the world; where, from his window and in secret, he could contemplate it and where, shielded from every gaze, he could turn his gaze upon himself.

To gaze upon oneself, shielded from every gaze: this is the double-heart of the invention of the intimate. On the one hand, the intimate entails being able to steal away from the gaze of the Other who would reduce man to the state of an object—"this man," as Anaëlle Lebovits writes, "that one would like to rivet to oneself, who would be disclosed, *partes extra partes*, under the extra-lucid gaze of an other."³ On the other hand (and while subtracting oneself from the gaze of the Other), it also entails being able to see oneself as manifest in the intimate that cannot be reduced to the subject's intimacy. To put it in Heideggerian terms, "it is only by means of this complex gesture, by this self-regard into the very remoteness of self, that something like a self can be constituted." The subject thus demonstrates that he is not riveted to himself, that he is not reducible to an object that would only be perceptible only under the gaze of the Other, and also that the intimate is not reduced to being the site where the subject, concealed, would free himself from himself. The intimate is thus the site where the subject makes himself an enigma, where he demonstrates that he is not transparent to himself. The intimate is not a site of pure freedom; it is instead the site where the subject appears in its division. Gazing upon itself there, the intimate, the site of shadows and secrets, can thus also be a place of modesty. The intimate is the site of the subject, that is, of its division.

If it is what I say it is—at once a source of power for the man who appropriates the world by his gaze and the cradle, the inner territory where what we name interiority, that is, this intimate division of the subject, unfolds—then one will grant that I am at least somewhat right to claim that the birth of the Albertian painting was an upheaval that inaugurated a new era.

This era is still our own. But for how much longer?

In order to satisfy ourselves with our treatment of the intimate, we must bring to light its tragic and crucial stakes; this is where its topicality resides. The possibility of concealment must not simply be thought of in terms of gain or conquest, of more or less: it is an absolute condition of the subject. It must therefore be said that there is no subject unless that subject cannot not be seen. We understand by this the modern subject—who thinks, and therefore, is; in other words, the subject who, under the gaze, does not think. Thus, in the modern era, the intimate—the secret territory of the shadow or of the opaque—is the very site of the subject.

To speak of the intimate in terms of territory is to inevitably raise the question of borders, a question posed today. But if it is truly worth pondering, it is not in order to refine a topology of the intimate in the manner of Lacan's *extime*; rather, it is because

³ Anaëlle Lebovits, "The Veils of Modesty" ("Les Voiles de la pudeur"), unpublished paper given at the École de la Cause freudienne, Paris, May 2006.

of the urgency of a threat that, bearing on the intimate, today bears down on each subject.

There is a politics of the intimate. The intimate can be threatened. It must be defended.

By invoking the right to concealment, we give the intimate a definition beyond the architectural and scopic; beyond, too, the domains of psychology and anthropology: the intimate takes on a political dimension, one founded on force. The definition of the intimate that I've given—a site free from every gaze—implies a relation of power, a relation *to* power, or more exactly, a separation *from* it. In truth, what matters is to hold a territory apart from the always totalitarian presence of the Other. This constitutes the real condition of the intimate, which we can associate with the right to secrecy. The intimate must be seen against the background of the Benthamite Other, the importunate gaze—intrusive or invasive—that wants to see and know all, all the time. The important thing is to reveal that which could limit this limitless desire. One could invoke the law, but the law preserves the private; or rather, the private is that part which can be protected by the law. The intimate exceeds; it cannot proceed from the law; it proceeds only from the real possibility of a subject to conceal himself and to remain silent. Its guarantee is material; that is, the right to secrecy can only be maintained by the subject himself, by his force alone, and not by the Other, by the law. It is an act of the subject that keeps the subject free. This political dimension is consubstantial with the notion of the intimate, which does not merely refer to the innermost part of us (the Latin *intimus* is the superlative of *interior*), but that comprises the idea of secrecy in its very definition.

Thus we perceive that the intimate, secrecy and freedom are intimately linked.

Here again we must remember that we're speaking of real freedom, of material freedom. As Jean-Claude Milner insists, the real question of freedom is to reveal how to obtain the conditions in which the weakest can be truly free in the face of the strongest. If juridical and institutional guarantees are precious, they nonetheless remain rather illusory. In other words, like the intimate, the doctrine of freedoms is not founded on the law, but on force. In truth, Milner says, we are all convinced of one thing: apart from fairy tales where the weak become strong (that is, the revolutionary dream), there is but a single guarantee of actual freedoms, and that is the right to secrecy, the single material limit to the power of the Other that we name "the State," "institutions," or "society."

That said, I will now make six remarks, with the goal of delineating the current state of the intimate.



The first concerns what I would call the interest of psychoanalysis. We should emphasize that, during the Romantic period, the notion of the intimate took on a hue that would go on to thoroughly color Freud's invention. Psychoanalysis sets apart

anything having to do with sexuality as that which is the most personal and the most concealed. Sexuality is designated as the opaque kernel of the intimate. This hue will always more or less color the intimate.

But this interest is more radical still, because the intimate doesn't only demarcate the most subjective site of the subject. It is, as I've said, its very condition. There can be no subject without a secret, that is, there can be no entirely transparent subject. Every dream of transparency removes, with the dissolution of every opacity, the opacity of the subject itself.

Democracy is, of course, animated by an ideal of transparency, but on principle it concerns itself only with power and the powerful, not with subjects. Not only does democracy set the opacity of the subject against the transparency of the Other, the State; it is supposed to defend this opacity against any intrusion, which also means defending the subject's freedom. This is where the problem lies today. We could cite Walter Benjamin: "Mankind, which in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order."⁴ Only, the problem today is not that we have taken ourselves as an object of contemplation, it's that our democratic world is dividing itself unequally into those who gaze and those who are gazed at. In reality, our democracy seems to be animated by a perfectly contradictory will: on the one hand, the Other tends to become more and more opaque, while on the other hand the subject is rendered increasingly transparent. As a result, even though these days every gesture made by every politician is subjected to media scrutiny, we still know less and less about the machinery of power. Meanwhile—to judge by all sorts of various indexes—power knows more and more about each one of us.

We live in a time when everything can be known; there are no longer any secrets. Confidentiality is dead. We have entered an era when secrecy has had its day. I was very struck by Sidney Pollack's 1975 film *The Three Days of the Condor*, in which Robert Redford plays a failed writer, recruited by the CIA, who works in a "reading unit" where agents spend all day going through spy novels with a fine-toothed comb in order to find possible leaks, or to learn new methods of "work." The thesis of Joseph Turner, the hero of this reading unit, is that there is no concealment, that no secret is concealed. All that is necessary is to read and to reconstruct. Every secret, even the most confidential secrets of the State, like those concerning the atomic bomb, are perfectly visible in texts that have absolutely nothing at all to do with the military or with espionage services. The truth is perfectly legible, but cut up, fragmented, scattered. The truth is an encrypted puzzle; all one would have to do is to assemble the pieces, and in order to do that, one must see them. That is, one must find the right point of view from which one can discern these elements of truth; these elements that, observed from another point, slip away and remain, not concealed, but invisible. In short, what we have here is a modern version of Edgar Allen Poe's "The

⁴ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968) 242.

Purloined Letter.” This is an extremely interesting thesis. It must be emphasized that, as in Poe’s story, the secrets in question are secrets of the State; the secrets to be extorted are secrets of the powerful. The question is whether or not the thesis of the film—that there are no more secrets—is no longer put into practice by the powerful for the powerful, but rather by the powerful for the subject. It is no longer necessary to uncover secrets of the State, in any case not *only* those secrets; what matters today are the secrets of the alcove, the intimate of the subject.

In this encrypted visibility of the secret, Edgar Allen Poe joins, in a sense, Leo Strauss, who highlighted the role of persecution in the art of writing, persecution that obliged the writer to practice a writing of dissimulation, an “art of writing between the lines.” The psychoanalyst is the one who reads what is written between the lines. However, there are two barriers that keep him from being an extortionist of the intimate. The first barrier is ethical: the psychoanalyst uncovers the intimate only to the subject that demands it of him. The second barrier proceeds from the real, that is, from the impossible: it is impossible to say everything, thus the psychoanalyst cannot extort the truth from the subject. Lacan, who once claimed that he told the truth but not-all [*pas-toute*] of it, said all there was to say on this subject.

We live in a time of a widespread uncovering [*dévoilement*], of which the Internet is both the symptom and the instrument. We note, moreover, that *The Three Days of the Condor* is inscribed in an earlier time in that it pursues the secret of the Others, the bad guys; there is also the fact that the instrument of truth in the film is the book. Today we live in the age of the Internet, of webcams, of widespread imaging. In the age of the Internet, the idea that there are no more secrets has for its counterpart the idea that there is no more possible mastery of information. Everything can be known, and everyone can know it all of the time. Thus we must have special procedures so that power can escape being uncovered. There is a need to render power opaque. Transparency is thus the modern watchword, but it works in only one direction.

All of this relates directly to our freedom. When we read Benjamin Constant’s *On the Liberty of the Moderns*, which dates from the 1820’s, we grasp a thesis that concerns our modernity, namely, that if the Ancients defined freedom as active and constant participation in public affairs, our freedom (we other Moderns) is comprised of the peaceful *jouissance* of private independence.

Psychoanalysis was born into this modernity and has to situate itself according to it. What is strange is that psychoanalysis, which aims at elucidation, is aligned on the side of the obscure, on the side of the defense of secrecy. It is the obscure side of weakness, which is that of the subject in the face of power. This can be easily deduced from the preceding: to wit, anything that threatens the right to secrecy threatens not only intimacy and freedom, it threatens the subject in its very existence. Without the right to secrecy, without concealment, there is no subject that thinks, hence no subject that is. Thus, we understand that it’s not only a question of the interest of psychoanalysis, but that the defense of the intimate and of secrecy is properly a cause of psychoanalysis.

It is here that we can sketch out the political dimension of psychoanalysis. It corresponds not to a new form of “application”—psychoanalysis’s intervention in the political field, armed with its concepts—but to the highlighting of an internal political dimension, one proper to psychoanalysis, simply because the possibility of the intimate is, in the end, the possibility of psychoanalysis.

Whether it’s a question of video surveillance and medical dossiers, or of procedures which seek to evaluate the risks a child might pose in the future, every measure that puts the intimate and the right to secrecy in peril constitutes a threat to psychoanalysis—which, moreover, is itself directly threatened. Hence the need for political vigilance, and even, today, a state of alert.



My second remark touches on the nature of threats at the borders of the intimate.

The right to concealment is a barrier; it constitutes the border of the intimate. If there is reason to speak of borders in the plural, it’s not because this border is diverse or variable, or that it’s a question of more or less secrecy, of degrees of the intimate. The right to secrecy and to the intimate are absolutes—either this right exists or it doesn’t. On the other hand, like any border, it demarcates two spaces: the intimate—the site of the subject—and the field of the Other. The border can thus be seen from two sides. This opens up three possible states for the border: either it remains hermetically sealed and preserves the intimate from any intrusion (this is what defines a certain state of real democracy), or there is a crossing over [*franchissement*]. But there are two ways of thinking about this crossing over: either there is invasion of the intimate, or there is renunciation of it. The first is the case of the Other, of power; the second is the case of the subject.

Let us consider first of all the act of power. Suppose that the Other has poked his nose into our intimate space or pried into our private life. This is an increasingly common occurrence, due to the fact that we live in an age of video surveillance. Whether police, urban, or military, this surveillance is at present more than just widespread: it is planetary. From this day forward there will be eyes revolving day and night around the Earth—as one can easily see by logging on to Google Earth. We have entered a paranoid age. But the presence of cameras on every street corner poses a serious question; it is not simply a matter of a technical innovation that permits power to extend itself and to invade the public space. Rather, with this technical progress, a reversal has taken place without our being aware of it. When, formerly, techniques of police surveillance were developed, they were developed with the aim of flushing out the secrets of criminals. Nowadays the latest techniques are used in the service of absolutely opposing aims: cameras are there to keep watch over the innocent and to control their secrets. The society of control that Deleuze spoke of is a society where the innocents are controlled. This is what engenders the diffuse feeling of society’s criminalization, where we are all watched as if we are would-be or unaware culprits.

As for this rampant and widespread criminalization of society, we can shed some light on certain procedures employed today in the service of policies that allegedly aim to prevent criminality. Prevention has become the watchword of the day, to the point that, in place of Foucault's "*Surveiller et punir*," we have now substituted "Supervise and Prevent." The novelty stems from the fact that the latest procedures of delinquency prevention, for the sake of maximum effectiveness, tend to be more and more preemptive. That is, these procedures no longer simply attempt to influence so-called "environmental" factors in the emergence of criminality, but aim at the very being of subjects. In other words, well beyond social, educational, juridical or police measures, preventative procedures will henceforth be a matter for medical science and will be devised by mental health specialists. This is supposed to render them beyond suspicion, since science, as we all know, can only work for our good.

This brings to mind a particular project, one very controversial in France, which has mobilized many people and is still politically relevant today: namely, a report of "collective expertise" published in 2005 by the *Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Médicale* (INSERM) on the prevention of delinquency, entitled "Conduct Disorders in the Child and the Adolescent." Delinquency, a sociologico-juridico-police notion, is treated in this report as a "conduct disorder," a psychiatric notion taken from the DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders). Its "predictive" signs are organized into four categories: aggressive conduct that causes or threatens physical harm to other people or animals, non-aggressive conduct that causes property loss or damage, deceitfulness or theft, and serious violations of rules. I'll cut to the chase: the report alerts us to the stunning precocity of the signs of this disorder: "aggressiveness, intractability and inadequate emotional control during childhood have been described as predictive of conduct disorder in adolescence."⁵ It is specified that these behaviors must be differentiated from what is termed "normal conduct." This comparison should be emphasized, as it highlights a certain mode of thinking about the individual, that is, that the behavior of a subject is linked directly to the normality of the group. Thus we see the field of psychology occupied by a mode of thinking that reasons not in terms of people but of "population." This is the threat Foucault pointed to—a threat which gives rise to a new Leviathan, a flood of statistics (the DSM, a worldwide psychiatric reference, is itself a statistical treatise of "disorders"). Psychiatrists and psychologists—these experts—do not think of singular and individual people in terms of cases; they think of them in terms of statistical beings in which the subject as singularity is reabsorbed, abolished—in Lacanian terms, foreclosed. We now know that these experts resolve the question of abnormality by retaining the criterion of age. It is claimed that behaviors such as physical aggression, lying or the theft of objects, that is, behaviors relatively frequent in small children, only become "abnormal" if they occur very frequently and last beyond the age of four years. As a consequence, our group of experts recommends a systematic medical screening for every child at 36 months, since "at this age, one can first locate the signs of a difficult temperament, of hyperactivity, and the first

⁵ All translations of this report are my own. [Trans.]

symptoms of a conduct disorder.” This in turn leads to the recommendation that every health professional learn to recognize the criteria defining conduct disorders, a task that concerns, first of all, intervention specialists in maternal and infantile protection agencies and in medico-psycho-pedagogical centers, as well as National Education medical personnel.

We scarcely dare add that our INSERM experts have identified certain risk factors in the course of the prenatal and perinatal periods: for example, a very young mother, the consumption of psychoactive substances during pregnancy, a low birth weight or complications arising during delivery. As a consequence, our experts recommend a testing of families presenting these risk factors over the course of the medical supervision of the pregnancy. These principles, and the “scientific” measures that result from them, are today defended by experts from the police services, who are advised by the minister of the interior, who is a candidate in the French presidential elections, and who has included these measures in his program of public security. We can thus consider this report, prepared by experts in medical research, as the ultimate illustration and justification of Michel Foucault’s thesis of biopower, that is, the notion that life and the body have henceforth become objects of power.

This system of child evaluation and administrative record-keeping, recommended by the experts of a national institute of medical research, bears witness to the fact that we have entered an age in which the gaze of the master—the intrusive gaze, relying on science and technical knowledge—is without limits. The subject who, in the past, submitted to the gaze of a God who peered into his soul today finds his body scrutinized by experts who probe the most secret recesses of his spirit—if not the very womb of his mother, perhaps even farther. The intimate, which used to be defined as a window open to the subject and closed to the Other, is now incessantly probed and extorted.

From now on, an immense machine lays siege to the borders of the intimate.



We must at present displace or reverse our point of view in order to discover a new perspective. There is another way to cross the border of the intimate: by going in the opposite direction [*dans l’autre sens*]. This would be the case of those who, unconstrained by any external force, open up their intimacy, confess it or expose it. This has nothing to do with stolen or extorted images or data, but rather with those that are deliberately exhibited. We should stress that this would not be a case of the subject renouncing his right to secrecy; on the contrary, it would be a free act, a certain exercise of this right. The right to remain silent, which one hears ritually invoked in American police films at each arrest, does not oblige one to be quiet. This would be totalitarianism, according to Lacan: everything not prohibited is obligatory. We might note in passing that this right to silence embodies the spirit of America (a nation founded by those fleeing persecution) whose citizens, as Jacques-Alain Miller points out, gave themselves a totally new constitution, one whose principle was not

prohibition but permissiveness. This does not prevent the existence of censorship; however, we must grant that censorship does not derive from the Constitution.

“The intimate exposed”: this irresistibly invokes the age of what we today call reality TV. Although this phenomenon is massive and warrants our interest, I only want to mention it here in order to highlight a strange feature of our era. Namely, that on the one hand, the desire to see everything no longer only animates power (“Big Brother is Watching You”⁶), it is now a widespread desire on the part of the subject, one that demands gratification. On the other hand, and at the same time, it is in this society—where each person wants to know what’s happening in the life of the other—that this obscene taste for exhibition develops. Each one wants to see and each one wants to be seen, all at once.

Be that as it may, I would like for us to pay attention here to what is taking place in art and literature, which have become eminent sites in the exercise of this freedom to flaunt the intimate. A veritable art of exhibiting the intimate is developing today in literature and in museums. Formerly, in art, intimacy was startling; images of the intimate were stolen and gave the spectator the delicious feeling that he was violating a prohibition, that he was an intruder who saw what he wasn’t supposed to see. Today the intimate is not stolen, it is displayed openly, without shame and without giving a *frisson* of pleasure. This can take all sorts of forms: pornography, exhibition, confession, book review, admission; *The Sexual Life of Catherine M.* by Catherine Millet, the films of Larry Clark, the photographs of Araki, or the work of Nan Goldin.

Of course, one could object that the intimate was being exposed long before these works came along, but we must remind ourselves that in the eighteenth century, for example, when Jean-Jacques Rousseau published his *Confessions*, it wasn’t considered an intimate work in the strict sense. What was then referred to as a *journal intime* was precisely that: a journal that remained secret and was by necessity not published. By contrast, what characterizes our age is that, in addition to revealing ourselves [*se dire*] in the secrecy of the analyst’s office, the intimate today is published, is displayed on screens and exposed on the walls of museums. And, we must add, without shame. We have entered the age of uncovering, which is also an age of the dissolution of shame. Of course, psychoanalysts should rejoice in this, since this tendency bears witness to a certain victory for Freud, in that the prohibition on sexuality no longer weighs on us; in any case, it no longer weighs on us the way it did in Freud’s day.

This dissolution of shame does not signal the total absence of modesty that would lead to provocation without limit, but rather the simple fact of a certain reduction of the feeling of guilt in the subject. In contrast to Sartre’s voyeur, who blushed when he thought he was seen by the Other, today’s subject no longer blushes when he is seen viewing images of his fantasy. This is what, in certain respects, distinguishes the

⁶ In English in the original. [Trans.]

exhibition in museums of what used to be referred to as “shameful images”; namely, that now they are exposed without shame. Shameful images have a hard time shaming us: times are hard for pornographers. That is, the border crossing I’m talking about in art can today no longer be thought of in terms of subversion, scandal, provocation, outrage, or profanation. Along with the dissolution of shame there is a certain dissolution of the sacred. The collapse of prohibitions does not call for sacrilege or blasphemy, at least not on a day-to-day basis. Scandal is so affordable these days that it is within the reach of the most common advertisement. This is why contemporary works of art that try to be provocative must play the game of escalation, a tiring game in an already-inflated market; these works end up being somewhat derisory, grotesque or pitiful. Fortunately, there are still a few irritable puritans here and there, obsessive censors that confer a whiff of sulfur on certain works that, without these calls for prohibition or even destruction, would not generate much of an audience.

The sole remaining prohibition, the one sacred value in our society that seems to remain, has to do with children. It is forbidden to touch a hair on their little blond heads, as if children had rediscovered that angelic purity on which Freud managed to cast some doubt. And it is undoubtedly the diabolical figure of Freud that we condemn today, seeing him as the one who, by uncovering the relationship of childhood to sexuality, quite simply depraved our virginal childhoods. In an age when sexuality is exhibited on every street corner, the image of the innocent child has, strangely, returned with a vengeance.

We have to admit, today, that we have seen everything. So how does one go about causing a scandal? The inquisitorial ardor of a certain “moral minority”⁷ is nothing but the sign of the collapse of all prohibitions; likewise, the desire for the restoration of values is at bottom an indication that the times have changed, that shameful images hardly shame us anymore, that their power of provocation has become blunted. This should give us pause.

In order to contrast it with certain historical precedents, we should like to return for a moment to the idea that shameful images without shame are a novelty. For example, after having read Daniel Arasse, one might be somewhat correct in considering Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* as the paradigm of the “shameful image.” This recumbent nude woman, who caresses herself while smiling at us, is in certain respects a shameful image without shame—except that this intimate image was destined only for the intimacy of a single gaze, that of Guidobaldo della Rovere, who ordered this “pin up”⁸ from Titian for his exclusive use. This poses a real museographical problem, not as to the contemporary exhibition of such a painting in a museum (in the Uffizi in Florence), but as to its meaning-effect [*effet de sens*] on visitors. During the Renaissance, the intimate was destined for an intimate space. Today it goes directly to the museum; that is, it is no longer destined for the secrecy of a *studiolo* or the

⁷ In English in the original. [Trans.]

⁸ In English in the original. [Trans.]

gaze of a lover, but for the bright lights and greedy eyes of culture. The museum is that great site of the democracy of the gaze; indeed, it rests on a principle that, in a way, derives from the Enlightenment: every visible work must be able to be seen by all. Let us admit, however, that such a democratic principle, which is as such beyond discussion, nevertheless has the effect of obscuring the meaning of certain works by delivering them over to gazes for which they were not destined. Hence we can draw the conclusion that the history of art is inconceivable without the construction of a history of the gaze. We can also perhaps understand if, in Europe (and perhaps especially in France), curators of public museums—the defenders of the democratic gaze—feel a certain hostility toward types like Guidobaldo della Rovere and private collectors in general, who, they claim, organize the privatization and the deprivation of the *jouissance* of a work that could be the property of all.

So there we have it: a charming picture of our current state of affairs. This leads us to make a double-remark. On the one hand, in our era, which advances under the standard of the Rights of Man, the material right to secrecy is materially threatened from all sides. On the other hand, one would be in part correct to try to prevent that right from becoming humankind's most important right. Secondly and conjointly, we remark today a widespread, excessive display of the intimate. For my part, I suggest we consider the question by confronting these two sides, one against the other: that of the widespread threat against the intimate, and the widespread extension of images of the intimate. There are two sides: the intimate exposed, and the intimate extorted. The question I am raising deals with the possible relation of one to the other.



My hypothesis is that the excessive display of images of the intimate that we find today in art arises not from the modern exercise of a freedom, but constitutes, paradoxically, a response to the threat *against* the intimate. Of course one could imagine, as a response to the hypermodern threat of a limitless gaze into the intimate, extending the use of the veil. (This is, moreover, what we are witnessing with the rise of Muslim rigor.) But in art, on the contrary, we are also witnessing a movement of uncovering, one that might appear, after all, to be simply in keeping with the desire for omniscience of the modern master. And yet it seems to me that images of art, certain ones at least, can stage an interruption of this desire. We must, then, specify how and why.

All of this means that in order to understand what one would today call “shameful images,” we need no longer look at the prohibition, but on the contrary, at this machine-for-seeing-everything, this machine for extorting the intimate that is today the power in the hands of the hypermodern master. To this we must add the fact that the visible has become a commodity; there is a privatization of the visible, with the result that, henceforth, the image of every single thing can be converted into money. Nothing and no one can escape from the system of exchange, which is global. The market is the contemporary form of the universal. There is no domain of human

affairs shielded from its law, including that of the sacred and the tragic. We no longer live in a world of masters and slaves, capitalists and proletarians, or citizens, but in a world of consumers, either real or virtual. Lacan prophesied this—"the rise of the object to the social zenith."⁹ The domination of prohibitions and of the father gives way neatly to the domination of the object. The current tendency is not toward the prohibition but toward the admission, in the sense that the body and the genitals (the most intimate of the intimate) are also seized upon by the market. Everything is free and must free itself in this sense. As a result, without prohibitions, we see the possibilities of provocation disappear. There is no longer a "hell." Everything is more or less permitted. There are some things that still make us tremble, but one gets the feeling that it is no longer possible to go very far in transgression unless one is to make a work out of crime. This is one possibility. Childhood is the only thing today that can stage an interruption, as we saw in the case of the CAPC of Bordeaux.¹⁰ By the end of the twentieth century, we had seen it all. But if the sacred has lost its glory and its power today, how do we go about being subversive? It's going to happen *vis-à-vis* the world of the market; Jeff Koons speaks of this. By using icons, by erecting new and ridiculous golden calves, Koons allows us to take a certain distance. By elevating always-perishable objects to the dignity of the work, always imperishable, he uncovers a certain truth; he lays bare the illusory prestige of the fetish. La Cicciolina is, in a sense, one of these works: she is a statue of love and of sex seized in the marketplace.¹¹ The topicality of "shameful images" would be in this sense the topicality of threats against the intimate. If one function of art is to show what one cannot see, we must nevertheless not limit ourselves to thinking that what we cannot see is what is prohibited, that poor taste would be the proper response to the conservative attitudes of a "moral majority"¹² who would force us to conceal what we cannot see. Not because the intimate would be any less threatened by a prohibition than by an obligatory admission—Foucault warned us against this—but because it is purely and simply threatened with dissolution.

Let us simply ask ourselves this question: what could be the possible meaning and value of exposing pornographic images in a world where we are seen everywhere, all

⁹ Jacques Lacan, "Radiophonie," *Scilicet* 2/3 (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970) 66.

¹⁰ In 2000, the Museum of Contemporary Art of Bordeaux (CAPC) organized an exhibit around the theme of child-hood, "Presumed Innocent" (*Présumés Innocents*). The exhibit brought together 200 works from 80 celebrated artists. Six years later, in 2006, a complaint was lodged by an extreme right-wing organization, charging that the works were "pornographic." The former director of the museum and two curators were placed under investigation; they now risk sentencing and punishment. The affair provoked a scandal with the majority of the French public siding with the accused. A number of politicians have also become involved and have lent their support. The matter is still ongoing. [Trans.]

¹¹ In 1991 the American sculptor married Anna Ilona Staller (also known by her stage name La Cicciolina), an Italian-Hungarian porn star turned politician, and the first hardcore performer in the world to be elected to a democratic parliament. [Trans.]

¹² In English in the original. [Trans.]

the time and from every angle, and sounded to the innermost depths of our bodies and our souls?

I've already mentioned that a new figure haunts our era, a phantom or a fantasy: that of the transparent subject. It is the correlate to what I call the limitless gaze of the master. The invention of the X-ray at the end of the nineteenth century gave birth to the scientific dream of the transparency of the body—to the point of inspiring the belief that, thanks to Röntgen, our most secret thoughts would no longer be safe from the practiced eye of the physician. It is clear that today the forces of technical expansion seem to want to extend the power of the machine-for-seeing to the point of creating a man without a shadow, a totally transparent subject, in body and soul. Between the explosion of medical imaging, the perpetual innovation in the field of police surveillance and espionage technology, the triumph of legal medicine and of anatomic pathology, or the strange displacement of psychiatric expertise towards what we henceforth will call "psychological autopsy," it seems that power is today centered on the gaze, and that the exercise of power consists first of all in increasing the powers of surveillance of the subject and the investigation of bodies. We are thus led to think that what formerly was considered a divine attribute—the omniscience of God, his power to see everything without being seen—has today become an attribute of a secular power, armed by both science and technology.

This is why it is of the utmost importance to be able to watch what is watching us; to reveal to everyone that which, without our seeing it, turns us into subjects-under-control, that is, observed objects.

It would hardly be forcing things to superimpose this fantasy of science onto what would be, for the police, an ideal situation. Photography has obviously played a historic role in doing this. By virtue of showing that this process of recuperation is today on its way to completion, I would direct your attention to the recent batch of police TV shows like *CSI*, in which we see the progressive substitution of the character of the cop, private eye, or detective by the figures of the scientific expert and the forensic scientist. The police, whose object is to defend the living, now strive above all to develop investigative techniques that deal with cadavers, objects, matter. Likewise, when doctors speak of developing the "psychological autopsy" as an area of expertise, one should worry that this means, from now on, that the subject as such will be thought of *a priori* as a cadaver, and that one might penetrate into its innermost recesses to root out the truth. Sustained by the scientific fantasy of transparency, power's right to the gaze, which is set against the subject's right to secrecy, becomes a major and acute political problem.

It is also a problem for any reflection on art today. Not that the question poses itself specifically for art; rather, following the idea of art I am putting forth, I believe that today, art is a site where the fantasy of science is posed and exposed as problematic in the sense that one uncovers it, that it is demonstrated and dismantled as such. Art is the site where the fantasy of science and of the modern master are perhaps most

profoundly thought through, and where there is a response to the threat such a fantasy entails.

I'll give an example: when the great Belgian artist Wim Delvoye produces radiographic images of a kiss or of sexual acts, or when Bernard Venet runs a self-portrait through a scanner, these artists are not merely aesthetically appropriating the latest scientific technologies, as has been done in art for a long time. As far as the use of radiography goes, it seems that Meret Oppenheim was the first (in 1964) to make X-ray portraits: self-portraits, to be exact. By exposing the scientific hyper-intimacy of the body, these artists' images are truly a critical response to the scientific fantasy of the transparent subject; that is, one which is fully knowable. These scientific images alert us to the desires of science and its pretensions to an entirely calculable, assessable, and as a result fully predictable subject. In truth, what these images of transparency show us, what these artists show us by showing us scientific images of the body's transparency, is that, along with the fantasy of science, there also exists a certain irreducible opacity.

Science does have a stumbling block. I'll say which later.

To linger for a moment with the idea of a critical art or of an art of resistance, I cannot help referencing a work by Bruce Nauman. I have to admit that I think of Bruce Nauman as a sort of universal thinker; he is to my mind the Swiss army knife of our era, the great revealer of the latest malaise of our civilization. I have, moreover, come up with a law that I call the *Law of T.A.A.W.O.B.N.A.T.T.S*: There's-Always-A-Work-Of-Bruce-Nauman's-Adapted-To-The-Situation. For now I'll speak of the audio piece exhibited in Paris and more recently at the Tate Modern in London. One enters freely into a small padded room, dark and empty, and as one approaches the walls one hears—vaguely at first, and then, as one nears the partition, more distinctly—a voice, whispering firmly, “get out of my mind, get out of this room.”¹³ It is the voice of Bruce Nauman himself. Thus one goes to a museum, one walks calmly into a space with the aim of seeing, as is fair; and once inside, one discovers first of all that there is nothing to see, and then that one is “inside the mind of Bruce Nauman” and would do well to get out of there, and fast. A work that kicks you to the curb: all in all, not bad for a museum piece. In fact, if I had to award a Grand Prize in Art against the “psychological autopsy”—to pick a work that most acutely denounces the desire of experts to probe our souls, a work of public safety announcing that the assessors are already in our heads, in short, a work that most savagely defends the intimate—I would, without hesitation, nominate this piece by Bruce Nauman.



Now, in order to conclude, and to respond at the same time to certain questions still in suspension, we must face a paradox.

¹³ In English in the original. [Trans]

To refer to psychoanalysis, as I have been doing, is to defend a discourse that, one might claim, is also responsible for extorting the intimate. Michel Foucault may have thought so. Saying-everything [*le tout-dire*] leads straight to the confessional—the Church and communism have both been guilty of this. Now, as far as suspecting that psychoanalysis is on the side of the inquisitive gaze, I give you—as fodder for suspicious minds—another bad sign, the fact that Freud conceived of the material device of psychoanalysis, the relation of armchair to couch, by invoking the power it offered him to “see without being seen.” He thus invoked (without knowing it, I believe) what used to be considered an attribute of God, the only being capable of seeing without being seen.¹⁴ By placing himself in his armchair, the psychoanalyst is supposed to be sitting on the throne of an omniscient god.

The entire problem can be limited to two questions, which in turn imply two barriers. The first is ethical: if the analyst does indeed have a certain omniscience at his disposal, the value of this omniscience lies in the analyst’s not making use of it. Whether he does or not rests on an ethical choice alone, one from which analysis is suspended: in his role as listener, the analyst is non-seeing (which is what perhaps gives him the power, like Tiresias, to see into the future). The second barrier is real: does it necessarily follow that, from the power to see everything, everything can be seen? In truth, the problem is played out here, since this begs the question of a limit to the gaze—one founded not on a prohibition, on a choice, or on any contingency, but on an impossible, on the real.

All of this only makes sense if we put psychoanalysis into historical perspective. Jacques-Alain Miller tried his hand at this on a radio show some months ago. We must indeed admit that the primary effect of psychoanalysis in our world has been to modify common sense by loudly touting its claim: by saying, “everything is good for you.” At any rate, this is how society has interpreted it. These days, the idea that saying everything is beneficial has become common sense. Formerly, there were things that one did not say, lest the sacred be offended. We must realize that, as a result of this possibility, the act of saying had great value. As a result, the authority of censorship has played an important role throughout history. Nor did Freud fail to recognize its importance, giving, as he did, the notion of censorship a place in his theory. Writers, too, have been aware of the problem, from the time when the act of saying still counted for something. Censorship was the writer’s partner. Again, it was Leo Strauss who highlighted the role of persecution in the art of writing, which required a writing of dissimulation, an “art of writing between the lines” whereby every piece of writing was supposed to be an encoded message. Even Rousseau (to whom I have also already alluded), who professed a frankness without limits, admitted to employing a certain art of writing so as not to reveal to certain malicious

¹⁴ I refer here to two texts: Sigmund Freud, “On Beginning the Treatment” (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psychoanalysis I), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (hereafter SE), trans. James Strachey et al. vol. 12 (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1974) 121-45 and “An Autobiographical Study,” S.E. 20: 3-71.

people what he was really thinking. Nevertheless, today we must observe that saying-everything has triumphed. We live in the age of the Internet that, to judge by the evidence, is heading in the direction of saying-everything.

And this is the point. That is, we have to conclude that we no longer live in the era of Freud. Freud lived in another time, the Victorian age, which pivoted on the suppression of speech, with its cohort of censorship and repression. In a sense, he borrowed these notions from his time. In that world of censorship and repression, psychoanalysis thus obviously marked the appearance of a certain freeing-up of speech. As Jacques-Alain Miller emphasizes, Dada and Surrealism will later be parts of this current.

This freeing-up of speech has led to a mutation in depth in the twentieth-century correlative to a weakening of the sacred. The psychoanalyst, it is said, must plead guilty in this respect, for he has indeed contributed to the dissolution of the sacred. Thus, during its first century, psychoanalysis has been contemporaneous with an art caught up in a Batailleian dialectic between the sacred, prohibition, and transgression. By pitting itself against censorship and repression, psychoanalysis thus works together with the provocative exhibition of shameful images.

But our present age, the age of the triumph of Freud and the Internet, of the triumph of the say-everything, opens up the obviously more melancholy horizon of twenty-first century psychoanalysis. What is left for us to hope for if the say-everything has already triumphed? Obviously, there are still moral panics and censors; there are still liberatory battles to fight. But to conclude here would make for a dull ending—a false one, to be honest. The latest result of the social say-everything is that it dissolves the field of language. In other words, Freud's triumph is also a defeat.

However, against the background of this dull ending, another question appears: can one truly say everything? To say everything is supposed to resolve everything. But although one can try to say everything, this attempt is futile, for there is, fortunately for psychoanalysis, something that remains unresolved, something never resolved, something that, we can safely predict, will never be resolved. Something having to do with sexuality. Something in the sexuality of the human species will never be resolved. So we must reconcile ourselves to that which will never be resolved. This opens up new possibilities for psychoanalysis in our hypermodern age. That which is not resolved is exactly what Lacan called "the impossible sexual relation." Obviously, this does not mean (and we should know this by now—Lacan started the whole business in the 70's) that there is no sexual relationship, but rather that there is, for the human species, no such thing as a fixed, defined body of knowledge concerning the relation between the sexes. Pink flamingoes know this, as do guinea pigs, but men do not, nor do women. This is, by the way, why humankind has invented all sorts of organized bodies of knowledge, such as marriage and the *Kama Sutra*—in an attempt to compensate for this lack.

In other words, there seems to be a beyond [*au-delà*] of prohibition. Prohibition used to be a barrier that called for transgression. Art was at one time a site of freedom

against prohibition. Today we are discovering that prohibition is not the ultimate barrier, but that, fundamentally, it is a means of giving a human face—by means of the law, the symbolic, language—to the real of an impossible. Following the logic of Cocteau's remark in *The Wedding on the Eiffel Tower*, "since these mysteries are beyond us, let's pretend we're organizing them."¹⁵ Prohibition takes over for the impossible.



Which brings me to my last remark. I would contend that today, art resides on the side of this real—that shameful images come to be inscribed precisely where there is something unresolved in sexuality, something that cannot be exhausted, either by saying or by seeing. A space is opening up in art today: not of sexuality, but of malaise in sexuality, of malaise in *jouissance*.

This is also an opening for an art of the post-Freudian age. We are under the impression today that it is good to admit to every *jouissance*, but there exists something before which speech fails, whatever we might do. When we read Catherine Millet's novel, it tells us of a certain silence of *jouissance*. Nan Goldin is a great artist of civilization's malaise, in other words, of the malaise of *jouissance*, of the great disorder of love. She, too, is an artist of a psychoanalysis-of-the-present, of the ultimate truth of psychoanalysis, which is that of the impossible. Her images of beaten-up transvestites at four o'clock in the morning, with their mascara running and their pretty dresses all askew: these are images of the unveiling of the truth of sex. And of the phallus: all worn out and flaccid, not turned-on and erect. We live in the age of the weary phallus. Goldin's is the punk art of sex, the "no future"¹⁶ of sex. The image has lost all capacity to shock. This is not to say that her images themselves are flaccid, deliberately. Nor are they ugly, provocative, disgusting—nothing of the kind; they are simply true. These images can be moving, striking, troubling, whatever you like; there is no reason whatsoever that the truth has to be ugly and unpleasant. What these images show is that there is something behind the shocking, behind the image, behind all things: the great incurable disorder of love. For his part, Larry Clark's filming of American adolescents demonstrates a liberated sexuality, albeit one dating from the era of the triumph of psychoanalysis: a sexuality that has finished expressing itself, that is, a sexuality that is worn out. These children are, in a way, still the children of Freud and Coca-Cola.

I would thus situate things in this way: certain images are capable of showing malaise in *jouissance*, of showing that which remains unresolved in the domain of sexuality. There again I find the Lacano-Wittgensteinian machine that leads me to the question of the image, following the proposition of the *Tractatus* that states that

¹⁵ Jean Cocteau, *The Wedding on the Eiffel Tower*, trans Michael Benedikt, in *Modern French Theatre: The Avant-Garde, Dada and Surrealism*, ed. Michael Benedikt and George E. Wellwarth (New York: Dutton, 1966) 94. [Translation modified]

¹⁶ In English in the original. [Trans]

there is something inexpressible, that there are things one cannot say, and that that which one cannot say shows itself. From this I simply draw the conclusion that today, shameful images are no longer to be considered subversive or emancipatory, that they no longer stand up against prohibition, but that they confront the impossible: the sexual relation that does not exist.

To conclude, we might evoke two radiographic images by Wim Delvoye.¹⁷ These X-ray images possess the power of extreme truth. But not where one would think, nor where one would look. Displaying a kiss or an act of fellatio, they are there to be seen, of course, like every image. But, on the one hand, these images show what one cannot see with the naked eye, the interior of bodies in action. We are no longer in the era of the pornographic movie. The value of the appearance of the pornographic movie, if there is one, was that it showed something, a part of the anatomy that cinema had never shown before: sexual organs in action. X-ray images go one step further by going beyond anatomy, beyond the sexual organs under our skin. Thus the images of Wim Delvoye tend to show something that no one had ever seen before: how the sexual organs work. Perhaps it would be better to say that these images show that one does not see it. Or, better yet, they show that it is normal for one not to see it.

One can photograph the intimate functioning of the sexual organs using science and the most sophisticated techniques. Yet this in no way risks divulging the secret of sex, of how human desire¹⁸ works, or of the astonishing machine of the sexes for which there are no blueprints—as opposed to the poop-machine that (as if by chance) Wim Delvoye himself built, and with complete success.¹⁹ The Cloaca-Turbo (which also allows one to see a mechanism inside the body) and the X-ray image of a sexual act would be inverse copies of each other: on the one hand, the image of a machine that works, and on the other, the image of a machine that doesn't. To be more exact, I would say that these X-ray images (which resemble Leonardo's famous anatomical drawing representing an act of coitus in cutaway) demonstrate above all that there is something one cannot see: how love works, the secret of sexuality. This is their critical dimension. They are addressed as much to physicians as to everyone else, with the message that the search for bodily transparency is a fantasy because there is something that we will never be able to see, know, or master: the sexual relation. You can X-ray the body, autopsy the body, render the body as transparent as you like, but you will never learn the secret of the sexual relation. This is what, after all, definitively resists the will of the master, who insists that things "work." *Medical imaging brought up short by the sexual relation*: this could be the title for this series of images by Wim Delvoye.

¹⁷ To find reproductions of Delvoye's X-ray works online see <<http://www.touchyourself.org/blog/2005/12/delvoyes-x-ray-sex.html>> [Editor's note]

¹⁸ In English in the original. [Trans]

¹⁹ To find reproductions of Delvoye's Cloaca online, see <<http://www.cloaca.be/machine.html>> [Editor's note]

As a result, it is rather amusing to point out that the first X-ray image, made by Röntgen, who invented radiography in 1895 (the same year psychoanalysis and the cinema were born) was that of the hand of his wife, and that what we first notice when we see it is the dark shadow of her wedding ring. Thus the first image of the interior of a woman's body reveals the presence of a man, specifically, a husband—a scientist husband from whom she could keep no secrets. No doubt that explains this image. One wonders what Röntgen had in mind when he decided to produce, as his first image, an X-ray of his wife's body. We might say that Wim Delvoye shows us what Röntgen had in mind.



The hypermodern world is subjected to the order of transparency. This watchword seeks to triumph thus: "all of the real is visible, and what is not visible is not real." In this world, art seems to join with psychoanalysis in the same cause: to dispel the illusion of transparency. This cause is, moreover, that of the defense of the shadow. It is a cause of truth.

Art and psychoanalysis: two discourses of the other side of transparency.

From this we conclude that, in this hypermodern world, art and psychoanalysis are necessary.