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EDITORIAL

S-Thesis

S has been conceived as a “trap” for the subject in much the same way Lacan considered the image a “trap for the gaze”: soliciting one’s look, the seduction of the image captures us in the act of seeing and spirits our scopical desire behind the mirror image—there to cleverly upend it, returning it to us as a gaze that, as Lacan specifies, sees us from a point where we do not see it.¹ Hijacked by a painterly technique that, exemplarily like Velázquez in *Las Meninas*, deftly turns the tables on the viewing subject, our desire to see is paraded before us in visual representation as an uncanny anamorphic *object* of enjoyment that smears the surface of our perceptual apparatus and dims every hope of a transparent “window” onto the world.

The technique in question here will be psychoanalysis, with its “trick”—as one of the contributors to this issue has called it—of free association that successfully effects an equivalent parlor-game on words, enabling us to glimpse traces of the subject as it stages its own disappearance within the coils of language. However, *S* is also committed to employing “free association” in its other sense as well: to freely associate with other techniques, discourses, theories as they solicit our collective attention and expose other facets of the speaking subject’s desire.



This first issue of *S* is devoted to aesthetics as a reminder that the *S*-point, the point of the subject as breach or gap in the field of discourse, is an instance that inevitably *takes place*, occupying space and time in some type of form. Indeed, Lacan’s teachings can be considered a life-long series of attempts to extract the laws in accordance with which a subject performs this miraculous conversion or, perhaps better, “mathematization” into its representational representative: the non-signifying object (a) that, as the subject’s *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, appears only in its disappearing.

Of those laws, the ones chiefly summoned in this issue are geometrical perspective, the method by which three-dimensional space was captured in two-dimensional pictorial representation at the birth of a certain modernity; and its spectral other,

¹ See for example, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XIII, The Object of Psychoanalysis, 1965-1966*, trans. Cormac Gallagher from unedited French manuscripts (lesson of 18 May, 1966).

projective geometry. Resuscitated in the seventeenth century by perspective's introduction of ideal points of infinity, this other geometry of ancient origin—which would have to wait until the nineteenth century for proper formalization—extends Euclid's laws to authorize the introduction of a topological body (and therefore, with it, an *analytic scene*) back into the emptied flattened lines of symbolic representation.

Explicitly or implicitly for the contributors to this issue, these two intertwined geometric histories afford a conceptual blueprint for tracing and exposing another face of the imaginary as disclosed here in works by Rembrandt, Brunelleschi, Montaigne, Joyce, Bruce Naumann, Jan De Cock and Alfred Hitchcock. Frequently relegated to a subordinate place within the Lacanian registers, the imaginary emerges from these readings as the key site of a contestation for which even the term “ideological” seems decidedly anemic.

This issue also inaugurates *S*'s Dialogues, a section that takes advantage of the speed and ease of internet publication to enable readers to initiate a kind of return movement to authors whose words prompt them in this way. Also peer-reviewed, texts in Dialogues are the records of unexpected encounters between *das Es* and its Subject.

BERNARD BAAS

Translated by Chris Semk

PYGMALION'S GAZE

"There always was a gaze behind. But—this is the most subtle point—where does this gaze come from?"

—J. Lacan

Although the myth of Pygmalion is well known, let us recall the principal elements of Ovid's account: Pygmalion, who had never fallen in love with a woman, succeeded in sculpting "in snow-white ivory" the statue of a woman more beautiful than nature had ever made.¹ Amazed by the almost corporeal beauty, Pygmalion fell in love with her, so much that he caressed her, held her in his arms, and covered her with kisses. Venus then granted that the "ivory virgin" be transformed into a real virgin, whom he made his spouse.

If the creation of works in the plastic arts has something to do with desire, it is understandable that Pygmalion should have been made the emblematic figure of the artist—at the very least of the plastic artist. Not so much because the work created by art eventually rivals the living reality of a product of nature (there are other myths, such as the story of Zeuxis and Parrhasios, that can embody the identity of the signifier and the signified), but rather because the determining factor in creation here is the artist's erotic desire for the body which is both his model and the finished product.

Thus, the myth of Pygmalion is not concerned with the classic philosophical problem—principally Platonic—of *mimesis* (concerning the faithfulness of the copy to its model). Nor is the myth concerned with the modern aesthetic problem of the human body's ideal beauty. For both are founded upon the absence of desire in the relationship of art to the molded form of the human body. Of course, Plato acknowledged the beauty of another "ivory virgin": the chryselephantine statue of *Athena Parthenos* by Phidias;² but it might have been more for the "pure pleasure" of

¹ This article originally appeared as "Le regard de Pygmalion," *Savoirs et clinique* 7 (2006): 83-94. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 243-297.

² Plato, *Hippias Major*, 290ab.

the ivory's "pure whiteness" than for the virgin's beauty itself.³ The proof is in Socrates' reply to Hippias, who defined beauty as a beautiful virgin (*parthénos kalè kalon*): by that account, Socrates answered, one might as well say that beauty is "a beautiful mare" or "a beautiful pot."⁴ If one thinks that the distinctive feature of a mare is to be ridden and that within a cooking pot one turns a spoon (which will be the subject of discussion a little later in the text⁵), one can easily guess what Plato's judgment on aesthetic sublimation would have been . . . Likewise, when Kant affirmed that "the ideal of the beautiful is [. . .] only to be sought in the *human figure*," it was in order to specify right away that this ideal does not allow "any sensuous charm to mingle with the delight in its object."⁶ For Kant, it was unimaginable that an authentic aesthetic judgment could proceed from erotic desire. This is what made it possible for Nietzsche to mock the naïveté of Kant and the Kantians—"the naïveté of a country vicar"—for whom it is possible to "contemplate even statues of female nudes 'without interest,'" and he added, "The experiences of artists are on this thorny issue 'more interesting' and Pygmalion was in any case not necessarily an 'unaesthetic man.'"⁷

All of this allows us to understand that, in the 17th century, it was possible to name an engraving by Rembrandt *The Statue of Pygmalion*, a print of which is on display in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Tourcoing (see fig. 1).⁸

What one sees in the engraving is an artist contemplating the body of a female nude, a body as white as ivory. Certainly, nothing permits one to identify this scene with that of Pygmalion, since there is not a single element evoking a sculpting studio; on the contrary, everything in the engraving signals the art of drawing and painting, especially the paper that the seated figure appears to hold on his knees, the canvas resting against the easel, the palm-frond . . . In the museum catalogue, Sophie Raux reports that according to the art historian Emmens, the confusion between the scene represented by the engraving and the legend of Pygmalion results from the fact that the name "Pygmalion" had once applied to vain and boastful artists, a reputation that marked Rembrandt himself.⁹ A vanity that, of course, is related to the fact that Pygmalion, in the myth, claims to have produced through art a beauty superior to anything created by nature. The title with which the engraving is displayed in the Tourcoing museum, *Le dessinateur et son modèle*, is therefore undoubtedly more

³ Plato, *Philebus*, 53ab.

⁴ Plato, *Hippias Major*, 287e.

⁵ Plato, *Hippias Major*, 290d.

⁶ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. James Creed Meredith, rev. and ed. Nicholas Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) § 17, 66.

⁷ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 84.

⁸ Number 192 in Adam Bartsch's catalogue (no. 1771 in the Tourcoing museum catalogue). Figure 1 reproduced with permission of Musée des Beaux-Arts de Tourcoing.

⁹ *Collection d'estampes du musée des Beaux-Arts de Tourcoing*, 1998 (41).



Figure 1: Rembrandt, *The Painter and his model* (around 1639). Collection of Musée des Beaux-Arts de Tourcoing. © Musée des Beaux-Arts de Tourcoing.

fitting for what it portrays; and it is certainly more judicious than the title proposed by Karel Boon in his edition of Rembrandt's complete engravings: *The Painter Designing Virtue*¹⁰—as if it were necessary to rescue the painting's obvious indecency by a little moral supplement! For if the scene pictured in the engraving cannot strictly be identified with the Pygmalion legend, it is nevertheless a fact that that the young girl, white as the virgin of ivory and flesh, who offers herself to the designer's gaze does make this painting a kind of allegory—just as the Pygmalion myth is an allegory¹¹—of the enigmatic relationship between an artist and his creation. From this point of view, the formula, *the painter and his model*, has at least the merit of maintaining the indecision regarding the interest that an artist can have toward the naked young woman who presents herself to his gaze.

In fact, in Rembrandt's engraving, it is impossible to discern the gaze with which the artist looks at his model. There are only a few indefinite lines that mark the placement of the eyes. This is not due to any imperfection of the reprint displayed in the Tourcoing museum; the same imprecision appears in earlier reprints of the engraving. But these earlier editions allow us to grasp the young girl's physiognomy better; her head slightly turned toward the left reveals a discreetly smiling face. Yet there again, it is impossible to say whether or not the markings represent an eyelid, closed as if to suggest modesty—this modesty would be confirmed by the drape that falls from the young girl's left arm and conceals her genitals from the artist's eyes. One thing is sure, however: she does not direct her gaze toward the artist who faces her. In other words, the drawing does not make any gaze explicit. It merely indicates the direction of the artist's gaze toward his model; and it is only because this model is a female nude that we are permitted to deduce that the artist's gaze is maintained by a desire similar to that which is believed to have animated Pygmalion's gaze. Undoubtedly, it is impossible to reduce the scene that the engraving represents to a relationship between two gazes where the onset of a reciprocal desire is at play—as in the theft of desire, recounted by Plato, between the eyes of the lover and the beloved¹²—the advent of a reciprocal desire. The duality of the two represented personages is not enough to account for the composition of the painting.

Something else is at play here, which concerns the gaze, or rather our gaze above all. For to consider the composition, the spectator's gaze is caught first by the opposition and the heterogeneity of two planes. The first is the representative plane, the plane

¹⁰ K. G. Boon, *Rembrandt, gravures, œuvre complete*, trans. Van Hermijnen (Paris: Flammarion, 1978).

¹¹ The Pygmalion myth has been read primarily, and for some time, as an allegory for love; it only became an allegory for artistic creation from Rousseau's version. In Rousseau's short essay "Pygmalion" (in *Complete Works*), the statue (called Galathea, etymologically indicating whiteness) miraculously comes alive at the moment when the sculptor, in the complete crisis of his creation despairs of his muse. For this transformation of the myth, see A. Geisler-Szmulewicz, *Le mythe de Pygmalion au XIXe siècle (Pour une approche de la conscience des mythes)*, Paris, Honore Champion, 1999, p. 39sq.

¹² Plato, *Phaedrus*, 251b.

that stages the artist and his model. The clarity of the white dominates to such an extent that it assaults the eyes of the viewer. But it is not the represented scene that is clear or luminous; this clarity is that of the drawing itself that is held together with but a few rapid strokes, sketched out on the white background of the paper, and that requires only an elementary work of engraving—just a few lines left by the burin on the copper. This first plane, the representative plane, is thus made from a few sketches and regrets, lacking both precision in the contours and distinctions between the objects represented (nothing is recognizable in the jumbled lower right of the drawing, and the objects suspended above the artist are not clearly identifiable, even if there seem to be a shield, a scabbard, and a feathered hat, which are found in another of Rembrandt's drawings, portraying his studio). Only the minimum necessary to signify the scene is present. On the other hand, the second plane suggests, on the part of the engraver, a very elaborate execution in order to obtain the dark color, the denseness of black, the thickness of the shadows, from which only a bust of a woman emerges, resting against what seems to be the corner of a fireplace (some recognize a bust of a child—one may well wonder why—resting against a pedestal). Except for the bust, this background, this backstage (*arrière-scène*), portrays nothing. The coincidence of these two planes, completely heterogeneous, produces an apparent paradox: from a drawing and engraving point of view, the least worked plane is the representation's most luminous, the plane of the visible scene; whereas the most worked plane is behind (*l'arrière plan*), the darker plane, the plane—dare we say—of the *autre scène*, the one where nothing happens and where, aside from the bust, nothing is represented. But if nothing is accessible in this other scene, it is because it is hidden by the large white canvas at the center of the composition, leaning against the easel. It is this blank canvas, this pure space unsullied by representation, that divides the picture's two planes and that creates a screen which prevents us from seeing beyond it. Of course, artists have long used the motif of a canvas leaning against an easel, thus forming a screen to the viewer's gaze; Rembrandt himself made use of this motif in a little painting entitled *The Easel*.¹³

But in that case, the screen is formed by the back of the canvas, making it impossible for the viewer to see the painting on the other side. In the engraving under present discussion, however—and this is what accounts for its originality,—it is precisely the recto of the canvas that is seen, it is the visible side of the painting that, being blank, forms a screen to the viewer's gaze. There is something essential in that engraving that one does not find in the preparatory sketch, where the play of *chiaroscuro* functions as a means to bring out only the young girl and where the artist almost disappears into the darkened background.¹⁴ Between this preparatory drawing and the final engraving, Rembrandt radically modified the structure of his composition; he deliberately chose not to contrast the figure and the background, but two radically distinct planes, separated by the blank canvas.

¹³ Also known as *The Painter in his Studio*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

¹⁴ Rembrandt, *The Painter and his Model* (1647), British Museum, London.

As such, Rembrandt's engraving allows us to better understand Lacan's reflections on the "screen," which, according to him, is constitutive of all paintings. In his well-known lesson on painting (chapters 8 and 9 of his seminar, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*), Lacan explains that, in every painting, the field where visual perception is at its sharpest is marked precisely by a certain lack, by a certain absence:

Indeed, there is something whose absence can always be observed in a picture—which is not the case in perception. This is the central field, where the separating power of the eye is exercised to the maximum in vision. In every picture, this central field cannot but be absent, and replaced by a hole—a reflection, in short, of the pupil behind which is situated the gaze. Consequently, and in as much as the picture enters into a relation of desire, the place of a central screen is always marked, which is precisely that by which, in front of the picture, I am elided as subject of the geometrical plane.¹⁵

It is in this sense that every painting might be qualified as a "trap for the gaze [*piège à regard*]." For, if the viewer-subject, facing the painting, is always called "to map himself as such,"¹⁷ to situate his/her own place with respect to the spatial coordinates of the representation (the "geometrical plane"), he/she cannot, however, determine this place; for it is the nature of the painting not to be able to include the subject who is looking at it. The impossibility of assigning a place to the subject corresponds to this "absence," "hole," or "screen," in the painting by which the subject is "elided" from the geometrical plane. This is what allows Lacan to say, "And if I am anything in the picture, it is always in the form of the screen,"¹⁸ which is to say that "I" am only present as an absence.

In Rembrandt's engraving, this screen is completely visible, to such an extent that the representation seems to present it as such, since precisely what the "central field" represents is a panel that masks the background. But this is what accounts for the engraving's singularity. For it does not seem necessary to focus on that which plays the role of the screen in every representation. So much so that it is not easy to designate the locus that fulfills this function in "every" painting. Moreover, considering all of Lacan's reflections in the two chapters of the seminar, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, the function of the screen appears not so much an element of the painting as the painting itself. Indeed, the painting—one could really say "every painting"—is itself that which marks the boundary between the representative register, where the optical geometrical space is organized, and that which is beyond (*l'au-delà de*) the representation. But if it is a boundary or a limit,

¹⁵ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977) 108. Hereafter *Four Fundamental Concepts*.

¹⁶ Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 101.

¹⁷ Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 100.

¹⁸ Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 97.

painting is also “that which forms the mediation”¹⁹ between what is shown—that is to say, the space of the representation—and what is not shown, what exceeds representation. What is truly unique about Rembrandt’s engraving is that it portrays the function of the screen, at play in every painting, by means of a painting. But in this case the painting thus represented is a painting that [itself] represents nothing, because it is a blank panel, an empty canvas. This blank panel is thus represented as such; it is, with respect to the representative plane, what is untouched by all representation and screens off what is beyond the representation. Anyone who would like to look at the background of the image need only “lay down his gaze there as one lays down one’s weapons”: “You want to see? Well, take a look at this.”²⁰ “This,” that is to say, this blank screen that forbids access to that which is beyond representation (*l’au-delà de la représentation*).

What is meant by “that which is beyond representation” remains to be explained. If, in Rembrandt’s engraving, this beyond is indeed the composition’s dark and blurry background, if it is this *other scene* [*autre scène*] that the blank canvas’s screen hides, then what is the meaning and status of this other scene? Undoubtedly, the expression “*other scene*” may be understood as the “*scene*” of the unconscious. But it would not be sufficient to understand it as the hidden scene of repressed, namely sexual, representations. The somewhat unsophisticated psychoanalytic thesis, according to which painting in general is the equivalent of the famous fig-leaf that discreetly covers the sexual organs, would only apply, in Rembrandt’s engraving, to the swathe of cloth that hides the nude girl’s genitalia from the artist’s gaze. It is of course possible to establish a connection with Freud’s remark concerning Medusa’s head;²¹ which would bring us back to our *Athena Parthenos*, since the Medusa’s head figured on the obverse of Athena’s shield—which Rembrandt did not fail to suggest in his painting of *Pallas Athena*.²² But if, in the engraving under present consideration, the scene which the blank canvas hides from the viewer’s gaze can be called the *other scene*, it would mean understanding it as the scene of the Other, in the sense in which Lacan speaks of the “field of the Other” [*le champ de l’Autre*]. For all that, this scene is not one of unconscious representation because it is devoid of any representation; what it stages [*met en scène*] is “the void of the Other as such” [*le*

¹⁹ Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 96.

²⁰ Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 101.

²¹ Sigmund Freud, “The Medusa’s Head,” in *Collected Papers V*, ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1950) 105-6.

²² The painting in question is in the Gulbenkian collection. Also known as *Alexander the Great*, the decoration on the shield justifies the name *Pallas Athena*. Note that, in the engraving under consideration as well as the design representing Rembrandt’s studio, the hanging objects appear to be: a shield, a lance, a scabbard . . . However, aside from the dissimilarities between the faces, the different dates of these compositions does not allow the conclusion—and this despite the palm-frond of victory—that the young girl was the model for this Athena.

vide de l'Autre comme tel],²³ in other words, that which, belonging to the Other, can neither be reduced to nor integrated in any representation (although all representation proceeds from it), which is in no way specularizable; in a word: what cannot be shown. Yet, "what cannot be seen," is the gaze itself, "the split [*schize*] between the eye and the gaze,"²⁴ in other words the radical impossibility of reducing gaze to vision (Lacan also speaks, elsewhere, of the "split (*schize*) between gaze and vision"²⁵).

A complete explanation of Lacan's thesis on the gaze as *objet a* would exceed the limits of this study,²⁶ but it is not negligible that his entire reading of the gaze began by taking up Merleau-Ponty's thesis on the gaze as the invisible that haunts the visible: the gaze is not the visual function; rather it is the invisible gaze that returns from the world toward the subject and thus opens up the space of visibility. It is in this way that the seeing subject is always already seen; and he/she is seeing only insofar as he/she is seen. The gaze as *objet a* is what supports the subject's vision without his/her knowing or even perceiving anything about it. In the case of the painting, this gaze is that which comes back to the viewer from the painting and which renders him/her seen. In a way, the viewer's scopic desire tends to see the invisible gaze that attracts his/her eye toward the canvas—what Lacan calls the "appetite of the eye on the part of the person looking."²⁷ But the painting does not show this gaze: the viewer's eye is caught by and on "something that incites him to ask what is behind it."²⁸ And what catches the eye is precisely the screen. The screen, as "locus of mediation," is both what separates and brings together the plane of the subject or the visual plane and the plane of the Other or the plane of the gaze:

that which forms the mediation from the one to the other, that which is between the two, is something of another nature than geometrical, optical space, something that plays an exactly reverse role, which operates, not because it can be traversed, but on the contrary because it is opaque—I mean the screen.²⁹

In Rembrandt's engraving, this opaque screen is the white panel resting against the easel; that is what catches the viewer's eye. But for this very reason, this screen gestures toward what it hides: beyond it [*au-delà de lui*], there is nothing but an indistinct and darkened mass where this invisible gaze that attracts us and allows us

²³ Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre X, L'angoisse* (Paris: Seuil, 2004) 318. [my translation — Trans.]

²⁴ Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 182, 67.

²⁵ Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 78.

²⁶ For a more precise explanation of Lacan's lesson on the painting and the gaze as *objet a*, see Bernard Baas, *L'adoration des bergers, ou de la dignité d'un clair-obscur* (Louvain: Peeters, 1994).

²⁷ Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 115.

²⁸ Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 112.

²⁹ Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 96.

to see, is watching us. It has been said before that the engraving's originality lies in its explicit and even literal inscription, in the space of representation, of the screen that marks the limits of the representable and which thus constitutes the "mediation" between the representable and the unrepresentable (*imprésentable*). Thus the white panel is indeed the screen in both senses of the word: both a panel of *protection*—insofar as it is impenetrable—and of *projection*—insofar as the unrepresentability (*l'imprésentabilité*) of the gaze as *objet a* is made manifest by the absence of any representation.

Yet, since this painting itself, in the representational register, plays on the opposition of the two planes (the luminous plane and the background), it is unsurprising that it stages—represents—the split (*schize*) between vision and gaze. Indeed, in the composition's foreground, the artist is contemplating his nude model—his flesh and ivory virgin—and his gaze is stopped by the limit of the visible that is constituted by the swathe of cloth covering the young girl's genitalia. But another gaze falls upon him from the painting's shadowy background: the gaze of the bust, the gaze of this young girl in stone, from whose shoulders falls the material that could veil her. This other gaze, this petrified gaze, is that of the Other, the gaze as *objet a*. The artist's gaze proceeds from this hidden gaze and clearly falls on his model, but also comes up against the limit of the visible. This is what Pygmalion can neither see nor understand: he is himself only seeing insofar as he is already being seen.

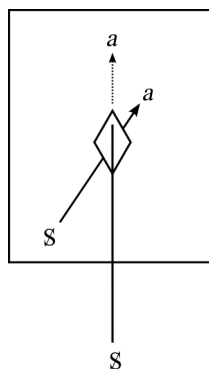
In this respect, the engraving's composition brings to light something remarkable: the straight line—perfectly straight—that runs from the artist's eye to the bust's eye, passing precisely by the eye of the young girl, as if to signify that the artist, looking at his model, is himself already looked at by this other gaze that comes from beyond that which he is looking at. Without his knowing anything of it, his gaze is caught by the desired object, beyond which another gaze comes to rest upon him, the gaze of the Other that he cannot see and which allows him to see.

The artist's position in the scene is not negligible as such: of course he is seated; but not seated on the little chair—contrary to the description given in some monographs. Perhaps he is simply squatting, but certainly next to the seat. Now, this empty seat is turned not toward the model but toward the bust. If the artist were seated on this chair, he would see the gaze looking at him. But this is precisely what is not possible. This is why it is important that the chair be empty (what is more, the exact same chair is found in another of Rembrandt's engravings, *The Virgin and Child with a Cat*.³⁰ there too the seat is empty, and is seen by the enigmatic gaze of a figure in the background of the composition³¹).

³⁰ Number 63 in Adam Bartsch's catalogue.

³¹ On the composition of this engraving, and especially on the gaze, see Baas, 113. It may be the same chair as the one in the drawing of Rembrandt's studio—but there, it is the model who is seated on it—and in *La Sainte Famille*, Musée du Louvre—where the Virgin occupies the seat.

Thus, in Rembrandt's picture, the axis that runs from the artist's eye to the bust that watches him crosses the axis that runs from the viewer to the darkened background of the composition. The axes' juncture is at the center of the composition, the screen formed by the blank canvas. For those who are familiar with Lacanian algebra, note that our position as viewers, insofar as, being subjects, we are "elided" from the representative plane, as well as the seated artist's position, is the position of the subject as S ("the divided subject"); and, for the viewer as for the artist, this elision or subjective destitution obtains from the impossible connection/relationship with the gaze as *objet a*. In both cases, this impossible relationship is marked, in the picture, by the blank screen. That is to say that the screen is the equivalent of the symbol by which Lacan transcribes this impossible relationship: \diamond ("lozenge"); whence the matheme $S \diamond a$. From the perspective of what it *represents*, Rembrandt's picture writes this matheme between the artist's and the bust's gaze; and, insofar as it is *presented* to us, the picture somehow *performs* what the matheme symbolizes. It is thus possible to schematize this double writing:



The white canvas—the screen of the lozenge—thereby marks, for the artist as well as for the viewer, that which is both barrier and mediation between the seeing subject and the gaze as *objet a*; it marks the limit where the subject's gaze is stopped so as not to have to sustain the other gaze, the invisible gaze that renders it seeing. In this way, the white panel at the center of the engraving creates a screen between the representative plane and the plane of the "beyond representation." The intersection of the two planes is here signified and performed by the palm frond that, crossing over what is supposed to be the object of contemplation in the represented scene (the young girl), crosses the representative plane and disappears into the background. Thus the frond traces our gaze's trajectory toward what cannot be seen. In so doing, it visibly doubles the invisible layout that runs, in a straight line, from the artist's eye to the statue's eye, passing through the young girl's gaze—proof that, for Rembrandt himself, the engraving was above all a matter of the eye and the gaze?

Proof, in any case, that the Pygmalion myth, despite its numerous incarnations throughout history—notably in Rousseau³² and G.B. Shaw³³—cannot be reduced to a dual relationship. Of course, Rembrandt's engraving is not an illustration, as it were, of the Pygmalion legend. But if it does conserve something of that mythical figure, it is in the sense that the "tableau," for the viewer as well as for the artist, enters into a relationship with desire. This desire may well seem to proceed only from the subject's passion for the beautiful object before him—like Pygmalion who could believe that his ivory virgin was alone the cause of his desire; it is nevertheless true that it calls upon, as its true cause—its *object-cause*—this other gaze, which is both the principle and the end of the scopic impulse, this gaze that one cannot see but which allows something to be shown [*qui est ce qui donne à voir*]:

Modifying the formula I have of desire as unconscious—*man's desire is the desire of the Other*—I would say that it is a question of a sort of desire *on the part of the Other*, at the end of which is the *showing* [*le donner-à-voir*].³⁴

Thanks to Rembrandt for having allowed us to appreciate this *donner-à-voir*.

³² See note 11 above.

³³ Shaw's famous play, and later a musical, *My Fair Lady*. Lacan, who, surprisingly, makes no reference to Pygmalion in any of his works, oral or written, does make an allusion to Shaw's play: *Le Séminaire, Livre XIV, La logique du fantasme* (lesson of September 30, 1966).

³⁴ Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 115.

THOMAS BROCKELMAN

MISSING THE POINT

Reading the Lacanian Subject through Perspective

The Punctal Subject Lacan, Descartes and Brunelleschi

Today, the “Cartesian” nature of the Lacanian subject has been broadly accepted; so much so that we have little difficulty in understanding the idea of an insubstantial but focal subjectivity, one which is irreducible to any self (“*moi*”) and yet responsible for those disruptions of selfhood to which Freud referred with the term “unconscious.” Here, of course, we must assume what Lacan does—namely, the unwarranted nature of the *cogito*: the basic argument of the second meditation demands only that we acknowledge a subject *for whom* doubt is staged, or, more precisely, that we admit there *is representing* going on. To put this in Kantian language (and it is Kant upon whom we rely here), when Descartes subtracts everything that he can doubt, he transforms being itself into a field of representation—things taken by the act of “doubting” to be mental constructs. “Subject” names the precondition for that subtractive operation, a condition that, as transcendental, cannot appear *within* the field it makes possible. Or, as Mladen Dolar puts it, “in the place of the supposed certainty of the subject’s being, there is just a void. It is not the same subject that thinks and that is; the one that is is not the one that thinks, even more, the one that is is ultimately not a subject at all.”¹

Although this is not entirely clear before the 1960s—perhaps because of Lacan’s earlier *Auseinandersetzung* with Sartre—Lacan’s writings and seminars from the early 1960s onwards clearly indicate an alliance with *this* Descartes. In fact, such Cartesianism runs implicitly through Lacan’s work from the late 1940s onwards—in the distinction between the subject (“*je*”) and the ego (“*moi*”), between the subject of enunciation and what it enunciates or, finally, between a “knowledge” suggested by the analyst but inaccessible to the analysand.² This last distinction demands that we address the peculiar way that a radicalized Cartesianism can be of use in psychoanalysis rather than simply in constructing a philosophical position. No doubt, Lacan’s approach to Descartes is mediated by his interpretive transformation of Freud’s science, by his insight that the “unconscious” is misunderstood when taken as

¹ Mladen Dolar, “Cogito as the Subject of the Unconscious” in *Cogito and the Unconscious*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998) 18.

a substantive but secret set of “contents,” a “real me” somehow lying beneath my consciousness. Thus, in *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, Lacan asserts that the subject of psychoanalysis is “the Cartesian one” precisely insofar as it is not “the living substratum [. . .] nor any sort of substance.”³

Against such psychologism (most famously the kind of analysis embraced by Jung), Lacan insists that the unconscious is the *subject of representation*. As such, it is essentially inaccessible to a representational consciousness, heterogeneous to the very objectifying “form” imposed by representation. The subject (“I”, or “*je*”) cannot appear as a content of consciousness because it is not that sort of thing. Indeed, it is not an “object,” a “what” at all and, indeed, strictly speaking does not even exist but is only the presupposition of every representation.⁴



Of course, the real difficulty in understanding Lacanian thought lies not in understanding this concept of the subject but in seeing the connection between such a conceptualization of the psychoanalytic subject and the broader Lacanian “position”—the philosophical insight underlying Lacan’s understanding of world and, most problematically, of history. It is one thing to say that we must understand human subjectivity as the “point” of representation, it’s another to found upon such an assertion a coherent philosophical position. Indeed, drawing the line from one to the other remains problematic for Lacanians, and this largely explains the continued opacity of Lacan’s thought.

In the light of such a difficulty, it is important to note that while it has become popular to name this substantless, dimensional subject “Cartesian,” it is also—both in the history of thought and in Lacan’s *own* research—importantly *pre-Cartesian*: in Seminar XI and, even more centrally in Seminar XIII, Lacan also finds in the history of *pictorial perspective*, and specifically in the development of systematic linear perspective during the Italian renaissance, the historical origin of Descartes’ (and Pascal’s) subject. That is, Lacan realizes that the ground for the purely “doubting”

² I am indebted to Adrian Johnston, both for this specific account of this distinction between “*savoir*” and “*verité*” as it is introduced in Seminar XIII, and in general for his clear understanding of the role of Descartes in the seminars of the 1960s. See *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005) 70 (hereafter, *Time*). See below for Lacan’s transformation of this distinction at the end of his life.

³ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (Seminar XI), trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977) 126.

⁴ In “Position of the Unconscious,” Lacan writes that the subject is oddly lodged between not yet speaking and “an instant after” speaking, an observation that Johnston translates as amounting to the claim that it is “pre-ontological.” Jacques Lacan, “Position of the Unconscious,” in *Reading Seminar XI: Lacan’s Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink and Maire Jaanus, trans. Bruce Fink, (Albany: SUNY, 1995) 269. See Johnston, *Time*, 63.

consciousness of the *Meditations* was laid two centuries before in the painting, architecture and theory of Alberti, Brunelleschi and Fillarette, Leonardo and others.⁵ The key here lies in the notions of a “vanishing point” and “viewpoint,” concepts which—particularly in the simplest (and most favored) version of perspective, so called “one-point” perspective—anticipate Lacan’s psychoanalytic subject.

If that’s the case, if we can actually “model” the Lacanian subject on the perspectival one, then it should be possible to *think through* the relationship between subject and world/subject and self in relationship to that same model. Differently than in the case of Descartes, who so basically mistook his own insight that generations of thought were required to grasp it, we should be able to set this model in motion, to see its *function*. Such, in fact, is my task in the following comments—to *think through* the subject of psychoanalysis by means of the peculiar erasure and anamorphosis performed by systematic perspective. The psychoanalysis emerging from the perspectival model demonstrates both a promise and a crisis that we might not otherwise glimpse. Above all, in pushing that relationship between subject and world to the point where it exposes a deep, indeed constitutive, tension at its foundation, the perspectival “picture” can help us to understand how psychoanalysis must perch between a modernist vision of history, a history with freedom as its focus, and a limiting transcendental understanding of reality itself. Committed both to a *project* of liberation (even if of a limited, pessimistic kind) and a social ontology resisting any real freedom, we can grasp the peculiar crisis-nature of Lacanian analysis as a science.



In what was arguably the initiating act of Italian Renaissance painting, Filippo Brunelleschi produced a famous demonstration in the first years of the quattrocento. Painting in correct one-point perspective (a perspective system not yet formalized in theory) the baptistery and piazza of the duomo in Florence as they looked from a place inside its door in the first years of the *quattrocento*, he placed a pin-hole at the center of his panel. Furthermore, this “hole” in the painting occupied the key geometrical site organizing its representational schema, the so-called “vanishing point,” where parallel receding lines seem to meet. In order to complete the experiment, the viewer was to stand inside the duomo at the very position from which the work had been painted. Holding a small mirror, he was to gaze through the pinhole, jockeying the mirror into such a position that it reflected the scene on the panel in perfect continuity with the *actual scene* that extended out visually from the mirror’s edge. The picture in the mirror and the scene beyond its border blended into a single image. The “miracle” about which Manetti, Vasari and others later wrote lay precisely in the way that the represented and real scenes blended—that the actual piazza appeared as a continuation of the space of the panel’s representation.

⁵ See, for example, Seminar XIII (lesson of May 4, 1966). In *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XIII, The Object of Psychoanalysis, 1965-1966*, trans. Cormac Gallagher from unedited French manuscripts.

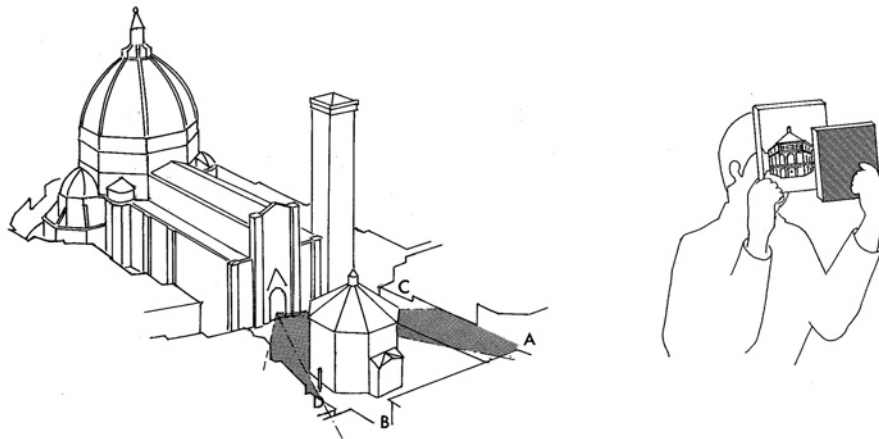


Fig. 1: Brunelleschi's First Demonstration, according to Damisch

In his magisterial book, *The Origin of Perspective*, Hubert Damisch has argued compellingly that the “demonstration” here concerns the relationship between perspectival space and subjectivity.⁶ While Brunelleschi’s accomplishment in this panel clearly belongs to a history of, if you like, “smoke and mirrors,” of quasi-magical perspectival effects that both predates and outlasts it, the form that he chose here for his trick bears thought. Why force his viewer to hold this awkward small mirror when Brunelleschi might have dispensed with the pinhole and the mirror, having the viewer look, from the privileged “viewpoint,” directly at the panel superimposed on the scene? Why not look *at* the painting instead of *through* it? Such a technology would have been simpler and would also have demonstrated the “blending” of representation and visual space just as well as the preferred scheme.

As Damisch demonstrates, the reason for Brunelleschi’s preference of the pinhole view and the small mirror has to do with an, as yet, unarticulated—and, in the forming language of the *quattrocento* still *unarticulable*—sense about *subjectivity* and spatial representation. Cutting the viewing hole in the painting precisely *at* the vanishing point collapses two representational functions, but in each of these, the effect of the pinhole and the mirror is to underscore the “subjective” nature of pictorial representation. On the one hand, a line perpendicular to the picture-plane behind the peep-hole itself contains the so-called “viewpoint” around whose symmetrical simulacrum *in the painting* the geometries of the representation are organized: otherwise put, jockeying the mirror allows Brunelleschi to demonstrate that the view represented is specific to a chosen viewpoint, that it is a representation

⁶ See Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, trans. John Goodman (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1994) 121. Figures 1 and 2 reproduced with permission of MIT Press.

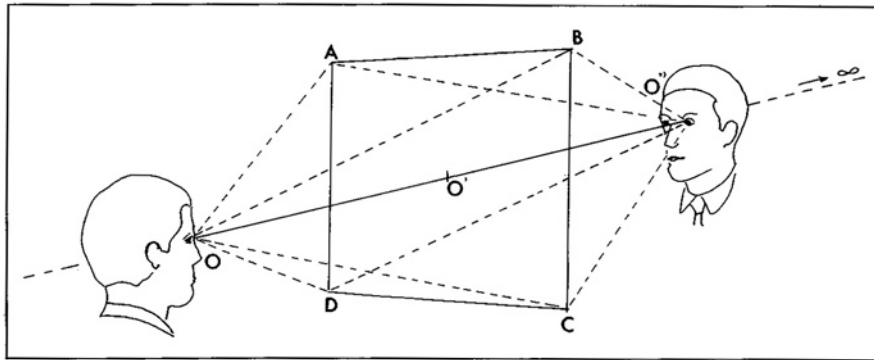


Fig. 2: Reconstruction of the Vanishing Point in Brunelleschi's 1st Demonstration by Damisch

for a viewer, and to that extent of a viewer. You picture your "self" in picturing where you are in relationship to the painted scene. The viewer of the pinhole device simulates putting the viewer "in the picture" to demonstrate this representational fact.

On the other hand, Damisch notes that the advantage of the chosen system is that it puts the vanishing point (located at infinity on that same "centric" line, as Alberti later calls it) *behind the eye* of the viewer. In other words, it forces us to associate that vanishing point (where the parallel lines of spatial recession meet at the horizon within the painting) with what will later be called the dimensional, insubstantial *subject* of representation. Representation of space in correct "one-point" perspective—translation of three-dimensional space into systematic two-dimensional representation—involves the projection of a *point of exception* to that representation, a subject point as "hole" in the totalizing representation of being as objectivity (Damisch, 121). In Damisch's words, the subject of one-point perspective is "behind the eye" of the viewer at infinity.

Brunelleschi's first experiment thus proves an odd initiation of the Lacanian subject; for, (to reverse the order of my presentation of them) in superimposing vanishing and viewpoints on a single perpendicular line, at a single point, it both *excludes* that subject from the painting and *includes* it within it, indicating both subjectivity's heterogeneity to the field of representation (as insubstantial, dimensional, etc.) and the fact that representation is *for it* (as the spatially positioned monocular viewer). In other words, the structure of subjectivity is calibrated with the utmost accuracy, demanding both that we conceive representation in terms of its possessing a constitutive "hole," and that we be able to calculate precisely the position of this exception point in relationship to the geometry of a specific representation.

Fundamental Fantasy and Master Signifier

Let me begin with a contrast, an image from Freud, one that he calls a primal fantasy (*Urphantasie*). In general, Freud wields the term *Phantasie* in various ways, all of which have in common the notion of a psychically constructed and coherent scene in which the subject or “dreamer” is present as an observer.⁷ Beginning in 1915, moreover, Freud speaks of “primal fantasy” (*Urphantasie*)—using that term to indicate a “primal scene” (most typically the scene of witnessed parental coitus) that is present to the individual even when it represents no actual experience. Freud’s various “*Urphantasien*” share a reference to origins; in the case of the primal fantasy of the parental sex-act, this reference is quite literally to the subject’s origination, and the “primal scene” here is a kind of staging or representation of one’s own conception (Language, p. 332).

So, whereas Brunelleschi’s demonstration offers us the image of a scene which is explicitly non-whole (broken at least at one point, the vanishing point) and dependent (on the subject viewing it), the Freudian primal fantasy suggests a universe closed on itself. Furthermore, if we take Freud’s own most famous *entrée* to the primal scene/primal fantasy combination—namely, the “Wolfman” case—it is interesting to note that what leads Freud to such a scene of parental intercourse from the “Wolfman’s” own dream of “wolves in a tree” is the obvious anxiety underlying it. Here we should shift from the perspective of Freud to that of Lacan who, less concerned than Freud with the idea that the “scene” captures an “actual” infantile event would comment, rather, on the peculiar combination of *fantasy* of a complete and reliably independent world and such anxiety. In other words, it is only at an *affective* level that the fantasy delivers its really “fundamental,” unbearable content; it is only at that level that it is irreducibly unconscious.

To suggest *that* content, we might join Eric Santner and Slavoj Žižek in returning to a different Freud, the speculative theorist of *Moses and Monotheism* who proposes that the myth of Moses the patriarch and, indeed, the accompanying production of a patriarchal “God-the-Father,” amount to responses to a repressed *murder* of the actual (Egyptian) Moses.⁸ According to this account, the fundamental fantasy—that we are guilty of some horrible primal crime and thus must endlessly atone for it—*actually* aims to defeat anxiety, to transform it *into* guilt. After all, Freud’s deduced lesson from the death of the *actual* Moses, the “father,” is that there *are no* external consequences, no divine retribution for murder. However, we prefer a state in which what overcomes us is a specific object demanding a definite atonement

⁷ Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-analysis* (New York: Norton, 1973) 314–16. Hereafter, Language.

⁸See Eric Santner, “Traumatic Revelations: Freud’s Moses and the Origins of Anti-Semitism,” in *Sexuation*, ed. Renata Salecl (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) and Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2003) 128–29. Hereafter, Puppet.

rather than an undefined “cloud” of affect. We prefer to have offended the gods, who demand expiatory sacrifices rather than confront a fundamentally meaningless universe where no punishment follows from our “wicked” deeds. Afflicted by paralyzing anxiety regarding the meaninglessness of the world, we create an unconscious fantasy by which we owe a specific debt for breaking the world-order, we find ourselves in need of atonement for contravening God’s will.



The fundamental fantasy, then, does two things: first, it accounts for that “subject” visible in Brunelleschi’s perspective demonstration by expunging it “from the picture”—by attributing to it a basic transgression demanding compensatory atonement. “We” are sinners (in the Christian vision, *original* sinners, guilty of disrupting the basic fabric of Being). In such a cosmos, we as human beings are primordially guilty of disrupting the fundamental order and therefore excluded from it. Of course, this way of explaining the unconscious fantasy already implies its *second* characteristic, namely, its *virtue* of totalizing being, guaranteeing a “meaningful” universe. An ordered universe, essentially complete in itself, still holds “no place” for the spontaneous human will, the subject. The cosmos is whole: only, short of the redemption posited by orthodoxy, we cannot belong to it.

In brief, the exchange enacted through the fundamental fantasy acts in a profoundly *pre-modern* fashion. Moreover, from a Lacanian perspective, the fundamental fantasy *produces* reality by means of this *proto-representation*, wherein, precisely, the “field” of experience is cast as a fantasmatic or imaginary totality.⁹ That is, fantasy projects the social *qua* totality by imagining it as totalized from the position of transcendence, from a privileged subject’s perspective. Reality emerges from the real precisely when the world of human existence is conceived *as the perspective of an omniscient subject*—as what Žižek follows Lacan in calling the “Other.” In order to conceive of the world as “ontologically closed” we imagine a “viewpoint” *from which* it appears as totality.¹⁰ Reality is always conceived from and for such a totalizing view, such an outside. As a result, reality *per se* is a product of an omniscient subjectivity we imagine. Žižek notes this explicitly:

What psychoanalysis calls “fantasy” is the endeavor to close this gap by (mis)perceiving the pre-ontological Real as simply *another*, “more fundamental,” level of reality—fantasy projects on to the pre-ontological Real the form of constituted reality (as in the Christian notion of another, suprasensible reality). (Ticklish, 57)

⁹ “The fundamental fantasy provides the subject with the minimum of being, it serves as a support for his existence—in short, its deceptive gesture is ‘Look, I suffer, therefore I am, I exist, I participate in the positive order of being.’” Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject* (London: Verso, 1999) 281. Hereafter, Ticklish.

Schema huius praeiusta diuisionis Sphaerarum.

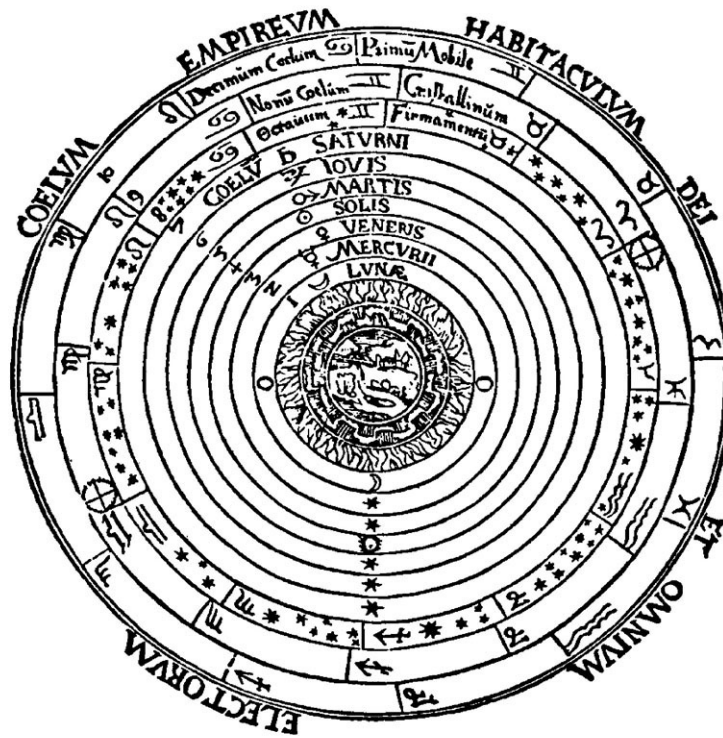


Fig. 3: Pre-Copernican map of the cosmos

¹⁰ In a passage from *The Fragile Absolute*, Žižek articulates this point in relationship to sexual fantasy: “one should not,” Žižek writes, “confound this ‘primordially repressed’ myth (‘fundamental fantasy’) with the multitude of inconsistent daydreams that always accompany our symbolic commitments, allowing us to endure them.” In order to make this distinction, he then elaborates on two predominant forms of (heterosexual) fantasy today—Peter Hoeg’s idea, from *The Woman and the Ape*, “of a woman who wants a strong animal partner, a potent ‘beast,’ not a hysterical impotent weakling” and the notion of the “cybernetic” lover from male fantasy, the “perfectly programmed ‘doll’ who fulfills all his wishes, not a living being.” The point of this excursion into gendered sexual fantasy is that, in this context, the level of the fundamental fantasy could be metaphorized through “the unbearable ideal couple of a male ape copulating with a female cyborg, the fantasmatic support of the ‘normal’ couple of man and woman copulating.” That is, the fundamental fantasy is the fantasy of an Other in both senses of the genitive: it is the fantasmatic projection of an Other whose perspective includes all possible perspectives (in this case, the female and the male of the couple). On the other hand,

The pre-Copernican image of the cosmos familiar to us from maps like the one above pictures the “universe” opened by the fundamental fantasy, wherein guilt is interpreted as resulting from our transgression of a lawful order. Thus, the map takes the heterogeneity of the divine subject and gives it a “place.” Indeed, “place” is vital here in a couple of ways: on the one hand, the medieval cosmos suggests, as a kind of graphic equivalent of the great Thomistic or Neo-Platonic “Chain of Being” theories, that every being “has a place” within an ordered cosmos. As Žižek puts it, the fundamental fantasy “provides a sense of ontological ‘safety,’ of dwelling within a self-enclosed finite circle of meaning where things (natural phenomena) in a way ‘speak to us,’ address us.”¹¹ On the other hand, of course, there is the divine place, the “Empyrean Heaven” which, appropriately, occupies the “highest” and outermost circle of being. This is, of course, the place of places; for it implies a position from which God can overview all of being, from which he can, in fact, constitute it as a whole.



The remaining piece of this Lacanian “genetic ontology” is provided by the so-called “phallic” or “master” signifier. Its function is easy to capture by returning to the scene of primordial guilt framed by Freud’s interpretation of religion—a tableau which translates the “cloud” of anxiety resulting from remorse at a human crime not only into a crime against God but also into a specific path of atonement, a particular site which is precisely that of the master signifier. Such a path, furthermore, also has the benefit of strengthening the bonds of the group, sharing guilt. The torturing, hectoring affect of the “superego” (the internalized, murdered father) is *not* pleasant and it can be *harmful* as well. On the other hand, the Freud of *Moses and Monotheism* notes a straightforward affective benefit for the individual in belonging to the *community* of the guilty—namely, the sense of shared “accomplishment” in relinquishing immediate desires to follow the dictates of the “Law.” In a pre-modern context, the master signifier *builds the self*, helping the individual to become stronger by becoming a full and mature part of the community. Notice, however, that such a sense of accomplishment hinges upon the definite and shared nature of the “code” of Law. We can only overcome our immediate desires and needs to the extent that these are opposed by *specific* prohibitions. A vague sense of disquiet about a given act won’t suffice.

In effect, the master signifier is responsible for the conscious effects of the unconscious fundamental fantasy: it paints that “cosmological” picture of the world *as whole* by creating the space of ideality (the “suprasensible,” in Žižek’s Christian example) which is the “picture” accompanying the repressed fantasy. How does it accomplish this?

reality is conceived (by us) as the Other’s viewpoint or fantasy. See *The Fragile Absolute* (London: Verso, 2000) 65–6.

¹¹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997) 160. Hereafter, *Plague*.

Think of the way that a photographer or painter can accentuate a foreground image—say, the “subject” of a portrait—by limiting the function of focus to that figure and blurring the background. Perhaps, as is often the case, the artist will accentuate this effect (think of the darkness in so many of Rembrandt’s backgrounds) with light and color, for example bringing forward the foreground, brilliantly accented, to grab our attention.

We should notice three separate phenomena at work in such an aesthetic effect: first, the subject of the photograph or painting in this way becomes something like a *place* of interest, a *topos* selected from amongst an indefinite but numerable set of possibilities. That is, in the language of structuralism, it marks a signifier, unattached to any particular meaning. In *The Ticklish Subject*, Žižek uses the example of Abraham Lincoln’s statement, “You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all of the time.” Ever since Lincoln uttered these words, people have lost themselves in the coils of the logical ambiguity they express: “does it mean that there are some people who can always be fooled, or that on every occasion someone or other is bound to be fooled?” (Ticklish, 56). The point for Žižek, however, is precisely that these words just *sound good*, that they are “witty” enough to fascinate us. In other words, they provide a *focus* (and, in that sense, serve as a “signifier”) for our attention and, like the foregrounded subject of a portrait, draw our attention away from an *unfocused* and meaningless background.

Of course, and this makes the second important phenomenon, both Lincoln’s words and the portrait manage to provide such a focus because they are *enigmatic*, because, meaningless in themselves, they seem to be mysteries, to invite an endless process of interpretation. In this light, it is hardly surprising that Žižek at one point suggests that an individual’s feelings for someone with whom she/he has fallen in love provide a perfect example of such an enigmatic signifier. After all, our love refers to “an unknowable X, to the *je ne sais quoi* that makes me fall in love,” and as a result, the place of the “master signifier” marks an endless effort to find a meaning adequate to it (Puppet, 72).

Finally, moreover, the enigma of the phallic signifier gives birth to a kind of *transcendence* or *ideality*, figuring the limit or end of the search for a “solution” to the mystery it poses. In other words, around this signifier we are utterly convinced that there is a meaning to our love, to the portrait hanging before us or, for that matter, to Lincoln’s words. This meaning is *out there*, beyond us, but in a position that makes sense, not just of some particular phenomenon (Lincoln’s “sound bite,” say) but, rather, of our lives as a whole. The promise of one’s search for the meaning of one’s love is that this meaning will “make sense” of all the absurdity in a life. Our fascination, indeed, is predicated upon this hermeneutic affect, wherein the very search for a meaning instantiates it. It all “makes sense,” if we could just put our finger on how . . . Thus, it is not simply that the master signifier fascinates us; it does so in a fashion that retroactively provides consistency to our lives.

Herein lies the peculiar space of the fundamental fantasy attached to the back, as it were, of the master signifier. Its space corresponds to that peculiar transcendence that we posit when we take the solution to the enigma to “exist” “out there.” Only one thing must be added: we must understand that a precondition of such ideality is *that we never actually achieve it*, that we are never able to occupy the space of the Other from which the meaning of our lives would be manifest. Žižek acknowledges this necessity, for example, with regard to the way love operates, noting that “the moment I can enumerate reasons why I love you, the things about you that made me fall in love with you, we can be sure that this is not love,” or not any longer (Puppet, 72). In other words, to be effective, the master signifier must remain an enigma, not only in the sense that it promises *transparent meaning* but also in the sense that it *promises* such meaning, that it never actually delivers it.

Modernity and Fantasy

With these accounts of the fundamental fantasy and the master signifier, it is now possible to pose my basic, structural question—possible, that is, to see how the structure of the “perspectival” subject forces us to a deep problem in Lacanian theory. That problem derives from the observation that it is *no coincidence* that the Lacanian psychoanalytic subject is *also* the radicalized modern subject. In other words, there’s a bond between the subject of psychoanalysis and modernity. We might articulate the problem itself as follows: on the one hand, the revolution apparent in Brunelleschi’s perspective experiment (a revolution which becomes the “cause” of both modern philosophy and modern science) depends upon what seems to be an *exposure* of fantasy as “false.” Recall that in the demonstration, and in systematic painterly and architectural perspective in general, the subject is revealed as both constitutive of the world’s apparent totality and as a specific void or lack *in* that totality. We needn’t wander any further than Nicholas of Cusa’s speculations (contemporary with Brunelleschi) on the perspectival nature of all truth and the resultant impossibility that we live in a “centered” universe to see contained in Brunelleschi’s insight trouble for unconscious fantasy.

Recall that, for Nicholas (and his disciple, Giordano Bruno), *because* all truth is constituted perspectivally (that is, for a finitely positioned viewer), there can be no finitely locatable “center” to the universe. Or, as he also puts it in the *Docta Ignorantia*, in a perspectival universe, *every point* (and thus *no point*) is the center.¹² It remains for Bruno to draw the most outrageous consequences already implied in Cusanus’s still “orthodox” thought—namely that such a universe reserves no special “place” either for any individual or for humanity as a whole. Thus, at a single blow,

the entire *cosmos* of the master signifier is challenged. In the infinite, homogeneous space underlying perspective, we lose the sense of security it grants us.

¹² See “On Learned Ignorance,” in *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, ed. H. Lawrence Bond. Classics of Western Spirituality (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1997) 161.

Indeed, in its invisible subject-effect, perspective might constitute *the* exemplary historical moment within a Lacanian view of history, the moment when people were able to “traverse” the fundamental fantasy itself—to liberate themselves from its claim. In other words, representation was the primary hammer with which the cosmological world-view, with its closure and its Platonism, could be smashed. Perspective “subjectivized” us, forced us to live without a “place” from which and for which we were constituted. I might go so far as to say that what we mean by “subject” within the modern context is nothing except the structure necessary to conceptualize the real *without* transcendence, the structure necessary to escape the “cosmological” fantasy and the seduction of ethics. The inception of the modern is thus an *experience of freedom*, a matter that we should not forget in the ambiguous history following from it.

To this extent, the *political* revolutions of the eighteenth century belong essentially to—perhaps one might even say that they provide something like a goal of—the subjectivism that makes such a representational transformation possible. Or, to put it in other words, the possibility of a genuinely political society, a society that would acknowledge and take responsibility for the freedom of itself and persons within it, lies in the loss of “our place” which ushered in modern space and modern science. Only a society that conceptually admits the freedom of its acts and the acts of its citizens—refusing all forms of arguments from nature—can provide the conditions to further that freedom. Modernity opens the possibility of political freedom, and such opening provides modernity’s ultimate justification.

On the other hand, though, from a Lacanian perspective, the phallic signifier and its fantasmatic reverse are *constitutive* figures: reality itself depends upon their existence. In other words, nestled into what often seems a merely technical account, the Freudian-Lacanian tradition includes a profound transcendental insight: what we *mean* experientially by reality is something like an existence guaranteed by fantasy, an existence which we imagine to be totalized and which, as totalized, excludes *us* (that is, as *subject*) from it. It is thus not possible to suppose that the truth of the subject, the truth suggested by Brunelleschi’s experiment, somehow does away with fundamental fantasy.

The problem with a modernist interpretation of Lacan should be obvious from my characterization of the fundamental fantasy. The “perspectival” moment, whatever its revolutionary potential, doesn’t shatter reality itself: nor could it, fantasy being *constitutive* of reality *per se*. Leaving aside for the moment the question of the possibility and limitation of revolutionary change within a Lacanian framework, I want to focus on the tension here between the claim of transcendental constitution assigned to the fantasy/master signifier combination and the claim that the modern, perspectival moment (with its various Cartesian and subjectivist permutations) *exposes* the fantasy.



The obvious resolution of that tension—supported by a century of critical theory about modern-technological societies and the specific interpretations of those changes proposed by Jacques-Alain Miller and members of the Slovenian School—is that fundamental fantasy and master signifier don't disappear within the modern world but that they are profoundly *changed* by it. For the most part, we discover the effects of the modern subject in the emergence of new forms of fantasy, forms that no longer follow the model of an exclusionary transcendence.

And, just as, as a kind of corollary to it, the pre-Copernican diagram of the cosmos gave us *entrée* to the fantasy-formation, we might here return to the *counter-formation* to such cosmology proposed by the founders of modern science, in order to understand the underpinnings of such a new formation of reality. Think here of the radical (and, of course, for its author, traumatic) immanentism of Spinoza's philosophy. In subtracting the very space of transcendence from the universe, in proposing his "monist" philosophy, Spinoza follows the most explosive potential of the modern revolution, but, oddly, he retreats in a characteristic way: in his *Ethics*, he posits a position, the "mind of God," which conceives all natural events in terms of their pure actuality—in terms, that is, of a completed causal chain. Indeed, the moment of retreat from the subversive potential of modernity comes precisely here, at the moment when *nature itself* is reconceived immanently from a totalized perspective. At first, powerfully, we conceive of all being as subsisting in a single plane, a plane of material causes. But then we add to that thesis *a closure* of that material dimension: all effects are already contained in their causes, so that the end of the universe is already implicit in the first events occurring within it. We are faced with a reductive causal determinism, a determinism without the possibility of freedom. Paraphrasing Hegel, Žižek tells us that "teleology is the truth of linear mechanical causality."¹³ Is not such totalization of nature the almost invariable accompaniment of all early-modern, all "mechanistic" science?

It might also be instructive to recall a theoretical trope that emerged almost as soon as the perspectival metaphor established itself in the 15th century—the location of the divine at the confluence of all "viewpoints" constituting perspectival space. For it turns out that modernity opens a *second* possible "position" from which reality may be constituted. Recall the philosophical view first articulated by Nicholas of Cusa, but reflected in Bruno, Leibniz and Newton. This argument starts in a radical de-centering of the medieval, cosmological, world-view. Space is projected as an infinite and homogeneous field amenable to purely quantitative understanding. Where in such a universe is God—still the "subject" for philosophy until Descartes? A universe without center can allow no places "nearer" or "farther" from him: nor (which is really the same thing) can it admit the image of a God out "beyond" space. Cusanus's solution is to conceive God as present in every point, every position, *but only insofar as any such point is conceived as viewpoint*. In Newton's famous phrase, the universe

¹³ Slavoj Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004) 113.

is God's "*sensorium*." In other words, the subject is in *every* place *qua* viewpoint. The "other space" of this fantasy, then, consists of the infinite (but complete) set of all points within *objective space*. It is the same space in which we live but now conceived as a web of subject points. There is, and can be, no distinguishing characteristic of such a space, since it is the *very same space* as the one we inhabit, but it is, nonetheless, functionally distinct from objective space. Thus, we get a sense of uncanny "closeness" to us, typical of a paranoid psychical economy.

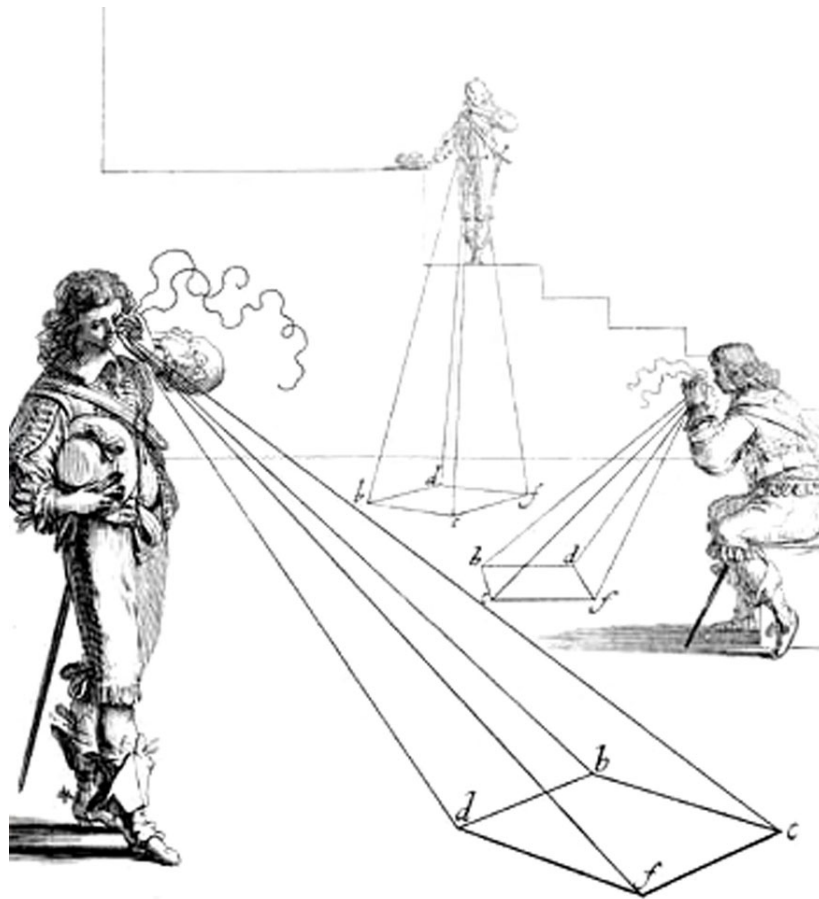


Fig. 4: Detail from Abraham Bosse: *Les Perspectiveurs*, 1648, Bibliothèque nationale de France

And this paranoid structure also informs the form of subjectivization at work here. For example, in a late work, "On the Image of God," Nicholas describes an icon that he gave to the monks at his former home, Tegernsee: like those paintings with which murder-mysteries have made us familiar, the eyes of this icon had the odd quality of seeming to gaze *at* the viewer no matter where he positioned himself. If we admit that such subjection indicates a subject who is anywhere and everywhere, we are "subjected" to the gaze of the "Other" at any and every point.¹⁴ Space itself seems to be alive with this (nonetheless) obscene gaze. Surely, though it emerges with early modernity, this idol seems remarkably contemporary. It captures that uncanny sense of a subject of the world that is no longer simply transcendent.



To understand the unconscious element of this "paranoid" construction of reality, the key transformation involves that closing off of transcendence which we have seen to be definitive of the modern fantasy. Instead of *outside* a closed cosmos, the Other now inhabits a space of unprecedented intimacy to the subject, right there, at the same "point of view" *as* that of the subject but still distinct from it. A paranoid intimacy, then.

The effects of this paranoid relationship are twofold and, to a large extent, historically ordered. Let me name them: obsessional neurosis and perversion.

The first, whose emergence I might date in the period after the Renaissance, retains the basic economy of guilt-before-law that we have already seen to have been definitive of reality in the *pre-modern* period. Still, without the function of a master signifier producing the Other's transcendence, guilt effects the individual differently. With the disappearance of the concrete site for guilt's atonement, we lose also the "communal" structure that reinforces individual identity *before* the modern period. To put this in Lacan's terms, modernity could be identified with the gradual disappearance of *ritual*, of those kinds of communal bonds founded upon a *symbolically shared* sense of guilt.¹⁵

¹⁴ See Miran Bozovic's introduction to Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon writings, where Bozovic argues that Bentham's own reference to the panoptic tower's presence within the panopticon prison as "like a God" must be understood at the level of fantasy. The panoptic gaze (in which every point is watched from everywhere) certainly takes the place of fantasy of transcendence; that is, like the old God, this new one allows the constitution of the Real as reality. Still, Žižek's analysis allows us to see the essential difference between the new God and the old. See "Introduction: An Utterly Dark Spot," in Jeremy Bentham, *The Panopticon Papers*, ed. Miran Bozovic (London: Verso, 1995).

¹⁵ "What we are faced with, to employ the jargon that corresponds to our approaches to man's subjective needs, is the increasing absence of all those saturations of the superego and ego ideal that are realized in all kinds of organic forms in traditional societies, forms that extend from the rituals of everyday intimacy to the periodic festivals in which the community manifests itself. We no longer know them except in their most obviously degraded aspects." Lacan, "Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis," in *Écrits: a Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W.

The displacement of the pre-Copernican “map” is both symbol and cause of the decay of such a *public* law and, with it, of a public identity based upon shared guilt. For one thing, there is no longer a specific set of public rules sufficing to satisfy the demands of conscience. Think here of the great struggle of the Protestant Reformation, which follows the modern revolution by *internalizing* faith, making it a matter of “the heart” rather than of public rites. Increasingly, in the period of the 17th and 18th centuries, the individual is thrown back on herself in determining the “content of conscience,” a position that, in turn, weakens identification *through* and *with* the social bond. In a series of arguments, Žižek associates the infinite demand of the Protestant, Kantian call to “duty” with the situation of Kafka’s subject called “before the law,” that is, faced with a legal demand never specified or, better, whose specific content we are never allowed to know. We know we are supposed (not) to do something, but we can never really know what that something is. Our primordial guilt becomes, then, precisely the anxiety in the presence of a Law without possibility of a finite redress by “following the rules,” since these rules are never specified (see, for example, Puppet, 129).



Now, of course, the results of this change are themselves ambiguous and well-documented—on the one hand, the emergence of modern neurosis and the accelerated weakening of instituted forms of community, on the other, the development of the “genius,” the self-creating individual and the Romantic cult of individualism, but either end of the equation indicates that, when guilt is finally separated off from the symbolic apparatus of a specific set of requirements and prohibitions—when “the Law” ceases to form a potential identity—we face a transformed fantasy/master signifier combination.

We must ask what happens when the “object,” the place of the superego, is occupied by the very “excess” of being that guilt intended to tame? This is in fact the strange condition controlling *our* reality today, the condition under which totality emerges as that strange, excessive totality, “life”: “Are we really living?” we ask. Have we really “given our all?” or “enjoyed ourselves?” These Romantic questions begin to haunt humanity, to provide, ironically, the nexus of guilt (“I have not really lived, given my all, enjoyed, etc”), precisely at that moment, at the end of the Enlightenment, when the old institutions and specific demands of the old Law fall. Less and less are persons tortured by guilt at moral transgression: at an ever accelerating pace, our guilt now becomes *performance-guilt* about life, guilt that transforms life into a “vague” totality capable of providing a measure for our success or failure and a measure, of course, in terms of which we almost inevitably fall short.

Norton, 1977) 26. See also Žižek, *Plague*, 43 n34.

The key transformation at that historical moment is the prominence of a *new* totalizing device, a device for the imposition of “reality” on the real—now associated with “life” or in the term wielded by Lacan, Žižek and Todd McGowan, “enjoyment.” McGowan has recently hypothesized that increasingly since the 19th century we have become a “society of enjoyment,” a society in which the commandment to “enjoy!” has largely displaced traditional moral imperatives (and a state of affairs that breeds endless reactionary proposals for “returns” to an earlier world). In other words, the society of enjoyment or, as McGowan specifies it, “the society of *commanded* enjoyment,” is the visible symptom of the paranoid fundamental fantasy, the way that the “belief” in the big Other continues when we consciously claim to disavow it.¹⁶ Guilt and anxiety—the weapons of the superego—still operate, but they do so by torturing us for *not enjoying ourselves*, not being “really alive” in response to the direct enjoyment of the Other.

And it is in this sense of a disavowed belief in the Other that we are justified in following Žižek’s lead in finding the predominant master signifier of our world—or what replaces it—in *perversion*. The pervert is a false transgressor of the law, apparently radical in his/her willingness to engage in “forbidden” practices but secretly invested in maintaining Law *so as to leave room for the pleasure of breaking the rules!* The structure of this deception is a fundamental fantasy in which the pervert imagines her/himself to be a kind of “bodyguard” for the Other, protector and facilitator of the *Other’s* desire rather than his/her own.¹⁷ Consider the transformation of Kantian moral theory first suggested by Lacan in his seventh seminar and much elaborated upon by Žižek and his colleague Alenka Zupančič.¹⁸ Kantian moral theory—the demand that a free subject heed the “call of conscience”—suggests an outcome today that is far from Kant’s own moral rigor. In *The Ticklish Subject*, Žižek even suggests that one can see this outcome in Michel Foucault’s ethic of the “care of the self” (from his *History of Sexuality*).¹⁹ Kant’s moral philosophy demands that we distinguish the “inner” voice of conscience from the external and artificial imperatives imposed by tradition, religion, etc. We must not confuse the form of the categorical imperative with the content of specific duties. Foucault simply sees the

¹⁶ Žižek most commonly refers to this as the “superegoic injunction to enjoy.” See for example his essay, “Objet a in Social Links,” in *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis: Reflections on Seminar XVII*, ed. Justin Clemens and Russell Grigg (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006) 115. Hereafter, *Objet a*.

¹⁷ Žižek writes that “the ultimate perverse fantasy,” lies in “the notion that we are ultimately instruments of the Other *jouissance*, sucked out of our life-substance like batteries.” *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: The MIT Press, 2006) 313. See also “Objet a,” where Žižek writes, “the pervert knows perfectly what he is for the Other: a knowledge supports his position as the object of his Other’s (divided subject’s) *jouissance*” (*Objet a*, 115).

¹⁸ See, for example, Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real* (London and New York: Verso, 2000) and Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

¹⁹ See *Ticklish*, 279–80.

necessity of completing this “formal” interiorization of morality. “The care of the self” demands that we avoid *all* socially imposed (and thus artificial) rules, *including the rules that Kant ascribed to duty or morality itself*. The new imperative of conscience is that one do “what one really wants to do,” a task that first demands of the “moral agent” that she discern this “true” desire in a preconstituted and complete “self”—a self which here *plays the role* of the Other (one might determine what “it” wants by means of a *ouija* board or . . . by means of free association). To return to the preferred Lacanian term, the new formations transform the superego from an agency of *prohibition* to one of *enforced enjoyment*.

I referred above to perversion as a “substitute” for the master signifier, an assertion that I would justify in part with the analogous way that perversion *diverts* or fascinates us, preventing us from “paying attention to what’s behind the curtain” of fantasy. That is, here too, as in the traditional fantasy, reality gains its consistency by diverting attention from a fragmentary and senseless condition. In such a movement, we might locate all the varieties of frenetic activity that fill the space of post-Romantic cultural politics—from the Nietzschean cult of the “overman” and its reverberations in modern art to the “play of the signifier” embraced by post-structuralists to the “Risk Society” of Ulrich Beck. In each of these cases, “play,” a kind of hyper-activity, is substituted for any challenge to the order of reality. Indeed, Žižek *defines* the “game” aspect here in precisely this manner—indicating the “perverse” nature of the culture it supports: the game is defined by the question, “what do we have to change so that ultimately nothing will really change?” (Ticklish, p. 200).

And so, the communal and “moral” behaviors built upon the traditional master signifier/fantasy combination gradually give way to the perverse and paranoid world blossoming around us today. In a strange sense, then, conservative critics of modernity are right; morality *has* decayed. The traditional father *is* in crisis. The revolutionary promise of the modern subject is disarmed and its “truth” simply recycled as the pathology of modernity. But those reactionaries are also wrong: given its origin in the *truth* of subjectivity, modernity cannot be retracted. Rather, the only possibility lies in somehow *passing through* the paranoid fundamental fantasy and its perverse substitute for the master signifier, in going *beyond* the pervert’s cynical games.

Conclusions

Our exercise in “picture thinking,” our effort to *think through* the Lacanian subject by referring it back to the problem of systematic pictorial perspective as it emerged at the dawn of modernity, thus allows us to understand much about our contemporary world. Indeed, I would suggest that, as a number of thinkers from Jacques-Alain Miller to Julia Kristeva and Teresa Brennan have proposed, Lacanian theory thus provides a powerful alternative for historically-based critical theory to the Frankfurt

School or its traditional adversaries.²⁰ In other words, Lacan provides a unique access to the contours of our historical present, a powerful tool for comprehending life in late capitalist industrial and consumer societies. According to the model we have uncovered here, the history of modernity has been one of adaptation: “how to maintain social stability in the face of an insight (the subject) with revolutionary potential?” This is the implicit question whose various answers have comprised the secret history of our present. In its ability to analyze the increasing extremity of the moves necessary to maintain the socially constituted Other in the face of its exposure as fantasy, such a theory can explain much that remains opaque within either conservative or traditional Marxist critiques, not only about the fate of subjectivity but also about the imaginary and social organizations with which a capitalist, technological world maintains its stability.

In addition to this comprehension of the way that social reality maintains itself in the face of a threatening “truth,” we must also record the fact of psychoanalysis itself—that is, the fact of a “revolutionary” practice, a practice which somehow *enacts* the potential only “pictured” in Brunelleschi’s experiment. Along with those political revolutions I previously mentioned as following through on the potential of the subjectivist moment, we should add the potential of an analytic “traversal of the fantasy,” the revolution encoded *in* psychoanalysis. Exposure of the modern subject opens the possibility that the subject could challenge the very limitations of its “world.”

Of course, such a possibility corresponds oddly—and that’s the point—with its opposite, with the way that the “truth” of analysis can be, depending on context, an excuse or opportunity for mere adaptation or retreat. In other words, the ambiguity of the modern insight invites further research into that distinction to which Lacan himself repeatedly returned in his latest work, between “truth” and “knowledge.” Could it be that the key here is a “knowledge” irreducible to any represented truth? Could it be that the analysand’s leap into her/his own unconscious fantasy involves this knowledge which cannot be turned into a form of “comfort”?²¹

²⁰ See Jacques-Alain Miller, *Le Neveu de Lacan* (Paris: Verdier, 2003), Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia, 1984), and Teresa Brennan, *History After Lacan* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

²¹ In *The Plague of Fantasies*, Slavoj Žižek summarizes the complex history of Lacan’s thought on the relationship between knowledge and truth as follows: for most of his career, Lacan belongs in a solidly existentialist tradition, one which conceives the goal of therapy in terms of authenticity. As Žižek explains, this Lacan accented the role of truth for the analysand. Emphasizing the hysterical symptom, the symptom which “tells the truth in the guise of a lie,” the Lacan of the 1940s through the mid-1960s sees analysis as moving toward the analysand’s need to acknowledge the “lie” she/he has been living. It is the lie of my own desire hidden in the hysterical symptom. Analysis aims at authenticity to the extent that its goal would coincide with the analysand’s acknowledgment or knowledge of that repressed desire. For Žižek, however, the very last period of Lacan’s life, when he was working through the implications of the idea, introduced earlier in the 1960s, of a “fundamental fantasy,” departs from both the

These are questions that must remain unanswered, along with one other query that I've already left dangling. Above, I deferred the problem of how we might understand the possibility of revolutionary change from a Lacanian perspective. After all, to the extent that reality itself depends upon fantasy, revolution makes no sense. We seem to be thoroughly enclosed in our fantasy or, at the very least, in *a* fantasy. What would it really mean to "fulfill" this revolutionary potential of the modern subject?

The fact that the most powerful contemporary research in Lacanian theory, that of Žižek and Alain Badiou, is directed against any "conservative" vision of Lacan—against any interpretation of psychoanalysis which confirms the impossibility of revolution or, even worse, takes its task to lie in a return to traditional forms of authority and community—should alert us to the importance of understanding the appearance they combat. Lacking space here to really address this issue,²² let me simply suggest that the very terms of the problem may deceive us: after all, the very idea that we are trapped "in" a world produced by fantasy is the *product* of fantasy itself, a product exposed by psychoanalysis. Here, too, we must understand the *demonstrative* nature of Brunelleschi's experiment: in other words, "subject," this "point" of focus and infinity, only "exists" to the extent that it demonstrates the failure of reality itself, the lack underlying apparent totality. Surely, if such a demonstration shows us anything, it must be that *history*, too, resists reduction to the coordinates of fantasy. Somehow, then, psychoanalysis must align itself with the possibility of genuine transformation, a possibility upon which its practice insists, even when it tells us a different story. The question of how and with what qualifications analysis must enter such alliance remains open.

existentialist ideal and any intersection of truth and analytic progress (Plague, 37). Here, the key movement takes us away from the overlapping of truth and knowledge, to a condition in which the "truth" enjoyed by the analyst is rigorously divided off from a new, "a-subjective" knowledge on the part of the analysand (Plague, 37).

²² I do, however, wrestle with it in a book manuscript forthcoming from Continuum Press, *Žižek and Heidegger: the Question Concerning Techno-Capitalism*.

JONATHAN KIM-REUTER

MONTAIGNE IN THE “GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS”

The Image of the Corps Morcelé in the Essays

Given the imagistic sources for the *corps morcelé* (the “body in bits and pieces” or the “fragmented body”), it is understandable that Lacan turned to painting, and to the artist Hieronymous Bosch, for a graphic depiction of the disintegrating ego. The tortured and disfigured bodies in the “Garden of Earthly Delights” vividly complement the reports of dream content by patients in analysis. The pre-linguistic locus of this archaic experience and its specifically figurative nature, not to mention the developmental push toward forms of psychic wholeness, makes the encounter with the *corps morcelé* an especially fugitive and elusive affair, for which examples are not only lacking but constitutionally inadequate. In the two important papers on the imaginary conditions wherein ego formation takes its cues from the overcoming of the infantile body, namely “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function” and “Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis,” Lacan turns to Bosch to aid him in illustrating this difficult theoretical notion.¹ That we lack words adequate to this experience is precisely Lacan’s point, and it justifies his stepping outside the psychoanalytic domain for the artistic, where words and language give place to affect and image. Yet, between the painted body and the visible body there is a continuity, not an identity, an approximation that can never trespass the former’s asymptotic limits. This raises the question, then, of whether the evocative significance of Bosch and painting has no cousin among the authors of literature. To paint a similar portrait of the image of the *corps morcelé* with words is difficult but surely not beyond the creative literary imagination. One would need to oppose the generalizing character of language, to draw down the word to the level of subjective experience; there would need to be a pervasive mood of anxiousness suitable to a subject undergoing the collapse of its ego formation; there should be an exclusive attention to the body and to the body’s sensory, affective life: one would need to write essays, and one would have to be Montaigne. In the *Essays*, Montaigne portrays his own “Garden of Earthly Delights,” a vision of a fragmented body as useful as those in Bosch for exploring Lacan’s realm of the imaginary.²

¹ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006). Hereafter *Écrits*.

² Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald Frame (Stanford:

Montaigne is not an unfounded choice to illustrate the forces and effects of subjectivity that find a home in the imaginary. In the paper on the structure of the imaginary, "Presentation on Psychical Causality," Lacan ranks Montaigne just below Freud in revealing the profound and irresolvable gaps and contradictions that make the imaginary identity of the ego unequal to the being of the subject which it represents (Écrits, 146). For Montaigne, as for Freud, the divisions within the ego or the *moi* illustrate the crucial phenomenon of misrecognition (*méconnaissance*), insofar as they point up the real function of the ego, which is its illusory function. "This also happens to me: that I do not find myself in the place where I look; and I find myself more by chance encounter than by searching my judgment" (Essays, 27). Montaigne, it would seem, stands within the scene of his own primordial alienation, watching closely as the totalizing dream of the ego crumbles everywhere around him. This consideration puts Montaigne in a fairly elite constellation of psychoanalytic figures, even granting the obvious cultural, historical and theoretical differences. His position is further consolidated when, in Seminar XI, Lacan looks to Montaigne for the paradigmatic illustration the phenomenon of *aphanisis* ("fading").³ Lacan writes, "I would show you that Montaigne is truly the one who has centered himself, not around skepticism but around the living moment of the *aphanisis* of the subject" (Seminar XI, 223). To situate the author of the *Essays* in this psychoanalytic register of experience is to position Montaigne at the very disappearance of the subject into the signifier or the "field of the Other." The *Essays* can be read as a primer on the *aphanisis* of the human subject because Montaigne wields his doubt and uncertainty as moments for ego constitution and ego disintegration. In him is illustrated the core Lacanian critique of the subject as an autonomous and unified entity.

There are many levels on which *aphanisis* is displayed, but perhaps the most primal generator of this phenomenon, at least developmentally, is manifested in the move to overcome the division between the dissonant experience of the lived body and the "'orthopedic' form of its totality" (Écrits, 78). Carried out at the level of the visual image, the movement "from insufficiency to anticipation" (Écrits, 78) is the key idea in mapping out the field of the imaginary. All of its forces are centered on the lure offered by the visual image to the subject. If the specular capture of the I by the image fails, or is pressured to do so by the analyst, the individual is thrown back on the body's anarchic subterranean existence, its "turbulent movements" (Écrits, 76) or what Lacan refers to more generally as humankind's specific "prematurity of birth" (Écrits, 78). Understandably, in the analytical situation the patient will muster every ego defense available to avoid such an attack on the formative unity of ego identity. Aggressiveness, for Lacan, is a key behavioral sign that the formal structure of the ego—the vital marriage of subject and image—is starting to lose its hold over

Stanford University Press, 1958). Hereafter Essays.

³ *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978). Hereafter Seminar XI.

subjectivity (Écrits, 84-5). If the collapse is complete, the spell of the "visual gestalt of his own body" (Écrits, 92) is broken and the ego shatters. The patient becomes one of the tortured souls in Bosch's "Garden of Earthly Delights," and the subject experiences at the level of the body the fracturing of identity. Images of the *corps morcelé* populate the distressed life of the patient, as he becomes the playfield for terrible visions of corporeal dislocation.⁴ "Most often," Lacan writes concerning the appearance of these body-images in the patient's dreams and fantasies, "the resemblance is to a jig-saw puzzle, with the separate parts of the body of a man or an animal in disorderly array."⁵

It hardly seems conceivable that Montaigne occupies a place in this traumatic universe. Montaigne is the paradigm Renaissance humanist. In the *Essays*, the sovereign individualism of the classical past flowers anew. The many Stoic counsels against the corrupting passions of the body originate from a philosophical retreat from lived experience, a sheltering of the mind or the soul against all affective states that would dislodge the self-mastery pursued by the sage. Against the accidents of life, "the wise man, after having well weighed and considered their qualities and measured and judged them for what they are, springs above them by a power of a vigorous courage. He disdains them and tramples them underfoot, having a strong and solid soul, against which the arrows of fortune, when they come to strike, must necessarily bounce off and be blunted, meeting a body on which they can make no impression" (Essays, 226). In borrowing the title of one of the essays from Cicero—"That to philosophize is to learn to die"—Montaigne is giving himself over to a thinking that seeks to remove from itself all mediating influences. Self-mastery weights the subject down with a meditation on death so as to deaden the existential cues offered by the world to the subject.

Nevertheless, no reading of the *Essays* can any longer abide by the simplistic arrangement of the three books of the *Essays* into supposed Stoic, Pyrrhonian and Epicurean phases, as if each book was an unadulterated position or school rather than the unfolding record of a life.⁶ The Stoicism adopted by Montaigne, inasmuch as it

⁴ As Lacan writes, "Among the latter images are some that represent the elective vectors of aggressive intentions, which they provide with an efficacy that might be called magical. These are the images of castration, emasculation, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, and bursting open of the body—in short, the imagos that I personally have grouped together under the heading 'imagos of the fragmented body,' a heading that certainly seems to be structural" (Écrits, 85).

⁵ Lacan, "Some Reflections on the Ego," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 34 (1953): 11-17 (13). Hereafter "Some Reflections."

⁶ There has been a long-standing debate over whether Montaigne evolved or developed through different stages (Stoic, Skeptic, Epicurean) corresponding to the different books of the *Essays*. Pierre Villey, whose edition of the *Essays*—complete with identified sources for quotations—is the modern version used by nearly all readers, advanced the "evolution" theory. Its basic thesis is that Montaigne identified with an early Stoic phase (first book), followed by a period during which he underwent a Skeptical crisis (second book), which was then followed

flowed into his thought as part of the Renaissance *Zeitgeist*, was also very much tied to a relation to the body that is singular in its history but general in its implications. The *Essays*, after all, as Montaigne writes in the opening letter to all future readers, is a book composed as a "private convenience" for friends and relatives, containing as it does "some features of my habits and temperament," in which the author is presented "entire and wholly naked" (*Essays*, 2). In other words, the *Essays*, and this is perhaps what so fixed the inestimable psychoanalytic value of Montaigne for Lacan, is a portrait whose compositional material is the author's relation to his own body. This combination of elements is the "psychic relationship *par excellence*": "the relation of the subject to his own body in terms of his identification with an *imago*" ("Some Reflections," 12). From the very outset, and thus adulterating considerably the portrait of Stoicism, the intimate bond between the body, its image, and the ego were on display for all to see. Normally stitched together in the distant past in the life of the individual, they have forced themselves on Montaigne with an insistence that can only be the outcome of a traumatic experience. Is there in the *Essays* an unraveling of the ego that leaves in its troubled wake the exposed chaos of the body? The answer to this question lies in the essay "Of idleness." Contained within its few short paragraphs is a logic of the imaginary that structures the entirety of Montaigne's effort at self-portraiture in the *Essays*.

The close connection between Montaigne and the *Essays* means that any judgment regarding an individual essay's interpretive significance should be laced with caution. Why privilege any one essay when they all bear the impress of a life? The *Essays* is, after all, a most unusual book: "a book consubstantial with its author, concerned with my own self, an integral part of my life" (*Essays*, 504). "I am myself the matter of my book," continues Montaigne in the same passage, an admission that would be an act of defenseless vanity if what follows was less candid, less inconsistent, and less steeped in the minutiae of subjectivity. His vanity is of a species that does not flatter but expose. He is not looking to draw the reader in so much as draw his inner life out.⁷ On this count, all the essays succeed, but among them "Of idleness" possesses a uniquely revelatory power. Its title refers to the expectation of what retirement promised Montaigne after he left public life behind for the simple pleasures of managing the affairs of his family estate. The implied temporary cessation of

by the mollifying attitude toward life expressed in Epicureanism (third book). Although still persuasive, the "evolutionary" theory has been questioned. For two of the more influential responses, see Donald Frame, *Montaigne's Discovery of Man: The Humanization of a Humanist* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955) and Floyd Gray, "The Unity of Montaigne in the *Essays*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 22 (1961): 79-86.

⁷ In his "Preface," William Hazlett makes this point eloquently, and with more than a touch of psychoanalytic relevance: "Of all egotists, Montaigne, if not the greatest, was the most fascinating, because, perhaps, he was the least affected and most truthful. What he did and what he had professed to do, was to dissect his mind, and show us, as best he could, how it was made, and what relation it bore to external objects." See *The Works of Michel de Montaigne*, ed. William C. Hazlett, trans. Charles Cotton, vol. 1 (New York: Edwin C. Hill, 1910) 55.

movement ("idling") was going to give way to a full stop. The cares of the world were no longer his. "Lately when I retired to my home, determined so far as possible to bother about nothing except spending the little life I have left in rest and seclusion, it seemed to me I could do my mind no greater favor than to let it entertain itself in full idleness and stay and settle in itself" (Essays, 21). Montaigne is here giving voice to at least two Stoic precepts, the one having to do with the wise sage's counsel of solitude, and the other fixing attention on the mind and the Stoic quest to achieve psychic tranquility or calmness (*apatheia*). An intimation of past difficulty with the latter leads Montaigne to believe that in the former he might more easily attain Stoic impassibility. From the essay, "Our feelings reach out beyond us," there is a glimpse of this former struggle, and of the lesson learned: "he who knows himself no longer takes extraneous business for his own; he loves and cultivates himself before anything else; he refuses superfluous occupations and useless thoughts and projects" (Essays, 9). The "extraneous business" of public service is an obstacle to full self-possession. All worldly affairs are foreign intrusions; although he is quite admired for his political skills, Montaigne comes to realize his being lies elsewhere. The decision to return to the family estate is motivated by an insight that turns against all exteriority. Supporting this insight is a belief in the fundamental unity and integrity of the mind, the domicile of true identity, and that by cleaving away the external shell of "superfluous occupations and useless thoughts and projects," the native and authentic self will re-surface intact. Returning to the context of thought in "Of idleness," Montaigne affirms the ego's seeming substantiality, coming into its own self-visibility in idleness—"which I hoped it might do more easily now, having become weightier and riper with time" (Essays, 21).

Montaigne's experience of idleness, however, is anything but psychic quietude. The narrative that began with the mind in seclusion terminates abruptly in a portrait of self-identity in complete and total dissolution. The anticipation leading Montaigne on in his attempted recovery of the unified self, the self that was lying below the surface of appearances, intact, ready to spring to life once the world faded from view, is proven misleading. For reasons that will become clear only later, when Montaigne deigns to set aside the mirror held up by the external, public world, he is left without any stabilizing reflection. Psychic unity and self-mastery are shown to be illusions. From idleness comes a scene where the subject-image-ego structure has collapsed. Instead of a mind in calm self-repose, Montaigne encounters a primal chaos: "on the contrary, like a runaway horse, it gives itself a hundred times more trouble than it took for others, and gives birth to so many chimeras and fantastic monsters, one after another, without order or purpose, that in order to contemplate their ineptitude and strangeness at my pleasure, I have begun to put them in writing, hoping in time to make my mind ashamed of itself" (Essays, 21). In a sort of meta-commentary that precedes but accompanies this self-description in the essay, Montaigne observes that a mind lacking a determinate shape or form is especially prey to this psychic affliction. Uncoupled from the form-giving, "orthopedic" properties of the *imago*, the self or ego becomes a plaything of the affective dynamism of the imaginary: "so it is

with minds. Unless you keep them busy with some definite subject that will bridle and control them, they throw themselves in disorder hither and yon in the vague field of imagination. [. . .]. And there is no mad or idle fancy that they do not bring forth in this agitation" (Essays, 21). Without simplifying the descriptive richness in these passages, in essence Montaigne is relating his own descent into the phenomenon of anxiety lying at the origins of ego development. The lure of the image that was supposed to captivate the subject and provide a secure point of identification, wherein the ego would emerge out of the psychic dissonance between identity and lived experience, has lost its totalizing promise. The normally unbidden and developmentally masked alienation of the ego in the illusory unity of the *imago* has become traumatically visible. What is one to make of this profusion of disordered images against which Montaigne is helpless?

To begin with, there is no mistaking the uncanny resemblance between the images and visions described here and those encountered by Lacan and others in clinical practice. The effort at controlling the mind by giving it a "definite subject" to fixate on could be taken to mean a busying of the mind that amounts to nothing more than a technique of distraction. This, however, does not square with "disorder" and the "ineptitude and strangeness" into which the mind is thrown if lacking an object on which the subject can be fixed. More than a mere diversionary tactic, Montaigne is touching upon precisely the psychoanalytic point that Lacan made in the "Mirror Stage" article. The subject is turned over to the formative control offered by the objectifying effect produced through an identification with and assumption of an external form (*Gestalt*). "It suffices to understand the mirror stage," Lacan writes, "in this context as an *identification*, in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image—an image that is seemingly predestined to have an effect at this phase, as witnessed by the use in analytic theory of antiquity's term, 'imago'" (Écrits, 76). The mind is lacking in itself the structuring principle needed in order to support the subject as it traverses the chasm created by the "specific prematurity" of the human individual. What it needs is something to fix it in place, to give it a determinate shape or contour. Lacking this formative structure or "formal fixation" (Écrits, 90), the psyche is subjected to the turbulent, "unbridled" domain of lived experience. The individual may go through many such ideal unities or *imagos*, but to undergo the fracturing of the ego's ideal unity is to fall into the distress of finding oneself without the primordial constitution that maps out for the subject an *Umwelt*. There is a failure "to the structures of systematic misrecognition and objectification that characterize ego formation" (Écrits, 94). The "vital dehiscence constitutive of man" (Écrits, 94) opens up beneath Montaigne's feet. The description he provides in the essay "Of idleness" obeys the same logic of the imaginary as portrayed by Lacan. This is an important point: both the essay, "Of idleness," and the dreams and fantasies of patients suffering ego disintegration manifest the fundamental notion of the *corps morcelé*. The images of "chimeras and fantastic monsters, one after another, without order or purpose," are these not drawn from the same pool of terrifying creatures as that of the flying fish

whose inflated, transparent body stalked the dreams of one of Lacan's analysands? (Écrits 86) To admit that they are situates the opening moments of the *Essays* in a psychoanalytically suggestive light. More is needed, however, in order to see the essay "Of idleness" as the very dimension of the imaginary from which Montaigne never leaves. Let us look more closely at how Montaigne responds to his sudden immersion in the lived experience of his own subjectivity.

"I have begun to put them in writing, hoping in time to make my mind ashamed of itself" (Essays, 21). Against the carnival of disordered images, Montaigne puts quill to paper so as to give them some semblance of reality. They are like nothing he has ever encountered before; in them he does not recognize himself. In their "ineptitude and strangeness," the images are truly monstrous, that is, they offer neither formative integrity nor formative recognition. They are very much like "jig-saw puzzles," to borrow the expression from Lacan. To describe them as "chimeras" is to join Bosch in his "Garden of Earthly Delights," where half-human, half-animal creatures populate the foreign terrain. The functional unity of the human body is lost in these precipitates of ego deformation. They are the products of an unraveling of the structural effects of identification, which is for Montaigne a glimpse into the truth, lost afterwards to much of the Western philosophical tradition, that the being of the subject is not reducible to the being of consciousness. It is a truth, however, that is shocking and alien, and that offends the dignity of the individual and the authority of reason. Such an unruly and disobedient awareness must be domesticated, or at the very least brought into an order of familiarity. "I have begun to put them in writing," remarks Montaigne, an act that begins with "Of idleness" and which constitutes the very project of the *Essays*. Thinking he could tame and bridle the roaming affectivity so disturbing to the driving and regulating forces of identification, Montaigne himself becomes a literary version of Bosch: his essays are themselves "fancies," the imaginary's flotsam and jetsam washed up on the shores of language.

The image of the *corps morcelé* is the central motif in the portrait of the self offered by Montaigne. That the images are fragmentary, lacking determinate shape or form, is clearly indicated by the preceding analysis. The fact that the images are modeled upon and take existence from a disturbance to Montaigne's body-image, that it is in fact his own embattled body-image which serves as the very material for writing, this is the psychoanalytic *tour de force* represented by the *Essays*. "Of idleness" is neither an isolated statement of intention, nor is it a solitary depiction of the body's formative insecurity. Everywhere one turns, Montaigne is fixing his inquisitive eye on the field of the imaginary. One of the best examples comes from the essay "Of friendship." Anthony Wilden, the English translator of Lacan's *Discours de Rome*, in a rare and still brilliant instance of a Lacanian reading of the *Essays* in terms of the relation between Montaigne and La Boétie, finds in their friendship a crucial analytic insight.⁸ For Wilden, the *Essays* represent an individual's search for the illusionary

⁸ Anthony Wilden, "Par Divers Moyens On Arrive A Pareille Fin: A Reading of Montaigne," *Modern Language Notes* 83.4 (1968): 577-97.

point of overcoming the *dehiscence* that marks all human relations. "[T]he *Essays*," writes Wilden, "are a particularly interesting example of an interpersonal relationship dependent upon the constitution of a lost id" (Wilden, 581). There is a void at the heart of the *Essays*, an "absent image" of the friend La Boétie (Wilden, 591). Captured in the ideal image offered by La Boétie, his untimely death preceding the *Essays* sets in motion the experience of radical alienation and the resultant quest for lost unity that drives Montaigne without cease. Wilden's thesis is significant in that it captures the intersubjective horizons outside of which the *Essays* cannot be read. Moreover, he is one of the only commentators to pick up on the properly imaginary context for understanding the movements of self that make the *Essays* such a unique document of lived subjectivity.⁹

What he does not develop, however, is the profound bodily meditation that takes place for Montaigne as a result of the fracturing of his ideal image, his "proto-self" (Wilden, 588). The imaginary is not just the place where the *corps morcelé* lodges its unsettling force, it is, in its essence, a dimension of the body itself. Lacan's masterstroke was to de-center the subject and thus doom the traditional philosophy of consciousness; Montaigne perhaps exceeds even Lacan in bringing out the nature of the operative forces pushing the subject out of focus. The various essays are so many captured fragments from a glimpse into what, on an existential level, it would mean to try to inhabit the imaginary realm, to expose the self to the winds of the passions. Picking up again the thread of the essay "Of friendship," witness, for example, the profound implication of the following passage. Drawing on an analogy with painting to orient his efforts, the deformed body-image, void of all structural unity, is on full display: "As I was considering the way a painter I employ went about his work, I had a mind to imitate him. He chooses the best spot, the middle of each wall, to put a picture labored over with all his skill, and the empty space all around it he fills with grotesques, which are fantastic paintings whose only charm lies in their variety and strangeness. And what are these things of mine, in truth, but *grotesques and monstrous bodies, pieced together of divers members*, without definite shape, having no order, no sequence, or proportion other than accidental" (*Essays*, 135, my italics). Here again is the description given in "Of idleness," where the essays, being Montaigne's attempt to study the images of corporeal dislocation, would themselves be formless and disordered. The painting metaphor solidifies the intent and the meaning: to move within the imaginary realm one needs to remain at the sensory level, close to the lived experience of the body; the contents of the portrait, lacking solidity and determinacy, will be pieces of the body-image that have been snatched from the fleeting life they lead. Without any support from an *imago* that would give Montaigne's ego a sense of being totalized in a stable unity, any and every *essai* of the self reveals a truth, partial and uncertain as it may be.

⁹ "It is the contradictions of the *Essays* between assertions of personal solidity and stability (plenitude) and Montaigne's discovery of his own vacillations (flux) which reveal the existential status of imagination and absence in the constitution of human desire" (Wilden 595).

With the self of consciousness displaced by the subject of the imaginary, the body weighs heavily on the images that make it into writing. From the essay "Of practice," Montaigne describes this captivation of the subject by the lived body: "I expose myself entire: my portrait is a cadaver on which the veins, the muscles, and the tendons appear at a glance, each part in its place. One part of what I am was produced by a cough, another by a pallor or a palpitation of the heart—in any case dubiously. It is not my deeds that I write down; it is myself, it is my essence" (Essays, 274). Lacking the formative permanence and integrity of a specular image, each reflection "at a glance" carries with it a trace of that which has been refused the structuring effects of a visual form. There is no body-image synthesis because the ego has lost its ideal locus of objectification. Where there is no identifying form, there is no "alienating destination," no "mental permanence" (Écrits, 76), and the "I" encounters not a rigid world of statues but a world given over to Heraclitean flux and unrest. "The world," Montaigne observes, "is but a perennial movement. All things in it are in constant motion—the earth, the rocks of the Caucasus, the pyramids of Egypt—both with the common motion and with their own. Stability itself is nothing but a more languid motion" (Essays, 610). Such a paradoxical overturning of the structure of human life and knowledge is possible only on the basis of the bodying forth of the subject. Writing essays is for Montaigne to raise a watchtower in the imaginary order itself.¹⁰ He becomes a recording machine for the monstrous images whose animating force is the body. In a sense, for Montaigne waking life is a dream only a body could have. "In order to train my *fancy* even to dream with some order and purpose, and in order to keep it from losing its way and roving with the wind, there is nothing like *embodying* and registering all the little thoughts that come to it. I listen to my *reveries* because I have to record them" (Essays, 504, my italics). Not even the slightest "imaginings" are corrected (Essays, 574), as they are all testimony to the existential mutability of the embodied subject.

To maintain the subject within the interior orbit of the *corps morcelé* is to move at the level of the image. Without any structuring form to capture the subject and draw it away from the body's turbulence, the individual lives in intimate proximity to the

¹⁰ In focusing Montaigne's psychoanalytic value on his proximity to the imaginary order, I realize that however similar the *Essays* might seem to Bosch's "Garden of Earthly Delights," there is still this fundamental and irreducible difference: to capture his corporeal visions, he turned to the word, to language. This raises the very significant question of the status of the unconscious with Montaigne. For Lacan, the Freudian unconscious presupposes the Cartesian subject, divided and split as it is between thought and being. From the perspective of Descartes, Montaigne makes a fatal alliance with being. Whereas Descartes enforces the division of the subject into *cogito* and *sum*, pinning the being of the subject in the act of thinking, Montaigne observes no comparable split. Indeed, Montaigne aggravates the very assumption of such a *cogito* unfettered from the substance of embodied subjectivity. Thus, the necessary precondition of the subject of the unconscious, namely the alienation of the subject as it is forced to choose between being and meaning or thought, is absent in the *Essays*. What complicates this otherwise sound picture? Not only does Montaigne not stop speaking, displaying a striking and subversive awareness of the divergence, in Lacanian terms, between

affective register, wherein all paths to the visible world are labyrinthine struggles that take place "against a background of organic disturbances and discord" ("Some Reflections," 15). For Montaigne, the play of "reveries" across the field of the subject constitutes a radical involvement with the lived body. At this level, that is, at the level of the imaginary, the body mirrors little back to the subject that looks anything like the human form. If there is a madness in the *Essays*, it belongs to the same species of madness "by which a man thinks he is a man," a psychoanalytic truth which is also the most profound illusion (*Écrits*, 153). Like one of the tortured residents of the "Garden of Earthly Delights," Montaigne sees everywhere around him a world populated by images of the body as if seen through a prism. If by fortune and by practice he is to remain in the realm of the imaginary, a gaze doubled-back on itself and returned to its primal sources in the corporeal fact, as the subject caught up in the image of the *corps morcelé*, is it any surprise that in describing the style of his writings he chooses to call them, this literary cousin of Bosch, "essays in flesh and bone" (*Essays*, 640)?

the subject of the statement and the subject of the enunciation, but like Freud, he never for once makes the mistake of believing that conscious intention is adequate to the full expression of signification. See further, Lorenzo Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2007) 38. Between Montaigne and Descartes there emerges the possibility of psychoanalysis sketched in the outlines of the unconscious. This strange period in the history of thought yet remains to be written, obscured as it is and has been by the reading of the *Essays* that situates its skepticism, retroactively, within the project of Cartesian certainty and the self-founding of the subject in consciousness. Yet, if skepticism shares with psychoanalysis a certain taste for the negative, it remains simultaneously and paradoxically true that both Montaigne and Descartes make Freud's epochal discovery possible. I want to thank a reviewer's comments for signaling the need to address this problematic.

JULIET FLOWER MACCANNELL

THE REAL IMAGINARY

Lacan's Joyce

In his twenty-third seminar, Jacques Lacan framed the *sinthome* as a radical unknotting of the symbolic, the imaginary and the real. He offered *le sinthome* not as a mere technical addition to the battery of psychoanalytic tools, but as a concept of paramount importance, for its unique adequation to what he found to be a significant change in the conventional relation of subject to culture and of ego to other.¹ The *sinthome* denoted for Lacan a new way that the subject could confront the challenge posed by the rancid politics of our time—the politics produced by (or at least not precluded by) the traditional Borromean entwining of the three registers (symbolic, imaginary, real, or SIR). The corollary to Lacan's staking out this new ground is a surprising promotion of the imaginary to a principal role in the subject's relation to the real—of bearing more of this burden than he had previously thought. By the time of his twenty-third seminar, that is, Lacan realizes that the crucial task of mediating between the real and the imaginary for the subject could no longer be shouldered exclusively by a symbolic whose failings were increasingly (and alarmingly) apparent. The rupture that the *sinthome* indexes appears most importantly for Lacan in the art of writing—and in particular, the writing of James Joyce.

In the nineteen-sixties, Lacan began closely studying the work of Joyce, an interest enhanced when Hélène Cixous (who was writing a book on Joyce that drew on her affinity for Jacques Derrida's theses on "*écriture*") became Lacan's assistant.² From Joyce's proper name ("Joy-ce"/*jouissance*) to his family psychiatric history (Joyce's daughter Lucia was diagnosed as schizophrenic³), the Irish author clearly suited Lacan's abiding concerns. As the father of a troubled daughter and himself the son of a weak, alcoholic father, Joyce was, according to Lacan, marked by the failures of the paternal metaphor. In Seminar XXIII, Lacan posited that Joyce's artistic enterprise

¹ Seminar XXIII, 1976 in *Ornicar?* (1976): 6-11, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Luke Thurston. Unless otherwise noted, page numbers refer to Luke Thurston's unpublished English translation. I also refer to the often confusingly titled "Joyce the Symptom I" (as mentioned in note 1 of Thurston's translation; in manuscript), the address he delivered at the invitation of Jacques Aubert at the opening of the fifth international Joyce Symposium, 26 June 1975,

was his way of “making a name for himself,” of provisioning a necessary supplement, and Joyce’s art appears to be compensating for this paternal lack. Lacan says,

Joyce did this close-up: born in Dublin with a boozing, practically good-for-nothing father, [. . .] a fanatic with two families [. . .]. The phallus is the conjunction of this parasite, the little prick in question, and the function of language [*parole*]. And it is thus that Joyce’s art is the true guarantee of his phallus. (Seminar XXIII, lesson of 18 November, 1975, 3)

However, Lacan proposes a slightly new version of what he means by “father,” designating a “Borromean father” who *is not* the name, but the one who *names*. This father who *names* functions where the unconscious “is knotted to a *sinthome*” that is completely unique to and in each and every individual (JSI, 9).

Thus in “Joyce the Symptom I,” when Lacan says Joyce wants to *be* the symptom (“he displays the apparatus, the essence and the abstraction of the symptom,” JSI, 6), he does not intend the traditional or familiar psychoanalytic symptom (indeed, to his psychoanalytic students Lacan will remark, “the *Symptom* in Joyce is a symptom that doesn’t concern you at all,” JSI, 6). For Joyce’s writing urged upon Lacan a radically new definition of the symptom, one that emerges from Joyce’s singular (though not uncommon) situation with regard to language—or rather, to languages (or “*l’élanguages*”). Joyce is situated, Lacan says, not only by his relation to the English that he speaks and writes, but also to the Irish tongue that the British Empire has so forcefully cut out of his native Ireland. Imperial English is a language that is not Joyce’s own; it is instead a language that Lacan says he “plays upon [. . .] for his own was wiped off the map, that is, Gaelic [. . .] not his own, therefore, but that of the invaders, the oppressors” (JSI, 7).

In a recent essay I described Joyce’s peculiar linguistico-politico problematic in this way:

Joyce’s personal *malaise* in his own (Irish) civilization was that of a double encirclement by the hell of an English language that had been forcibly imposed over his culture and that had remained fixed at the moment of its imposition. It had no freedom to change or evolve. As the language of a conqueror forced upon his new subjects, it brooked none of the playful, metaphoric outlets for the *jouissance* that language represses—outlets open to any “native” speaking-being. English stagnated in its Irish iteration. (See *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in the passage where young Stephen

published in Seminar XXIII as “Joyce le Symptôme,” *Le Séminaire, livre XXIII: le sinthome*, texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005) 161–69. Hereafter JSI.

² From 1963 to 1965. In 1963, Cixous traveled to the United States to research Joyce at SUNY Buffalo, Yale University, and Robinson Jeffers in California. She was introduced to Jacques Lacan, who was interested in Joyce, by Jean-Jacques Mayoux. Lacan worked with Cixous for the next two years.

³ A diagnosis Joyce rejected, calling Lucia simply “telepathic” (Seminar XXIII, 43).

discovers he only knows what the English priest laughs at as the old-fashioned word for candle-snuffer [*tundish*], because it is no longer current in English usage.) The upshot was that Joyce was oppressed not simply by language. His oppression was aggravated specifically by its being the language, deeply foreign to his culture, of his imperial oppressor.⁴

What ends up intriguing Lacan in Joyce's writing is the manner in which Joyce responds to this double linguistic/political imposition-privation: the body of Joyce's work culminates in nothing less than the destruction (or deconstruction) of the English language.⁵ Lacan says:

sinthome is an old way of spelling what has more recently been spelt symptom. This orthographic modification clearly marks the date at which Greek was injected into French, into my language. Likewise, in the first chapter of *Ulysses*, Joyce expresses the wish that we should hellenise, that we should inject the hellenic language into something—one is not sure into what, since it is not Gaelic; even though Ireland is the subject, Joyce had to write in English. Joyce wrote in English in such a way that as [. . .] Philippe Sollers has remarked in *Tel Quel* the English language no longer exists. (Seminar XXIII, lesson of 18 November, 1975, 1)

Lacan will go even further: "It is hard not to see that a certain relation to language [*la parole*] is increasingly imposed on [Joyce], to the point where he ends up breaking or dissolving language itself, by decomposing it, going beyond phonetic identity" (Seminar XXIII, lesson of 17 February, 1976, 43).

Now, in Seminar XXIII, Lacan repeatedly remarks on his own feeble English, on his own inability to understand Joyce, his own uncertain reading, and his vain efforts to keep abreast of all the academic writing on Joyce, culminating in this confession:

It is obvious that I don't know everything, and in particular, I don't know, when I read Joyce—for that's what's frightful I am reduced to having to read him!—what he believed about himself. It is absolutely sure that I haven't analysed him—and I regret it. But anyway, he was clearly not very disposed to it. (Seminar XXIII, 10 February, 1976, 37)

⁴ Juliet Flower MacCannell, "Nowhere, Else: On Utopia," *Umbr(a)*, forthcoming, 2008.

⁵ The French manuscript reads a bit differently. Speaking of Joyce's *Ulysses*, Lacan says, "*il ne s'agissait pas du gaélic, encore qu'il s'agit de l'Irlande, mais que Joyce devait écrire en anglais, il a été écrit en anglais d'une façon telle que, comme l'a dit quelqu'un dont j'espère qu'il est dans cette assemblée, Philippe Sollers [sic], dans "Tel Quel", il l'a écrit d'une façon telle que la langue [sic, though the context surely requires la langue] anglaise n'existe plus. Elle avait déjà, je dirais, peu de consistance, ce qui ne veut pas dire qu'il soit facile d'écrire en anglais. Mais Joyce, par la succession d'oeuvres qu'il a écrites en anglais, y a ajouté ce quelque chose qui fait dire au même auteur il faudrait écrire l'élangues, les langues, les langues par où je suppose qu'il entend désigner quelque chose comme l'élation dont on nous dit, enfin, que c'est au principe de je ne sais quel sinthome que nous appelons en psychiatrie la manie.*" *Ornicar?* (Séminaire du 18 novembre, 1975): 6.

Despite these disclaimers, Lacan progressively unfolds something extraordinary, something radically *different* that he finds in Joyce's writing. It constitutes a new dimension to the subject's relation to language, speech, and finally to university discourse, which for Lacan correlates with the ethics of capitalism and is the dominant discourse of our time.⁶

Long before this seminar, Lacan had begun exploring a crucial change in the post-Kantian subject (see his seventh seminar on the *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*⁷). Now he realizes that if one is to have any hope of taking the full measure of the surprises to be encountered in Joyce (such as Lacan's own astonishment that Joyce is "not hooked up to the unconscious" [JSI, 5]), one must start down an unknown pathway. For while Freud discovered that the subject is a function of an endemic discontent with or malaise in civilization, he largely saw that malaise affecting the subject on the psychical plane. And although Freud clearly knew that it also acts on (and is obliquely expressed in) the political plane, it is Lacan who developed the analytic linkage. In his encounter with Joyce's writing, Lacan feels under pressure to frame a fresh concept that can recognize, name and define new factors in the relation of the subject to language, including the political factor. This he names the *sinthome*. It is by means of the *sinthome* that Lacan will courageously undertake a highly original reading of Joyce which will have, as crucial byproduct of recognizing these "new factors," an amazing reassessment of his own psychoanalytic theses regarding language and *jouissance*, the ego and the imaginary.

The crucial new "factor" in the subject's relation to language appears in Lacan's revitalized appreciation for what we call "tone" in the work of the signifier. The linguist Ferdinand de Saussure had already discovered that the "body" of language requires the addition of a new signifier in order to remain an open, generative system. It offers or promises the subject meaning and a certain place in the symbolic order (which it, of course, cannot really deliver) by its structuring of "meaning" on the basis of adding yet one more signifier. In Seminar XXIII, Lacan, however, remarks that psychoanalytic meaning is produced by a certain splicing of the imaginary and the symbolic in order to obtain "unconscious knowledge"—or as he puts it, "what the analysand reveals over time about his symptom."⁸ Here, he now suggests that given that the three registers are in reality separate ("imaginary, symbolic and real do not

⁶ For Lacan, university discourse is the dominant discourse of our post-Hegelian era. In the introductory section of "Joyce the Symptom I" entitled "University and Analysis," Lacan writes that Joyce may mean the closing or turning away from this dominant discourse: "In accordance with what Joyce himself knew would happen to him posthumously, the university in charge. It's almost exclusively academics who busy themselves with Joyce. [. . .]. And he hoped for nothing less than to keep them busy until the extinction of the university. We're headed in that direction" (JSI, 3).

⁷ *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1997).

⁸ Seminar XXIII, lesson of 13 January, 1976, 22.

intermingle”⁹), any meaning, conscious or unconscious, that is produced in language is the byproduct of the knot. What “meaning” would there then be if this knot were undone—and undone by something so slight as an intonation, an overtone, a resonance?

In *Seminar XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (1969), Lacan introduced a new “tonal” factor when he says that the next signifier must “strike” the whole symbolic-linguistic order like a gong striking a bell.¹⁰ Only its *resonating* provides an opening out for (and of) the Order. Lacan then wonders how (and if) this new opening out can still take place once the “symbolic system” and its “order” follows an inevitable tendency to close in on itself: to regard itself as a finite, albeit vast, treasury of accumulated “signifiers” rather than as the bearer of infinite promise, including the never concluded promise of meaning.¹¹ Why do we need this opening? Why is a “next” or “new” signifier crucial to the symbolic order and (or as) its language? Why is the production of “the new” so important?

To understand these “whys,” one needs a basic knowledge of the semiotic production of “meaning” and significance, as identified by de Saussure. According to his semiotic theory of language, *meaning* emanates strictly from the procession and retroactivity of signifiers. There can be no “meaning” until a second or “next” signifier is added to a first utterance, S₁, that only retroactively becomes a signifier (pointing to something else) when a second signifier is added to it. This second signifier endows the first with a significance it cannot have on its own. Moreover, this *meaning*, for psychoanalysis, is not only symbolic, but *unconscious*. It is that part of the first utterance that is lost when it becomes a signifier or a link in the chaining of meanings—the part lost we call *jouissance*. Lacan says, “If there is knowledge that is not known, as I have already said, it is instituted at the level of S₂, which is the one I call the other signifier” (Seminar XVII, 33).

In Seminar XVII, Lacan describes our current relation to signifiers, in which we tend to regard signifying chains from the point of view of their already massive accumulation, as a “treasury” of meanings: a rich storehouse of already acquired “total” knowledge (or what he terms a Hegelian *savoir-totalité*). Lacan warns against any such dream of finalizing, quantifying and adding up all “meaning”: it is a variant of the death drive that necessarily results in the end of meaning-making:

This other signifier is not alone. The stomach of the Other, the big Other, is full of them. This stomach is like some monstrous Trojan horse that provides

⁹ Seminar XXIII, lesson of 13 January, 1976, 22.

¹⁰ *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007) 33. Hereafter Seminar XVII.

¹¹ An infinity that ironically (and we might even say tragically) always ends by forming itself into a circle, closing in on itself. On Lacan, the circle and infinity, see my recent work, “The City, Year Zero: Memory and the Spatial Unconscious,” *Journal of Romance Studies* 7.2 (2007): 1-18.

the foundations for the fantasy of a totality-knowledge [*savoir-totalité*]. It is, however, clear that its function entails that something comes and strikes it from without, otherwise nothing will ever emerge from it. And Troy will never be taken. (Seminar XVII, 33)

It is true that, under the rubric of postmodernism, the value of the *new* has recently come strongly into question. Lacan, however, remains true to the thesis that only the fact of a *new* signifier (that permits the next to emerge from the Order) grants knowledge (S₂), and the linguistic formations that support it, true symbolic standing. If this Order becomes (as it so often does) sclerotic, it is no longer enough simply to add on another signifier: it will offer neither promise nor hope. Rather, Lacan asserts here, something has to *strike* the signifiers it has amassed (like so much capital), and strike them in such a way as to realize the dimension in which they actually exist—that of fantasy.

The existence of the treasury of signifiers as a vast quantity of “ones” is a fantasy because it elides the fact that there is or can be no “one” without “zero.” Only the insertion of a zero, a gap, a rupture could hope to free up or loosen the “meaning” repressed in or under them. Only the revelation or articulation that the idea of accumulation (of knowledge, of power, of capital) is indeed a fantasy of full enjoyment without loss or lack might liberate us psychically from its domination.

To put it another way: the treasury of signifiers, like the wealth of nations, constitutes a new kind of *unconscious*, “the stomach of the Other” Lacan calls it, the belly of a “monstrous Trojan horse that provides the foundation for the fantasy of a totality-knowledge.” Because signifiers, when they become a simple unit of this mass, are effectively neutered, deprived of their creative force, what else is there to “strike” this mass, to deliver the creative blow? It could only be an evocation of what an S₁ actually starts out as: an utterance, a partial speech, an intonation that is not yet a “meaning,” not yet tied to a long chain of signifiers. One must rupture this chain to recall the full reserve power of that first signifier—the vocalization that has broken with nature, the animal, *jouissance* while retaining their echo—that permits it to break into the vault that holds (fantasmatically) the wealth of knowledge, power, and capital. “It is [. . .] clear that its function entails that something comes and strikes it from without, otherwise nothing will ever emerge from it” (Seminar XVII, 33), that is, only a signifier deprived of its fellows, reduced to nothing other than a rupturing sound, has the power to break into—or out of—this monstrous enclosure.

I have recently argued that the sclerosis that characterizes “the discourse of the university” and its twin, the ethos of capitalism, are both founded on making “accumulation” (in the case of university discourse, the amassing of “total knowledge”) the discursive *agent* of contemporary discourse.¹² (In the university

¹² Juliet Flower MacCannell, “More Thoughts for the Times on War and Death: Lacan’s Critique of Capitalism in Seminar XVII” in Clemens and Grigg, ed., *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis: Reflections on Seminar XVII* (Durham and London: Duke University Press 2006) 194–215. (Previously published in Slovenian, trans. Alenka Zupančič,

discourse, the S_2 is positioned in the upper left hand.) But it has a peculiar “*mot d’ordre*,” one that (in contrast to the discourse of the master) demands not *work*, but simply *accounting*. In such a discourse, where can renewal emerge? Lacan makes clear that it no longer resides in the linguistic signifier (S_1) that originally functioned to purge us of a certain unbearable *jouissance* and to substitute unsatisfiable desire in its place.

Lacan defines the task of the signifier as that of carving a body out of animal substance, a process of carving away a *jouissance* that “returns” only as ghostly “letters” on the body that index what the organic, animal body has lost to the imperium of language. But by the middle of the seventies (and with the political history of the previous three decades in mind—the second world war, the nuclear threat, Nazism, collaborationism, the wars in Indochina and in Algeria), it had become painfully evident to Lacan that the linguistic-symbolic order was very much in need of renewal. And this was not only because the “discourse of the university” had become a closed, encyclopedic, comprehensive and self-satisfied compilation of the “known.” Lacan makes clear from his remarks in Seminar XVII regarding the rigidifying socioeconomic order that there are *political* consequences to making “language” the instrument for neutralizing or voiding *jouissance*. Language is a double-edged sword, indeed, for it also brings us what he calls in that seminar “*jouissance en toc*”: the pseudo *jouissance* of a world filled with little gadgets (*lathouses*), a phony *jouissance* that substitutes for (and militates against) the creative forces that resist the death drive.

In fact, after Seminar XVII it seems perhaps possible to place Lacan closer to the sentiments about language expressed by Roland Barthes in his *Leçon inaugurale* (on taking the chair of Semiology at the Collège de France): “*La langue est tout simplement fasciste*.”¹³ *La langue without lalangue*, “Language” without the “extra” dimensions that tone, babble, overlapping resonances bring to it, cannot empower its signifiers, cannot mobilize them against the entropy of the death drive. These other elements of *lalangue* alone permit language to engage its signifiers against drive energy (*jouissance*), but now do so without repressing it, while not yet being destroyed by it. If language has failed to remain a shelter against the real and has even become the instrument or bearer of threat and a danger itself, it is because it has to a large degree become tone-deaf. Thus it is that Lacan comes to a new conclusion about language:

Razpol 13 [2003]: 157-191).

¹³ “*La langue, comme performance de tout langage, n’est ni réactionnaire ni progressiste; elle est tout simplement fasciste; car le fascisme, ce n’est pas d’empêcher de dire, c’est d’obliger à dire*.” “But language—the performance of a language system—is neither reactionary nor progressive; it is quite simply fascist; for fascism does not prevent speech, it compels speech.” Roland Barthes, “Inaugural Lecture, Collège de France,” in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983) 457-78 (461).

There must be something in the signifier which resonates. It is surprising that this has been in no way apparent to the English philosophers. I call them philosophers because they are not psychoanalysts—they have a rock-solid belief that language has no effect. They imagine that there are drives and so on, [. . .], for they don't know what a drive is: the echo in the body of the fact that there is speech [*dire*]; but for this speech to resonate, [. . .], the body must be sensitive to it. (Seminar XXIII, lesson of 18 November, 1975, 4)

Lacan was ready for someone like Joyce, an author unhampered by concerns for meaning and whose *lalangue* formed a creative mode of writing that could convey (rather than cut away) the specific *jouissance* of its author. Lacan advises,

Read some pages from *Finnegans Wake* without trying to understand anything. It reads, but as someone of my circle remarked to me, that's because we can feel present in it the *jouissance* of the one who wrote it. (JSI, 5)

Noting that Joyce's name "echoes Freud's—Joyce is related to joy, to *jouissance*, as it is written in the English language," Lacan says,

this joy, this *jouissance* is the only thing that we're able to get a hold of in his text. [. . .]. Joyce gives it all the power of language without, for all that, any of it being analyzable, which is what strikes the reader and leaves one literally dumbfounded—in the sense that one is struck dumb. (JSI, 8)

Lacan needed a term for this singularly new entity, yes, but where is it located? (Recall that the *jouissance* Lacan encountered in Joyce is not "hooked to the unconscious.") Certainly not there where *jouissance* unconsciously persists (in the symptom) and not where this persistence is expressed only by denying it (in the signifier). He had to create a new term, *le sinthome*, for this signifier-symptom that could bear and not reject *jouissance*—but without being damaged by it.

As Lacan describes the variations on Borromean "knottings" that correspond to the *sinthome* in Seminar XXIII, he suggests that the *sinthome* is a "mis-tied" knot, a mistake that nonetheless transforms the traditional symptom and the symbol alike into a new hybrid form: a linguistic, or linguistically modeled, formation that somehow permits *jouissance* to flow through it rather than be repressed and hidden by it. The difference lies in where it is located. Lacan makes the point that the original conception of the symbolic is a choosing between two signifiers that privileges the "hole" between them: as Saussure taught us, it is the differences or the void between signifiers that is of paramount importance. However, Lacan says, this has led to the fixing of that hole by a "frame" which has taken on far too much importance:

The triplicity which the knot allows to be illustrated results from a consistence which is only feigned by the imaginary, a foundational hole which emerges in the symbolic, and an ex-sistence which belongs to the real, as its fundamental characteristic. *This method offers no hope of breaking the constitutive knot of the symbolic, the imaginary and the real.* [. . .]. [. . .] we observe desire. From

this observation we infer its cause is objectal [*objectivée*]. The desire for knowledge encounters obstacles. As an embodiment of this obstacle I have invented the knot.

The knot must come undone. The knot is the only support conceivable for a relation between something and something else.¹⁴ (Seminar XXIII, lesson of 9 December, 1975, 9-10; my emphasis)

“The knot must come undone.”¹⁵ Joyce’s writing has, it seems, confronted Lacan with a new means to the truth, which depends on a renewed sense of urgency, the urgency of art, the urgency of making psychoanalysis a part of this urgency, and reconnecting both to a freshly revalued imaginary. This new imaginary is (and must be) realized as providing something both completely new and yet very ancient: a confrontation with the real that the self-enclosed, self-satisfied “symbolic” no longer seems capable of confronting. The real, says Lacan, is always framed as seen through the hole—that hole gaping between two signifiers.¹⁶

In a fabulatory manner, I propose that the real, as I think it in my pan-se¹⁷ is comprised really—the real effectively lying—of the hole which subsists in that its consistence is nothing more than the totality of the knot which ties it together with the symbolic and the imaginary. The knot which may be termed borromean cannot be cut without dissolving the myth it offers of the subject, as *non-supposé*, in other words the subject as real, no more varied than each body which can be given the sign speaking-being [*parlêtre*]. Only due to this knot can the body be given a status that is respectable, in the everyday sense of the word. (Seminar XXIII, lesson of 9 December, 1975, 10)

But now Lacan proposes an alternative, an art that

has to do with a call/appeal to the real, not as linked to the body, but as different. At a distance from the body there is the possibility of something I termed last time resonance or consonance. In relation to its poles, the body and language, the real is what harmonizes [*fait accord*].” (Seminar XXIII, lesson of 9 December, 1975, 11)

This proposition, which places art and the imaginary at the heart of a new subjective relation, commands a corresponding alteration in the psychoanalytic structuring of

¹⁴ He cites the Borromean knot (as given on Seminar XXIII, 35, French edition).

¹⁵ Lacan says, “th[e] analytic grasp of knot is the negative of religion” (Seminar XXIII, lesson of 9 December, 1975, 10). This reflects on Joyce’s antipathy to the Jesuit education he received, and also on Freud’s anger that religion demands that certain fundamental things can never be questioned or made subject to proof.

¹⁶ Lacan says, “To produce a true hole, it must be framed by something resembling a bubble, a torus, so that each one of these holes is outlined by something which holds them together, for us to have something which could be termed a true hole. (Seminar XXIII, lesson of 18 November, 1975, 7).

¹⁷ Lacan plays on *panser*, to bandage, and its homonym, *penser*, to think.

the ego. Toward the end of his twenty-third seminar, Lacan makes the critical, even revolutionary discovery of an ego that is no longer bounded by the form of the circle, no longer defined as and by the two-dimensional imaginary barrier it erects (unsustainably) between itself and the twinned hostilities of the real (the id and/or the social order). But a form of ego that no longer defends itself with the armor of the symbolic or that escapes into the comforting fantasy of the circle (of imaginary enclosure) is an ego that has opened itself *to* the real *through* the imaginary: a new form of “ego” which Lacan pictures no longer as a vacant circle but as a set of open “brackets” (Figure 1).

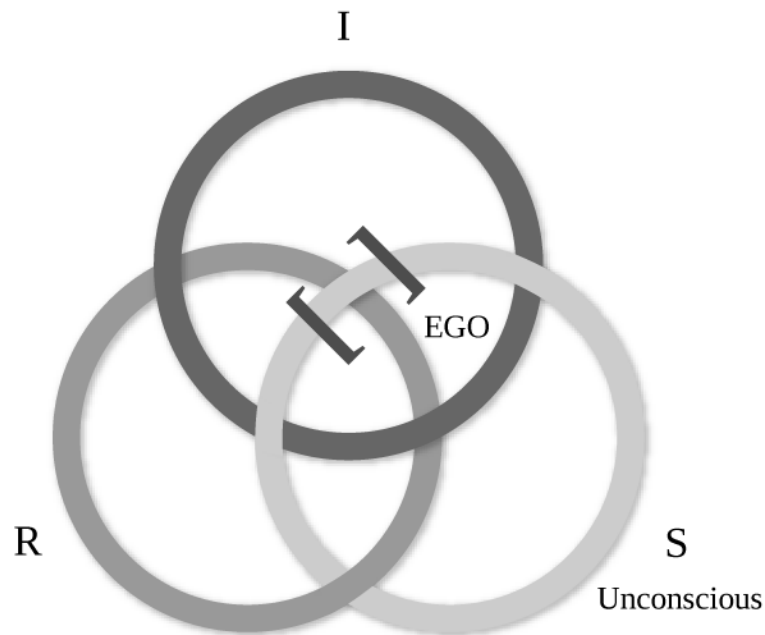


Figure 1

Lacan has encountered a fundamental alteration in the structure of the ego and for him it appears first in Joyce. This is an ego that is no longer determined by an imaginary, 2-D or flat relation to the body, to the “sack and cord” image that sustains the circular, closed ego. This is the very definition for Joyce of a hellish circle, mirrored by the sermons on Hell that fill so much of the middle of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. It is precisely this circle and this Hell that Joyce breaks into, and breaks apart. The scene where Lacan finds this new ego most clearly is the one where young Stephen is beaten mercilessly by his peers. Lacan says that Stephen’s response is unheralded: after the beating, rather than nourishing the wounds to his

ego, his pride, and his body, Joyce describes Stephen as literally “emptied out,” as having no relation to his body at all.

What this indicates, for Lacan, is that Joyce goes beyond an imaginary tied to the ideal of “consistency” that defines our “body”:

Joyce wonders why [. . .] he [Stephen] has nothing against [the boy]. [. . .] he metaphorizes nothing less than his relation to his body. He observes that the whole affair has emptied out; he expresses this by saying that it’s like a fruit being peeled.” (Seminar XXIII, lesson of 11 May, 1976, 59)

Lacan concludes that the fact that the body-image is *not engaged* in Joyce is a sign that the ego has a quite particular function—that of opening up, rupturing and freeing the imaginary from supporting the consistency of the body. The rupture of the ego “sets the imaginary relation free” (lesson of 11 May, 1976, 63). Lacan continues,

It is easy to imagine that the imaginary will bugger off—if the unconscious allows it to, and it incontestably does. [. . .]. One thinks against a signifier [. . .] one leans against a signifier in order to think.” (Seminar XXIII, lesson of 11 May, 1976, 63)

The way Joyce’s Stephen leaned against that fence . . .

What Lacan has done, it seems to me, is free the imaginary from its sterile relation to the “ego-as-circle” to which the traditional SIR Borromean knot seemed to consign it, putting it in touch with that other kind of ego that long haunted the work of a Rousseau, a Baudelaire—the one capable, as Baudelaire says, of taking a bath of multitude because it is open to other egos and not walled off from them. An ego that therefore becomes capable of opening the “Order” that only simulates a symbolic order in the old sense, had purchased its mastery at the expense of this different ego-other relation, that had used oppression, imperialism, coercion, and the demand for unquestioning faith.

In Joyce, Lacan discovered another kind of imaginary and another kind of ego, an open one: he diagrams the “open ego” as a set of brackets, rather than as a circular link (see again Fig. 1) through which experience flows—without being referred back to its effect on the fortress with which it has surrounded itself. This is an ego no longer ensnared in (and buried under) a mass of verbiage that tries to obscure the enormous power of the drives. That power remains key: for the drives constitute a demand to find ever-new ways of dealing with them. For this ego and this imaginary, the future might just be open, too. I would say that for Lacan, Joyce clears the way for a *second imagination* not limited to an imaginary homogeneity with the real—a real that has been flattened and enclosed—the “real” in a sack. This first form of the imaginary is stuck in a mirror, hemmed in by the limits that the symbolic demands be placed on it. But an imaginary that is freed, through a mis-tie, from its eternal imbrication in the triple knot, can address the elementary structuring of meaning that the knot affords. It is therefore something else, something not restricted by the ego’s

compass and not limited to an egosphere that, no matter how far it is stretched, remains a stifling container. With it, the *new* becomes once more possible.

Lacan places the imaginary in a direct relation with the real (in contrast to his original definition of the imaginary, where it flees the real). The reason why this is of extreme importance to us today is (as it should by now be clear) the unstated matter of my paper. As the globe is increasingly encircled by the plenitude of “known knowledge,” by an “*aléthosphère*” brimming over with the avatars of pseudo *jouissance* (*lathouses*), the negative effect on the individual of “the discourse of the university” (and its twin, capitalist discourse) needs to be much more fully assessed than one has thought. The globalized imperative to “enjoy” what is already accumulated, already at hand, is precisely what blocks desire: we want want, we lack lack, we can no longer desire. As such, we cannot therefore have any possible relation—desiring, analytic, knowledgeable, and yes, even unconscious—to our own *jouissance*.

Joyce, for Lacan, leads the way to untying the rigidifying knot, the hypertrophied Borromean knot, by breaking it apart, taking down the mechanisms by which it unsustainably sustains itself and its closed-up ego.

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

¹ Originally published in *Umbr(a): The Semblance* (2007): 37-57. Reprinted here as part of *Dialogues* with kind permission.

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.

LIEVEN JONCKHEERE

THE POLITICS OF “ATOPIA OF THE
INTIMATE” IN CONTEMPORARY ART

*THE VIEW FROM LACANIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS (Response to
Gérard Wajcman)*

Introduction: Three Lacanian Paradigms of “the Intimate”

In his remarkable paper on “the intimate” in contemporary art, “Intimate Extorted, Intimate Exposed,” Gérard Wajcman assumes an opposition between a Lacanian and a Freudian notion of “the intimate.” In the period of Lacan’s return to Freud (*retour à Freud*), Lacanians were fond of identifying with Freud—as Lacan himself did. Lately, however, it has become more decent to oppose Lacan to Freud, an opposition which finally boils down to the opposition between what can be called “the first Lacan”—who initially, in the fifties, did indeed explicitly return to Freud—and a “second Lacan”—who later, in the sixties, more or less explicitly pretended to go beyond Freud. “The first Lacan” was all about language, or the signifier, in the unconscious, while in “the second Lacan” there was much more ado about enjoyment, or the object of enjoyment, in the fantasy.

Following Jacques-Alain Miller’s elaborations of this opposition, I will take a closer look at “the Lacan of language” and “the Lacan of enjoyment.” In the process I will show that, although Lacan himself scarcely mentions the notion of “the intimate” as such, it is in fact possible to construct and substantiate two different Lacanian versions of it: the first would indeed be the unconscious as a regulation of our relationship with language or the signifier; the second being the fantasy as a regulation of our relationship with enjoyment or, the object.

But then I will have to introduce “a third Lacan.” Indeed, in the final period of his teaching he developed a radically new perspective on the symptom, to the point of

renaming it "the *sinthome*." For now I will just say that this *sinthome* is our relation with an act, or what we have to invent in order to gear our unconscious and our fantasy to our ego. My point will be that this concept of the *sinthome* should allow us to infer yet another version of the "intimate," which probably is the most relevant one today, for the future.

Three periods in Lacan's teaching can be summed up as three possible versions of the "intimate": the unconscious, the fantasy, the *sinthome*. I will try to show in each case how and why it is already in itself impossible to fix "the intimate" as such. The unconscious, fantasy and *sinthome* are three successive ways of conceptualizing the impossibility of grasping our intimacy, which is the atopia hinted at by my title. Initially this atopia is valid for the subject itself, or the "speakbeing" (*parlêtre*), as Lacan later on renamed it: we cannot grasp what is most "intimate" to ourselves.¹ Moreover, this is why the Other cannot grasp our "intimate" either. Unfortunately, neither the subject nor the Other are conscious of this.

And this is where art comes in. In conjunction with Wacjman's fundamental idea of art as an "exposition" of "the intimate," I would like to show how this exposition of what I call the atopia of the three Lacanian versions of the "intimate" must assume three different forms, in order to convince both parties that "it" really is beyond any grasp. The plastic arts formerly used to stage the atopia of the "intimate" of the unconscious, of our relation with language; today, the contemporary plastic arts continue to occupy themselves with extimizing the atopia of the intimate of the fantasy, of our relation with the object of enjoyment; meanwhile the most interesting forms of the plastic arts, for the future, are starting to monstrate the atopia of "the intimate" of the *sinthome*. I will explain in due course what I mean with this classical Freudian concept of staging (as a translation of the German *Darstellung*), and these neologisms of extimization (which I derive from Lacan's French neologism *extimité*) and monstration (*monstration*).

The First Lacan: Language, Signifier, Unconscious

Let's push off with "the first Lacan"—in search of our first notion of "the intimate," our first form of the impossibility of grasping "the intimate."

A structural concept of the unconscious

I mentioned how Lacan initially returned to Freud. In the fifties, with the help of linguistic notions borrowed from Jakobson, Saussure, Peirce and even Greek stoicism, he forged a solid structural concept out of Freud's sometimes confused notion of the "unconscious." For "the first Lacan," the unconscious is our affair with language. Or more precisely: it is a solution to the problem language confronts us with, a problem

¹ I translate *parlêtre* as speakbeing to signal its strange, neologistic quality in French as well. Although often translated as speakingbeing, this latter should be reserved for *être parlant*.

which Lacan in the end formulated as our parasitization by language. One could say that the unconscious is the standard reaction of immunization against a language, also defined, by William S. Burroughs, as "a virus from outer space."

The key formulas of "the first Lacan" are well known: "The unconscious is structured like a language," "In the unconscious the signifier represents the subject for another signifier," "The subject of the unconscious is divided between two signifiers," and so on.

Lacan's linguistic conceptualization of the unconscious had important clinical repercussions: the unconscious began to speak again; it reopened itself to psychoanalysis. For under the reign of ego-psychology, with its dogged struggle against imaginary resistances and reality-directed education, the unconscious had completely shut down.

Atopia = ambiguity of the unconscious

This is not the place to go into the details of "the first Lacan." What matters, however, is that his structural concept of the unconscious produces a first, symbolic explanation of the impossibility of grasping "the intimate." At this stage, the atopia of "the intimate" translates itself as the irreducible ambiguity, or double meaning, of speech—not only in relation to ourselves, but also in relation to the Other. Given (an allusion to Duchamp's *étant donné*) the unconscious, it is impossible to speak about ourselves in an unambiguous way; given the unconscious, it is impossible to say something that has the same meaning for everybody, something that everybody can understand unambiguously. This unconscious-based ambiguity riddles all of our common speech, mostly without our noticing it.

Now, Freud invented a trick with the explicit purpose of confronting us as much as possible, in a controlled, experimental way, with the unconscious ambiguity of speech. "Free association"—because that is what I am driving at—is not an aim in itself, but only a trick, a trick intended to seduce hysterics into producing automatically all kinds of "formations of the unconscious" (*Bildungen des Unbewussten*). "Speak of anything you can think of and you will end up saying things you never thought of"—you will end up telling dreams, making more or less witty slips of the tongue. This is the Freudian trinity of the dream/parapraxis/wit, all of which, according to Freud, come about as the result of a game of condensations (*Verdichtung*) and displacements (*Verschiebung*) of images, that Lacan conceptualizes linguistically as metaphors (*métaphore*) and metonymies (*métonymie*) of signifiers.

In any case, free association is intended to produce as many unconscious formations, or metonymies and metaphors, as possible, which confront the subject or *speaking* directly with the uncontrollable and irreducible ambiguity of speech.

At this point, let me avoid any misunderstanding: dreams, slips, witticisms do not completely let out or betray our deepest "intimate." Anyone who has done analysis should at least have gotten rid of this illusion, this fear. Indeed, one often recognizes

such people by the sheer quirk that they no longer seem to worry about their slips of the tongue, producing them one after the other, accumulating them even to the point of seeming to enjoy making them, as if they were consciously-produced witticisms. In fact, they have experienced how formations of the unconscious do not unambiguously betray their "deepest feelings" to the Other; they have experienced how the Other cannot have any hold over them via their unconscious. On the contrary. Unconscious formations do not betray that someone is, for instance, "aggressive" towards the Other, that one has a sneaking death wish; the only thing their irreducible ambiguity betrays is our radical division by the signifier, by the signifiers of the Other. And this is what *analysants* (Lacan explicitly distinguishes the "active" *analysante* from the more passive "analysand"), at a particular point in their analysis, start to rub into the Other, by their joyful—I nearly said their Joycean—accumulation of more or less witty slips of the tongue.

Phallic double meaning

Nevertheless, this irreducible double meaning of speech as such, and, *a fortiori*, of the interspersed unconscious formations, does not mean that speech is completely adrift, that unconscious formations are open to just any meaning. There really is some anchorage or quilting point—namely, the signifier of the phallus: at least, every unconscious ambiguity has a phallic meaning. Space does not permit me to develop this point either, but suffice it to say that this phallocentrism of the unconscious is the heritage of the confrontation with the difference between the sexes in early childhood, at a moment when all we could fall back on was this "visual advantage" of man. In any event, this key position of the phallic signifier implies that the ambiguous intimate of the unconscious is always in a sense masculine. Which also, incidentally, is the reason for qualifying this first kind of "the intimate" as hysteric.

Staging of "the Intimate" of the Unconscious in "Hysterical" Art: the Case of Surrealism

Now, we should ask ourselves what kind of art might correspond to this symbolic, phallic or hysterical ambiguity of "the intimate" of the unconscious. Which plastic art assumes the defense of this particular strategic point of our "intimate," by exposing it in a way that confronts ourselves, but also the Other, with its atopia, with our utter impossibility of grasping it, that is, both of getting hold of it and, of having a hold over it?

I cannot think of any better example than surrealism, surrealism in the vein of Salvador Dali, with its creations of dream worlds, worlds made up of visual puns. Coming immediately to the point, one can say that this kind of surrealism pushes through where hysteria reaches its limits, loses courage. At the point where ordinary hysterics, like ourselves, can no longer manage to produce our ambiguous unconscious formations—in the form of bodily conversion symptoms—surrealism

takes over, creating sublime unconscious formations. But in the process, in this process of sublimation, the unconscious has also switched stages. Insofar as it is subjected to what Freud called considerations of representability (*Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit*), the unconscious is always inscribed on some stage; it should always be possible to represent the unconscious on what Fechner, before Freud, already called the Other stage (*anderer Schauplatz*). In cases of hysterical conversion symptoms, this stage is the body—not the anatomical body, but the dreamt-of body. You could say that surrealism makes this hysterical body expand, stretching it over the entire visible world, broadening the stage of the unconscious to the field of reality itself.

It is well known that, with its end of populating the whole of reality with its sublime versions of the unconscious, surrealism frequently explicitly exploited psychoanalytic knowledge. But for a start, it is already noteworthy that surrealism had to borrow Freud's same trick to get hysteric's to produce the unconscious automatically. In order to endlessly pile on its sublime unconscious formations, surrealism also had to surrender to the automaton of the symbolic system—think, for example, of *écriture automatique*, automatic writing.

For obvious reasons, psychoanalysis never felt surrealism posed it much of a problem: it felt all too familiar. A classic paradigm for the interpretation of this kind of "unconscious art" was developed by the Viennese art historian, Ernst Gombrich, who died in 2001. In 1966, Gombrich could still propose a reading of the plastic arts based on Freud's analysis of witticisms: "Verbal Wit as a Paradigm of Art."²

The Limits of Staging "the Intimate" of the Unconscious in "Hysterical" Art

I do not want to deal at length with this form of art here, which, as a matter of fact, seems to be becoming increasingly "outmoded." Today, surrealism is perceived as anything but avant-garde. To some it no longer appears to have any relevance at all. In any case, we no longer seem to expect anything from it.

Perhaps this has to do with our feeling that today the unconscious, with its symbolic, phallic or hysteric ambiguity, no longer escapes the Other's hold. Do we not fear that the ambiguity of the unconscious has become reducible in all its manifestations everywhere? Mind you, I am not implying that this is really the case: the clinic reveals that the ambiguity of the unconscious remains as irreducible as ever. Nevertheless, we no longer seem to be able to trust art to defend the atopia of our "intimate" by staging the ambiguity of the unconscious, of the signifier, all over our bodies, over the whole of reality.

Where does this "anticipatory anxiety" (*Angsterwartung*) come from? One can hardly deny that our general attitude, our general policy towards the signifier has changed.

² Ernst Gombrich, "Freud's Aesthetics," *Encounter* 26 (1966): 30-40.

The ambiguity of the signifier has become politically incorrect, hunted down everywhere.

There was a time, not so long ago, in Freud's lifetime, when not everything could be said. But at the same time, there was also a form of "tolerance," even a kind of sympathy, for the ambiguity of the signifier as cultivated in art. Playing on the ambiguity of the signifier, art said half of what ought not have been said at all. This offered a relief, an "energy saving" to the public—according to Freud's analysis of the technique of witticism. Thus art, surrealism in the first and last instance, was admired hysterically for its witty exposition of the phallic ambiguity of the unconscious.

Today, we need to recognize how this situation has changed radically. We can say everything today but with one absolute proviso: everything must be said in an unambiguous or unequivocal manner. All that we say is formatted in an unambiguous sign-language: we fill in questionnaires, we answer the questions of the Other in the Other's own words. His formats have no latitude for unconscious formations, no play for dreams, slips, witticisms. The formatting of speech has become generalized policy. We are promised more and more formatting, and still we keep demanding more.

Oddly enough, this formatting of speech is being brought to a head in the so-called psychotherapeutic situation. Patients are told they must "say everything." Of course this injunction has nothing whatsoever to do with the psychoanalytic rule of free association as a prerequisite for the production of the unconscious, with its irreducible ambiguity. For many of today's psychotherapists, "saying everything" is only supposed to heal if all is told in unambiguous words, in words the psychotherapist himself can fully understand. On the contrary, "saying everything" only makes things worse, it has been said, when ambiguity is not reduced; and this is all the more true when ambiguity is stimulated, as unfortunately happens with psychoanalytic interpretation. Indeed, evaluators of the efficacy of psychotherapy put it bluntly that every patient basically suffers from ambiguity and that consequently the only remedy is unequivocality; psychoanalysis is condemned as a danger to mental health to the extent that it only fuels ambiguity, resulting in rampant "negative therapeutic reactions" which finally must become systematized in all kinds of "borderline disorders." In short: today we are treated by the Other as if we were all "autistic," expected not to be able to cope with the ambiguity of the signifier.

The injunction to "say everything" in the Other's formats is supposed to completely dissolve the ambiguity of speech, its unconscious formations. Mind you, this is not an aim in itself. The ultimate aim is to make us forget that there is something that cannot be said. In fact, we no longer tolerate the ambiguities of the signifier, simply because we have come to realize that they revolve around something that it is impossible to say. Wacjman hinted at this point as *l'impossible à dire du rapport sexuel*, but this navel of Lacanian theory is beyond our current scope.

Let us rather return to art. I concluded that we no longer trust surrealism to defend "the intimate" by exposing the atopia of the unconscious, by staging unconscious

ambiguity. I also suggested that this is because we have begun to fear how ambient autistic ideology will ultimately oblige us to reduce this ambiguity, thus having a hold over us. Consequently art has to be modern, it has to be flexible, which means that it has to defend "the intimate" on another atypical front. It need no longer be defended on the front of the unconscious but, rather, on that of the fantasy—by exposing the irreducible ambiguity of our relationship with enjoyment, by extimizing the irreducible atopia of various objects of enjoyment. Therefore let us jump quickly to "the second Lacan."

The Second Lacan: Enjoyment, Object, Fantasy

I indicated how Lacan first returned to Freud, with his structural concept of the unconscious based on the linguistic notion of the signifier—with the result that the unconscious began speaking again in its irreducibly ambiguous way. That was in the fifties. During the sixties, Lacan would make all kinds of attempts to push psychoanalysis beyond Freud. All of these have in some way to do with his conclusion that Freud, with his concept of the unconscious, did not really allow for an end to the psychoanalytic cure. As a result, preliminary to any possible conclusion of a psychoanalytic cure, Lacan first had to develop his own concept of enjoyment.

Four partial, asexual objects of enjoyment

To begin with, Lacan's concept of enjoyment remained firmly rooted in Freud's rather rudimentary notion of the *Trieb*—which can be translated in English as "drive," or even as "drift," following Lacan's French translation as *dérive*; but it could also be translated with the neologism "pulsion," following yet another of Lacan's translations of *Trieb* as *pulsion*.

The point in Lacan's conceptualization of enjoyment is that, unlike language in the unconscious, it does not entirely revolve around the phallus but is split up into several objects Freud calls "partial sexual" objects. To the extent that these do not take into account the phallic difference between the sexes, Lacan calls them "asexual."

From Lacan we know of four such objects of the drive, four objects of enjoyment: the breast, the faeces, the gaze and the voice. The first, the breast, did not have to wait for psychoanalysis to be discovered as an object of enjoyment. What Freud essentially discovered with regard to the object is that faeces can also function as such an object of enjoyment—incidentally Freud himself conceived of this discovery as one of the major scandals of psychoanalysis. Lacan would later add two more objects of enjoyment, the gaze as the object of scopophilic enjoyment, and the voice as the object of invocative enjoyment. If Freud unearthed the anal object as the pre-eminent modern, capitalist object, the gaze and voice could be said to be the typically post-modern objects constructed by Lacan.

The fantasy as topological solution for enjoyment

What is the problem with these four objects of enjoyment? Recall that, according to Lacan, language in itself is already a problem: he called it an intruder, a parasite, necessitating the unconscious as a reaction of immunization against it; the unconscious neutralizes language in a way by infusing it with phallic ambiguity. Now, enjoyment, surging from inside, from four different bodily openings—mouth, anus, eyes, ears—is even more disturbing, even more traumatic than language. But to this trauma, there's also a standard answer: the fantasy. Whereas the unconscious protects against language, the fantasy protects against enjoyment, albeit in a completely different way. It does so by extracting the objects of enjoyment out of the body and projecting them somewhere into "outer space."

Unfortunately (or fortunately) fantasy performs this operation in such a topologically complicated way that it cannot finally be decided where precisely these objects are to be localized: inside our body or outside, are they still stuck on a bodily orifice, or do they hide in some hole in the Other, in reality? As these objects lack a clearly demarcated space, one can easily understand that this constitutes another version of atopia. In other words: fantasy inaugurates our topological relationship with the objects of enjoyment, resulting in the impossibility of grasping them, of getting a hold on and over them—for the subject as well as for the Other.

Lacan displays his atopia of the object of enjoyment in the fantasy with the help of the topology of surfaces, in particular the Möbius-strip. One must imagine this Möbius-strip as the cutting line of the object, as the edge of the hole in the body resulting from the "extraction" of the object. But at the same time, seen from the other side, from the side of the subject, it also forms a kind of window upon the world wherein this object is "projected." To sum up, one can say that the Möbius-strip constitutes the boundary or dividing line between body and world. Now, if one has a closer look, following the Möbius-strip with one's finger, like Escher's procession of ants, one will realize that it is not a boundary that unequivocally demarcates an outside from an inside, an *Innenwelt* from an *Umwelt*. So it cannot really be said that the object lies in the outside world, because there's not really an outside, because there remains this weird topological continuity between inside and outside.

At one point in Seminar XIII, on "The object of psychoanalysis," Lacan illustrates this topology of the fantasy with a surrealist painting by René Magritte, called "*La Condition Humaine*" (The Human Condition, 1933).³ This is a painting depicting a painting in a window, which precisely represents what otherwise could have been seen through this window. And this is indeed how one should conceive of the fantasy, as a painted screen, the screen of reality; but as it is mounted or stretched upon a framework structured like a Möbius-strip, it becomes impossible to decide on which side of the screen the invisible object of enjoyment lies: in front of it or behind

³ *Le Séminaire Livre XIII: L'objet de la psychanalyse*, lesson of 30 March 1966. Unpublished.

it? I will not go any deeper into this fantasy topology, as I simply wanted to introduce a second, imaginary form of "the intimate": "the intimate" of the object of enjoyment in the fantasy.

Extimization of "the Intimate" of the Fantasy in "Perverse" Art

To my mind, post-modern art defends this "intimate" by exposing the particular atopia of the object of enjoyment, due to its impossibility of being localized. It does so in a way that can be called extimization. Extimization is my own neologism, derived from a neologism Lacan coined in Seminar VII, and that reappeared again some ten years later, in Seminar XVI.⁴ There Lacan dropped the signifier of *extimité*, defining this "extimity" as "this exteriority which is the most intimate to us, what is closest to us being all the same outside us" (*cette extériorité qui nous est la plus intime, ce qui nous est le plus prochain tout en nous étant extérieur*).

Gaze and voice

Against the Other's desire to see and hear everything

Inside its own formats

Not surprisingly, the objects extimized are the voice and the gaze. In these are located art's refusal of the post-modern obligation to say and show everything within the contours of the Other's formats. In this sense, art presents itself as the exact opposite of talk shows and reality soaps, where everything really is told and shown in the formats of the Other.

How does art manage to produce this voice and gaze? It typically does so by giving in, in a completely exaggerated way, to the obligations just mentioned, by surpassing the Other's wildest desires to hear and to see:

"You want me to say everything. Hear this within your formats, if you can!"

"You want me to show everything? See this within your formats, if you can!"

By showing and saying more than everything about oneself, something is made visible that cannot be seen and something is made audible that cannot be heard. In psychoanalytic terms we could call this "acting out."

⁴ Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre VII: L'éthique de la psychanalyse* (1960), texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris, Seuil, 1986) 167; Translated as *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977) (hereafter Ethics). *Le Séminaire, Livre XVI: D'un Autre à l'autre* (1969), texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris, Seuil, 2006) 224.

Following my elaboration of the fantasy topology, one can be more precise: by giving in completely to the Other's unbridled desire to see and to hear, art reveals the fantasy. Revealing the fantasy means that the Other is confronted with the impossibility of localizing the object of enjoyment. In front of the productions of post-modern art, the Other cannot decide whether the gaze is on its own side or on the side of the "exposed subject," whether the voice is on the side of the "exposed subject" or on its, the Other's, own side.

Gaze: Duchamp and Van Oost

We should probably not carry this parallelism between scopic and invocative enjoyment too far. First, let us have a closer look at the extimization of the gaze.

Dead phallus and living object the Black Woman of Van Oost

My starting point is an opposition Wacjman points out in the work of Nan Goldin. In his essay, he draws attention to the fact that the gaze frequently makes its appearance in marked contrast with the phallus—not the full-blown phallus, but the phallus in its misery, "*l'heure du phallus fatigué*," in Wacjman's beautiful expression, or the drooping prick, if I may put it my way. Recall that the phallus was the anchoring point for the first form of art: the art of sublime, unassailable formations of the unconscious, with the signifier in all its ambiguity. Now it seems that post-modern art only can hope to defend this other "intimate" of the fantasy by means of the revelation of the gaze, while simultaneously deflating the phallus. Once the phallus is deflated, the gaze can appear.

This change in the standing of the phallus reminds one of fetishism: at first the shoe is everything, the phallus come alive, but one flickering moment of supreme enjoyment later it has already been reduced to a disposable packaging. Post-modern art exhibits how it is no longer possible to make a phallic fetish out of just any old object whatsoever.

At this point I would like to share an intimate experience, which, for me at least, has acted as a breakthrough experience in my inconceivably private understanding of post-modern art. Back in 1998, I visited an exhibition in Paris, called "Fétiches et Fétichismes."⁵ All kinds of fetishes were lying in a jumble: authentic anthropological fetishes and private sexual fetishes; religious fetishes, such as "a real nail of the real cross of the real Christ," and artworks more or less explicitly inspired by fetishist iconography; there was even a psychoanalytic fetish, Lacan's sofa . . . As I was trudging between these fetish heaps, I began feeling more and more morose, until I finally felt like a drooping dick. Kleinians would say that I was introjecting the morosity of all those fetishes. Indeed, all those fetishes exuded the same shabbiness,

⁵ J.-M. Ribettes, *Fétiches & Fétichismes, Dans le défaut de l'objet religieux, économique et sexuel* (Expo au Passage de Retz) (Paris: Blanche, 1998).

gave the same impression of having been consumed completely, exhibited the same deathliness of the deflated phallus, of the phallus in the hour after the supreme moment of enjoyment. All but one. In the midst of this phallus muddle, lost somewhere in a corner, on the ground, I suddenly spotted an irregularly-shaped black blot—my first impression was of a huge ink blot. Getting nearer I discovered, recoiling immediately in dismay, that it was in fact a sculpture of a woman lying face downward, completely cloaked in black velvet, her long black hair scattered around her. I had been confronted with an untitled “black woman” of Flemish artist Jan Van Oost. And this encounter immediately stirred something up in me. I had felt attracted to the inkblot, but on discovering the woman I had recoiled for a fraction of a second. The weird thing is that my own movement of to-and-fro, my own moment of staggering, was immediately transferred to the blot, to the sculpture. Indeed, from then on, the “thing” seemed to be animated by a permanent, uncontrollable possibility of reversibility between a two-dimensional inkblot and the three-dimensional womansculpture. It was as if the thing started to pulsate. 2-D/3-D/2-D/3-D/2-D/3-D/ . . . Finally the impression remained of a pulsation that could not be located exactly, that constantly seemed to migrate from myself, from my own body, to the outer world . . . Did I keep staggering to-and-fro? Or was there a constant reversal between inkblot and womansculpture? I was moved.

Looking back, I realize that at that moment, feeling lost and losing myself in the midst of all those dead phallusses, I had been confronted with something alive and kicking, with the pulsation of the drive—my scopic drive—whereby it definitively remained in abeyance what was object and what was source, whether this object-source lay inside myself or somewhere out there.⁶

To me this encounter with the scopic drive, with the impossibility of locating the scopic enjoyment, in the radical guise of Van Oost’s black woman, has become one of my inconceivably private access roads to post-modern fantasmatic art.

Duchamp beyond “La Mariée” and the introduction of the gaze

Of course, for me just like for anyone else, the *via regia* to any possible understanding of this kind of art remains a certain Marcel Duchamp. I think it’s hard to say anything meaningful about post-modern fantasmatic art without passing through Duchamp, without a thorough study of Duchamp’s “openings.” In my opinion, it is only Duchamp who really introduced the gaze as the pre-eminent post-modern object in art.

I refer to my study on the relationship, or rather the non-relationship, of Duchamp’s ready-mades with his first magnum opus, “The bride stripped bare by her bachelors,

⁶ This is what Lacan, in Seminar VII, called “the Thing” (*la Chose, das Ding*). Consequently, one could call this a sublimation, in the sense of elevating an object “to the dignity of the Thing” (*élever un objet à la dignité de la chose*). See *Ethics*, 112.

even" (*La Mariée mise à nu par ses Célibataires, meme*).⁷ Today everybody knows at least one of these ready-mades, whether the tilted urinal or the Mona Lisa with the goatee. On the other hand, I am always surprised to find that "The Bride" did not become so widely known. Anyway, in my account I tried to show that Duchamp's work of more than ten years on "The Bride" can be compared to an attempt at reconstructing a scopic fantasy by every available resource. I suspect it was probably his own fantasy that was at stake, after it had been brutally shaken by the marriage of his sister—but this is not really my point here. My point is that, in the process, Duchamp had to reach the conclusion that it was impossible to round off this reconstruction of the scopic fantasy; indeed, "The Bride" remained "definitively unfinished" in the words of Duchamp himself. He had tried to reconstruct a fantasy with all available resources, but again and again he was forced to discover that some "things" did not fit in it. It was Duchamp's major artistic act not to foreclose those "things," but to retain them, out of a particular form of indifference that Duchamp himself called "ironism of affirmation" (*ironisme d'affirmation*), and to baptize them "ready-mades." For me, this impossibility of reconstructing the fantasy is one possible form of what Lacan once called "traversing the fantasy" (*traversée du fantasme*).

In any event, from that moment on, beyond "The Bride," with one masterstroke, Duchamp had created two new openings for contemporary art. On the one hand, the ready-mades would become the principle of a new form of art, an art beyond fantasy. But on the other hand, he had also reached a condition of freedom in handling fantasy; he was no longer completely stuck inside it, in its enjoyment. Paraphrasing what Lacan said about the Name-of-the-Father, "we can do without the father, on the condition of using him" (*on peut se passer du père, à condition de s'en servir*),⁸ I would say that Duchamp taught us how to do without the fantasy, but only on condition of using it, of using it as a ready-made—a ready-made fantasy revealing the object of the gaze, in response to the Other's desire to see everything in its own formats. In my analysis, this is what Duchamp finally realized with his second magnum opus "Given: 1° the waterfall, 2° the lighting gas" (*Etant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage*). Duchamp tinkered for nearly twenty years with this anticipation of the peepshow, which is even less well known than "The Bride." Nonetheless, "Given" remains a major paradigm for post-modern art because, for the first time, fantasy is presented in a way that reveals the gaze in its impossibility of being localized, of being fixed, contained—the gaze in its extimacy or atopia. When first confronted with "Given," for a fraction of a second one cannot localize the source and the object of scopic enjoyment. Is it outside you or inside you . . . One cannot localize the scopic drive. You cannot make up your mind whether you are looking or being looked at.

⁷ Lieven Jonckheere, *Het seksuele fantasme voorbij. Zeven psychoanalytische gevalsstudies* [*Beyond the Sexual Fantasm: Seven Psychoanalytic Case Studies*] (Leuven: Acco, 2003) 59-120.

⁸ *Le Séminaire, Livre XXIII: Le sinthome* (1975-1976), texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005) 136.

Voice: Nauman's Room

A comparable experience of this impossibility of deciding, of the permanent possibility of uncontrollable reversal characterizes the extimization of the voice as an object of enjoyment. An installation by Bruce Nauman, as recalled by Wacjman, is absolutely unrivalled in this respect. I consider it the invocative counterpart of Duchamp's "room" in "*Etant donnés*." You enter a dark and empty, soundproof room to gradually discover that the confused sound you initially heard actually is a voice, a voice whispering definitely "Get out of this room! Get out of my head!" I suspect that, in Nauman's room, Wacjman must have been traversed for a fraction of a second by the same inconceivably private, almost bodily experience of pulsation as the one I just described before Van Oost's inkblotwomansculpture. For a fraction of a second, he must have been divided by the same atopia, by the same experience of impossibility of locating this voice, in the walls or inside his own head. Was it the voice of the Other or his own?

I propose making Nauman's room a compulsory passage in the formation of every psychotherapist. And later it should become their standard waiting room.

Shit: Nauman and Delvoye

Wacjman honours Nauman's place in post-modern art with this amusing law Y.A.T.U.O.D.B.N.A.A.L.S.—*y-a-toujours-une-oeuvre-de-Bruce-Nauman-adaptée-à-la-situation*. My version runs as follows: T.A.A.W.B.N.A.T.A.O.O.E.—there's-always-a-work-of-Nauman-adapted-to-an-object-of-enjoyment.

Indeed, Nauman not only extimizes our fantasmatic relationship with the voice in a way that confronts us with the radical impossibility of getting a hold on it. I suspect we could also find plenty of examples of the extimization of the gaze in his work. However, I think it's more interesting to note that he does not limit himself to these post-modern objects of enjoyment. Besides, Naumann has remained sensitive to the pre-eminent modern object of anal enjoyment—which for one reason or another always is fun when extimized. Whereas the gaze and the voice always produce some anxiety, with a tinge of disgust for the gaze and a tinge of disbelief for the voice, the extimization of shit mostly makes people laugh, just for a second, in relief.

A representative specimen of this anal object is Nauman's "A cast of the space under my chair" (1965-1968), consisting of a granite block fitting exactly in the space under the seat and between the legs of a particular type of steel tube chair. A friend of mine, Marc De Kesel, has made an absolutely remarkable, and funny, analysis of this work, opposing it dialectically to Manzoni's "Pedestal of the world" (*Socle du monde*, 1961) picture, revealing in passing the anal character of both minimalist works.⁹

⁹ Marc de Kesel, *Wij, Modernen. Essays over subject & moderniteit* [*We, Moderns: Essays on the Subject and Modernity*] (Leuven: Peeters, 1998) 187-207.

Of course, in line with this modernist, anal tradition, we Belgians also have our own Wim Delvoye with his unsurpassed "Cloaca."¹⁰

The Third Lacan: *Sinthome*

It is, however, high time to say a word about "the third Lacan"—and the notion of "the intimate" that can be inferred from it—in our search for the form of art that can stand up for this "intimate" by exposing in a particular way its particular atopia, the particular form of its impossibility to be grasped.

Art of the future

As a matter of fact, there have been several indications lately that contemporary art is having a hard time guarding "the intimate" via the extimization of the fantasy that serves as the stronghold of our irreducibly topologically distorted relationship with the object of enjoyment—just like how, after World War II, it became difficult to guard "the intimate" in the way surrealism had done, that is via the staging of the unconscious as the stronghold of our relationship with the irreducible ambiguity of language.

Incidentally, it does not escape Wacjman either how fantasmatic art today also seems to have reached some kind of limit. This is implied in his remark that art no longer succeeds in creating scandals by what it shows. The only scandal left is what it costs; I cannot judge whether art has in this way been recuperated or whether it has become more subversive than ever, by becoming economically subversive.

However this may be, new forms of art have lately been gaining ground—new forms of art that are difficult to judge within prevailing views on art, within the fantasy paradigm. Consequently I believe we should fall back on "the third Lacan," in order to judge how these new art forms still manage to guard something "intimate."

¹⁰ The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York describes Delvoye's "Cloaca" as "an elaborate, room-sized installation that replicates the human digestive system [. . .]. Built from an astonishing array of laboratory glassware, electric pumps, plastic tubing and computer monitors, this unique biotechnical installation was designed by Delvoye in collaboration with scientists at the University of Antwerp. Cloaca is fed a variety of nutritious meals twice daily. It then chews, swallows, digests, and eliminates. [. . .]. Cloaca's mouth is an opening leading to a blending mechanism that chews the food before it begins the 27-hour-long digestive trajectory. Six glass vats connected by tubes, pipes, pumps and various electronic components are Cloaca's stomach, pancreas and small and large intestines. The food is kept at constant temperature of 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit and each of Cloaca's organs contains computer-monitored enzymes, bacteria, acids and bases such as pepsin, pancreatin, and hydrochloric acid. The product finally goes through a separator and the remaining solids are extruded on to a conveyer belt." <<http://www.absolutearts.com/artsnews/2002/01/25/29594.html>> [accessed April 11, 2008].

No sinthome, no speakbeing

Lacan elaborated the unconscious in the fifties and the object of enjoyment in the sixties. From the seventies on, the crucial concept would become the *sinthome*. This is not merely a different way of spelling "symptom." In fact, it is the ancient spelling of the word, but it also means a radicalization of the function of the symptom. The *sinthome* is the symptom insofar as no human being can do without it; it is the symptom as our most typical quality as a *speakbeing*, our essence, so to speak. No *sinthome*, no *speakbeing*. This *sinthome* is something everyone must invent, everybody must throw it together for him- or herself, with all one's available resources. Consequently it always turns out to be an "inconceivably private joke," to use the expression Lacan thought especially appropriate in the case of the particular *sinthome* James Joyce knocked together for himself.

In short: as *speakbeings* we cannot do without a *sinthome*, but we have to knock it together ourselves. This has to do with the fact that the ambiguity of the unconscious and the topology of the fantasy do not succeed in definitively arranging our relationship with language and enjoyment in an endurable way. The failure of the standard solutions of unconscious and fantasy have to be supplemented by the inconceivably private invention of the *sinthome*.

For Lacan, this *sinthome* seems to be our most radical form of the "intimate." And once again, this means that the *sinthome* is also characterized by a particular form of atopia, by a radical impossibility of getting a hold on it, for the *speakbeing* as well as for the Other. And in a way, it's even more impossible to get a hold on the *sinthome* than it is the unconscious and the fantasy.

The sinthome makes a Borromean knot

In order to understand this atopia of the *sinthome*, I must briefly touch on the topology of the Borromean knot. For clarity's sake, we can distinguish between two types of topology, serving two different purposes. I already mentioned the topology of surfaces, with the Möbius-strip as the most important specimen for Lacan's elaboration of his theory of the fantasy as our relationship with the objects of enjoyment. Quite a different matter is the topology of knots, with the Borromean knot as the most important specimen for Lacan's elaboration of his theory of the *sinthome*.

The starting point for this topology of knots is the representation of the different constituents of the *speakbeing* as simple rings (see Figure 1). There is the symbolic ring of the unconscious, of our relationship with language; there is the real ring of our relationship with enjoyment, which by the way at this stage is no longer limited to the fantasy; and there is the imaginary ring of our body, of our bodily image as it came about in an identification with its mirror image.

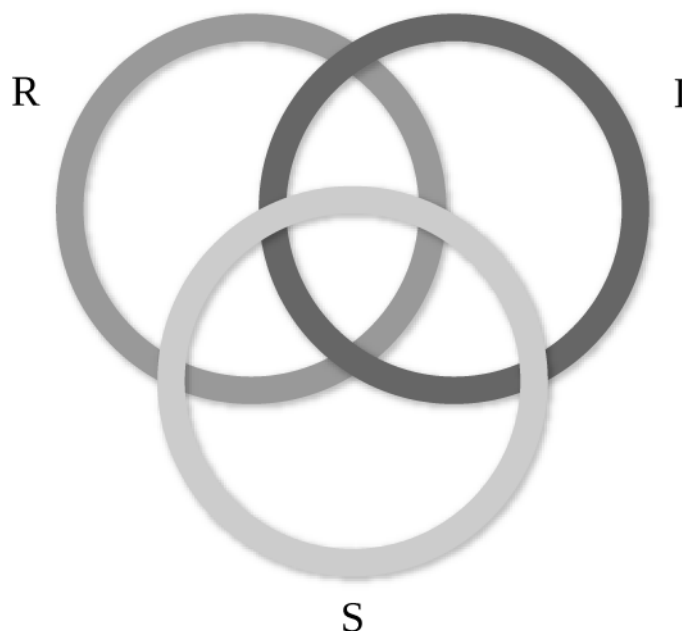


Figure 1

Now, as the articulation between the symbolic, imaginary and real is not given, not ready-made, every *speakebeing* has to take care of it in his own, inconceivably private way. Everyone is free to dream about some perfect Borromean knotting. This would mean that the symbolic, real and imaginary are twined together in such a way that the third always passes above the upper and under the underlying two other rings. As a result, all three remain together without ever clicking together; and when one is cut, all of the three fall apart. This would be an ideal Borromean knotting.

Nevertheless this is but a theoretical dream. At the very basis of Lacan's Borromean clinic lies the assumption that the *speakebeing* can never knot together symbolic, imaginary and real in a Borromean way without falling back on a fourth ring. This fourth is the *sinthome*.

The origins of the sinthome

Now, what is the stuff this *sinthome* is made of? I said it is knocked together with all available resources. These resources are threefold as, in my hypothesis, the *sinthome* has to be constructed by doubling one of the three registers or rings (see Figure 2).

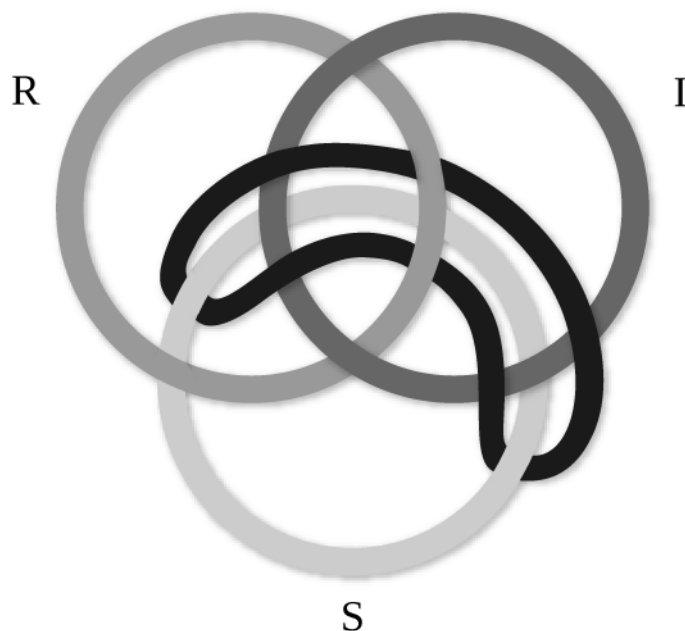


Figure 2

The standard, neurotic *sinthome* consists of a doubling of the symbolic, under the guise of the Name-of-the-Father. But the *speaking* can also invent its own, private *sinthome* by doubling the real. This seems to be what some psychotics do, when they extract an object of enjoyment from their own body. In the case of auto-mutilation, this is done literally. Fortunately this can also take the form of some ready-made or self-made thing. Whereas the old hysteric takes out her phallic, sausage-like dog for walk, young psychotics rambling around with their inevitable walkman or plastic bag may be conceived of as taking out, dangling on the leash, their extracted object of enjoyment: voice or gaze, breast or shit. Last, the *sinthome* can also be “found” by doubling the imaginary of the mirror-formed ego. This is what Lacan in Seminar XXIII, on the *sinthome*, elaborates in the “case” of Joyce.

Joyce's sinthome

According to Lacan, Joyce did not succeed in doubling the symbolic with the signifier of the Name-of-the-Father; the Name-of-the-Father was foreclosed. In the absence of this symbolic father, Joyce had to fabricate a fourth ring of his own. And this he could only do by doubling the imaginary (see Figure 3).

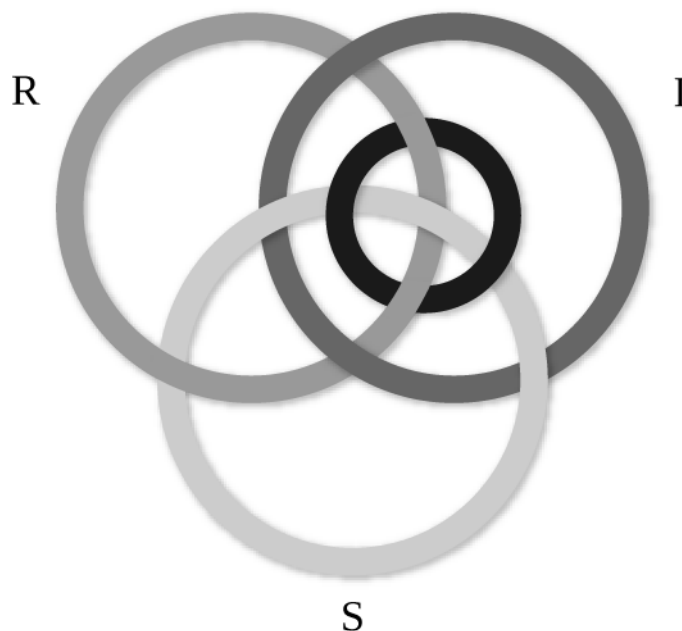


Figure 3

In fact, the problem is that Joyce's first panicky reaction to the absence of the father consisted of clicking together symbolic and real, just like two wedding rings. symbolic and real got married, the unconscious and enjoyment were held firmly in each other's grasp. Moreover, this is what constituted Joyce's first problem, which can be called "psychotic," namely, this feeling that speech was imposed or even enforced upon him. Initially, at the time of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the enjoyment of this imposed speech still had some aesthetic quality about it, which made it possible for Joyce to experience it as discrete moments of "epiphany." As is well known, he borrowed this notion of "epiphany" from the aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas, where it signals the manifestation of God; yet, for the heretic Joyce, it became a manifestation of the enjoyment of women inventing language while chitchatting among themselves. Finally, with *Finnegans Wake*, this feminine enjoyment in speech would put pressure on the aesthetic framework of the epiphany to the point of breaking it up.

The feeling of speech being imposed is the consequence of the clicking together of the symbolic of language and the real of enjoyment. But Joyce also manifested a second "psychotic" problem, which was the consequence of the imaginary of his bodily ego remaining unknotted with the odd couple of symbolic and real. He had this recurrent experience that his ego could slip away from him "as easily as a fruit is divested of its soft, ripe peel."¹¹ Consequently, he could never really bask in this common neurotic

¹¹ James Joyce, *A Portrait of The Artist as a Young Man*, in *The Essential James Joyce*,

illusion that one can avail oneself of language as an instrument for the communication of the inner Self.

How did Joyce manage to solve this double-edged problem, of the siege by speech and the ego loss? He took the only road that remained open to him, by doubling the imaginary of the mirror ego. In his case, this ego-doubling had two peculiarities. First of all, he successively created three new egos for himself; and second, these new egos were no longer based on the mirror image but each was in its own way based on the materiality of the letter. His first ego was the literary character of "The Artist Stephen Daedalus." The next was, rather surprisingly, the body of his wife Nora, to the extent that he could seduce her into describing her "affair" with her own body in all of its obscene intimacies. The last but not least of Joyce's literary egos is the name he made as a writer, as The Writer, thanks to his completely new way of treating language. In his final "Work in Progress" on *Finnegans Wake*, in a desperate struggle to contain the devastating (feminine?) enjoyment caused by his being continuously besieged by imposed speech, Joyce would invent an inconceivably private way of treating language, consisting of what Lacan calls the "telescoping" of signifiers. By sliding several signifiers into each other, in ways which by the way are not unlike Borromean knottings, Joyce started to create an endless series of trans-linguistic enigmas. Lacan calls this kind of "authorship" Joyce's *sinthome*.

Monstration of the atopia of the sinthome

This *sinthome* made the name Joyce known all over the world, it enabled him to write literary history and it still makes literary critics of all kinds dig for hidden meanings inside and outside his life. Ironically, it is precisely this completely "public" *sinthome* that constitutes Joyce's utmost "intimate."

You could say that, in a way, the *sinthome* makes "the intimate" even more explicitly public than the unconscious and the fantasy do, and once again this is what a particular type of contemporary art only heightens. I argued that the atopia of the unconscious is revealed in its staging, and the atopia of the fantasy in its extimization. Now, the atopia of the *sinthome* is revealed in still another way, which we could call its monstration (*monstration*). This rather unusual term is a hapax in Lacan's teaching; he once dropped it when manipulating his Borromean knots before the eyes of his puzzled public: "I ended up with the *monstration* of this knot, although I was looking for a demonstration of the doing of the analytical discourse" (*j'ai été amené à la monstration de ce noeud, alors que je cherchais une démonstration du faire du discours analytique*).¹² It is not completely clear what Lacan is aiming at, but the notion of monstration seems to imply that the Borromean knot, with its obligatory *sinthome*, is not in any case a representation, a staged representation, which actually is the case for unconscious formations (Freudian representations which Lacan renamed signifiers)—it is "the Thing" (*das Ding*)

(Cambridge: Granada Publishing Limited, 1977) 235.

¹² *Le Séminaire, Livre XXII: RSI, Ornicaire?* 5 (1975): 17 (lesson of 11 March, 1975).

presenting itself—"the thing itself" which is the object mentioned above. We saw that, in the case of the extimization, this object presented itself as inside and outside at the same time, as being on the side of the subject and on the side of the Other at the same time. Now, in the monstration of "the Thing itself," it is even more difficult to locate the object, to put one's finger on it. It is true that the object is the spot where the four rings of the Borromean knot-with-*sinthome* are blocked up—or, with Lacan's equivocal expression, which it is impossible to translate into English, at least for me: "the Borromean knot is of no use, but it blocks up" (*il sert à rien, mais il serre*).¹³ But on the other hand, it is also true that this blocked-up spot always migrates when the Borromean knot is being manipulated; it can never be fixed definitively. In short: the Borromean knot-with-*sinthome* monstrates the most radical form of atopia of "the thing itself" or the object.

However, this atopia holds equally for the *sinthome*. I showed how, in order to form a Borromean knot, the fourth ring of the *sinthome* should always be knotted together in a particular manner with the imaginary of the bodily ego, the symbolic of language and the real of enjoyment. All the same, the *sinthome* keeps a seemingly unrestricted freedom of movement, guaranteeing the same freedom to the symbolic, imaginary and real. For instance: one can pull all of the four rings in all directions, any one of them can take the place of all of the others. Each ring can be moved endlessly in relationship to the three others. In short: one can never really lay one's finger on the precise spot where the *sinthome* links symbolic, imaginary and real in a Borromean knot; and one cannot even definitively decide which of those four rings is the *sinthome*.

Atopia of Joyce's sinthome

What about the atopia of the object/thing and the *sinthome* in the case, the artistic case, of Joyce then? First of all, the atopia of his particular *sinthome*, his authorship, has everything to do with the fact that the name Joyce has become identified with a kind of writing which it is utterly impossible to interpret. Indeed, Joyce himself explicitly counted on university hermeneutics of all kinds, including psychoanalytic ones, to ferret out over three hundred-plus years whatever he may have meant with his inconceivably private jokes. His witticisms cannot be interpreted, not even within the Freudian paradigm of witticism.

Moreover, their production never reaches an end. Joyce simply could not help making them. Most typically, he could not confine himself to simply correcting the proofs of *Finnegans Wake*, but felt compelled to add a whole mountain-torrent of original telescopings of signifiers. In short: the *sinthome* never comes to rest, it remains a "Work in Progress."

¹³ *Le Séminaire, Livre XXIII: Le sinthome* (1975-1976), texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 2005) 81, 84.

The sinthome = a feminine intimate

Finally, what seems to be the most fundamental characteristic of this "Intimacy in Progress" of the *sinthome* is only hinted at by Lacan in a casual remark. At least in the case of Joyce's writing, of his writer ego, Lacan suggests that it has something feminine about it. The ambiguous "intimate" of unconscious signifiers was called masculine because of its phallocentrism; to the extent that "the intimate" of the enjoyment in the fantasy is not completely signified and localized by the phallus, it was called "perverse" by Freud and "asexual" by Lacan; now the "Intimacy in Progress" of the *sinthome*, knotting together language, body and enjoyment in this flexible Borromean way, would be feminine. One could say that, for Lacan, Joyce's authorship at the level of *Finnegans Wake* corresponds to his inconceivably private version of the typically paranoid delusion of becoming a woman.

Monstration of the "the Intimate" of the Sinthome in "Psychotic" Art

Finally, we should ask ourselves where in the contemporary plastic arts the seeds of such sinthomic or Borromean art *à la* Joyce can be perceived? The immediate example that occurs to me is that of Flemish artist Jan De Cock. I have not yet had the opportunity to go into the details of his particular "Work in Progress," nor do I intend to pronounce upon the potential "inconceivably private meaning" of it for De Cock himself as a *speakebeing*, but I definitely have the impression that it can be understood as "doing with space what Joyce did with language." What Joyce did with the signifiers of the Other, of different languages, De Cock does with cubes and shapes borrowed from Donald Judd and Daniel Buren, amongst others: he telescopes them in all possible ways, he knots them together in all kinds of Borromean ways.

Moreover, these cubist jokes also seem to "multicomplexify" themselves in the same unstoppable, rampant way as Joyce's linguistic jokes, with comparable disruptive effects on "social space" as Joyce had on language. I just mentioned how Joyce's editors got into trouble due to the impossibility of their protégé to put a stop to his "Work in Progress" on language. Now the rumor is that letting De Cock in for an installation poses the same kinds of problems. The most remarkable example in this respect is his highly publicized show at the Tate some years ago. After some lobbying, I suspect, he finally received permission to do "something" at the entrance of the Tate. But, as usual, his cubist telescopings proved unstoppable, and thus in no time he telescoped himself into the heart of the Tate—as much to the annoyance of the Tate as to the delight of the Flemish art public. But this strategy also works the other way around: when allowed to do something inside, De Cock always manages to telescope himself outside—creating a kind of cubist cancerous growth that produces metastases everywhere—as if the intestines of a building are turned inside out in a cancerous proliferation of telescoped cubes.

Conclusion

My sense is that many more examples of this supple, Borromean construction of an intimacy beyond any grasp can be found in contemporary plastic art practices. But it must be time to arrive at some kind of conclusion. Or rather: at a fundamental question raised by the logic of this "work in progress" of the discovery and conceptualization of the particular atopia of intimacy by psychoanalysis and its exposition by the plastic arts. To put it bluntly: should we be confident that psychoanalysis will survive long enough to discover and conceptualize yet another version of the intimate in time, a version of the intimate with which we are not yet familiar—and that some form of the plastic arts will once again be able to expose its atopia in a way that once more reveals the utter impossibility, for the subject as well as for the Other, of grasping it?

BOOK REVIEW

SEX BOMB THE BOOK

In(ter)sectal Wars of Reinscription in Hitchcock's Cryptonymies

SIGI JÖTTKANDT

Tom Cohen, Hitchcock's Cryptonymies: Volume I. Secret Agents

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Tom Cohen, Hitchcock's Cryptonymies: Volume II. War Machines

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That rumbling you hear? It's the sound of the universal reading room crashing down in a epoch-shattering "gran mal d'archive," taking along with it the whole of the "tele-technic principles, auratic habits, prehistorical and Enlightenment epistemes" that, according to Tom Cohen, constitute the aesthetic as a biopolitical program.¹ Dropping all pretense of being "mere play," the aesthetic over the past century has increasingly revealed itself as what Cohen regards as the arche-site of our sensory programming—the pre-cognitive motherboard onto which the technologies of our perception and memory are hard-coded and where, accordingly, the very concepts of agency and the human itself are pre-defined. It is hard to imagine a clearer accounting of the aesthetic's ideological and political potential. It ought not to surprise, then, that it is at this faculty three of the most powerful thinkers of the twentieth century—Friedrich Nietzsche, Walter Benjamin and Paul de Man—have, in different ways, trained their theoretical arsenal. The spectral presences of each of these anti-aestheticians can readily be felt behind Cohen's ravaging of the traditional categories of mimetic humanism, as he continues his deconstruction of the aesthetic programs lurking behind such terms as "aura," "nature," "earth," "sun," "memory," "personification," "anthropomorphism," "home," "identity," "the state," the "non-human other," "family," "time," and "sexuality" that

¹ Tom Cohen, "Climate Change in the Aesthetic State (a Memory (Dis)Order)," *Parallax* 10.3 (2004): 83-98. Hereafter, *Climate Change*.

he began with *Anti-Mimesis from Plato to Hitchcock* and *Ideology and Inscription: "Cultural Studies" after Benjamin, de Man, and Bakhtin*.²

In his latest offering, the two-volume set, *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies (Secret Agents and War Machines)*, Cohen's target is ironically modest: in Cohen's sights is nothing less than the aesthetic state itself, which he describes in shorthand as the "regime of the Book." Hitchcock, by Cohen's own admission, serves him as a sort of "Rosetta stone" for re-inspecting the event of cinema, one whose re-citation of the image—the key site of mimetic identification—will decisively transform and alter the anthropomorphic horizon we have inherited from the literary era. Privileged figure of Romantic transcendence and saturated with the quasi-religious concept of "aura," the image unexpectedly finds itself in Cohen's destructions the locus of a battle over reading, comprising a "pan-graphematic and performative site in which forces of legibility compete to access contesting pasts and alternative temporal configurations" (Climate Change, 87). The image, arch figure of aesthetic ideology, will find itself the unwitting agent of what Cohen, following Benjamin, calls cinematic "de-auraticization."

Hitchcock's Cryptonymies thus offers an implicit response to a call we have been hearing for while now in a variety of circles for a "return to the imaginary"—the register in Lacanian psychoanalysis linked to the senses (among which the visual holds a special place), narcissism and identification. As a result of the imaginary subject's constitutive tendency toward miscognition (of the Other and itself) through which it engages its destructive relations of rivalry and aggression, the imaginary is most often regarded as the infantile bad boy of the three psychic registers (imaginary, symbolic, real) whose mis-identifications, according to the standard psychoanalytic narrative of the subject's ethical trajectory, require overcoming by symbolic recognition. Nevertheless, there is a growing feeling—which the number of recent books concerned with beauty and affect (especially love) suggest is not just confined to Lacanian circles—that more focused attention needs to be paid to this imaginary sphere, and precisely for the reasons that Cohen cogently remarks above.³ For to the extent that the imaginary is the original register in which the ego constitutes itself as a narcissistic subject, on top of which all other subsequent identifications are built, it is the Ur-site of the subject's cognitive and, as I will suggest later, sexual programming. It is in the imaginary—or to go back to Cohen's term, the aesthetic—after all, that we learn to make "wholes" out of the bundle of sensory impressions that constitute us in Lacan's famous mirror stage. One might be justified,

² Tom Cohen, *Anti-Mimesis from Plato to Hitchcock* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Cohen, *Ideology and Inscription: "Cultural Studies" after Benjamin, de Man, and Bakhtin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

³ See for example, Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), Rei Terada, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion After the Death of the Subject* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001) and Marc de Kesel's forthcoming *Ethics and Eros: A Close Reading of Lacan's Seminar VII* (Albany: SUNY Press).

then, in claiming that the interests of the imaginary are precisely those of classical aesthetics, namely, a concern with the delineation of outlines or, *form*.

Considering what is at stake—nothing less than the constitution of our world as representation—Cohen's figure of war to describe the contest taking place over the image must be taken, I believe, completely literally. This is a war waged not only at the level of epistemology, that is, over the cognitive and sensory ordering that has given us our habitual Platonic models of light, subjectality, reason, sight. It is simultaneously a war *within* the image itself to the extent that this battle will be reflexively doubled, re-folded into Hitchcock's narratives in the shape of a counter-logic that assaults the "home state's regimes of identification" (*Secret Agents*, 239) from the inside. Throughout *Secret Agents*, Cohen tracks an assortment of villains who, like Hitchcock, employ the traditional metaphors of light against itself, this time as a medium of Benjaminian "shock." "At different sites," Cohen notes, "Hitchcock will identify his cinematic assault with a nuclear blast, a boy's futuristic raygun, a mock worship of asolarity" (*Climate Change*, 89).

At the beginning of his first volume, Cohen helpfully provides a "user's guide" of these "secret agents," embodiments of a counter-aesthetic program that surreptitiously perforates the edges of our anthropomorphic horizon. Here, along with black cats, cartoon birds, silver wrapped chocolate bonbons, buttons, rotating black suns, eggs, small persistently underfoot dogs, one finds an entry on "teeth," which he glosses in typically deadpan fashion: "the eye metonymically transcoded as site of masticulation, ingestion, the lips as eyelids, teeth as shredders, where the white skeleton protrudes" (*Secret Agents*, 62). Or again, "fire": "Empedoclean inversion: the nonidentity of the spectral cinematic subject emerges from the ashes of an incineration of lights" (*Secret Agents*, 55). Or yet again "legs, steps": "couriers of signification, including the phonetic or graphematic mark, footsteps without feet" (*Secret Agents*, 56).

In addition, as if behind or beyond (to use a contested term for Cohen) each such "zoomorphic" figure, Cohen detects the presence of even stranger visual objects—letters and marking systems that seem to serve as each creature's conceptual wire-frame. While of necessity a "secret agent" occupies (at least temporarily) a place within the mimetic regime, albeit always as the disturbing and destructive "other" of a Platonic binarism, Cohen discovers in Hitchcock an alternative representational system that supplies what I propose to call the "laws" on which his corporealized traces subsist: the letters, bar slashes, relay systems, writing, reading, telepathic and telegraphic communication structures that Cohen unveils as operating a hidden, alternative graphic and/or phonetic system in each of the films he discusses. Hence the entries in the user's guide on reading ("almost always women. Almost always interrupted," *Secret Agents*, 61), on the letter X ("an operative chi- or chiasmus isolating the systemic exchange of binary values, including referents," *Secret Agents*, 63), on the phrase "sounds like" ("alerts to phenomenatic relays and structure of dialogue or sound, of its role in networks of punning connectives and scriptive

agencies," Secret Agents, 62)—not to mention his entire, indeed stupendous cogitation on the numbers 1 and 3, the letters M, A, R, and C, A, the triangle, and so on. Although each volume's umbrella title "Cryptonymies" seems intended to reference the entirety of Hitchcock's underhand signifying system, these "citational" or metalinguistic markers clearly most mesmerize Cohen as they dodge prescriptive meaning and weave alternate histories, temporalities, perceptual and cognitive systems out of the twisted bars and letteral rubble thrown up by their animatic double-agents' bombs.

Here, at the border of the aesthetic state, in the badlands "beyond roads and transit" (Climate Change, 97) where all our habitual technologies of perception and cognition are cast into the smithying Empedoclean fire, Cohen declares war. It is a declaration that I sincerely hope will put decisive end to the lingering question of whether deconstruction is or can be "political," for long before 9/11 Cohen has been reporting word from the front-lines of "coming wars of reinscription": successions of cognitive guerilla skirmishes that are to decide what constitutes "time [. . .] representation, mnemonic management, experience, gender, perception" (Secret Agents, 244) in the aftermath of the nuclear "event" he calls Hitchcockian cinema. As Cohen's terminology implies—he frequently describes it as a "prefigural" (Secret Agents, 82), or, in a nod to Benjamin, "prehistorial," "aterra" (War Machines, 137) or "atopos" (War Machines, 89)—this (non-)site of reinscription will be no round-table gathering in some Habermasian-declared Green Zone—as if hostilities could momentarily cease while we formulate a new constitution that meets the barest minimum of the demands of the multiple warring parties, as we fracture into smaller and smaller political units, each claiming our unique individual traditional "rights." As Cohen's term "war" cannot fail to make us keenly aware, any "political" institutions that might emerge from the Hitchcockian cinematic assault must be the spoils of a victory, a wresting away of perceptual and cognitive territory from the Other by *force*. For Cohen, at least, has never lost sight of the original "scandalon" of the Law and the founding act of violence on which its power rests: to Cohen, all police are mafia, all banks brothels. One recalls Paul de Man's arresting statement, which never seems far from Cohen's mind: "history [. . .] is the emergence of a language of power out of a language of cognition," which the author of *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies* seems to gloss thus: history (understood as the programming "technologies" of perception and understanding) falls to the last man standing once every traditional cognitive and sensory framework has been pulverized by the collapse of the regime of "the Book."⁴ The event that triggered this—the assassin's bullet that brought down the administration of our "universal reading room"—is cinema, *Hitchcock*.

Despite my pacifist tendencies, I feel prompted to pick up Cohen's gauntlet, since one cannot count on others to fight one's own battles. Here is the claim I propose to stake on a plot of Cohen's strange new (a)territory: the coming wars he speaks of are sex

⁴ Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed and intro. Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) 133.

wars. Or, more accurately, the war of reinscription is sexuation. Clearly this will require some unpacking.

One might begin by performing a sort of “diagnostics” of Cohen’s reading practice, to which the title of the volumes, *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies*, already points the way. Put simply, Cohen reads paranoiacally. He discovers hidden signifiers, trans-coded meanings, the presence of yet-undetected linguistic bombs in the folds of the Hitchcockian landscape. Referencing one another across Hitchcock’s oeuvre, these “cryptonyms” generate a secret language or “citational network,” as Cohen calls it, whose ultimate signified comes to be located in a central “figure,” Hitchcock, whose cameo famously appears in each film. As he thereby re-marks the border separating film and life, fiction and reality, “Hitchcock” parabolically dismantles the enframing four corners of our representational home, to reconstitute them in other shapes and forms, most notably, for Cohen, into the letter H of Hitchcock himself that Cohen detects criss-crossing the director’s oeuvre. H, for example, in the first letter of many of the characters’ names: Huntley, Haverstock, Henriette, Harry, Henry, Harriet, H.H., Hugheson (*Secret Agents*, 55). H, more subliminally, repeated in the inevitable shots of train tracks (the train itself always being a “cinematic topos” says Cohen, *Secret Agents*, 63). H, finally, arriving at its most stripped-down form in what Cohen, following William Rothman, calls the “bar series”: a pattern of vertical slashes that turns up without fail in all of Hitchcock’s films: in the form of banisters and spiked fences, for example, or in rows of trees or a fabric’s design, or again in the bars of a musical score (*Secret Agents*, xvi). For Rothman, who is credited as having been the first to identify it, the bar series must be regarded as Hitchcock’s “signature.”

Once one becomes alert to this citational pattern it is hard to avoid, as Cohen finds. Whenever it appears, it alerts one to the presence of a ghostly Other haunting the cryptonymist’s strangely pregnant universe, an Other we ordinarily fail to sense but which Cohen, more acute to slight glitches in the matrix, unerringly draws into our line of vision. What enables Cohen to detect these “cryptonymic” clues is a strangely lazy kind of eye that lingers uncomprehendingly on bare outlines and forms. Where one ordinarily “sees” say, a tree with Norman Bates beside it (in the famous still image from *Psycho* that Cohen examines in the fifth chapter of *War Machines*), Cohen discovers the letter J, an umbrella, a fish-hook or, ominously in the case of another tree on the horizon, a mushroom cloud. The way Cohen views Hitchcock, in other words, is with what de Man would call “material” vision: a “way of seeing” that momentarily suspends cognitive categories—or rather *precedes* them—to view the world “as poets do.”

This expression is of course the famous phrase that de Man, in his essay “Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant,” filches from Kant while developing his own enigmatic notion of “aesthetic vision.” Here, first, is the passage from Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* that de Man cites in this essay:

If, then, we call the sight of the starry heaven sublime, we must not place at the foundation of judgment concepts of worlds inhabited by rational beings

and regard the bright points, with which we see the space above us filled, as their suns moving in circles purposively fixed with reference to them; but we must regard it, just as we see it [. . .] as a distant, all-embracing vault [. . .]. Only under such a representation can we range that sublimity that a pure aesthetic judgment ascribes to this object. And in the same way, if we are to call the sight of the ocean sublime, we must not think of it as we ordinarily do, as implying all kinds of knowledge (that are not contained in immediate intuition). [. . .]. To find the ocean nevertheless sublime we must regard it as poets do, merely by what the eye reveals—if it is at rest, as a clear mirror of water only bounded by the heavens; if it is stormy, as an abyss threatening to overwhelm everything” (Aesthetic Ideology, 80).

De Man comments on Kant thus:

The predominant perception, in the Kant passage, is that of the heavens and the ocean as an architectonic construct. [. . .]. [In Kant's passage] the sky does not appear in it as associated in any way with shelter. It is not the construct under which, in Heidegger's terms, we can dwell. In a lesser-known passage from the *Logic* Kant speaks of “a wild man who, from a distance, sees a house of which he does not know the use. He certainly observes the same object as does another, who knows it to be definitely built and arranged to serve as a dwelling for human beings. Yet in formal terms this knowledge of the selfsame object differs in both cases. For the first it is mere intuition [*blosse Anschauung*], for the other both intuition and concept.” The poet who sees the heaven as a vault is clearly like the savage [. . .]. He does not see prior to dwelling, but merely sees. (Aesthetic Ideology, 81)

De Man concludes that “the critique of the aesthetic ends up, in Kant, in a formal materialism that runs counter to all values and characteristics associated with aesthetic experience, including the aesthetic experience of the beautiful and the sublime as described by Kant and Hegel themselves.” *Blosse Anschauung*, “mere intuition,” as de Man reads Kant, amounts to a vision that “to the same extent that [it] is purely material, devoid of any reflexive or intellectual complication, it is also purely formal, devoid of semantic depth and reducible to the formal mathematization or geometricization of pure optics” (Aesthetic Ideology, 83).

Permit me then an initial observation: Cohen's cryptonymic eye is a scanner that “takes in” sensory data from a pre-cognitive position analogous to Kantian aesthetic vision in de Man's account. But, different from the machine-like figures that habitually close out de Man's and de Man-inspired symphonies of illegibility (bizarre Kleistian robotic dancers, stuttering Hegelian automatons, Kantian “flat, third-person” worlds etc.), the chief feature of Cohen's roving, almost Whitmanesque eyeball is that it is “alive,” albeit in a most disconcerting kind of way. For, as a second observation, one might say that Cohen's is a perceptual apparatus that, at the same time as it atomizes conventional representational schemas—our usual, Platonic, anthropocentric “frames” for thought—is also engaged in a sort of recombinant therapy.

For this eye not only “kills” what both de Man and Lacan in their in differing yet isomorphic ways have taught us has been dead all along, namely, the solar, anthropomorphic, sheltering “house” of symbolic representation. In the bare rattling playgrounds of a symbolic stripped of all imaginary lures and feints—stripped, that is, of all the fleshly cladding that the word “beauty” or the “aesthetic” has traditionally encompassed—Cohen discovers a yet more disturbing form of “life” radiating out in fractal patterns to infect what is left of the planet. Hearing the “matter” in deconstruction’s much vaunted “materiality,” Cohen uncovers a bizarre prehistorical parallel world where, stripped of their butterfly wings of symbolic meanings, signifiers regress beyond every silken form of imaginary cocooning and begin to crawl, caterpillar-like, across the screen in an uncanny letteral animation.

The closest conceptual equivalent I can think of is Lacan’s myth of the lamella in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, the mobile lip or rim of the drive that slithers revenant-like in advance or behind any symbolically-defined form.⁵ In Cohen’s case, this lip or rim, this cut that is neither dead nor alive (because it is too much alive) is nothing but language itself or, perhaps more accurately, the archaic stuff or building blocks of language: the pre-figural, pre-letteral shapes and sounds that gather under the most embracing use of the term “inscription.” Like the Cheshire cat’s gashed smile, these free-floating recombinant signifiers appear, vanish and re-emerge as impossible spectral forms whose eerie, bio-inorganic “life” precedes all corporealized clothing or (aesthetic-ideological) “phenomenalization.”

Accordingly, this provides a convenient landing-point to examine Cohen’s critique of Slavoj Žižek’s reading of Hitchcock which only at the most superficial level concerns the old complaint of Žižek’s own paranoid compulsion to “find” Lacan, *avant la lettre*, anywhere he looks. Rather, for Cohen, Žižek’s real failure lies in overlooking or, in the cryptonymist’s stronger words, “evading” any allusion to language whatsoever (Secret Agents, 46). When Cohen locates this uncanny vitality in the form of language itself—in the “heart” of the symbolic, to momentarily lapse back into organic metaphors—he is thus clearly trying to distance himself (if a little too rapidly to my mind) from any easy comparison one might make between his cryptonymic or, if I may risk a pun (since he certainly would), impossible or “koanic” vision and the Lacanian real—or at least Žižek’s particular brand of it.

Briefly, Cohen’s main problem with Žižek (admittedly a fairly early Žižek) lies in certain of the latter’s formulations regarding something that lies “beyond” the reach of the symbolic. Cohen notes how Žižek “assumes that any evocation of linguistic elements leads only to the metonymic chains of the symbolic,” and he observes how the psychoanalytic theorist “is determined to demonstrate that he, or ‘Lacan’ is ‘beyond the wall of language’” (Secret Agents, 46). Žižek is thus, for this reason, incurably idealist to Cohen’s mind—a reproach that encompasses in shorthand the usual deconstructive criticism of Lacanian psychoanalysis, (that is, that the phallus is

⁵ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977) 187.

a transcendental or “theological” category).⁶ But what differentiates Cohen from the majority of his deconstructive cohorts, all of whom share the same scrupulous refusal to grant anything “beyond” or outside linguistic structures, is precisely the “life” Cohen discovers in language’s purely formal properties themselves—the strange, hidden, coded linguistic forms and significations that surreptitiously assemble alternative representational frameworks under the nose of the Law itself. In place of the still disquieting but by now somewhat familiar robotic figures who, stripped of their reassuring imaginary masks, populate the post-de Manian landscape, the symbolic left by Cohen’s reading event is inhabited by an as-yet unthinkable biolinguistic-technicity that virally attacks and infects every attempt at boundary definition, including and most especially the dividing line between “life” and “death.”

My earlier description of what I was calling Cohen’s “paranoia” thus requires further nuance in light of his critique of Žižek. Although there is a demonstrably formal pattern to the cryptonymic citational network Cohen detects that clusters around the central node of Hitchcock’s signature (in its imaginary guise, the cameo; in its symbolic form, the bar slash series), such a signature is about as far away as one can get from conventional notions of the auteur director for which Hitchcock, within a certain vein of film criticism, has traditionally stood. Despite his ground-breaking discovery of the bar series, Rothman, for example, inevitably lapses back into the imaginary trap of trying to give mimetic content to this purely formal marking system, Cohen says, when he interprets it as “associated with sexual fear and the specific threat of loss or control or breakdown,” attempting in this way, as Cohen puts it “to pile up another auteurist coup” (*Secret Agents*, xvii). Offering a considerably more unsettling vision, Cohen describes this formal pattern as something that precedes “the coalescence of perception, image or sound, or even letter” (*Secret Agents*, xvii), while in its imaginary guise as the cameo, Hitchcock’s signature “marks the disarticulation of the mimetic protocol by the very logic that should uphold its program” (*Secret Agents*, 243). To the extent that the H signature marks purely “a point of repetition,” it cannot be enlisted in the service of a mimetic humanism revolving around a solar metaphors of light, home, earth, time, identity, memory and so on. It cannot, in other words, be the signing of an imaginary counterpart of the viewing subject—albeit bigger, cleverer, more powerful, etc.—who surreptitiously pulls the strings behind the curtains, proffering intentional clues concealed in chocolate bonbons for the most astute of his audience to decode at their leisure. Cryptonymy, in Cohen’s usage, in other words, is not a psychosis.

⁶ Cohen comments how “In surpassing metonymy en route to the real or ‘the Thing,’ Žižek unwittingly returns to metaphor, much as in superseding the signifier he invokes a ‘sign’ that contains in itself the ‘answer of the real.’ In moving ‘beyond’ one form of signifying practice he only moves to another, and triggers regressions to suspect or precritical figures: metaphor, or what might translate his use of ‘sign,’ symbol” (*War Machines*, 177). Cohen also notes how as soon as “the problem of material signs” returns in Žižek, they generate a crisis of reading that produce symptomatic “sinthomes” which, while intended to break with “a merely intersubjective model,” end up inverting and perpetuating its “theological model.” See *War Machines*, 175–78.

Cryptonymic “paranoia” is something entirely different whose distance from psychotic paranoia can be summed up in this way: to the extent that the psychotic is haunted by an Other whose malevolent traces she detects in the most seemingly innocent of scenes, it is always a complete Other who pre-exists the psychotic subject (even as it assumes new shapes and guises to try to trap the canny psychotic). In cryptonymic paranoia, on the other hand, the Other is definitively incomplete. It is, accordingly, the Other’s *lack* the cryptonymist seeks out, pressing as he does against the weak spots in the Other’s structural foundations, tapping for hidden passages between seemingly solid symbolic walls in which to plant his pulverizing bombs.

Hence although both psychotics and cryptonymists operate in some sense on the outskirts of the Law, their psychic structures (and hence strategems of “political” resistance) are completely different. To use Lacanian terms now to pick up some speed, insofar as the psychotic “forecloses” the master signifier—the phallus, the cut of castration, the original marker of difference—she inhabits a purely imaginary world. The symbolic, with its life-sustaining metaphor is out of bounds for her such that every signifier immediately—that is to say, unmediatedly—points back to a small other, the inevitable persecuting figure with whom she engages in a life or death struggle for mastery. With the cryptonymist, however, it is not a question of foreclosing the cut of the phallic signifier but, rather, of creating new shapes out of the representational fabric that his unbuttoning of our habitual symbolic quilting points has worked loose. The two volumes of *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies* formalize this two-pronged strategy rather neatly: first, *Secret Agents*—the uncovering of the hidden meanings, codes, secret messages that will blow up the official regime of the Book. Then, *War Machines*: the war that ensues over who will control the symbolic reconstruction (as well as its imaginary/aesthetic re-upholstering) and, in the process, determine the coming definition of “history.”

Let us take a closer look at one such “cryptonymic” reading, the eighth chapter from *Secret Agents*, on Hitchcock’s *Sabotage*, where the territory contested is precisely the future of words, letters, reading and where the warring parties are none other than literature (in the classical allegorical form of the British seventeenth century poet Edmund Spenser referenced in Detective Ted Spenser’s name) and cinema (the Bijou theater in whose anterooms the anarchist Verloc plots his terrorist assault on London). But if one imagines this a merely formal or aesthetic contest between two competing and soon to be obsolete media, I must warn in advance that the ultimate stakes of this war will be nothing less than the constitution of “the human” and, more generally, of “life” itself.

The *Sabotage* plot, in both senses of the word, revolves around a conspiracy to blow up Picadilly Circus, named several times in the film as “the center of the world.” Instigated by a “certain foreign power,” the terrorist act is to be carried out by Carl Verloc (Oskar Homolka) who exploits a movie theater as a front for his terrorist plans. Verloc is married to “Mrs V” (Sylvia Sydney) whose principal romantic interest in him seems to be the fact that he is kind to and looks after her little brother Stevie.

Stevie himself is a bumbling preteen who, in what would be an unthinkable move in the logic of ordinary representational narrative (that is, the narrative logic of “the Book”) is blown up by the bomb Verloc has him carry into London. Hovering at the fringes of this strangely inert and desexualized family is the Detective Ted Spenser who tries to inveigle his way into Mrs V’s affections by posing as a neighborly greengrocer in an attempt to get closer to and hopefully to interfere with Verloc’s terrorist plans.

Cohen does not find it difficult to see in *Sabotage* an allegory of Hitchcock’s filmmaking practice of the time. Released in 1936, at the end of the filmmaker’s “British period,” *Sabotage* is found to reflect a certain impasse or deadlock confronting the director who, like Verloc’s first attempt at causing a politically disruptive event that opens the movie, generates merely entertainment out of his cinematic “bombs.” People simply laugh when the lights go out in Verloc/Hitchcock’s initial filmic act(s) of sabotage. To hit effectively at the state will require more overt, “sturdier” acts of terror if one is to keep ahead of the official regime’s seemingly infinite ability to enfold and colonize potentially revolutionary activity back into its existing armature by deeming it mere play, “aesthetic.”

Hitchcock’s solution to this impasse, as Cohen notes, is simply to speed up, to accelerate. In *Sabotage*, we are given a film that begins with an ending (a blackout), a “family” that has been cut off in advance from any reproductive promise, a female love interest whose asexual screen presence in her sailor boy outfit compromises in advance all of Ted’s attempts to fold her allegorically into conventional romantic narratives. Failing the anticipated love story, we have what might otherwise be an alternative narrative interest in the boy Stevie but he is, as I said, astonishingly blown up. As Cohen puts it, in *Sabotage* Hitchcock “suspends ‘suspense’” itself (Secret Agents, 149), that is, he suspends the temporal dimension of narrative that traditionally powers the representational engine in the regime of the Book.

Hence time, according to Cohen, is one of the key figures that Hitchcock attacks in this film with his cinematic “time-bombs.” The other is nothing less than definition itself, whether of the meaning of “sabotage” or “act” or, meta-reflexively, the definition of definition. The film’s opening titles of the dictionary entry on “sabotage” bring this “problem of semantics” to center stage:

(Mech. shoe or armature of pile, boring-rod, &c. Hence sa-boted (-od_ a [[F. cf. satae shoe, stym. Dub]

Sa-botage, sa-bo-tarj. Willful destruction of buildings or machinery with the object or alarming a group of persons or inspiring public uneasiness.

Sa-bre (-er), n. & v.t. Cavalry sword with a curved blade (the s., military . . .

To raise the question of definition in this way is to launch an assault on words and their meanings comparable to Verloc’s bombs, claims Cohen. As he puts it, “By displaying in advance a dictionary definition of sabotage, Hitchcock puts the word, its definition, and definition itself, in question. Words are all sabots, ‘mech[anical]

shoes' (says the barely legible opening text) or steps, suggesting by their dismemberment another definition (of definition)" (Secret Agents, 153).

The principal definition *Sabotage* will call into question, the word the film will "sabotage," will be "life." In a series of moves traceable back to a more recognizable form of deconstruction, Cohen identifies a number of cross-overs between seeming binary oppositions, showing how what appeared to be a firm distinction between two opposites collapses under scrutiny. The first of these is the border separating man from animal found, for example, in the aquarium sequence where the explosion of Picadilly Circus is imaged onto a fish tank that, serving as he says as a "deanthropomorphizing screen," displaces "the human" as such (Secret Agents, 156). Next, the division between the sexes will be called into question when, in the same sequence, we overhear a man commenting to his girlfriend how "after laying a million eggs the female oyster changes her sex." The existence of this "counternatural 'nature'—a sabotaging within the premise of natural signs and generation" (Secret Agents, 156)—accordingly cuts off "generation at its source," revealing "Nature" to Cohen as "another front" (Secret Agents, 156), whose creatures "are examples of technicity, animation, changelings belonging to a proactive mimesis without model or copy, a semiophysical morphing—that is, what is fully dissociative from the 'human' archive" (Secret Agents, 156-7).

Last, Cohen interrogates the border separating organic and inorganic "life" by way of an analysis of the famous Disney cartoon sequence that takes place just after Mrs Verloc has heard of Stevie's death. Featuring a bird drawn to look like Mae West, the cartoon performs the musical number, "Who Killed Cock Robin?" The first thing Cohen notes is something very odd about Mrs. V's laughter while she watches the film; it seems distinctly hysterical, "hallucinatory"—Cohen calls it "Homeric" (Secret Agents, 159). Distinct from the "aesthetic" laughter that accompanied Verloc's first attempt at sabotage, Cohen sees Mrs. V's convulsive laughter heralding a catastrophic morphing of both animal and human into sheer graphematicity. Watching the cartoon, Mrs. V. is thus like us, Hitchcock's filmgoing public, viewing a "sheer phenomenalization of form" (160), says Cohen, whose "spectral animation" produces a "life" that is nothing but a "sheerly technical script" (160). The arch figure Cohen finds for this in *Sabotage* is the shorthand a reporter uses to note down the name of the film Stevie was carrying when the time-bomb went off. Cohen observes how "the reporter records the film's title, *Bartholomew the Strangler*, but he does so in shorthand as the camera watches the paper fill with unreadable squiggles—figural traces neither mimetic nor letteral" (151). These "squiggles," Cohen claims, trope "the graphematics of *Sabotage* itself: seemingly mimetic, a mere recording action, it is yet a mode of sheer graphematics whose implications cannot at once be read or accessed" (158). Traced back to such "squiggles,"—nothing but *pure form*—Hitchcockian cinema empties out all existing definitions of "life," "nature," the "human," "gender," "sex," "agency," "memory," "personification," "identity," "the archive," "home," "the family," "the state"; in a word, "aura"—to use the Benjaminian concept that serves

Cohen as an umbrella term—along with the aesthetic-ideological program embodied, or rather, *seemingly* embodied in the era of the Book.



Given the scale and virtuosity of Cohen's cryptonymic readings, it seems perhaps a little churlish to take him to task but this is nevertheless what I am compelled to do. For what I am about to say reaches into the heart of a central difficulty when assessing the respective "political" efficacy of psychoanalytic and deconstructive stratagems.⁷ Let me repeat my earlier assertion: the war of reinscription is sexualization. Cohen's immediate response to this statement would likely be to say that, like Rothman, I have slipped back into the aesthetic program of the Book, insofar as I am attributing *content* to what is purely a *formal* event or disinscription, as he ultimately names it, a little unwillingly, at the end of *War Machines* (War Machines, 263). (Recall how for Rothman the bar series is associated with "sexual fear and the specific threat of loss or control or breakdown.") Yet this is far from what I mean for the simple reason that sexualization, understood in the psychoanalytic sense, has nothing to do with the attribution of content (whether biological or social) but rather, quite literally, with form. Let me put it as unambiguously as possible: the cut of (dis)inscription is the sexualizing act. Or again, there is no inscription that is not sexed *because the cut is always a phallic cut*.

I would like now to fast-forward to the second volume, *War Machines*, for it is here we find Cohen's most extended meditation on the cut, whose most powerful formalization is detected in Hitchcock's *The Birds*. In the terrorizing starlings, Cohen discovers "a cut, a black hole or zero converted into proactive assault" (War Machines, 139) that, pecking out eyes, assaults the entire ocularcentric program. For the cryptonymist, it is as if the eviscerating techno-linguistic program of which all of the other animemes are mere phenomenalizations shatters into digital points and now, bent on destruction, returns as sheer avenging marks and cuts (although in the name of what blind "Justice" we will never know). Hence, far from being the avatars of an avenging "nature" or, in another nod to Žižek, Tippi Hedren's sexuality, the birds for Cohen are allied with the pulverizing of any possible "interpretation" and attribution of content, that is, of every possible re-citation within existing signifying networks. Attacking the schoolhouse, the key site of cultural transmission, Cohen finds the birds "interrupt[ing] human programming at the site of collective memorization, inscription" (War Machines, 151). Such dematerializing inscriptions

⁷ I am implicitly following the distinction Alain Badiou makes between *le politique* and *la politique* in *Peut-on penser la politique?* Ed Pluth glosses the difference thus: "the political [*le politique*] is characterized by consensus building and the achievement of an adequate representation of the will of the people," whereas "politics" [*la politique*] must be thought of as "something that does not fit into the kinds of social connections (representations) sought after by the political." It is the second sense of politics [*la politique*] I intend to reference here. See Ed Pluth, *Signifiers and Acts* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007) 149.

are nothing but technicity itself, "flying cuts [that] precede and supercede any epoch of the book past or to come as if en route to, and in excess of, a coming digital culture" (War Machines, 154). Anterior to "nature," these terrorist technomemes thus also assault reproduction in its most mythological and fantasmatic form of sex as the Ur-site of origin, taking with it an entire metaphysics based on distinctions between the organic and the inorganic, species and individual, genetics versus environment and so on, in the process. Born not of sexual coupling but of graphematic cuts, the birds slice through "the idea of nature as natural, as the originary, as ground, as mother, as reference" (152) so efficiently as to "bar" any possible aesthetic relapse (155).

Still, and rather interestingly, such technomemes do appear to have some odd kind of derivation or "origin" in what Cohen calls "the black hole of black holes" (War Machines, 102) into which the various black cats and black suns and acephalic black birds emerge and disappear as if through fleeting worm holes. This inky black bog serves Cohen as the prime site of the "prearchival, preoriginary 'archival' site, atopos" called in *Psycho*, "Mother" (War Machines, 92), even if this is a "mother" who voids "all origins [and] transforms genealogical procedures" (War Machines, 94). Cohen likens this "Mother," or rather "Mothers," (War Machines, 253) to the Derridean *khora*, an "(a)material site or atopos of inscription before all phenomenality" (94) where language, letters "disaggregate into their composite of inscriptions." Although initially apparently femininely gendered, "Mother," in Cohen's usage, presents precisely a neutral non-site of sheer anteriority into which all of the binary oppositions spawned by a certain Enlightenment tradition dissolve, including and especially the original marker of difference itself, sex. Hence Cohen's descriptions of "Mother" as "detached from romance or sex" (War Machines, 78), "not necessarily a she, not of a gendered binary or origin" (War Machines, 77). Accordingly, at the very heart of the ocularcentric program, Cohen uncovers a (non-)figure who evacuates the entirety of what "she," as the key embodiment of cultural transmission, generation, family, origin, nature, earth, and so on, once was thought to represent. In the repetition "mother/Mother" (heard in the children's chant in *Marnie*: "Mother, mother I am ill"), one inaudibly shifts backwards from mother (as maternal figure, both gendered and sexed) to Mother with a capital M whose three triangles in her letter disarticulate—triangulate—all binary divisions such as male and female, man and woman. To enable us to hear this desexualization, Cohen frequently refers to Mother as "It," in which we must also recognize the most reduced and stripped down version of the bar series.

Desexing "Mother" in this way, Cohen goes a long way towards exploding one of the common myths in certain strains of gender theory which holds that sex is a socially constructed difference and can thus be attacked on the symbolic level (that is, by performing different symbolic meanings). By identifying sexual difference as a purely formal, that is, letteral difference, Cohen in fact shows up performative gender theory as the chiefly imaginary (rather than symbolic) strategy that it is. For when we play with and "perform" the signifiers of gender (in the sense of socially coded meanings),

we invariably invest them with content—content that admittedly may go some way towards reorganizing relations of power within the existing symbolic system. However, because it is imaginarily attached to the signifiers for which it produces signifieds, performative gender theory is unable to undertake genuine changes at the structural level, for this demands a conception of sexual difference as a purely formal difference.

Cohen is, in fact, very close to this formal (psychoanalytic) conception of sex as a certain relation to the signifier as such (rather than to its imaginary signifieds) when he locates sexual difference at the level of the letter. In his fourth chapter in *War Machines*, Cohen engages in his most detailed discussion of sex and gender which revolves around the figure of Mae West. In it, I find the most exacting and illuminating account I have yet read of *one side* of the feminine subjective position as it is condensed in Lacan's formulas of sexuation. As is well-known, in Lacan masculine and feminine identities are decided by the distinction of having or being the phallus (which, one recalls, is not the penis but the signifier of lack. Biological men can be feminine subjects just as readily—if not as easily—as biological women can be masculine subjects). To “have” the phallus is to be marked by lack as a masculine subject, whereas to “be” the phallus, as a feminine subject, is to embody lack itself.

With admirable subtlety, Cohen interrogates this feminine “being” of the phallus in the shape of Mae West, the “‘female’ female impersonator” whose “copying” of woman reveals a fault in the mimetic program of Western metaphysics. For as a woman in drag, “Mae West” can never reference an “original” woman without revealing how this original is already a repetition, a mask or pantomime over whose interior void the integument of a heterosexual norm has stretched and spread itself. “How long,” Cohen asks, “for how many centuries or millennia, has ‘woman’ been this, a performative effect of another’s eye mimed within its own prosthetics, an impersonation of another as itself which supplants any original it claimed to be reciting inversely?” (*War Machines*, 71).

To avoid any misunderstanding that all Cohen is doing is rehearsing the familiar trope of gender as a performative category, at this point one must recall how in *Sabotage* Mae West was allied with cinematic animation. As the object of masculine desire, the Mae West “bird” inflates and contracts in sync with the trilling notes of Cock Robin’s wooing serenade in the Disney sequence. Yet as her cartoon stature cannot fail but bring home to us, this “performance” is based on nothing that has its source in the natural world. “Mae West”—Woman—is simply a projection of recurring marks (Cohen called them “squiggles”) whose illusion of “life” is owed solely to the speed at which they flit through the masculine desiring light-apparatus to become projected onto an imaginary bodily surface or “screen.” Such squiggles or inscriptions are quite literally “nothing” which, if we hear in this word the psychoanalytic term “lack,” we find a persuasive way of understanding Lacan’s famous statement, “*The* Woman does not exist”: *being* the phallus, that is, the purely

formal, that is, letteral inscription of difference, she has no actual existence, no "life" beyond what is (imaginarily) projected onto her purely symbolic frame. For this reason, then, any change one might think one creates by reassigning different content to these projections (through their "queering" or through gender inversion) remains purely aesthetic (that is, of the order of the imaginary). Genuine "political" change, on the other hand, must take place at the level of symbolic inscription itself, which I emphasize is not of the order of symbolic or socially coded meanings but, rather, of the cut itself. A choice of a masculine or a feminine subjectivity comes down to the way one permits the cut of castration to be carved into one's psyche.

As I said previously, Cohen's is a deeply illuminating discussion of one aspect of the feminine position, but where I cannot follow him—or rather, find it unnecessary to follow him—is in his next move, which is to ascribe an unsexuated status to the (non-)site of this (dis)inscriptive process Cohen follows Hitchcock in calling "Mother." For I am convinced that the cut is always, inevitably a phallic cut to the extent that it is necessarily a representation. Cohen himself seems to allow this point when he asks if anything precedes this prosthetic "woman" who emerges from a "male-shaped discourse," troped tellingly, perhaps, in the filmmaker's first "talkie," *Blackmail*, as originating from a policemen's restroom, that is, in the toilet of the Law. As Cohen puts it, "a certain order of 'talk' is homosocially and male inscribed" (War Machines, 71).

To put it quickly now, my sense is that Cohen's insistence that "Mother" must present as a non-sexuated concept is what drives him into a neo-Schellingian language of progressively more archaic figures—the "prephenomenal," the "prehistorical," the "preoriginary," etc.—that, for all of the careful and subtle nuancing that Cohen gives them, could nevertheless be vulnerable to the very charge he levels at Žižek: that the Thing, the real, the "khora," Mother—however we wish to name it—occupies an anti-space, a bubbling non-site beyond or outside, or at the very least prior to the limits of the symbolic. The chief reason Cohen needs to rhetorically resort to this "reverse *Aufhebung*," I submit, is because he uncharacteristically misses something crucial about sexual difference itself which, as Joan Copjec never fails to remind us, is not a binary opposition.⁸ It is only when man and woman are conceived as two opposing or contradictory halves that we need to seek out a "third" position, an "it" that would be "prior" to an Enlightenment program founded on the oppositions of light/dark, self/other, human/animal, literature/cinema, man/woman and so on. Understood, however, as two different modes of failure (to assume a full identity, for there to be a sexual relation), the problem disappears, for if man and woman are not binary oppositions engaged in an imaginary struggle for mastery, there is no need to seek recourse either in the reconciliatory, aestheticizing tropes of

⁸ See for example Joan Copjec, "m/f, or Not Reconciled," in *The Woman in Question*, ed. Parveen Adams and Elizabeth Cowie (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 1990) 10-18. See also her chapter "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason" (from which the graph of the formulas of sexuation has also been adapted) in *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994).

love and marriage that furnish the “universal reading room,” or in Cohen’s reverse Hegelianism—the positing of an archaic non-site of disinscription that destroys this binary logic before it even “begins.”

As I stated, to my mind there can be no cut, no inscription that is not already sexed, for any act of representation always takes place, by definition, within the sphere of the phallically-drawn symbolic. Nor can there be any voluntary opt-out clause from this phallic economy, at least if we wish to speak and become part of a community of subjects. Hence the definitions of masculine and feminine are inevitably subject to phallically-drawn definitions (such as “having” or “being” the phallus). But while Lacan’s famous “formulas of sexuation” proposed in his *Encore Seminar* expose the impossibility of ever escaping being defined by the phallus, we must recall that they define sexual difference each time not in one but two ways.

Masculine Side	Feminine Side
$\exists x \quad \overline{\Phi x}$	$\overline{\exists x} \quad \overline{\Phi x}$
$\forall x \quad \Phi x$	$\overline{\forall x} \quad \Phi x$
There is at least one x that is not submitted to the phallic function	There is not one x that is not submitted to the phallic function
All x 's are (every x is) submitted to the phallic function	Not all (not every) x is submitted to the phallic function.

Table 1: Lacan's formulas of sexuation

The left-hand side requires little in the way of explanation, describing as it does the masculine logic of the founding exception, the one who, in escaping the phallic Law, serves as its ultimate support. An entire literature has been based on this Romance logic whose purest form, implicitly cited in the figure of Detective Ted Spenser in *Sabotage*, is often thought to be Edmund Spenser’s allegorical poem the *Faerie Queene*.⁹ We have already seen Cohen devoting his unfailing energies to the deconstruction of this logic that he tropes through the regime of the Book. On the

⁹ Amusing evidence of Spenser’s place in the English romance tradition is found in Anthony Trollope’s archaic Miss Thorne who regards the allegorical poet as “the purest type of her country’s literature,” see *Barchester Towers* (London: Penguin, 1994) 189.

feminine side, however, we read the following: there is not one feminine subject that is not subject to the phallic function; nevertheless, not all are subject to the phallic function—two contrary statements that I am tempted to gloss thus: although there is not one cut that is not phallically drawn (insofar as *The Woman*, “being” the phallus, strictly speaking does not “exist” as Cohen already so aptly demonstrated. As the phallus, Woman “is” nothing but the pure lack that is inscription, the very cut itself), this is not to say, with the other side of the formula, that there would therefore be one cut that escapes the cut (as is the case in the masculine logic). Rather, I gloss it as saying the cut is itself cut from within.

How do you cut a cut? This sounds like a very odd proposition, but it has in fact a fairly simple answer. In what is starting to sound a bit like a phallic parlor game of paper, scissors, stone (which incidentally formalizes the Lacanian triad rather well—paper/imaginary, scissors/symbolic and stone/real), the cut of (symbolic) inscription is itself “cut” by the “stone” phallus of the real. I propose, in other words, to take Hitchcock at his word when he calls “Mother,” mother. For this real phallus, this Medusa that freezes all symbolic binaries and turns its inscriptive cuts to stone pillars is the maternal phallus, the very same maternal phallus that haunts and torments the psychotic throughout all of her paranoid delusions. But we can now see the key difference between the psychotic and a neurotic’s paranoia (which, as Freud points out, is frequently indistinguishable from psychosis in its earliest flowerings¹⁰). Herself uncut by castration, the psychotic misreads the maternal phallus as a fullness, a complete Other—that is to say, she mistakes the “not all” of woman for the masculine exception. The psychotic, in other words, makes a sexual category error when, on hearing the double negative “there is not one woman that is not subject to the phallic function” she draws from its contrary a positive statement. As we know from the most elementary mathematical logic, however, a double negative does not produce a positive: a lack of lack doesn’t necessarily imply a plenitude.¹¹ What Cohen, on the other hand, albeit without naming it as such, enables us to see is how, intersecting every symbolically-drawn inscription, maternal phallus ceaselessly slices and dices the phallic cut from the *inside*. The neurotic is perfectly right, then, to feel paranoid since what this implies is a certain vertigo that comes from finding every fixed point, every ground, every handle or grip, every definition and orienting “quilting point” melting away not so much like quicksand but sandstone beneath our fingers, a devouring dissolve that never stops eating away at every law and limit, including and most especially the dividing line between “life” and “death.” Subatomic Mater, it is with good reason we run as fast as we can from her into the arms

¹⁰ Freud observes how the onset of a psychosis resembles that of neurosis. See his account of the Schreber case, “Psychoanalytic notes on an autobiographical account of a case of paranoia (dementia paranoides),” *Standard Edition* 12, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1978) 3-82, esp. 49 and 56-7n.3.

¹¹ In contrast to classical mathematical logic, intuitionist logic requires only a proof of non-contradiction in the contrary of a double negative statement.

of the paternal metaphor, for there is no castrating cut he can inflict that could possibly be as bad.

On the failed honeymoon in *Marnie* that seems to ironically mime the Lacanian phrase “there is no sexual relation,” Sean Connery tells Tippi Hedren about a species of insect called “phatid bugs” who “escape the eyes of hungry birds by living and dying in the shape of a flower.” These bugs, I suggest, illustrate the logic of the maternal phallus. Tiny little living points, they gather into imaginary floral clusters to deceive the soaring graphematic cuts of cinematic deconstructions which, like Hitchcockian birds or roving Nazgul, remain to their peril blind to beauty and insensitive to love. Trusting that even if detected, such Sauronic agents of what Cohen calls “cinema” will take them for one of their own—that is, nothing but “pure” cuts, the formal inscription of sexual difference (as the reproductive organs of plants)—these tiny beating units of *jouissance* hide in full view of the symbolic Law. Intersecting inscription at every point, such living, pulsating, feminine *jouissance* discovers its securest and most effective site from which to launch its corrosive attack in the enveloping petals of the aesthetic and the confabulating leaves of the Book.

Hence my parting shot: by situating “Mother’s” de-auratic powers in a non-sexuated, non-site associated with pure *techné*, Cohen risks losing sight of the “aesthetic” origin of de Manian mater-ial vision in which word we must also hear the insistent buzzing or humming of a specifically feminine *jouissance*. Nevertheless, one of the supreme values of Cohen’s achievement lies in the way he decisively counters a disturbing tendency one occasionally finds in Lacanian readings to ascribe an almost transcendental status to this “Other *jouissance*,” as Lacan calls it, associated as it is with the *jouissance* of female saints, or an absolute Other that might be mistaken for a religious concept. For by identifying it precisely as inscription or “writing,” Cohen rightly re-situates this incomprehensible, in-scene (as opposed to her obscene paternal counter-part) Mother of Enjoyment right in the bones of the symbolic itself: Mother, a living if not necessarily breathing *écriture*, a DNA marrow of sheer enjoyment that traverses every phenomenal form and dissolves all symbolic definitions from within. For this Mother, what we call “birth” and “death” are irrelevant. Far stranger and more dreadful than any possible technicity is this “life” that transects all divisions of speciation, re-marking an “I” that is not so much an other as a multiple: we, the uncounted and perhaps uncountable communities of interconnected sub-dermal ecosystems in the cycles of whose flowerings a paranoid neurotic might briefly rest and refuel.