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The Subject of Jouissance: The Late Lacan and Gender and Queer Theories

Frederic C. Baitinger

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THE SUBJECT OF JOUISSANCE: 
THE LATE LACAN AND GENDER AND QUEER THEORIES

by

FRÉDÉRIC BAITINGER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in the French Program in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2019
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The Late Lacan and Gender and Queer Theories

by

Frédéric Baitinger

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in the French Program in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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The Subject of Jouissance: The Late Lacan and Gender and Queer Theories

by

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The Subject of Jouissance argues that Lacan’s approach to psychoanalysis, far from being heteronormative, offers a notion of identity that deconstructs gender as a social norm, and opens onto a non-normative theory of the subject (of jouissance) that still remains to be fully explored by feminist, gender, and queer scholars. Drawing mostly on the later Lacan, The Subject of Jouissance shows that by locating the identity of the subject in the singularity of its bodily mode of enjoyment (that Lacan calls “jouissance”), and not in the Imaginary illusions of the ego, nor in the Symbolic social structures, Lacan fosters thinking about identity as an ethical act through which a subject learns how to make something socially valuable out of what would have
remained excessive, autistic or perverse in its own singular mode of jouissance.

To contextualize this idea and emphasize its relevance, *The Subject of Jouissance* stages encounters between Lacan and the work of feminist and queer scholars such as Judith Butler, Hélène Cixous and Lee Edelman, as well as the works of French post-structuralists who influenced Lacan’s late teaching, such as Jacques Derrida and Georges Bataille. In doing so, this dissertation intervenes in current debates in American academia that oppose relational theorists, who support the optimism of identity politics, like the lgbt+ movement, and anti-relational theorists, who favor a “queer” dissolution of the very notion of identity. In *The Subject of Jouissance* I argue that it is possible to build an ethics of jouissance that preserves, on the one hand, the singularity of one’s own mode of jouissance and, on the other, keeps as a primary goal the creation of new forms of sociality that goes beyond the limits that impose onto our psychic life the discourse of economy and the discourse of (neuro)science.
PREFACE

My dissertation proposes re-opening a dialogue between psychoanalysis and gender and queer theories by taking as its compass the late and last teaching of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Opposing the idea hold by most gender and queer scholars according to which psychoanalysis is a technique aiming at correcting or normalizing a potentially “deviant subject,” my dissertation underscores that Lacan’s late and last approach to psychoanalysis puts at the very center of its preoccupation the singularity of each subject’s unconscious desire. However, differing from most gender and queer scholars who also emphasize the importance of singularity, Lacan’s late teaching does not use singularity as a point of departure for minority politics, nor as a weapon against any form of symbolic power. On the contrary, he suggests that it is possible for each subject to build a knowledge of its own singularity that that could help it, on the one hand, to contain what is potentially negative, deadly or anti-social in its singularity and, on the other hand, that would give to this subject the occasion to turn its singularity into a new source of agency and social bonding.

To situate my argument I use in my introduction The Ethics of Opting Out (2017), a book by Mari Ruti in which she suggests that when it comes to the question of the singular, there exists at least two opposite groups of feminist, gender and queer scholars. There is the group of gender and queer scholars that she calls “relational,” who believe like the lgbtiq++ movement
that the singularity of each subject needs to be recognized at a political level through the
development of minority/identity politics. And there is the group of queer scholars that she calls
“anti-relational,” who think that identity politics betrays the very notion of singularity that is at
the core of the queer protest. Likewise, Ruti suggests that the opposition between the two groups
is also visible when it comes to the way in which these thinkers approach, understand and use
psychoanalysis in general, and Lacanian psychoanalysis in particular.

For most relational theorists, psychoanalysis is generally considered a conservative
theory or, at best, an interesting theory about subjection. It is, for example, how Judith Butler in
*The Psychic Life of Power* (1997) uses the work of Freud and Lacan to understand how
subjectivity is created through the interiorization of a certain dominant discourse and how certain
subjective singularities (such as the one of gays, lesbians or queers subjects) are bound to feel
melancholic, or depressive given certain historical contexts. However, as soon as the question
moves from the one of subjection to the one of subversion, most relational thinkers prefer using
an ethical framework such as the one of Emmanuel Levinas, or a psychological framework such
as the one of Silvan Tomkins, or a post-structuralism framework such as the one put forth by
Jacques Derrida.

Differing from the relational theorists, most anti-relational theorists do not focus on the
normative aspect of psychoanalysis, but on what makes the very notion of norm problematic
from a psychoanalytic point of view. For Lee Edelman, for example, in *No Future: Queer Theory
and the Death Drive*, the notion of jouissance—and all the more the notion of the sinthome that
Lacan developed in his very last teaching on James Joyce—is, *par excellence*, a notion that enables a radical critique of the conformism entailed by the relational position. This is how Edelman opposes, in a gesture very similar to the one of Georges Bataille in *The Accursed Share*, a restricted economy oriented towards the future and the preservation of life, which he associates with a relational position, and a general economy oriented towards jouissance and expenditure, which he associates with a radically queer affirmation of one’s singularity. Consequently, one could argue that an “anti-relational” theorist like Edelman, contrary to a “relational theorists” like Butler, do not consider psychoanalysis, and even less Lacanian psychoanalysis, as a conservative theory but as a potentially very subversive one.

However, the problem with this “anti-social” reading of Lacanian psychoanalysis is that it greatly undermines what is traumatic for any given subject in its experience of jouissance. To put it simply, it confuses the notion of jouissance with the notion of desire by raising the moment of jouissance, as well as the fading of the subject that it triggers, to the level of an affirmation of one’s own singularity, while under-evaluating the deep alienation that such moment of sensible ecstasy implies on the side of the subject that undergoes it. In other words, even if anti-relational theorists have tried to find in Lacanian psychoanalysis a subversive dimension, they did so by deeply undermining what is potentially deadly and abusive in one’s singular mode of jouissance. Instead of understanding how jouissance, unlike desire, partakes in the contemporary capitalist super-ego (which forces us to “enjoy”), or with all kinds of abuses or addictions, they celebrated it as what is the most singular in one’s identity, as well as what enables a deviant subject to transgress any given norms.
Taking as its standpoint this opposition between relational and anti-relational thinkers, my dissertation asks three fundamental questions. First, it questions if the group of relational thinkers is justified to say that psychoanalysis as the late and last Lacan defines it is a conservative theory, or if it could offer a non-normative theory of gender? Second, it asks if Lacanian psychoanalysis is really a neo-libertine theory that systematically values jouissance over castration, or if Lacanian psychoanalysis offers a way to take jouissance into account while not giving to it free rein. Finally, my dissertation examines whether the late and last Lacan can offer a theory of the subject that could potentially reconcile the anti-relational desire to take into account the singularity of one’s own mode of jouissance, and the relational need for political recognition, which always implies, in one way or another, a limitation on the free rein of jouissance.
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I am extremely grateful to my adviser Royal S. Brown who first introduced me to the different interpretations of Lacan in English and helped me connect these readings to my love of French avant-garde Literature and French avant-garde cinema, while never imposing on my research any specific direction, except the one of my true desire: an interpretation of Lacanian psychoanalysis’ potential impact on gender and queer theory.

I also cannot begin to express my thanks to Francesca Canadé Sautman and Maxime Blanchard for their boundless care and support throughout my journey as a graduate student. Without them, I would have never succeeded in completing my dissertation on time, nor had the feeling that no matter what was happening there would always be a light at the end of the tunnel. I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to Raphael Liogier for his invaluable intellectual friendship without which I would not have been able to connect some aspects of my research to contemporary political issues such as populism and the #MeToo movement.

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INTRODUCTION: THE SUBJECT OF JOUISSANCE

The Death of the Humanist Subject
Starting right after World War I, and growing increasingly stronger after the horror of World War II and the disappointment created by Communism, an intellectual revolution happened in France that led to the emergence of what the historian Stefanos Geroulanos has called “an atheism that is not humanist.”¹ This new atheism, which also took the name of “anti-humanism” by the early 60s, aimed at questioning, in general terms, all the values defended by humanism, and more specifically, the very meaning of what the human, as an immutable and metaphysical “nature,” is. Authors such as Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida and then Jacques-Alain Miller, Jacques Rancière, and Jean-Luc Nancy, to name only a few, suggested, in many different ways, that the values defended by humanism were in fact nothing but ideological claims turned into a certain set of transcendental values.² For example, when humanists from the Renaissance use the expression *humanum* of Man, one has to understand in the word *humanum* what makes of Man the guarantor of certain cultural values

¹ Geroulanos, Stefanos. *An Atheism That Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2010. The very phrase “an atheism that is not humanist” comes from Emmanuel Lévinas’s book on Blanchot. See, Lévinas, Emmanuel. “On Maurice Blanchot,” in *Proper Names*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1996. Lévinas writes, “Contemporary thought holds the suprise for us of an atheism that is not humanist. The Gods are dead or withdrawn from the world, concrete, even rational man does not contain the universe. In all those books that go beyond metaphysics we witness the exaltation of an obedience and faithfulness that are not obedience or faithfulness to anyone” (127).

² See, for example, Nancy, Jean-Luc. “The Forgetting of Philosophy,” in *The Gravity of Thought*. Trans. Francois Raffoul and Gregory Recco. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1993. pp. 7-74. In this text, Nancy, aligned with the position defended by Heidegger in *Letter on Humanism*, argues that to be in favor of humanism amounts to being favor of forgetting what the task of philosophy is, which means, of forgetting the task of criticizing ideologies.
that Heidegger associates, in his *Letter on Humanism*, with the Greek *Paideia*. When philosophers of the *Enlightenment*, like Montesquieu, Rousseau or Condorcet use the word “humanism,” they use it to express their personal belief in the existence of a human subject naturally inclined towards the good of others (kindness and benevolence towards one’s fellow human beings), and a subject capable of becoming, as Descartes had it, "the master and possessor" of himself and the world. Finally, when 19th century philosophers such as Hegel, Feuerbach, Humboldt or Marx, or utopian socialists such as Proudhon, Saint Simon or Comte, talk about humanism, they express their belief in the idea of progress, which is to say in a form of “anthropotheism” that tends to make of Man the new absolute value. Auguste Comte, for example, developed at once the most scientific and atheistic theory of the social while grounding his utopian socialism in a “Religion of humanity.” Likewise, Proudhon and Saint-Simon used the ideal of science in order to build a “new Christianism” [*Nouveau Christianisme*] or a “scientific socialism.”

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4 See, for example, Feuerbach, Ludwig. *The Essence of Religion: God the Image of Man: Man's Dependence Upon Nature the Last and Only Source of Religion*. Transl. Alexander Loos. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2010. In this book, Feuerbach suggested that everything that Man had attributed to God was actually attributes of Man. See also, Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Transl. Robert C. Tucker, New York: Norton, 1978. In a manner very similar to Feuerbach, Marx writes, “The criticism of religion ends with the teaching that man is the highest being for man—hence with the categorical imperative to overthrow all relations in which man is a debased, enslaved, abandoned, despicable beings.” (65). The same reasoning could be found in Hegel’s vision of history of course.


As a result, one could argue that humanism, since its inception in Greek Paideia, its scientific turn during the Enlightenment, and its final utopian socialist twist in the 19th century has always been traversed by a contradiction between an aspiration towards scientific rigor (and thus a rejection of religion and all its transcendental values), and a hidden return, at a political level, to a strange form of religiosity, incapable of seeing itself as such, but ready to use all technologies available to put in motion its most metaphysical and most of the time racist dreams. Lacan, summarizing this strange connection between humanism, metaphysics and politics, famously said, in a letter addressed to Heidegger: “Metaphysics has never been anything and can only continue by plugging the hole of politics.” Following suits, many anti-humanist thinkers ended up arguing that humanism, despite its alleged good intentions, was in fact bound to produce the most horrible ideologies (such a Nazism, Stalinism, or Maoism, etc.), which in turn were most likely to provoke the fall of Man and then, in its wake, the collapse of Europe, and then the collapse of the rest of the world. Commenting on this idea, Geroulanos writes:

If the nineteenth century was marked by a “Death of God,” Man after the era of catastrophe—the age of World War I, the rise of Nazism, Stalinism, World War II, and the immediate postwar period—could no longer claim to feel the void left by God’s absence without bringing forth the worst in Human history and paradoxically denigrating the dignity of the human subject. Nor could the persistent conception of this world in terms of the philosophical and political centrality of Man (a conception dating to Descartes and proceeding to the tradition of natural law, the Enlightenment, the French

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Revolution, and nineteenth-century liberalism and Marxism) offer satisfactory alternatives to the economic, material, and political division and ruin of Europe. (2)

This is why the anti-humanist critique of humanism did not stop in France and Europe, but spread rapidly into the rest of the world—and especially in American Universities, before becoming one of the most important influences of the contemporary field of “Critical Theory.” As early as the beginning of the process of decolonization, engaged in the early sixties, for example, many anti-humanist post-colonial theorists, such as Homi Bhabha or Gayatri Spivak argued that the entire history of western countries was, in fact, mostly the expression of the ideological hubris of humanism, and the humanist subject nothing but the one and only responsible for the history of slavery, for the history of colonialism, and nowadays, for powering an economic system that is on the verge of destroying the whole planet.⁹ Likewise, for many feminists, and queer scholars such as Judith Butler or Lee Edelman, it is the very notion of identity, supported by the fundamental essentialism of humanism that needed to be questioned. However, it would be a mistake to think that the anti-humanist critique of the humanist subject and its aftermath in feminism, gender and queer theory is new.

The Birth of the Decentered Subject
Hegel, in the *The Philosophy of Rights*, had already criticized Kant's moral definition of moral autonomy for opening the possibility of making one's subjectivity the center of a malevolent

maxim raised to the level of a universal. Likewise, the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, in his famous text “Kant with Sade,” argued that the very structure of the modern moral subject, as defined by Kant in *The Critique of Practical Reason*, was similar to the structure of the subject implied by the maxims defended by the marquis de Sade, both of them implying a subject gaining his agency out of his sadism. Post-structuralists thinkers such as Georges Bataille, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida tried, in many different ways (through eroticism and transgression, jouissance and the Real, desubjectivation and the care of the self, desiring-machine or *différance*), to deal with this ambiguity. The result of their theoretical investigation was summarized by American scholars in the expression of “the decentered subject.”

The decentered subject is a subject divided between a conscious subject, associated with the “I” that speaks, and an unconscious subject that stands for the locus of polymorphous drives looking for satisfaction. As such, the decentered subject, far from being a stable ground upon which the Good, the True, and the Beautiful had erected their empire, is a subjected subject, a subject that lacks any form of transparency and thus the agency necessary to control the perversity of its drives. The decentered subject is thus doubly decentered. It is deprived of the kind of mastery necessary to ground the discourse of science, and deprived of the agency to act

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morally. This is perhaps why, as Lacan suggested in his Seminar XVII *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, Freud himself eventually shied away from the most radical implications of his own discovery when he introduced the notion of the pleasure principle and its supposed masochistic beyond, the death drive.\(^{14}\) And this is perhaps why also most post-structuralist scholars of Judith Butler's generation are fixated on the idea that the humanist subject must be abandoned.\(^{15}\)

However, the abandonment of the category of the humanist subject remains problematic in many ways. The most obvious being that it radically goes against the idea of empowering subaltern populations. How is it possible to propose at the same time the critique of the colonial, white, masculine subject and the empowerment of the dispossessed, queer or subaltern subject? Butler herself, in *Dispossession*, battles with the problem.\(^{16}\) The question being: what shall one do with the negativity attached to the humanist subject? Shall one repress it in the name of the Other, which means in the name of the “service of the Goods” as Lacan calls it in his Seminar VII *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, or shall one make of it the source of the subversive potential of the decentered subject? Contextualizing this very question in the current debate that divides the field of gender and queer theory, Mari Ruti, in *The Ethics of Opting Out*, wonders how shall one “tease out all the different frequencies of negativity circulating in contemporary queer theory” (6)? I would add to Ruti’s question: how shall one understand the positions that Lacan, and even more the late Lacan occupies within these frequencies?


I. WHAT TO DO WITH NEGATIVITY?

One has to acknowledge that there is a division in the field of queer theory between relational theorists and anti-relational theorists, or between the Lgbtiq+ movement and the “antisocial” turn in queer theory that has opposed it. This division is centered on the question of “optimism,” and “integration.” Does the queer community need to gain more rights to help turn what was considered “abject” and queer in gay and lesbian sexuality into something respectable, or does the queer community need to keep fighting against the norm in general? More broadly, the field of gender studies, for almost two decades, has been traversed by a tension between its historical ties with the gay and lesbian communities (and their aspiration to gain more rights and recognition), and its ties to non-normative behaviors, alternative modes of sexuality and non-patriarchal fantasies.

On one hand, the movement of queer studies is aligned with other identity politics movement (like feminism or black lives matters) in its quest to grant to gay and lesbian people the same rights as straight or white people. On the other hand, a part of the queer movement sees this attempt at "normalizing" the queer population as a way to betray the very "anti-normative" spirit that should animate, at a radical level, this community. In this sense, one could say that the field of queer theory is divided between two very distinct positions, one that claims that gay and lesbian people are actually "normal" people that were kept in the closet for too long, and the other that protests by saying that there is something deeply non-normative in gay and lesbian desire.
No Bad Feelings Allowed Here
To problematize this tension, Lauren Berlant, in *Cruel Optimism*, suggests that a relation of cruel optimism exists when something we desire is in reality an impediment to our flourishing, like when we remain faithful to specific fantasies of satisfaction even if they have repeatedly disappointed us. Cruel optimism could thus be defined as the stubborn and irrational belief according to which certain ways of life that have hurt us in the past will eventually pay off and make us happy in the future. To name only a few of them, such cruel optimism implies the fantasy that the belief system we have inherited from our society and families will bring us love, intimacy, success, security, financial reward, or the so called “goodlife” that we crave even when they are extremely unlikely to do so. One could even argue that when the script did not really deliver the promised happiness, it is generally not the script itself that is considered at fault but the person who failed to follow it correctly. As a result, it is most of the time the subject who is judged guilty, and not the “happiness script.” This is why such cruel optimism provokes a limitation of life, of what is desirable, of what is deemed “valuable,” etc. In a similar vein, Sarah Ahmed, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, writes, “If we do not assume that happiness is what we must defend, if we start questioning the happiness we are defending, then we can ask other questions about life, or what we want life to become. Possibilities have to be recognized as possibilities to become possible.”

However, optimism as such is also necessary to build a meaningful life. Sara Ahmed, in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), argues for example that gay marriage brings the queer

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community into the “The right kind of queer by deposing your hope for happiness in the right place”\(^{19}\) (18). But is this hope not a trap? Not a way to tame the queer subversive potential? From the perspective of capitalism, it is better that you be married than that you cruise sex clubs until 4am. Marriage channels sexuality and the potential messiness of the drives. Marriage is the oldest institution created to channel sexual energy into specific pathways in order to generate a well-oiled economic order. Marriage is a way to submit sexuality and jouissance to the “performance principle” that is guiding the system of neo-liberalism. Marcuse knew this in the 50s when he wrote, “in a repressive order, which enforces the equation between normal, socially useful, and good, the manifestations of pleasure for its own sake must appear as a fleur du mal.”\(^{20}\)

Likewise, Foucault in *The Birth of Biopolitics* also saw in marriage a biopolitical mechanism that helps the social power to penetrate the most intimate corner of our beings.\(^{21}\) Marriage is a tool at the service of the power in place to use sexuality as a way to control the unruliness of jouissance, to channel it in order to put it at the service of the community, and not at the service of an isolated individual. Laura Kipnis, in *Against Love* (2003), critiques the “ideology” of marriage by arguing that it reduces love to a kind of “work.”\(^{22}\) One has to work on his/her marriage, on his/her sex-life as one has to work to make money. Marriage is an investment that requires work, like everything else. It is thus the negation of jouissance and its


instant reward, its negation of the future. Kipnis argues that the ideology of romantic love that supports the ideology of marriage is also what creates, in the first place, “the modern notion of the soul”—a critique that Lacan had already precisely formulated in his Seminar XX, Encore, in the lesson called “A Love Letter.” To love is to love romantically. And to love romantically is to love according to certain idealized image valued by the market. To love romantically is thus to love in agreement with the desire of the Other, Lacan would say.

To go even further, and add one layer of complexity, it is interesting to point out that compared to a prior stage of capitalism, one can argue that neo-liberalism does not repress desire as such but uses desire to increase the productivity of its workers. It is what Herbert Marcuse calls, in Eros and Civilization, the “performance principle,” which is the capitalist equivalent of Freud's reality principle. As long as a desire is productive, as long as it pushes the worker to work even more, and sometimes without even being paid, desire is “good” and, even, one of the motors of late capitalism. Efficiency is not only a social good, but a personal virtue. One has to be productive, and productive at a personal level. One has to harness his/her desire to his work in order to produce more. In this sense, the very affirmation of desire, as soon as it gets attached to the productivity principle, becomes the affirmation of the desire of the Other, which is to say the affirmation of the values defended by the current dominant discourse. This reduction of desire to the form of the desire of the Other is what Marcuse called “surplus repression,” and that Lacan called, in his Seminar XVII, “surplus-jouissance.” This sur-plus involves a kind of manipulation of jouissance, a way to put it at the service of the neoliberal machine.

To illustrate this argument and connect it to the field of feminism, gender and queer
studies, one could link it to sexuality. While sexuality has been considered a highly transgressive site for more than three decades, the democratization of the porno industry has turned sexuality into a host of new markets. With neo-liberalism, it is libido itself, with its polymorphous perversity that is used to fuel new porno markets. Every sexual fantasy becomes a “niche” to create new products. We are ordered to enjoy, order to express our desire, ordered to explore fantastically our sexuality.

The New Super-Ego of Capitalism: Enjoy!
This is why today, as Jacques-Alain Miller points in “The Unconscious and the Speaking Body,” the paradigm is no longer the one of repression. It is the one of enjoyment, of a perverse submission to a set of socially acceptable regimes of jouissance. One has to enjoy, to take care of one’s body, to unleash its fantasies, to act upon them. Likewise, Žižek, in Neighbors and Other Monsters, argued that we are “bombarded from all sides by the different versions of the super-ego injunction, “Enjoy.” To put it in an axiomatic form, one could say that the new paradigm of our time is the one of pornography. Pornography is the paradigm of today’s world. It is entirely imaginary and grounded on a compulsory injunction coming from the drives, elevated at the status of a new super-ego. This is why the transgression that is praised in pornography is not a transgression that aims at liberating the individual from the grip of the Other, but a transgression that is linked to perversion. And the truth that this transgression reveals, as a symptom, is nothing but what Lacan called, at the end of his teaching, the fundamental absence of sexual relationships between the sexes. Everyone is alone in his fantasy.

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In such a perverse world, governed by the super-ego of pornography, the body that was supposed to be entirely liberated, and thus free to attain satisfaction is, in reality, reduced to be an imaginary body, reduced to a fixed image. It is a body entirely imaginary, a fetish fixated to an Image, regulated by the Other. Miller writes, “The Body conditions everything that the register of the imaginary lodges of representations, as well as what it signifies, in terms of meaning and representation, even the image of the world itself. It is in the imaginary body that the words of language makes the representations enter, and it is these words too that constitutes an illusory world on the model of the unity of the body” (Miller, *The Unconscious and the Speaking Body*, my translation, 8). Such imaginary body is what is incarnated in all the images through which one lives one’s gender, and more broadly one’s narcissistic relationship to one’s own body.

However, the body as imaginary is, as paradoxical as it may sound, the worst enemy of the real body since its image is the source of an illusionary mastery that remains alien to the body and its mode of jouissance. While the image is fixed and flat, the real body is continually changing and has affective depth. Unfortunately, it is through the false mastery of the imaginary that most contemporary discourses about well-being, but also about the construction of identity, contend that a true return to the body is possible (cf. Mari Ruti). Eric Laurent, in *L’envers de la Biopolitique* writes,

What hides the paradox of the current discourse about a “return to nature,” is that it evokes the image of the body in order to make the real of jouissance disappear. The shape of the body and its inner functioning, as well as the multiplication of its images, always presented as the only real dimension of the body, fascinates most people, and presents
itself as being all the more a good remedy to the contemporary anxiety that this images are relying on innovative technologies. The body as a machine functions in couple with the body as an image. But let’s not be fooled by it. The power of the techno-scientific discourse, as well as the products that it produces only aims at ruling over jouissance through a scopic control of the body.”24 (My translation)

There is, on the one hand, the fragile and fragmented body of jouissance, and all its organs, ready to be modified, exchanged, etc. On the other, there is the imaginary unified image of the body, linked to the narcissistic image that a subject has of itself. In this relationship, the function of the image is to incarnate, in an external space, the unity of the body that would otherwise remain fragmented. This unity, however, is not a unity that is anchored in the jouissance of the body itself, but it is an external unity that aims at controlling through a kind of scopic regulation, the body and its jouissance. It is a unity that precisely “troubles” the functioning of the real body, as Judith Butler would have it.25 This is why, for Eric Laurent, and contrary to one might think, the “return to the body” that is celebrated today is nothing but an indirect celebration of an increased control over the real body through a hyper-modern technologic regulation of the body through the imaginary. To put it differently, the more we use modern technology to gain an imaginary control over our body, the more we are becoming the very instrument of these technologies, and through them, the very instrument of the dominant discourse.

This techno-scientific belief rests, mostly, on the idea that if a technology can produce an image of a given phenomenon, this image will reveal the truth of it. However, such idea is not

only false, but dangerous as Dennis Forest argues in his new book *Neuroscepticisme*, since it introduces, in the name of science, a new form of essentialism.\(^{26}\)

\(\text{\textit{Jouissance as the Other of Enjoyment}}\)

What escapes this new essentialism, entirely trapped in the field of the Imaginary, is precisely jouissance, since jouissance is what escapes the mastery of the Imaginary, what threatens it, what slips beyond or beneath its grasp. Indeed, there is no image that can adequately represents jouissance, since jouissance is the ir-representable Other within the body. Jouissance is also what fractures the unity of the Imaginary, its wholeness, via the symptoms it produces. Finally jouissance is what is impossible to negate, while being forever unpredictable. Jouissance, indeed, contrary to controllable enjoyment, is sometimes ecstatic or ravishing, as Marguerite Duras has it (*In the Ravishing of Lol V Stein*), or sometimes traumatic and anxiety building as in the case of eroticism.\(^{27}\) Eric Laurent, commenting on this series of idea in his book *The Other Side of Biopolitics*, writes: “The moment of ecstasy is the reverse of what appears as obvious in a image. The ecstasy is the manifestation of a body without image, from which the subject is absent, as if it was outside of itself” (my translation, 15). There is thus a radical disjunction between the body as imaginary and the real body as a locus for jouissance. Faced with this division, the question is: should this division be reduced through a renewed usage of the Imaginary, or should the false mastery of the Imaginary be traversed in order to attain another body, free from its Imaginary reduction? Or in which way would it be possible to approach the


question of jouissance beyond its Imaginary regulation, and its narcissistic dimension? (Could it be, for example, what drives the beautiful movie *The Shape of Water*?).

II. THE TEMPTATION TO OPT OUT

To give an answer to this question, a new trend in queer theory has appeared, the trend to opt out. To opt out means, first, to oppose the Imaginary injunction of neoliberalism to enjoy, to be happy, to keep working and consuming in agreement with the discourse of the master. To opt out means also to refuse to believe in the ideology of happiness that surrounds the American dream of consumption and mass production. Commenting on this trend in *The Ethics of Opting Out*, Mari Ruti writes, “Opting out—the ability to defeat cruel optimism, as it were—presupposes the capacity to resist what Ahmed calls the dominant “happiness script” of our society, for happiness is more or less an unquestioned value in our culture: something that everyone is supposed to want.” Surplus-jouissance, surplus-production, “keep working.” The system needs to maintain in us a lack that serves as the motor for our desire for consumption. Consequently, to defy such a script, some recent queer scholars have argued that to maintain a critical distance from the neo-liberal optimistic ideology, one needs to ally with the death-drive. In other words, if one wants to escape the grip of the imaginary, and the submission to the social Other that it implies, one has to pass an alliance with what is excessive in jouissance, to embrace in jouissance what does not fit into the boxes of the socially acceptable regimes of jouissance.

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The queer scholars who defend such position have been named, for these reasons, the anti-social, anti-relational theorists.

The Queer Lacanianism of Anti-relational Theorists
The Anti-social, anti-relational theorists consist of prominent Lacanian scholars, such as Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman, but also of anti-psychoanalytic Foucauldian scholars such as Halperin. What unites these different thinkers, beyond their differences, is their valorization of negativity in order to oppose what they consider to be the “fake” optimism of the lgbtiq+ movement. To give a simple illustration to this position, one could say that the anti-hero of this movement is Jean Genet. The movement towards abjection that Genet accomplished represents the model of a Queer ethics of opting out: a refusal to endorse the values of neo-liberalism, i.e., of productivity, rationality, commitment, responsibility, etc. Instead, Genet is deemed by these thinkers to be the Saint of transgression, perversion, etc. For Halperin, Genet represents the thrill of “being naughty, disobedient, sinful, bad” (2007, 57). The best representative of this position is Lee Edelman’s No future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive. In this book, Edelman rejects all the fantasies about a better future, all the fantasies of progress that supports the development of neo-liberalism and the mainstream of lgbtiq+ identity politics. Edelman calls this hope that supports this position, “reproductive futurism,” a hope which itself subordinates the vision of the future to a set of values that Edelman summarizes in the notion of “reproductive futurism,” which is to say a vision of the future centered around the figure of the child. For Edelman, the

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point at stake is to make visible that queer theorists want to escape this vision of the future, which is entirely subordinated to a certain vision of the common good; they need to posit a sense of ethics that departs radically from any categories of right and wrong. The need to posit what Edelman calls, in reference to Lacan’s Seminar on Joyce, *The Sinthome*, the concept of *sinthomosexuality*.

Likewise, in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), Jack Halberstam promotes failure in all its various forms (stupidity, ignorance, forgetfulness, refusal to learn, unemployment, self-cutting, etc.) to oppose the subordination of queer theory to the neo-liberal “principle of productivity” and the idealized sense of hope that underpins it. To oppose the injunction to perform well, Halberstam promotes that art of “failing.” The negative feeling that comes with failing can be used to poke holes in the otherwise seamless optimistic narrative about success (as in “It is getting better.”) Halberstam writes,

> Failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behaviors and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods. Failure preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood and disturb the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children, winners and losers. And while failure certainly comes accompanied by a host of negative affects, such as disappointment, disillusionment, and despair, it also provides the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life.” (34)

Another good representative of the ethics of opting out, is Jasbir Puar’s *Terrorist Assemblage*

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(2016), where he aligns suicide bombing with queerness. The suicide bombing, unlike the queer seeking social recognition and integration, represents the pure negativity of the system, and what refuses, until the very end, to be part of the system. The suicide bombing is the pure representative of the death drive, of the desire to put a radical end to a cycle, and to clean the table for a fresh start. Puar reads the suicide bombers as the perfect example of the dissolution of subjectivity that poststructuralists, and particularly Deleuze-Guattari, advocate.

The Critique of the Anti-relational Theorists
The problem with the anti-relational position is that it only reflects the stance of certain queer scholars who are mostly interested in promoting the subversive potential of radical negativity, by highlighting the connection between jouissance and self-undoing. Munoz, during the PMLA round table from which the very split between relation and anti-relational theories emerged, called this position “the last stand of the white gay man.” To support his claim, Munoz argued that the antisocial position is actually a position that implies, on the behalf of the one who defends it, not be threatened in his identity in the first place. It is a position that takes as its point of departure a strong subject, encapsulated in itself, and as its point of arrival, a shattered subject, which is to say a subject that has the capacity to shatter its own self without completely collapsing. This is why one can go as far as suggesting that such an ethical position, primarily defended by Lee Edelman in No Future, but also by Lynn Huffer in Mad for Foucault, is actually

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a position that reflects a certain white privilege. Such a position, moreover, always relies on the most simplistic reading of post-structuralism, by taking Foucault's concept of desubjectivation, Deleuze & Guattari praise of schizophrenia, and Lacan’s emphasis on jouissance in his late teaching, as an unproblematic claim, instead of interrogating the historical context in which such a fascination for the shattering of the self-emerged.

As Carolyn Dean argues, in The Self and its Pleasure, or Allan Stoekl in Politics, Writing, Mutilation: The Cases of Bataille, Blanchot, Roussel, Leiris, Ponge, the very idea of such a shattering of the self, which became central in the work of Maurice Blanchot or Samuel Beckett for example, was created in Europe, after the Second World War, by white men who were not only occupying a privileged position in the symbolic order, but who also had a very high sense of self-mastery (as it is still clearly the case with Lee Edelman). As such, the ideal of self-shattering or decentering represented for them a form of subversion of their too self-secured sense of identity. But, in turn, one can wonder what does it mean to propose such a "subversion" to contemporary subjects who are neither secure about their symbolic position (their economic sustainability), nor in their identity (their subjective sense of oneness). This is why, most of the time, anti-relational queer theorists remain at the level of rhetoric, and give the impression that they are deeply disconnected from any concrete practice of political activism. Perhaps, instead of praising the antisocial turn for its rhetorical radicalism, one should question wether this systematic attack on the subject, in the name of its “queerness,” is not, actually, a politico-ethical

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dead end? The larger question is whether it is possible to reclaim the category of the subject without falling back onto the imaginary trap that the humanist subject entails?

The Relational Critique of the Antisocial Turn
Opposed to this position stands the position defended by “the rest of us,” which is to say those who are interested in understanding the relations between sexuality, race, class, gender, nationality, and other collective identity markers without turning every symbolic construction into a source of alienation. To give just one example, for Judith Butler, in *Frames of War*, the anti-relational position is wrong inasmuch as it produces a “defiant subject” at the expense of the group, at the expense of the existence of the others.38

However, for Butler, to criticize the desire to opt out does not mean to call for a return of the humanist subject either. On the contrary, any attempt to re-center the subject is intrinsically evil. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler argues that there is “no re-centering of the subject without unleashing unacceptable sadism and cruelty (77).39 For Butler, to advocate for the return of the subject always means to advocate for the return of its narcissistic and aggressive ego. Butler writes, “the subject is produced at the expense of a relational social ontology” (55). There is thus a kind of either or for Butler. It is either the centered subject, bound through his illusion of


mastery to sadism and cruelty, or the decentered subject, completely submitted to death drive.\textsuperscript{40}

In an effort to bypass this double dead end, Tim Dean, in \textit{Unlimited Intimacies}, or Bersani and Adams, in \textit{Intimacies} (2009), and all the more Ruti in \textit{The Ethics of Opting Out} (2017), using Lacan's stand on ethics, tried to forge an ethics on what remains in the Other forever alienated.\textsuperscript{41} This foreign body, within the narcissistic body, is what Jacques-Alain Miller calls, the \textit{extimate ennemies}, which is to say, what is at the same time the most intimate and the most alien in someone, and also what grounds, on the ordinary basis, the mode of jouissance of a subject.

\textbf{III. LACAN IN THE FIELDS OF FEMINISM, GENDER AND QUEER STUDIES}

The early Lacan of the "Return to Freud" has been used by Butler's generation of Gender and Queer theorists to understand how alienation works. They emphasized, thus, what was of the order of the Symbolic. Lacan was useful inasmuch as his theory of the Symbolic, once reread through Althusser, could provide a powerful understanding of how subjectivity is created by the Symbolic order, and of how the subject produced by this Symbolic structure was the puppet of it. (It is what I demonstrate in the first part of chapter two).

\textsuperscript{40} Ruti, in the \textit{Ethics of Opting Out: Queer Theory's Defiant Subjects}, criticizes Butler for two reasons. Ruti writes, “Butler’s anxiety about the subject’s possessive and aggressive tendencies is so excessive that it threatens to exclude the possibility of benign relationship altogether. On the one hand, she elevates relationality to the ultimate good. On the other, she implies that non-violent relationality is more or less impossible because of the subject’s narcissistic and colonizing inclinations. The result of this contradiction is that the only way to be an acceptable subject, in Butler’s vision, is to adopt a stance of unmitigated masochism; the good subject, in Butlerian terms, accepts its violation by the other while meticulously safeguarding against its own violent tendencies.” (57)

On the opposite side, queer theorists like Bersani, Edelman, etc. have used the late Lacan, and its emphasis on the real and jouissance to posit a form of liberation from the Symbolic. As a result, there is a split between a vision of Lacan as a structuralist that deprives the subject of any form of agency—which is the position of Butler and other relational theorists. And there is the vision of Lacan as the supporter of an unbridled jouissance, which is the position defended by Edelman. Commenting on this strange split, Ruti writes,

First, Lacan has been hijacked by antirelational hardliners, such as Edelman, to such an extent that critics who advocate a more relational approach—critics who comprise queer theory’s so-called social (relational) school—have found it difficult to find a palatable entry point to Lacanian theory. Second, many queer theorists have interpreted Foucault’s (1961) early critique of psychoanalysis as a normalizing discourse to mean that Foucault and psychoanalysis are incompatible. This perspective overlooks the ways in which Foucault’s (entirely justified) attack on the conservative tendencies of psychoanalysis does not apply to Lacan. (4-5)

What Lacan tried to accomplish, throughout his whole teaching, and all the more in his late and last teaching, was not to destroy the notion of the subject, but to build a new subject that would be, at the same time, the product of the critique of the humanist subject, and the foundation of a new subject, capable of a different kind of agency. The goal of psychoanalysis for Lacan is to help the analysand dissociate his desire from the desire of the Other in order to go beyond the

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42 Ruti writes, “(...) the queer theoretical community appears fairly starkly divided between those who have chosen to follow Lacan (Bersani, Edelman, and Tim Dean), and those who have chosen to follow Foucault (Halperin, Lynn Huffer, and a whole host of scholars who are “vaguely foucauldian” without overtly proclaiming themselves as such).” (4)
cruel optimism that attaches it to the powerful symbolic structures and their super-ego command to enjoy.

The Lacanian Defiant Subject

Contrary to most queer scholars, relational or anti-relational, Lacan has a theory of the Subject to offer, even though Lacan’s subject is everything but a humanist subject. As Ruti has it: “What is unique about Lacan is precisely that he theorizes autonomy (defiance) in the context of a conception of subjectivity that is otherwise completely antithetical to the ideals underpinning the sovereign humanist subject” (56).

To give an idea about how Lacan managed to theorize subject’s autonomy outside any reference to the ideals underpinning the humanist subject, it suffices to mention, in this introduction, Lacan’s *Seminar VII* on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, where Lacan takes the figure of Antigone to define what an ethical act is from his anti-humanist perspective.43 Lacan says,

> It is because we know better than those who went before how to recognize the nature of desire… that a reconsideration of ethics is possible, that a form of ethical judgment is possible, of a kind that gives the question the force of a Last judgment: Have you acted in conformity with the desire that is in you? … I propose then that, from an analytic point of view, the only thing of which one can be guilty is of having given ground relative to one’s desire (44).

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The Lacanian ethical act is thus a destructive (or self-destructive) act through which the subject utters a categorical “no!” to the Symbolic order. This “no!” breaks all attachment to the hegemonic power. As such, the Lacanian ethics of psychoanalysis is not normative in any sense. Lacan does not want to help the analysand to conform to the values and ideals of its time. He does not want to make of psychoanalysis an instrument at the “service of the goods,” and neither at the service of an unbridled jouissance, but to put it at the service of the singularity of the subject.

While ethics, since Aristotle at least, is mostly concerned with the “cleaning up of desire,” and the affirmation of the Good, Lacan’s ethical act is centered, on the contrary, on the rebellious insurgence of desire, as well as a potentially excessive jouissance. Just as Antigone says to Creon, “that’s how it is because it is that’s how it is,” the ethical act is an act that is at the same time non-negotiable, and potentially in absolute rupture with what the symbolic order requires from the individual. As such, one could even argue that it is through this act that the Lacanian subject asserts its agency. It is at least thanks to this act that the lacanian subject gains a chance to free itself from the desire of the Other, while forcing this Other to recognize the heresy of its desire. Commenting on the radicalness of Lacan’s ethics, Ruti writes, “This is why Lacan can, somewhat counterintuitively, offer queer theory a more robust theory of agency than Butler (and the rest of poststructuralist theory) has been able to devise” (42).

The agency of Lacan’s subject, which is of the same kind as the radical freedom of Antigone in the face of Creon’s Symbolic law, is also what connects Lacan’s ethic to the notion his most fundamental and personal concept, i.e. the Real. The Real, in Lacan’s work, is what
escapes the grasp of the symbolic, what disrupts it from within. This is why the Real, in a sense, can be considered as the foundation of the Lacanian subject’s renewed sense of agency and freedom. It is because the Real of Antigone’s act appears, where her Symbolic submission should have been that the Lacanian subject can affirm a form of ex-sistence (as a form of exit) that goes beyond the limits that has been assigned to it by a given law or a given discourse.

Žižek, in Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, says that the Real that the Lacanian ethical act introduces in the world is like a bone in the throat of the Symbolic that makes it choke. Zizek argues that the Lacanian ethical act is like a “gesture which, by definition, touches the dimensions of some impossible Real. (…) In a situation of a forced choice, the subject makes the “crazy,” impossible choice of, in a way, striking at himself, at what is most precious to himself” (Butler, Laclau, and Žižek, 122). The Lacanian ethical act is not an act that is concerned primarily with the Other (the Good, or any other Universal), nor directly with the others (as is it the case in Affect Theory), but with the construction of a subject that is neither unhooked from the Other, nor enslaved by the Other. It is an act that requires the subject to stay faithful to the truth of its desire while remaining in contact with the Other, even though this contact can be conflictual. Alenka Zupancic, in Ethics of the Real, writes: “Will I act in conformity to what threw me out of joint, will I be ready to reformulate what has hitherto been the foundation of my existence”44 (2000).

However, to affirm one’s own desire, and thus to poke in the name of the Real a hole in the structure of the discourse of the Other (which is normally in charge of defining the limits of reality) does not mean, either, that the desire and the jouissance that triggers this radical act are

not, in one way or another, also the product of the Symbolic. The difficulty, in Lacan's ethics, is to be able to distinguish what, in the subject, belongs to the desire of the Other, and what belongs to the truth of one's desire and, beyond this question, what distinguishes the notion of desire from the notion of jouissance.

It is around this question that the split between anti-relational and relational theorists take place. While for a relational theorist like Butler such a split is deemed impossible insofar as the subject is considered the pure product of the Other, it is what Lacan's notion of the Real posits at the very center of his theory of the subject. Even though, for Lacan, the influence of the Other on the construction of the subject of the unconscious is decisive, this influence could nonetheless be limited. The entry into the Symbolic implies a loss of jouissance that Lacan, following Freud, conceptualizes with the notion of Castration. But this loss of jouissance leaves a remainder that cannot be negativated, and which Lacan called object a (we will see how in chapter one). And it is thanks to this remainder, impossible to integrate into the symbolic that Lacan intends to foster a new subject, a radically anti-humanist subject, but that would be capable, at the same time, to assert a new form of agency, a form of agency that would take into account not only the desire of the subject (and its relation to the Other) but also the very element that connects the two at the level of the body, i.e., jouissance.

Lacan’s Subject of Jouissance
The goal of Lacan, during his late teaching, was to understand how one can learn how to do something with his symptom, with his negativity, and he became capable of putting it at work
against the apparently omnipotent power of the Other. The secret, when it comes to jouissance, is to learn how to manipulate it, in order not to become its slave. For it is only when jouissance is no longer invasive and excessive that the very possibility of desire reopens, and thus the possibility of a Lacanian ethical act for the subject. Such an ethics represents, from my point of view, a possible point of resistance to the Butlerian idea according to which there could be no resistance that does not imply a form of alliance, and thus a form of submission to the dominant power. In a Butlerian framework, indeed, agency is always a function of power, and power a question of Imaginary representations and Symbolic structures. Thus, for Butler and many other relational theorists, the only way to reclaim some form of agency is to harness, through parodic, playful reappropriations, the very power that has shaped the subject. Subversion is always a question of reappropriation and resignification. But it is never directly a question of desire, and neither of jouissance. As a consequence, the option of opting out, unlike in Lacan’s ethics of desire, is never one for Butler, since there is no “outside” of the power structure whatsoever. Ruti, commenting on the limits of Butler’s theory of subversion in comparison to Lacan’s and Žižek, writes,

The crux of the disagreement between Butler and Žižek (or between the Foucault of biopolitics and the Lacan of the Real): if for Butler the subject arises when social interpellation succeeds, for Žižek the subject emerges when interpellation falters; if for Butler the subject consists in a nexus of internalized ideological forces, for Žižek the subject only becomes a “real” subject when it attains a degree of freedom from ideology. (50)
Dwelling on this opposition, constructed by Ruti, this dissertation will argue that Lacan’s notion of ethics offers not only a much more radical theory of agency than Butler and the relational “camp” of queer theory, but offers also a very stimulating critique of the fascination for death and jouissance that haunts the “anti-social turn” in queer theory.

IV. THE SUBJECT OF JOUISSANCE AND THE LATE LACAN

It is well known that Lacan has been accused by Butler's generation of scholars of formalism and a-historicism as if the notion of the big Other that he used to talk about Symbolic structure was a logical structure floating above the fluctuations and violence of history.\footnote{Copjec, Joan. \textit{Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists}. London: Verso, 2015.} Lacan, indeed, through his early emphasis on the Symbolic, was considered to have elevated the structure of patriarchy to the level of a transcendental structure. But this reading of Lacan relies on a profound misunderstanding of Lacan's conception of the Symbolic.

While most of Lacan’s American readers have understood the notion of the Symbolic and the notion of the Other as a closed structure, interpellating the subject from the outside, Lacan always maintained the idea that the Other is fundamentally incomplete, which means that there is no “hegemonic” Other that could be entirely secured and absolute.\footnote{Chiesa, Lorenzo. \textit{The Not-Two: Logic and God in Lacan}. MIT Press, 2016.} Quite on the contrary, by asserting that "there is no Other of the Other" Lacan wanted to emphasis the fact that the Other, just like any form of symbolic order, is always dependent for its sustainability on specific historical configurations, and thus on specific master discourses. Žižek, commenting on this idea in \textit{Contingency}..., writes, "When Lacan emphatically asserts that "there is no big Other," his
point is precisely that there is no a priori formal structure scheme exempt from historical contingencies—there are only contingent, fragile, inconsistent configurations” (310).

A Lacanian New Body
This fragility is all visible, for example, in the relationship of the subject to its body, which is normally characterized by a form of passionate attachment that Freud named “primary narcissism,” and that implies an identification to an external image that is loved and admired.

But the body, in the late Lacan, and more specifically, in Seminar XXIII, Joyce the Sinthome, is no longer related to the “Mirror Stage,” and its link to the presence of a parent that confirms it at a symbolic level. The body, instead, becomes a primitive “having” upon which the subject of the unconscious has to learn how to ground its “being.” For the late Lacan, there is thus a radical inversion between “having” and “being.” It is not, as the discourse of philosophy has argued, since Descartes at least, “being” that comes first, and “having” that comes second, but it is “having,” in the sense of “having a body” that comes first and “being” that comes after.

Commenting on this idea, while emphasizing its importance, Eric Laurent writes,

> Jouissance has to be experienced, to be felt. And it is only after this experience is done that effects of knowledge, themselves related to effects of the signifiers, are produced on the body. (…) For Descartes, what is felt is thinking, through which, thanks to a demonstration (ergo), is given the certainty of being. For Lacan, what is felt is jouissance, starting from the fact that one has a body. And from this body, marked with

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events of jouissance, with the traumas of lalangue, will come afterwards unconscious
effects of meaning that Lacan approaches as effects of knowledge. It is a different kind of
demonstration, an ergo through jouissance. (my translation, 59)

In other words, for the late Lacan, the dialectic of “having” and “being” is completely detached
from the earlier Lacanian logic of the Phallus in which a woman was supposed to “be” the
Phallus for a man who “has” it.48 Opposed to such a logic, anchored in the Phallus, all speaking
beings, for the late Lacan, regardless of their bodily anatomy, “have” a primitive relation to their
bodies in the form of an opaque jouissance, and construct their “being” in relation to this
primitive “having,” or in denial of it. Having is on the side of existence and jouissance, while
“being” is on the side of language and meaning (on the side of the parlote of lalangue). This is
why the body changes status in Lacan’s late teaching and becomes the “speaking body.” The
speaking body is a mystery that is close to the concept of the flesh developed by the late
Merleau-Ponty (un corps sentant, senti). Miller writes,

The sign slices up the flesh, devitalizing and cadaverising it, and then the body becomes
separate from it. In this distinction between body and flesh, the body shows itself to be
something that is able to flesh out the locus of the Other of the signifier as a surface of
inscription. For us, the Cartesian mystery of psychosomatic union is displaced. What is
mysterious, but which remains indubitable, is what results from the symbolic’s purchase
on the body. To put it in Cartesian terms, the mystery is rather that of union between
speech and the body. By dint of this fact of experience, one can say that it belongs to the

48 Vanheule, Stijn, Derek Hook, and Calum Neill. Reading Lacan’s Écrits: From “Signification of the Phallus” to
What the late Lacan has to offer to contemporary field of feminism, gender and queer studies is thus this radical alternative between, on the one hand, a submission to the false mastery of the imaginary, which always implies a form of submission to external gender norms and, more broadly to any kind of ideological discourses. And on the other hand, the choice of the mystery of the speaking body and the ethics of desire that goes with it, i.e. the ethics that aims at learning how to deal with one’s symptom in order to make of it the point of departure of a renewed sense of agency, as well as a renewed point of departure for a new conception of the social bond. Eric Laurent writes, “A choice opens up between conformism as selflessness, and the safeguarding of singularity” (21). It is this choice that chapter one, *Everyone is Queer, which is to say Singular*, opens.

To Speak the Language of the Body

However, this emphasis on singularity over conformism is itself divided into two different approaches. Learning how to speak the language of the body [*lalangue du corps*] implies, for the late Lacan, to be able to write, at a logical level, the inscription of the body in the three registers of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. This point is fundamental, and defines the originality of Lacan’s position. If Lacan is in favor of singularity, it does not mean that he is in favor of the dissolution of the ideal of universality carried by the discourse of science. Quite of the contrary, Lacan never stopped inventing new forms of writing that were, at the same time, universality transmittable, and capable of producing a knowledge of the singular. This is why
Lacan’s ethics of desire, and the kind of writing and thinking that it unlock should not be
confused, as chapter two demonstrates, with the notion of writing and deconstruction developed
by Derrida in *Writing and Difference*, nor with Hélène Cixous’ concept of feminine writing, as
chapter three shows, nor with Georges Bataille’s notion of non-knowledge, as chapter four
exposes. On the contrary, it is a writing—a matheme—that provides what the late Lacan of
*Seminar XXIII* calls “a support for thinking.” And such a support for thinking is necessary as
soon as one accepts that within language, there is no stable meaning inasmuch as there is no
“reference” in the world that could stabilize it. Lacan writes, in his *Seminar XVIII D’un discours
qui ne serait pas du semblant*, “it is for this reason that the reference is only real, because it is
impossible to designate. As a result, one has to construct it. And one construct it only if one is
capable of it” (my translation, 388-389).

More radically, with the vanishing of any form of reference, what vanishes too is the idea
of a master-signifier that could guarantee the “good” functioning of language. As chapter four on
Georges Bataille’s notion of inner experience (and its relation to the impossible) shows, if there
is no such a thing as God, or science, or reason, or law to support the closure of the production of
meaning and its endless drifting along the metaphorical or metonymical chain of signification,
then one needs, as Lacan did, to reclaim the possibility of constructing a knowledge of the
singular, in order to maintain open the possibility of the subject, and through this possibility, the
possibility of an ethics of desire, and an ethics of jouissance. To put it differently, how can a
subject, once impacted in its body by a signifier, which itself has produced a contingent event of
jouissance, can learn how to transform such contingent event into a singular knowledge. And can
this singular knowledge, once built by the subject, can become the ground upon which the newly
born subject (of jouissance) will become capable of asserting its desire—against the desire of the Other.

The Subject of Jouissance and the Speaking Body
At the end of his critique of the Oedipus complex, in *Seminar XVII*, Lacan opposes the discourse of universality, which excludes the subject of jouissance and its excessive and opaque jouissance, to the discourse of psychoanalysis, which tries to elaborate a logical writing of the perturbation that the subject of jouissance introduces in every form of discourse and thus, in every form of structure. The stakes of this distinction is to think anew the relationship between the Symbolic and the body as Real, which is to say the relationship between what the universal discourse of science can grasp of the singularity of the subject, and what necessarily remains out of its grasps, as a leftover. Commenting on this idea, Miller says,

> This leftover is not the failure of psychoanalysis but is strictly speaking what constitutes your worth, if indeed you find out how to transfer it into the state of an oeuvre. It is doubtless in this respect that everyone flounders, stumbles and hobbles along, but this is also what makes for the difference and nobility of each and every one of you. Lacan spoke of the bar on the S of his subject as a trait of “noble bastardy.” (96)

And it is this trait of “noble bastardy,” I would say, that makes of the late teaching of Lacan a very queer one, since it makes of everyone’s floundering and stumbling the ground of each one’s future noble bastardy.


——. *Giving an Account of Oneself*. Vancouver: Crane Library at the University of British Columbia, 2011.


Heidegger, Martin. “Letter on Humanism.” In *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to


CHAPTER ONE: EVERYONE IS QUEER, WHICH MEANS SINGULAR

“Psychoanalysts do not have to join in the choir of mourners who yearn for time past. They can be humanist if they want, Christians, why not, but as analysts they cannot be traditionalists because this reactive, reactionary, conservative position goes against the grain of their act.”

Jacques-Alain Miller

“How does one go about teaching what cannot be taught? This is something Freud ventures into. He thought that all is but a dream and that everyone (if one can say such a thing), that everyone is mad, that is, delusional.”

Jacques Lacan

What's Wrong with Psychoanalysis?
It is a fact; or rather a matter of efficiency: psychoanalysis as Freud invented it, and as Lacan redefined it through his “Return to Freud,” have fallen out of fashion in the United-States. As a medical practice, most American patients (and health care insurance) prefer a drug-based treatment, a behavioral approach grounded in neuroscience, or one of many forms of short term therapy.49 As a paradigm to interpret culture, feminists or other gender or queer scholars or activists prefer the pragmatic angle of identity politics. As an ethical current devoted to fostering

self-knowledge and reflection, post-modern/post-colonial subjects prefer discourses enhancing empowerment. It is as if, since the 1970s at least, a cultural shift took place in the United-States in which Freud’s vision of the human psyche, as well as Lacan’s version of it, have been ceaselessly attacked as something “inefficient,” “un-scientific,” “sexist” and “repressive.” Jacqueline Rose, in *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (1986), summarizes these critiques thus. “First the quarrel over sexual difference (the dispute over the *phallo-centrism* of Freud); then the concept of ideology (femininity as a norm); and now the concept of the death drive which was no less controversial than the other two.” Likewise, Juliette Mitchell, in *Feminine Sexuality*, declared that “Freud, and Lacan after him, are both accused of producing phallocentric theories—of taking man as the norm and woman as what is different therefrom.” Finally, Elisabeth Grosz, in *Lacan: a Feminist Introduction* suggested that “The relations between [Lacan’s] version of psychoanalysis and feminism remain ambivalent. It is never entirely clear whether he is simply a more subtle misogynist than Freud, or whether his reading of Freud constitutes a ‘feminist’ breakthrough.” As a result of these critiques, it is the very hypothesis of the unconscious that most contemporary scholars, social workers and activists have abandoned. But how should we evaluate this move away from Freud and the unconscious? What historical and political context motivated such a move, and what kind of impact does it have on the ways in which questions of identity and subjectivity are addressed by contemporary scholars?

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feminist, gender and queer scholars today?

Eli Zaretsky, in *Political Freud, a History* (2015) suggests that the trend towards introspection that characterized Freud’s work was actually the product of its own place and time (early 20th century Vienna), while the current trend towards empowerment and political identity should be seen as a symptom of the current American hedonistic culture. While Freud invented psychoanalysis at a moment when Europe was still a repressive and patriarchal culture, and capitalism still anchored in a Protestant ethics, psychoanalysis fell out of fashion at a moment when capitalism, led by the economic imperialism of the United States, entered a new phase of its development. Zaretsky writes,

The first and most important of the changes in the spirit of capitalism occurred when narcissism, as the libidinal face of egoism, replaced asceticism, the first component of the spirit of capitalism as described by Weber. For Weber, capitalism required instinctual renunciation, or asceticism, because of the imperative of saving. As we saw, when the mantra shifted from saving to spending, the Protestant ethic faded. By the seventies, the new spirit of capitalism assumed the naturalness of egoism or, as it came to be called, rational choice. (180)

What became important, by the seventies, was thus no longer the critique of the overly repressive nature of culture, as it was the case with Freud, but the pragmatic enhancement of each individual’s happiness.54 As such, it is the narcissism of each individual, and not the nature of the collective super-ego that became the center of theoretic and practical attention.

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54 See the introduction for a longer analysis of this phenomenon.
However, one has to admit that the emphasis on individual happiness did not bring the outcome that one was expecting from it. (I return to this question in the Epilogue). Today we are witnessing—it is all over the news—a strong return of the repressed. On the side of mental health, short-term treatment leaves most patients addicted to chemical substances and literally incapable of dealing in depth with what provoked their mental disorder in the first place. On the side of the social, most institutions (medical, educational, familial) that were guaranteeing the wellbeing of each citizen are slowly disappearing. As a result, an increasing number of people are each day becoming more and more under-educated, underpaid and, as Judith Butler has it, vulnerable. On the side of politics, one could pretty much make the same argument since one of the effects of thirty years of identity politics has been to either normalize previously villainized minorities, or to increase contemporary forms of segregation. In other words, within the paradigm of identity politics, most political victories have also led to increase the number of deadly confrontations, at an Imaginary level, between oppressed minorities, “frozen” in their identity, fighting for their rights, and an oppressive majority, also congealed in a fixed identity, and fighting to maintain the privileges that comes with its “stable” identity. Finally, on the side of ethics, the abandonment of Freud’s unconscious hypothesis has triggered, one could say, the abandonment of any attempt at exposing at a global level the hidden sources of violence and racism that are currently threatening the very functioning of western democracies.

Of course, by underlining these facts, my intention is not to diminish all the political and

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social “victories” that identity politics movements have achieved during the past thirty years. On the contrary, my claim would be more that these political victories have also served as an alibi not to question the egoistic and narcissistic ideology that is at the very core of our current social and economic system. If one takes the case of feminism, for example, it is quite clear that while the feminist movement has achieved many political and economic victories, these victories have served also, one could argue, to undermine all the “feminine” values that do not coincide with the values put at the fore by the capitalist market. This is why the very notion of love, for example, as bell hooks argues in her book Communion: the Female Search for Love (2002), 57 or Mari Ruti in The Summons of Love (2015), 58 was abandoned by the feminist movement as a notion that was desperately entangled with female masochism, and more broadly with a female desire to submit to male authority. Moreover, one could add, as Judith Butler did in Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1991), that the feminist movement, for a very long time, has also left out of its political activism all the “women” that did not fit the definition of what a white heterosexual woman is. 59 Likewise, in the case of the gay and lesbian liberation movement, it is clear that this movement has won very important political victories, which enabled gay and lesbian communities to obtain new rights and new forms of social recognitions, but at the expense of a certain “normalization” of the movement. 60 This is why a queer scholar like David Halperin in Saint Foucault writes,

Coined in 1990 by Teresa de Laurentis expressly in order to disturb the complacency embodied in the routine conjunction “gay and lesbian” (…), “queer theory has since been transformed into an unproblematic, substantive designation for a determinate subfield of academic practice, respectable enough to appear in advertisements for academic jobs and in labels on shelves of bookstore. In any case, the more it verges on becoming a normative academic discipline, the less queer “queer theory” can plausibly claim to be.

(112)

This is why also another queer scholar like Lee Edelman wrote, as a reaction, No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive, a book in which he accused the gay movement of having submitted itself, in order to gain a form of social recognition, to the values of the capitalist market. In other words, each time identity and politics have worked together to improve the situation of a given oppressed minorities, they did so by excluding from their fight all the people that did not fit in the general definition of the group, or by staging as potential enemies all the people that belonged to a more privileged group.

More dramatically, I would argue, they did so by re-essentializing, in one way or another, the concept of identity that they were using, instead of fostering, as Halperin has it, “the function of queer identity as an empty place holder for an identity that is still in progress” (112). This is why, to go beyond such a vicious circle, this chapter argues that it is precisely through a return to psychoanalysis, and even more so, to Lacanian psychoanalysis, that a proper conceptualization and practice of a radically queer identity could emerge. By radically queer identity, I simply

mean an identity that would always be singular and, in the making, rather than an idealized identity that would function as the Imaginary referent of an actual existing human being.

I proceed in this introductory chapter as follows. First, I explain why psychoanalysis in general, as well as Lacanian psychoanalysis in particular, have been so often described as an ideological practice in charge of normalizing possibly deviant subjects. Second, I challenge this negative reading by suggesting that Lacan’s over-all teaching, far from being normative and phallo-centric is, on the contrary, entirely grounded on a notion—the notion of object a—that is making of the Lacanian subject a potentially very queer subject. Taking up Tim Dean’s idea according to which “Lacanian psychoanalysis is a queer theory,” I undertake a close reading of Lacan’s *Seminar X* in order to show how Lacan’s theory of object a does actually provide the right conditions to support the identity of a radically queer subject. Finally, I close the chapter by showing how Butler’s definition of identity, while prefiguring what a queer subject could be, actually failed, from a Lacanian point of view, to access the “true” queerness of a subject, since this queerness is not to be found in the register of the Imaginary but, as this chapter will start to show, in the register of the Real.

I. UNDOING SOME FALSE IDEAS ABOUT PSYCHOANALYSIS

If psychoanalysis in general, and Lacanian psychoanalysis in particular, has become the target of so many critics coming from feminist, post-feminist, gender, and queer scholars in the United-States, it is certainly due to the fact that Freud's American appropriation happened from a pragmatic perspective. To use Bourdieu’s famous expression, this appropriation happened in
agreement with the values of the “homo economicus,” constantly on the lookout to become better adjusted to the capitalist system. The term “homo economicus” designates, in economy, a subject that always acts to obtain the highest possible well-being for him or herself, given available information about opportunities and other constraints (natural and institutional). Under the figure of the “homo economicus,” what is at stake, from a psychoanalytic point of view, is the relation of the subject to pleasure and its beyond—i.e., what Lacan calls jouissance.

The word jouissance is the name that Lacan gave to the fact that human beings, because they speak, and because this ability to speak has effects on the functioning of their drives, makes this functioning slide into what Freud named the death drive. This is why Lacan defines jouissance “an excess of affects,” or as a form of enjoyment that is always on the verge of exceeding the limits assigned to pleasure by Freud’s pleasure principle. In regard to this notion, the question at stake for psychoanalysis is, in which sense this excess should be subsumed under the logic of reason, and in which sense this excess should be taken into account as something that would remain, at a fundamental level, entangled in the death drive and thus, radically queer?62

Is Psychoanalysis Always at The Service of The Master?
Unfortunately, far from being a queer theory, psychoanalysis, since its arrival into the United-States, has become nothing but a forceful tool to maintain the system of power in place. Its major goal, indeed, has been to make sure that the mode of enjoyment of a subject conforms to the ways in which the society is allowing its members enjoyment. Freud’s heritage, upon his landing

62 Commenting on the relationship between the figure of the Homo Economicus and psychoanalysis, Louis Althusser writes, in his famous text Freud and Lacan (1964), “Marx based his theory on the rejection of the myth of the ‘homo Economicus,’ Freud bases his theory on the rejection of the myth of the “homo psychologicus.”” Lacan has understood Freud’s liberating rupture. He has understood it in the fullest sense of the term, taking it rigorously at its word and forcing it to produce its own consequences, without concession or quarter.” (147)
in the United States, as well as through his legacy in the I.P.A (International Psychoanalytical Association), was immediately reworked and reduced by the Anglo-Saxon community of psychoanalysts to the goal of re-adapting the “deviant” subject to the rules and norms of the society, to make of it a happy consumer. The most important figure to foster such a reception of Freud in the United States was Heinz Hartmann. Heinz Hartmann (1894 – 1970) was an Austrian psychiatrist and psychoanalyst born in Vienna. He did his training analysis with Sandor Rado and a second analysis with Freud (which Freud offered to do for free). Freud considered Hartmann one of his best pupils. He presented his first paper on ego in 1937, which became afterward the basis of his development of ego-psychology. Fleeing the Nazis’ regime, Hartmann arrived in the United-States in 1941. He founded, in 1945, with the help of Anna Freud and Ernst Kriss the journal *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, and became the president of the I.P.A in 1950, and received afterward the honorary title of lifetime president of the association.

In *Ego, Psychology and the Problem of Adaptation* (1937) Hartmann argued that psychoanalysis primary task was not to aim at revealing repressed primitive impulses but to repair the structure already there, to make it more efficient, better adjusted to the task. Hartmann posited, within the sphere of the ego, which is normally the place where the sexual demands of the Id and those of the Super-ego meet and battle, “conflict-free ego capacities.” He claimed that every newborn arrived with a built-in ego, waiting only for favorable environmental conditions to spark and grow. Ego defense mechanism became thus an element playing an important role in the whole economy of the psyche seen as an adaptive process. Hartmann proposed the word neutralization to describe the task that ego psychology was reassigning to the psychoanalytic treatment. By neutralization, Hartmann meant the operation through which the ego slowly gains
control over the sexual and aggressive component of the drives.

Likewise, increasing importance given to the D.S.M. (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders), as well as the recent development of C.B.T. (cognitive behavior therapy), should be seen as the radicalization of the aim and goal of ego-psychology through its renewed alliance to science and the logic of capitalism (through its relation to health care insurance issues and efficiency). Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a type of psychotherapy that focuses on changing unhelpful cognitive behaviors through specific therapeutic interventions. As such, CBT is a "problem-focused" and "action-oriented" form of therapy used to treat specific problems related to specific mental disorder. It is thus different from a psychoanalytic approach to psychotherapy where the therapist looks for the unconscious meaning behind the behaviors in order to help the patient to become aware of it. Instead, in CBT, the therapist's role is to assist the client in finding and practicing effective strategies to decrease symptoms of the disorder. Consequently, with C.B.T, psychoanalysis is being reduced to the question: what could be the most efficient and the cheapest way to put back to work a “deviant” or “pathological” subject? How can his/her symptom be cured as a detached piece, which is to say without having to question the whole unconscious system that has generated it? As such, it becomes obviously easy to see this kind of approach to psychoanalysis as nothing but the most refined and recent instrument developed by society to control its undesirable or even potentially dangerous subjects.

63 The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) is a reference book on Mental Disorders, published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). It offers a standard criteria for the classification of mental disorders. Many clinicians and researchers working with health insurance companies, pharmaceutical companies and policy makers use it. As such, the DSM has generated controversy and criticism over the validity and reliability of its diagnostic categories; its reliance on superficial symptoms; or its use of artificial dividing lines between "normality" and mental disorder; as well as possible cultural bias concerning the medicalization of human distress.

It is clearly against this deviation of psychoanalysis that Michel Foucault, in *Madness and Civilization (1961)*\(^{65}\), as well as in *History of Sexuality, Vol I (1978)*\(^{66}\), took a stand. Advocating in favor of an epistemological as well as an historical approach to madness and sexuality, Foucault wanted to criticize the “scientist” as well as the “moralist” turn that psychology and psychiatry took through their increasing alliance with political power. He praised, on the contrary, psychoanalysis for having been the only discipline that tried to unveil the secret relationship between mental health and power.\(^{67}\) Foucault writes, in *Madness and Civilization*, “It is not psychology that is involved in psychoanalysis: but precisely an experience of unreason that has been psychology’s meaning, in the modern world, to mask.” (198)

Unfortunately, Foucault’s reception in the United States (by feminists, post-feminists, gender and queer scholars) used his critique of psychology and psychiatric power to criticize psychoanalysis in general.\(^{68}\) Forgetting, by doing so, that Foucault wrote, in *Madness and Civilization*, that psychoanalysis was precisely not to be confused with psychology. Reciprocally, one could argue that many Anglo-American scholars used Foucault to mask, once again, the

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\(^{67}\) See, also, on this question, Winnubst, Shannon. “The Missing Link: Reading Foucault and Bataille together” in *A Companion to Foucault*, Edited by Christopher Falzon, Timothy O’Leary and Jana Sawicki, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2013, 453-471. In this article, Shannon Winnubst argues that Bataille’s conception of eroticism influenced Foucault’s critic of capitalism, and more importantly, his critique of the figure of the “homo economicus”—a figure that is totally opposed to the figure of the erotic man whose behavior is oriented towards expenditure, and not conservation.

experience of unreason that psychoanalysis was supposed to put forward. Instead, those scholars misread psychoanalysis as an instrument of subjection created by the modern state to replace a dying class of priests. As a result of this very specific reception, all the feminist, gender and queer scholars who tried to think about sexuality outside the framework of gender identity have taken psychoanalysis as one of their most important enemies. Gay and lesbian studies, for example, saw in Freud’s description of homosexuality a way to reduce it to perversion. Eve Sedgwick, for example, in her now famous book *Epistemology of the Closet (1990)*, argued that the binary and simplistic opposition between heterosexuality and homosexuality, and thus between genital love and perversion, was just a way to shut down thinking, and with thinking, new possibilities of existence. Likewise, many feminist and queer scholars saw in Freud and Lacan’s emphasis on the Phallus a way to reduce femininity to a masquerade, as well as a way to reduce queer and *trans* people to potential perverts or psychotics. In other words, feminist, gender and queer scholars saw in psychoanalysis nothing but a “religion of castration,” i.e. the new social institution that was trying to reject in the realm of the pre-Oedipus any sexual orientation (or any mode of enjoyment/jouissance) that was not aligned with the goal of patriarchy and capitalism. Jan Campbell, in *Arguing with the Phallus (2000)*\(^2\) writes,

> It seems then, for psychoanalysis, that the only positive alternative to our unconscious

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negativity is the law. Return from abject narcissism and borderline psychosis means the upholding of Oedipal Law, and the ethical and religious principles that accompany this kind of patriarchal and colonial society. From Freud to Lacan and Kristeva, the oedipal law is our only hope of a “civilized” society; without it we are left to the ravages of our narcissistic and ‘primitive’ imaginaries that occludes ethics and difference with uncontainable aggressive identification. (Campbell, 2)

But in what sense can those critical judgments about Freud and Lacan be applied to the French reception of Freud, and to the way in which Lacan conceived his “Return to Freud”?

Lacan’s Return to Freud and Its Political Implications
Freud famously said that the real battle for psychoanalysis would not take place in a country, like America, that would accept it too easily but, in a country, and a culture that would reject it violently at first. And he added, five years later, in On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement (1914) that “Among European countries, France has… shown itself the least disposed to welcome psycho-analysis.” (32) And it is true that, at first, the medical reception of Freud in France was not very friendly.73 But this rejection did not prevent Freud from finding in the Princess Marie de Bonaparte one of his most important supporters;74 to creating the

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Psychoanalytic Society of Paris (PSP) as early as 1925;\textsuperscript{75} and for France to become, right after the Second World War, a very active center for psychoanalysis, with personalities as important as Henri Ey, Serge Leclair, Daniel Lagache, Francoise Dolto and, of course, Jacques Lacan.\textsuperscript{76} However, to present the history of the reception of Freud in France under such a positive light would be misleading and reductive in many ways since, as Sherry Turkle brilliantly demonstrated it in her book \textit{Psychoanalytic Politics} (1978), what is most essential to understand is that psychoanalysis entered France, first and foremost, through the mediation of artists and writers and that psychoanalysis became, afterward, for many leftist, Marxist and feminist movements, one of their most important theoretical tools.\textsuperscript{77} “Since May 68” writes Turkle, “French Marxism, French Feminism, French Anti-psychiatry, and French Psychoanalysis have become so tied up with one another that they resemble a complex knot—it is sometimes hard to tell where one strand leaves off and the other begins.” (8)

One of the best examples of such a complex knot could be found in the MLF (Women’s Liberation Movement) founded by Antoinette Fouque.\textsuperscript{78} The MLF was created in May 1968. At the beginning, it was named \textit{Feminism, Marxism, and Action} and was trying to bring together a Marxist approach to class struggle and feminism. As such, the movement was split in different tendencies. One was centered on a Marxist tendency that emphasized the economic component of women’s alienation. A lesbian tendency was supported by Monique Wittig who tried to


\textsuperscript{78} See Antoinette Fouque, \textit{There are 2 Sexes, Essays in Feminology}, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.
abolish the use of the word woman, as well as the notion of gender in her book *The Straight Mind*. And finally, as a reaction to these previous tendencies, a third, *Psych et Po*, was more focused on the psychoanalytical dimension of the fight (largely inspired by Lacanian psychoanalysis), led by Antoinette Fouque, and who advocated for the creation of a “feminine subject” that would not try to empower women as if they were men, but to empower the “feminine” (I will come back to this question in Chapter Three: *To Believe Weeping*). As such, *Psych et Po* chose to focus on the psychosexual dimension of women’s oppression by trying to bring the “feminine” into existence through the creation of autonomous female spaces (where women could explore their sexualities outside the male gaze), and the invention of a kind of writing that could defy the ordering of Logos, that is to say, a writing that could undermine the naming and ordering of what Derrida described under the term of Pha-logo-centrism (for a precise definition of the notion, see Chapter Two, *The Purloined Lacan*).\(^79\)

We are thus confronted with a very interesting split between France and America. While psychoanalysis has been taken as the best new support to the existing institutions in America, it has been taken as the best ally to left-wing political movements in France. Reciprocally, while most forms of left thinking in the United States have taken the form of an attack against psychoanalysis, most left-wing theories in France have been incorporating psychoanalysis as one of their major tools toward a new form of critical politics. But how shall we understand the position of Lacanian psychoanalysis in the coordinates of this debate?

\(^79\) For more details on this question, see Chapter Three on the notion of the Not-All, and the notion of feminine writing as developed by Hélène Cixous and its relation to the MLF and to Lacanian psychoanalysis.
Opposed to the conservative reduction of Freud generated by the heralds of ego-psychology, Lacan, through his “Return to Freud,” interrogated and reframed the relations that Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalysis entertained with the structure of the patriarchal family, and more specifically with the function and the authority that such a structure attributes to the figure of the father. Simply put, Freud’s theory of the Oedipus complex was either abandoned by post-Freudians with a feminist twist and replaced by an exploration of the pre-Oedipal, non-verbal stage of infancy (Klein), or by a psychoanalysis of the will to power (Adler, Horney). Alternatively, it was reinforced by the more conservative branch of Freudianism represented by Anna Freud, Heinz Hartmann, and more broadly the supporters of ego-psychology. In other words, each early critique of Freud turned out to be, primarily, a critique of Freud’s conception of the Oedipus complex, and more specifically, of the function that Freud had attributed to the father. This place and function were either too strong for the feminists or not strong enough for the supporters of ego-psychology. But how shall we situate Lacan’s “Return to Freud” in the coordinates of this debate?

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II. LACAN’S EARLY DISCONTENT WITH PSYCHOANALYSIS

While Lacan is all too often reduced to his so-called structuralist period by most Anglo-American scholars\(^81\)—which goes from *Seminar XI* to *Seminar XIX* (1963-1972)—and thus considered less “critical” than, for example, Derrida's deconstructive post-structuralism, Lacan's teaching was not a typical structuralist one, as this Chapter will start to suggest, and as Chapter Two will demonstrate in detail. From the start, and all the more in his late and last teaching, Lacan developed a unique form of post-structuralism that can only be grasped on the condition of not reducing his teaching to a systematic construction but, rather, to see it as an open construction that never stops criticizing itself. Without going as far as Lacan’s late teaching, it is possible to locate Lacan’s opposition to the idea that the unconscious was reducible to a structure in Lacan's first opposition to the structuralist “ideology,” as well as his opposition to ego-psychology, in the first version of the “The Mirror Stage” (1936)\(^82\) published as a part of his text “The Family Complexes.”

The Oedipus Complex and Its Historical Crisis

“The Family Complex in the Formation of the Individual” (1938) is the first important psychoanalytical text written by Lacan. He published it in a French Encyclopedia directed by

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\(^82\) The original version of the presentation given by Lacan at the *International Congress of Psychoanalysis* in Marienbad has been lost. The best account that still exists of this paper is the description of the “mirror” stage that Lacan gave in his first published article, “The Family Complexes,” and then in its final rewriting in 1949 called “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience”. For both of these texts see, Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, Trans, Bruce Fink, Heloise Fink and Russell Grigg, New York: Norton & Company, 2002.
Henri Wallon. In agreement with the early Freud, Lacan emphasizes the importance of the agency of culture in the formation of the human family, and pointed to the fact that human life, as such, always involves “a paradoxical economy of instinct” (5). The family, according the early Lacan, is not the expression of nature but a cultural institution whose goal is to conserve and transmit certain social structures through what Freud called the Oedipus complex. The notion of the complex is quite refined in Lacan’s text. Suffices it to say that it intends to name, on the one hand, all the social rules and Symbolic structures that organize the institution of the family and, on the other, all the ways in which these rules and structures are incorporated at a singular level by each individual belonging to a given family. The idea of complex is thus at the same time a form and a set of activities. The complex is a form in the sense that it represents a certain fixed reality within the development of the institution of the family, itself marked by a certain economical and historical configuration. The complex is also composed of a certain set of activities that are supposed to ensure the repetition of these fixed and dated forms of the family institution, as well as the lived emotions attached to these forms. Lacan writes,

It is this that complex defines, that it reproduces a certain reality of ambiance, and for two reasons. 1) Its form represents this reality in what is objectively distinct at a given stage of psychic development; this stage specifies its origins. 2) Its activity repeats in lived experience the reality thus fixed, each time that some experiences occur that would demand a superior objectification of this reality; these experiences specify the conditioning of the complex. (3)

83 Henri Wallon was a philosopher (agrégé de philosophie), a doctor, a politician and a professor at the College de France. He was also the son of the historian and politician Henri Wallon who played a major part in the creation of the Third Republic. It is also from him that Lacan borrowed his concept of the “Mirror Stage.”
But if the fixed forms that a complex is supposed to repeat at a subjective level are also said to be historical forms that keep evolving throughout history, it means that those fixed forms evolve through moments of crisis and are able to reach what Lacan calls, in a very Hegelian manner, “superior forms objectification.” However, it is important to underscore here, these moments of crisis are precisely what the complex is constantly trying to avoid since the form of the complex is, normally fixed. However, by emphasizing the possible evolution of the form of the complex through a dialectical confrontation of the individual to the historical limits of a given form of the family, Lacan was already departing from Freud’s universal conception of the Oedipus complex, and from the adaptive position defended by Anna Freud and ego-psychology.

Three smaller complexes organize the Family Complex as a whole. These three complexes, which are not without rapport to Freud’s theory of libidinal stages are, however, not the direct expression of it since, contrary to Freud’s theory, these three complexes are not, for Lacan, unlike for Freud, the expression of an internal excess of the partial drives but the product of a fundamental deficiency. The notion of deficiency, when used by Lacan, refers to the idea that the development of a human being is grounded in the incapacity in which he/she is to survive without the presence of his/her parents, and without the existence of society. In other words, for the early Lacan, what is universal in human experience is not, contrary to what Freud thought, the Oedipus complex and its link to an overly powerful father but, quite on the contrary, the state of deficiency in which every infant finds itself. Commenting on this point, this deficiency is also, for Lacan, what generates the most important element that is at the core of the
notion of complex, namely the unconscious function that the imago plays in it.\textsuperscript{84} (14) As we will see, the complex as a whole is organized by Lacan in three smaller complexes that are all centered on one type of imago.

The first complex isolated by Lacan is the \textit{weaning complex}. The weaning complex is the transposition, at a psychic level, of the feeding relationships between the mother (or the caretaker) and the baby. It thus represents the primordial form of relation between the individual and the family institution. It is what constitutes the most fundamental form of the \textit{maternal imago}. What is at stake in this complex is the possibility of turning a \textit{vital tension} (the need for the breast) into a \textit{mental intention} (the capacity to lose the breast), i.e., to turn a feeling of frustration and loss into a sense of control and freedom. If the loss is accepted, the infant can pass onto the next stage, but if the loss is somehow refused, it is what will open the way to a certain \textit{appetite for death}, which is to say what will lead to the emergence of what Freud called, in \textit{Beyond the Pleasure Principle} (1922), the death drive. This appetite for death, which is a consequence of the direct refusal to lose the \textit{maternal imago}, expresses itself in the form of an oceanic desire to go back into the womb of the mother (which becomes death itself).\textsuperscript{85} Or, perhaps in a more sublimated fashion, the weaning complex can be said to be at the origin of the “nostalgia for wholeness” that is at the foundation of all the metaphysical systems that try to represent the “mirage of a universal harmony,” (23) or “the mystical abyss of affective

\textsuperscript{84} Gustav Jung coined the word \textit{imago} in his work \textit{Psychology of the Unconscious} (1912) to describe how people form their personality and apprehend others through multiple identifications. Freud, the very same year, used it too to name the journal he just had created with Hanns Sachs and Otto Rank. And when he used it in his own writing, as in “The Dynamics of Transference” (1912), he reduced its meaning to an erotic fixation related to traits belonging to the primary object.

\textsuperscript{85} This reading of the death drive as a desire to return into the womb of the mother could be linked to Romain Rolland’s notion of oceanic feeling, as Freud talks about it at the beginning of \textit{Civilization and its Discontents} (1930).
fusion” (24). The “death drive” is thus not, for Lacan, the direct expression of a drive but the result of a “congenital insufficiency” (24) that drives humans towards their own death. If this “congenital insufficiency” is not corrected by the effect of the Family complex, it leaves the individual vulnerable to the attraction of death (which will become, in Lacan’s later teaching, the individual’s desire to lose himself in jouissance). Jacques-Alain Miller, commenting on this idea in his text “A Critical Reading of the Family complex” (2005) writes:

> Everything that is a fantasy of death, a call to death, even to suicide, is to be found in the clinic, and Lacan will not deny this later -, as soon as it is a question of that, it is the mother, the maternal imago which comes to give logic to that. The mother rules over – it is his idea – the primitive loss, that of the breast. The maternal imago is called up again in the subject, with a variable intensity, each time that a loss of jouissance takes place. (13)

To fight against the morbidity contained in the maternal imago Lacan created his second complex, called the intrusion complex.

The intrusion complex is the generalization of the feeling of jealousy that appears within the oldest children of a family when a younger sibling is born. The imago at stake in this complex is not the maternal imago, but the imago of the fellow human (semblable). Through the notion of the imago of the fellow human, what Lacan wants to emphasis is how, in the mental life of human beings, the image of the other is constantly mixed or assimilated within the narcissistic image of the individual. As such, Imaginary relations are bound to generate feelings of jealousy and rivalry inasmuch as they imply an identification with the person that we are in competition with, or in love with. This is why Lacan links the appetite for death in relation to the
maternal imago, and the aggressiveness or violence against the rival in the intrusion complex. To explain further this link, which presupposes the idea of affective identification, Lacan goes back, once again, to his theory of the “Mirror Stage.” In this stage, the infant anticipates, through the recognition of his own image in the mirror, a sense of unity of his person that he has not yet acquired. Even though this sense of unity and mastery is purely Imaginary it does provide to the infant a sense of affective unity which can be taken as the proper explanation of what Freud called imprecisely, affective identification. This “affective unity,” achieved through an identification to an image, is thus deeply narcissistic and, as such, excluding of all others. This is why the complex of intrusion, as well as the “Mirror Stage” are both calling for a third complex which could provide a way to organize and pacify what would otherwise constantly sway in between a “non-violent” but deeply masochistic appetite for death, and an aggressive and violent sense of rivalry. This third complex, which is supposed to introduce a higher organization through a possible sublimation of all the negative dimensions of the two prior complexes, is the complex of Oedipus.

The Fragility of the Paternal Imago
Lacan’s entire interpretation of Freud’s Oedipus complex revolves around the notion of a paternal imago developed as a counter point to the value attributed to the father by Freud in the Oedipus complex. In the classical Freudian version of the Oedipus complex, the fantasy of castration is only attached to the masculine side of sexuation. Only boys, indeed, can be threatened with castration by their father if they do not manage to take control over their premature genital desire. It is thanks to this “fear of castration” that the first repression of
sexuality can take place in Freud’s theory and that a process of sublimation, through the incorporation of the *imago of the father*, can take place (which in turn generates the *Ego Ideal*). On the female side, on the contrary, since it appears to be castrated from the start, the fantasy of castration is replaced by Freud by its exact opposite: the *penis-envy complex*. But this dissymmetry between men and women when it comes to the fantasy of castration needs to be corrected according to Lacan. The origin of the fantasy of castration should not be located in the threatening presence of the father but as a consequence of a possible return of the *imago of the mother* and its subjective correlate: the fragmented body, which is to say, as a “gender inclusive” reaction against a possible regression to a stage prior to the weaning complex. As such, one could argue that Lacan’s rereading of Freud’s complex of castration aligns him with an analyst like Karen Horney, who proposed to reread Freud’s anxiety of castration in terms of the fear of the maternal imago (as a devouring vagina). Castration is thus no longer centered on the penis for Lacan but becomes the symbol of the body as being fundamentally fragmented. Miller adds: “Castration treated as a fantasy is nothing other than the partialization, on a special part of the body, of these fantasies, which are fundamentally always fantasies of dislocation, of dismemberment” (14). The notion of fantasy, at this stage of Lacan’s teaching, relates to the one of narcissism. Narcissism is the “glue” that holds the detached pieces of the fragmented body together, and the fantasy of castration is what reveals the precariousness of the narcissistic ego and the fragmented body that sustains it. In other words, narcissism, as a narcissistic function, is

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86 For a full analysis of the penis envy complex, see Chapter Three, first Part.

87 See, Lacan, Jacques. “Passage à l’acte et Acting Out,” in *Seminar X*, Lacan writes, “Here is the possibility of this phantasy of the fragmented body which some of you have recognised, have encountered, in schizophrenics. This does not for all that allow us to decide on the determinants of this phantasy of the fragmented body which those of whom I am speaking have seen being outlined in the schizophrenic” (Gallagher, 80).
what renders necessary the function of the *paternal imago*. The function of the *paternal imago* is what is in charge of causing a split between the object that one desires and the object that one identifies with. This splitting, which announces the split that causes the Phallus in the theory of the Name-of-the-Father, must be in place in order to prevent the appearance of anxiety attached to the maternal imago when the emergence of genital desire brings it back. The paternal imago stands, at the same time, as an obstacle, and as a model that transgresses such an obstacle. Lacan writes, “it [the *paternal imago*] appears to the ego at the same time as the support of its defense and the example of his triumph.” It is also what enables the subject to substitute for the object of his desire (the maternal imago) a different one—the “paternal object,” which is not an object of desire but an “object of identification.” Miller, in his commentary of Lacan’s text, writes, “The value of this reprise of the Oedipus complex is to make us pass from the deadly maternal other, from the semblable as other which is also deadly [the imago of the fellowman], to a sublimated other. In other words, without the *paternal imago*, no sublimation, and without sublimation, no separation from the deadly *maternal imago*.” This articulation of the notion of sublimation (of the deadly imago of the mother) with the one of the paternal imago is the kernel of Lacan’s early Return to Freud. It is so central that Lacan did not even hesitate to make the psychic development of the individual depend on it.

To Think the Paternal Imago Outside Patriarchy

However, it does not follow from Lacan’s emphasis on the importance of the paternal imago in the structuring of the psyche, that his rereading of Freud’s complex should be considered conservative. On the contrary, as early as the 40s, Lacan was saying that,
I am not one to bewail the so-called loosening of family ties. Is it not significant that the family should have become reduced to its biological group to the degree that it integrated the most advanced forms of cultural progress? But I do think that a great many psychological consequences follow the social decline of the paternal imago. Whatever its future this decline constitutes a psychological crisis. It may even be that the emergence of psychoanalysis itself is linked to this very crisis. (Gallagher)

For Lacan, if there is a decline of the ties of the family, this decline does not necessarily mean something negative. Quite the contrary, the reduction of the size of the family has brought with it many cultural achievements. But these achievements should not hide the fact that alongside the decline of the patriarchal structure of the family, another decline is happening, the decline of the paternal imago. In other words, one should not be confused and read too rapidly Lacan's "Return to Freud," because Lacan is not linking what worries him in the decline of the family ties to the decline of the figure of the father; and even less so to the decline of patriarchy. More prudently, Lacan is warning those who are focusing their attention on this decline to look at a more problematic decline, the decline of the paternal imago as a symbolic function. What Lacan
deplores is the crumbling of the power or the effectiveness of the *paternal imago*, and not the crumbling of the patriarchal form of the family, which means that Lacan is warning us against the decline of the Symbolic supports without which there can be no separation from the *maternal imago*. It is, for example, because the *paternal imago* was already not properly functioning in Freud's Vienna that neurotic and psychotic subjects came to seek help from him, and that psychoanalysis was invented. It was perhaps also invented, Lacan dares to suggest, thanks to the humiliation of the figure of the father, and the mockery of his authority.

It is the kernel of the majority of neuroses—this must be recognized as the great neurosis of our time. Our experience leads us to designate its principle determinant in the personality of the father which is always lacking in some way or another, whether he be absent or humiliated, divided or a sham. It is this lack which, as explained by our theory of the Oedipus complex, exhausts instinctual energy and vitiates the dialectic of sublimation. (Gallagher, 56)

If the *paternal imago* is in decline, if it no longer performs its task as efficiently as before, providing the right Imaginary and Symbolic support to enable a dialectical process of sublimation for the child, it is because the modern father is fundamentally humiliated. It is, one could say, because the imago of the father has been fractured, just as in *La Trilogie des

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Opposed to such a negative reading, Bachofen argued in *Mother Right: an Investigation of the Religious and Juridical Character of Matriarchy in the Ancient World* (1861) that even if matriarchy preceded patriarchy, the passage from the former to the later was not the mark of a defeat but, quite on the contrary, the very symbol of humankind’s progress. Matriarchy, indeed, was not the symbol of a primitive communism for Bachofen but, in a quite misogynist vein, the very symbol of an overly powerful, threatening and irrational Nature. This is why Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), the father of French sociology, ended up arguing, in *Leçon de Sociologie physique des moeurs et du droit* (1893), that the patriarchal structure were, in fact, in danger themselves of being replaced by the structure of the bourgeois/conjugal family. These structures, for Durkheim, were supposed to be weaker than the ones of the larger patriarchal families, and thus supposed to be responsible for the creation of the modern hyper-individualistic personality, and for the progressive destruction of the social links. See, for more details on the question, Roudinesco, Elisabeth. “Patriarchat,” in *Dictionnaire de la psychanalyse*, Fayard, Paris, 1997, 771-772.
Coïffontaine of Paul Claudel, that the very possibly of interrogating the mechanics of its efficiency and the nature of its power has become possible.\textsuperscript{90} If Freud was able to invent psychoanalysis, it is because the very imago that was sustaining the process of socialization, starting with the imago of God, had already started to crumble, to vacillate.

It has often been commented upon that Freud, through the invention of the unconscious, asserted the third major blow to human narcissism.\textsuperscript{91} The first one being the one made by Copernicus, decentering the earth from its center position; the second the one made by Darwin, re-inscribing the human species in the history of biology; and finally the one asserted by Freud, depriving mankind of its most precious ability, consciousness, and even more than consciousness, agency. However, for Lacan, these blows had not been correctly situated. To become interesting, one has to connect them with the social context in which they have taken place. During the patriarchal years, any man, no matter how gifted or stupid he was, could incarnate the function as long as the Symbolic order could secure his authority. Men living during 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, on the contrary, were starting to lose some of the power that the social structure had granted them, becoming progressively vulnerable, and thus potentially


\textsuperscript{91} See, Freud, Sigmund. \textit{Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis} (Parts I and II), in the Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XV (1915-1916). The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, London. Freud writes, “Humanity has in the course of time had to endure from the hands of science two great outrages upon its naive self-love. The first was when it realized that our earth was not the center of the universe, but only a tiny speck in a world-system of a magnitude hardly conceivable; this is associated in our minds with the name of Copernicus, although Alexandrian doctrines taught something very similar. The second was when biological research robbed man of his peculiar privilege of having been specially created, and relegated him to a descent from the animal world, implying an ineradicable animal nature in him: this transvaluation has been accomplished in our own time upon the instigation of Charles Darwin, Wallace, and their predecessors, and not without the most violent opposition from their contemporaries. But man's craving for grandiosity is now suffering the third and most bitter blow from present-day psychological research which is endeavoring to prove to the ego of each one of us that he is not even master in his own house, but that he must remain content with the veriest scraps of information about what is going on unconsciously in his own mind. We psycho-analysts were neither the first nor the only ones to propose to mankind that they should look inward; but it appears to be our lot to advocate it most insistently and to support it by empirical evidence which touches every man closely.”
That at least was the thesis that Lacan defends in this early text, and that he takes from Emile Durkheim's analysis of the history of family and his theory of the decline of the father in the reduced form of the bourgeois family. This thesis has been proven wrong by many recent studies, underlining the relativity of the patriarchal form of the family in human history.

However, if the decline of the paternal imago is a problem for Lacan, it is only insofar as it opens up the space for the questioning of the genitalization of the Oedipus complex as such, which means only inasmuch as it allows questioning Freud's assertion according to which the Oedipus complex is universal. In order not make the mistake of reducing the *paternal imago*, as a function, to its historical incarnation in the patriarchal form of the family, one has to let go of the idea that the only way for the paternal imago to perform its function is to take the form of the patriarchal family. Lacan writes,

> The whole argument of this study is to demonstrate that the Oedipus complex presupposes a certain typical structure in the psychological relations between the parents, and we have in particular insisted upon the twofold role played by the father in representing authority and being at the center of the revelation of sexuality. It is to this very ambiguity of his imago, as the incarnation of repression and the catalyst of an essential access to reality, that we have related the twofold progress typical in our culture, of a certain tempering of the super-ego and of a highly evolutionary orientation of the personality. (Gallagher, 78)

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92 A terrifying illustration of this idea can be found in the “Incels” (involuntary celibate) movement that emerged recently in Canada. See, for example, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/minority-report/201804/the-incel-movement.
If Lacan, in this passage, condemns the Oedipus complex, he nonetheless wants to save a part of its structure. What he eliminates is the supposed universalism of the preeminence of the father, as well as the political nostalgia that goes with it (this sour desire to return to the old forms of the father, being in the form of a restauration of the power of God, or in the one of nationalism or populism, as we are witnessing now). Contrary to this backward trend, Lacan, already in the 30s, was trying to extract from Freud's Oedipus complex what was not linked to Freud's masculinist bias. In other words, what Lacan is already trying to do, here, is to link the deadly effect of the maternal imago, to the function of the paternal imago. To put it in the form of a question: how is it possible to maintain the functioning of the paternal imago, in order not to be absorbed in the maternal imago, while giving up the historical authority that permitted its incarnation? In other words, how should the question of the afterlife of the paternal imago be approached, once it has entered the era of its decline? And why would Lacan’s answer to this question could still be of interest for contemporary gender and queer theorists?

III. QUEER THEORY MEETS LACAN

Right at the opening of his chapter “Lacan Meets Queer Theory,” in his book *Beyond Sexuality*, Tim Dean asks himself this question: how could a dialogue between Lacan, or a French Lacanian, and Queer scholars be envisioned? Of course, Dean asked that question before the “antisocial turn” in queer theory had happened. As such, this question, which will be mine too for the time being, could thus be rephrased as: how could a dialogue between Gender and Queer

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94 See Introduction for a precise description of this debate, and an analysis of its theoretical stakes.
relational theorists, such as Judith Butler, and Lacan can be envisioned?

On the French side of the dialogue, Jacques-Alain Miller, in a text called “Pure Psychoanalysis, Applied Psychoanalysis,” argued that young American analysts are in need of a theoretical change within their practice, even though they are not ready or well equipped to understand the last teaching of Lacan. On the side of the university, he thinks that most American scholars, who are studying Lacan within the field of Critical and Social theory, like Tim Dean for example, are strange Lacanians, for they want to read Lacan without undergoing a psychoanalysis themselves. Yet, on the American side, the situation seems slightly different, since there is a real curiosity, claims Dean, at least on the behalf of certain Queer scholars, but this curiosity is being pushed away by French Lacanians. Here is how Tim Dean talks about the situation,

I discovered to my disappointment at an International Conference on Sexuation (in New York City, April 1997, where I first presented a preliminary version of this chapter), that for their part Lacanian analysts proved far less willing to engage queer theory than I, perhaps naively, had anticipated. Yet spurred on by my conviction that psychoanalysis is a queer theory. I’ve persisted with this imaginary encounter, a dialogue between—to invoke Yeats—self and antiself. (215)

Although Dean, as a queer scholar, is convinced that psychoanalysis is a queer theory, French Lacanians have not been interested so far in furthering the relationship between the two. But why could psychoanalysis, and more specifically, a Lacanian approach to psychoanalysis be said to be

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95 Jacques-Alain Miller, “Pure Psychoanalysis, Applied psychoanalysis,” Trans. by Barbara P. Fulks, in lacanian ink 20, (Spring 2002), 4-43.
queer? To answer this question, Dean underlines the fact that, for Lacan as well as for Queer scholars like Gayle Rubin in *Thinking Sex: Note for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,*\(^6\) the question of sexuality (and sexual relationships) needs to be problematized outside the terms of gender. Indeed, Lacan’s account of sexuality “reveals desire as determined not by the gender of object-choice, but by the object a, which remains largely independent of gender” (212). From there Dean argues that such a Lacanian approach of object through object a could in turn be used to think anew contemporary identity politics in a queer way. But what is object a, and in what relation does it stand with the subject?

To start exploring these questions, which will guide the rest of this dissertation, I will use Lacan’s *Seminar X on Anxiety* where he rearticulates the notions of desire and jouissance through the invention of object a.

Lacan’s Object a, and the Birth of the Subject of Jouissance

*Seminar X, on Anxiety* [1962-1963] accomplishes in Lacan’s teaching a major conceptual shift. In it, Lacan takes his distance from Freud’s myth of the Oedipus complex in order to think anew the question of castration and its relation to the phenomenon of anxiety.\(^7\) While Freud, in *Totem and Taboo,* grounded the anxiety of castration in the threatening presence of the primitive father, Lacan, in *Seminar X,* relocates this threat in the biological functioning of the male organ and, through it, to object a. By undertaking this shift Lacan, as Jacques-Alain Miller suggested in his


presentation of the Seminar, revolutionized his own thinking. Lacan affected a passage from a Copernican system of thought, centered on the concept of the Name-of-the-Father, to an Einsteinian system of thought, with multiple Names-of-the-Father. Seminar X is thus a very important moment in Lacan’s teaching. This seminar introduces for the first time the idea that the function of the father, as the bearer of the law within the Oedipus complex, is now disappearing, and that what is taking its place is the Real of the body. As such, it makes explicit that Lacan’s teaching is not just reducible to Freud’s Oedipus complex but is also a very thorough critique of it. This Seminar is thus a very important one in order to understand why the teaching of Lacan cannot be reduced to a formalization of the Freudian concepts, which is, unfortunately what is most often remembered of the teaching of Lacan.

Taking his distance from Freud, Lacan is redefining Freud’s entire network of concepts by making of them a particular case of a broader function. It is as if Lacan were starting to see in Freud’s Oedipus complex, not the universal structure of the human psyche but a particular case elevated in the master’s discourse to the level of a universal. As such, Seminar X represents the first step towards a deconstruction of the Oedipus complex, as well as the first step towards the construction of a new form of psychoanalysis that would erase the normative aspects of Freudian psychoanalysis and its potentialities for segregation (between the “normal,” and the non-normal).

Contrary to the classical approach of anxiety by the tenet of ego-psychology, or the new approach of it by CBT, Lacan, in Seminar X, does not consider anxiety as a malfunction in need of a treatment. On the contrary, Lacan wants to return to a philosophical approach of anxiety in

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order to understand the place that anxiety occupies in the functioning of the human psyche. Jacques-Alain Miller, in his introductory lesson to this Seminar, writes: “Under the title of Anxiety, is a book where anxiety, properly speaking, is not a trouble, where it is not about treating it, but where what is at stake is to give to it its right place, its conceptual place, with a reference to Kierkegaard’s concept of anxiety” (my translation).100

In The Concept of Anxiety (1844)101 Kierkegaard defines anxiety as the “dizziness of freedom,” which itself is related to the Christian notion of sin. To take just one famous Biblical example, one could say that it is precisely because Adam knew that God had forbidden him to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil but remained “free” to do it that anxiety emerged in him. It is because Adam was free to make the wrong decision (free to decide to eat the fruit) that he was possibly a sinner, and it is because Adam was also aware of that and then of guilt (if Adam was to become conscious of the wrongness of his action). As such, anxiety is, for Kierkegaard, what engenders, at the same time, the possibility of sin and guilt. However, anxiety is not only negative for Kierkegaard since it is thanks to this affect that one can become truly aware of one’s true freedom. It is thanks to anxiety, indeed, that one can become aware of the very nature of one’s acts, and reciprocally, of one’s own guilt. Kierkegaard writes, in The Concept of Anxiety:

That anxiety makes its appearance is the pivot upon which everything turns. Man is a synthesis of the psychical and the physical; however, a synthesis is unthinkable if the two

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are not united in a third. This third is spirit. In innocence, man is not merely animal, for if
he were at any moment of his life merely animal, he would never become man. So spirit
is present, but as immediate, as dreaming. Inasmuch as it is now present, it is in a sense
now a hostile power, for it constantly disturbs the relation between soul and body, a
relation that indeed has persistence and yet does not have endurance, inasmuch as it first
receives the latter by the spirit. On the other hand, spirit is a friendly power, since it is
precisely that which constitutes the relation. What, then, is man’s relation to this
ambiguous power? How does spirit relate itself to itself and to its conditionality? It
relates itself as anxiety. (43-44)

If anxiety is a concept, for Kierkegaard, and not only an affect (a fear without object), it is
because Kierkegaard attributes to it a very specific function in a very precise architecture of
concepts. Anxiety is what defines the ways in which spirit—as an “ambiguous power”—relates
to itself. Anxiety is the knot at the crossroad of the psychical and the physical that reveals to the
person that feels the ambiguous nature—sometimes as a hostile power, sometimes as a friendly
power—of spirit. Anxiety is thus located at the crossroad of many other concepts, and functions
as an inner signal that denotes the nature of the relationship that all the other concepts have with
one another. Likewise, for Lacan, the phenomenon of anxiety is primarily a notion that is located
in a very precise architecture of concepts that Lacan summarized in his Graph of Desire. But
what is Lacan’s graph of desire, and where is the phenomenon of anxiety located in it?

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102 See, Lacan, Jacques. Seminaire V, Les formations de l’inconscient, Text established by Jacques-Alain Miller,
whole graph of desire, see Van Haute, Phillipe. Against Adaptation: Lacan’s Subversion of the Subject. The Lacanian
Lacan’s Graph of Desire and its Relations to Jouissance

Lacan developed his Graph of Desire in Seminar V, Les Formations de l’inconscient (1957-1958), and in “Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir dans l’inconscient freudien.” (1960) In the Graph, the subject of speech, written s, is in relation to the Other, O, as the locus of the signifiers: s (O). The subject of the unconscious, in turn, takes its position in relation to the Other as a $, which is to say as a subject identified with the Other through a unary trait. This division of the subject of the unconscious, in turn, is reflected in the division that affects the Other between the big Other O and the little other written o. This division of the Other is what guarantees, in Lacan’s schematism, that the Other is not equivalent to a universal signifier like God. For if the Other were equivalent to such a master signifier, just as in the case of Schreber’s paranoia, there would be no remainder, i.e., nothing in the subject that could resist his complete identification to this Other, and thus nothing that could stand in the way of the Subject’s complete “normalization”.103 This situation is written $ <> a on the Graph, since the remainder in question is precisely what Lacan will call object a, and what is associated in the affective life of the subject with the affect of anxiety. As such, for Lacan, object a is not an object per se since it does not belong to the Imaginary space defined by the “Mirror Stage.” On the contrary, the construction of object a, Miller suggests in his presentation, engages Lacan in a kind of deconstruction of the specular object as such.

To go even further, one could say that the whole Seminar X is a critique of the Imaginary as Lacan developed it through the two versions of his “Mirror Stage” (1936 -1949). This is why,

103 For a more detailed analysis of Schreber’s case, see the introduction of Chapter Four.
as Seminar X moves toward the definition of object a, most of Lacan’s early schemas related to the “Mirror Stage,” like the one of the inverted bouquet, for example, are not only revisited but abandoned. The notion of the specular that Lacan uses to describe what takes place at the level of the “Mirror Stage,” are now reconsidered as phenomenon in which object a is absent, which is to say as a mode of the subject in which the subject is secured from object a, and thus from anxiety. The field of the specular becomes the field where the subject avoids anxiety. At the opposite of such an avoidance of anxiety and object a, Lacan wants to make of anxiety, in his Seminar X, a way to access the Real.

In his text on anxiety, Inhibition, Symptoms, Anxiety (1926), Freud makes of inhibition the most important signifier in order to understand what anxiety is, especially when it comes to understanding the malfunctioning that it introduces in a subject in the form of symptoms. Following Freud’s footsteps, Lacan defines anxiety as what points, inside the subject, to what escapes the hold of the signifier and the Symbolic order. It is the barrier or the inner obstacle that prevents the Symbolic order subsuming in its dialectic all the Imaginary elements that were previously outside of it. As such, anxiety becomes, in Seminar X, the ultimate sign of what cannot be aufheben (dialecticized), i.e. what points towards what cannot be integrated in the movement of symbolization that marks “Lacan’s Return to Freud” and that Miller calls Lacan’s second paradigm. In other words, anxiety is what marks the limits of the process of symbolization opened by the elaboration of the “Mirror Stage.” It is what points towards an ultimate remainder that cannot be integrated in a broader logic, nor dissolved into more simple

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104 See Miller, Jacques-Alain. “Les 6 Paradigmes de la jouissance.” In the second paradigm, Lacan tries to integrate into a Symbolic network all the Imaginary elements that he had previously isolated during his early phase on the “Mirror Stage.”
To illustrate this function of anxiety, Lacan mentions Otto Rank’s description of *The Trauma of Birth* (1952). Anxiety is, primarily, the sign of the subject’s *hilflosigkeit*, which is to say the sign of its fundamental distress, as well as its fundamental paralysis when its life lacks meaning. However, this distress is surprisingly not connected by Lacan to what normally constitutes for Freud the major source of anxiety within his theory, namely the anxiety of castration. This form of anxiety is not related to any object but to its lack (it is when the little boy becomes aware of what is missing in the little girl that he starts to fear its loss). But this loss is totally absent in *Seminar X* (I will explain why in full detail later). Likewise, the reference to the Oedipus myth, as well as its rewriting in purely logical terms as developed by Lacan in *Seminar IV on La Relation d’Objet* (1956-1957), is also completely absent from *Seminar X* (again, the explanation of this absence will come later).105

It is as if *Seminar X* was the negative of *Seminar IV*. While in *Seminar IV*, anxiety was approached through the Freudian notion of the anxiety of castration, it is approached in *Seminar X* through the Real and the notion of *object a*. In other words, what changes between *Seminar IV* and *Seminar X* is not only the notion of anxiety, but also the notion of object. While the notion of object was seen, in *Seminar IV*, as a way to avoid anxiety, as in the case of the little Hans where his phobia of horses gives an object to his otherwise “empty” and uncontrollable anxiety of castration, *object a* is a remainder that resisted the first reduction of anxiety to a phobic object.106 Consequently, anxiety is also what comes to re-define, in Lacan’s teaching, the function that the

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Phallus had so far, since anxiety re-defines the limits of the process of symbolization described by Lacan in “The Signification of the Phallus” (1958). Lacan writes:

The Phallus is the signifier of this very Aufhebung, which it inaugurates (initiates) by its disappearance. This is why the demon of Aidos (Scham) springs forth at the very moment the Phallus is unveiled in the ancient mysteries (see the famous painting in the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii). It then becomes the bar with which the demon’s hand strikes the signified, marking it as the bastard offspring of its signifying concatenation.” (Ecrits, 692)

The signified stroked by the demon (by the Phallus) is, of course, the one that comes from the Imaginary, which is to say from the specular dimension described in the “Mirror Stage.” This is why, in Seminar X, Lacan underlines that anxiety cannot be struck by the demon of Aidos inasmuch as it is not a signified. Anxiety, on the contrary, is what gives access to what cannot be integrated into the process of symbolization, i.e., what can give access, or at least what can point towards “the true grasp on the Real”. To put it differently, while, prior to this Seminar, the notion of the Phallus was the one that was responsible for introducing a lack, as well as a split (a spaltung) in the subject, it is now anxiety and its links to the body that are supposed to introduce these elements. To sum up, it is during this Seminar, that Lacan approached for the first time the question of castration and sexual difference, but from a perspective of jouissance, and not from a purely Symbolic perspective.
Detumescence: a Castration of/by Jouissance

Throughout his early teaching, Lacan used the sign -φ to designate, at the same time, the Imaginary object of castration (the mother’s phallus φ) as well as its suppression by the Symbolic operation of castration accomplished by the Phallus (φ). In Seminar X, however, Lacan initiates a new way of approaching the question of castration that is grounded on the body and its specific modes of jouissance.107 As such, one could even add, as Miller does, that Lacan discovered in this Seminar what will slowly become the very center of his late and last teaching, which is to say, the jouissance of the body in relation to the Real. Lacan undertook this shift inasmuch as he could not find, within the relationship of the subject (s) to the Other (O), either in the form of a separation (aphanasis: disappearance of desire) or of an alienation (as the object of the Other’s desire), the proper place to locate object a. Neither on the side of the subject, nor on the side of the Other, object a occupies, just as in Kierkegaard, a place of exception.108

Anxiety and object a are phenomena that cannot be reduced to the dimension of the signifier inasmuch as they belong exclusively to the body and its modes of jouissance, which is to say to the body as a living entity, and not as an object mortified by the signifier. Beyond the specular body of the “mirror stage” exists a remainder of a certain jouissance that cannot be

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107 See, for more details, Lesson 19 of Seminar X. It is in this Lesson that Lacan argues for the first time about a form of castration that is not related to the threatening presence of the father but that has everything to do with the male organ and the biological fact of detumescence.

108 And it is precisely this place that became, once formalized by Lacan through the concept of the “not all”, the point of departure and the support of the late and last Lacan. However, the notion of the “not-all” (that I will define at length in a different chapter) should not be confused with the notion of exception inasmuch as the notion of exception presupposes the existence of a universal, a “for all” that the notion of the “not-all” precisely denies. In his Seminar XX Encore (1972-1973), Lacan will even go as far as saying that the exception that object a represents in his early teaching is actually describing the condition of all signifiers, which is to say the fact that they are all “not all” reducible to their functioning in the symbolic order. To put it differently, Lacan will advance the idea, in Encore, that there is a constant alliance between the order of signifier (the order of the Other) and the order of the modes of enjoyment (of jouissance)—constant alliance that he will name lalangue (I will of course come back at length also to that notion).
negativized by the effect of the signifier (and it this remainder that Chapter Four studies in
details). It is a jouissance that resists the order of the Phallus, a jouissance that cannot be entirely
integrated into its Symbolic order. From the perspective of the Symbolic order, the anxiety of
castration is related to the perception of the absence of the phallic organ in the woman, as well as
to all the behaviors or fantasy that comes from the desire to deny such an absence. This is why
anxiety is generally said to have no object. In his Seminar IV, for example, in “Dialectic of
Frustration,” Lacan underlines the fact that castration is essentially related to a Symbolic order
that attributes to the Phallus, defined as the symbol of man’s power, a special signification.109
This is why the notion of castration, approached from a Symbolic perspective, is also related to
the Oedipus complex and the notion of the Law that such a myth is supposed to legitimize.
Within the myth of the Oedipus, indeed, castration is never related to the actual penis of the boy,
or the actual privation of penis for the little girl, but to the acceptation of a certain Symbolic
order which attributes certain rights and duties to the subject according to their anatomical
differences. To accept castration is to accept a given Symbolic order; and to accept a certain
Symbolic order is to accept its Law; and to accept its Law is to accept being integrated into the
Symbolic order. Finally, this acceptance is what Lacan calls the acceptance of the Symbolic debt,
which is to say, to renounce being the Imaginary Phallus of the mother, i.e. to renounce the
illusion of an absolute power.

To think differently about the relationship between anxiety and castration, Lacan stops
considering the Phallus as a signifier and starts seeing it as an organ. It is as if Lacan, in this
Seminar, managed to give its organs back to the Imaginary body of the “Mirror Stage” since the

Imaginary body of the mirror stage is a body without organs. The body of the “Mirror Stage,” indeed, is a body that is entirely under the spell of its specular image and, as such, a body that is entirely subsumed or mortified by its introduction (or submission) into the Symbolic order. Contrary to this Imaginary body, mortified by its entrance into the Symbolic order, the notion of the phallus as an organ that Lacan develops in this Seminar leads him to redefine the Freudian libido as a paradoxical organ defined through the myth of the Lamelle. Lacan introduces the myth of the lamella to replace the notion of the Phallus, as well as to give some life to the concept of libido as a paradoxical organ. The libido as a paradoxical organ designates, in Lacan’s teachings, what Freud named the points of fixation of the libido, which is to say a point of fixation in the mode of jouissance of the subject that cannot be changed by any form of Symbolic operation inasmuch as those points resist the grasp of the phallic aufhebung. Consequently, one can argue that Lacan, in Seminar X, liberates jouissance from its submission to the Symbolic in order to isolate in it a jouissance impossible to negate. This jouissance is what Lacan connects to a new series of organ-objects subsumed under the name of object a. In other words, Lacan, in this seminar, proposes a radically new approach to the notion of castration and anxiety through biology, anatomy, and the properties of the male.

Within this new paradigm, the -φ that was used to mark the effect of the Symbolic castration becomes, purely and simply, a way to mark an anatomical property of the male organ: the detumescence that happens after the moment of jouissance of the organ. Miller writes: “[Lacan] makes of the detumescence of the organ, of its deficiency, of the disappearance of the phallic function during the sexual act, the principle of the anxiety of castration.” (OL III, 6,

Lesson 17, my translation) Such a property of the male organ, it has to be emphasized, does not require any external element to be actualized, unlike the complex of castration described by Freud in the Oedipus complex. This castration happens at a biological level through the male organ and not through the encounter with the Phallus as a signifier. As such, it is a castration that does away with the narrative of the Oedipus complex (which implements the anxiety of castration through the figure of the father) by relocating the source of the anxiety of castration at the very level of the organ.

An Elevation of the Feminine Position
The feminine position, in this new bodily approach of the notion of castration, stops being considered a position that has always already been castrated. In other words, while the masculine position was the one holding the upper hand in the Oedipus complex, it now becomes, through the logic of the organ, the position that can castrate itself. On the contrary, while the feminine position, in the Oedipus complex, was linked to a certain feeling of inferiority, and to the necessity of accepting to “be” the Phallus for a man who “has” it, it now becomes the position that lacks nothing. Thus, when it comes to jouissance, it is the masculine position that is always-already castrated, while the feminine position is not.

This idea will become the compass that will orient Lacan’s late and last teaching. It is in the form of an elegy to the feminine body that Lacan constructs his late and last teaching, since the feminine position is a position that cannot lose anything in her encounter with jouissance.111

This, in turn, allows her to have a non-mediated relation to the desire of the Other, unlike the one

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111 See chapter Five for a full analysis of the question.
of the male who fears castration as an effect of jouissance. To put it in another way, women only have to enter the order of the Phallus inasmuch as they want to enter in relationship with the desire as well as the jouissance of a male. It is only because women have to deal with the functioning of the male organ and its relation to the phallic order that they have to accept (or not) to enter the theatre of the Phallus in the guise of a masquerade. This specific relationship to the Phallic order, however, is what makes them more capable of becoming conscious of the artificiality of the whole Symbolic order, which is why Lacan will connect, in his *Seminar XX, Encore*, the feminine position to the matheme $S (A)$ (for a full discussion of this matheme, see Chapter Three, Part II, and Chapter Four, Part II). This new approach to castration is what will lead Lacan to develop what he called the two fundamental fantasies that comes with the functioning of the male and the female organ.

*The Two Fundamental Fantasies*

On the male side, the fantasy is the one of feminine masochism, which is to say the fantasy of a woman that would be entirely passive, and that would enjoy being exclusively the object of men’s desire. Lacan writes, “the feminine masochism is a masculine fantasy.” (222) In other words, on the male side the fantasy is one that tends to substitute for the threat of castration, an object that can provoke an erection without becoming a threat for detumescence. On the female side, the fantasy is the one of Don Giovanni, which is to say the fantasy of a man that would not be under the threat of castration, and that would not need any form of participation of his woman in the phallic masquerade. Lacan writes, “Don Giovanni is a feminine dream.” (224) In other words, the figure of Don Giovanni is the figure of a man that denies the actual castration of the
organ, and that pretends to not need the desire of the woman to help him master his own relation to jouissance.\textsuperscript{112} At the heart of those two fantasies is the notion of separation. The notion of separation is what will come to replace the notion of castration at the level of the body and the organs. To be even more precise, Lacan makes of castration, in Seminar X, a particular case of the broader notion of separation. If castration is the specific name given to the anxiety experimented by a male when it comes to the detumescence of the penis, separation is the generic name of all the experiences of anxiety that are attached to the disappearance of an organ. This is why Lacan, in his Seminar XI, will add to the Freudian list of “organs,” such as oral, anal, and phallic, the visual (scoping) as well as the voice organ.\textsuperscript{113}

To illustrate his new approach of castration through the notion of separation, Lacan introduced the myth of the Lamella. Lacan writes, “the lamella is something extra-flat which moves like the amoeba. (…) it is, like the amoeba in relation to sexed being, immortal—because it survives any division, any scissiparous intervention. And it can run around. This lamella, this organ, whose characteristic is not to exist, but which is nevertheless an organ (…) is the libido” (The Four..., 197-198).\textsuperscript{114} This myth expresses the idea that castration is not, as in the Oedipal myth, the result of a transgression, or of a punishment, but more simply the result of sexual reproduction, i.e., that in animals like humans, the libido becomes an organ that can be lost on the male side of sexuation. This loss of the organ is not the result of the presence of the Other, but it is a loss that is as necessary as the laws of entropy. In other words, in Lacan’s myth

\textsuperscript{112} See, Miller, Jacques-Alain. “Les formules de la sexuation.”
\textsuperscript{114} For more detail on the notion of Lamella, see Seminar XI, 197-200.
of the lamella, the concept of castration is reduced to the moment of disappearance of the organ after the moment of orgasm.

IV. THE OTHER SIDE OF THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX

Lacan, however, will preserve the notion of castration as a quilting point to understand Freud’s libidinal stages. Lacan will maintain the notion of Symbolic castration as introduced by Freud in order to maintain the structure of the object within the development of the psyche. This structure, however, is no longer the faithful description of a biological maturation but a fantasmatic construction that takes its meaning only retroactively, that is to say, once the Oedipus complex has been posited as a quilting point. To posit the Oedipus complex as a quilting point is to underline the fact that the very notion of object (as oral object, anal object, and genital object) is inconceivable outside the framework of the Oedipus complex.¹¹⁵ It means that desire and the law are but one thing, i.e. that desire and the law have a common object—the object that is forbidden by the law and that desire takes as its aim. As such, the construction of the object within the coordinates of the Oedipus is linked to the paternal law and to the desire of the mother that the father, as the representative of the law, forbids.

If we connect now the structure of the Oedipal object and the structure of object a (which does not imply the presence any authoritative figure), one can see that the structure of the Oedipus complex becomes nothing but a lucubration of knowledge on a much more basic

biological phenomenon that Lacan calls separation.\textsuperscript{116} While separation at the level of the organ has to do with a form of auto-mutilation, castration on the side of the Oedipus has to do with a hetero-mutilation. Consequently, if the castration of the organ stands as the paradigm, and the Oedipal castration only as a particular case, it means that the function and the place granted to the father by Freud was not an essential feature of the complex, but simply a way to exteriorize, in the figure of the father, a mutilation that would have happened inside the individual in any case. Even more to the point, it means that the father, as well as all the concepts that such a figure carries in Freud as well as in the early Lacan (like The-Name-of-the-Father or the Paternal Metaphor, etc.) are no longer necessary.

At the pure level of the castration of the organ, what is produced is an object that is prior to the level of desire. It is an object that is prior to the law too. This is why Lacan, towards the end of Seminar X, calls into question the function of the Name of the Father and, through this function, the place and the function of love.

Love and Desire, Anxiety and Jouissance
The economy of desire, as Lacan developed it through his early teaching, is entirely grounded on

\textsuperscript{116} See, for a detailed analysis of the notion of separation, Lacan, Jacques. “La bouche et l’Oeil,” in Seminar X 265-279. Lacan writes, “The fundamental “separation,” not separation, but partition within, this is what is found at the origin and from the level from the oral drive on, inscribed in what will be the structuring of desire. Hence the astonishment at the fact that we have gone to this level to find some more accessible image for what has always remained for us - and why? - a paradox up to now, namely that in phallic functioning, in the one linked to copulation, it is also the image of a cut, of a separation, of what we improperly call castration, because it is an image of gelding that functions. It is no doubt not by chance, nor no doubt in a misguided way, that we went searching in older phantasies for the justification of what we did not know very well how to justify at the level of the phallic phase, it must nevertheless be noted that at this level something has been produced which is going to allow us to find our bearings in the whole subsequent dialectic” (Gallagher, 165).
love.\textsuperscript{117} It is because love trumps the Real satisfaction of the needs that the entire dialectic of frustration can start and actually transform a Real object (such as the breast) into a Symbolic object. And it is also because love trumps the satisfaction of the needs that the notion of absolute satisfaction becomes one that only love can give, that is to say, that only an object that has been transformed into a symbol, not to say, into an agalma (into the precious, and over-valorized object of desire), can give.\textsuperscript{118}

Opposed to this economy of desire grounded on love, there is the experience of anxiety which brings back to the Real object—the object \textit{a}—that is, to the object of the drives and the Real satisfaction of jouissance that is attached to this object. And on this side, there is a clear disjunction between jouissance and desire. In other words, while love, within the dialectic of frustration, developed by the early Lacan, was the only force that could permit jouissance to condescend to desire, love becomes in \textit{Seminar X} what veils anxiety and its product—\textit{object a}. And while the Phallus, as a signifier, was occupying the place of what was lacking in the Other, it is now the \textit{object a} which comes to occupy this place. This is why anxiety is said to be a “signal that does not fool” inasmuch as it is a signal that brings back to the Real satisfaction of the drives, while unmasking the semblance upon which love, desire and the Phallus are functioning. In other words, if anxiety cannot fool, it is because anxiety points towards what


\textsuperscript{118} For a detailed analysis of the notion of agalma, see, Lacan, Jacques. “Agalma,” in \textit{Séminaire VIII, Le Transfert}, Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris: Edition du Seuil, 1991, 163-178. Lacan writes, agalma, from agallo, “to adorn, to ornament,” signifies in effect - at first sight - "ornament, adornment". First of all the notion of ornament, of adornment is not that simple; it can be seen immediately that this may take us very far. (...) You should not see in it any taste for rarity but rather the fact that in a text which we suppose to be extremely rigorous, that of the \textit{Symposium}, something leads us to this crucial point which is formally indicated at the moment at which I told you the stage revolves completely and, after these games of praising regulated as they had been up to then by this subject of love, there enters this actor, Alcibiades, who is going to change everything” (163-178).
cannot be integrated within the circuit of meaning, that is to say, towards an opaque jouissance of the drives, deprived of any meaning.

This opaque jouissance of the drives, which is related to object a, is a jouissance to which Lacan gives a mythical status, i.e., a status that subtracts it from any temporal construction (unlike the retroactive construction of the Oedipal object). The subject experiences this jouissance at a phenomenological level, but it can also not experience it since this experience precedes the entry of the subject into the circuit of love. At the level of the circuit of love, anxiety can only be logically reconstructed (just as in Freud’s text, “A Child is Being Beaten,” the masochist moment in the fantasy). As such, anxiety can either be felt, or reconstructed logically. Likewise, with desire, desire can either be repressed, as it appears in the metonymic process, or it can be put at the fore under the guise of the agalmatic object, that is, under the guise of a fascinating and attractive object. On the one hand, there is the metonymical status of desire (when desire is what runs in between the signifiers and under the signifying chain), and on the other the metaphorical status of desire, when the object of desire acquires an Imaginary status. On the metonymical side, desire has no object since its object is the metonymy of the “lack-in-being” itself. While when the metonymical desire encounters love, it means that it has suddenly met an object that is the perfect metaphor of its lack. Miller summarizes the whole movement of Lacan’s Seminar X thus:

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<th>First Part</th>
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<td>Jouissance</td>
<td>Mythical</td>
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<td>Anxiety</td>
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<td>Desire</td>
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Through this schema, what becomes clear is that up to *Seminar X*, Lacan had always conceived the object of desire through the concept of intentionality, which means that he had always positioned the object as the aim of desire, and not, as he did in the second part of *Seminar X*, as a *cause of desire*. In other words, up to *Seminar X*, Lacan always conceived the object as what was in front of the subject, or as what was the horizon of desire itself (as what was fascinating it)—even though he had tried already to integrate this intentional object within the fantasy. Moving away from this phenomenological framework, Lacan substitutes for the concept of intentionality, the one of causality through the introduction of *object a* “cause of desire.” In other words, with *Seminar X*, the Real object of desire stopped being placed in front or ahead of the subject, but is being relocated before the emergence of desire, as what gives to desire its orientation, its proper aim. Consequently, at the end of *Seminar X*, it becomes possible to distinguish between the object that desire aims at (the object of love - *agalma*), and the object that is causing desire (*object a - palea*). The anal object is what represents best *object a* as *palea* and its link to the remainder that needs to be excreted. The Phallus, on the contrary, is what represents best the object of love as *agalma*, and its link to the idea of authority, power and perfection.

And it is also why, when Lacan defines anew the end of the analytic process, he associates it with the “detumescence” of desire and love, that is to say, to the reduction of what misleads within the object of desire. This “detumescence” of desire is not the result of the analyst’s interpretation of the desire of the analysand, but the result of interpretation/construction of his or her hidden *object a*. It is, indeed, through the construction and the interpretation of the *object a* that an analysis can produce some effects at the level of desire. This effect is produced

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119 More details on this question in the Epilogue, in the last section on “Kant with Sade.”
insofar as object a is precisely what conditions desire, what orients it toward a specific object. Object a is the hidden object of desire. It is what governs and orients desire without being known by the one who desires. In this sense, the most authentic desire is a desire that ignores completely its cause, a desire that has no knowledge about what causes it, that is, a desire that has no conscious link to its object a. In other words, one can distinguish between the object-cause (object a), which is always the unknowable object, and the object-aim (agalma), which is always a false object a.

It is this strict opposition that enables Lacan, in chapter IV of Seminar X, to make a distinction between the fantasy of the pervert, and the fantasy of the neurotic. On the side of the pervert, object a remains at its original place, i.e., in the subject as a hidden and unknowable object. This position is illustrated by Sade himself who ignored, until the very end of his life, that he was, in fact, in the position of the object a that his victims were supposed to occupy too (the question of perversion will be at the center of the Epilogue of this dissertation). On the side of the neurotic, in contrast, object a is integrated into the Other, that is, integrated within the fantasy. Consequently, the object a of the neurotic is not a real object a, but a false object a tainted by its integration into the field of the Other. But it is insofar as the neurotics integrates object a into the Other that object a becomes accessible to psychoanalysis, and the neurotic can be treated through free association and speech. The mistake of the neurotic is that he tries to make of object a as object cause of desire the same as the object of desire (agalma). In other words, the neurotics want to turn object a into something visible, something that belongs to the realm of the Imaginary. This is why the fantasy of the neurotic is said to be inauthentic, and the object a that is presented in his (or her) fantasy, a fallacy. Opposed to such a reduction of object a
to the realm of the specular and the Other, Lacan wants to posit, in *Seminar X*, in a kind of queer way, I would say, *object a* as what is outside the grasp of the Imaginary and the Symbolic. *Object a*, strictly speaking, is not only on the side of the subject, but on the side of what the subject will never know about itself. As such, *object a* cannot be grasped within the Other and its procedures of representation, even if *object a* remains, nonetheless, the product, or the remainder of the Symbolic order as its waste.

Lacan said, “The object defined as a remainder, irreducible to the symbolization of the Other, depends nonetheless on the Other” (*Seminar X*, 382). *Object a* is thus the irrepresentable relation of the subject to the Other. This amphiboly of *object a* is what makes it difficult to localize it. And it is also what leads the neurotics to try to blur the distinct structures of jouissance and desire within his fantasy. While the structure of jouissance is related to *object a*, and is reducible to a jouissance of the proper body, the structure of desire implies the existence of a subject in relation to the Other.

The Difference between Love and Anxiety  
Normally, the mediation between jouissance and desire is what love is supposed to enable within the early Lacan. Love, indeed, is what falsifies *object a (palea)* into an object of desire (*agalma*) by integrating it into the realm of the Other. Anxiety, on the other hand, does not enable a mediation between jouissance and desire but rather, establishes a disjunction between the two and, also, as Miller puts it, “anxiety is what transform jouissance into an object cause of desire.” (Miller, *Seminar 2003-2004*, Lesson 18) In other words, while love transforms jouissance into desire, anxiety is what transform jouissance into *object a*. 
Anxiety is what produces object a as the object cause of desire. This is why anxiety is, first and foremost in this Seminar, reducible to a logical moment that does not need to be felt. Anxiety, to be more precise, is the logical (as well as effective) result of the discrepancy between the demands of the drives (the demand for absolute jouissance) and the level of the ego (and its ideals and values). It is thus the signal, or the index that points towards Das Ding, that is to say, toward the absolute object a. Lacan gives a representation of the possible confusion between Das Ding and the object of love (agalma), at the opening of the Seminar, through the image of the blinded man and the praying mantis. Through this representation, what Lacan wants to highlight is the link between the optical illusion on which love is resting, and the possibility that under this veil lies a creature ready to devour her lover. In other words, anxiety emerges as a consequence of this possible discrepancy between the Imaginary dimension of the object of love, and the “real” nature of the jouissance of this object. Anxiety is the signal that the object is taking over the lack that the object was supposed to cork. Anxiety is thus the signal that the presence of the object is threatening the possibility of the lack itself, i.e., the very empty place (−φ) that was supposed to protect the subject from being completely at the mercy of the Other. In other words, anxiety emerges each time something of the object a starts to appear in the field of the Other and introduces a perturbation in the Imaginary that starts, in turns, to threaten the specular image (which Lacan writes I(a)) that supports the formation of the ego as well as the construction of “Reality.” The uncanniness (unheimlichkeit) described by Freud refers exactly to this phenomenon of strangeness or discordance introduced in the Imaginary by the emergence, within its field, of object a—which is, strictly speaking, an object impossible to represent.120

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The phenomenon of aggressiveness that Lacan described in his text “Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis” (1948) comes from this specific situation, that is to say, from the fact that as soon as the subject identifies himself completely with his specular image, he immediately becomes entirely in the power of the Other. Consequently, anxiety starts to emerge in the subject as he starts to realize that he could be destroyed by this Other onto which his ego is grounded. As such, one could conclude that anxiety is the exact opposite of love, since love always preserves the lack within the Other—while anxiety does not.

From the Theory of the Subject to the Production of Object a
But Lacan does not only define anxiety in this first sense. During the second half of his Seminar, he focuses on a different kind of anxiety—an anxiety that is not produced by the object, but an anxiety that produces the object a itself, that is to say, an anxiety that produces object a as object-cause-of-desire. In other words, Lacan’s approach to anxiety, in the second part, is not centered on the Freudian approach of the phenomenon (as we can find it in Freud's text “Unheimlich”) but on its reverse. Object a, in this second part, becomes the paradigm of what cannot be integrated in the specular field. It becomes, as such, the non-specularizable. The movement of the whole Seminar could thus be described as a movement going from the description of the intrusion of object a into the specular field that cannot represent it, to the movement of separation of object a from the Real body in the second movement. In other words, while the first part of the seminar is concerned with the Imaginary body of the mirror stage, as well as with the Imaginary dimension of the ego, the second half is more concerned about the Real body of jouissance and the question

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of the detumescence of the organ.

It is as if Lacan introduced for the first time in his theory of the subject the presence of the “Real body,” that is to say, the presence of a body that has no unified Imaginary form inasmuch as its separation from the Other has not yet taken place. It is as if the Real body were expanding beyond the limits of the body itself, as if the Real body were also a part of the Other itself. And it is those particularities about the limits of the Real body—which leaves it entangled in the Other—that will enable Lacan to elaborate, in his next Seminar on *The Four fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, his renewed approach to the unconscious (I will come back at length to the question in Chapter Five).

To understand the slippery nature of the articulation between the Real body, the Other and object *a*, Lacan introduces a new formalization. Instead of using his old schema of the image of the mirror and the inverted bouquet, as he did in the “Mirror Stage,” and in “Remarks on Daniel Lagache’s Presentation” (1960) he uses the image of Euler’s circles to make visible all the logical ways in which two circles can share a common part.  

![Euler Circles Diagram]

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Then, using this new schema to clarify certain clinical notions, Lacan deduces that in the case of anxiety, for example, object a belongs to the field of the Other. In the case of perversion, on the contrary, object a belongs to the field of the subject. But it is only in the case of love that the topological space where object a is inscribed belongs to neither of the two fields. Object a, in the case of love, belongs neither to the subject nor to the Other. Object a is separated. It is what cannot be known by the subject and what cannot be represented in the field of the Other. It is thus a topological space that should be detached from the rest of the theory of the subject. This is why object a cannot be integrated with the dialectic of symbolization, and why also object a has nothing to do with the Name-of-the-Father and its power of symbolization. Object a is more related to the power of the maternal imago and its connection to an unbridled jouissance that goes beyond the pleasure principle.

In Seminar X, object a is not yet a pure product of logic. It does not have only, as it will have later, a purely logical consistency, but it still refers to the body and its affects, even though object a is already approached in a topological way (thanks to the Euler Circles). In other words, object a is already located as an “empty” topological place, but it is approached and described through what Lacan called “some episodical substances of representation,” i.e., through the description of the five forms of object a. These five forms of the object a, which each in their own way defy the power of representation of the Symbolic, are the reason why Lacan, at the end

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of his Seminar, moves beyond the notion of the Name-of-the-Father written in the singular to the notion of the Names-of-the-Father written in the plural. This move from the singular to the plural is Lacan's way to take into account his new discovery about castration and the Real body, and to apply it to his whole conceptual apparatus. Through this pluralization of the Names-of-the-Father Lacan will also end up debasing the notion of the function of the paternal metaphor that was at the very core of the Name-of-the-Father's ability to give name to things, as well as to give the correct meaning or interpretation to things. Renouncing this function, which was central in Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex (and which made of Freud a defender of the figure of the father), will be at the origin of Lacan's exclusion from the I.P.A (International Psychoanalytic Association) as well as the launching of Lacan's second teaching—which will start with Seminar XI (1964-1965) on the Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, and will end with Seminar XX, Encore (1972-1973).

It is as if Lacan, as early as 1963, had foreseen the decline of the figure as well as the function of the father coming; it is as if he had understood way ahead of his time, that the Name-of-the-Father as well as the function of the paternal metaphor was nothing but a social construction that was about to be exposed as a pure construction by the discourse of gender and queer studies, and then left aside as an archaic symptom of a dated form of social bond. While the paternal metaphor, in the formalization of the early Lacan, was supposed to give a phallic meaning to the opaque Desire-of-the-Mother, its function finds its limits while opening up onto an even deeper and non-symbolizable opaqueness, i.e., the opaqueness of jouissance as linked to object a. As such, object a is the symbol of the failure of the paternal metaphor and marks the

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limits of the power of the Symbolic itself. It represents, in this sense, the return within Lacan's theory of the Real of the drives. *Object a*, as the object of the drives, is what resists any form of symbolization, and what turns the Phallic order and its power into a pure construction, a pure “semblance,” as Lacan puts it. Consequently, one can conclude that from the point of view of *object a*, the power dynamic that gender and queer studies focus on does not belong to the field of the drives but to the Imaginary field of narcissism, which gives to the ego its *Ego Ideal* of absolute power. (Lacan goes as far as saying that the idea of God is anchored in male impotency).

Accordingly, the new figure of the father that Lacan will draw from this construction of *object a* will be a figure that is not itself the dupe of the *paternal metaphor* (in that it does not believe that *object a* can be integrally subsumed within the field of the Imaginary or the Symbolic), but that would constantly draw back desire towards its Real and unknowable cause—*object a*. As such, the new figure of the father is one that puts the function of *object a* as cause-of-desire at the fore and not, so to speak, the relation of *object a* to jouissance.127 To sum up, one could argue that even as early as the departure of his second teaching, Lacan's approach to psychoanalysis was already aligned with the goal of the feminist movement, and perhaps even more, with the non-normative goal of what will be developed, more than thirty years after, under the name of Queer theory.

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CONCLUSION: JUDITH BUTLER MEETS LACAN

To conclude this introductory chapter, and emphasize its relevance within the contemporary field of feminism and queer theory, I will compare the classical critique of gender normativity by queer relational theorists to the one put forth by Lacan through his invention of object a. In order to do so, I will use the work of Judith Butler who is without a doubt the most important relational theorist as well as the one who is known for having introduced into this field of study what Anne-Emmanuelle Berger called, in her last book, a queer turn in feminism.¹²⁸

Butler’s Queer Turn in Feminism
Judith Butler wonders, at the opening of her famous book, Gender Trouble (1990), what does it mean to give the feminist movement the goal of promoting, or at least to defend, the category of “women”? Such a goal, replies Butler, aims at giving women, within a specific social context, a new political representation, and through this representation, new rights. But Butler argues that these representations are linked to a certain number of discursive practices that are themselves linked to certain uses of language and reason that are creating the very obstacles that have plagued the history of the feminist movement. It is, indeed, during the 80s and 90s that the feminist movement, through the development of Gender and Queer studies, started to question the universal status of the category women, and the dichotomy between heterosexuality and homosexuality, inasmuch as those categories could not include many minorities that were...

looking to be integrated into it.\textsuperscript{129} As a result, Butler argued that the very notion of the subject, as a coherent and stable entity, had to be abandoned if the feminist movement was to extract itself from such deadlock.

The subject, for Butler, is not a transcendental structure but something that is created historically by a series of discourses and practices organized at a social level. As such, the subject is nothing but the end point of many discursive practices, i.e., a purely social construct. Reciprocally, argued Butler in a very Foucauldian way, what is generally located as the outside of such a cultural and social construct—the body and the drives—is also nothing but the negative fantasy generated by those discursive practices themselves. Furthermore, Butler argued that to equate, as Lacan supposedly did in his \textit{Seminar XX Encore},\textsuperscript{130} the category of women to such pre-discursive field was nothing but a way to reduce “women” to such a fantasy. Butler writes, “Within feminist political practice, a radical rethinking of the ontological construction of identity appears to be necessary in order to formulate a representational politics that might revive feminism on other ground” (7).

It is at that level—at the level of a radical rethinking of the ontological construction of identity—that Butler introduces what can be called “a queer turn in feminism,” a turn that has also triggered the passage from feminism to post-feminism, which is to say the passage from a feminism grounded on a transcendental conception of the subject to a post-feminism that takes as


its point of departure the post-structuralist critique of the notion of identity. It is thus possible to argue that Butler, inspired by post-structuralist thinkers such as Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida or Michel Foucault tried to extract feminism from its historical ground in order to make of it an instrument capable of proposing a radical critique of the category of identity as such. This is why Butler ended up producing, with Gender Trouble, a critique that not only concerned the feminist movement, but the very definition of identity, and thus of identity politics, regardless of the question of sexual orientation per se.

However, it is important to emphasize that Butler did not accomplish her “queer turn” by using psychoanalysis, and even less a Lacanian approach to psychoanalysis. On the contrary, she accused Lacan’s early teaching of remaining Phallocentric and even, as Derrida puts it, of remaining Pha-logo-centric. And Butler did so, I would argue, by not taking into account the shift that Lacan introduced in his teaching through his invention of object a. Butler, indeed, in Bodies that Matter (1993), in the chapter “The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary,” argued against the early Lacan (through a double reading of “The Mirror Stage,” and “The Interpretation of the Phallus”) that Lacan's interpretation of the Phallus was, in fact, nothing more than a reification of a male Imaginary that was based, in turn, on the male anatomy, and thus bound to foreclose the possibility of moving concretely beyond the binary oppositions between “having the Phallus” (male side of sexuation), and “being the Phallus” (female side of

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131 For an interesting Marxist oriented critique of such a move, see Teresa L. Ebert, Ludic Feminism and After, Post-Modernism, Desire, and Labor in Late Capitalism, University of Michigan Press, 1995.


sexuation) that structures patriarchy. Butler writes,

This Lacanian trajectory [from “The Mirror Stage” to “The Signification of the Phallus”] will be showed to become problematic on (at least) two accounts: (1) the morphological scheme which becomes the epistemic condition for the world of objects and others to appear is marked as masculine, and, hence, becomes the basis for an anthropocentric and androcentric epistemological imperialism (this is one criticism of Lacan offered by Luce Irigaray and supplies the compelling reason for her project to articulate a feminine Imaginary); and (2) the idealization of the body as a center of control sketched in “The Mirror Stage” and rearticulated in Lacan's notion of the Phallus as that which controls signification in discourse, in the “Signification of the Phallus.” (1958)

Instead of taking this division for granted, Butler argued that Lacan’s early conception of the Phallus (and of the Name-of-the-Father) made of it a transcendental structure imposing its abstract framework onto bodies that can never fully exemplify the position they are supposed to incarnate.135

134 Butler writes, “Although Lacan explicitly denounces the possibility that the phallus is a body part or an imaginary effect that repudiation will be read as constitutive of the very symbolic status he confers on the phallus in the course of the later essay. As an idealization of a body part, the phantasmatic figure of the phallus within Lacan’s essay undergoes a set of contradictions similar to those that unsettle Freud’s analysis of erotogenic parts. The Lesbian phallus may be said to intervene as an unexpected consequence of the Lacanian scheme, an apparently contradictory signifier which, through a critical mimesis, calls into question the ostensibly originating and controlling power of the Lacanian phallus, indeed, its installation as the privileged signifier of the symbolic order. The move emblematised by the lesbian phallus contests the relationship between the logic of non-contradiction and the legislation of a compulsory heterosexuality at the level of the symbolic and bodily morphogenesis.” (Gender Trouble, 73)

135 Butler’s critique of Lacan’s teaching is actually very similar to the one addressed to Lacan by Derrida in The Post-Card. I will come back in detail to this critique in Chapter Two.
Butler’s Imaginary Notion of Identity
To move beyond this transcendental structure, Butler proposed to trade the notion of identity for the one of performativity. To approach the notion of identity through the one of performativity enables Butler to no longer tie this notion to a certain set of fixed poles of imaginary identifications, nor to a certain set of Symbolic positions. Identity becomes, on the contrary, the expression of an ongoing process of performances that signals the end of the dictate of the compulsory binary heterosexual matrix. Identity becomes, once connected to the notion of performance, argues Butler, an empty category able to change according to the circumstances in which it is taking place.

Jacques-Alain Miller, commenting on Butler’s notion of identity as performative in his Seminar Detached Pieces, has said: “There is here something like a tipsiness around the questioning of the concept of identity itself, and a substitution, a metaphor in which identifications takes over identity” (my translation). The tipsiness that Miller is pointing at in Butler’s reasoning relates to the fact that Butler, as I will try to show in the coming paragraphs, tries to bypass what is fixed and normative in identity by using the very instruments upon which the normative dimension of identity is grounded, i.e., the level of imaginary identifications. Butler, from a Lacanian point of view, wants to use the very imaginary mechanism of identification to break the logic of identification and reach the sphere of singular jouissance. But such a move from identification to jouissance is only possible at the condition of making a distinction between what Lacan calls “phallic jouissance,” which is related to identification, and

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137 “Il y a là comme une ivresse de la mise en question même du concept d’identité, et cette substitution, cette métaphore où l’identification vient prendre le dessus par-rapport à l’identité” (Miller, Detached Pieces).
that has the meaningful structure of fiction and what he calls *object a*, which designates a jouissance that is related to a “jouissance outside meaning.” It is precisely this second form of jouissance, and not the broadening of the first kind that works at “undoing gender,” as Butler would say.

When it comes to articulating the question of the identity and the unity of the subject to its mode of jouissance, the crux of the matter is not only, according to Lacan, to pluralizing the meaning of the Phallus, as Butler suggest in her chapter “The Lesbian Phallus,” but to access the level of a jouissance that is outside meaning. For it is only at that condition that the subject can access the very core of his/her identity, the one that does not lie, i.e., the core of its *object a*. In other words, if a relational queer thinker like Butler seems to agree with Lacan about the non-fixed nature of identity, they disagree, nonetheless, about the ways in which such a non-fixed identity could be accessed and named. On the one hand, Butler feels that this move is only possible on the condition of substituting for the fixed and universal models of identification offered to a subject within a patriarchal system, a pluralization of transitional models of identification that could be performed by a subject at a certain moment. On the other hand, Lacan wants to help the subject to ground his/her identity through a re-appropriation of his (or her) “opaque jouissance” coming from *object a*—and not on any form of imaginary identifications. In other words, while most relational queer scholars hope that the construction of a new Imaginary (beyond the masculine one) could renew the very notion of identity politics, Lacan, for his part, advocates for the crossing of the Imaginary plane and the access to what he called *object a*. And *object a*, as Dean aptly pointed out, is something that is at the same time the product of the Symbolic (as it is the product of the relation of a human being to language) and what stands
beyond it, in the realm of the Lacanian Real (as what cannot be reduced to a meaningful fiction).\textsuperscript{138}

**A Lacanian Critique of Butler’s Notion of Performativity**

The stakes of what separates Lacan’s from Butler’s approach is the weight given to the Imaginary, which is to say the kind of desire that is generally attached to any form of identification. Fabian Fajnwaks, in a text called “Lacan et les théories *queer*: malentendus et méconnaissances,”\textsuperscript{139} writes,

The Other is being reduced to its cultural and language determinations that permit shaping the identity of the subject in terms of gender, while ignoring that this Other also incarnates itself in figures that convey a desire to the subject. Lacan gave to this desire the mark of a particular interest, which function is to articulate “the incarnation of the law within desire.” It is thus as if Butler emptied out this Other, which language and culture with its cliches about gender supposes, of its particular desire in regard to the subject. Although it is this particularity that enables the subject, in the use that he (or she) makes of it in his (or her) fantasmatic construction, to become singular. (my translation, 29-30)\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{138} See Dean, Tim, p. 92.


\textsuperscript{140} The Original French versions goes, “L’Autre se trouve ainsi réduit aux déterminations culturelles et langagières qui permettent de donner corps à l’identité en termes de genre d’un sujet, en ignorant que cet autre-là s’incarne aussi dans des figures qui véhiculent un désir à l’égard du sujet. Lacan donnait à ce désir la marque d’un intérêt particulier, intérêt qui permet d’articuler l’incarnation de la loi dans le désir. C’est donc comme si Butler vidait cet Autre, que le langage et la culture avec ses stéréotypes du genre supposent, de son désir particulier à l’égard du sujet, particularité qui permet dans l’équation qu’en fait le sujet dans sa construction fantasmique, de se singulariser” (29-30).
The problem that needs to be explored is thus the one of the desire of the Other, which is to say not only the limitation at an Imaginary level of the available models of identifications, but the affective and unconscious weight that is attached to all these imaginary representations. In other words, what is needed, from a Lacanian point of view, is not a new “Lesbian Phallus” but an understanding of the impact of the desire of the Other on the claim of gender and queer theory.

Butler herself tried to answer the question when she first elaborated, in the conclusion “From parody to politics” of her book *Gender Trouble*, her theory of subversive parody. However, Butler's theory, I would argue, is quite ambivalent as it reveals her misapprehension of the problematic of desire, and perhaps even more, as Dean argues too, a complete misapprehension of the Lacanian Real and its links to object a. Thinking the problematic of desire through the Hegelian framework of the dialectic of the master and slave, Butler actually reduces desire to an Imaginary phenomenon (that could be subverted at an Imaginary level) while equating, in turn, the Lacanian Real to a pre-discursive notion (that would deprive the subject of any form of agency). On the one hand, indeed, Butler argues that a parodic enactment of gender norms can provide a good strategy to subvert the pretension of those models to be “real” or natural. On the other hand, she seems aware that such parodic strategies can also be the expression of a certain despair in front of such models. In other words, it seems to me that Butler’s theory of parody is facing a sort of dilemma where parody can either be the expression of a subversive laughter, or the expression of a deep despair,

Parody, by itself, is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what make certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which
repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony. A typology of actions would clearly not suffice, for parodic displacement, indeed, parodic laughter, depends on the context and reception in which subversive confusion can be fostered. What performance will invert the inner/outer distinction and compel a radical rethinking of the psychological presupposition of gender identity and sexuality? What performance where will compel a reconsideration of the place and stability of the masculine and the feminine? And what kind of gender performance will enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilizes the naturalized categories of identity and desire?” (189)

Unfortunately, what could properly ground a “subversive performance,” i.e., a performance that would be truly troubling, cannot be of the same order as what it is supposed to ground. Otherwise, as Butler is lucidly pointing at, such a performance would run the constant risk of being as empty and deprived of meaning as the norms and models that the performance was supposed to subvert.\textsuperscript{141} It is as if Butler tried to deconstruct the transcendental subject by reducing it to a succession of false identifications, and then mourned the fact that such deconstructed subject—reduced to an imaginary effect—had no place left to ground his/her agency. Quite on the contrary, if such a performance were to be grounded in what Lacan called \textit{object a}, then the question of the agency and the “authenticity” of the subject would no longer be a problem. The only problem left would be how to gain an access to this mode of jouissance (that is generally repressed by the desire of the Other), and how to gain a form of control over it (since

\textsuperscript{141} I undertake a deeper exploration of this problem in chapter Four, where I confront Lacan and Georges Bataille on the question of the relation of the Real and knowledge.
jouissance is always excessive and about to turn into the death drive)?

This is why one could conclude that for Lacan the very notion of power that so occupies Judith Butler does not, in fact, belong to the field of the drives but to the Imaginary field of narcissism, since it is narcissism that gives to the ego its illusion of absolute power. Consequently, the whole issue of identity for Lacan is, unlike for a Queer relational such as Butler, not a question of Imaginary identification nor of Symbolic construction but related to the relationship of each subject to its singular mode of jouissance. It is because each subject, for very contingent reasons, develops a singular mode of jouissance (as a Real) that such a thing as a queer subject exists for Lacan. But what is queer in the Lacanian subject, contrary to what is generally being said, should not be reduced to the Imaginary body of the “Mirror stage” nor to the Symbolic structures of language but precisely conceived as what is Real, and thus disconnected from these registers. And it is precisely this new conception of jouissance as Real that Lacan developed during the second half of his “Return to Freud,” and that is generally known as his “structuralist period.”

However, as the next chapter demonstrates, this period of Lacan’s teaching, far from being reducible to the critique of structuralism put forth by Derrida and Foucault, was actually laying the foundation of a theory of the subject that is, at the same time, the product of the most famous post-structuralist critique of the humanist subject, but also a unique form of post-structuralism that remains to be known and used by gender and queer scholars.
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CHAPTER TWO: THE PURLOINED LACAN
Or How Derrida Ousted Lacan During the 1966 John Hopkins Conference

“Pre-structuralism is before the signifier, and post-structuralism, the good one, that is to say the only one, Lacan’s, is beyond the signifier: it is the consideration of the beyond of the signifier.

The only poststructuralism is that of the object, that which leads us “beyond the signifier,” to a new form, hitherto unpublished, of objective deficiency.”

Jacques-Alain Miller

“What I have inscribed, with the help of letters, of the formations of the unconscious to recuperate them from that of which Freud formulates them, as being what they are, effects of the signifier, does not authorize us to make of the letter a signifier, nor to affect for it, which is more, a primacy in regard to the signifier.”

Jacques Derrida

Lacan in the Midst of the Post-Structuralist Controversy
It was during the famous conference organized by René Girard at the John Hopkins University, entitled The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: Symposium on the Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man (1966),\(^{142}\) that the notion of post-structuralism emerged for the very first time. The word post-structuralism was invented, as

François Cusset suggests in *French Theory* (2008), in haste. Something like an event or a trauma had happened to the notion of structuralism during the Baltimore conference and had to be registered, and thus to be named. Post-structuralism it was. Simple. Vague. Delimited neither by a content nor by a time. *Post* as what comes after, but nothing else. No indication about the link between the before and the after, nor a suggestion about a new direction. A simple and vague *after*. In other words, while the Baltimore conference had been organized at first with the intention of helping American scholars (trained in different conceptual frameworks such as archetypal, gestaltist, contextualist, functionalist, etc.) to understand better the new language of criticism that was used by French scholars (like Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, Lacan, Foucault or Althusser, etc.), it ended up becoming the landmark of the end of structuralism as well as the date of birth of its American afterlife under the name of *post-structuralism*.

The controversy arose from the fact that most French thinkers who had been invited to represent “structuralism” during the conference did not feel so attached to the term, nor to a so-called unified structuralist theory. Macksey and Denato, in the introduction to their 1970 book on the conference, wrote, “With the exception of Lévi-Strauss, all those whose names have come to be associated with structural theory—Foucault, Lacan, Derrida—, have felt obliged programmatically to take their distance with relation to the term” (ix). To make sense of this intellectual turnaround, one has to go back, first, to what was happening at that time in the *Ecole*

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144 Far from being “structuralist,” what united all these authors, according to Gilles Deleuze in “The New Archivist,” *Critiques* (the only one who declined Girard’s invitation), was something much vaguer and, more importantly, something much more “subversive,” something like “A cold and concerted destruction of the subject, a lively distaste for notions of origin, of lost origin, of recovered origin, a dismantling of unifying pseudo-synthesis of consciousness, a denunciation of all the mystifications of history performed in the name of progress, consciousness, and of the future of reason” (17).
Normale Supérieure (ENS) in Paris, where all the thinkers invited—Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, Barthes & co.—were all dealing with Althusser’s philosophical agenda, at the time the “head” of the ENS. To put it simply, Althusser’s ambition was to rethink Marxism by using structuralism as his theoretical framework. As such, Althusser emphasized, on the one hand, the importance of the notion of structure as a unilateral causal power over the existentialist approach of the subject that was still prevailing at that time. But on the other hand, Althusser forged, with the help of Lacan, a new conception of the subject that was, at the same time, the effect of the structure, and the point of departure of its potential subversion. As a consequence of this double ambition, an intense polemic among Althusser’s students and colleagues started around the year 1964, and gave birth to a Journal called Les Cahiers pour l’Analyse.145

The stakes of the polemic revolved, first, around the status that needed to be given to the use of mathematical models in “Structuralism” and, second, around the relationship that the old notion of the subject was entertaining with the structure that was supposed to rule it. What was in question was the capacity of science to penetrate the imaginary or ideological illusion that governs the human mind and, reciprocally, the capacity of the human mind to be shaped by external structures. While, for a humanist philosopher like Sartre, what was needed was the subject’s clarity of consciousness, for the younger generation of anti-humanist philosophers of

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145 For a very good history of this polemic see, Hallward, Peter. “Introduction: Theoretical Training,” in Concept and Form, Volume 1, Selections from THE CAHIERS POUR L’ANALYSE, Ed. by Peter Hallward and Knox Peden. New York: Verso, 2012. pp. 1-55. Halward writes, “The Cahiers pour l’Analyse was a journal edited by a small group of philosophy students at the Ecole Normale Superieure (ENS) in Paris. Ten issues of the journal appeared between 1966 and 1969, arguably the most fertile and productive years in French philosophy during the whole of the twentieth century. The Cahiers published major articles by many of the most significant thinkers of the period, including Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Luce Irigaray, and Jacques Lacan, and many of the young ENS students and graduates involved in the production of the journal (notably Jacques-Alain Miller, JeanClaude Milner, Alain Badiou, Francois Regnault, Yves Duroux and Jacques Bouveresse) were soon to become major figures in French intellectual life” (Introduction, 1).
the ENS, what was needed was a theory of the subject that could acknowledge the primacy of science while enabling the inclusion, within science, of the subjective dimension that science was supposed to exclude. As Foucault put it in an interview with Madeleine Chapsale, the theoretical ambition of the moment was “to liberate ourselves definitively from humanism, and to embrace our own passion, the passion of the concept” (514).

To Embrace the Passion of the Concept as an Anti-Humanist
To embrace the passion of concept as an anti-humanist while trying to make room for the subject is far from being an easy task. It is almost an impossible task since the concept excludes, by definition, the notion of the subject. While a concept always remains identical to itself, a subject is something that never coincides with itself. A subject is an “object” that has no stable relationship to itself since its identity is still in progress. As such, in between the concept and the subject there is an unavoidable gap. And it is precisely this gap, according to Derrida, that structuralism has been denying since its inception. Derrida, in the paper that he presented during the Baltimore conference pointed in Saussure’s model to all the metaphysical propositions implicit in much of his linguistic thinking, making of them the correlate of a humanist subject implying certain concepts of presence and identity. In the name of Nietzsche, Freud and Heidegger, Derrida accused Saussure, and thus all the other “structuralists,” despite their claim of being no longer humanist, of perpetuating the legacy of the philosophy of Modernity and its naive definition of the humanist subject. To overcome this perpetuation, Derrida proposed to invent a new science, the science Of Grammatology; a science that soon became, at least in the United-States, the point of departure of a movement of deconstruction of most humanist
discourses that culminated in the creation of the post-colonial studies.

In agreement with Derrida’s critique of the humanist subject, but opposed to his conception of *Granmatology*, Lacan proposed, during the same conference, in his presentation “Of Structure as an Immixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to any Subject Whatever,” to push structuralism further—through the use of new mathematical concepts—in order to make room for what Lacan called, in his presentation published in *The Structuralist Controvery*, “the subject of jouissance.” The subject of jouissance is the name that Lacan gave, at that time, to the affective part of the subject of the unconscious, since, as Miller aptly puts it, Lacan’s subject of the unconscious, for its part, “has no body.”146 The subject of jouissance, to put it differently, is what happens to the subject of the unconscious once it is connected to *object a*.147 It is, in sum, the speaking body, the affective result of the contingent and traumatic impact of an “immixing of an Otherness” onto a body that speaks. Lacan said,

> It is, of course, absolutely essential to understand how the symbolic order can enter inside the *vécu*, lived experience, of mental life, but I cannot put forth tonight such an explanation. Consider, however, that which is at the same time the least known and the most certain fact about this mythical subject which is the sensible phase of the living being: this fathomless thing capable of experiencing something between birth and death, capable of covering the whole spectrum of pain and pleasure in a word, what in French we call the *sujet de la Jouissance*. (194)

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147 For a fuller definition of *object a*, see Chapter One, III, “Queer Theory Meets Lacan.”
What is at stake for Lacan is thus not the deconstructive analysis of the structure itself, but the ways in which this structure is impacting a body and, reciprocally, how this impacted body interprets at an affective level the impact of the structure. In other words, what is at stake is not only a theoretical question but also a question that has to do with what is the most opposed to any concept, i.e., the contingent affects that traverse a body and that Lacan named, during the Baltimore conference, the subject of jouissance.

Unfortunately, Lacan’s position, compared to Derrida or Foucault’s positions, never attracted much attention in the United-States. Quite the contrary, Lacan was reduced by most American Feminist, Gender and Queer Scholars, as we have seen in Chapter One, to his structuralist definition of the subject of the unconscious, and was thus considered less critical and cutting edge than Derrida’s deconstructive Grammatology or Foucault genealogical analysis of discourse of power.

In this chapter, I challenge this idea by arguing that Lacan’s position was, from the beginning and all the more after the elaboration of object a, in agreement with the critical goal of post-structuralism, as well as ahead of it when it comes to understanding the relationships between a body that speaks, and discourses of power that are supposed to shape it. To do so, I start by giving a definition to the word structuralism by putting the term in contraposition with the history of Grammar and Linguistics, and then in contraposition to the broader field of the Human Sciences. Second, I analyze the way in which structuralism became enmeshed with Marxism and Freudianism under the patronage of Louis Althusser, and how this new form of structuralism became for a whole new generation of anti-humanist philosophers the starting point
of a quarrel over the notion of science and its relation to the old notion of the subject. Third, I present Derrida’s critical position in the debate before confronting it with the one defended by Lacan. Then, I put in dialogue the two thinkers through their different reading of Poe’s novella *The Purloined Letter*. Finally, I end the chapter with a reading of *Lituraterre (1975)*, a text in which Lacan connects the notion of the subject of jouissance to his late teaching while answering Derrida’s critique of his early definition of the subject of the unconscious.148

I. STRUCTURALISM AND THE DEATH OF THE HUMANIST SUBJECT

What does the term “structuralism” mean? Francois Whal raises the question in his introduction to the collective book *Qu’est-ce que le structuralisme?* published in France a year after the Baltimore’s conference.149 Whal writes, “Let's push the question to the point of becoming paradoxical: does structuralism exists? The answer used to be self-evident; today, one may like to be more cautious with his answer” (my translation). The previous answer to the question “what is structuralism?” the one that was supposed to be so self-evident prior to the conference, was the one forged by Ferdinand de Saussure in his *Cours de Linguistique Générale* (1913), and then the one that Lévi-Strauss gave to it in his famous collection of essays *Structural Anthropology*

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150 “Poussons notre question jusqu’au paradoxe; le structuralisme existe-t-il? La réponse paraissait naguère évidente ; aujourd’hui, il ne nous déplait pas de faire passer notre réponse par un temps de prudence.” (8)
(1958).\textsuperscript{151} A brief survey of these two definitions, as well as their main implications in the field of linguistic and human sciences will thus be helpful to understand what later came to pose a problem in “structuralism.”

The Notion of Structure in Grammar
The idea that language is structured is as old as the creation of the first Grammar by the ancient Greeks.\textsuperscript{152} Aristotle, for example, in his \textit{Organon I & II} defines the sounds produced by the human voice as symbols of the soul, words as the written symbols of the symbols emitted by the voice, and Grammar as the system of conventions that regulates the usage and the articulations of those symbols. Grammar is a set of structural rules governing the composition of phrases (subject, verb, complement), clauses (first, second, third, etc.), and words in a given language. These rules, in turn, correspond to the cognitive information underlying what is expressed in language. In other words, for a grammarian, language is nothing but a tool that represents thought, and grammar rules the attempt to make sure that language is used properly. Within this perspective, the idea of structure is linked, first, to the idea of language as a medium that represents something else. Second, it implies the idea that there exists a correspondence between things in the world and the “thoughts” expressed in language. Aristotle writes, “Just as all men have not the same writing, so all men have not the same speech sounds, but the mental


experiences, which these directly symbolize, are the same for all, as also are those things of which our experiences are the images” (On Interpretation, 1, 16a). This fundamental idea—that “mental experiences are the same for all” is what will support all the theorization on language and Grammar up until Saussure’s invention of linguistics. It is, to give but one example, the idea that supports the General grammar published by the Academy of Port Royal in 1660.153 Largely inspired by Descartes’s idea about the existence of a “mathesis universalis” present in nature, these authors tried to prove that grammar was universal inasmuch as it was reducible to a set of structures that were themselves the product of universal mental processes.154

Wilhelm von Humboldt picked up the idea two centuries later in a conference called “Uber das entstehen des grammatisch en Formen und ihren Einfluss aud die Ideen” (1822) “On the Origin of Grammatical Forms and their Influence on the Development of Ideas,” and argued that language was a ruled-based system thanks to which a pre-existing thought could represent itself.155 In this classical framework, the construction of a sentence imitates the construction of thought, which itself is supposed to represent accurately the world. There is, to put it simply, the idea of a correspondence between the structures of thought and the structures of the world, and these structures are themselves reflected in the structure of language. If a sentence is always


154 The concept of mathesis universalis was mentioned by Descartes in the rule IV of his Regulae ad directionem ingenii (Rules for the Direction of the Mind) as the ideal way one could articulate together the formal and logical models developed by mathematics, and the ambition of experimental science to develop a knowledge about Nature. Descartes writes, anticipating in many ways Lévi-Strauss’ definition of structuralism, “There must be a certain general science which explains everything which can be asked about order and measure, and which is concerned with no particular subject matter, and that this very thing is called pure mathematic [mathesis universalis] (161). See, Descartes, René. “Rules for the Direction of the Mind,” in Descartes, Philosophical Essays, Translation by For more details on this idea, see Chomsky, Noam. Cartesian Linguistics: A Chapter in the History of Rational Thought, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009.

composed of, at least, a subject, a verb and a complement, it is inasmuch as the world itself is
supposed to be made of substances linked to qualities by a copula (since the verb to be represents
the fundamentally affirmative structure of all the other verbs). Wittgenstein, a century after
Humboldt, tried to use this idea to redefine in his *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* (1922) the
conditions under which an agreement between thoughts (expressed in language) and the world
(as a totality of facts) was possible.\textsuperscript{156} Wittgenstein created logical tools such as “truth tables”
and “truth conditions” to formalize his ideas, and these tools became, soon after, the foundation
of modern semantics.\textsuperscript{157}

However, when one adopts such a point of view on language, what becomes difficult is to
account for the multiple grammar structures that exist in different languages and, reciprocally,
what make disciplines like “Philology” or “Comparative Grammar” necessary. For a linguist and
philologist like Humboldt, for example, the simplest way to resolve this problem was to imagine
that differences between languages were the result of “local practices” of speech, i.e. the result of
the fact that people are using language mostly to communicate, and not to represent ideas. In
other words, for Humboldt, it is because people speak to communicate and not to express clear
ideas that the “primitive” and “universal” structure of thought, carried by a pure and primitive
grammar, slowly fade from the surface, and that the multiplicity of languages was born.

However, for comparatist such as the *French Encyclopedists* of the XVIIIth century, the problem

\textsuperscript{156} Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889 – 1951) was an Austrian-British philosopher, specialist in logic, philosophy of
mathematics, and philosophy of language. He worked under the supervision of Bertrand Russell. He is famous for
having completely changed his mind during his lifetime about language, and what he considered to be the essence of
it. See, for the “first” Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *The Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*. Translated by Pears David &

\textsuperscript{157} Semantics is the linguistic and philosophical study of meaning. It is, as the “first” Wittgenstein defined it, a
search for the correct “denotation” of a given word, since language, in semantics, is supposed to represent the world,
which is to say the “totality of facts, and not of things” (*Tractatus*, 1.2).
led them to argue that the structure of the French language was supposed to be closer to the
original structure of thought than the German, since the German grammar was supposed to be
further removed from a simple description of the world than French! This incapacity of the
Grammarians approach to explain the diversity of language is, without a doubt, what triggered a
revolution in the field of language; a revolution carried by Ferdinand de Saussure in his famous
*Cours de linguistique générale* (1916).

Saussure’s Notion of Structure: The Linguistic Turn

To go beyond the correspondence hypothesis and the kind of metaphysical conception about the
relations between the structure of language and the structures of the world that it implies,
Saussure took a completely different point of departure from his predecessors. Contrary to them,
Saussure considered language as a medium of communication and not as the written form of a
mental process. This new point of departure, then, forced him to give a new definition to the
most basic unit of language—the word—and then to the relations that unite these basic elements
of language to one another in order to create meaning. If one does not take as its point of
departure written language but speech, the task of delimiting what constitutes the simplest unit of
language becomes, in fact, more difficult. Far from being able to find these units already formed
and delimited within language, as a collection of words corresponding to a collection of ideas,
Saussure thought that the proper task of a linguist was actually to find out how these units could
be isolated during an act of speech. However, in order to find them, argued Saussure, the linguist
has to presuppose the existence, in language, of a structure that forms a system. If language is

first a continuous flow of speech in which it is impossible to establish non-arbitrary cuts, and if ideas, in turn, are in the same state of confusion and continuity, how could language still perform its function if it were not for a structure that gives to this mess some coherence and order? It is to give an answer to this question that Saussure suggested that to find such a structure, one has to focus on the way in which the two dimensions of langue—its materiality and its meaning—are interconnected to one another.

For Saussure, this connection is comparable to the one that happens between water and air, which by themselves are both continuous even though they produce at their edges isolated elements. Likewise, the encounter between the realm of thought and the one of sounds is what produces, for Saussure, the cuts in language. It is inasmuch as someone “understands” a statement and is capable of anticipating its global meaning that this person is capable, in turn, of introducing the right cuts in the sounds that form a sentence. In other words, the process of cutting to isolate words is already the result of a movement of understanding, which is itself the result of a prior cutting. What is thus essential, for Saussure, is to understand how language works when it is actually spoken, and when its process of signification happens in a linear temporality (diachronically). Ideally, one should be able to identify, within the seamless materiality of sounds, all the correct linguistic elements that “correspond” to the thought expressed in language. Saussure calls these linguistic elements, made of sounds, “signifiers,” and he calls the most basic element of meaning attached to them “signified.” The study of the signifier is related to phonology, and the one of the signified to semantics (in a classical context) or pragmatics. Saussure famously represented them in the form of a mathematical schema where the signifier, marked S, is placed under the signified, marked s: s/S. Moreover, Saussure called
the unity of the signifier and the signified the *sign*, and language in general the *synchronic* or *structural totality* of all the signs that compose a given language. However, to re-define the smallest linguistic unit the signifier, and the semantic unit, the signified, leaves one problem ahead. Indeed, since the meaning of a sentence is always hinging on the last word pronounced, how could someone isolate the correct signifier before the end of the sentence? This phenomenon is what makes it impossible, strictly speaking, to be sure that the correct linguistic element has been isolated with its correct signified, and thus that the correct sign has been understood, if there is not, at some point, an element that puts an end to this virtually endless process.\(^{159}\) (it is thanks to this phenomenon that Lacan will forge his concepts of *lalangue*.)

To extract oneself from this difficulty, one has to abandon the classical idea about what constitutes the identity of a linguistic element, as well as the identity of a thought or an idea.\(^{160}\) The identity of a signifier, for Saussure, is not like the one of a word, resting on a direct correspondence with an idea. It is thus not what one calls generally a *material identity*. On the contrary, a signifier acquires its identity in relation to the others that are directly next to it in the sentence, or similar to it in the system of language. In other words, signifiers, unlike words, do not have a stable identity, which means, an identity that would be independent and absolute.

Signifiers, for Saussure, have a *relational identity* since they are always the result of a system of differences, of small variations between other signifiers (like the signifier “de” in the series of

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\(^{159}\) I will come back to this question in the third part of this chapter, when I will explain Lacan’a notion of the quilting point, as he developed it in his Seminar III, *On Psychosis*.

\(^{160}\) Saussure wrote, in a preparatory manuscript for his course, cited by R. Godel in his commentary of Saussure’s Course: “Il est vraisemblable qu’en allant au fond des choses, on s’aperçoit dans ce domaine, comme dans le domaine parent de la langue, que toutes les incongruités de la pensée proviennent d’une insuffisante réflexion sur ce qu’est l’identité ou le caractère de l’identité, lorsqu’il s’agit d’un être inexistant comme le mot ou la personne mythique, ou une lettre de l’alphabet, qui ne sont que différente forme du SIGNE au sens philosophique.” See Godel, Robert. *Les sources manuscrites du « cours de linguistique générale*, Genève: Droz, 1957, p. 136.
words deconstruction, demolition, debasement, etc.). Likewise, the signified, for Saussure, is not comparable to a signification that would subsist as a pure thought outside of the network of signifiers that have circumscribed it. Unlike meaning, the signified, for Saussure, is always the result of a fragile and localized construction that is comparable to the one of the signifier. There is thus no absolute signified, but only moments of agreement between a signifier and a signified, which produce, together, a sign. In Saussure's conception of language, words are thus not acoustic images representing abstract and well-defined ideas, or things localizable in the world, but the precarious result of a cutting that is itself the result of a very precarious process of understanding.

However, when the relational identity of a signifier is attached to the relational identity of a signified, it finally forms a sign, which constitutes, one may say, Saussure's way to return to a more classical approach to identity. Indeed, by describing the functioning of language as the functioning of a system made up of several elements (signifiers) that generates meaning exclusively through the relationship of one signifier to another (signified), Saussure did not destroy the concept of identity as such, and thus the concept of the subject of speech that supported it, but he gave to it a new scientific status. This status consisted in introducing new mathematical models to deal with the construction of the sign and of meaning, and thus of the notion of identity, at the strict level of speech. And it is this renewed approach to the identity of the sign, through the detour of mathematical models that ended up transforming one of the oldest Sciences of Man, namely Rhetoric, into a scientific discipline which soon became a scientific model for all the other Sciences of Man.
Lévi-Strauss’ Notion of Structure: The Anthropological Turn

The most important thinker who found a direct source of inspiration in Saussure’s method was Claude Lévi-Strauss. It is thanks to him, indeed, that Saussure’s method showed how powerful it could become when applied to analyzing complex anthropological objects such as, for example, the structure of kinship.161 In *The Elementary Forms of Kinship* (1949), Lévi-Strauss did not use, however, Saussure’s linguistic models to explain the functioning of these basic social structures but, instead, the concept of the *Klein four-group* invented by the mathematician Felix Klein.162 In other words, what Lévi-Strauss did was not exactly applying linguistic concepts developed by Saussure to his own field, but experimenting in the field of anthropology in the same way Saussure did in the field of linguistics. Neville Dyson-Hudson alluded to this problem at the beginning of his presentation “Structure and Infrastructure in Primitive Society: Lévi-Strauss and Radcliffe-Brown,” when he said, for instance, that “anthropology has today a wider audience than ever before because of Lévi-Strauss’ writings; yet those writings have drawn greater enthusiasm from outsiders than from anthropologists and have so far had greater impact on other fields than on his own” (219).

Like Saussure, who started by discarding the classical idea according to which language was just a representation of thought, Lévi-Strauss started his own investigation by discarding the dominant explanation of the structure of kinship, namely the functionalist hypothesis, rebaptized for the occasion by Lévi-Strauss as “the naturalist fallacy.” In the *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) Bronislaw Malinowski suggested that every social practice could be explained by


162 Christian Felix Klein (1849 – 1925) was a German mathematician. He is mostly famous for having invented the notion of group theory, and for having worked intensively on complex analysis and non-Euclidean geometry.
its ability to satisfy basic biological needs.\textsuperscript{163} Likewise, Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown argued, although in a slightly different manner than Malinowski that all the social practices were actually the result of a natural process of coadaptation without which social interaction would be left in a state of continuous chaos.\textsuperscript{164} In other words, it is the idea of function that was supposed to explain the existence of social structure, up to the “structuralist” intervention of Lévi-Strauss. To put it otherwise, human society as a whole was conceived as an organism, and each social phenomenon was associated with a natural function. This is why, for Lévi-Strauss, all these explanations were nothing but “naturalistic fallacy” since to attribute a function to an object or a phenomenon always implies to submit it to a form of teleological mode of thinking, and thus to submit it to a false natural development.

To oppose this “naturalistic fallacy,” Lévi-Strauss proposed, in the chapter XV of his \textit{Structural Anthropology} (1958), a structuralist definition of the notion of “social structure.” In it, he makes clear that the notion of structure, in anthropology just as in Saussurian linguistics, is nothing but the attempt to approach, using mathematical models, the “invisible” and immaterial structures that the notion of function were hiding so far. Lévi-Strauss writes, “the term ‘social structure’ has nothing to do with empirical reality, but with models which are built up after it.” (271) In other words, to approach the social as a structuralist is to approach it beyond its empirical reality, just like for Saussure, to approach scientifically language was to approach it beyond its reduction to a materialization of thought. To sum it up, structuralism was for Lévi

\textsuperscript{163} Malinowski, Bronislaw. \textit{Argonauts of the Western Pacific}. Waveland Press, 1984.

Strauss a method of analyzing and grouping data beyond their immediate meaning, rather than a new way to study specific interactions or particular social phenomenon.

“Structuralism” after Lévi-Strauss was thus nothing but a method to analyze any kind of social object that offers a systematic or structural character. By systematic or structural character, Lévi-Strauss means any ensemble of elements articulated to one another in such a way that the modification of one element entails the topological modification of all the others.165 This systematic character, already crucial for Saussure, is what gave Lévi-Strauss the possibility of forming, from any given structure, a series of transformations that keep expressing the same type of order throughout its multiple deformations.166 It is also these series of transformations, once established, that can serve as a predictive model regarding the changes affecting all the elements of the structure once one is moving.167 To summarize Lévi-Strauss’ definition of the term “social structure,” and by implication, of the term structuralism, one could say that structuralism is the name of the attempt to use mathematical models to study and understand social phenomena beyond any naturalistic intuition.

More than a unique approach or methodology, what the term structuralism referred to, prior to the Baltimore conference, was thus something like a shared hope. The hope was that thanks to Saussure’s scientific approach to language, and Lévi-Strauss’ effort to extend Saussure’s method to other objects, the old and mostly metaphysical “Sciences of Man” could

165 Lévi-Strauss writes, “First, the structure exhibits the characteristic of a system. It is made up of several elements, none of which can undergo a change without affecting changes in all the other elements” (271).

166 Lévi-Strauss writes, “Second, for any given model there should be a possibility of ordering a series of transformations resulting in a group of models of the same type” (272).

167 Lévi-Strauss writes, “Third, the above properties make it possible to predict how the model will react if one of its elements are submitted to certain modifications” (272).
finally achieve a stage of “real” scientificity and a unified science of signs could emerge. In other words, one could say that structuralism was the name of the idea according to which any human phenomenon, inasmuch as it involves the use of language, was potentially analyzable in the same scientific manner as the one practiced by Saussure. To illustrate this point, one could mention, here, the case of Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, who “revolutionized” the field of classical studies by applying linguistic models to the study of ancient Greece. But it is without a doubt Roland Barthes who gave to the “structuralist” dream its best expression. It is he who described in his inaugural lecture at the College de France on Semiology, what such a science could be. In his presentation “To Write: an intransitive Verb?” during the Baltimore’s conference, Barthes proposed a description of the kind of imperialist position that linguistics came to occupy in the French intellectual world of the 60s. He writes,

We see culture more and more as a general system of symbols, governed by the same operations. There is unity in this symbolic field: culture in all its aspects, is a language. Therefore, it is possible today to anticipate the creation of a single, unified science of culture, which will depend on diverse disciplines, all devoted to analyzing, on different levels of description, culture as language. (136)

One can legitimately wonder, however, faced with Barthes’ dream, if the kind of systematic structure that “structuralism” presupposes in any social phenomenon is actually present in

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culture, or if it is simply superimposed onto it. In other words, one can wonder whether the “unified science of culture” that Barthes talks about is but a convenient hypothesis to organize at a supposedly neutral and scientific level what would otherwise present itself, strictly speaking, as the pure expression of a certain state of power, or a particular subject, contingently impacted by a given culture.

II. STRUCTURALISM MEETS MARXISM & PSYCHOANALYSIS

For the Marxist philosopher and sociologist Lucien Goldmann, present as a keynote speaker at the Baltimore conference, the problem with structuralism was not so much a problem of choosing between linguistic models, and more complex and elaborated mathematical models, but an ideological problem. For Goldmann, the problem with structuralism was, primarily, one of disavowal of subjectivity and history. Structuralism was guilty, for Goldmann, of reducing “Man” to an animal that speaks, while “Man” does not speak in a void but in a historical context and through its body. Goldmann said, during the discussion of Barthes’ paper, “For me, what is interesting about this scientific perspective is to see what is ideological about it. The sociologist must analyze this current of thought which tries to eliminate the psychological and sociological subject, to see if it isn’t a way for a collective subject to view the status of man in terms of a certain ideology.” (148)

Althusser’s Notion of Structure: The Marxist Turn

The word ideology, of course, was a very important one in 1966. To explain its importance, and the role that it came to play in “the structuralist controversy,” it is useful to evoke here the figure of Louis Althusser. During the 60s Althusser was a very influential philosopher for whom the notion of ideology was of crucial importance to understand the concept of alienation and “false consciousness” in Marx’s *Capital.* Althusser was also the one ruling over the prestigious Parisian institution of the *Ecole Normale Supérieure.* In this context, Althusser organized, between 1961 and 1964 a series of three Seminars in which he proposed to study *The Young Marx* (1961-1962), *The Origin of Structuralism* (1962-1963), and finally *The Relations Between Lacan and Psychoanalysis* (1963-1964), a series of Seminars that lead to the publication of Althusser’s famous book, co-authored with Etienne Balibar, *Lire le Capital* (1965).

The reason why Althusser had organized all these conferences was quite ambitious. Althusser wanted to change the intellectual climate of the time, a climate still dominated by various combinations of phenomenology and existentialism, and thus by an emphasis on the ‘concrete’ or lived dimension of experience. For intellectuals like Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Michel Foucault, all the *Human Sciences* were, at best, the servant of metaphysical or ethical values, and not the contrary. As such, the *Human Sciences* were not proper candidates to become real sciences. On the contrary, for philosophers like Sartre and

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172 See Foucault, Michel. *Les mots et les choses.* In this book, Foucault writes the history of the epistemology of the Western Social Sciences, which he calls the ethnology of Western culture.
Merleau-Ponty, what was at stake in the wake of the Second World War and the rapid
development of imperialism was, as Merleau-Ponty had it in *Humanism and Terror* (1947), “the
realization of Man,” i.e., a return to humanist values, and not a turn towards a scientific approach
of social and cultural phenomenon.¹⁷³ For Althusser, on the contrary, the problem with the
*Human Sciences* was the one of their scientific status. Althusser denounced, in a conference
called “Philosophy and the Human Sciences,” the *ideological alliance* that was still prevailing, in
1964 in France between a certain kind of classical philosophy, supporting the idea of a self-
centered subject, and the development of Social Sciences such as psychology, sociology or
education.¹⁷⁴ For Althusser most of the *Human Sciences* of his time were still *techniques* for
gaining social control over individuals and not yet proper sciences.¹⁷⁵

In contrast, Althusser wanted to forge a new approach to philosophy that could help the
*Human Sciences* to become scientific. He argued in favor of a philosophy that would be based
upon the rejection of all the ideological components generally attached to philosophy, i.e.,
“positivism,” “empiricism,” “psychologism,” and “pragmatism.” For Althusser, it was a question
of raising philosophy to the level of a *theoretical philosophy* (in opposition to all the other
*ideological philosophies*), in order to assign to philosophy itself a new task: the task of reflecting

101-102.

¹⁷⁴ During that time, in France, it is, most definitely, the existentialist philosophy of Sartre, with its transcendental
subject and its metaphysical conception of freedom, and the one of Merleau-Ponty, with its phenomenological
approach to consciousness, which represented the classical position described by Althusser in his conference.
Foucault too, in an interview on *Les mots et les choses*, in 1966, names Sartre as the last philosopher who incarnated
a “classical” position, which meant, a position where the status of the transcendental subject is not put into question.
See, www.youtube.com/watch?v=0UhdLiKYonE.

¹⁷⁵ See, for more details, Althusser, Louis. *Psychoanalysis and the Human Sciences*. Trans. by Steven Rendall, NY:
on the reality of the scientific practices. In other words, Althusser thought that the role of philosophy was not to turn social sciences into techniques of adaptation disguised as sciences, but to help them acquiring a status comparable to the one achieved by Saussure with linguistics. But how did Althusser manage to extract philosophy from its old ideological ground and to raise it to the level of a theoretical philosophy?

Lacan’s Structuralism: The Psychoanalytic Turn
To answer this question, it is now necessary to turn to Althusser’s relationship to Lacan.

Althusser ties to Lacan are numerous. Althusser, for example, is the one who agreed to host Lacan’s Seminar at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, in 1964, and who found in Lacan’s teaching tools to elaborate his concept of ideology. Althusser’s debt to Lacan revolves around the following points. First, Lacan represents, for Althusser, the only psychoanalyst who tried to separate radically the discipline of psychoanalysis from any other form of psychology. During his famous “return to Freud,” which started in 1953 and ended in 1964, Lacan criticized most of the Freudian and Post-Freudians psychoanalysts, such as Anna Freud or Heinz Hartmann, for having betrayed Freud’s discovery of the unconscious. While Freud, indeed, discovered, beyond the subject of consciousness, the subject of the unconscious, his followers did everything they could to minimize his discovery by reducing the possible influence of the unconscious on the subject of consciousness, which is to say, on the ego. Althusser writes, summarizing Lacan’s “Return to Freud,”

176 Althusser writes, in his conference, “The Place of Psychoanalysis in the Human Sciences,” “… all the descriptions of therapy, that currently exist, are absolutely incapable of taking the place of theoretical concepts that would actually make it possible to have access not only to what analytic practice is—which is only part of what is involved—but to that of which it is the concrete substance, namely its own theory” (10).
If, in fact, the reality principle is only an intervention made on the individual by social norms that operate through the mediation of the proximate family milieu and that are assumed by the individual himself in the form of the superego, then analytic therapy becomes simply a negotiation between the individual and society, a negotiation that, like all delicate negotiations, needs the good office of the psychoanalyst who will fix things, and who will fix them, of course, by saying: this poor boy, his ego has been crushed by his superego. The ego was too weak; we’re going to strengthen it: it is the whole psychoanalysis of the ego defense systems, whose great theoretician is Anna Freud, who is one of Lacan’s personal enemies. (27)

Anna Freud’s effort mostly consisted in conceiving psychoanalysis as the science of the biological (the drives) or the psychological (the superego) in order to make it fit the demands of the social.\footnote{Anna Freud, in her most famous book, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* (1936), made of the Ego the cornerstone of the child psychic ability to adjust itself to reality. By doing so, Anna lost sight of Freud’s most important discovery: the underlying unconscious Id determining the ego itself. The ego, indeed, became for Anna the only psychic faculty that had the ability to use and channel the unconscious conflicts constitutive of the human psyche—i.e., the conflicts between sexual drives (Id), aggressive drives (Super-ego), and moral ideals (ego). This is why Anna Freud went even as far as making of the ego the source of valuable and useful modes of repressions and sublimations. She proposed to isolate, within the ego-defenses, the ones that were socially valuable, and those that only represented an impediment for the person, or a direct threat for society. By doing so, she emphasized the reality based ego (the part of the ego working in agreement with the reality principle), and downplayed the ego’s involvement in the constitution of the fantasy (the part of the ego working in agreement with the pleasure principle). Consequently, Anna Freud thought that development essentially involved the gradual mastery of the id by the ego, what she called “the education, or perhaps better, the socialization of the drives” (32). And it is with this goal in mind that her group (the “B” group) took control of the I.P.A. and that she trained many of the analysts that were about to immigrate to the United States and who would become, like Hartmann, Ernst Kris and Rudolph Loewenstein, the new figures of psychoanalysis in America after the Second World War.}
betrayed the original desire of Freud, and this is why, also, psychoanalysis has become, since the Second World War, especially in America, a technique of adaptation at the service of the social.

Contrary to this reduction of psychoanalysis to a vulgar technique of adaptation, Lacan, according to Althusser, wanted to make of psychoanalysis a true science of the subject of the unconscious. To do so, Lacan famously applied to Freud’s concept of the unconscious, as he described it in texts such as the *Science of Dreams* (1900-1901), *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), or *Jokes and their Interpretations* (1905), the linguistic concepts developed by Saussure and Roman Jakobson. Turning away from the classical interpretation of the Freudian unconscious as a reserve of libido, Lacan proposed in his “Discours de Rome” (1953), in a gesture similar in its radicalism to the gesture accomplished by Saussure with language, to define the subject of the unconscious as a chain of signifiers structured like a language. He then used Jakobson’s notion of metaphor and metonymy to describe all the unconscious operations that Freud had identified through his own biological framework. Lacan re-described Freud’s notion of displacement with Jakobson’s notion of metaphor, and the operation of condensation with the one of metonymy. In other words, Lacan managed to formalize what Freud had only described at a biological and anthropological level. By doing so, Lacan managed to give to Freud’s unconscious a scientific writing that enabled him, in turn, to separate the subject of consciousness, which is the ego, from the subject of the unconscious, represented by a chain of signifiers structured like a language. This is why, for Althusser, Lacan represents the one and

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178 See, Lacan, Jacques. “Discours de Rome,” in *Autres Ecrits*, pp. 133-164. Commenting on Lacan’s discourse in his conference “Psychoanalysis and Psychology,” Althusser writes, “As soon as we try to reduce psychoanalysis to psychology, the unconscious becomes the interior of consciousness; either biological id, something that falls short of the ungraspable subject interior to the subject, or simply the experienced but occulted sense, the nonsense that is always the risk taken by meaning experienced in the intentionality of consciousness” (71).
only psychoanalyst who has managed to disentangle the structure of the subject of the unconscious from its imaginary subordination, in psychology, to the structure of the ego. This is, for Althusser, the kernel of Lacan’s work, and the point of departure that he took to think anew the concept of ideology, and also the Lacan that many Anglo-American gender and queer scholar have retained from Lacan’s work in order to think, through Althusser’s concept of ideology, the relationship of the subject to power.

Althusser’s Appropriation of Lacan’s Structuralism

For Althusser, the notion of ideology functions as an equivalent of the word “reality” in Lacan’s early works. Human “reality,” for the early Lacan of the “Mirror Stage,” (1936) unlike the “reality” that the animal inhabits, is never “natural” but always the result of a cultural construction that relies mostly on imaginary processes of identification. To summarize Lacan’s argument, one could say that it is because humans are born in a state of deficiency that they identify, at an imaginary level, to one another. And it is because humans identify to one another that their ego is precarious and, more problematically, that the ultimate source of conflict in between them is not different from what bound them together at an imaginary level. There is thus, in Lacan’s “Mirror Stage,” a connection between human deficiency, identification as the source of the ego identity, and the construction of reality as an imaginary artefact. This why

179 See Lacan, Jacques. Beyond the “Reality Principle,” (1936) in Ecrits, 58-74. Lacan writes, at the end of this article “Two questions arise here: how is the reality to which man’s knowledge is universally attuned constituted by these images, these objects of interests? And how is the I constituted, in which the subject recognizes itself, by his typical identifications? Freud answers these two questions by again moving on metapsychological ground. He posits a “Reality Principle” whose role in his theory I propose to critique.” (74) This critique of Freud’s “Reality Principle” is what Lacan will do in his famous article “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” in Ecrits, 75-81.

Althusser thought that Lacan’s theory of the “Mirror Stage” was actually perfect to describe, at a
psychoanalytical level, what Marx had described at the level of the social under the term
ideology. Althusser writes in his book on *Lenin*, “Ideology represents the imaginary relationship
of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (109). Now, faced with this imaginary
construction, the task of philosophy, and all the more of human sciences is, according to
Althusser, not to build linguistic models of a given ideological “reality,” but to invent theoretical
concepts that could theorize the condition under which “reality” functions and at the same time
hides itself in complex processes of recognition. In other words, the question is, for Althusser, to
produce a series of concepts, or mathematical writings capable of going beyond the imaginary
mask that hides the symbolic structures that are actually supporting the “real condition of
existence,” which means reality.

With Althusser, the question about structuralism becomes thus a question about the nature
of “reality,” and the impact that structuralism, as a new approach to structure, beyond the
imaginary, could have on its definition. If it is true to say that there is no human reality outside
the social structure that causes it, then how can one still hope to change anything in these
structures? For it is one thing to be able to use mathematical model to describe the structure that
governs and shapes the human experience, and yet another one to understand how these
structures are being incorporated by a living creature, and perhaps even modified by this same
creature. In other words, how shall one conceive the relations between the subject of the
unconscious and the ideological structures that subject him? How much freedom and agency can
a Lacano-Althusserian subjected subject have, once it has been admitted that it is entirely shaped
by the social structures that surround him?
III. DERRIDA’S ANTI-HUMANIST TURN

It is, one could say, in order to apply the program put forth by Althusser while pointing at its limits that Derrida wrote, in the name of a new theoretical philosophy to come, his critique of the language of the Human Sciences. In his presentation “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” during the Baltimore conference, Derrida placed the very concept of “structure” used by Saussure first, and then by Lévi-Strauss and other structuralists, under critical scrutiny. Derrida argued that “something has occurred in the history of the concept of structure that could be called an “event” (247). This “event,” however, did not happen in opposition to the repetitive character of the structure, but it happened to the notion of structure itself. In other words, Derrida’s thesis is that something had happened in the history of the concept of structure to the “structurality of the structure” (247) itself, which means that something had happened to what was grounding, so far, the very concept structure.

A Structuralism without a Center
In of Grammatology (1967) Derrida defines this event with the utmost precision. His argument, to put it simply, consists in saying that the very idea of system that Saussure associated with language is actually a metaphysical invention that is about to come to an end. This metaphysical invention is what supported, since the Greeks and the invention of phonology, the very idea of logos. Logos is, for Derrida, the name of the original ordering of language by a


metaphysical desire. This ordering is also at work in every other discipline that is using, as its framework, the idea of system. Thus, the profusion of words in Derrida’s discourse that ends with the word “centrism,” like logo-centrism, phallo-centrism, ethno-centrism, pha-logo-centrism, etc. In each of these seemingly barbarian terms, the same critique is actually repeated and systematized by Derrida. It is always a question of pointing, in each discourse, to what constitutes, in it, its principle of organization, its meta-discourse. What function of the law, of order, plays in a given discourse? What organizes it? And how shall we evaluate the metaphysical status of this principle?

This ground, argues Derrida, is related to the notion of center, as well as to the two other metaphysical notions that derive from it: the notion of presence and the notion of origin. And, through the crisis of these three notions, it is nothing less than the whole edifice of western epistemology that comes undone, since it was thanks to these basal concepts that the notion of structure received its order, as well as the limits of the “free” movements of its elements. To put it differently, it was the idea of center that rendered the idea of structure possible. Likewise, it was the idea of presence that was grounding the idea of a self-centered subject, and it was the idea of origin, united to the idea of destination (telos and arche) that was grounding the idea of a

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183 In a similar manner, Lacan will say, five years later, in his Seminar XX, Encore, that language is an elucubration of knowledge over an original form of language called by Lacan, lalangue. Lalangue, to put it more clearly, is the language as spoken by a little kid, thus a language containing all the possible mistakes and confusion due to homophony. Jean-Michel Rabate, in Lacan and the Subject of Literature, proposes to translate the word lalangue in English by the expression Lalalanguage. I will come back to this definition of language, in opposition lalangue, in Chapter Five, Psychoanalysis against Psychoanalysis.
closed and meaningful universe. Derrida writes,

If this is so, the entire history of the concept of structure, before the rupture of which we are speaking, must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center. Successively, and in a regulated fashion, the center receives different forms or names. The history of Metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix—if you will pardon me for demonstrating so little and for being so elliptical in order to come more quickly to my principal theme—is the determination of Being as presence in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence—eidos, arché, telos, energeia, ousia, (essence, existence, substance, subject) aletheia, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth.” (Writing and Difference, 279-280)

With the disappearance of the idea of center, it is the very organizing principle of any type of human knowledge that crumbles, i.e., the very concept of presence. But what happened to the notion of center? And more importantly, what happened to the notion of presence that was

184 Derrida writes, “The thematic of historicity, although it seems a somewhat late arrival in philosophy, has always been required by the determination of being as presence. With or without etymology, and in spite of the classic antagonism which opposes these significations throughout all of classical thought, it could be shown that the concept of episteme has always called forth that of historia, if history is always the unity of a becoming, as tradition of truth or development of science or knowledge oriented toward the appropriation of truth in presence and self-presence, toward knowledge in consciousness-of-self” (Writing and Difference, 291).

185 “S’il en est bien ainsi, toute l’histoire du concept de structure, avant la rupture dont nous parlons, doit être pensé comme une série de substitutions de centre à centre, un enchainement de déterminations du centre. Le centre reçoit, successivement et de manière réglée, des formes ou des noms différents. L’histoire de la métaphysique, comme l’histoire de l’occident serait l’histoire de ces métaphores et de ces métonymies. La forme matricielle en serait—qu’on me pardonne d’être aussi peu démonstratif et aussi elliptique, c’est pour en venir plus vite à mon thème principal—à la détermination de l’être comme présence à tous les sens de ce mot. On pourrait montrer que tous les noms du fondement, du principe ou du centre ont toujours désigné l’invariant d’une présence (eidos, arche, telos, energeia, ousia (essence, existence, substance, sujet) aletheia, transcendantalité, conscience, Dieu, homme, etc.)” (411).
supporting the very idea of the center?

Derrida, in his presentation, refuses at first to associate this event to specific authors, but prefers describing it as the result of a historical context, of a collective effort. However, out of convenience, he ends up citing three names belonging to the history of philosophy, and to whom he attributes the merit of expressing better than the rest of their generation, what was at stake with this “event.” The first proper name cited by Derrida is Nietzsche. It is thanks to Nietzsche’s critique of metaphysics that the very idea of truth was replaced by the idea of interpretation. Second, it is thanks to Freud’s critique of consciousness and identity that the very idea of presence as the foundation of consciousness was exchanged for the one of the unconscious. And third, it is thanks to Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics and onto-theology that the very notion of being emerged as a renewed question, namely as a question involving the existence of the one who is this being, and not only as a question involving the essence of that being.  

However, Nietzsche, Freud and Heidegger’s critiques share in common one major limitation. They are all trapped in a circle that consists in criticizing metaphysics by using the very concepts that the history of metaphysics has generated. Derrida summarizes this vicious circle thus: “We have no language—no syntax and no lexicon—which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest” (280). To illustrate his point, Derrida uses the concept of sign. This concept, which is also at the center of Saussure’s linguistic, is precisely the concept that is supposed to operate, in classical thinking, as

the junction between the sensible and the intelligible. It is the concept of sign, indeed, that stabilizes the whole system of language in Saussure’s linguistic, and that guarantees the very possibility of meaning. Without it, the signifier and the signified would be condemned to an endless movement of substitution that would, eventually, cancel their opposition by making of language itself a non-systematic structure, and thus incapable of generating stable meanings. As such, if one wants to criticize this concept, one is caught in a circle since to perform this critique, one still has to make sense, and thus one still has to use the concept of sign in a pre-critical manner.\textsuperscript{187}

A Structuralism without Science
Given this vicious circle, however, all critical discourses are not equal. Their difference in value, argues Derrida, “can be measured by the critical rigor with which this relation to the history of metaphysics and to inherited concepts is thought” (282). In the particular case of Lévi-Strauss, remarks Derrida, one can observe at work this difficulty in the ways in which the classical opposition between nature and culture is at the same time being denounced as a metaphysical construct, but nonetheless posited in order to be disclaimed. What is considered natural, for Lévi-Strauss, is what is universal and spontaneous. What is of the order of culture is, on the contrary, what can vary between one culture and the other. However, as early as the opening of his first book, \textit{The Elementary Forms of Kinship} (1949), Lévi-Strauss admits that what he considers the building block of every human society—the prohibition of incest—is neither on the side of

\textsuperscript{187} Here again, one can suggest that what Derrida describes here, in his own conceptual framework, is the famous Lacanian principle according to which “there is no Other of the Other,” as well as its scientific corollary, “there is no meta-language.”
nature (since it is a system of norms and interdictions), nor on the side of culture since it is universal. This is why, concludes Derrida, with certain basal concepts that ground the very distinctions upon which their own intelligibility depends, there are only two ways to proceed. The first one consists in conducting, in a philosophical manner, a critique of the language used by philosophy to think this very concept. One could call this approach a critique of the language of philosophy by philosophy itself, which is, for Derrida, “the most daring way of making the beginning of a step outside of philosophy” (284). The second, more pragmatic, consist in agreeing to keep using these concepts for the sake of a local analysis, while denouncing, when pertinent, their metaphysical limits. This second option is, remarks Derrida, the one chosen by Lévi-Strauss. Derrida writes, “Lévi-Strauss will always remain faithful to this double intention: to preserve as an instrument something whose truth value is criticized” (284).

To supplement his position, Lévi-Strauss, in his book *La pensée sauvage* (1962), proposed the model of the *bricoleur*. The *bricoleur* is someone that uses, in order to build something, the materials that are surrounding him, and not materials that have been designed exclusively for their project. The *bricoleur* is thus the one who knows how to tweak, bend, and modify what already exists in order to make it useful to another purpose. It is, conceptually speaking, the one who knows how to use metaphysical concepts in order to make them perform a different task from the one they were originally made for. More problematically, Derrida argues that what is opposed to the *bricoleur*, namely the engineer, is actually a mythical figure too for Lévi-Strauss, since it presupposes the idea that someone could create an entire language that

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would be very appropriate to the task. Consequently, if the figure of the engineer is a myth, and
the one of the bricoleur the only one at hand, it means that the only discourse accessible is a
mythological discourse that can only have the form of that which it describes. Commenting on
this problematic consequence of Lévi-Strauss’ method, Derrida writes, “It is there that we
rediscover the mythopoetical virtue of bricolage. In effect, what appears most fascinating in this
critical search for a new status of discourse is the stated abandonment of all reference to a center,
to a subject, to the privileged reference, to an origin, or to an absolute archia” (286).

With bricolage, what becomes evident is, underscores Derrida, that language excludes
totalization inasmuch as it relies on a system in which what occupies the center is itself subjected
to an infinite number of substitutions. It is because the system of language, in the discourse of
the bricoleur, has put, at the place its former center what Lévi-Strauss has called, in his
Introduction à l’œuvre de Marcel Mauss (1950), “this floating signifier, which is the servitude of
all finite thought” (189). Commenting on this “floating signifier,” through the example of the
word “mana” used by Mauss, Lévi-Strauss writes,

… mana is a simple form, or more exactly, a symbol in the pure state, and therefore
capable of becoming charged with any sort of symbolic content whatever? In the system
of symbols constituted by all cosmologies, mana would simply be a zero symbolic value,
that is to say, a sign marking the necessity of a symbolic content supplementary to that
which the signified is already loaded, but which can take on any value required, provided
only that this value still remains part of the available reserve and is not, as phonologists

put it, a group term. (290)

If something like a floating signifier is necessary, it is because there is, at a fundamental level, a lack in any system of language. Stated more clearly, it is because language cannot totalize itself, because it cannot completely stabilize the meaning of its terms that such a thing as a “floating signifier,” representing in its overabundance of meaning the actual lack of meaning that grounds the system of language itself, is necessary. However, to acknowledge the presence of such a “floating signifier,” such as the one of Mana, does not suffice to account for the passage, within the history of a culture, from one “floating signifier” to the other. It is, even, what “structuralism” can only think of as the model of catastrophe, or brutal change brought forth by chance.

There is thus, according to Derrida, a tension in Lévi-Strauss’ structuralism, concerning the notion of center as a floating signifier. While Lévi-Strauss acknowledges, on the one hand, the absence of center in any symbolic system, he nonetheless accepts, on the other, to suspend this “acknowledgement” in order to be able to excavate the structure grounded by a given “floating signifier.” This why, for Derrida, the work of Lévi-Strauss, despite all of its efforts, remains, for a large part, imbedded in “a sort of ethic of presence, an ethic of nostalgia for origin, an ethic of archaic and natural innocence, of a purity of presence and self-presence in speech” (292). This “ethic of presence” corresponds, in Lévi-Strauss’ work, to a “restricted” form of play, grounded on a nostalgia for the center, corresponding to all the possible permutations authorized, within a given system, between all its elements. But there is also, for Derrida, another way to look at the absence of center in any given symbolic system, and it is the one put forth by Nietzsche first, and then explored by Georges Bataille in his Summa
This second position, which affirms joyfully the absence of center, Derrida associates it to a “general” form of play that corresponds with the possibility of playing with the very “floating signifier” that functions as the temporary and empty principle of totalization of a given symbolic system.

Derrida named this possible exploration *Grammatology*, and associated it with the concept of writing, which he opposed to the concept of language. Derrida argues that “everything that for at least some twenty centuries tended toward and finally succeeded in being gathered under the name of language is beginning to let itself be transferred to, or at least summarized under, the name of writing” (Spivak 6). While the concept of language, taken in its traditional understanding, reduces “writing” to a secondary position, making of it a simple instrument at the service of a thought (as it is the case, for example, in Aristotle's approach of language and writing), Derrida wants to make of language a moment, and thus a reduced version of a vaster concept of writing. Derrida says, in *Of Grammatology* (1967), “Either writing was never a simple ‘supplement,’ or it is urgently necessary to construct a new logic of the supplement” (*Of Grammatology*, 7). This logic of the ‘supplement,’ which makes of “language” a species of writing as a genre, is precisely why Derrida invented Grammatology as a new discipline. Grammatology is the study of “writing” as soon as writing is no longer submitted to the logos, which is to say to the metaphysic of presence that the notion of language implies.

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191 “Tout ce qui, depuis au moins quelques vingt siècles, tendait et parvenait enfin à se rassembler sous le nom de langage commence à se laisser déporter ou du moins résumer sous le nom d’écriture.” (16)

192 “Ou bien l’écriture n’a jamais été un simple “supplément,” ou bien il est urgent de construire une nouvelle logique du supplément.” (17)
Writing the Disappearance of the Subject
To support his conception of Grammatology, while extending his notion of general writing, Derrida argued, in “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” that Freud’s most important merit is to have developed, through his theory of the unconscious, an unprecedented conception of writing. He proposed the metaphor of the Wunderblock (i.e., the “mystic pad,” see definition on page 151) as a non-phonetic type of writing. This concept of trace and archi-trace, found by Derrida in Freud’s Esquisse..., and in his letter to Fliess, should not be confused—it is important to emphasize this from the start—with the classical notion of trace, which suggests the idea of a mark that is inscribed on a surface and that can be retrieved through memory. On the contrary, the concept of trace is a concept that suggests that the trace is nothing but a play of differences between many forces that are impacted or traversing, at any given moment, the mental psyche of an individual. Derrida writes, “Trace as memory is not a pure breaching that might be

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193 Derrida writes, in “Freud and the Scene of Writing”: “Depuis Platon et Aristote, on n’a cessé d’illustrer par des images graphiques les rapports de la raison et de l’expérience, de la perception et de la mémoire. Mais une confiance n’a jamais cessé de s’y rassurer dans le sens du terme connu et familier, à savoir de l’écriture. Le geste esquissé par Freud interrompt cette assurance et ouvre un nouveau type de question sur la métaphoricité, l’écriture et l’espacement en général.” (L’écriture et la différence, 296-297)

194 See, Freud, Sigmund. The Origins of Psychoanalysis: Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Draft and Notes 1887-1902, ed. By M. Bonaparte, A. Freud and E. Kris, New York, Basic Books, 1954. Freud writes, “As you know, I am working on the assumption that our psychical mechanism has come about by a process of stratification: the material present in the shape of memory traces is from time to time subjected to a rearrangement in accordance with fresh circumstances –is, as it were, transcribed. Thus, what is essentially new in my theory is the thesis that memory is present not once but several times over, that it is registered in various species of signs.” (173) That is the perception neurons, which register consciousness without keeping a memory of it, then the neurons (Pept. I) that register perception, then the reelaboration of these traces at an unconscious level, and finally the neurons of the pre-conscious, linked to the ego, that reorganize at a third level the elements registered by the second set of neurons. Commenting on this description, Jean-Michel Rabaté, in Jacques Lacan: Psychoanalysis and the Subject of Literature, writes, “It is indeed Freud's most materialist text, since he hoped to fund psychology upon a theory of purely quantitative process based on differences between what he called the “Φ neurons” and the “Ψ neurons.” The Φ neurons are permeable neurons that perceive the external world, while the Ψ neurons retain traces of these perceptions. Memory is presented by “Pa” process of Bahnung—literally 'opening up the path' and 'linking'—which connects certain types of Ψ neurons” (175).
reappropriated at any time as simple presence; it is rather the ungraspable and invisible
difference between breaches” (WD, 201). As such, what disappears with the concept of trace
as the origin of the process of memory is the very notion of “first time,” and thus of origin.

If the trace is not a mark, it is because it has no origin, and if it has no origin, it can neither
have a stable identity. This is why, concludes Derrida, “It is a non-origin which is
originary” (WD, 203). To this conception of the trace Freud will add, in his letter 52 to Fliess, a
type of writing that would be like a “lithography before words” (307). This very peculiar type of
writing, which Freud posits at the very foundation of the human psyche, is not a writing that can
be deciphered like any other type of writing. On the contrary, such a primary writing is a writing
that no code, whatsoever, can decipher. As such, concludes Derrida, “in psychic writing, which
thus prefigures the meaning of writing in general, the difference between signifier and signified
is never radical” (WD, 209). In other words, if the primary writing is a writing in which there is
no stable sign, and thus no stable meaning, it implies also that the very concept of secondary
writing (as a simple representation of words) is impossible too.

If there is no such thing as an original trace, or an original text, it means also that there is
no writing that could be its faithful transcription. Derrida writes, “The conscious text is thus not a
transcription, because there is no text present elsewhere as an unconscious one to be transposed
or transported” (WD, 211). Or, “The unconscious text is already a weave of pure traces,
differences in which meaning and force are united—a text nowhere present, consisting of archives
which are always already transcriptions. Originary prints. Everything begins with

195 “La trace comme mémoire n’est pas un frayage pur qu’on pourrait toujours récupérer comme présence simple,
c’est la différence insaisissable et invisible entre les frayages” (WD, 299).
reproduction” (WD, 211). In other words, for Derrida, if there is no original to be transcribed, it means also that any conception of writing that pretends to be the faithful transcription of an “original” trace is but a lie, or at least an original construction that needs to be taken as such.196 This original construction, in turn, is always-already a re-construction (après-coup) of an archi-trace that left no solid traces in the psyche itself. This is why, for Derrida, “The overall writing of dreams exceeds phonetic writing and puts speech back in its place. As in hieroglyphics or rebuses, voice is circumvented” (WD, 218).

This is why, also, Derrida thinks that linguistics, inasmuch as it is submitted to phonology, cannot be the right tool to approach Freud’s unconscious.197 This is why Derrida argues that, “It is with a graphematics still to come, rather than with a linguistics dominated by an ancient phonologism, that psychoanalysis sees itself as destined to collaborate” (WD, 220). Or, a couple of lines later, that “The interest which psychoanalysis brings to linguistics presupposes an overstepping of the habitual meaning of the word speech” (WD, 220). And perhaps even more than transgressing the meaning of the word language, what one needs to do is to subvert the very meaning of the subject that was supporting this old conception of language, since “the ‘subject' of writing does not exist if we mean by that some sovereign solitude of the author. The subject of writing is a system of relations between strata: what Freud called the Mystic Pad, the psyche, society, the world. Within that scene, on that stage, the punctual simplicity of the classical subject is not to be found” (WD, 226-227).


197 This critique of linguistics will also be repeated by Lacan in his Séminaire XVIII, D’un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant, through his use of the word linguisterie.
With the concept of trace and archi-trace, and then with the concept of general writing, what Derrida is attacking, in the end, is nothing less than the very notion of the *humanist subject*, which is to say the very notion of the subject that has supported the whole history of western metaphysics. If there is no original trace, and thus no writing that could transcribe the trace faithfully, it means also that there is no subject in the classical sense of the term, but only the threat or the permanent anxiety of its disappearance. Derrida writes, “The trace is the erasure of selfhood, of one's own presence, and is constituted by the threat or anguish of its irremediable disappearance, of the disappearance of its disappearance” (*WD*, 230). Likewise, beyond the critique of the *humanist subject*, what Derrida attacks is the classical reduction of language to speech and, by implication of writing to speech. But if it is so, in what sense could one say that Derrida, by formulating such a critique of structuralism, produced also a critique of Lacan's reduction of the subject of the unconscious to the subject of speech? And, reciprocally, in which sense could one say that Derrida’s critique of structuralism was in fact largely inspired by Lacan?

### IV. LACAN’S 1966 SUBJECT OF JOUISSANCE

It is during the Baltimore conference that Lacan and Derrida met for the first time.\(^{198}\) Apparently, Lacan tried during that conference to explain to Derrida why the Lacanian theory of the subject, as Lacan developed it during his “Return to Freud,” was not only in agreement with Derrida’s

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\(^{198}\) Derrida talks about it in an interview that is now part of a DVD, produced by Zeitgeist Films, simply named “Derrida.”
critique of structuralism, but also anticipating it in many aspects. Lacan declared, indeed, ten years after the conference, during his *Seminar XXIII on Joyce*, that Derrida had neglected to acknowledge what the invention of *Grammatology* and *archi-ecriture* owed to his own teaching. While Jacques-Alain Miller, disciple of the two philosophers, suggested, in his note on *Seminar XXIII*, that “the topicality of the question of writing in the intellectual and literary context of the time was largely due to Derrida’s early articles, collected in *Writing and Difference*” (207). However, as the next part of the chapter will show, Derrida refused to engage with Lacan or, rather, politely dismissed his invitation to talk about it. Eric Laurent, commenting on the anecdote in his book *L’envers de la biopolitique* (2016), suggested that Derrida, perhaps caught in a form of anxiety of reference, did everything he could during the Baltimore conference to avoid the confrontation. Let me try, then, to reconstruct this dialogue that never took place between the two men.

The Humanist Subject Is an Archaic Illusion

Lacan opens his conference by warning his audience about the growing confusion that will soon


200 Miller also writes, “These days we can scarcely imagine just how incongruous this orientation was in the philosophical context of the time, and this played no small part in the fact that among all the teachers back then at the Sorbonne, I chose the young Derrida to become his student.” (210) For more details on this question, see, Miller, Jacques-Alain. “A Note Threaded Stich by Stich, #15 Derrida and the knot,” in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII, The Sinthome*, Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, Transl. Adrian Price, Malden: Polity, 2016.
surround the word structure. Lacan writes, “It may happen that there will be mistakes, confusion, more and more approximate uses of this notion, and I think that soon there will be some sort of fad about this word” (187). However, adds Lacan, these mistakes and confusions, which in turn generate misunderstanding, i.e., the misrecognition of the notion of structure itself is deeply linked to what is at stake with the notion of the subject in psychoanalysis. To justify this idea, Lacan alludes to the definition that he gave to the Freudian unconscious during his “Return to Freud,” which is to say, “the unconscious is structured like a language” (188). The language that gives its structure to the unconscious, however, is not a special kind of meta-language, like the mathematical language, or the semantical language, or the cinematographical language, as Derrida implied it in *of Grammatology*, but language in its most simple and concrete form, namely the language that people talk to one another. In other words, if the unconscious is structured like a language, it means that it is structured like a language that does not pretend to be, in any form, a meta-language, but a language that is reduced to the level of speech.

This is why, for Lacan, the structure of the unconscious is linked to the person who speaks this language, namely, the subject. Lacan writes, “the question that the unconscious raises for you is a problem that touches the most sensitive point of the nature of language, which is the question of the subject” (188). However, the subject for Lacan is not reducible to what linguists call the “shifter,” which is to say the personal pronoun in a sentence. Beyond the subject that consciously speaks, there is another “thing,” or something that is always thinking and that is

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201 It is interesting to point out that Derrida makes the same remarks, in the opening chapter of *De la Grammatologie*, regarding the word language. Derrida writes: “Cette inflation du signe langage est l’inflation du signe lui-même, l’inflation absolue, l’inflation elle-même. Pourtant, par une face ou une ombre d’elle-même, elle fait encore signe: cette crise est aussi un symptôme” (15).
barred from consciousness. This “something” that thinks, which Lacan calls “the subject of jouissance,” is thus not reducible to any form of instinct or primitive knowledge that it would be possible to make conscious. It is, in fact, literally barred from consciousness and cannot be retrieved. If it is so, how does Lacan intend to articulate these two different subjects, i.e., the subject of the unconscious and the subject of jouissance? Normally, as Derrida suggested in his presentation, it is always through the idea of unity that the very possibility of deploying the structure of a phenomenon becomes possible. In the case of an organism, for example, it is inasmuch as its mature state is considered to represent a unity of functions that its very structure becomes understandable. Unfortunately, adds Lacan, such a unity, when it comes to the human being, is more difficult to isolate. Of course, the quest to find such unity have been at the center of all the philosophies of consciousness, and at the center of all the psychological concepts related to the idea of “total personality.” But it is precisely these two fundamental positions—the one of philosophy and the one of psychology—that Freud’s discovery about the unconscious have radically challenged. Lacan, commenting on this idea, writes,

I am sure that of the people who are here—and if anybody is not of my opinion I hope that he will raise his hand—is that life is something that goes, as we say in French, à la dérive. Life goes down the river, from time to time touching a bank, staying for a while here and there, without understanding anything of what happens. The idea of the unifying unity of the human condition has always had on me the effect of a scandalous lie. (190)

In his text “Science and Truth” (1966), Lacan qualifies the idea about the natural unity of the subject as “the archaic illusion—an illusion we can generalize with the expression
‘psychologization of the subject’” (729). Such a unity, indeed, approached from a psychoanalytic point of view, is nothing but an illusion that implies a form of rejection of the body that supports the unity of the subject, as well as a misrecognition of the fundamental inconsistency of the phenomenon implied in consciousness. The only “unity” that psychoanalysis can admit is, in the end, the unity that the imaginary introduces in a being, and that Lacan described in his “Mirror Stage” (1936) as being a lure, which is to say a false unity superimposed on an organism that is, at a fundamental level, constantly changing. This is why Lacan concludes, in agreement with Derrida, that to attribute to the phenomenon of consciousness an idealistic unity is not only a conceptual mistake. But it is also the sign that philosophy and psychology, as academic disciplines, are still secretly at the service of social ideals.

However, if Lacan contests the unity of consciousness, he does not do it, unlike Derrida, in the name of a Nietzschean approach of the unconscious, which is to say in the name of a “psychology of depth.” For Lacan, indeed, to do so would amount to fall into the parallel illusion that consists in making of Freud’s unconscious the product of an inner nature removed

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202 “La seule fonction homogène de la conscience est dans la capture imaginaire du moi par son reflet spéculaire et dans la fonction de méconnaissance qui lui en reste attachée” (312).

203 “La psychologie est véhicule d’idéaux : La psyché n’y représente plus que le parrainage qui la fait qualifier d’académique. L’idéal est cerf de la société” (312).

from any form of logic.\textsuperscript{205} Opposing such a tendency, what Lacan tried to achieve throughout his “Return to Freud” was precisely to fight against this temptation by always showing how Freud’s notion of the unconscious was, in fact, reducible to a \textit{signifying chain}, organized logically, and describable through the linguistic determinations developed by Saussure and Jacobson.\textsuperscript{206} Lacan went even further, in “Position of the Unconscious” (1964), by saying that Freud’s discovery of the unconscious was nothing but the effort to push away any form of reduction of the unconscious to any kind of metaphysical conception of the unconscious (either archetypal or instinctual or spiritualist) that would make it impossible to study it scientifically.\textsuperscript{207} Likewise, in “On Freud’s “Trieb” and the Psychoanalyst’s Desire” (1964) Lacan said also that “The drive, as it is constructed by Freud on the basis of the experience of the unconscious, prohibits psychologizing thought from resorting to ‘instinct,’ with which it masks its ignorance by assuming the existence of morals in nature” (851). This is why, if one wants to extract philosophy and psychology from their immemorial allegiance to the ideal of a given society, one needs to abandon the very notion of the \textit{humanist subject} and replace it, not with an extended

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\textsuperscript{205} For more details on this question see, Lacan, Jacques. Le Séminaire VI, \textit{Le désir et son interprétation}, Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, Edition du Seuil, Paris, 2011. In this Seminar, Lacan writes, “En d’autres termes, la psychanalyse qui se soutient de son allégeance freudienne ne saurait en aucun cas se donner pour un rite de passage à une expérience archétypique ou d’aucune façon ineffable : le jour où quelqu’un y fera entendre quelque chose de cet ordre qui ne sera pas un minus, ce serait que toutes limites y auraient été abolie. Ce dont nous sommes encore loin” (277). Perhaps, it is Lacan himself, during his late teaching that tried to accomplish such a program through the invention of the real unconscious, the sinthome, the escabeau, the speaking being and the speaking body. It is a question that will be at the center of this dissertation, and more specifically, a question that I will address in Chapter Five.

\textsuperscript{206} “L’inconscient, à partir de Freud, est une chaine de signifiants qui quelque part (sur une autre scène écrit-il) se répète et insiste pour interférer dans les coupures que lui offre le discours effectif et la cogitation qu’il informe” (279). The signifying chain, as well as its impact on the constitution of the subject, is what Lacan describes in great detail in his text on Poe’s \textit{Purloined Letter}, and what Derrida critiques in “Le Facteur de la vérité.” in \textit{La carte Postale: de Socrate a Freud et au-dela}. (1980). See, for more details, the next part of this chapter.

notion of writing, as Derrida proposed, but with the invention of a pure mathematical formality. Lacan declared, in his Seminar on the *The Purloined Letter* (1956), “The program traced out for us is hence to figure out how a formal language determines the subject. But the interest of such a program is not simple, since it assumes that a subject will not fulfill it except by contributing something of his own to it” (31). And he repeated the same statement at the opening of his last teaching when he said, “Mathematical formalism is our aim, our ideal. Why? Because it alone is *mathème*, i.e., capable of being transmitted integrally” (108).

The Subject of Science and the Subject of Jouissance
Lacan’s hypothesis is that the very existence of Freud’s notion of the unconscious, as well as the very existence of psychoanalysis, is linked to the history of science. It is science, and perhaps even more the subject required by science, that has rendered possible the discovery of the unconscious by Freud. The subject of science is a subject that implies a radical disjunction between truth and knowledge. To illustrate this point, Lacan goes back to Descartes’s *Metaphysical Meditations* (1641). For Descartes, indeed, there is a clear difference between

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208 “Une chose est sure: si le sujet est bien là, au nœud de la différence, toute référence humaniste y devient superflue, car c’est à elle qu’il coupe court” (337).


211 “Il est indispensable que la psychanalyse comme pratique, que l’inconscient, celui de Freud comme découverte, aient pris leur place avant la naissance, au siècle qu’on a appelé le siècle du génie, le XXVIIIème, de la science” (337).

the notion of truth, which depends entirely on the Authority of Tradition, and the notion of knowledge, which relies exclusively on the notion of mathesis universalis (i.e., to what can be theorized about nature in a mathematical language). This division between truth and knowledge is also, argues Lacan, the division that distinguishes the subject of science from the subject of religion. To put it otherwise, it is to the extent that a subject is capable of distinguishing within itself what is of the order of truth (what is of the order of his relation to Tradition) and what is of the order of knowledge that a subject is properly considered a “modern subject.” Otherwise, if a subject refuses to make a distinction between these two orders, he is more likely to be considered “archaic” or traditionalist, but not modern. Commenting on this tension between truth and knowledge, through a rereading of Hegel’s notion of absolute knowledge, Lacan writes, in “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,”

For let us reexamine from this angle the service we expect from Hegel’s phenomenology: that of marking out an ideal solution—one that involves a permanent revisionism, so to speak, in which what is disturbing about truth is constantly being reabsorbed, truth being in itself but what is lacking in the realization of knowledge. The antinomy the Scholastic tradition posited as principal is here taken to be resolved by virtue of being imaginary. Truth is nothing but what knowledge can learn that it knows merely by putting its ignorance to work. This is a real crisis, in which the imaginary is eliminated in engendering a new symbolic form, to use my own categories. This dialectic is convergent and proceeds to the conjuncture defined as absolute knowledge. As it is deduced, this conjuncture can only be the conjunction of the symbolic with a real from which nothing more can be expected. What is this, if not a subject finalized in his self-identity? From
which one can conclude that this subject is already perfect(ed) here and is the fundamental hypothesis of the entire process. He is named, in effect, as the substratum of this process; he is called Selbstbewusstsein, the being of the conscious, wholly conscious self. (675)\textsuperscript{213}

For Lacan, what Descartes’s cogito implies is nothing less, in its hypothesis, than Hegel’s conception of absolute knowledge. The position of the cogito, and thus the position that science requires from its subject implies, if one takes it seriously, to go as far as Hegel’s hypothesis about absolute knowledge since it is only when there is a complete resorption of truth within knowledge that the unity and the transparency of the cogito (as an ego) is posited. But this transparency is also, for Lacan, the root of a laicization of the religious discourse that tends to normalize the unruliness of the subject, not in the name of God but, as in the case of ego-psychology, in the name of its socialization.

At the opposite of such a tendency, which aims at normalizing the relations between truth and knowledge, Lacan wants to resuscitate the radicalism of Freud’s vision of the drives in order to establish an unsurmountable distinction between truth and knowledge. This unsurmountable distinction between truth and knowledge is also what can guarantee, in turn, the impossible return of the humanist subject. Finally, it is what is bound to provoke the destitution of the old Sciences of Man, since the concept of man is also what renders the conciliation between truth

and knowledge impossible.\textsuperscript{214} This is why Lacan, instead of following the epistemological model of the \textit{Sciences of Man}, proposes to use the epistemological model of the other Sciences to study scientifically the inner division of the subject. Lacan said, “One should descry therein the crucially important mark of structuralism. It ushers into every human science it conquers a very particular mode of the subject for which the only index I have found is topological: the generating sign of the Mobius strip that I call the inner eight. The subject is, as it were, internally excluded from its object” (731). In order to develop a purely scientific knowledge of the phenomenon it studies (i.e. disconnected from any “archaic illusion”) structuralism has to exclude from its very object what constitutes its truth, which is to say its relationship to his drives and his desire. This is why there is something that needs to be elucidated, for Lacan, about the “object” of the \textit{Human Sciences} since this object becomes knowable to the exact extent that it disappears as a Real object, which is to say what Lacan calls, in his \textit{Seminar X on Anxiety}, as an \textit{object a}.

Between the order of truth, and the one of knowledge, there is, in fact, an unsurmountable division. Lacan writes, “an inscription does not etch into the same side of the parchment when it comes from the printing-plate of truth and when it comes from that of knowledge” (734), even though these inscriptions are most often intertwined, since the parchment has the form of a Moebius stripe. There is, on “one side” of the Moebius stripe the subject that speaks, and on “the other,” even though they are one and the same, what causes the subject to speak. To say it another way, there is the order of desire, which is linked to the lack that the law introduces in the

\textsuperscript{214} “Il n’y a pas de science de l’homme, ce qu’il nous faut entendre au même temps qu’il n’y a pas de petites économies. Il n’y a pas de science de l’homme, parce que l’homme de la science n’existe pas, mais seulement son sujet. On sait ma répugnance de toujours pour l’appellation de sciences humaines, qui me semble être l’appel même de la servitude” (339).
subject, and the order of jouissance, which corresponds to the level of the drives and which involves the relation to *Das Ding*, i.e., the primary lost object and the absolute satisfaction that it represents.\textsuperscript{215} This is why the notion of truth, caught in between these two dimensions of the subject, is necessarily incomplete, or impossible to say it all, since there is no meta-language, and thus no possibility to say the truth about the truth. However, it is not because there is no truth about the truth that the notion of truth should be discarded for Lacan. Quite the contrary, Lacan opposing Derrida argues that the notion of truth, itself inseparable from the notion of “Full Speech,” is needed to understand how the signifier affects, in its being, the person that speaks. Lacan writes, in “Science and Truth,”

> To lend my voice to support these intolerable words, "I, truth, speak...," goes beyond allegory. Which quite simply means everything that can be said of truth, of the only truth—namely, that there is no such thing as a metalanguage (an assertion made so as to situate all of logical positivism), no language being able to say the truth about truth, since truth is grounded in the fact that truth speaks, and that it has no other means by which to become grounded. This is precisely why the unconscious, which tells the truth about truth, is structured like a language, and why I, in so teaching, tell the truth about Freud who knew how to let the truth—going by the name of the unconscious—speak. This lack of truth about truth—necessitating as it does all the traps that metalanguage, as sham and logic, falls into—is the rightful place of *Urverdrangung*, that is, of primal repression

which draws toward itself all the other repressions—not to mention other rhetorical
effects that we can recognize only by means of the subject of science. (736-737)

The truth that Freud discovered with the unconscious is thus a negative truth, a truth that turns
truth into an impossible ideal. It is a truth, indeed, that pokes a hole at the very center of the
classical notion of truth since it is a truth that speaks a language that is itself incomplete and
lacking a meta-language that could say the truth about it. This is why Lacan can specify that to
say that “the unconscious is structured like a language” does not mean that the unconscious has
the structure of a closed system but, on the contrary, that the unconscious is structured like the
open system that language is. The truth that ‘I’ speaks without knowing it is thus a truth that is
grounded on a lack, or, perhaps even more so, a truth that is grounded on a logical impossibility
that, in turn, produces at a subjective level, an Urverdrängung, that is, the primary repression of
this very impossibility, and the affective effects linked to this impossibility. But how did Lacan
manage to create a form of knowledge that could fit this incomplete truth, and how did he
manage to articulate this knowledge to the notion of the subject?

Suture: A New Alliance between Truth and Knowledge
To bypass this difficulty, Lacan introduced in his Baltimore presentation a new concept of unity,
not as a unifying principle, but as a countable unity that generates its own form of excess, as in
the mathematical writing \( n+1 \). The formula, “n plus one,” indeed, is the key to the genesis of
numbers as intrinsically calling for a “one more,” for a supplementary unit. Through this allusion
to mathematics, Lacan wanted to compare the double structure of the subject (as the subject of
the unconscious and as the subject of jouissance) to the structure of numbers. The subject, like a number, keeps counting itself as one while this very counting is what generates its disappearance and, at the same time, its excess in the form of a $+1$. Lacan said during his Baltimore conference,

The sameness is not in things but in the mark that makes it possible to add things with no consideration as to their differences. The mark has the effect of rubbing out the difference, and this is the key to what happens to the subject, the unconscious subject in the repetition; because you know that the subject repeats? something peculiarly significant, the subject is here, for instance, in this obscure thing that we call in some cases trauma, or exquisite pleasure. (Immixing, 192)

Commenting on this idea, which at first sight is quite complex, Jacques-Alain Miller, in “Action of the Structure,” a text written in 1964 for the Cahiers pour l’Analyse, introduced the term “suture.” When Miller forged this concept he was, at the time, the editor of the first issue of Les Cahiers pour l’Analyse and, it is important to note, one of Derrida's students too. As such, one could argue that Miller’s concept of Suture was, in a way, the result of these two influences.

Taking up Derrida’s reflection on The Origin of Geometry and Lacan’s concept of numeral unity, Miller proposed a complete “logic of the signifier” that could account, at once, for the subject of the unconscious (and thus for the order of the signifier), and for the subject of jouissance (and its

216 For more detail on this question, see, Miller, Jacques-Alain. “A Note Threaded Stich by Stich, # Derrida and the knot, in The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII, The Sinthome, Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, Trans. Adrian Price, Polity, Malden, 2016. Miller writes, “I tribute to the memory of the philosopher who was one of my mentors of my youth, I shall develop further the detail conjured up by the mention of Derrida’s name on p. 124 on The Sinthome” (206). Or “By my reckoning, however, the debt that I had acquired with respect to the man who throughout my years at the École Normale had been my professor, my mentor, my friend, and even my confident (as the so called caimans of the ENS often are), forbade me from entering into this controversy by supporting Lacan’s colors against his, just as I deemed that I did not share Lacan’s declared contempt for Derrida” (207).
affective dimension). While Derrida, for his part, made of the relation of the humanist subject to logic a relation of exclusion, Miller, taking up Lacan’s insight about the subject of jouissance, proposed to see it more in the form of a repression. According to Miller, the subject of jouissance is not the opposite of the archi-trace upon which his presence is made possible, but the subject of jouissance is the repressed of the very structure that makes it possible. This is why the subject of jouissance is fundamentally absent. It is what lacks, what stands for the lack, in the very structure that supports it. It is the missing element. It is, as Miller proposed it in his famous article on “Suture: Elements of the Logic of the Signifier,” in a relation of internal exclusion with the structure that governs it. Miller writes, “Suture names the relation of the subject to the chain of its discourse, we shall see that it figures there as the element that which is lacking, in the form of a stand-in” (93).

To explain this internal exclusion, Miller goes back to Lacan's definition of the subject as a number, and uses to explore it Frege's conception of the zero, of number and successor. Miller’s idea is that in Lacan’s definition, the subject occupies, in regards to the progression of


natural numbers, the very function to which can be assigned their progression, even though the subject accomplishes this function without even knowing it. To demonstrate this idea, Miller argues that what supports the original unity of numbers is the very concept of zero. Zero, indeed, in Frege’s theory of numbers, is not the synonym of an infinite void, but the original container, the original empty set upon which all the other numbers are made. This is why Frege can built upon this definition of the zero as an empty set all the other numbers, since the zero can either be the empty set containing zero element, or the container that will serve to build all the other numbers. In other words, zero is what represents, as a pure set, what is at the same time necessary to build numbers, and what is constantly erased by the very progression that it supports. Zero as a set is either erased by the fact that it is first and foremost an empty set, or by the fact that, in every other number, it is the number of elements that are in a set that catches our attention, and not the empty set that supports their gathering.

But in order to obtain such a concept of zero, underlines Miller, Frege had to posit the existence of truth as what is identical to itself, and of what is not true as what is non-identical to itself, and then defined the number zero by attributing to it the concept of “non-identical to itself. Miller writes, “It is this decisive proposition that the concept of non-identical with itself is assigned by the number zero which suture logical discourse” (97). Indeed, if zero is the set to which has been assigned the concept of 'non-identical to itself,” and if truth is defined as what is “identical to itself,” then it can be concluded that zero is, at the same time, a set (and thus something identical to itself) that contains no elements (and thus something that is non-identical to itself). Likewise, if one applies this reasoning to the definition of the subject, one can conclude that the subject is, in in relation to his identity, like the zero in relation to the progression of
number. It is what makes it possible, what supports it, when it is on the side of the empty set, but it is also what is repressed from its definition when it is on the side of the “non-identical to itself.” In other word, the subject is either, as the subject of the unconscious, the support of the very principle of his unity or, as the subject of jouissance, the very notion that makes this unity impossible. Miller writes,

The impossible object, which the discourse of logic summons as the not-identical with itself and then rejects as the pure negative, which it summons and rejects wanting to know nothing of it, we name this object, insofar as it function as the excess which operates in the series of numbers, the subject. Its exclusion form the discourse which internally it intimates is suture. If we now determine the trait as the signifier, and ascribe to the number the position of signified, the relation of lack to the trait should be considered as the logic of the signifier. (Concept and Form, 1, 99)221

In regard to this logic of the signifier, the psychoanalytical goal is to help the subject of the unconscious to become aware of his fundamental state of alienation in order to enable him, afterwards, to make room for the subject of jouissance. As Miller puts it, “This will provide the occasion to note that which people believe they can attack Lacan with, in the literary Departments of America, namely the superiority of grammatologic analysis, or deconstruction. If this grammatological analysis is perhaps justified — and it certainly is — as regards the fabrication of theses, it is not as evident with regard to the status attributed to it in literature” (“A Reading of The Family complex,” Miller). To illustrate this idea and connect it, later, to Derrida’s


V. LACAN, DERRIDA AND THE PURLOINED SUBJECT OF JOUissance

It is in his text on Poe’s The Purloined Letter, a text that opens the Ecrits (published the same year as the Baltimore’s conference), that Lacan found the best literary image to illustrate his idea about the ways in which the symbolic structure is constantly impacting the subject at the level of his unconscious and at the level of his jouissance.222 For Lacan, one can make of the letter that circulates in Poe’s story a metaphor of the unconscious, and of the ways in which the letter affects the behaviors and the personalities of those who are in contact with it, a metaphor of the impact of the signifier on the subjective formation of the ego, as well as on the subject of jouissance.223 Likewise, it is also through the study of Lacan’s “Seminar on the Purloined Letter” (1956) that Derrida, in The Post Card (1980), explained with the outmost precision why he considered Lacan’s logic of the signifier false and, more importantly, enmeshed with a conception of truth and power that made it a conservative theory. But did Lacan really produce, as Derrida argued, and as most Anglo-American Feminist, Gender and Queer scholars still think,

222 “If what Freud discovered and rediscovered with perpetually increasing sense of shock has a meaning, it is that the displacement of the signifier determines the subjects in their acts, in their destiny, in their refusals, in their blindness, in their end and in their fate, their innate gifts and social acquisitions notwithstanding, without regard for character or sex, and that, willingly or not, everything that might be considered the stuff of psychology, kit and caboodle, will follow the path of the signifier” (60).

223 Isabelle Alfarady writes, “Pour Lacan comme pour Freud, la contrainte de répétition, la ronde du signifiant, touchent à l’éthique de la psychanalyse, interroge la psychanalyse sur ses fins et ses limites. Freud se voit dans l’obligation de reconnaître la primauté de l’instinct de mort sur le principe de plaisir, principe qu’il tenait jusque-là pour la cause première, l’instance primordiale et dont il est forcé de concéder qu’il est à son service. Lacan, lecteur de « La lettre Volée, » prend acte, non sans gravité, de la logique implacable et presque inhumaine du déterminisme de la lettre. (…) La manière dont Freud a de traiter la source que représente la clinique sur un pied d’égalité avec la fiction au regard de la contrainte de répétition n’est pas indifférente : l’œuvre littéraire aurait le pouvoir de consigner les effets de répétition et de retour du refoule. La littérature en tant qu’œuvre de la lettre serait mieux placée que toute autre pour répondre d’une telle loi” (Derrida – Lacan, 97).
a Pha-logo-centric theory reproducing at a theoretical level all the humanist values and ideals that it is was supposed to debunk. What shall we make of this critique? Does it aim only at critique Lacan’s subject of the unconscious, or does it includes also Lacan’s subject of jouissance?

The Trajectory of the Letter and its Effect on the Character of the Story
In “The Purloined Letter,” indeed, one can isolate two scenes that are the repetitions of one another and that illustrate perfectly Lacan’s idea. During the first scene, which takes place in the Queen’s boudoir, her Minister sees that the Queen is hiding from the King (who does not see it) a letter that could compromise her and the King. Defying the authority of the Queen, while making sure that she sees him doing it, the Minister steals the letter from the Queen while the King remains blind to this action. In the second scene, which takes place in the Minister’s office, a private detective named Dupin steals from the Minister the letter he stole from the Queen while the Minister himself remains unaware of the theft. In regard to these two scenes, Lacan argues that each of the scenes reproduces the same structure, while simply changing the place that each character occupies in them. While, in the first scene, the King (as the representative of the law) does not see that the Queen hides a compromising letter from him, in the second scene it is the police hired by the Queen that become incapable of seeing the letter that the Minister is hiding from them. Likewise, while in the first scene the Queen is the one who sees that the King does not see the letter, in the second scene, Dupin, having realized that the police have not seen the letter lying in plain sight in the Minister’s home, ensures that the Minister does not see that he takes the letter. Finally, while in the first scene, the Minister is the one that sees the letter and that
steals it, in the second scene, Dupin is the one that sees the letter and that steals it from the
Minister. As such, “The Purloined Letter” argues Lacan, is structured by three subjective
positions that are articulated to one another in a manner that leaves no ambiguity about the
hidden presence of a Symbolic order in relation to which each character receives its identity.

Lacan writes,

Thus, three moments, ordering three glances, sustained by three subjects, incarnated in
each case by different people. The first is based on a glance that sees nothing: The King
and then the police. The second is based on a glance which sees that the first sees nothing
and deceives itself into thereby believing to be covered what it hides: The Queen and then
the Minister. The third is based on a glance which sees that the first two glances leave what
must be hidden uncovered to whomever would seize it: The Minister and finally Dupin.

(Ecrits, 10)

What is at stake in this description is the possibility to prove that each character, in its most
subjective dimension, is the product of the position he occupies in regard to the letter, which is to
say in regard to the signifier that determines his unconscious, that he (or she) is blind to the very
presence of this signifier. This is why there are three different types of subjects (those who see
nothing, those who see that others see nothing, and finally those who see what the two others
leave uncovered, i.e. the letter). But this is why, also, the type of subject that a character is also
changes according to the position the character occupies vis-a-vis the letter. For example, the

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224 “Donc trois temps, ordonnant trois regards, supportés par trois sujets, à chaque fois incarnés par des personnages
différents. Le premier est d’un regard qui ne voit rien : c’est le roi et c’est la police. Le second d’un regard qui voit
que le premier ne voit rien et se leurre d’en voir couvert ce qu’il cache : c’est la reine puis le ministre. Le troisième
qui de ces deux regards voit qu’ils laissent ce qui est à cacher à découvert pour qui voudra s’en emparer : c’est le
ministre, et c’est Dupin enfin” (15).
personality of the minister changes once he is in possession of the letter. Likewise, the personality of the Queen changes too when she enters in possession of the letter. Lacan writes, “We shall see that their displacement is determined by the place that a pure signifier—the purloined letter—comes to occupy in their trio” (Ecrits, 10). Or, to put it differently, “While the letter may be *en souffrance*, they are the ones who shall suffer from it. By passing beneath its shadow, they become its reflection. By coming into the letter's possession—an admirably ambiguous bit of language—its meaning possesses them” (Ecrits, 21). In other words, what represents the unconscious of the character, in Poe’s story, is nothing but the relation that each character has with the purloined letter, which is to say the relation that each character has with a pure signifier (since we never know the nature nor the content of the letter). Lacan writes, “what could be a better example of the fact that man is inhabited by the signifier, than the one Poe forged himself to help us understand Dupin’s feat?” (34).

The Signifier as the Instance of Death
The order of the signifier, in Poe’s story, is organized around the position of the King, and the authority and legitimacy he incarnates. In regard to this authority, which is blind to what does not constitute its structure, the purloined letter incarnates what could potentially disrupt the authority of this position, and thus the whole organization it represents. In turn, to possess the letter is to become a clandestine, forced to live in secrecy. This is why, for Lacan, the signifier of the purloined letter is what represents the presence of “death” in the story, and thus what triggers in each character that possesses it an automatism of repetition. Lacan writes, “the signifier—you are perhaps starting to catch my drift—materializes the instance of death” (Ecrits, 16). This is
why Lacan concludes that

If what Freud discovered, and rediscovers ever more abruptly, has a meaning, it is that the signifier's displacement determines subjects' acts, destiny, refusals, blindness's, success, and fate, regardless of their innate gifts and instruction, and regardless of their character or sex; and that everything pertaining to the psychological pregiven follows willy-nilly the signifier's train, like weapons and baggage. (Ecrits, 21)

To be in possession of the purloined letter is to become its dupe. In the case of the Minister, for example, it is quite clear that it is because the Minister stole the letter from the Queen that he becomes himself like the Queen, which is to say a character living in secrecy, forced to ground his being in a realm that is not, unlike the one of the King, exclusively the one of the law. Lacan writes, prefiguring in a way his late analysis on femininity as not-all caught in the phallic function,

A man who is man enough to brave, and even scorn, a woman's dreaded ire suffers the curse of the sign of which he has dispossessed her so greatly as to undergo metamorphosis. For this sign is clearly that of woman, because she brings out her very being therein by founding it outside the law, which ever contains her—due to the effect of origins—in a position as signifier, nay, as fetish. In order to be worthy of the power of this sign she need but remain immobile in its shadow, man aging thereby, moreover, like the Queen, to simulate mastery of non-action that the Minister's ‘lynx eye’ alone was able
to see through. \textit{(Ecrits, 43)}^{225}

The letter is, through its relation to the authority of the King, what reduces the being of the
Queen to a fetish; it is also, as a sign of her secret lover, what enables her to ground her being
beyond the law that fetishizes her. However, this beyond is only accessible for the Queen
inasmuch as she remains quietly hidden in the shadow of the law that forbids such a beyond. In
other words, the power that the purloined letter holds is either a power that forces the one that
uses it to remain quiet and hidden in the shadow of the law that it secretly transgresses; or a
power that destroys itself the minute it reveals the inner contradiction it shelters. Lacan writes,
“the fact that its author remains on the sidelines reveals the extent to which guilt and blame are
not at stake here, but rather the sign of contradiction and scandal constituted by the letter, in the
sense in which the Gospel says that the sign must come regardless of the misfortune of he who
serves as its bearer” \textit{(Ecrits, 23)}. Thus, if the Minister were to use the letter and reveal its
content, it would imply that he would become the one by whom the scandal comes, and thus also
the one that has to accept the full consequences of its gesture. It would imply that the Minister
agrees to place himself in the position of full mastery, which is a purely imaginary position for
Lacan. Lacan says, indeed, “For what matters to the robber is not only that the said person know
who robbed her, but that she know what kind of robber she is dealing with; the fact is that she
believes him capable of anything, which should be understood as follows: she confers upon him
a position that no one can really assume, because it is imaginary, that of absolute master” \textit{(Ecrits,

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\textsuperscript{225} “L’homme assez homme pour braver jusqu’au mépris l’ivre redoutée de la femme, subit jusqu’à la métamorphose
la malédiction du signe dont il l’a dépossédée. Car ce signe est bien celui de la femme, pour ce qu’elle y fait valoir
son être, en le fondant hors de la loi, qui la contient toujours, de par l’effet des origines, en position de signifiant,
voire de fétiche. Pour être à la hauteur du pouvoir de ce signe, elle n’a qu’à se tenir immobile a son ombre, y
trouvant de surcroit, telle la reine, cette simulation de la maîtrise du non-agir que seul « l’œil de lynx » du ministre
pu percer” (31).
Lacan as the Postman of Truth

However, since the Minister is not completely crazy, i.e., since he does not believe in his absolute mastery, he behaves as a neurotic, i.e. as someone who pretends that he does not have the letter (denegation), just as the Queen did when she tried to hide the letter from the King. However, it is precisely because the Minister starts to behave like the Queen that, in turn, Dupin is able to steal the letter from him. But Dupin, unlike the Queen or the Minister, does not want to keep the letter for himself but, very much like a psychoanalyst wants to return the letter to its destination in exchange for money. Lacan writes,

Are we not, in fact, justified in feeling implicated when Dupin is perhaps about to withdraw from the letter's symbolic circuit—we who make ourselves the emissaries of all the purloined letters which, at least for a while, remain en souffrance with us in the transference? And is it not the responsibility their transference entails that we neutralize by equating it with the signifier that most thoroughly annihilates every signification—namely, money?” (Ecrits, 27)

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226 “Car ce qui importe au voleur, ce n’est pas seulement que ladite personne sache qui l’a volé, mais bien à qui elle a affaire en fait de voleur; c’est qu’elle le croit capable de tout, ce qu’il faut entendre: qu’elle lui confère la position qu’il n’est à la mesure de personne d’assumer réellement parce qu’elle est imaginaire, celle du maître absolu” (33).

227 Lacan nuanced his judgment on Dupin when he wrote, “Ce petit poulet [Dupin], il jubile à la pensée de ce qui se passera quand l’intéressé –devant qui ?, à quelle fin ?, aura à en faire usage. Ce que l’on peut dire, c’est que Dupin jouit” (104).

228 “Il s’agit peut-être pour Dupin de se retirer lui-même du circuit symbolique de la lettre, -- nous qui nous faisons aussi les émissaires de toutes les lettres volées qui pour un temps au moins seront chez nous en souffrance dans le transfert. Et n’est-ce pas la responsabilité que leur transfert comporte, que nous neutralisons en la faisant équivaloir au signifiant le plus annihilant qui soit de toute signification, à savoir l’argent” (37).
In other words, it is in as much as Dupin did not want the power that the letter could have granted him, but only the monetary reward, that he was able to return it to the Queen, while avenging her honor by leaving the Minister unaware of his loss of power. What is thus essential in Lacan's reading of “The Purloined Letter” is not only his use of the letter as a metaphor for the signifier, and through the signifier, as a metaphor for the phallus, and his use of the two scenes to show the impact of the signifier on the characters, but also his emphasis on Dupin's faithfulness to the King and to the Queen, and more importantly; his emphasis on Dupin's faithfulness to the law that binds him to the power and the authority of the Queen and the King. But in which sense can one conclude from this that Lacan, because he compared Dupin to a psychoanalyst, subordinated psychoanalysis to the service of Law, and made of it, as Derrida claimed it in The Purveyor of Truth, a pha-logo-centered practice? To this question, as Lacan himself suggested at the end of his Seminar on The Purloined Letter, “the burden of proof rests, rather, with those who argue that the constitutive order of the symbolic does not suffice to explain everything here.” (31) So, let’s see how Derrida carries the burden of such proof.

Derrida’s Critique of Lacan’s Conception of the Letter

Derrida, in “The Purveyor of Truth,” (or differently translated, “The Postman of Truth”) attacked Lacan’s reading of Poe’s story and, through it, Lacan’s conception of the unconscious, as well as Lacan's conception of truth and of the signifier.229 However, and before entering into the details, it is important to highlight that Derrida wrote his critique in 1975, which is to say at the very

moment when Lacan was already moving away from his early teaching and deploying his late teaching on Joyce. As such, Derrida wrote it as if Lacan's teaching formed a coherent system supported by a single truth, and not a teaching in a constant evolution. Himself aware of this limitation, Derrida wrote, as a warning note for a possible reader who would have contested his critique on such ground, the following statement,

It remains that a certain type of statement on the truth has been made, and enlarged, at a certain specific moment, in the form of a system. And it bears all the characteristics necessary for this effect. Since the Seminar [on The Purloined Letter] belongs to this system (such, at least, is my hypothesis), as do a certain number of other essays to which I will refer (in order not, in turn, to enclose the *Ecrits* in the Seminar), it must be demarcated if one wishes to understand the reading of “The Purloined Letter.” One can and must do this, even if after 1966, in a transformed theoretical field, the Lacanian discourse of the truth, the text, and literature lent itself to a certain number of major rearrangements or decisive reworking, although this is not certain. (192)

Derrida, in the footnote that ends this sentence, defines the system of truth, to which he attaches the early teaching of Lacan thus:

The doctrine of truth as cause (Ursache), as well as the expression “effects of truth,” can be aligned with the system we are about to examine. The effects of truth are the effects of the truth, as “The Direction of the Treatment” (in which it is a question of “directing the subject towards 'full' speech,” or in any event of leaving him “free to try it,” *Ecrits* [1977,

230 See Chapter Five for a full analysis of Lacan’s very last teaching.
has already said: “it is a question of truth, of the only truth, of the truth about the effects of truth” (ibid). Circulation will be always circulation about the truth: toward the truth. Cause and effect of the circle, *causa sui*, proper course and destiny of the letter.

(207)

In regard to this definition of truth, I will now analyze Derrida's critique of Lacan in order to measure, afterwards, how Lacan's late teaching escapes—or not—what Derrida called himself the works of the young Lacan. Derrida writes, of the “(...) works of the young Lacan, as will perhaps be said one day, and once more, by the academics who are always in a hurry to cut to the quick that which does not bear partition” (192).

According to Derrida, if Lacan’s letter always arrives at its destination, it is because the letter, as an empty signifier, has a pre-assigned place within Lacan’s conception of the symbolic order. It is in as much as Lacan uses Poe’s text to illustrate a “truth”—the truth about the nature of Freud’s unconscious—that Poe’s *The Purloined Letter* can arrive at its destination. It is, to put it simply, because Lacan subordinates Poe’s text to a framework that is external to it that it can serve as the “perfect” illustration of Lacan’s idea about the nature of the signifier, and thus about the correct definition that should be given to the Freudian unconscious. For Derrida, this nature is to be found in the place of the lack, the place of what is missing at the center of every system, and without which there would be no circulation, no movement possible of the letter, and thus no possibility to purloin it and neither to return it to its proper destination. Derrida writes,

Question of the letter, question of the materiality of the signifier: perhaps it will suffice to change a letter, perhaps even less than a letter, in the expression “le manque à sa
place” (Lacan, 1972). If the lack has its place [le manque a sa place] perhaps it will suffice to introduce into this expression a written a, that is, a a without an accent mark, in order to make apparent that if the lack has its place [le manque a sa place] in this atomistic topology of the signifier, if it occupies a determined place with defined contours, then the existing order will not have been upset: the letter will always refine its proper place, a circumvented lack (certainly not an empirical, but a transcendental one, which is better yet, and more certain), the letter will be where it always will have been, always should have been, intangible and indestructible via the detour of the proper, and properly circular, itinerary.” (The Purloined Poe, 177)

If the letter can be purloined, it is because it is lacking somewhere. And if it is lacking somewhere, it is because lack as such has its place in Lacan’s structuralist conception of language as a system. More problematically, even, it is not only because Lacan applied to Poe’s text this specific conception of the signifier that he was able to use it to illustrate this “truth,” but because Lacan considered that this “truth” was not external to Poe’s fiction, but equivalent to the truth that grounds the very possibility of fiction itself. Indeed, Lacan said, during his Seminar on The Purloined Letter, “it is this truth, let’s point it out, that makes possible the existence of fiction”(12). It is thus the nature of what is a fiction that is not questioned by Lacan or, rather the possibility that other kinds of fictions resisting the kind of “truth” that supports Lacan's reading could exist.231 Derrida writes, “what Lacan analyzes, decomposing it into its elements, its origin, and its destination, uncovering it in its truth, is a story [histoire]” (179). And this story, adds

Derrida, is a story that does not take into account the way in which the story is written, which is to say its narrating form and, thus, the function that the narrator occupies in the story. In other words, what Lacan’s truth forecloses, by focusing exclusively on the meaning of the story, is the distinction between fiction and narration. Derrida writes, “Without ever saying a word about it, Lacan excludes the textual fiction from within which he has extracted the so-called general narration” (180). As a result, Lacan reduced Poe’s fiction to its overall meaning, its signified, by leaving out of his analysis what Derrida calls the frame of the story, i.e., its mode of narration. And it is this reduction that enabled Lacan to argue that once the letter has been put back at its right place, it can find, once again, its proper meaning. Of course, underlines Derrida, the letter is said to have no meaning in Poe’s story, as well as in Lacan’s analysis, but this lack of meaning is directly limited by the fact that the letter, as part of the symbolic order, has a proper place. And it is this place, argues Derrida, which eventually ends up representing the “truth” of the letter, and thus its ultimate meaning. Derrida writes,

> But when Lacan says that the letter has no proper place, this must be understood henceforth as no objective place, a place determinable in an empirical and naïve topology. When he says that it has no proper meaning, this must henceforth be understood as the exhaustible content of what is written in the note. For the signifier-letter, in the topology and psychoanalytical-transcendental semantic with which we are dealing, has a proper place and meaning which comes from the condition, origin and destination of the entire circulation, as of the entire logic of the signifier. (182)

The letter, indeed, has a place of origin (the duc…) and a place of destination (the Queen).
Likewise, in the structure of the unconscious, the signifier has a place of origin, and a place of destination, which is the lack or the hole that constitutes the subject of the unconscious as such. This is why the meaning of the letter, just like the meaning of the signifier, argues Derrida, coincide with the very circular trajectory of the letter itself. This circular trajectory, in turn, is linked to the acceptance of the contract that links the Queen to the King. In other words, the meaning of the letter is linked to the fundamental state of subjection of the subject, i.e., to its subjection to “the phallic law represented by the King and guarded by the Queen, the law that she should share with him according to the pact, and that she threatens to divide, to dissociate, and to betray” (183). For Derrida, the true meaning of the letter in Lacan’s teaching is linked to the place of castration since what the purloined letter could unveil, if its content were to be revealed, is precisely the lack of authority of the King, and by implication the very hole (the utopic point, as Miller describes it in “The logic of the Signifier”) upon which its symbolic power is grounded. This is why, concludes Derrida, Lacan’s analysis of the circulation of the purloined letter could be accused of implying a form of idealism, since none of the protagonists of the story desire to break the limit of the phallic law. On the contrary, all of them want to maintain what Derrida calls, borrowing the term from Bataille's *The Accursed Share*, a restricted

economy, which is to say a closed system grounded on the respect of the phallic law.\textsuperscript{233} Such idealism, argues Derrida, is also visible in the notion of “quilting point” that Lacan developed in his \textit{Seminar III on Psychosis} to guarantee the proper connection between the signifier with its signified.\textsuperscript{234} Derrida, concluding his critique of Lacan, writes, “The agency of the Lacanian letter is the \textit{relève} of writing in the system of speech” (195).

Going beyond Lacan’s Pha-logo-centrism
To escape this restricted economy, Derrida suggested that it would suffice to take seriously into account the idea (rejected by Lacan) that the Queen, or the Minister, or Dupin could actually be willing to break the contract that link them to the King, for the letter to never arrive at its destination.\textsuperscript{235} Derrida writes,

Contrary to what the Seminar says in its last words (“What the 'Purloined letter,' that is the not delivered letter [lettre en souffrance], means is that a letter always arrives at its destination [1972b, 72])—a letter can always not arrive at its destination. (…) It can always be fragmented without return, and the system of the symbolic, of castration, of the...

\textsuperscript{233} See, Bataille, \textit{The Accursed Share: 1/2 and 2/3}. New York: Zone Books, 1991. Derrida, commenting on Bataille’s work, writes, “This system is in fact the system of the ideality of the signifier. The idealism lodged within it is not a theoretical position of the analyst; it is a structural effect of \textit{signification} in general, to whatever transformations or adjustments one subjects the space of \textit{semiosis}” (194).


\textsuperscript{235} Commenting on this idea, Isabelle Alfandary writes, “L’enjeu de l’interpellation de Lacan par Derrida tourne autour du statut du hasard. Au destin réglé de la lettre lacaniennne, il oppose depuis le principe d’itérabilité et de divisibilité de la marque, l’oxymore de la destinerrance.” (90) And, a page later, “A la loi implacable du signifiant, Derrida oppose la logique différentielle et indécidable de l’écriture depuis une conception de la structure de la marque ou le principe d’itérabilité ne tombe pas simplement sous le coup de la compulsion de répétition” (91).
signifier, of the truth, of the contract, etc., always attempt to protect the letter from this fragmentation: this is the point of view of the King or the Queen, which are the same here, they are bound by contract to reappropriate the bit. (…) And without this threat (breach of contract, division or multiplication, the separation without return from the phallus which was begun for a moment by the Queen, that is by every 'subject'), the circuit of the letter would not even have begun. (187)

What threatens the arrival of the letter, and thus the very system that supports its circulation is, paradoxically, what makes this system possible in the first place. It is, to put it differently, because the phallic law is not an unbreakable law, like the law of nature, but a human law grounded on a contract that its foundation coincides with what threatens its very possibility. This very paradox, in turn, is what reveals the contingent nature of the foundation of what presents itself, at a social level, as a universal law. And it is in regard to this paradox, and to the position that Lacanian psychoanalysis entertains with it, that Derrida's critique needs to be understood. In what sense it is true to say that Lacan, by encoding Dupin as a psychoanalyst in charge of returning the letter to its proper place, submits psychoanalysis to the service of the phallic law, and not to the possibility of its subversion? With this question, what is at stake, for Derrida, is not only the question of the foundation of the law, but the relation of the feminine position to the law, and perhaps even more, the relation of the feminine position to the one of absolute mastery, occupied momentarily, and at a strictly imaginary level, by the Minister, and then, perhaps also by Dupin. How shall one understand Lacan's comment of the relation between the possession of

236 Derrida writes at the end of La carte Postale, “Une lettre n’arrive pas toujours à destination et dès lors que cela appartient à sa structure, on peut dire qu’elle n’y arrive jamais vraiment, que quand elle arrive, son pouvoir ne jamais y arriver la tourmente d’une dérive interne” (517).
the letter and the effect of femininization that its possession triggers in the one that possesses it? Should one relate this understanding to Lacan's negative reading of the position of absolute mastery that the position of the Minister implies but that he fails to occupy the minute he starts to be feminized by the possession of the letter? Commenting on Lacan's reading of Dupin as a psychoanalyst trying to return the letter to its proper place, Derrida writes,

As soon as one interprets the retribution demanded by Dupin as an analytic procedure in order to withdraw from the circuit thanks to “the signifier most destructive of all signification, namely money,” it is difficult to account for all the signs of non-neutrality multiplied at the end the “Purloined Letter.” Is it not a paradox? … And Dupin’s “explosion of feelings at the end of the story” [1972b, 68], his rage of manifestly feminine nature” [1972b, 71] when he claims to be settling his account with the Minister by signing his own maneuver, must be pointed out. (190)

To go beyond this paradoxical reading of Dupin’s “explosion of feelings at the end of the story,” Derrida re-contextualizes his character by using Poe’s other short stories that feature Dupin. By doing so, Derrida shows that Dupin is not occupying the position of the psychoanalyst, as Lacan claims he does, but that he is actually much closer to occupying the imaginary position of absolute mastery that Lacan would have ever been willing to admit. First, Poe describes him, in the opening lines of “The Murder in the Rue Morgue,” as a young gentleman of an excellent and illustrious family, reduced to poverty, and who was no longer caring for “the retrieval of his fortunes” (142). Moreover, Dupin is also described as someone who still has enough money to

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live without working, and to buy as many books as he wants. As such, Dupin represents, argues Derrida, the luxuriousness of literature itself, which is to say the pure luxuriousness of the intertextual plays that Poe uses to frame his fictions.

Second, Dupin is also directly described by the narrator of Poe’s short stories—a narrator who identifies with Dupin’s “peculiar analytic ability” as well as with Dupin’s “gloomy (melancholic) fantastics”—as a “madman.” This is why Derrida concludes his critique by arguing that if Dupin is the one who brings the letter to its destination, he is also the one who threatens, from an imaginary and literary outside, the very symbolic order that he is supposed to guard. In other words, while Lacan used “The Purloined Letter” to prove the superiority and the anteriority of the symbolic order over the mere shadows of the imaginary, Derrida concluded his critique by showing that Poe’s story, as soon as one takes into account its literary dimension, proves exactly the contrary, i.e. the superiority of the imaginary over the symbolic. Or even worse, the guarding of the symbolic by the absolute mastery of a purely literary and thus imaginary character.

CONCLUSION: LACAN’S ANSWER TO DERRIDA IN LITURATERRÉ

Lacan's answer to Derrida's critique is contained in “Lituraterre,” a text that Lacan published in 1971 in a new quarterly journal called “Literature.”\(^{238}\) Lacan's text opens the journal. It is thus the one that sets the tone of the issue that is devoted to the question of the relation between

\(^{238}\) It is interesting to underline that Lacan published his text “Lituraterre” in the same Journal and issue in which Cixous published her commentary on Dora’s case in which she attacks the early Lacan and his conception of the letter in a manner close to that of Derrida. I will come back to this in Chapter Three.
Literature and Psychoanalysis. The whole piece, which is highly literary in itself for a theoretical text (since it uses many puns and verbal creations), is a commentary by the author himself of “The Seminar on The Purloined Letter.” It is also a text that Jacques-Alain Miller has decided to place as the opening text of Lacan's Autres Ecrits, which is to say at the opening of the collection of texts that represent the late teaching of Lacan. As such, one could argue that “Lituraterre” is a rereading of the early Lacan by the late Lacan.

From the Signifier to the Letter

The common point between the early Lacan and the late Lacan is to be found in a famous pun, repeated many times in James Joyce's Finnegans Wake, “a letter, a litter,” a pun that Lacan mentioned during his Seminar on “The Purloined Letter,” and that he quotes once again in “Lituraterre.” The main goal of this text is to take a position against the way in which literature is generally being used by psychoanalysts. Lacan’s basic thesis is that literary criticism has not received “any fresh air from psychoanalysis” (3-4). By submitting a literary text to an Oedipal analysis, most psychoanalytic readings are blind to the riddle of literature itself. As such, one could argue that Lacan is taking the side of Derrida on the question. However, it remains to be understood how Lacan defends his own reading of Poe against Derrida's attack on it.

239 Lacan writes, “In what they turned between their fingers what did they hold but what did not answer to their description “A letter, a litter”: in Joyce' circle, they played on the homophony of the two words in English” (40). See, also, Our Examination round His Factification for Incamation of Works in Progress, Paris: Shakespeare & Co., 1929.

To do so, Lacan argues in “Lituraterre” that one needs to distinguish the letter from the signifier it carries. In the case of *The Purloined Letter*, it is quite simple, since we never know the signifier that the letter is carrying, but that we know what effect the letter is producing on the person that possess it (an effect of femininization).\footnote{Commenting of the homophony between the word letter in *The Purloined Letter*, which refers to an epistle, and the word letter, in “Instance of the letter…” which refers to the alphabetic letter, Lacan writes, in *Seminar XVIII*, “(…) ce n’est pas absolument pour rien que mes *Ecrits* commençaient par *Le séminaire sur “La Lettre Volee”*. La lettre est prise là dans un autre sens que celui de *L’Instance de lettre dans l’inconscient*, qui est celui de l’épistole" (92).} The letter, as an epistle, is the equivalent of the phallus. Lacan leaves no ambiguity about it. Lacan said, when he made a comment about it during his Seminar XVIII, “I specifically speak exclusively in these pages of the function of the phallus inasmuch as it is articulated in a certain discourse” (my translation).\footnote{“Je ne parle très précisément dans ces pages que de la fonction du phallus en tant qu’elle s’articule dans un certain discours” (94).} The function of the Phallus is illustrated, first, by the character of the Minister, who is a character known for a certain fantasy about himself, which is the fantasy “of a man who dares anything.”

At a more abstract level, what does the notion of letter mean? The letter, for Lacan, is what is capable of producing subjective effects beyond any form of meaning, and the signifier, what is reducible to what carries meaning. This is why, on a more abstract level, the letter designates, for Lacan, the structure of language *inasmuch as the subject is involved in it*. When Lacan wrote “L’instance de la lettre dans l’inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud” he used the word letter to talk about the way in which the subject and language although two separate entities, are also fundamentally connected to one another through a “littoral.” In other words, the subject does not use language as an external tool to express his needs, and language, in turn, is not reducible to a set of grammatical and syntactic structures. When a subject speaks, he is...
directly affected, and to a certain point spoken by the language he is using, and the very nature of the system of signs that the subject is using is also affected by the fact that it is being used by a living being. This is why Lacan, in “Lituraterre,” says that the letter is also a “littoral,” which is to say a point of contact between two realities that have nothing in common but the fact that their very nature changes when they encounter the “other.”

*The Letter: a Shore Between the Body and the Signifier*

Language, as such, has its own matter and structure. The subject, as subject of jouissance, also has its own matter and structure. But the nature of the two is altered as soon as they get in contact with one another. Lacan writes, “The letter is it not . . . littoral more properly, that is, figuring as a domain entirely made for the other frontier, in that they are strangers, to the extent of not being reciprocal (my translation).” In other words, between the subject of jouissance and language exists a strange shore that Lacan named the letter (or litter), which is to say the littoral between language as a system of signs, and the living beings as subject of jouissance. But how does Lacan articulate the two? Opposing here, without mentioning him, Derrida, Lacan writes, “What I have inscribed, with the help of letters, of the formations of the unconscious to recuperate them from that of which Freud formulates them, as being what they are, effects of the signifier, does not authorize us to make of the letter a signifier, nor to affect for it, which is more, 

243 Commenting on this idea, Alfarandy writes, “La parole n’est pas l’attribut du sujet comme le prétend la linguistique, ni même sa prérogative, c’est au contraire, le sujet, singulièrement bien nommé puisqu’il s’entend comme assujetti à un ordre qui le dépasse, qui est l’effet de cette cause de laquelle il participe mais qui lui échappe” (163).

244 “La lettre n’est-elle pas… littorale plus proprement, soit figurant qu’un domaine tout entier fait pour l’autre frontière, de ce qu’ils sont étrangers, jusqu’à n’être pas réciproque” (14).
a primacy in regard to the signifier” (14). If the letter designates a shore (a littoral) between language as such and the subject of jouissance, it also means that the letter is not, as Derrida thought, primary in regard to language itself. On the contrary, for Lacan the letter has to be conceived as a “ruissèlement,” i.e. as a streaming down of water (or a streaming down of signifiers) that comes to mark the ground (the body of the speaking being).

This image of the streaming down of water is, in some sense, not that far from the image that Saussure uses to understand the articulation between a signifier and its signified, since Saussure used the metaphor of condensation to demonstrate their junction. Lacan, however, unlike Saussure, uses the metaphor of the streaming down of water to make more complex the articulation between the signifier and its signified by adding to it the idea of the ground onto which the condensation of water leaves its marks. The letter, contrary to the Saussurian sign, is not the harmonious junction between a signifier and its signified but the contingent and real effect produced by a signifier, not yet stabilized into a sign, on a body that erases its signified as much as it embodies it. Lacan writes, “The streaming is the bouquet of a first stroke (trait) and of what effaces it. I have said it: it is from their conjunction that the subject is made, but in that two times are marked there. It is necessary then that the erasure be distinguished there” (16). The “first trait” that Lacan mentions here is the « unary trait » through which a subject identifies with a signifier that will serve him, afterwards, to represent himself in relation to other signifiers (and thus to other subjects). This first moment is, of course, a well-known reference to Lacan’s early

245 See Chapter Two, Part I, Saussure: The Linguistic Turn.
definition of the signifier as “what represents a subject for another signifier” (819). In a second moment, however, what erases this first identification to a signifier, or rather what makes this kind of identification precarious is the way in which it resonates at a body level in the subject that has identified with it. In other words, a signifier becomes a letter, for Lacan, as soon as it touches the body of a subject and loses any possibility of forming a stable sign. It functions exactly like the mathematical formula that Lacan gave during his Baltimore conference.

When a signifier touches a subject, it loses its possible universal signified in order to become, instead, a letter, that is, what turns the abstract concept of shore (of littoral) into a “litura pure,” which means into something “literal.” This pure letter, that emerges once the “first trait” of identification has been crossed out, is thus not what carries meaning in Lacan, and thus neither what is related to the order of the Phallus as Derrida suggests in The Factor of Truth. On the contrary, the letter is what literally represents what is the most opposed to such order, i.e. the unbridled jouissance of the subject. It is, indeed, the jouissance of the body of the subject that breaks the order of the signifier, what Lacan calls also the order of semblance—and thus the order of the Phallus—by destabilizing the system of signified that articulates such order at a universal level. As such, one could argue that the letter is comparable to Derrida’s concept of archi-trace, even if the concept of the letter implies, in Lacan, the presence of a fixated

jouissance that is absent from Derrida’s concept. Lacan writes, “What is evoked of jouissance insofar as a semblant is broken, this is what in the real presents itself as a furrowing” (my translation).

The Jouissance of the Letter
What leaves its marks on the body, what makes furrowed erosions on it, is the way in which the jouissance of the body crosses out the signifiers to which the subject is identified. As a consequence, the letter is also, for Lacan, what produces holes in the order of knowledge, since its very presence is what disrupts the normal functioning of the order of the signifier, and thus the normal functioning of knowledge. Lacan writes, “The edge of the hole in knowledge, is that not what it sketches” (my translation)? Likewise, the notion of writing attached to the notion of the letter works also as an erosion of the signified. As such, writing is not primarily subordinated to meaning, and thus to phonology, as it is for Derrida, but directly connected to the subject of jouissance. Lacan will even end up saying, in his Seminar XX Encore, that language (as structured) is an elucubration of knowledge on a more primitive language made of letters. In

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247 Lacan writes, in Seminar XVIII, “Quelqu’un a écrit un jour que le phallus serait le signifiant qui désignerait le manque de signifiant. C’est absurde, je n’ai jamais articulé une chose pareille. Le phallus est très proprement le jouissance sexuelle en tant qu’elle est coordonnée à un semblant, qu’elle est solidaire d’un semblant” (34). “La fonction dite du phallus – qui est, à vrai dire, la plus maladroitement maniée, mais qui est là et qui fonctionne dans ce qu’il en est d’une expérience, qui n’est pas seulement liée à je ne sais quoi qui serait à considérer comme déviant, pathologique, mais qui est essentiel comme tel à l’institution du discours analytique, -- cette fonction du phallus rend désormais intenable la bipolarité sexuelle, et intenable d’une façon qui volatilise littéralement ce qu’il en est de ce qui peut s’écrire de ce rapport” (67). “Le phallus c’est l’organe en tant qu’il est la jouissance féminine” (67). “L’instrument phallique, je vous ai déjà dit qu’il n’est pas à confondre avec le pénis. Le pénis, lui, se règle sur la loi, c’est-à-dire sur le désir, c’est-à-dire sur le plus-de-jouir, c’est-à-dire sur la cause du désir, c’est-à-dire sur le fantasme” (70). “Voila l’instrument phallique posé, avec des guillemets, comme cause du langage, je n’ai pas dit origine” (71).

248 “ce qui de jouissance s’évoque à ce que se rompe un semblant, voilà dans le réel ce qui se présente comme ravinement” (17).

249 “Le bord du trou dans le savoir, voilà-t-il pas ce qu’elle [la lettre] dessine” (14).
this sense, one could argue that writing, for Lacan, is similar to Derrida’s concept of *general writing*, which is to say equivalent to Derrida’s notions of *grammatology*. However, in contrast with Derrida, Lacan tried to invent a discourse that could take its departure from the *littoral* of the letter, but that would not reduce it to the order of the signifier, and nor to a purely meaningless productions of letters. Lacan writes, “Is it possible from the littoral to constitute a discourse such as characterizes itself as not being emitted from the *semblant*? There is the question only proposed by the literature called *avant-garde*, which is itself made of the littoral: and thus, does not sustain itself by the *semblant*, but for all that proves nothing but the breakage, which only a discourse can produce, with an impact of production” (my translation).²⁵⁰ It is precisely this question that Lacan explored through the study of feminine jouissance, and that he conceptualized, as the next chapter will show, thanks to the logical quantifier of the “not-all” (which Lacan opposes to the more familiar notion of the “for all.”), and that Hélène Cixous, with the help of Derrida and Georges Bataille, turned into a new form of feminine writing.

**WORK CITED**


²⁵⁰ “Est-il possible, du littoral de constituer tel discours qui se caractérise de ne pas s’émêter du semblant? Là est la question qui ne se propose que de la littérature d’avant–garde, laquelle est elle-même fait de littoral : et donc ne se soutient pas du semblant, mais pour autant ne prouve rien que la cassure, que seul un discours peut produire, avec effet de production” (18).


CHAPTER THREE: TO BELIEVE WEEPING
Cixous's 'Feminine Writing' in Relation to Lacan, Bataille and Derrida

Either we believe weeping, and then we can inhabit the world where the feminine being and the masculine being come into contact, exchange with each other, caress each other, respect each other, or quite incapable of maintaining a discourse as to their exact differences, but live them, these differences, and where – as the opening to the text tells us – if masculine and feminine agree with each other (I cannot say understand each other) it is because there is feminine, there is masculine, in the one and in the other. There are obviously points of conjunction—which does not mean identification.

Hélène Cixous

The Feminist Critiques of Lacan’s Return to Freud
Largely inspired by Derrida’s critique of Lacan’s pha-logo-centrism, many feminists, gender and queer scholars have argued that Lacan’s “Return to Freud” did nothing more than turn the value attributed by Freud to the male penis into a Phallic function. Lacan, they argued, remained faithful to Freud’s Phallo-centrism (as Ernest Jones coined it\textsuperscript{251} and thus to his unconscious

\textsuperscript{251} Jones accused Freud, in “The early Development of Female Sexuality” (1927), of having adopted regarding female sexuality an “unduly phallo-centric view of the problem in question” (439). Jones argued that the “phallic phase” (during which the “penis envy” is supposed to emerge in the mental life of the little girl) represented a secondary defensive solution to a psychic conflict that had its roots not in the traumatic discovery of the anatomical difference between the two sexes (and the kind of trauma that it can trigger in both sexes), but in the privilege accorded to the boy’s penis in Freud’s theory. Jones himself had actually stumbled on this “unduly phallo-centric” privilege in “The theory of Symbolism” (1916), a paper in which he had “discovered,” to his own astonishment, that most symbols were not only of a sexual nature but, in one way or another, connected to the male organ, i.e., the Phallus. Jones writes: “The field of sexual symbolism is an outstandingly rich and varied one, and the vast majority of symbols belongs to this category. There are probably more symbols of the male organ itself than all other symbols put together. This is a totally unexpected finding, even more so of the paucity of symbolized ideas in general, and is so difficult to reconcile with our sense of proportion that it needs an effort to refuse the easy escape of simply denying the facts, a feat which is greatly facilitated by the circumstance that, thanks to our education, the facts are not very accessible” (103).
misogyny. However, as this chapter will show, the position of Lacan on the question of the Phallus, and then on the question of femininity, is not only complex, but also multilayered. My thesis is that Lacan’s trajectory, in regard to these question, has been directly opposed to Freud’s. Freud, for his part, paid more and more attention to the Oedipus complex and the place that the male organ played in it while he was paying less and less attention to the question of infantile sexuality. On the contrary, as this chapter will show, Lacan attributed less and less importance to the figure of the father as he paid more and more attention to the question of femininity, and with femininity to the question of singularity. It is, to put it differently, thanks to his late conception of femininity (developed in his *Seminar XX Encore*)—as being “not all” submitted to the Phallic function—that Lacan was able to explore further the connections between object a, the subject of jouissance and the notion of the letter.

Such complexity, I believe, could explain why, as Elisabeth Grosz puts it in her *Feminist Introduction to Jacques Lacan* “The relations between his [Lacan] version of psychoanalysis and feminism remain ambivalent. It is never entirely clear whether he is simply a subtler misogynist than Freud, or whether his reading of Freud constitutes a ‘feminist’ breakthrough” (148). For many Anglo-American feminists Lacan’s merit is very limited since he kept using words that are clearly privileging men when it comes to power, and words that are clearly referring to women when he talks about bodily pleasure, masquerade, and motherhood. Lacan used during the "Return to Freud" expression the Name-of-the-Father to talk about the inscription, at a

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singular level, of the Symbolic law. He used the word Phallus to think about sexual difference. He invented, also, the notion of feminine jouissance to talk about a form of pleasure that escapes the logic of castration. Thus, one could easily argue (without taking the pains to read him) Lacan did nothing more than turn Freud’s myth of the Oedipus complex into a logical function and thus remained faithful to Freud’s Phallo-centrism (as Ernest Jones coined it).

However, to take Lacan’s concepts out of their more nuanced context, and to judge them according to what they mean only in a patriarchal context is not only intellectually dishonest, but also, as the famous feminist psychoanalyst who defended the legacy of Freud and Lacan, Juliet Mitchell, claimed, false. In her Lacan’s Reader on *Feminine Sexuality*, Mitchell suggested that most feminists have not properly understood Freud and Lacan since “Freud, and Lacan after him, are both accused of producing phallocentric theories—of taking man as the norm and woman as what is different therefrom” (8). According to Mitchell, Freud and Lacan’s Phallocentrism, contrary to what most feminists claim, is not the sign of their misogyny but, on the contrary, the logical consequence of the effort they made to extract sexuality from any form of biological determinism. The logic of the Phallus is, primarily, a logic of the cultural production of sexual difference, and not a theory that aims at reinforcing the unconscious logic that supports patriarchy. To put it differently, the logic of the Phallus is a way to explain sexual difference when such a difference has no biological foundation. In this view, for both sexes the Phallus represents a lack and, at the same time, what can fulfil it. Consequently, Freud, and even more so, Lacan’s Phallo-centrism should not be seen as a way to reinforce a given social order, but as a way to describe its current functioning, and thus as a potential tool, for feminists, to subvert it. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, another important feminist supporter of Lacan writes, in *Jacques Lacan*
By equating Lacan’s phallic signifier with patriarchy, she [Luce Irigaray, but also most feminists who criticize Lacan] substantivizes the concept biologically so that Phallus = Penis = male. Her views therefore imply that males and females have natural psychic attributes in keeping with gender. By failing to accept the structural effect and symbolic nature of the Lacanian phallic signifier—neutral in its own right—Irigaray’s assessment of Lacan as a phallocrat is wrong. (Lacan and Philosophy, 273)

If most feminists accused Freud, and even more Lacan, for being misogynist, it is because they have reduced the concept of the Phallus, developed by Freud, and then reread by Lacan, to its biological origin, and thus reduced it to the male’s penis, and to men in general. Likewise, for many Anglo-American feminists, Cixous’ definition of the “feminine,” has been accused of essentialism inasmuch as they are both supposed to reproduce, although in an inverted way, all the clichés around which patriarchy has defined the “feminine.”

Opposing such a reading, I argue, in this chapter, that Lacan’s approach of the “feminine” shifted when he developed his later teaching beyond the Oedipus complex. Second, the argument ventures the hypothesis that once reread through the framework of the later Lacan, Cixous’ approach of the “feminine,” far from being reducible to a form of essentialism, offers a very intriguing way to posit the “feminine” without having to define it through its negative relation to the Phallus. In the first part of this chapter, I thus re-inscribe Cixous’ concept and practice of the “feminine” within the feminist and psychoanalytical context in which it emerged. Building on
this context, I then show how Cixous’ notion of the feminine takes its departure from Lacan’s later elaboration on the feminine while going beyond it through a re-appropriation of Bataille’s notion of general economy, and Derrida’s notion of writing.

I. THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX RELOADED

To understand what Cixous means when she talks about “feminine writing” in “The Laugh of the Medusa,” or when she argues in favor of a “feminine economy” in “Castration or Decapitation,” one has to understand, first, how the notion of the feminine had been defined by Freud, and by the early Lacan in his famous text, “The Signification of the Phallus”; and how Lacan, in his later teaching, re-problematized his own definition of the feminine in terms of jouissance. For it is as an answer to the problems and paradoxes that Lacan's teaching creates around the notion of the feminine and its relation (and non-relation) to the Phallus that Cixous’ own notion of the feminine acquires its full pertinence. In order to present Freud’s theory of femininity, I have chosen to divide the first part of this chapter into three parts. In the first, I present Freud’s theory of infantile sexuality and its relation to Freud’s theory of the drives. In the second, I discuss Freud’s theory of the Oedipus complex and its relation to Freud’s theory of psychosexual development. In the third, I present Freud’s theory of femininity within the context of Freud’s theory of infantile sexuality, and Freud’s theory of the Oedipus complex.

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255 “Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing” (875).
Freud’s Theory of Infantile Sexuality

To understand Freud’s theory of infantile sexuality, one has to understand the reason why Freud himself was led to such a groundbreaking theory. At first Freud simply thought that most symptoms of his hysterical patient’s symptoms had their roots in an early sexual trauma. This trauma, in turn, was supposed to have been repressed in the unconscious and returned in the form of the hysterical symptoms. Consequently, the young Freud argued that all mental illness were due to an early sexual encounter with an adult (most of the time the father) that had been found by the ego of the child incompatible with its own values, or the values of society. The child’s ego, in order to cope with the anxiety generated by the incompatible experience, put in place mechanisms of defense that aim at keeping the trauma away from consciousness. And it is out of these defense mechanisms that the child starts developing neurotic symptoms that are the indirect expression of what has been repressed. This was the basis of Freud’s infantile seduction theory, a theory that he developed in 1896. This theory provided the explanation for the origin of neurosis (hysteria and obsessional). The theory also oriented psychoanalytic cure: to help the patient remember the trauma in order to lift the defense mechanisms that were preventing the conscious processing of the repressed materials.\(^{256}\) However, after having tried to locate in the past of his patients the actual sexual trauma which could have caused their symptoms, Freud came to the

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conclusion that, in many cases, the sexual trauma had not really happened.\textsuperscript{257} Freud consequently renounced his infantile seduction theory and proposed, instead, that most traumas were of the order of a fantasy, and thus not real. Consequently, Freud moved from a trauma based theory to a fantasy based theory, and by doing so, stopped paying so much attention to the ego and its defense mechanisms, and started to look for the cause of the fantasy at an unconscious level.\textsuperscript{258} And it is this move away from the ego and the reality of the trauma that pushed Freud to articulate his groundbreaking theory of \textit{infantile sexuality}. His theory was strongly rejected by his medical colleagues as well as by the Good Society of Vienna who took for granted Krafft-Ebing's \textit{Psychopathia Sexualis} (1893) or Havelock Ellis's \textit{Studies in the Psychology of Sex} (1897) view that sexuality was absent in childhood, and only revealed during puberty through the manifestation of an irresistible attraction exercised by one sex upon the other.\textsuperscript{259}

\textsuperscript{257} Freud, Sigmund. \textit{The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1888-1904}. Translation and Edition J. Masson, Harvard University Press, 1985. See, in particular pp. 264-266. In this letter, Freud explains to Fliess that to maintain his seduction theory would amount to accusing most fathers of being perverts, and to accuse almost all of them of being responsible for the neurosis of their children. He also emphasized the fact that the remembering of the trauma was most of the time not enough to cure the symptom of his patient. The war neurosis that Freud studied at the end of the First World War actually confirmed this hypothesis since in the case of this neurosis, it is the trauma itself that becomes the center of the compulsion to repeat.

\textsuperscript{258} This move from a trauma based theory to a fantasy based theory triggered many discussions in the psychoanalytic community. The subject is still sensitive nowadays, especially when it comes to questions of rape. Of course, Freud never dismissed the possibility of an actual trauma as being the real cause of a mental illness, but he nonetheless underlined the crucial importance played by the role of a fantasy in any form of experience. For more information about this important debate, see Moussaieff Masson, Jeffrey. \textit{The Assault on Truth}. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1984. In this book Masson argues that Freud changed his theory because he refused to believe that so many children had actually been abused by parents. In a feminist manner, Masson accused Freud of depriving his women patients (such as Dora for example) of voicing their legitimate discontent against their oppressor, since the cause of the trauma is no longer said to be real, but internal. Consequently, while in the first theory, patients were seen as the victims of real aggressions, they became, within the second theory, fantastically responsible of their own misery. Kate Millet, in \textit{Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality}, writes: “Freud often dealt with children, especially females, who had been sexually abused; he resolved the entire problem by deciding that it was an Oedipal fantasy on their part. So female children were not only sexually abused, they had to assent that they imagined it. This process undermines sanity, since if what takes place isn’t real but imaginary, then you are at fault: you are illogical, as well as naughty, to have imagined an unimaginable act: incest. You ascribe guilt to your father, and you are also a very guilty, sexy little creature yourself. So much for you (222).

Opposing this simplistic (and almost angelical) view, Freud argued, in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), that sexuality was something more diffuse (present in many different parts of the body), and that made itself felt from the first years of life. Thus, instead of considering children as little angels, Freud proposed to see them as having to deal with the delicate, and most of the time overwhelming task of discharging excitations (coming from within and from without) impinging upon them. Freud went even as far as describing the infant, regardless of his sexed body, as a *polymorphous perverse*, i.e., as being capable of extracting sexual pleasure from virtually any erotogenic part of his body. Freud then concluded that what was held as the natural expression of human sexuality—the famous genital stage represented by heterosexual patriarchal family structure—was a construction to be explained rather than a biological ground upon which to build a theory of *human development*. On the contrary, Freud boldly declared that the object of the drives were *variable, contingent* and only chosen in their definitive form in consequence of the oddities of one's own life. In other words, instead of taking monogamous heterosexuality as a norm, and all deviations from this “norm” as perversions, Freud took perversion as the “normal” case, and made of genital sexuality the particular case to be explained.

Of course, such a theory was not only shocking for the scientific and scholarly community of his time, but it also provoked a very strong rejection within psychoanalysis itself.

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260 The word drive, in Freud’s theory, designates any form of biological or psychological need that has the power of driving the behavior of an individual. Freud isolated four different kind of drives: the oral, the anal, the phallic and the genital drive. More importantly, Freud argued that each of these *drives* needed to be separated in four elements: the *source* of excitation, the *pressure* that it imposes on the organism, the *object* to which the excitation gets attached, and the *aim*, i.e., the way in which the satisfaction is obtained. In the case of the oral drive, for example, the drive arises from the cavity of the mouth (the source), creates the need for sucking activities (the aim), and gets attached to particular external objects, such as the mother’s breast (the object).
In the introduction to the fourth edition of the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) Freud asserted that the reason why his theory of infantile sexuality was rejected was that it confronted humanity with the "ugly," repressed truth that a realm of brute sexual corporality underlined the higher spheres of mental life. And that such confrontation triggered in those who hear his theory a form of defense mechanism that was correlated with the kind of resistance that his patients were opposing to the advancement of the cure. Applying to himself the formula of the poet Friedrich Hebbel, Freud suggested that by formulating his theory about infantile sexuality, he ended up “disturbing the sleep of the world,” which is to say that he had become someone who had put into question some of the most important and commonly accepted ideas about the human nature.261

But Freud also connected his theory of infantile sexuality to a theory of *psychosexual development*; a theory that was supposed to map the different steps that a child is supposed to take in order to become a “normal” adult.262 And, through this theory, I would suggest, Freud did not try to disrupt once more “the sleep of the world” but, quite on the contrary, he tried to understand how the world had slept for so long. Indeed, Freud proposed a theory of psychosexual development that took as its model the patriarchal structure of the western family and the ways in which such structure organizes the relationship between the parents (as mother and father, but also as husband and wife) and the children. And it is only in connection to this

261 See, Hebbel, Friedrich. “Gyges and His Ring,” Three Plays by Hebbel. Transl. Marion W. Sonnenfeld, Bucknell: Bucknell University Press, 1974, 213-271. Hebbel writes: “So, Gyges, if the wave of life moves you this way or that, it will raise you, and higher than you would think. But you must trust it, and not be repelled when the crown appears. Only make sure you don’t disturb the sleeping world!” (267-268)

262 A libidinal stage marks a moment, in the development of a child, when the libido is organized under the primacy of one erotogenic zone and the relinquishment of other erotogenic zones.
second theory, as I will show, that the question of female sexuality and femininity became a properly psychoanalytic question for Freud.

Freud’s Theory of Psychosexual Development.
The theory of psychosexual development that Freud described in “Formulations Regarding the Two Principles in Mental Functioning” (1911) as well as in “Papers on Metapsychology” (1911-1917) is composed of five stages. First, the child goes through an oral phase (between 0 and 1), when it is being fed by the mother or the care-taker; then through an anal phase (around 2), when he is trained for toilet use, then through a phallic phase (around 3 to 6), when it discovers its own sex, and enters the gendered dynamic of the Oedipus complex (within which the infant starts to desire his mother and have aggressive feelings towards his father), and then through a latent phase (during which sexuality is dormant in the child), and finally to a genital phase (which starts at puberty and lasts until the end of life), when the primary goal of sexuality is reproduction. However, Freud also stressed that the passage from one stage to the other was anything but automatic. He proposed, on the contrary, to see in the difficulties (mental and physical) implied in the passage from one stage to the other the very cause of all arrested developments in a child, and he made of them the most common cause of mental illness (being neurosis or psychosis).

Freud, then, proposed, in “The Disposition to Obsessional Neurosis” (1913), as well as in “On Narcissism: An Introduction” (1915), explanations for the child’s psychosexual difficulty moving from one stage to the other by introducing a distinction between two opposite kinds of
drives. Freud posited first a series of drives linked to sexuality per se—the sexual-drives, which he linked to primary narcissism, and a series of drives linked to self-preservation—the ego-drives, which he linked to secondary narcissism. To posit this distinction, Freud pointed to the fact that as soon as the infant passes his oral phase through his “weaning complex” and accesses the anal stage, its oral drive, for example, becomes charged with sexual drives that are in conflict with the new exigencies of the stage the infant is now in. In other words, Freud explained that the passing of each stages was responsible of imposing on the fragmented sexual drives of the infant an increased amount of repression, which, in turn, was responsible of creating, within the infant psyche, a series of unconscious psychical conflicts between what was required of it to survive, which was at the origin of its ego-drives, and what its sexual drives were requesting of it to obtain immediate satisfaction. Freud then used this inner conflict to explain the early formation of the ego of the child.

According to Freud, the ego owes its birth and its derivative source of energy to the repression imposed by the self-preservation drives onto the sexual drives. As such, Freud conceptualized the ego as the representative of the social demands imposed on the infant, and thus as the main center of the defense mechanism put forth by the child to keep at bay the unworthy polymorphous perverse demands of its drives. This early conception of ego formation

263 The notion of narcissism in Freud’s theory is of a crucial importance. Freud argued that narcissism was a necessary stage between the auto-eroticism of the sexual drives, and the capacity to turn such auto-eroticism outward, which is to say, to turn it into an object-love. By primary narcissism, Freud meant the self-love that an infant feels about its own body, and its preservation. It is, as he puts it in “On Narcissism: an Introduction”: “the libidinal complement to the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation” (11). It is then out of this primary narcissism that the ego is formed as the consequence of parental control and social expectations. On the other hand, the notion of secondary narcissism is a notion that refers to a later period in life when the libido withdraws from object-love to choose as its new object the person itself. Consequently, this withdrawal implies, generally, a kind of megalomania on the behalf on the narcissistic person, or the possibility of constituting love-object relations of a narcissistic type.
is one that corresponds to Freud first topographical representation of the psychic apparatus.\textsuperscript{264}

Within this first topic, inspired by the scientific context of the time (models in neurology, physiology, psychopathology), Freud proposed, in a manner close to the one developed in \textit{Project for a Scientific Psychology} (1895) a representation of the human mind as the interaction of three subsystems, each of them occupying a certain place in relation to the other. Freud assigned to each of these subsystem a separate character and operational mode, and named them: the \textit{unconscious}, the \textit{preconscious} and the \textit{conscious}. While the unconscious system is in charge of keeping all the memory-traces, the one of consciousness supports the activity of perception (and the variety of its sensory qualities), and the preconscious system operates the mediation between the unconscious system of memory-trace and the purely perceptual system of consciousness according to either a diurnal \textit{progressive} logic (which goes from unconscious to consciousness), or a regressive logic (which goes from consciousness to the unconscious) as it is visible in dreams formations.

Through this topographical model of the psyche Freud was able to explain how something like the “Reality Principle” could be implemented within the psyche of the child. It also enabled him to explain how parts of the polymorphous perversity of the child were actually capable of surviving during adulthood at an unconscious level (in the form of neurotic symptoms), or even sometimes at a conscious level (sexual perversion), or more simply in dreams. Freud also associated the formulation of this topic with the idea that the analytic cure should aim at lifting all the defenses of the ego, and help the person reconnect with its sexuality,

beyond the barrier of the ego, and all its defense mechanism. Freud thus, one may conclude, proposed a theory of psychosexual development as a mix of biological non-essentialism, and cultural constructivism, and proposed as the appropriate role assigned to the psychoanalytic cure, a kind of undoing of his patient's defense mechanism.

Freud’s Second Topic and the Death Drive
Freud conception of the psychic apparatus changed radically in the 20s when he began to notice that his basic conception was not adequate to describe an increasing number of clinical cases (especially those related to war neurosis and masochism). Freud had argued in his Project for a Scientific Psychology (1895) that the psychic apparatus was a homeostatic system invested with quantities of energy and regulated by the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. As such, the pleasure principle, according to Freud, was nothing more than a principle of consistency that was not fundamentally opposed to the reality principle inasmuch as the reality principle was only an external agency demanding a postponing of satisfaction, but not its renouncement. In other words, Freud thought, up until he wrote Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), that the pleasure principle and the reality principle were not opposed to one another, but obeying the same logic. However, Freud encountered many clinical cases that seemed to prove exactly the opposite. In the case of war neurotics, for example, the recurrence of their nightmares as well as their inclination to keep remembering the trauma that they had experienced seemed to prove that something other than the pleasure principle was at play at the very core of the human psyche. Likewise, the joy taken by the masochist in his own mistreatment as well as the inner sense of guilt felt by neurotic people seemed also to be at odds with Freud’s pleasure principle. Finally,
the famous “fort-da” game that Freud witnessed in his little nephew’s playing, and the way he interpreted it as a ‘playful’ repetition of the traumatic experience of departure of the mother, seemed also to contradict his earlier theory. As a result, Freud concluded that beyond the life drive (and their division into ego-drives and sexual drives) that he had theorized so far, was existing a “death drive” that needed to be taken into account. The ‘death drive” became thus the drive impelling towards repetition and conservatism, and the “life drive” or “sexual drive” which pushed forwards to the creation of new forms. Summarizing his new vision of the psyche in “Analysis Terminable and Interminable” (1938), Freud wrote:

If we take into consideration the whole picture made up by the phenomena of masochism immanent in so many people, the negative therapeutic reaction of the sense of guilt found in so many neurotics, we shall no longer be able to adhere to the belief that mental events are exclusively governed by the desire for pleasure. These phenomena are unmistakable indications of the presence of a power in mental life which we call the instinct of aggression or of destruction according to its aims, and which we trace back to the original death instinct of living matter. (243)

And it is through the recognition of this instinct of aggression that Freud was led to redefine entirely his model of the psychic apparatus. He argued that aggressiveness was to be understood neither as a reaction of self-defense nor as the result of a brutish disposition but rather as the expression of an internal conflict that was primarily expressing itself in the form of self-destructiveness (masochism), and in the form of an aggressive behavior toward others (sadism) when allowed to.
This place attributed by Freud to aggressiveness and the death drive is, without a doubt, what triggered the most dissension within the psychoanalytic movement during Freud’s life time, and what continues to keep many thinkers distant from Freud’s late theory of the human psyche.265 (see, for a full analysis of Freud’s notion of the death drive, the Epilogue, Part I).

Freud, in Civilization and its Discontent (1929), made of the desire for aggression a central element of the human psyche, and connected it to the presence of death and violence and every type of human society. And then he used such desire for aggression to dismiss any leftist political belief—generally held by Freudian leftist thinkers such as Wilhelm Reich and then Herbert Marcuse and the Frankfurt School—that associated a lifting of the social demands imposed on each individual with an increase of happiness.266 Freud, to state it even more clearly, isolated in the human experience the desire for aggression in order to justify, at a psychoanalytical level, his conservative political positions.267

It is also because of his new emphasis on aggressivity that Freud revised his first topology and proposed a new one in The Ego and the Id (1923), which substituted for the triad

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266 Freud writes, in Civilization and its Discontent: “It was found that men become neurotic because they cannot tolerate the degree of privation that society imposes on them in virtue of its cultural ideals, and it was supposed that a return to greater possibilities of happiness would ensue if these standards were abolished or greatly relaxed” (46).

267 Freud writes, “The bit of truth behind all this—one so eagerly denied—is that men are not gentle, friendly creatures wishing for love, who simply defend themselves if they are attacked, but that a powerful measure of desire for aggression has to be reckoned as part of their instinctual endowment. The result is that their neighbor is to them not only a possible helper or sexual object, but also a temptation to them to gratify their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without recompense, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him” (Civilization 85).
unconscious, pre-conscious, conscious, the id, the ego and the super-ego.\textsuperscript{268} The main difference between the two models is that in the second topology the three components of the human psyche all have a part immerged within the unconscious. As such, this second topology, unlike the first topology, does not borrow its model from the physical sciences but, as Pontalis and Laplanche emphasize in \textit{The Language of Psychoanalysis}, it “is instead shot through with anthropomorphism; the intra-subjective fields tend to be conceived of after the fashion of intersubjective relations, and the systems are pictured as relatively autonomous persons-within-the-person (the super-ego, for instance, is said to behave in a sadistic way toward the ego)” (452). And it is out of this new anthropocentric model of the human psyche that Freud made of the ego the instance in charge of dealing with the opposite claims of the id (the life-drives) and the super-ego (the “moral conscious”), and that he was led, also, to formulate his conception of female sexuality and femininity.

The Dark Continent of Female Sexuality
It is, in fact, only as an old man suffering from cancer that Freud started to produce, under the pressure of many female analysts surrounding him, which included his own daughter Anna Freud, a psychoanalytic theory about female sexuality and femininity. Regarding such a topic, Freud assumed for a very long time the idea that male and female sexuality could be thought of as paralleling one another. Freud went even as far as suggesting in \textit{The Interpretation of Dreams} 

\footnote{\textsuperscript{268} The notion of the super-ego is defined by Freud in his famous article on “The Uncanny” (1919) thus: “The idea of the ‘double’ does not necessarily disappear with the passing of primary narcissism, for it can receive fresh meaning from the later stages of the ego’s development. A special agency is slowly formed there, which is able to stand over against the rest of the ego, which has the function of observing and criticizing the self and of exercising a censorship within the mind, and which we become aware of as our ‘conscience’” (234-235).}
that the two positions, in regards to the Oedipus complex, were mirroring one another inasmuch as Freud thought that both sexes had a natural attraction for the opposite sex (attraction for the mother for the little boy, and attraction for the father for the little girl), as well as a natural form of aggressiveness and competition in regards to the same sex (competition with the father for the little boy, competition with the mother for the little girl). But it is precisely this ultimate trace of biological essentialism that Freud’s theory about *gender difference* and *female sexuality* will completely overthrow. Such a change in Freud’s theory, of course, did not happened over night. It is out of a gradual, and one could say “scientific” process of confronting his previous theory with new clinical materials that Freud undertook such a change. Although the precise description of this change would be of value, I will only mention here the three most important female clinical cases that have lead Freud to change his theory. After having studied a case of female paranoia in “A Case of Paranoia Running Counter to the Psychoanalytic Theory of the Disease” (1915), Freud realized that women could be fixated to their mother, just as little boys were. Then, through the case of “A Child is Being Beaten” (1919)—and perhaps even more through the analysis of his own daughter Anna—Freud came to understand that the place and

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269 Freud, Sigmund. “A Case of Paranoia Running Counter to the Psychoanalytic Theory of the Disease,” London: Hogarth Press, Vol. 14, 263. In this paper, which deals with the case of a 30 year old woman who falsely accused her male lover of having taken nude photographs of her, Freud argues, first, against what he previously thought, that paranoia is not necessarily linked to a disavowal of homosexuality (cf. “The case of the President Schreber”), since the young women protected herself against her love for a man by developing a paranoiac delusion. However, through this paranoiac delusion, concludes Freud, she only exhibited her primary fixation to her mother as a love object, and thus to her non-resolved homosexual choice.

270 Freud’s idea about the importance of masochist fantasies in women’s development came to him after having analyzed the “masochist” fantasy of his own daughter, Anna Freud, which she described in her unpublished novel *Heinrich Musham*. Thanks to the analysis of this fantasy, Freud came to the conclusion that masochist fantasies were not only typically feminine, but also the very root of women’s “penis envy.” One could also add, here, that Anna Freud started a therapy with her own “sick” father in 1925, the very same year that Freud wrote his first paper on feminine sexuality, a paper that Anna Freud read on the behalf of her father (who was too sick to read it himself) during the *Homburg international Psycho-Analytical Congress*, in 1925. For more details on this, see Sayers, Janet, “Anna Freud, Father’s child,” in *Mothers of Psychoanalysis*, Helene Deutsch, Karen Horney, Anna Freud, Melanie Klein, New York: Norton & Company, 1991, 145-151.

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the function of masochist fantasy in women’s sexual development were of a crucial importance in order to understand their possible access (or denial) to “normal femininity.”271 And finally, in “The Psychogenesis of a Case of Female Homosexuality”272 (1920), Freud arrived at the conclusion that “the expectation of there being a complete parallel [between the sexes] was mistaken.”273 For a very long time, then, Freud kept repeating that the sexual life of women, compared to the one of men, remained for psychoanalysis in complete obscurity.274 He even went as far as saying, in his essay “The Question of Lay Analysis” (1926) that “we know less about the sexual life of little girls than of boys. But we need not feel ashamed of this distinction; after all, the sexual life of adult women is a ‘dark continent’ for psychology.”275 However, Freud, despite this seemingly desperate conclusion, started to build, in a series of three conferences given between 1925 and 1933, a theory about this “dark continent” by suggesting—even though still lacking the proper amount of clinical materials to draw a properly scientific conclusion—that differing from little boys, little girls were suffering, at an unconscious level, from a “penis envy.”

Regarding this “penis envy”—and before entering into the details of it—one could

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271 Freud, “A Child is Being Beaten,” London: Hogarth Press, Standard. Ed, Vol. 17, 177. In this paper, Freud argues that the very common fantasy of being beaten by the father, among little girls, is a way to turn away from their mother, and to become the subservient object of the father, that is to say, the object that the father loves the most.

272 Freud, “The Psychogenesis of a Case of Female Homosexuality,” London: Hogarth, Standard Ed., Vol. 18, 147. In this paper, Freud argues that homosexuality, on the side of women, is to be understood as the result of the impossibility to win the love of the father when facing a mother who is craving too much male attention.

273 Freud, 197.

274 See, Freud, Sigmund. Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905), where Freud argues that “the sexual life of men alone has become accessible to research. That of women, still veiled in an incomprehensible obscurity” (151).

275 Freud, 212.
legitimately wonder, as Sarah Kaufman did at the opening of her book *The Enigma of Woman, Woman in Freud’s Writings* (1985), if the reason why Freud waited so long to render this idea public was to be found in the fact that he was clearly anticipating that the publication of his theory would trigger very negative reactions among women, and perhaps even more among women analysts or male analysts with feminist views. Nonetheless, Freud did eventually publish his theory, although not without warning his readers about the uncertainty of it.276 Freud wrote, in “Some Anatomical Differences Between the Sexes”:

> But now everything has changed. The time before me is limited. The whole of it is no longer spent in working, so that my opportunities for making fresh observations are not so numerous. If I think I see something new, I am uncertain whether I can wait for it to be confirmed. And further, everything that is to be seen upon the surface has already been exhausted; what remains has to be slowly and laboriously dragged up from the depths. Finally, I am no longer alone. An eager crowd of fellow-workers is ready to make use of what is unfinished or doubtful, and I can leave to them that part of the work which I should otherwise have done myself. On this occasion, therefore, I feel justified in publishing something which stands in urgent need of confirmation before its value or lack of value can be decided. (242)

One could legitimately wonder whether, from the start, the question of female sexuality was at the same time the one upon which Freud had been able, through the study of women hysterics, to make his major discovery—the unconscious—and also the one around which the very future of

psychoanalysis would be at stake. As the rest of this chapter will show, it is, indeed, around the question of female sexuality, and particularly around the challenges that this question poses to the conceptual apparatus deployed by Freud—especially the Oedipus complex—that most critiques of Freudian psychoanalysis started in the early 20s. It is on the same question that the split between orthodox and non-orthodox Freudian psychoanalysis happened in 1946. But what is Freud’s theory of female sexuality and femininity?

Freud’s Theory of Femininity
Freud devoted three papers to the question of female sexuality. The first one was called “Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes” (1925), the second “Female Sexuality” (1931), and the third one “Femininity” (1933). The common point of departure of these papers is Freud’s theory of early childhood sexuality as he developed it in his *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905). In this book, Freud argued that during the stage of early infancy, little boys and little girls were actually similar. From a biological perspective, little boys are said to possess within themselves to a greater or lesser extent, the presence of the sexual apparatus of the little girl, and vice versa. In other words, little boys and little girls, as regards to their biological constitution, can be said to be potentially bisexual, “as though an individual is not a man or a woman but always both” (139). As such, concludes Freud, what distinguishes female sexuality from male sexuality cannot be found at a biological level. But Freud also argues that this difference can neither be reduced to the psychological one which associates masculinity

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with activity, and femininity with passivity. Even though such an association can be supported by biological evidence, it can also be easily refuted by means of counter biological evidence and, more importantly, it leaves ultimately the one who uses it with the same consequence: if masculinity is defined by activity, and femininity with passivity, then it means that both male and female are psychological bisexual since active and passive behavior can be observed on both sides of the sexual difference. But if the difference between masculinity and femininity cannot be defined at a biological or a psychological level, it means that it has to be defined in relation to something that is external to it.

In the case of little boys, the external element that comes to shape their sexuality is the Oedipus complex. The Oedipus complex is the name that Freud gave to the libidinal stage—the phallic one—during which the little boy starts desiring his mother as his love object, and regards his father as his rival. To escape this complex, Freud argued in “The Dissolution Of the Oedipus Complex” (1924) that the little boy had to be dragged out of it through his fear of castration, a fear imposed on him by the threatening presence of his father, or any other authoritative figure. Now, unlike little boys, the encountering of the Oedipus complex by little girls during the phallic phase (the phallic phase that little girls share with boys) raises one more problem according to Freud: “How does it happen,” writes Freud, “that girls abandon it [their first love object, which is the mother] and instead take their fathers as an object?” (Some Psychological... 248) To answer this question Freud argued, in “Femininity,” that the whole psychological and

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278 See, for example, Freud, “Analysis of a Phobia in a Five Years old Boy,” London: Hogarth, Vol. 10, 1-148. In this clinical case, Freud describes the difficulties that a five years old boy named Hans had going through his own Oedipus complex, that is to say the difficulties he had to overcome his castration complex (and the way in which the little Hans developed a phobia in order to materialize and contain his otherwise unmanageable anxiety). The case also highlights the difficulty that triggered, for a little boy, the discovery of the anatomical difference between the sexes.
sexual development of women was actually dependent on the little girl’s discovery about the anatomical difference between boys and girls. In comparison to little boys, little girls recognize the ostensibly visible organ of little boys “as being the superior counterpart of their own small and inconspicuous organ, and from that time forward fall a victim to envy for the penis” (249). In other words, it is inasmuch as little girls suffer from ‘penis envy’ that their psychological evolution differs from the one of men (men are anxious about losing their penis). Freud writes,

One cannot very well doubt the importance of envy for the penis. You may take it as an instance of male injustice if I assert that envy and jealousy play an even greater part in the mental life of a woman than of men. It is not that I think these characteristics are absent in men or that I think they have no other roots in women than envy for the penis, but I am inclined to attribute their greater amount in women to this latter influence. Some analysts, however, have shown an inclination to depreciate the importance of this first installment of penis envy in the phallic phase. (125)

Thanks to this “penis envy,” Freud then proceeded to explain many “oddities” of the little girls’ sexual and emotional development. For example, it is because little girls hold their mother responsible for their lack of penis that they turn away from their mother. “Girls hold their mother responsible for their lack of penis and do not forgive her for their being thus put at a disadvantage” (Femininity 124). But it is also thanks to their “penis envy” that little girls take their father as their new love object. Freud writes: “the wish with which the girl turns to her father is no doubt originally the wish for the penis which her mother has refused her and which she now expects from the father” (128). But it is only at the condition that the little girl manages
to repress her “penis envy” and exchange it for the desire to receive a baby from the father that she can properly enter into the Oedipus complex. Freud writes: “the feminine situation is only established, however, if the wish for a penis is replaced by one for a baby, if, that is, a baby takes the place of a penis in accordance with an ancient symbolic equivalence.” (128). If, however, the little girl refuses to let go of her “penis envy,” she is then bound to fall prey of a “masculinity complex.”

The Masculinity Complex
The “masculinity complex” is the name that Freud gave to the little girl’s refusal to let go of her “penis envy,” as well her potential future denial, disavowal or foreclosure of her very condition as a “feminine” woman. She may even, adds Freud, start to develop a of form of contempt for her own sex. “Thus,” writes Freud, “a girl may refuse to accept the fact of being castrated, may harden herself in the conviction that she does possess a penis, and may subsequently be compelled to behave as though she were a man” (Some Psychological..., 244). And even if a little girl accepts, at a conscious level, her castrated condition, she may still express her repressed “penis envy” in a form of jealousy that, stresses Freud, is not strictly speaking the property of womanhood, but nonetheless more frequent among women than men. Finally, the last but not least consequence of the little girl’s “penis envy” is to be located in her relationship to her clitoris. If, indeed, the clitoris is comparable to a penis in the sense that it can be actively masturbated (just as little boy can actively masturbate his), the little girl has to let go of this activity in order to access a “proper” feminine sexuality, i.e., to switch from the active pleasure that she can give to herself through the masturbation of her clitoris to the pleasure that she can
receive from the penis of a man.279

This is why Freud underscores the fact that the situation of little girls and little boys, with regard to the Oedipus complex and its articulation with the castration complex, is almost the opposite. While the little boy finds in the fear of castration the motor that will enable him, through the development of a strong super-ego, to overcome his Oedipus complex, the little girl is pushed into the Oedipus complex thanks to her primordial castration and the transformation of her “penis envy” into the desire to receive a child from her father. Unlike little boys, then, the little girl is maintained indefinitely in a form of rivalry with the mother over the love of the father up until she can learn, at puberty, to transfer this love for the father onto another man. As such, the Oedipus complex is only a “secondary formation” for little girls, which means, for Freud, that it cannot be resolved through the fear of castration, and thus though the creation of a strong super-ego, but through love for the father first, and then love for the man who will give to the woman a child. Freud writes: “in these circumstances the formation of the super-ego must suffer, it cannot attain the strength and independence which give it its cultural significance, and feminists are not pleased when we point out to them the effects of this factor upon the average feminine character” (Femininity, 129).

But despite this obviously anti-feminist conclusion, Freud added that it is inasmuch as a woman denies or disavows in herself her “penis envy,” or refuses to trade it for a baby in her relation to the man she loves, her maturation as an average feminine character can become problematic. Freud writes: “The discovery that she is castrated is a turning point in a girl’s...

279 One can now understand why Marie Bonaparte became so interested in Freud’s work, and why she decided to go to Vienna to start an analysis with Freud.
growth. Three possible lines of development starts from it: one leads to sexual inhibition or neurosis, the second to change in character in the sense of a masculinity complex, the third, finally, to normal femininity” (126). In other words, women have no other choice, according to Freud, than to follow the path of their “penis envy” if they want to achieve a mature female sexuality (i.e., a sexuality centered on the passivity of the vagina, and not on the activity of the clitoris) as well as a “normal” gender identity, i.e., the sexuality and the gender identity of a bourgeoise and not the one of an hysteric, a lesbian or a psychotic. For if a little girl is not capable of repressing her “penis envy” by sublimating it through an attachment to the father, then only two other roads are opened to her: the one where she develops a “masculinity complex,” where she clings to clitoral masturbation, non-passivity, and which leads to lesbianism; and the one where she represses her “penis envy” without managing to sublimate it, and which leads to sexual inhibition, frigidity.

Of course, Freud himself was aware that his approach of “femininity” through the concept of “penis envy’ was bound to offend feminists and women psychoanalysts of all kinds. In his paper on “Female Sexuality,” (1931) Freud wrote, in the first footnote: “It is to be anticipated that men analysts with feminist views, as well as our women analysts, will disagree with what I have said here.” Freud was completely correct in that assessment.

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280 See, Miller, “Of Distribution Between the sexes,” trans. by Philip Dravers in Psychoanalytic Notebooks 11, 2003, 9-26. In this text, Jacques-Alain Miller describes the “Freudian Woman” as coinciding with the profile of the “bourgeoise,” which is to say with the image of what a woman is supposed to be within the configuration of a patriarchal and bourgeois family.

In Freud’s theory on femininity, the question of the feminine is inseparable from the question of the castration complex. For a little boy, it is always the fear of being castrated and, for a little girl, the desire to overcome her actual castration that creates a difference between the two sexes, which, at a libidinal level, are equivalent. While the little boy, for Freud, represses his desire for his mother and endorses his father’s law out of this fear (which is why the castration complex marks the exit from the Oedipus complex for boys); the little girl, on the other hand, resolves the conflict by accepting her actual castration on the condition that she will retrieve her missing penis through the man who will love her, and who will give her a child (which is why the castration complex marks the entrance of the little girl into the Oedipus complex). As such, many feminists have charged Freud’s theory of femininity with perpetuating a form of essentialism at biological and cultural levels.

II. EARLY PSYCHOANALYTIC DISCONTENTS WITH FEMININITY

An intense debate around the question of female sexuality took place between 1920 and the mid-1930s, and ended in 1946 with the divide of the *British Association of Psychoanalysis* in three different groups of psychoanalysts defending three different conceptions of psychoanalysis.²⁸² This debate, as the last part of this chapter will show, consisted not only in a critique of Freud’s theory of “femininity,” but it also triggered a critique of the whole orientation of Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis.

²⁸² The best account of this debate, as well as the most sophisticated critique of Freud’s view on women can be found in Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, Berkley: University of California, 1978.
The Early Feminist Critique of “Penis Envy”

The first woman analyst who dared to disagree with Freud was the German psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Karen Horney. Trained as an analyst in Berlin by Karl Abraham, she entered the debate by answering Abraham’s influential article “Manifestation of the Female Castration Complex” (1922). In this article, Abraham dismisses the feminist idea that Freud’s “penis envy” was actually not referring to a masculine penis, nor to an anatomical difference between the sexes, but to a legitimate political claim in face of all the existing inequalities that impacted the possibilities offered to the two sexes. Opposed to this feminist critique of Freud, Abraham argued that such a rereading was, in fact, the result of a political process of rationalization over an unresolved unconscious “masculinity complex.” Abraham wrote:

For instance, it is said that girls even in childhood are at a disadvantage to boys because boys are allowed greater freedom; or, in later life, men are permitted to choose their profession and can extend their sphere of activity in many directions, and especially that they are subjected to far fewer restrictions in their sexual life. Psycho-analysis, however, 

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283 Karen Horney (1885 – 1952) was one of the first women to receive a medical degree in Germany. She became, under the supervision of Karl Abraham, a Freudian psychoanalyst. She then moved to the United States in 1932 after having been rejected by the Freudian orthodox for her heretical views on Freud’s conception of female sexuality. She first worked at the Chicago Institute of Psychoanalysis before moving to Brooklyn where she worked for The New School for Social Research and for the New York Psychoanalytic Institute. As a consequence of her many disagreements with Freud, and Freudian orthodoxy, she founded her own organization, the Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis. A psychoanalytic center devoted to Karen Horney’s approach of analysis still exists today in New York. It offers a feminist approach to analysis.

284 Karl Abraham (1877-1925) was an influential German psychoanalyst, a very close collaborator of Freud who called him his “best pupil.” First introduced to psychoanalysis by Carl Gustav Jung, he met Freud in 1907 in Vienna, and returned to Berlin in 1910 where he founded the Berliner Society of Psychoanalysis. He was also the president of the International Psychoanalytical Association from 1914 to 1918. He was the analyst of Melanie Klein, Edward Glover, Alix Strachey, and the mentor of the Berlin group, which included Karen Horney, Helene Deutsch, and Franz Alexander. He was also the first one to underline the importance of the role played by the mother during the pre-Oedipal phase. He developed the concept of the “bad” pre-oedipal mother, which paved the way for Melanie Klein's emphasis on the pre-Oedipal phase, as well as the relationship between the infant and the mother.
shows that conscious arguments of this sort are of limited value, and are the result of rationalization—a process which veils the motives lying deeper. (467)

In other words, Abraham, in his paper, reduced the feminist claim about “penis envy” to the expression of a rationalization of a hysterical neurosis manifesting itself in a fierce resentment over men or, in the best case, in a desire to sublimate a “masculinity complex” through the pursuit of an intellectual career—as Abraham thought was the case with most women analysts that he was training and supervising (Abraham was also, as we will see, Melanie Klein’s analyst).

Displeased with Abraham’s answer to the early feminist critique of Freud, and more broadly with Freud’s theory about female sexuality and femininity, Horney joined, in 1922, a politically more progressive branch of psychoanalysis founded by the psychoanalyst Alfred Adler. Adler, although a very close collaborator of Freud, withdrew from Freud’s circle in 1911, only a year only after having been appointed at the head of the “Internationale Psychoanalytische Vereinigung” (The International Psychoanalytic Association, I.P.A.) that Freud had created in 1910 to provide a formal institution for the psychoanalytic movement. Adler argued that the creation of such an institution was bound to generate a “censorship of scientific freedom.” And Adler was actually quite right. His eviction from the I.P.A was only

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285 Alfred Adler (1870 – 1937) was an Austrian medical doctor and psychotherapist who created the school of individual psychology, a branch of psychoanalysis that emphasizes the fact that the social realm is as important as the internal realm in the analysis of a human psyche. Although a very close collaborator of Freud up until 1910, he was nonetheless the first one to leave Freud’s Wednesday evening’s group, and to create an alternative psychoanalytic group in Vienna, influenced by Nietzschean and socialist ideas. For more information, see, The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler, Ed. Heinz L. Ansbacher & Rowena R. Ansbacher, New York: Basic Books, 1956. And see also, Hoffman, The Drive for Self: Alfred Adler and the Founding of Individual Psychology, Addison-Welsley Publishing Company, 1994.

286 Quoted by Freud in “On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement.” (50)
the first of a long list. Adler left his position in Freud’s movement and created his own psychoanalytic association: *The Society for Individual Psychology*. The society was centered on a Marxist as well as a cultural approach to the social, and a Nietzschean approach to the psyche. For Adler, the effects of culture on the development of the psyche, as well as on the construction and the definition of “masculinity” and “femininity” were to be placed at the center of psychoanalytic concern, and not to be dismissed as mere “rationalization” of any unconscious “masculinity complex.”

Likewise, the very notion of “masculinity complex,” according to Adler, was not to be seen as the result of resistance coming from the ego against an unconscious truth but, on the contrary, the healthy expression of a Nietzschean “will to power,” i.e., a conscious desire emanating from the individual, and not, as Freud had argued in his theory about femininity, as the expression of an unconscious “masculinity complex.” As such, Adler made of the “masculine protestation,” which Freud held as the most essential resistance that had to be overcome in each of his patients through patient analytic work, the kernel of his *Individual Psychology*. Freud actually wrote a very severe critique of Adler’s psychoanalytical position in “On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement” (1914). Freud argued that Adler, through his theory, had actually reduced human behavior to the expression of a single aggressive drive, and that he had thus

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287 Although slightly off the topic of this chapter, it is nonetheless important to say that Karl Gustav Jung, whom Freud held as the most intelligent and capable of his disciples, was also invited to withdraw from the I.P.A in 1914 when Freud realized that Jung was no longer respecting his most fundamental concepts, but that he was creating his own approach of the unconscious, as well as assigning a new direction to psychoanalytic treatment. For more detail on the difference between Freud and Jung, see, Freud, Sigmund, “On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement,” 60-66.

forgotten about the other fundamental drive of human nature, which is love. Consequently, Freud accused Adler of having disposed, within his own theory, of his most important discovery, the unconscious. And through this disposal Adler had created a psychology of the “will to power” that was perhaps interesting (but not bound to disrupt, as Freud’s theory did, the “sleep of the world”), however, that was completely different from what Freud himself had in mind. Freud, indeed, thought that the origin of all mental illness was to be found exclusively at a sexual and unconscious level, and that the role played by consciousness in regard to those unconscious processes was always on the side of defense mechanism, and not on the side of any “will to power.”

Using Adler’s cultural approach as her framework, while substituting for his single “aggressive drive,” the dualism of a “female drive,” Horney developed, in a series of 14 papers written between 1922 and 1937—collected and published after her death under the title *Feminine Psychology* (1967)—the idea that Freud’s conception of psychoanalysis was suffering from a masculine bias that was itself the product and the expression of a misogynist culture. This is why, according to Horney, Freud’s conception of “Femininity,” as well as the so called normal resolution of the “masculinity complex” into a desire for a baby, was nothing but a male fantasy, and certainly not an objective description of the condition of women. Horney wrote, in her essay “The Flight from Womanhood” (1927),

> Historically the relation of the sexes may be crudely described as that of master and

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289 It is interesting to note, here, that Freud criticized Adler for having given too much attention to the aggressive drive, while Freud himself eventually did the same 6 years later when he wrote *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and argued in favor of the primordial importance of the aggressive drive within the whole economy of the psychic apparatus. Likewise, Freud refused the idea of the existence of an aggressive drive when Sabina Spielrein, in “Destruction as the Cause of Becoming” (1912) argued in favor of the existence of an aggressive drive.
slave… Here we probably have the explanation also of the underestimation of this factor in analytical literature. In actual fact a girl is exposed from birth onward to the suggestion… of her inferiority, an experience which must constantly stimulate her masculinity complex. (338)

Reversing Abraham’s argument, and anticipating Simone de Beauvoir application of Hegel’s dialectic of the master and the slave to the relation of men and women in patriarchal society, Horney showed how woman’s so called “masculinity complex” was nothing but the result of a social construction that was aiming at maintaining women in a state of subordination in regards to men. Horney went even as far as saying that Freud’s conception of “penis envy” was in fact a secondary formation created by culture, and not a primary formation triggered by the discovery of the anatomical difference between the sexes. But to ground her position, Horney had to contest, in her paper “The Masculinity Complex in Women” (1927), one of the most fundamental concepts of Freudian psychoanalysis: the existence of a single-masculine libido. Against Freud’s monism, Horney argued for the presence, within women, of a specific feminine libido. Horney writes: “We have seen that the principle of attraction to the opposite sex, which is at work everywhere in nature, makes itself felt from the first years on” (33). In other words, Horney thought, against the late Freud (but aligned with the early Freud), that little girls were naturally more attracted to the other sex, and thus to their father, and that it was not necessary to elaborate a theory about the changing of object, as well as the changing of organ and aim (from the clitoris

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290 Following the same lines of reasoning, the psychoanalyst Clara Thompson, a couple of years after Horney, argued in “Cultural Pressure in the Psychology of Women” (1940) that Freud's “penis envy” was not to be understood as the psychological expression of an inevitable feeling of inferiority, triggered in the little girl by the discovery of the anatomical difference between the sex, but as a demand to be treated as a symbolic and social equal to a man.
to the vagina) to explain women’s attraction to men, and the possibility of vaginal pleasure.

Horney’s Critique of Female Masochism
Horney’s essentialist move, however, enabled her to produce the most convincing critique of Freud’s conception of female masochism, a concept that was playing such an important role in Freud’s developmental theory of femininity. Horney formulated her critique in “The Problem of Feminine Masochism” (1935), a paper that she also wrote to oppose the paper of another female analyst, Helene Deutsch.291 In “The Significance of Masochism in the Mental Life of Women” (1930), Deutsch had argued in agreement with Freud that clitoral pleasure was to be renounced and masochistic impulse accepted in order to access a properly feminine sexuality, i.e., a female sexuality centered on vaginal sensations.292 Opposing such a reductive view, Horney showed in her paper that it was not in the biological constitution of women to be masochistic, but that such masochism was in fact a direct consequence of the place and the function that was attributed to women in western culture—a place that was forcing them to adopt a submissive posture towards men as regards to love and power. Horney also pointed in “The Dread of Woman” (1932) that the concept of the “penis envy,” as well as the dogma of female inferiority were nothing but a male fantasy, and that both of them were in fact the expression of a

291 Helene Deutsch was a Polish-American psychoanalyst. She was analyzed first by Freud, and then by Karl Abraham. She helped to create the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute by formulating its training program and serving as its director for ten years. She remained a Freudian orthodox her whole life—even when she moved to England in 1938, and then to the United States to work at the Boston Psychoanalytic Institute. And even though Helene Deutsch became famous in the field of psychoanalysis for her work on female sexuality, her work has been criticized by feminists for her insistence on narcissism, masochism, and passivity as the essential traits of femininity. Her most important two volume book is, Deutsch, Helene. The Psychology of Women, A Psychoanalytic Interpretation. New York: Grune & Stratton, 1944. For more information on Helene Deutshe, see Roazen, Helene Deutsch. New York: Anchor Book, 1985. See also Webster, Benda S, “Helene Deutsch: a New Look,” Signs, 10, 1985, 553-571.

292 See also Deutsch, “Feminine Masochism,” in The Psychology of Women, 239-279.
masculine unconscious fear about a woman’s vagina and its power to absorb or to devour the male penis. Horney writes:

I think it is probable that the masculine dread of the woman (the mother) or of the female genital is more deep seated, weighs more heavily and is usually more energetically repressed than the dread of the man (father), and that the endeavor to find the penis in women represent first and foremost a convulsive attempt to deny the existence of the sinister female genitalia. (352)

By describing Freud’s masculine anxiety of castration as a secondary reaction, and by opposing it to a more primitive one—the dread of the mother, or of the female genitalia—Horney actually attacked one of the most important feature of Freud’s Oedipus complex: the complex of castration. She flipped Freud’s argument over by saying that it is not women who are castrated from the start, since they cannot lose what they don’t have, but men who are actually always-already on the verge of losing their masculinity if they cannot be potent. In other words, women can simply “be,” while men have to “perform” their masculinity, to show it, to prove it. And it is, according to Horney, because of this physical inferiority, and because of the anxiety that is attached to it that men, as a way to compensate for this difference, have managed to impose on women the two male fantasies that structure Freud’s understanding of female sexuality: the fantasy of “penis envy,” and its supposedly lesbian denial named “masculinity complex,” and

293 For a very thorough development of this idea in more recent branch of psychoanalysis, see Chassequel-Smirgel, Female Sexuality, University of Michigan Press, 1988. In this book, Chassequet argues that Freud's phallo-centrism was not wrong per se, but more like a motivated error defending against a deeper universal truth: the dread of the pre-oedipal mother as a devouring vagina. It is this dread—the dread of being engulfed and absorbed in the vagina, and not the discovery of the anatomical difference that is at the basis of the structure of the Oedipus complex, that is to say, at the basis of the need to operate a cut, at a symbolic level, between the infant and the mother. It is also an idea that will be of a central importance in the work of Hélène Cixous, and especially in her most famous text, “The Laugh of the Medusa.”
more importantly, the fantasy of “feminine masochism” without which no properly “feminine” sexuality could be achieved.

Freud did not welcome well all the critiques that Horney was addressing to him. He dismissed in “Female Sexuality” her view on the question of a specific feminine libidinal drive, and disagreed with her cultural explanation of the “penis envy.” Freud argued that Horney’s culturalist approach of female sexuality, as well as her emphasis on the existence of a “primary femininity” was, in fact, a way to anchor heterosexuality into biology, and to bypass the difficulty of accounting for the cultural construction of “masculinity” and “femininity” out of a purely perverse and polymorphous human being.294

Ernest Jones Critique of Freud’s Phallo-centrism
Largely inspired by Horney’s critique of Freud’s theory of female sexuality, Ernest Jones, one of the closest collaborators of Freud, and without a doubt the most active British psychoanalyst at the time, accused Freud, in his paper “The early Development of Female Sexuality” (1927), of having adopted, regarding female sexuality, an “unduly phallo-centric view of the problem in question” (439).295 Jones argued, indeed, that the “phallic phase” (during which the “penis envy”


295 Ernest Jones (1879 – 1958) was a British neurologist and a psychoanalyst. He met Freud in 1908, in Vienna, and became his lifelong friend as well as his biographer. Jones moved to the United States from 1908 to 1913, where he co-founded the American Psychopathological Association, and the American Psychoanalytic Association. Jones also became the president of the International Psychoanalytic Association from 1920 to 1924, and then from 1932 to 1939. In 1920 he founded the International Journal of Psychoanalysis. He worked also on the first English Edition of Freud’s work, with the help of Joan Riviere, his former analysand. Jones also helped Freud's family to escape Nazis Germany before the Second World War. He was also involved in the famous “Jones-Freud” controversy which eventually lead to the “Controversial Discussion” of 1946, which triggered the first split of the British Society of Psychoanalysis. These two controversies will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.
is supposed to emerge in the mental life of the little girl) represented a secondary defensive solution to a psychic conflict that had its roots not in the traumatic discovery of the anatomical difference between the two sexes (and the kind of trauma that it can trigger in both sexes), but in the privilege accorded to the boy’s penis in Freud’s theory. Jones himself had actually stumbled on this “unduly phallo-centric” privilege in “The Theory of Symbolism” (1916), a paper in which he had “discovered,” to his own astonishment, that most symbols were not only of a sexual nature but, in one way or another, connected to the male organ, i.e., the phallus. Jones writes,

> The field of sexual symbolism is an outstandingly rich and varied one, and the vast majority of symbols belongs to this category. There are probably more symbols of the male organ itself than all other symbols put together. This is a totally unexpected finding, even more so of the paucity of symbolized ideas in general, and is so difficult to reconcile with our sense of proportion that it needs an effort to refuse the easy escape of simply denying the facts, a feat which is greatly facilitated by the circumstance that, thanks to our education, the facts are not very accessible (103).

It is as a reaction to this “unexpected finding,” as well as an attempt to not taking the “easy escape of simply denying the facts,” that Jones developed, from 1927 to 1935, in a series of three papers devoted to the question of the early development of female sexuality, the idea that Freud’s complex of castration (and its female counterpart, the “penis envy”) was actually the very expression of his “phallo-centrism.”²⁹⁶ Jones writes, “I came to the conclusion that the concept of  

‘castration’ has in some respects hindered our appreciation of the fundamental conflicts. We have here an example of what Horney has indicated as an unconscious bias from approaching such studies too much from a male point of view” (459).

It is precisely not to fall into the same unconscious bias that Jones proposed to substitute to the word castration—which is always referring, directly or indirectly, to the presence or the absence of the boy’s penis—the one of aphanasis. The word aphanasis, in ancient Greek, evokes the idea of disappearance. But, unlike the word castration, which always evokes the real loss of the male organ, what disappears in the case of aphanasis is not an organ, but sexual desire. In other words, what both sexes dread disappearing is not, as Freud thought, their organ but their sexual desire. And it is this fear, commonly shared by both sexes, which is at the root of every neurosis, at every unconscious psychical conflict. Jones writes: “If we pursue to its roots the fundamental fear which lies at the basis of all neurosis we are driven, in my opinion, to the conclusion that what it really signifies is the aphanasis, the total, and of course permanent, extinction of the capacity (including opportunity) for sexual enjoyment” (460). In other words, aphanasis is the name of the possibility, for men and women, of seeing their desire disappearing. This is why Jones could write that “both sexes ultimately dread exactly the same thing, aphanasis” (462). In doing so, Jones produced an apparently pro-feminist theory of female sexuality, since he did not think female sexuality directly in relation to a phallic symbol.

However, through his theory of aphanasis Jones also restored the sense of proportion between the two sexes that his British and humanist education had previously implanted in him, and thus took, to a certain extent, the “easy way out of simply denying the facts.” And he did it
by positing a “feminine instinct,” making thus of “femininity” the end result of a biological process—more or less distorted or interrupted by external factors, and not the strange product of phallo-centrism itself. In his paper “Early Female Sexuality” (1935), Jones wrote, “to my mind (...) femininity develops progressively from the prompting of an instinctual constitution. In short, I do not see a woman—in the way feminists do—as *un homme manqué*, as a permanently disappointed creature struggling to console herself with secondary substitutes alien to her nature” (495). But what does it mean to refuse to see a woman as “un homme manqué” and, at the same time, to propose anchoring femininity into a biological process? Or, to put it differently, what does it mean to rescue women from their “penis envy” by granting them instead a “feminine instinct”? To answer those questions, one could argue, as Jane Gallop did in *The Daughter’s Seduction*, that it would actually be a mistake to see in Jones’s aphanasis a way to champion the right of female sexuality, instead of seeing in it a way to disavow his own finding about the preeminence of the Phallus as a symbol through the elaboration of a theory that would be more aligned with Jones sense of proportion.  

It is also, I would suggest, the way Jones took his distance from the radicalism of Freud’s theory of the unconscious. Jones made psychoanalysis more palatable to a broader audience by re-transforming it into a theory of consciousness in which the question of gender was either reduced to the expression of a “feminine drive,” or to a conscious political fight for economic equalities—but not a question of unconscious conflicts related to an anatomical difference.

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297 See Gallop, “Of Phallic Proportions: Lacanian Conceit,” in *The Daughter’s Seduction, Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982, 15-32. In this chapter, Jane Gallop argues that “As tempting as it might be to applaud Jones’ championing the rights of female sexuality to an equal place in psychoanalytic theory, it is important to read his partisanship as a repetition of his move in 1916, to an escape, a denial of the fact of symbolic phallo-centrism” (17).
III. RETHINKING FEMININITY WITH LACAN’S NOTION OF “NOT-ALL”

For the early Lacan as well, femininity needs to be theorized in relation to the castration complex. But, unlike Freud, Lacan does not think that the idea of castration has to be related to the actual penis. Instead, Lacan substitutes for the penis the idea that it is language itself, and more importantly, a very special signifier—the Phallus—that produces a logical effect of castration in every subject. The notion of the Phallus, which is all too often reduced to the reality of the penis is, on the contrary, an imaginary and symbolic notion for Lacan. First, the Phallus refers to the *imaginary phallus* (written $\varphi$) of the mother, and then, to the *symbolic Phallus* (written $\Phi$), once the function of the castration complex (written: $–\varphi$) has been put into place by the paternal Law. The imaginary phallus designates, in Lacan’s theory, the object that the mother desires beyond the child (or what seems to escape, from the child’s point of view, from the mother’s desire) and, by implication, the fact that the child is always trying to become that object, that is to say, that the child is always trying to be the imaginary phallus of the mother. To counter this phenomenon, which makes the child the puppet of the mother’s desire, the aim of the castration complex in Lacan’s theory is to deprive every subject, regardless of his or her gender, of the possibility of being the “imaginary phallus” of the mother (for a full description of this logic, see Chapter One, Part II). It is only when this possibility has been disabled that the symbolic Phallus ($\Phi$) is discovered as what it really is: a void within the Other (written $A$).

The Imaginary and Symbolic Phallus
Thus the symbolic Phallus is not the mark of a presence for Lacan, as the penis is in Freud, but the symbol of the lost Imaginary phallus (as the product of castration: – φ), and the symbol of the void that appears in the Other as a consequence of the acceptance of this loss. In other words, the Symbolic Phallus is at the same time what will force the child to renounce the fusional relationship with the mother (and the dream of an absolute satisfaction that goes with it), and what enables the child to regain what has been lost at an imaginary level in terms of symbolic power. The implication of this reformulation of the castration complex is that it is only when the child has renounced being the imaginary phallus of the mother that the question of sexual difference can be raised for Lacan. Sexual difference is not a question of biological difference, but a question of how a subject relates to his or her own castration. Or, to put it differently, it is a question of how a subject can sustain (or not) the lack that his or her own castration has unveiled within the Other. As such, sexual difference presents the ways in which the lack produced by the castration complex can be veiled and warded off through the cork of the fantasy.299 On the male side of the fantasy, Lacan finds a fetishistic logic that consists of reducing the sexual partner to an image that does not speak. On the female side of the fantasy, Lacan finds an erotomaniac logic that consists of giving to the partner who is loved, the plenitude of which one was deprived. Thus, when Lacan argues that men are said to have the Phallus, and women to be the Phallus, he means that men can only have the symbolic Phallus inasmuch as women accept to be their Phallus, and that women can be the Phallus inasmuch as men accept to have the Phallus. Both of

them, through their sexual relationship, “cork” the void of their castration with a fantasy—a fetishistic fantasy on the male side of “having,” and an erotomaniac fantasy on the female side of “being.”

Consequently, Lacan's early logical rewriting of Freud’s castration complex, seen from a feminist point of view, is not that different from Freud’s definition of the feminine position. Although more refined, Lacan’s definition still approaches the feminine through its relation to the masculine, and both positions through their relation to the symbolic Phallus. The Phallus in Lacan's “early” teaching is still a Phallus that carries, through its relation to the Name-of-the-Father, all the values that are attached to patriarchy. This is why, for many feminists, the “early” Lacan is not much better than the late Freud when it comes to understanding femininity. But it would be unfair to limit Lacan’s insight on the feminine to his “early” teaching.

Lacan’s teaching shifted drastically in the early 70's when he began a movement beyond the Oedipus through a re-elaboration of the “feminine position.” Lacan started to elaborate this new position in his Séminaire, Livre XIX: ...Ou Pire (1971-1972), where he established, contrary to what Freud’s Oedipus complex presupposes, that the two sexual positions are not complementary to one another but, on the contrary, in a state of profound dissymmetry—the dissymmetry that Lacan summarized in this formula: “there is no sexual relationship between the sexes.” With this new axiom, Lacan invented in his Seminar, Book XX: Encore (1972-1973), a

300 For a full analysis of this logic of the fantasy, Miller, “Of the Distribution Between the Sexes.”

logical table of sexuation in which the feminine was no longer reduced to the "negative" side of a logical binarism, but posited beyond it through a new relationship to jouissance. Lacan writes, “There is a jouissance, since I am confining myself here to jouissance, a jouissance of the body that is, if I may express myself thus – why not make a book title out of this, it’ll be the next book in the Galilée collection – ‘beyond the phallus,’ that would be cute, huh? And it would give another consistency to the women’s liberation movement. A jouissance beyond the phallus…” (74). And to approach this jouissance beyond the Phallus, Lacan invented a new logical quantifier – the "not all," and argued that the singularity of the feminine position, contrary to the masculine position defined by a universal acceptation of castration (the quantifier “for all”), was to be "not-all" submitted to the Phallic function.

The Jouissance of the Urfather
The word jouissance appeared for the first time during the XVth century to designate the action of using something in order to obtain from it the kind of satisfaction that it was designed for. As such, the word had a juridical dimension and was linked to the word “usufruct,” which designates the right to use or to enjoy a thing possessed, directly or indirectly (from the latin usus); or in the figurative sense (from the latin fructus), the right to derive profit from a thing possessed. During the XVI century, the word received a new hedonistic twist, and became the synonym of pleasure, enjoyment, joy and voluptuousness. There is thus at least two important

302 When Lacan talks about jouissance from a masculine perspective, he reduces it to sexual enjoyment, and aligns it with the satisfaction of the drives. As such, jouissance designates, also, any form of painful symptoms, psychic pain, as well as any form of excessive pleasure inasmuch as those phenomena are related to sexuality. But when Lacan talks about “feminine” jouissance, he makes of this other jouissance a supplementary one, that it to say, a jouissance that is not related to sexuality per se, but to the body and its relation to the Other.
dimensions to the word jouissance. The first one is the one of pleasure and enjoyment. The second, generally forgotten, is legal, and implies a connection between the law and the possibility of enjoyment. Now, if we apply this structure to the situation of the animal, one can say that there is a form of harmony between what the instinct of an animal prescribes and what the experience of satisfaction is. However, if we apply this structure to the speaking being, one can see that there is, on the contrary, a kind of disharmony between the two. Lacan made this disharmony evident in his article “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,” (1966) where he grounded his Graph of desire on a distinction between the notion of needs, demand and desire (see chapter One, Part III). Lacan argued that the effect of language on the speaking being was to split the satisfaction into a satisfaction that is forbidden (the one that has to be repressed and that gives rise to desire), and a satisfaction that is authorized (the one that can be turned into a demand). Lacan named the first one “the jouissance of the Other,” and the second one the “Phallic jouissance.”

Lacan named the satisfaction that language forbids “the jouissance of the Other” in reference to Freud’s theory of the Urfather developed in *Totem and Taboo*. In this book, Freud argued that prior to the creation of the human law there existed a dominant male who enjoyed all the women for himself. This primitive man, uncastrated, became then the symbol, once killed by the horde of sons (all brothers) of the now dead father, which is to say of the one and only male who had access to a form of unlimited satisfaction. Likewise, Lacan named the satisfaction authorized by the law the “Phallic jouissance” in reference to the horde of brothers who, in Freud’s theory, killed the father and then decided to forbid to themselves the unlimited jouissance that the primitive father enjoyed. In other words, the notion of jouissance, for Lacan,
is not only traversed by a tension between the one that is authorized, and the one that is forbidden, but it is also a notion that gets even more complex to handle when connected to the question of sexual difference.

In the scenario described by Freud in *Totem and Taboo*, it is, indeed, only the jouissance of the Urfather and the jouissance of the brothers that is at stake. It is only insofar as the brothers fear the castration of the Urfather, or the castration of the Totem that represents it, that they accept renouncing a part of their jouissance. However, on the side of women, the question of jouissance becomes quite different. Women, indeed, in Freud’s text, are simply the object of exchange of the brothers. Moreover, women, because of their anatomical constitution, cannot fear castration. Consequently, women do not relate to jouissance the same way as men. While men, in order to become a proper member of the horde of the brothers, have to accept castration, and thus limit their jouissance to the one that is socially acceptable, women, according to Lacan, are not subordinated structurally to the same constraint. However, such a difference does not imply either that women can have a full access to the jouissance of the Other since there does not exist, for women, such a thing as a Urmother who would have enjoyed all the men. It is such a complex situation that Lacan tried to formalize in the multiple formula of sexuation that he invented during his *Seminar XIX ... Ou Pire* (1971-1972), and his *Seminar XX, Encore* (1972-1973).
Lacan’s Formula of Sexuation
To summarize these formulas briefly, one can say that while it is possible to write, on the male side of sexuation, the function “all the men are subordinated to castration, except the Urfather,” it is not possible to write such a function on the female side of sexuation. Since there is no such a thing as a primitive figure that would incarnate the possibility of a full satisfaction, on the female side of sexuation, the necessity to subordinate “all the women” to a form of limitation of their jouissance does not exist in the same way either. There is thus only the possibility of writing two negative functions on the female side of sexuation for Lacan. One can write, first, that The Woman, as the equivalent of the Urfather, does not exist. Second, as an implication of the first function, one can write that there is no such thing, on the female side of sexuation, as “all the women”, since the exception without which the function “all” cannot be written is lacking. Consequently, one can infer from these two negative functions that “not all” women (in the double sense of not all of them, and not all of their jouissance) is subordinate to castration. In
other words, on the female side of sexuation, there is, of course, a Phallic jouissance inasmuch as women want to be in relation to “castrated” men. However, there is another form of jouissance that goes beyond the Phallic one, but that is not the equivalent of the jouissance of the Other (the Urfather). It is this third jouissance that Lacan called, in his Seminar XX, feminine jouissance, and about which he found the best example in the sculpted face of Saint Theresa of Avila.

It is because of the radical gap that exists between male and female speaking beings that psychoanalysis, for Lacan, regardless of its efforts, will never be able to produce a proper knowledge about the Real. In other words, it is at the level of sexual difference that the negative effects of language are the most blinding. And it is also at the level of sexual difference that, since the dawn of humans, every religion, every myth, and every ideology has tried to come up with a solution that could create harmony between the sexes. One could allude, here, to Plato’s Symposium, for example, and to the famous fable about the beast with two backs, or about the myth of the androgynous, or about the religious myth in Genesis. However, all these myths, or religious discourses about sexual difference are, in the end, nothing but lies, which is to say, simple acts of faith. This is why Lacan, to finalize his critique of religion, makes a pun on the French word Faith, “foi,” which he turns into “la foire”, which means, at the same time, what fails (from the word “foirer”) and the market place. In other words, faith is a failed attempt to resolve, for everyone and in a simple way, what cannot be resolved at a logical level. This is why, for the late Lacan, to think that psychoanalysis could produce through the use of letters and logical signs a proper knowledge of this Real—that as previous Lacan had tried so hard to do—is no less a kind of act of faith than the one required by the religious discourse. Lacan writes:
Le réel réel, si je puis dire, le vrai réel, en ce qui nous concerne, nous en sommes tout à fait sépare, à cause d’une chose tout à fait précise dont je crois quant à moi, encore que je n’ai jamais pu absolument le démontrer, que nous n’en viendrons jamais à bout; nous ne viendrons jamais à bout du rapport entre ces parlêtres que nous sexuons de mâle et ces parlêtres que nous sexuons de la femme. Là, les pédales sont radicalement perdues ; c’est même ce qui spécifie généralement l’être humain ; sur ce point il n’y a aucune chance que ça réussisse jamais, c’est-à-dire que nous en ayons la formule, une chose qui s’écrit scientifiquement. (32)

Lacan pointed to the fact, in a very feminist way, that to reduce the feminine position to the symmetrical opposite of the masculine position was, in fact, a very “masculine” fantasy: *The Woman* being the fantasy called forth by the masculine position and its specific desire towards the Other sex. This is why Lacan, in order to counter such a fantasy, barred the signifier *The Woman*, hoping to make clear that *The Woman* (as a universal) does not exist except as the product of a masculine fantasy. Lacan writes in *Encore*, “There is no such thing as *The Woman*, *The Woman* with a capital W indicating the universal. There’s no such thing as *The Woman* because, in her essence – I’ve already risked using that term, so why should I think twice about using it again? – she is not-all” (72-73). But let's be very careful here, and clarify a possible misunderstanding.

303 A woman, a lesbian, or a gay can also be situated on the masculine side of sexuation. Commenting on this situation, Elizabeth Wright reminds us, “This search for a fantasy in the woman can take place equally between a biological man and a biological woman, between two biological men or between two biological women”(30).
The Difference between the Not-All and Psychosis
If *The Woman* does not exist, if she is not-all included in the masculine set marked by its universal relation to the castration complex, it does not mean that the feminine position, for Lacan, has no relation to castration, and through castration to the Phallus. Contrary to the position developed by Deleuze and Guattari in *The Anti-Oedipus (1972)*, Lacan never equates the feminine position of the “not-all” with the one of psychosis. While the psychotic position implies foreclosure of the Phallic function, the feminine position, precisely because she is “not all” caught up in the phallic function, something of herself remains in it. Describing this double nature of the “not all,” Lacan said: “She is not not at all there, she is there in full. But there is something more” (74). This is why the feminine position in the late Lacan does not go against the Oedipus complex, but traverses it, while adding to it a supplementary jouissance, a jouissance that goes beyond the masculine one, which is eventually reducible to the autistic jouissance of the drives Jacques-Alain Miller describes in his very last Seminar, *The One All Alone (2010-2011).* Rather, the jouissance Lacan adds is a jouissance that would stand beyond the masculine one, in the realm of what certain mystics have called Pure Love. Lacan writes in *Encore,*

I don’t use the word ‘mystic’ as Peguy did. Mysticism isn’t everything that isn’t politics.

It is something serious, about which several people inform us – most often women, or


bright people like Saint John of the Cross, because one is not obliged, when one is male, to situate oneself on the side of $\forall x \Phi x$. One can also situate oneself on the side of the “not all”. There are men who are just as good as women. It happens. And who also feel just fine about it. Despite – I won’t say their phallus – despite what encumbers them that goes by that name, they get the idea or sense that there must be a jouissance that is beyond. Those are the ones we call mystics. (76)

What escapes the Phallic function within the feminine position, what is “not all” inscribable in this function is thus not for Lacan what comes before the Oedipus, but what stands beyond it (because it presupposes the crossing of the fantasy of The Woman) and, more importantly, it is also a beyond that is not reserved to biological women, but also open to biological men. Finally, it is a beyond that is related to the question of love and mysticism insofar as it implicates a form of jouissance that is not reducible to sexual jouissance, but is related to a joui-sens (enjoyment-of-meaning), that is to say, to a jouissance which implicates language as what produces it – although those who are experiencing it, in turn, cannot talk about it. It is, in this sense, a literary theme – the theme of divine love – and cannot be talked about as such. Lacan writes in Encore, “In all the time that people have been begging them, begging them on their hands and knees – I spoke last time of women psychoanalysts – to try to tell us, not a word” (75).

But isn't it precisely to counter this statement, and one could add, to go beyond Lacan (at least at this moment of his teaching), that Cixous, along with other feminists belonging to the
MLF\textsuperscript{306} (Mouvement de Libération des Femmes) invented a “feminine economy” and a “feminine writing”? And by doing so – this will be the thesis that I will explore in the last part of this chapter – Cixous did not simply reduce the “feminine” to a maternal metaphor,\textsuperscript{307} but she laid down the foundations of what her daughter Anne-Emmanuelle Berger has called in her last book, a queer turn in feminism.\textsuperscript{308} Cixous has not only invented a way to inscribe within language the supplementary jouissance that Lacan posited in Encore, but she has also invented a new form of economy that explores what, in the postmodern subject, is “not all” caught up in the universal of the social bond. It is this exploration that Cixous called “feminine writing”, even though the word “feminine” is the one that should be abandoned as soon as the deconstruction of its meaning will have finished its work.

IV. CIXOUS’ FEMININE ECONOMY AND ITS RELATION TO THE NOT-ALL

Cixous' notion of “feminine economy,” as she developed it in her text “Castration or Decapitation,” is Cixous’ way to elaborate the condition under which Lacan’s notion of the not-all could be capable of inscribing itself within language. To do so, Cixous remapped onto Lacan's formulas of sexuation the dichotomy that Georges Bataille established between a restricted economy (a masculine economy for Cixous), and a general economy (a feminine economy for Cixous), and then used Derrida’s reformulation of Bataille's propositions on writing in Writing

\textsuperscript{306} For a full explanation of what the MLF is, see chapter One, 58-59.


and Difference to elaborate her own notion of “feminine writing.” Through this montage, Cixous managed to go beyond Lacan’s affirmation about the feminine position’s inability to talk about its supplementary jouissance by inventing a new mode of writing, which would be no longer subordinated to the universality of the castration complex (and its restricted economy of meaning).

Bataille's Notion of General Economy

What is the definition that Bataille gives to the notion of general economy and to the practice of sovereign writing that is attached to it? And how have those notions been used by Cixous to re-articulate the relation of Lacan’s feminine position to the question of writing? The existence of a general economy can be inferred, as Bataille argues in the Accursed Share, Volume I, from the fact that any organism has at its disposal more energy resources than it needs to sustain its own living (the sun being the ultimate model of what gives without getting anything back). The application of this principle can be found in two basic life phenomena: growth and sexual practices. For example, because trees receive more energy from the sun than the amount they need to simply survive they keep growing. It is when particular organisms reach their limit of personal growth that they start to spend the extra-amount of energy they receive in non-useful activities—these activities being either related to pure squandering of energy (as is the case in

309 This hypothesis has already been briefly sketched by Verena Conley in her “Libidinal Economies: Freud and Marx.” “In Bataille Cixous finds the notion of a general economy of loss and spending rather than appropriation. Through the work of Jacques Derrida, she constructs the mix of spending (or dispensation) and writing to be an ongoing quest for meaning” (32).

aggressive behaviors), or to productive-expenditure, as is the case in sexual reproduction where
the excess of energy is no longer used for the growth of the organism itself, but for the growth of
the species in general. “Hence,” concludes Bataille, “the real excess does not begin until the
growth of the individual or group has reached its limits” (“Consumption” 29). Once the limits of
growth have been reached (for the individual as well as for the group to which he belongs), life
enters a state of ebullition, a state of extreme exuberance that requires the individual or the group
in this situation to think about the best way, or perhaps even more, the most acceptable way, to
get rid of this excess. In other words, the notion of general economy is defined as the counterpart
of what Bataille calls a restricted economy. While the restricted economy is an economy
grounded in lack, scarcity, and in the idea of a closed group, or a closed subject, the idea of a
general economy is grounded in excess, expenditure, and in the idea of the non-closure of the
subject.

As such, the question that a general economy deals with is no longer a question of utility
within the framework of a restricted economy, but rather an ethical question, a question of
acceptability – what is the best way to squander excess – and not: how can we use this energy in
the most productive way?311 Unfortunately, adds Bataille, the ethic that supports the capitalist
system is totally opposed to such a squandering of wealth. Entirely focused on the idea of

311 Bataille writes in The Accursed Share, Volume I, “Changing from the perspectives of restrictive economy to
those of general economy actually accomplishes a Copernican transformation: a reversal of thinking – and of ethics.
If a part of wealth (subject to a rough estimate) is doomed to destruction or at least to unproductive use without any
possible profit, it is logical, even inescapable, to surrender commodities without return. Henceforth, leaving aside
pure and simple dissipation, analogous to the construction of the Pyramids, the possibility of pursuing growth is
itself subordinated to giving: The industrial development of the entire world demands of Americans that they lucidly
grasp the necessity, for an economy such as theirs, of having a margin of profitless operations. An immense
industrial network cannot be managed in the same way that one changes a tire... It expresses a circuit of cosmic
energy on which it depends, which it cannot limit, and whose laws it cannot ignore without consequences. Woe to
those who, to the very end, insist on regulating the movement that exceeds them with the narrow mind of the
mechanic who changes a tire” (25-26).
accumulation, the capitalist system is reducible to the point of view that represents a restricted economy, for its constant goal is to appropriate the excess and to put it at the service of a few people, maintaining thus the possibility of growth for them (or for their group), but at the expense of the death or the starvation of others. Of course, pointing to this fact does not mean that all energy needs to be squandered in luxurious and useless endeavor, quite the contrary. But it does mean that in order to avoid being the unconscious victim of a movement of excessive energy, mankind as a whole needs to take into consideration what should be done with the excess that circulates on the planet at both a general level and a singular level, and more importantly, what should be done with this excess at the level of the individual.

Cixous' General Economy of the Feminine
Taking up this opposition, and then applying it to Lacan’s opposition between the masculine position and feminine position, Cixous makes the claim that the feminine position in Lacan’s theory is what can embody excess and what needs, from a masculine point of view, to be re-inscribed in the useful limits of a restricted economy. Cixous writes:

It's a question of submitting feminine disorder, its laughter, its inability to take the drumbeats seriously, to the threat of decapitation. If man operates under the threat of castration, if masculinity is culturally ordered by the castration complex, it might be said that the backlash, the return, on women of this castration anxiety is its displacement as decapitation, execution, of woman, as loss of her head. (Castration or Decapitation, 43)

If the feminine position is “not all” subordinated to the logic of castration, it does not mean that
the feminine position is simply free from castration; rather, it implies that it runs the risk of death the minute its supplementary jouissance starts to threaten the values and the sustainability of the restricted system within which it is otherwise inscribed. In other words, the feminine position for Cixous, just as the position that stands on the side of Bataille’s *general economy*, is not only a position that carries with it an anxiety of castration (like the masculine position in its relation to castration), but also a position that runs a constant risk of death. Once again borrowing an image from Bataille’s universe, Cixous suggests that the feminine, like the figure of the *Acephalic sovereign* (the figure of the headless), exceeds the figure of the Hegelian master in the exact measure that the feminine does not want to enjoy her position of mastery once she has faced death. In other words, in Cixous’ economy the feminine is said to risk decapitation not because it is refusing to submit to the anxiety of castration like the figure of the primal and un-castrated father in Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*, nor because the feminine refuses to participate to the tragi-comedy of sexual difference, but rather because the feminine position refuses to subordinate its confrontation with death to an external goal, to a future benefit.

And it is precisely because the feminine position is ready to risk decapitation that Cixous can ground in it a *new feminine economy* through a renewed relation to *giving*, like the Bataillean figure of the sovereign. From a masculine/restricted point of view, indeed, a man gives in

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312 Bataille founded a journal called *Acéphale*. The figure of the “Acéphale” was supposed to represent, according to Bataille, the figure of a human that would no longer be reduced to its head but who, on the contrary, would have made of his body and its sexuality the heterogeneous ground of its sovereign existence. See Hollier, “The Pineal Eye,” in *Against Architecture*, Boston: MIT Press, 1992.


314 See Georges Bataille’s article on “Sovereignty.”
order to get back a profit, i.e., more masculinity, a plus-value of virility, of authority, of power, of money, of pleasure, “all of which reinforce his phallocentric narcissism,” states Cixous (The Newly Born Woman 96). A gift in the masculine sense is always a gift made to oneself. However, in its feminine articulation, the structure of the gift is also oriented toward a “for” (a woman, like a man, is giving in order to get pleasure, to increase her value, and enhance her happiness); but unlike men, women do not attempt to recover what they have lost for the simple reason that their “self” is not stable (as it is always in relation to another) and could thus not be reinforced in the same way as the “self” of man. The point here is to think of an openness that would not be the expression of submission but an emanation of confidence and comprehension, or, to put it differently, a non-closure that would be detached from any self-sacrifice or masochism. For in a feminine/sovereign relation to giving, the masculine economy of self-assertion (at the expense of the other) is replaced by an economy of openness. And this economy of openness relies in turn on the fading of the masculine “I” that normally gives and looks for its own profit. Woman, in Cixous’ work, is thus the metaphor of a self, endlessly engaged in a process of becoming that escapes the telos of masculinity. “She [woman] is not able to return to herself, never settling down, pouring out, and going everywhere to the other. She does not flee extremes; she is not the being-of-the-end (the goal), but she is how-far-being-reaches” (The Newly Born Woman 87).

Cixous with Bataille: Feminine Writing as Sovereign Writing

Circling around these issues, Bataille writes, “I do not think, as a matter of fact, that we can

315 Bataille writes in “Nietzsche’s Laughter,” “The impossible is the loss of the self. How can one obtain that which is being lost, if not for compensation for gain. It matters little that the gain is illusory or smaller than the loss: deceiver or not, gain is the bait that makes loss accessible” (24).
touch upon the underlying meaning of political problems, where horror is always in the background, unless we consider the connection between work and eroticism, eroticism and war” (The Accursed Share, I, 17). Indeed, between the world of work (the masculine world of a restricted economy) and the world of eroticism (the feminine position of a general economy), there is now no connection. All the behaviors that eroticism involves are strictly prohibited within the orderly world of work (or at least should be, as the movement #MeToo and La ligue du LOL show). In the same way, the values and behaviors that characterize daily life are completely removed and alienated from erotic behaviors or from the debauchery of cruelty that happens during war. On a strange level, and up to a certain point, erotic behaviors and warlike behaviors could be taken as involving the same kind of bestial instincts. What is grounding and rendering possible the coexistence of these opposite and irreconcilable worlds within one individual or within one group of people is, according to Bataille, the very nature of thinking.

Even the discourse of psychoanalysis, argues Bataille, is forced to name the accursed domain of eroticism from the outside, and it tends to subordinate this accursed domain to the domain of thought with all its strength. That is to say that psychoanalysis, like every other science, tends to keep the question of sexuality separate from every other problem, in order to be able to define it and to operate on it. By doing so, psychoanalysis maintains the privilege of abstract thought in front of its object. As a consequence, instead of resorbing the split, psychoanalysis is simply theorizing it.

On a different note, what Bataille and Cixous want to achieve is a kind of thinking that is no longer separated from its object, but lost within it. In other words, Bataille and Cixous want not only to think sexuality as psychoanalysis does, but they also want to think it in its concrete
and integral reality, which means that they want to make sexuality and thinking complementary to one another. As such, one could even say that Bataille paved the way for Cixous to sexualize thought, i.e., to make thinking and sexuality the product of one another, not the product of their separation, for thought is normally considered asexual. Bataille writes, “Thought is asexual: one will see this limitation—antithetical to sovereignty, to every sovereign attitude—make of the intellectual world the flat and subordinate world that we know, this world of useful and isolated things, in which laborious activity is the rule, in which it is implied that each one of us should keep his place in a mechanical order” (The Accursed Share, I, 24). A sexualized thought would not be a thought that would be marked by the gender or the sex of the thinking person, but by the constant effort of this thought to include in its operations of thinking the heterogeneous worlds that such an operation would normally tend to cast away as gross, trivial or foul. A sexualized thought would then be a kind of thought that would be able to build a general economy of multi-leveled mind. Commenting on Bataille’s new approach to writing, Derrida in his article “From Restricted to General Economy, a Hegelianism Without Reserve” (1967) describes it as an articulation between a “Major” form of writing that exceeds the boundaries of meaning (and all the “masculine” values that are attached to it), and a “Minor” form of writing that is grounded on meaning.

Subverting the closed system of the restricted economy of meaning, Bataille's “Major” writing inscribes negativity within language itself. By instilling in all the words and concepts that his “Major” writing is using a certain slippage, he forces those words, notions and concepts to lose some of their meaning. Likewise, Cixous' feminine writing wants to accomplish the same kind of operation on all the words surrounding the notion of sexual difference. It wants to
destabilize all the concepts and notions that involve the feminine in order to make apparent the precariously of their meaning, and by implication, to make visible the network of significations that supports their meaning. For an example of this, one may look into Cixous' “Extreme Fidelity,” in which she writes, “An economy said to be F., “an economy said to be M.”—why distinguish between them? Why keep words which are so entirely treacherous, fearful, and war-mongering? This is where all the traps are set. I give myself a poet’s right, otherwise I would not dare to speak” (15). But this poet’s right is not a right to reduce women to the status of a metaphor; it is a right to write about what could make the Medusa a laughing figure, a figure of femininity that does not paralyzes men, that does not become the very source of the anxiety of castration.

Of a Certain Laughter to Become Feminine
To write in a feminine mode, just as to write in a sovereign mode, one has to learn a certain form of tragic laughter first, a laughter that Bataille defined for the first time in an article called “Nietzsche’s Laughter.” It is a laughter that does not rise from a position of superiority of the one who is laughing. Just as in Cixous' laugh of the Medusa, it is a phenomenon that implicates in its laughter the one who is laughing. Derrida situates Bataille's laughter as the most important feature of his writing. He defines it as what enables the figure of the master to slide into the figure of the sovereign. Laughter is the very function that permits Bataille’s writing to truly go
beyond the Hegelian dialectic of the master and the slave. Bataille's sovereign form of writing represents a true subversion of the philosophical discourse and its pretension to achieve a position of full mastery. Derrida writes,

To laugh at philosophy (at Hegelianism)—such in effect, is the form of the awakening—henceforth calls for an entire ‘discipline,’ an entire ‘method of meditation’ that acknowledges the philosopher’s byways, understands his techniques, makes use of his ruses, manipulates his cards, let him deploy his strategy, appropriate his texts. Then, thanks to this work which has prepared it—and philosophy is work itself according to Bataille— but quickly, furtively, and unforeseeably breaking with it, as betrayal or detachment, dryly, laughter bursts out. (“From Restricted to General Economy, a Hegelianism Without Reserve,” 252)

Cixous’ “laugh” of the Medusa, just like “Nietzsche’s laughter” in Bataille’s thinking, is what renders the feminine able to be a part of the restricted economy and a part of the general economy at the same time, because such a laughter is what enables the simultaneous presence of the two economies in the person who laughs. The laugh of the Medusa, just like Nietzsche’s laughter, is a laughter that laughs at the male's fantasy regarding *The Woman*, and also at the temptation that this fantasy represents for women who would like to gain power through it. It is thus a laughter that laughs at the very nature of men's thinking, and also a laughter that attacks or

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316 Bataille’s definition of Nietzsche's Laughter states, “In principle, laughing is the reaction the impossible offers when sympathy isn’t personally at stake. Either the impossible overcomes indifferent people, or it overcomes beings to whom I am bound by sympathy. But without really putting them at risk, I can laugh at the impossible in humanity: the impossible leaves the essence of the possible intact. Laughing at the impossible as it overcomes me, laughing knowing I am thinking, I am a God who mocks the possible that he is. I no longer hold life to the standard of the impossible in order to escape it, as nature does in tragedy, in Aristotle’s theory of catharsis. Zarathustra made laughter *sacred*” (“Nietzsche’s Laughter” 23).
exposes all the individuals who are trapped in this fantasy and have built their identity on it. And it is this specific laughter that makes Cixous’ conception of a feminine economy not a farfetched idea, but an idea that is in direct dialogue with Bataille and, even more, with Derrida’s reconstruction of the “system of Bataille’s proposition on writing” (“From Restricted to General Economy, a Hegelianism Without Reserve” 261). Derrida summarizes this system thus: “to say in language—the language of servility—that which is not servile” (262).

Beyond the Master: “To Believe Weeping”
Cixous’ way to put in practice such a sovereign mode of writing is, as she borrows the expression from Clarice Lispector’s last novella The Hour of the Star: “to believe weeping.”

To “believe weeping” is neither to weep nor to reject weeping. It is to stand outside weeping (and thus to stand on the masculine side) while accepting that there exists “weeping” (the feminine side) outside such a bloodless point of view. And, reciprocally, if one is weeping, somewhere there must exist a point of view that is capable of describing and structuring this weeping. In other words, “to believe weeping” is to put in contact the masculine and the feminine while being careful not to dissolve their differences. Cixous writes,

> Either we believe weeping, and then we can inhabit the world where the feminine being and the masculine being come into contact, exchange with each other, caress each other, respect each other, or quite incapable of maintaining a discourse as to their exact

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317 In Lispector’s The Hour of the Star, the male narrator (named Rodrigo S.M.) gives himself the mission to write, in a cold and impartial manner, the heartbreaking story of a little girl from the North-East of Brazil. And, in order to do so, the narrator says that he has to believe in the existence of what he cannot see: “I am aware of the existence of many things I have never seen. And you too. One cannot prove the existence of what is most real but the essential thing is to believe. To weep and believe” (8).
differences, but live them, these differences, and where—as the opening to the text tells us—if masculine and feminine agree with each other (I cannot say understand each other) it is because there is feminine, there is masculine, in the one and in the other. There are obviously points of conjunction – which does not mean identification. (Extreme Fidelity, 14)

Approached from this angle, it is clear that Cixous’ use of the word feminine is neither related to the sexed body (the female body) of the person who is claiming to be part of the feminine economy, nor related to the gender of this person (as we can imagine a woman, a man, a gay, a lesbian, or a trans-person belonging to both economies). This is why the adjective “feminine” is not something that can be attributed to women because of the sexed body, or because of their gender orientation—even if, historically speaking, every human being can be called either a descendant of Eve, or a descendant of Adam.

What I call “feminine” and “masculine” is the relationship to pleasure, the relationship to spending, because we are born into language, and I cannot do otherwise than to find myself before words; we cannot get rid of them, they are there. We could change them, we could put signs in their place, but they would become just as closed, just as immobile and petrifying as the word “masculine” and “feminine” and would lay down the law to us. (Extreme Fidelity, 15)

If there is no such thing as a strict opposition between the masculine and the feminine in real life, it is because such a strict opposition is only true at the level of structures. This means that the masculine and the feminine are only distinguishable at the level of the symbolic, and not at the
level of the individual. Indeed, at the level of the individual the notion of the masculine and the feminine are not defining two separate substances but, more simply, two possible ways to position oneself towards pleasure and knowledge. Cixous writes: “The stakes are extremely simple; it is a question of the apple: does one eat it or not? Will one enter into contact with the intimate inside of the fruit or not?” (Extreme Fidelity, 15) Those who eat the apple are Eve fall on the feminine side, while those who refuse to eat the apple remain on the masculine side. It is thus the question of the relationship between pleasure and the law that is at stake. What should prevail? Is it the quest for pleasure? Or is it the respect of the law?

What is at stake between a “feminine” and a “masculine” economy is thus not an essential difference between men and women, but a certain relationship to the law and to pleasure. It is, as Cixous reminds us, the difference between the temptation of the apple and the respect due to the law. It is, in this sense, the difference between the figure of Eve (the mother of temptation) and the one of Abraham (the father of faith). Eve receives the incomprehensible order (incomprehensible because Eve does not know what death or knowledge is) not to eat the apple, and she decides to eat it; Abraham receives the incomprehensible order to kill his son Isaac and decides to follow it. On the one hand, we have a “feminine” figure who transgresses the law in order to eat the fruit (which brings her in exchange pleasure and knowledge); on the other hand we have a “masculine” figure, Abraham, who is ready to sacrifice all his pleasure in order to follow the law. It is thus also a difference between what is always absent, which takes the form of an interdiction (the law), and what is always present, which takes the form of something that can be experienced with some form of pleasure (the apple).
The relationship to pleasure and the law, the individual’s response to this strange, antagonistic relationship indicates, whether we are men or women, different paths through life. It is not anatomical sex that determines anything here. It is, on the contrary, history from which one never escapes, individual and collective history, the cultural schema and the way the individual negotiates with these schema, with this data, adapts to them and reproduces them, or else gets round them, overcomes them, goes beyond them, gets through them – there are a thousand formulae – and joins up with or never joins up with a universe which I would call “without fear or reproach.” (Extreme Fidelity, 18)

The opposition between masculine and feminine is thus not an opposition that can be taken at face value. It exists only insofar as, historically speaking, certain cultural formations have ended up dividing this double approach to pleasure and the law into genders, and genders themselves into what supports biological differences, that is to say the sexed bodies. This is why Cixous writes, “If we resign ourselves to keeping words like ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ it is because there is an anchoring point somewhere in a far distant reality. But I believe we must do our utmost to reduce this heritage. Let us try, as quickly as possible, to abandon these binary distinctions which never make any sense” (Extreme Fidelity, 18). To this specific extent, the word “masculine” and “feminine” can help us to become more self-aware of the two routes that can be taken in front of the commandment of the law and the exploration of pleasure. But, on the other hand, they should be abandoned as soon as values attached to their opposition are extracted from the historical formation that gave birth to them.
CONCLUSION: HELENE CIXOUS AND THE JOUISSANCE OF THE TEXT

If to write in the feminine is “to believe weeping,” and if to “believe weeping” is to be able to constantly use and displace the limits and points of contact of what is “masculine” and what is “feminine” within oneself, it is then clear that the notion of the feminine is not an essentialist one in Cixous’ work. First, the notion of the feminine, differing from the notion of the masculine (where all the members of the set are said to be castrated) in Lacan’s later teaching, is “not all” submitted to the phallic function for Cixous. And this notion makes of each “feminine” position a singular one. It is from this singularity that the idea of a supplementary jouissance, a form of jouissance that goes beyond the castration complex, needs to be approached. Regarding the ways in which this supplementary jouissance can be taken as a point of departure for a new form of economy and a new form of writing, Cixous’ work does not owe so much a debt to Lacan (who will develop his own answer to these questions in his Seminar XXIII, see Chapter Five), but to Derrida, and all the more to Bataille (see Chapter Four). Cixous’ “feminine writing” is not so much a way to write the feminine per se than the constant effort to re-articulate the co-presence within one speaking being of both the masculine position and the feminine position through a certain laughter. And this constant re-articulation is, I would argue, what makes of Cixous’ feminine writing a practice not only relevant to biological women, but also to all speaking beings who are suffocated within the restricted economy of the masculine position. It is thus a notion and a practice that do not fight for the equality of rights between men and women (which is, needless to say, a very legitimate fight), but rather a notion and a practice that lay out the conditions under which it would become possible to go beyond the Oedipus, i.e., to go beyond

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318 For a complete overview of the most common critiques of Cixous’ conception of feminine writing, see Diana Holmes’s “Écriture Féminine: The Theory of a Feminine Writing.”
the values that the restricted economy of men have imposed upon the whole world, and that are
currently preventing our civilization from moving toward a more livable future. Bataille
summarized it perfectly in the introduction of The Accursed Share, Volume I when he wrote: “All
the same, two things are equally clear: no one has been able to contest the right of SERVILE
MAN to be in power – and yet his failure is monstrous!” (5)

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CHAPTER FOUR: A REMAINDER OF NON-KNOWLEDGE
Bataille, Lacan: A difficult Case

The positive fruit of the revelation of ignorance is non-knowledge, which is not a negation of knowledge but rather its most elaborated form. (…) The fact is that psychoanalysis, since it progresses in non-knowledge, is tied in the history of science to a state prior to Aristotelian definition, which is known as dialectic. Freud’s work bears witness to this in its reference to Plato and even to the pre-Socratics.

Jacques Lacan

Even if it is a short cut, one can say already, from the point that we have reached, that psychoanalysis is not a mystique of non-knowledge, and that in this disposition one makes room for non-knowledge of the analyst at the beginning, but one does not consider for that reason that non-knowledge is the culmen of experience.

Jacques-Alain Miller

Bataille as the Urfather of Deconstruction and Feminine Writing
Historians generally place Bataille and Lacan in different categories. While Lacan is considered a structuralist, Bataille has never been considered one and this for a simple reason: he never used Saussure and linguistics as one of his modes of analysis, nor believed in any systematic form of thinking. Paradoxically, even, Bataille was framed by Jürgen Habermas as a “proto-post
structuralist,” when he placed him, in his study of Modernity, in a line that goes from “Bataille, via Foucault, to Derrida.” And some other contemporary critics, one of the most important being Allan Stoekl, have gone as far as saying that Bataille’s work constitutes an “urtext for deconstruction.” And Queer scholars such as Tim Dean, Amy Hollywood or Shannon Winnubst state that the study of Bataille’s influence on Lacan could help develop a “queer” approach to psychoanalysis. By developing his concepts of “inner experience,” “non-knowledge,” “tragic laughter,” “luck,” “the impossible,” or “sovereignty,” etc. Bataille provided to Lacan—it will be the hypothesis of this chapter—a point of orientation to approach the Real, as well as the occasion to distinguish himself from Bataille.

But how can one articulate Lacan's notion of the Real, or Lacan’s notions of object a, the impossible, or feminine jouissance, to the notions that Bataille developed in relation to his conception of inner experience? In which sense is it possible to say, as Georges Didi-Huberman suggests in La Ressemblance informe, that Bataille's notion of inner experience and non-knowledge had a strong influence on Lacan's late thinking, and even more so on his conception


of feminine jouissance? And to which extent can one argue that Lacan’s definition of the Real is actually radically different from the one of Bataille, and thus from the position developed by Derrida in *Writing and Difference* (1967), and then by Cixous in *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975)?

**Bataille's Influence on Lacan's Late Teaching**

First, one has to acknowledge that Lacan was careful enough, in his *Ecrits*, “On a question prior to the treatment of psychosis,” to position himself against Bataille by identifying Schreber’s psychotic episode with Bataille’s *inner experience*. Lacan said in the last footnote of his text:

The last word with which our century’s “inner experience” has yielded us its computation was thus articulated fifty years ahead of its time by the theodicy to which Schreber was exposed: “God is a whore.” This is the term in which the process by which the signifier was “unleashed” in the Real culminates, after the Name-of-the-Father began to collapse—the latter being the signifier which, in the other, qua locus of the signifier, is the signifier of the Other qua locus of the law. (583)

And to make sure that his critique of “inner-experience” could not be associated with the wrong person, Lacan added, right after: "The inner experience I am speaking here is a reference to Georges Bataille's work. In *Madame Edwarda*, he describes the odd extremity of this experience" 

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We could then conclude that Lacan identifies Bataille's position with the one of strict psychosis, and that he refuses to embrace Bataille's work for this reason since, as we will see in Chapter Five, the aim of psychoanalysis for the late Lacan is no longer the traversal of the fantasy but, as he put it in *Seminar XXI*, an “ethics of the refusal to be non-dupe” (First Lesson, Unpublished). For the non-dupe, as Lacan keeps repeating, wonders. This is why Lacan is afraid of Bataille's *inner experience* and, even more so, of Bataille’s notion of non-knowledge. And this is why also, I would argue, one could say that Lacan is also afraid of Derrida’s notion of deconstruction, since such gesture implies, as we saw in Derrida’s critique of Lacan’s reading of Poe’s *PurloinedLetter*, to endorse Bataille’s radical refusal to respect the order of the letter.

Lacan, in his conference “I Speak to the Wall,”325 that Lacan gave at the same time as his *Seminar XIX, ... or worse* [1971-1972], said the following, regarding Bataille’s position, to his students,

Those who [the good students] have heard me quite well – or at least as best as they could – when I talked about knowledge as being the correlate of ignorance, and this idea tormented them a little. And there are some among them that have been poked by God knows which fly, a literary fly of course, things that can be found in Georges Bataille’s writings, because, otherwise, I don’t think they would have thought about it. I am talking about non-knowledge.

Georges Bataille gave a conference on non-knowledge one day, it might be found in two or three different places in his writings. God knows that he did not make a fuss of it. And

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especially the day he gave his conference in the Salle de Géographie de Saint-Germain-des-Prés, which you must know because it is a renowned place of culture, he did not utter a word, which was not a bad way to show his own non-knowledge.

People laughed, but they were wrong because now, it is very fancy, the non-knowledge. It can be found all over the place in the mystics, it is even from them that the notion comes from, it is with them that the notion has a meaning. And also, people know that I have insisted on the difference between knowledge and truth. Thus, if truth is not knowledge, it must then be non-knowledge. Aristotelian logic: everything that is not black is the non-black. (16)

It is a discovery this non-knowledge. One could not find a better way to introduce a definitive confusion on a delicate subject matter, the point in question in psychoanalysis being what I called the sensible frontier between truth and knowledge. (16-17)

Before entering in any precise argument, it is important to sketch briefly what non-knowledge is for Bataille, and designate who could be the “good students” who may have followed Bataille in his heresy. Non-knowledge names the ultimate point human experience can achieve. It is what is left of human experience when there is no longer any Other of the Other to guarantee any form of truth. The night of non-knowledge then appears and, with it, the dislocated remainder of a language, of a signifying chain ripped apart, undone, unfinished. (During an interview with Madeleine Chapsal, Bataille asked: was my last sentence finished? I think so said Chapsal. And Bataille to reply, if it was not, that would be a good image of what I wanted to express). A writing thus discontinued, disrupted, left unfinished. A writing moved by anxiety, ecstasy and
guilt. A writing filled with eroticism and perversion, a writing using language to destroy language itself.

Philippe Sollers, in the text he devoted to Bataille's style of writing, “Le Toit”\textsuperscript{326} said that Bataille's writing was aiming at opening a hole at the top of the roof of the temple, at opening at the center of language itself, a dark hole. That's the beyond that Bataille offers. That's the beyond that inner experience leads to. The erasure of the signifier through the progressive erasure of all the master signifiers that were organizing discourse. The letter, with Bataille, fades in the night of non-knowledge. Non-knowledge is the accomplishment of the death of the signifier—of the God hypothesis—in its two faces. The death of the moral God, and the death of the God of science, i.e. the non-deceiving God.

This is why many recent scholars have argued that Bataille’s conception of inner experience and non-knowledge should be placed at the origin of the branch of post-structuralism that came out of the group Tel Quel\textsuperscript{327} lead by Philippe Sollers and the young Foucault of \textit{Preface à la transgression},\textsuperscript{328} then broadened by Julia Kristeva through her concept of the semiotic,\textsuperscript{329} then generalized through the lineage of Derrida’s approach of deconstruction (and the key position that Bataille occupies in the dispositive deployed in \textit{Writing and Difference}\textsuperscript{330}); and then elaborated by women writers to give birth to the notion of \textit{écriture féminine} developed


\textsuperscript{327}Tel Quel was a literary journal founded by Philippe Sollers and Jean Herdern Hallier in 1960.


by Hélène Cixous and the MLF,\textsuperscript{331} or the conception of a feminine Imaginary developed by Luce Irigaray. Thus, the debate that Lacan is engaging with his old friend Bataille at the opening of his late teaching is not only interesting at the “hagiographical” level, but also as a tool to shed some light on the debate that has opposed, from the start, the French branch of feminism, entrenched in conflicted relationships with psychoanalysis, and the Anglo-American gender and queer theorists who have tended to reject psychoanalysis.

I. BEYOND THE SUBJECT OF SCIENCE: BATAILLE’S INNER EXPERIENCE

Bataille’s elaboration of inner experience can be divided in two parts. The first is composed of two books, \textit{Inner Experience} and \textit{Guilty}, and of a series of papers and conferences, all given during the Second World War. The second part is composed of a series of four conferences that Bataille gave between 1951 and 1953 as an answer to all the critiques that had been addressed to his notion of inner experience (and all the concepts that are related to it) after his first attempt to define and communicate it. For these reasons I have decided to address those two moments separately and in chronological order. From a methodological perspective, I chose to present Bataille’s thinking mostly through the reading of his articles and conferences and not through the study of his books. The reason for this choice is to be found in the difference of style that distinguishes Bataille’s books (very literary and aphoristic) from Bataille articles and conferences (very well constructed and argued). Contrary to his books, his conferences are “sober” and, as such, deprived of any literary effect. They are better documents to reconstruct,

from a purely rational ground, Bataille’s thinking. Additionally, and as we will see, the very
critique of Bataille’s style, when it comes to Inner Experience and Guilty will be part of what is
at issue at the end of this chapter.

It is during the second world war, while Bataille could no longer be directly engaged
politically (as he was during the pre-war time), that he wrote his first book Inner Experience
(1943). This book became then the first part of a bigger unpublished project, The Atheological
Summa.332 Through this Summa, which aims at reversing Thomas Aquinas’ Theological Summa,
Bataille wanted to create a new form of mysticism that could do away with any form of
dogmatism, or any form of submission to a given authority.333 Bataille wanted to describe a
spiritual experience, an inner experience, that would not be triggered and subsumed by any
desire for salvation, but that would be capable of exploring, in its full extension, the domain of
the sacred, i.e. the domain where life does not shy away from what threatens it, but affirms itself
all the way into death. In this sense, one could say that Bataille tried to explore the Real by
facing its truth completely staring in the eye the blinding presence of jouissance at the heart of
every human beings. And that the result of such a “sovereign desire,” was to place at the culmen
of human experience an ecstatic moment of non-knowledge.

332 The Atheological Summa is an unfinished project. Only parts of it were actually published during Bataille’s life
time. All the published and unpublished papers related to this Atheological Summa have been published in Bataille’s
complete work V, VI. See “Annexe 6, Plan pour la Somme athéologique,” in OC, V, VI, Paris: Gallimard, 1976,
360-374.

333 For a reading of Bataille’s Atheological Summa in relation to Thomas Aquinas Theological Summa, see
Holsinger, Bruce. The Pre-Modern Condition: Medievalism and the Making of Theory. Chicago: The University of
There is No Other of the Other: How to Embrace the Real?
In a conference that Bataille gave in 1942,\textsuperscript{334} a year prior to the publication of \textit{Inner Experience} and a couple of years after he founded the \textit{Socratic College}\textsuperscript{335} designed to study the nature and the scope of various experiences of the sacred, of experiences where the fringe of non-knowledge is directly visible in the human experience, Bataille wrote:

My proposition rests on his [Socrates] two famous maxims: “know yourself” and “I know but one thing, that I know nothing.” For my part only a kind of happy irony, I believe, follows from these two maxims; however, they seem no less fundamental to me than they were for Socrates. The first is the principle of inner experience and the second that of non-knowledge, on which this experience rests as soon as it abandons the mystical presupposition (14).

The principle of inner experience is thus attached, at first, to knowledge—it is attached to the famous commandment given to Socrates by the oracle of Delphi: \textit{gnautis eauton} (“know yourself”). However, this knowledge is immediately undermined by a second one, the knowledge that one knows nothing. In other words, if to enter the domain of inner experience requires the knowledge of oneself, this knowledge in turn is but a purely negative one. It is the knowledge that one knows actually nothing. It is this articulation that gives to the notion of non-knowledge its complexity, and to inner experience its proper ground. If, indeed, Bataille's inner experience is, just like the Socratic experience, an experience that implies “to know oneself,” this


knowledge, in turn, is being constantly contested by what this experience gives access to, i.e., “I know nothing.” As such, and contrary to any form of spiritual life, which generally posits—in order to go beyond this non-knowledge—either the idea of an eternal truth (idealism) or the idea of salvation (transcendence) as the telos of the first maxim (“know yourself”), and the idea of an incomprehensible God as the proper name of the second one (“I know but one thing, that I know nothing”), Bataille wants to get rid of any telos and, consequently, of any form of idealism or religious salvation.\textsuperscript{336}

Summarizing his vision of inner experience, Bataille gave to it the following definition. First, inner experience needs to “only have its principle and end in the absence of salvation, in the renunciation of all hope” (15). Second, inner experience only affirms that experience itself is the authority, although all authority has to be expiated. And third, inner experience can “only be a contestation of itself and non-knowledge” (15), which means that the paradoxical goal of inner experience is to elaborate a \textit{paradoxical knowledge} of an experience that ruins all other knowledge. In this sense, inner experience is not opposed to knowledge per se, but maintains knowledge not as its goals but as a necessary tool to access non-knowledge, just as knowledge is described as a tool to access the “learned ignorance” in Nicholas of Cusa’s \textit{De Docta Ignorancia}.\textsuperscript{337} In other words, inner experience is only opposed to the pretension of knowledge to assign to human life certain goals and limits. It is thus only opposed to knowledge when knowledge pretends to rule over experience, that is to say, when knowledge pretends to be in

\textsuperscript{336}Such a desire implies the disposal of the metaphor of the \textit{Homo Viator}, as Etienne Marcel described it in his book, that the late Lacan, in his \textit{Seminar XXI, Les non-dupes errent}, mentioned too, before disposing of his Christian spiritual itinerary towards illumination, like Bataille does in his inner experience.

possession of a truth that would impose its limits to inner experience. The crux of the matter, here, is thus the recognition of the limits that knowledge imposes on human behavior without any awareness of it. Bataille insists: “no inner experience is possible for those who allow themselves to be dominated by pleasure and pain.” For to be dominated by pleasure and pain is to be dominated by what Freud called the *pleasure principle*, that is to say, to be dominated by the commonly accepted knowledge about what is good and bad, about conformity to a certain way of life.\footnote{See the *Epilogue* for a full definition of Freud’s and Lacan’s death drive.}

Unbound from such knowledge, inner experience “naturally exceeds the subordination of human life to the search from pleasure, to the flight from pain. It postulates a positive value beyond pleasure” (14). But how shall we understand this “positive value” beyond pleasure? Wouldn’t it be more honest to say that beyond the pleasure principle stand no positive values, but what Freud named the death drive, that is to say, what Freud described as being entirely “negative”? Perhaps. But one could also argue here that by trying to give to the death drive a “positive value,” Bataille paved the way for Lacan to substitute for the Freudian death drive the much more ambiguous and complex notion of jouissance, a notion that encapsulates the one of pleasure as well as what goes beyond, and that turns the death drive into something “positive” in the sense of being impossible to negativized. Of course, to give a “positive value” to what stands beyond the pleasure principle is the “true” difficulty that weighs down the notion of inner experience, and the notion of non-knowledge that is attached to it. For if the very idea of “positivity” is always attached to a form of affirmation of life, or a form of usefulness that can comprehend a “negative” moment inasmuch as it can be “positivized” as a “negative” moment of
an overall “positive” movement, how can we not reduce inner experience “positivity” to such values? Well aware of this situation, Bataille writes: “The essential difficulty begins here. The search for a beyond in relation to immediate interests appears from the beginning as a principle of contestation” (14).

Luck as the Only Other of the Other
How is it possible to find within a principle of contestation something that is not entirely “negative” but, on the contrary, something to which can be attached a “positive value”? Bataille's answer to this question goes as follows: “if inner experience affirms the existence of a beyond and establishes this existence as a principle, it cannot stop its contestation there: this principle itself must be contested in turn and experience appears in this movement as a contestation without limit” (15). In other words, the “positive value” that can be attached to a principle of contestation is related to the extension of this contestation to the principle itself. It is because the principle of contestation is not only a principle that orients and organizes thinking, but a principle that affects thinking itself, and thus changes its own nature, that the idea of contestation can acquire a proper “positive values,” the value of a “movement of contestation without limit” (15). If the movement of contestation that triggers inner experience is properly without limit, it also means that it will eventually attack the ultimate principle of authority that normally stands as the ultimate authority of any form of beyond, i.e., the authority of God as the Good God that gave us moral law, and as a non-deceiving God, i.e., as a God that keeps the law of science valid. Bataille writes,
At the end of the reduction, experience alone subsists and, beyond pleasure, is only able to find value in itself. If experience appeared at this moment as the poetic or as the sacred itself or even, why not, as God, these values would remain connected to the contestation that the experience has made of itself. It would be a question of poetry contesting itself, of the sacred contesting itself, of God contesting himself. The pause that allows these possibilities to affirm their authority, to install themselves into existence, would disappear. Everything, authority itself, would be caught in a movement of interrogation without limit. There would be no other authority than in this movement, in this interrogation. (15)

The authority of God, within inner experience (as well as any other “transcendent” form of authority) is thus being contested by God itself. It is God as a principle of authority that contests his own privilege to rule. It is, even more to the point, the contestation of the idea of an organizing principle by the organizing principle itself. Such a contestation, it is worth noticing, is not without making reference to the Christian representation of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. For such a sacrifice could be seen as the contestation of God (as an angry God of revenge) by God himself (as an impotent Christ nailed on the cross). Although this contestation needs now to go even further, adds Bataille, by contesting the authority of the cross; or rather, by extending this “authority” to any form of contingent encounter that could produce the same kind of reversal as the encounter of Christ with the moment of the crucifixion. Inner experience is thus, at a fundamental level, just like the Christian experience that depends on the intervention of

339 See the Epilogue for an analysis of the function given by Bataille and Lacan to the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross.
grace, an experience that depends on luck, that is to say, that depends on a contingent encounter without which its movement would stall. Without the presence of luck (or bad luck), indeed, the discovery of the impossible (in the case of Christ, the impossible of his crucifixion), upon which everything relies, would be closed off. Bataille writes, “Without luck, an access to the level of the impossible—the comprehension of a limitless fortune—would be quite closed off to the being. In other words, luck is necessary for the being to go to the end of its possibility and to support that which, without luck would be impossible—would not even be perceived” (17).

Luck, within inner experience, is thus what stands as what can introduce, within experience, a connection to the unknown, the unforeseen, the radically contingent. And this radical contingency, in turn, is what uproots experience from any organizing principle. Normally, what rules over contingency is fundamentally what Bataille calls the possible. The possible is equated by Bataille to the realm of organic life and its development in a favorable setting. The impossible, on the contrary, is equated to the presence of death in life, and to the necessity of destruction for existence. This is why, generally speaking, man associates the possible with what is good, and the impossible with evil. As such one could say that there exists a profound agreement between man and the possible, and that this profound agreement is what fuels men's belief in an all-powerful and non-deceiving God thanks to whom the realm of evil and the impossible is turned into an illusion, and evil into a test imposed on men before eternal life. Bataille writes, “there is not an impossible if God exists, or at least the impossible is illusory: it is a test imposed on man while the triumph of the possible is given in advance” (Nietzsche's Laughter, 18). As soon as the idea of God is given existence, its existence casts away the very possibility of the impossible as the expression of contingency, and substitutes for it something
that has to do with man's guilt and misbehavior first, and then that has to do with the idea of salvation. Salvation is, according to Bataille, the element in every religious system that indicates the will to escape the confrontation with the impossible.

To Deal with the Impossible as a Mystique
There exists, of course, a mystical tradition, within Christianity that does not reduce God to the possible but which posits it as the unknowable par excellence. This mystical tradition can be associated with the names of Meister Eckhart, or the one of Angela of Foligno, or Catherine of Sienna for example, both of whom experienced the presence of God as the presence of what exceeds, at every level, the intellectual capacity of man. They attributed to God the domain of what stands beyond the possible and the impossible: the domain of negative theology. Going even further than this tradition of negative theology, Bataille's inner experience is the experience of the death of God itself and, by implication, an experience that has renounced any desire for salvation, and through salvation, an experience that allows one to renounce even the most laudable illusion—happiness. For happiness, just like salvation, is a way to reduce life to the realm of the possible and, consequently, a way to reject as evil the realm of the impossible. To affirm the possibility of inner experience is to affirm that the impossible cannot be completely

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overthrown. Even if we imagined, just like Hegel or Fukuyama, the end of history as a moment of complete victory of the possible over the impossible, a certain remainder of the impossible will persist. Perhaps not as a threat coming from the outside, but definitely as a threat coming from the inside of man. Bataille writes,

> An impossible exists in man that nothing will reduce, the same, in a fundamental way, for the happiest and for the most disinherited. The difference is in the illusion; happiness is no doubt a desirable form of illusion, but happiness can only defer the deadline. As we cannot limit ourselves to postponing the deadline, in the end, we can only face the impossible. (20)

The deadline that happiness (as an illusion) is postponing is the one of becoming fully conscious of the fact that at the very core of life does not stand the Good and the possible, but the impossible and evil. The presence of the impossible within each human life can be witnessed through certain inner states like poetical state, tragic state, ecstatic state or, even more so, anxiety—that it to say, through all the experiences that are marked by a certain presence of a beyond within everyday life. It is thus a question of not running away from those inner states (through apathy or salvation), and of consciously embracing them, i.e. “evading nothing, living the impossible” (20). And to fully embrace those states, one has to be able to put the possible and the impossible in proportion with one another, which is to say that one has to be able to become conscious of the impossible, while being able to place oneself at its level. For it is only when someone has fully placed himself at the level of the impossible that one can no longer limit himself from suffering the impossible in things, but becomes able to recognize it as such. In
other words, the impossible can only be recognized as such, according to Bataille (which makes his definition of the impossible very close to Lacan’s definition of the impossible) when the possible has also been recognized as such. For if the possible is not recognized as such first, it will tend to deny the very existence of the impossible through the concept of salvation, or through the concept of the good. And, reciprocally, the impossible, if not recognized as such, would be reduced to the domain of evil (from a religious point of view), or to the domain of the “death drive” (from a psychoanalytic/atheistic point of view). Bataille writes,

The impossible needs the possible from which to be disengaged. Salvation is the possible required by the mind for a confrontation with the impossible: it is therefore the evasion of the impossible” (…) Every impossible is that by which a possible ceases to be possible (as I said, without the possible there wouldn’t be any impossible: the tragic is the attribute of the powerful); at the extreme limit of its power, every possible aspires to the impossible (to what destroys it as possible). (22)

The impossible is thus something that is inconceivable without the possible that constantly strives to reduce it to its own domain. And, reciprocally, the possible is what produces logically the impossible each time its concept fails to embrace what goes beyond it, or each time its concept discovers elements that cannot be reintegrated in its larger “positive” narrative.

Nietzsche’s Laughter
What can give us a clue about how the possible and the impossible can be put in relation without canceling one another is Nietzsche’s famous laughter, “To see tragic characters founder and to be
able to laugh, despite the profound understanding, emotion and sympathy that we feel: this is divine.”

This very specific and “odd” laughter, as we will see, is what can help us to give a more satisfying explanation to the otherwise paradoxical relationship that inner experience attempts to articulate between the possible and the impossible. For it is through Nietzsche’s laughter that Bataille found (thanks also to the help of his friend Maurice Blanchot) the solution to the apparent paradox of a principle having to contest itself (like God Contesting God, or poetry contesting poetry, etc.). Of course, in general, the experience of laughter implies no paradox. Laughing is a natural reaction in front of the apparition of the impossible when this impossible touches neither the person who laughs nor a person towards a person for whom laughs could have some sympathy. In other words, laughter is the reaction that the impossible triggers when the impossible has no tragic consequences. In addition, in the case of Nietzsche, the basic rule of laugh is broken. Nietzsche’s laughter, indeed, is a laughter that implies a tie of sympathy between the one who laughs, and the one who is experiencing the impossible. Even more so, it is a laughter that aims at laughing at the impossible as it overcomes the one who is laughing, or as the one who is laughing is, at the same time, laughing at the possible that he is.

If Nietzsche’s laughter cannot be reduced to the possible laughing at the impossible (like the “normal phenomenon of laughter”), it cannot be attached to the idea that the impossible is laughing at the possible (like a desperate romantic kind of laugh). For “the impossible attained indolently through the neglect of the possible is an impossible eluded in advance: confronted without strength, it is only an obscene gesture” (24). More to the point, Nietzsche’s laughter is a laughter that mocks at the same time the possible that wants to do away with the impossible, as

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much as a laughter that mocks the idea that the impossible could be used to judge and condemn the possible. It is thus a laughter that opens onto the “absence of God.” Bataille writes, “Man’s limit isn’t God, isn’t the possible, it is the impossible, the absence of God” (23). And the impossible, once unhooked from the possible, and the absence of God, once unhooked from negative theology, is “the possible holding itself to the standard of the impossible.”

Inner experience becomes thus a kind of vertigo that affects man, or a kind of ecstatic revelation of the impossible. Bataille writes, as a sort of conclusion, “the virtue of non-avoidance consists in offering salvation at the beginning without making it an end but making it the trampoline of the impossible” (25). If salvation is, indeed, an attempt to connect the possible with the impossible, and if such connection entails the submission of the impossible to the possible (the second it is elevated to the status of a goal), to place it at the beginning prevents salvation from becoming the condemnation of the impossible. It makes of it what puts humans in touch with something that goes beyond the possible, without enslaving them to a pre-conceived idea of salvation. To illustrate this point, I want to present, now, the way in which Bataille tried to put in practice this approach of the impossible in a “science” called Heterology. This presentation will also highlight, when possible, what makes Bataille’s heterology, in many ways, the pre-figuration of what queer theory was about to become, i.e., a theory of what cannot be structurally represented.

345 Jacques Derrida, « De l’économie restreinte à l’économie générale, un hégélianisme sans réserve » in L’écriture et la différence, Edition du Seuil, Paris, 1967. pp. 369-408. In this text, Derrida is analyzing the function that Bataille’s laughter plays when it comes to distinguishing between the Hegelian figure of the Master, and its parodic subversion through the Bataillian’s figure of the sovereign. See also, for a reading of this text with Bataille’s own definition of laughter, Frederic-Charles Baitinger, “‘Je ris, donc je pense’: Rire et souveraineté dans la pensée de Georges Bataille”, Revue Humoresques, #41, 2015, pp. 117-129.
II. HETEROLOGY: A PRE-QUEER ANTI-RELATIONAL THEORY

Bataille, during the twenty and early thirties, while he was experimenting with the sacred through his esoteric group *Acephale*, and reflecting on it in his *College of Sociology*, invented a “science” called *Heterology*. Heterology is the science of what is “hetero,” of what is “completely other” (“ganz andere” said Bataille in German). Bataille even considered giving two other possible names to this science. The first one was *Agiology*, in order to refer to what is angelical (completely other as pure), as well as what is *sacer* (completely other as soiled). And the second one was *Scatology*, to point to what has been excreted as trash within a given social, biological, economical or intellectual system.

The Paradox of Heterology
The paradox of heterology is that the notion of “ganz andere,” of what is “completely other,” is, contrary to what the term heterology suggests, a notion impossible to define, impossible to reduce to a form of logos. If the “ganz andere” represents what cannot be integrated in a larger framework, it means that it exhibits precisely what is the most opposed to the movement of thought that would turn the “completely other” into the same. Robert Sasso, commenting on this impossibility in his book *Georges Bataille: le système du non-savoir*347 (1978), writes: “Any intellectual process, because it aims at a form of intelligibility that depends on a finite articulation of propositions, tends to be closed onto itself, leaving outside of itself what one has

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to call a residue or a left-over of the process itself” (my translation, 65). To go beyond this paradox, Bataille’s Heterology, rather than studying its object directly, is the study of the limit of the movement of appropriation that thinking represents, as well as the study of the movement of expulsion or excretion that the closure of knowledge produces. Heterology is not the study of what has been rejected—of the excreta per se, but the study of the relationship between the movement of appropriation that science and thinking represent and the movement of expulsion that their functioning put in motion without being conscious or aware of it. One could argue, then, that Heterology is the name of the first post-structuralist critique of knowledge and science made in the name of what Lacan called the Real, and Gender and Queer theory called, “queerness.” It is, to remain at a very general level, the first attempt made at localizing what, in the very functioning of knowledge, is generating its outside, and an outside most often judged queer, monstrous. One could also argue, here, that Bataille’s definition of Heterology, if one substitutes for the subject of science the “masculine subject” and for “excreta,” the “feminine subject,” is foreshadowing the definition that most post-feminists will give to the notion of the “feminine” as the repudiated, the excluded, the irrepresentable.348

It is in his text “The Use-Value of D.A.F de Sade (An Open Letter to My Current Comrades)”349 that Bataille assigns to Heterology its proper importance. In this text Bataille argues that there are, at the very core of every human life, as well as at the core of every human society, two basics urges: an urge for appropriation (which is best represented by science), and

348 See Judith Butler, “Subject of Sex, Gender, Desire” in Gender Trouble, “(…) to theorize the feminine, not as an expression of the metaphysic of substance, but as the irrepresentable absence effected by (masculine) denial that grounds the signifying economy through exclusion. The feminine as the repudiated/excluded within that system constitutes a critique and disruption of that hegemonic conceptual scheme,” New York: Routledge, 1993, 38-39

an urge for *excretion* (which is best represented in the violent movement of racism and xenophobia and sexism).\(^{350}\) The urge for appropriation is at the basis of our profane world, that is to say, at the basis of the world of work organized by the values of reason. Such a world consists in an urge to make everything as homogenous as possible through the constant effort of integrating everything into a larger system of thought. The urge for excretion, on the contrary, is at the base of what anthropologists like Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss have called *the sacred*, and that is at the basis of the religious world with all its taboos, its sacrifices, its ritual, orgies, and so on.\(^{351}\) Additionally, the urge for appropriation, argues Bataille, can itself be appropriated by the urge for excretion when what is appropriated, in the form of an oral absorption for example, is considered taboo itself. When in a ritual, for example, people eat their own excrement, or part of a human body, or any type of forbidden food, it is a movement of excretion through improper appropriation.\(^{352}\) In other words, excretion relies on heterogeneous elements that are impossible to integrate in a larger system of thought without threatening the sustainability of the system itself. Consequently, what is heterogeneous—and thus excreted—is always what is impossible to incorporate in a larger system of thoughts.

Faced with these two urges, the task of philosophy and religion is, normally, to make the heterogeneous elements as homogenous as possible with the rest of the system that generated and


\(^{352}\) See, also, the ethnographic movie from Jean Rouch “Les Maitres fous” where at the height of a ritual the participants eat a dog in order to defy the values of the colonial empire they are living in.
expelled them in the first place. However, by trying to do so, argues Bataille, religion and philosophy create inside what is heterogeneous two kinds of heterogeneities (which correspond to the two faces of the Other in Lacan’s early teaching). A first one that is attached to the notion of good—it is the figure of a good God that is securing the morality and the rationality of a homogenous vision of the world; and one that is helplessly bad—it is the figure of Satan and all the bad things that threaten the sustainability of the homogenous world. In order to avoid such a division that, ultimately, reinforces the heterogeneity of certain elements, Bataille is proposing, with his Heterology, the first practical and a theoretical “science” of this paradox. The task of Heterology, at first glance, could be compared to the one of poetry as surrealism defines it. Indeed, surrealism’s poetry proposes to integrate in a large aesthetic framework all the heterogeneous elements that previous poetries were leaving out (free associations, etc.). Nonetheless, Bataille emphasized that surrealist poetry ended up creating a new form of homogeneity in which everything that were not judged properly surrealist (like simple vulgarity for example) became even more alienated. Thus, contrary to surrealist poetry, Bataille’s Heterology has to first avoid a systematic representation of the world. It must study the way in which any kind of philosophical or religious thoughts produce their own heterogeneous elements. Bataille writes, “In that way, Heterology leads to the complete reversal of the philosophical process, which ceased to be the instrument of appropriation, and now serves excretion; it introduces the demand for the violent gratifications implied by social life” (154). Such a study, of course, will not be made in the name of a more inclusive vision of the world—otherwise it would, again, make what is heterogeneous homogenous to a new system and, by doing so, it would hypocritically cancel the heterogeneous nature of what it studies.
To Laugh at Philosophy and Anthropology
The origin of Bataille's notion of *Heterology* can be traced back to one of Bataille’s earliest text called “The Pineal Eye.”\(^{353}\) Like most of Bataille's text, such as *Inner Experience*, *My Mother*, and so many others, “The Pineal Eye” was an unfinished text that Bataille never published during his lifetime. Five different versions of the text exist. The question of unfinished texts is of central importance for Bataille. The failure of a project, indeed, represents the refutation of its origin. It is an outcome that should not have happened. A text like “The Pineal eye,” in this sense, should be approached as the refutation of its own aim, that is to say, as the refutation of any predictable outcome. Bataille wrote this text along with two others—*Story of the Eye* (1928)\(^{354}\) and *Solar Anus* (1931)\(^{355}\)—while he was undergoing a psychoanalytic treatment with doctor Borel during the year 1927. In this early text, which is a very strange mix of anthropology, mythology and philosophy, Bataille had “fun” with the seriousness of “science”. He engaged erotically and childishly with anthropology and philosophy, and more precisely, with one of the oddest concept of those two “scientific” disciplines: the concept of the *Pineal gland*.\(^{356}\)

The “Pineal Gland,” as an organ, represents an atrophied organ, or at least an organ that has lost its function, and which, additionally, is supposed to disappear as soon as the body dies.

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\(^{356}\) The pineal gland is a small gland located near the center of the brain. From the point of view of biological evolution, the pineal gland represents a kind of atrophied photoreceptor. In some species of amphibians and reptiles, it is linked to a light sensing organ, known as the parietal eye, which is also call the pineal eye or third eye. Descartes believed that the Pineal gland was the principal site of the soul/mind.
The Pineal Gland, because of these odd properties, was given, since Descartes at least, the privilege of uniting the body and the soul. But this privilege, which is supposed to be, at the same time, a philosophical and a scientific privilege, turned out to be, as we know now, a completely peculiar metaphysical hypothesis with no real scientific or philosophical basis. As such, a concept like the one of the Pineal Gland shows for Bataille how scientific anthropology, just like philosophy, is subordinated to the idea of a goal or of a “harmonious development,” i.e., to what we call a “teleological process.” By teleological process, one has to understand that, according to the discourse of science and philosophy, everything, in order to be understandable, has to be oriented towards a goal. The becoming of something is, thus, never unpredictable, but subordinated to its end or final stage of development. For example, when we look at a seed, we can imagine the way in which it is about to turn into a flower or a tree. The tree and the flower, theologically speaking, mark the end of a harmonious development. They represent the endpoint of a teleological process. Similarly, humans always see themselves as the endpoint of nature. They see themselves as the crown of nature. Its best achievement. Contrary to this “harmonious” vision of human evolution and history, which is best represented in Hegel's dialectical conception of History, Bataille's *mythical anthropology* would like to help humanity to think about itself not as the flower coming out of a seed, but as “a new laceration within a lacerated nature.”357 Within this new “framework,” evolution and becoming are no longer subordinated to the idea of a goal, but to certain moments of “explosion” of forces, just like a volcano that erupts only when some excessive amounts of energies have been accumulated and are now in need to be released.

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Within this new framework, the only way to correctly represent the evolution of mankind is no longer the one of science or philosophy but the one described through what Bataille called the tension between “the virulence of phantasms” on the one hand, and the strength of repression through the complex of Castration on the other. What is at stake, then, in Bataille's early position, is the relationship between the “castration complex” and the “virulence of phantasms”: how can one avoid submitting the virulence of phantasm to the law of the castration complex, i.e., to submit his phantasms to rules and norms that are external to it? And Bataille’s answer: by placing oneself in “a certain inaccessibility to fear,” which is to say by reinforcing, within oneself, the capacity of undergoing the attraction of the most repulsive object without being overwhelmed. In other words, to go beyond the domain of philosophy and science implies to go beyond the domain delimited by Freud by the Pleasure Principle\textsuperscript{358} and the so-called “seriousness of science.” For it is only when such a pretension would have been put outside the realm of science that the virulence of phantasm will be explored and studied for itself, that is to say as a free dimension of the human psyche, and not reduced to nonsense, or childish speculations.

Opposed to such a mythical anthropology, science has received the task of dissipating and annihilating mythological phantasms. Science has substituted, for example, the theory of evolution for creationist theories. In general, science has always tried to substitute for magical or mythological explanations of phenomenon, a rational understanding of them. This is why, for Bataille, science is “blindly emptying the universe of its human contents.” As such, Bataille makes a distinction between the understanding that science gives us and the meaning that

humans are looking to grasp from the universe. While science gives causal or logical explanations to the phenomenon it studies, science does so by emptying those phenomena of their human meaningfulness. Therefore, in order to have access to a mythological anthropology, one should not renounce science and dismiss it, but on the contrary, one should fully acquire it so to then turn science into a beast of burden, that is to say, reduce science to a state of subordination. Once science has been subordinated, it can be used to limit its own movement, and to situate in its proper place what stands beyond its realm. And what stands beyond its realm, because it has been cleaned up by science, is no longer subordinated to some religious or mythological agenda either. As such, it can thus be explored in its totality, without having to submit to external constraints. The whole domain of jouissance. The whole domain of phantasm. Open. This is why a text like “The Pineal eye” should be seen as a mythic description of the universe free from all kinds of external servitude.

The Pineal Eye
Through the “Third Eye” that the “Pineal Eye” represents, opposites coincide, the high and the low, good and evil, life and death. “The Pineal Eye,” within this “liberated context” (this non-teleological context), is something that eats the head and makes the body *Acephalic*. The head no longer is what imprisons the human mind within reason, but what plunges human life into what stands beyond it, i.e., into what exceeds it. When the pineal eye connects the human body directly to the blinding light of the sun, life becomes a “durable orgasm.” The Third eye, in Bataille's mythological anthropology, is the eye of a tree. But this tree, because it is also an animal, should be seen as a giant penis too, and perhaps even more so, as a giant penis who has
the sickening despair of vertigo. Likewise, Bataille's text completely reverses the meaning of the symbol of the sun. Instead of representing something bright, high and giving life, the sun becomes a point far at the bottom of the sky that attracts everything into its darkness. Things from the earth grow high, but through this movement, they lose themselves in the immensity of the sky. The sun becomes then a site of decomposition and death, and not a site of cleansing and regeneration. Finally, Jesus himself stumbles by miracle on the Vesuve in Bataille's phantasm and ends up being renamed Jesuve, that is to say, the name of an explosive savior.359

III. NON-KNOWLEDGE AND THE HISTORY OF LOGIC

Bataille developed the consequences his heterological vision of history and knowledge in a series of four conferences that he gave between 1951 and 1953 on the theme of non-knowledge. Those conferences should have been published in a book that Bataille wanted to call Mourir de rire et rire de mourir (“To die of laughter and to laugh at dying”) or The unfinished system of non-knowledge. Bataille, a year prior to his death, had agreed with Philippe Sollers and « Tel Quel » to publish the four conferences on non-knowledge under the title Conferences on non-knowledge. A book bearing the same title, with a content that is close from what Bataille had in mind, exists

359 For a lacanian reading of the name « Jesuve », see Albert Nguyên, “‘Le Jésuve', son nom de guerre », in La Perdi(c)tion de Georges Bataille, Essai de psychanalyse. Paris: Edition Stilus, Col. Résonances, 2016, 121-160. Albert Nguyen writes: “Lacan a donné la clé de lecture de la méthode Bataille : Bataille essaie de saisir comment on pourrait se passer du symbolique en s'en servant. “Se passer du père à condition de s'en servir”, la formule ne dit pas comment tel ou tel va s'en servir, et ne dit pas non plus les mutations qui s'en suivent dans la vie. (…). Se passer du symbolique : ainsi Bataille “se fait” classer comme fou (ce qui le rend “ombrageux” et qu'il conteste d'avoir avec son père et sa mère connu la folie), malade mental, pervers ; c'est oublier qu'il a construite de l’Erotisme la théorie, de l’Athéisme un discours, que ses critiques littéraires font autorité et que son charisme seul (cf. le conflit avec le père des Surréalistes André Breton) ne permet pas d'expliquer. Et oublier aussi le projecteur aveuglant qu'il a braqué sur l'expérience, et sur un tout autre mode, dans un tout autre style que le monologue intérieur de James Joyce : l'expérience intérieure va avec la construction de ce qu'il a appelé, tout de même pas par hasard, la Somme athéologique. On sait l'importance de l'athéisme pour l'expérience analytique, la lecture de Bataille va de pair avec la réflexion de Lacan sur ce point : si l'athée est pour Lacan celui qui est allé au bout de l'analyse, pour Bataille le vide de Dieu est un nom de l'impossible” (89-90).
now in English. It still does not exist in French. The book was intended to study and present the effects of non-knowledge on different aspects of life. More importantly, these conferences are the one that Lacan is referring to in his conference “Je parle aux murs”, and that we thus have to fully articulate them before turning to Lacan’s critique.

A Contingent Encounter with Logical Formalism
I think it is important, before entering into the analysis of Bataille's conferences, to underscore the fact that Bataille, right at the opening of his first conference, mentioned that he had, the night before, a very long conversation with the British analytic philosopher Ayer over the apparently simple question, “Was there a sun before man existed?” As we will see, this historical anecdote is conceptually important because it will help us to posit Bataille's concept of non-knowledge directly in relation to the question of logical formalism (influenced by Carnap, Schlik and Neurath), and then in the light of how Lacan made use of such a formalism in his own theory of psychoanalysis in order to go beyond Bataille’s non-knowledge. Ayer and Bataille met at the end of the Second World War, when Ayer came to Paris during his involvement with the British resistance. Ayer met Bataille through one of Bataille's exes, Isabelle Delmer (it is thus thanks to the contingency of love that an analytic philosopher and an anti-philosopher like Bataille


But it was only six years later, in 1951, that the conversation took place between Bataille and Ayer, as well as with Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Ambrosino. This gap of six years is significant in the sense that it suggests that Bataille not only had many conversations about the concept of truth and scientific knowledge with a very renowned analytic philosopher (and we know this because of Ayers' autobiography), but it also tells us that Bataille's concept of non-knowledge, far from being exclusively the product of his mystical tendencies, or a product of a facile inclination towards literature, also received a very strong influence from the tradition that is the most opposed to mysticism: logical positivism. The encounter between Ayer and Bataille can also be seen as the first recorded observation of the split between “Continental” and Anglo-American philosophy. Ayer reported in his autobiography *A Life* that during the first conversation he had with Bataille, he “vainly tried” to persuade Bataille that time was not merely a human invention.  

**A Logical Attack on the Word Nothing**  
When the conversation took place, Ayer had already written his book on the circle of Vienna, *Language, Truth and Logic (1936)*, and knew the existentialist philosophy of Sartre and Camus. Ayer's position, in agreement with the Vienna's circle, was against any form of metaphysical claim, that is to say, against the idea that there could be some Truth about the truth

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beyond the one achievable by science.\textsuperscript{365} Ayer was thus against the philosophy of Heidegger who wanted to preserve, through his metaphysics of the \textit{Dasein} some transcendent values, just as much as Carnap had been opposed to it. Siding with science, Carnap had been the first philosopher to state that metaphysical sentences like some used by Heidegger in his book \textit{What is Metaphysics?} were just nonsensical. For example, in the sentence “Das Nichts selbst nichtet” (“Nothingness itself nothings), the word nothing is used in a non-logical syntactic way, which means that there is no possibility to translate such a sentence into a logically constructed language.

Generalizing such an argument, Carnap and the circle of Vienna accused the whole metaphysical discourse, which pretended to have the Truth about truths, or to be in possession of the Value about values or, to use Lacan’s language, to have discovered the Other of the Other,\textsuperscript{366} of being exclusively made of pseudo-statements in no way different from the ones composing the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{365} See Ayer, “The Elimination of Metaphysics” in \textit{Language, Truth and Logic}, 33-46. In this chapter, Ayer, in the name of the Vienna’s circle, writes, “What is the purpose and method of philosophy? Rejection of the metaphysical thesis that philosophy affords us knowledge of a transcendent reality. Kant also rejected metaphysics in this sense, but whereas he accused metaphysicians of ignoring the limits of the human understanding, we accuse them of disobeying the rules with the significant use of language” (27).

\textsuperscript{366} See Jacques-Alain Miller, “Extimate Ennemies,” Trans. Frederic Baitinger & Azeen Khan, in \textit{The Lacanian Review}, #3. “This Other can be named by a word in the philosophy of logic, metalanguage. The Other of metalanguage gives to the Other of language its law. It stipulates its rules—rules for the formation of language, the conditions for the validity of its formulas, of what makes them acceptable or, on the contrary, unacceptable. This position thus affirms that there is the Other of the Other, the Other of the law as it is differentiated from the Other of language—which supposes that one can know what one says, and rightly so. Lacan himself opposed this position after he formulated it. Retreating from it, he refuted and contested it. This refutation goes with the devaluation of the Name-of-the-Father as the signifier of the Other of Law, which goes as far as making of it a cap, a cover for the fact that there is no Other of the Other in language. Therefore, there is no metalanguage insofar as it can only function and be communicated in language.”
\end{footnotesize}
discourse of religion. The circle of Vienna wanted to identify all the metaphysical parts of the philosophical discourse in order to dismiss them as secretly playing a conservative role. Ayer's reading and translation in English of Carnap's attack on metaphysics became even more violent. It is in this context that Ayer approached the philosophy of Sartre. He, of course, immediately saw in it a new form of metaphysics and declared it, particularly in his use of the word *nothingness*, nonsensical. Ayer's critic of existentialism played a very significant role in the reception of this philosophy in an Anglo-Saxon context. (Sartre said, famously, “Ayer est un con” [Ayer is an cunt])

Ayer evokes in his autobiography the disagreements he had with Merleau-Ponty on some fundamental principles, as well as the decision they took to keep their friendship despite their philosophical disagreements. Because Ayer was rejecting the use of the word nothingness in Heidegger and Sartre, he could not engage in the debate that Sartre and Heidegger had over humanism. For Sartre, as we saw in the preceding chapter, nothingness was a characteristic of

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367 For a very good study of the debate between Carnap and Heidegger see Michael Friedman, “Overcoming Metaphysics: Carnap and Heidegger,” in *A Parting of the Ways: Carnap, Cassirer and Heidegger*. New York: Open Court, 2011, 11-23. “Carnap’s complaint is not that the sentence in question is unverifiable in terms of sense-data, nor is the most important problem that the sentence coins a bizarre new world and thus violates ordinary usage. The main problem is rather a violation of the logical form of the concept of nothing. Heidegger uses the concept both as a substantive and as a verb, whereas modern logic has shown that it is neither” (11). Heidegger, answering this attack in an introductory chapter to *What is Metaphysics?* wrote: “Here the most extreme flattening out and uprooting of the traditional theory of judgment is accomplished under the semblance of mathematical science. Here the last consequences of a mode of thinking which began with Descartes are brought to a conclusion: a mode of thinking according to which truth is no longer disclosedness of what is and thus accommodation and grounding of Dasein in the disclosing being. But truth is rather diverted into certainty—to the mere securing of thought, and in fact the securing of mathematical thought against all that is not thinkable by it” (Heidegger, 227-228).

368 Neurath wrote: “Science and Art are today above all in the hands of the ruling classes and will also be used as instruments in the class struggle against the proletariat. Only a small number of scholars and artists place themselves on the side of the coming order and set themselves up as protection against this form of reactionary thought. The idealistic school philosophers of our day from Span to Heidegger want to rule, as the theologians once ruled, but the scholastics could support themselves on the substructure of the feudal order of production, whereas our school philosophers do not notice that their substructure is being pulled out from beneath their feet” (quoted by Friedman, 20).

369 A debate that also involved Bataille during his *Discussion on Sin*, see The Epilogue.
human existence. What is particular to humans is that they allow nothingness to enter their world. Nothingness is necessary to access human freedom outside being. Freedom is only possible through the potential of nothingness: the essence of freedom is negativity.

The Abyss Between Continental and Analytic Philosophy

It is around this disagreement on nothingness that the conversation between Bataille, Ayer, Ambrosino and Merleau-Ponty took place. Bataille wrote, at the opening of his conference: “We finally fell to discussing the following very strange question, ‘Was there a sun before man existed?’ Ayer had uttered the very simple proposition: there was a sun before men existed. And he saw no reason to doubt it. Merleau-Ponty, Ambrosino, and I disagreed with this proposition, and Ambrosino said that the sun had certainly not existed before the world. I, for my part, do not see how one can say so” (Bataille, 1998). In *Phenomenology of Perception (1945)*, Merleau-Ponty takes a position directly opposed to the one of Ayer when he refutes the idea that the world could exist without man. This idea, which could sound at first idealistic, is actually a consequence of Merleau-Ponty's critique of idealism. If there is a world that exists prior to its scientific construction, and that is imbued with meaning, as Merleau-Ponty states it, it is thus a world that is only accessible to humans. Merleau-Ponty was placing the discussion not on the level of realism, and the first axiom of verification put at the fore by the circle of Vienna; neither of idealism, like the analytic philosophy, and the definition of truth as tautological by Wittgenstein; but at the level of the description of the phenomenological experience. What does

the word “objective” means? And to this question, Merleau-Ponty's answer was that a pre-
scientific realm exists in which meaning is already manifested.

As for Bataille, the debate gave him first the occasion to name, for the very first time in
the history of philosophy, that gap that was about to take place between continental philosophy
(which generally deals with topics such as ethics, metaphysics, aesthetics, etc.) and Anglo-
American philosophy (linguistics, analytic philosophy, philosophy of language, etc.). “I should
say that yesterday's conversation produced an effect of shock. There exists between French and
English philosophers a sort of abyss which we do not find between French and German
philosophers” (Bataille, 80). Of course, one has to exclude from the German philosophers that
Bataille is evoking the members of the circle of Vienna, which ironically could be held
responsible of having nourished the trend of analytic philosophy in Oxford, and then of having
spread it in the United Stated during the diaspora of German intellectuals during World War II.371

Bataille's Ironical Objection to Logical Positivism
Bataille's interpretation of the sentence “there was a sun before men existed,” was that it was
neither true nor false, but simpler, meaningless since it posits the presence of the sun without
positing the presence of man at the same time. In other words, it proposes positing an object in
the world independently from the presence of a human that can perceive it. As a consequence,
Ayer’s proposition is meaningless for Bataille because it is a proposition that is detached from
what grounds meaning itself: the conjunction between a subject and an object. If one says, at the

371 See, for a full history of this movement, Andreas Vrahimis, “Questioning Metaphysics in Weimer Germany:
same time, “there is the sun” and “there is no men,” one detaches the subject from its object and vice versa. The sentence is thus neither true, as Ayer thinks, nor false as Merleau-Ponty thinks, but simply meaningless, i.e., detached from any subjective support. Bataille writes:

This proposition is such as to indicate that total meaninglessness that can be taken on by rational statement. Common meaning should be very meaningful in the sense in which any proposition one utters theoretically implies both subject and object. In the proposition, there was the sun and there are no men, we have a subject and no object.

(Bataille, 80)

But is that to say that Bataille is taking a logical positivist position against Ayer himself here? One can at least say that Bataille is appropriating the language of logical positivism in an almost parodic way. His argument, indeed, from a positivist point of view, does not hold. It fails, even, to object to Ayer's proposition from Ayer's point of view. When Bataille says that Ayer's sentence lack an object, or a subject, he does not mean it in the sense that the sentence would be grammatically or syntactically wrongly formed, but that there is something mentally troubling in the idea of the presence of the sun before the existence of men. And what is troubling, in a sense, is that it reveals the oddity that the subject of science represents, that is to say, that subjective oddity that the point of view of science places on what is represents. It is thus not a logical objection that Bataille is raising at first, but an emotional objection, which only indirectly comes
to have some repercussion at a logical level. In the sentence “there was a sun before men existed,” what is mentally disturbing is the presence of a subjectless sun, which is to say, the presence of a subjectless object. And then, Bataille proceeds to describe the “inner” reason why this “particular” sentence is making him so uncomfortable, projecting thus the meaninglessness of the sentence onto an unknowable origin,

It is impossible to consider the sun's existence without men. When we state this we think we know, but we know nothing. This proposition was not an exception in this respect. I can talk of any object, whereas I confront the subject, I am positioned facing the object, as if confronting a foreign body which represents, somehow something scandalous for me, because objects are useful. A given object enters into me insofar as I become dependent on objects. One thing that I cannot doubt is that I know myself. Finally, I wondered why I blamed that phrase of Ayer's. There are all sorts of facts of existence which would not have seemed quite as debatable to me. Which means that this unknowing; whose consequences I seek out by talking to you, is to be found everywhere. (Bataille, 1986, 81).

Beyond the truth value of the sentence, there is something that goes beyond it. A fringe of non-knowledge. And Bataille generalizes his feeling about this fringe of non-knowledge by saying:

“this non-knowledge, of which I am talking to you about in order to locate its consequences, is

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372 One could also emphasize here the very special place that the figure of the sun occupies in Bataille’s work. The sun, indeed, far from being reducible to a simple natural phenomenon for Bataille, is probably one of his most important obsessions. The sun, for example, is present in one of Bataille’s earliest texts, like “The Solar Anus” or “Pineal Eye,” where it is used to imagine a phantasmatic anthropology; but it is also at the center of his cycle of works on economy and expenditure called The Accursed Share (Volume I, II, and III), where the sun represents the ultimate example of excess, i.e., of what gives without receiving anything in return. It is thus understandable, from a psychoanalytic point of view, that Bataille felt reluctant to detach the perception of the sun from any anthropological stakes.
present everywhere. To be precise, what I mean by this non-knowledge: what results from every proposition when one tries to go at the bottom of its content, and one feels uneasy about it” (82). This presence, nonetheless, that goes beyond what scientific knowledge describes, should not be confused with the presence of a well-intentioned God, or the presence of a docile and loving “human nature” (as in the case of religion, or in the case of science), but as we have already seen in the preceding chapter, the presence of a certain evilness, of a certain aggressiveness, of a certain horror at the core of the human psyche. And this horror—that the knowledge of science is trying to hide—that Bataille has named the sacred or the “ganz andere,” and that, through the elaboration of his inner experience, and later through its erotic extensions, he wanted to explore in its full extension.373

This space of the sacred, once removed from its religious context (that is to say from the fear that pulls back people towards religion), is what gives its proper ground to Lacan’s notion of the Real as well as what will make visible the connection of the Real with jouissance in Bataille’s inner experience. Bataille writes, at the opening of his book Eroticism (1957),374 “I believe that eroticism has a significance for mankind that the scientific attitude cannot reach. Eroticism cannot be discussed unless man too is discussed in the process. In particular, it cannot be discussed independently of the history of religion” (8). In sum, if every scientific knowledge hides, at its core, a fringe of non-knowledge, and if this fringe of non-knowledge has always


something to do with eroticism, it means that it is the very definition of what is the “truth” of man, and of what is the relation of scientific knowledge to this truth that needs to be re-articulated for Bataille.

IV. LACAN’S CRITIQUE OF NON-KNOWLEDGE

Lacan gave at Saint Anne, on the 4th of November 1971, a conference called: “Knowledge, Ignorance, Truth and Jouissance.” This conference was the first one of a cycle devoted to the theme of “the knowledge of the Psychoanalyst” delivered to Saint Anne’s psychiatric interns. Lacan gave this series of lectures right before he started his Seminar XIX, ... or worse (1972), which marks the beginning of the end of Lacan's second classicism, as Jean-Claud Milner has it, and thus also the threshold of Lacan’s very last teaching, which I will fully discuss in Chapter Five.375

Interestingly enough for our subject, Lacan’s editor, Jacques-Alain Miller, argues in his introduction to Lacan’s conference “I Speak to the Wall,” that he has decided to publish the series of conferences apart from the Seminar XIX ... or Worse, because he thought that they

375 See, Milner, Jean-Claude. L’oeuvre claire: Lacan, la science, la philosophie. Col. L’ordre philosophique, Paris: Edition du Seuil, 1995. In L’oeuvre Claire, Milner isolates a first Lacanian classicism, which goes from Seminar I to Seminar XVI, and which corresponds to Lacan’s construction of a complete logic of the signifier (described in Chapter Two, Part IV). This logic isolates the subject of jouissance as what is excluded from the discourse of science. The second classicism, which goes from Seminar XVIII to Seminar XX, coincides with Lacan’s re-elaboration of the feminine position, and the deployment of the matheme (as what is exclusively made of letters, as described in Chapter III, Part IV), as well as the construction of the unorthodox quantifier “not all” (described in Chapter Three, Part III and IV), which defines feminine jouissance as what is “not all” subordinated to the law of the signifier. Finally, the very last teaching of Lacan, which goes from Seminar XXI, to Seminar XXV, marks what Milner describes as Lacan’s deconstructive moment (described in Chapter V). Milner writes, “Ainsi le second classicism a-t-il passé, à l’instant ou il paraissait s’accomplir. Lacan lui-même y a mis un terme. Le séminaire XX, qui en constitue le sommet, déclenche aussi le mécanisme de sa déconstruction. Tout est déjà mis en pièces lorsque Lacan choisit, aux approches de 1980, de se taire. Le noeud d’un côté, le poème de l’autre; la ficelle et la lettre; le silence et le calembour” (168).
would have created a diversion within the Seminar. But why was Lacan so afraid that his last teaching could be mixed with the work of Georges Bataille? And why was Jacques-Alain Miller reinforcing Lacan’s fear? In other word, why is Bataille’s notion of non-knowledge a notion that could be falsely mistaken for what Lacan wants to convey under the banner of the Real in his late and last teaching? What are the stakes of such a possible confusion? In which sense can Bataille’s non-knowledge threaten, in some ways, Lacan’s ambition in his late teaching?

Bataille’s Style and the Risk of a Sliding into an Impotence of Thinking

To enter this question, I want to analyze, first, a preface never published to the second edition of Inner Experience, where Bataille formulates what could have irritated Lacan while reading his book. Bataille wrote the following lines:

Speaking about Inner Experience and Guilty, someone whom I never caught being intellectually inconsequential told me that he did not like the books. They appeared to him as being dangerous, he said to me. On this point as—excluding one—on all the other points (at the condition that they matter), I agree with L. 376 (my translation, 583)

If we accept the idea that the L. mentioned here is Lacan,377 this passage, as well as the rest of the note, will give us a double clue to understand, 1) why Lacan does not like Bataille's concepts of inner experience and non-knowledge, and, 2) why despite this disagreement, and one

376 “Parlant de L’Exérience intérieure et du Coupable, quelqu'un dont je n'ai jamais pris la pensée en défaut, me dit qu'il n'aimait pas ces livres. Ils lui semblaient dangereux, me disait-il. En ce point comme – à l'exception d'un seul – en tous les autres (à la condition qu'ils importent), je suis bien d'accord avec L.” (OC VIII, 583).

377 Which is, I would say, more than possible as we know it from Michel Surya's biography of Bataille, as well as from Roudinesco's biography of Lacan, and as the judgment from L. expressed here is perfectly aligned with the critique that Lacan is addressing to Bataille's concept of non-knowledge in his conference “I Speak to the Walls.”
fundamental point that we will have to elucidate, Bataille and Lacan may agree, at a theoretical level, on everything else. But let's see, first, how Bataille agrees with L.’s judgment about his books *Inner Experience* and *Guilty* (1961). To begin with, admits Bataille, *Inner Experience* and *Guilty* are books that invite most of their readers—because of their apparent lack of composition, lack of rigor, their incompleteness, as well as their constant changing in style and subject matters—to a form of intellectual laziness. They attract, as such, readers who are on the lookout for a cheap literary experience that could sustain their desire for an easy way out of political responsibility. And although Bataille underlines the fact that he—himself—wrote them in that form for a very serious reason (in order to be faithful to the kind of awakening experience that he had prior to their execution), the use of such a form drove him to laziness too. Bataille writes, “I wrote without order, having to match a certain moral imperative, but the fatigue and the unhappy immorality that resulted from this awakening were inviting a sliding towards an impotence of thinking which turns it into a form of literature” (my translation). Of course, Bataille never grounded his thinking into a form of *sentimentality*, but he nonetheless adopted the mode of expression of those who do so, opening in his reader's mind a possible confusion between what Bataille tried to achieve as a thinker, and the concrete result he obtained as a

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379 “J’écrivais en désordre, ayant à répondre à une exigence morale, mais la fatigue et l’immoralité malheureuse qui résultait de l’éveil engageait le glissement vers l’impuissance de la pensée qui tourne en littérature” (OC VIII, 583).
Bataille wrote: “I did not really give in, I did not translate my fatigue into presuppositions grounded on a facile sentimentally, but I did express myself using the same mode as those who give in” (my translation). And, by doing so, Bataille invited the people inclined to substitute for the operation of thinking a facile adhesion to their own passion, to read and love him, and to find in his work the best justification of their own position. He prostituted thinking in order to make it appealing to the lazy taste of his generation.

But beyond this critique of his own way of expressing his thoughts, Bataille emphasized also the paradoxical fact that there is, perhaps, a worst risk than the one of laziness, the risk of reducing the operation of thinking into a form of sleepiness. Bataille writes: “coherent thinking necessarily makes room for the necessity of sleeping” (my translation). In other words, if it is true to say that Bataille's mode of expression runs the constant risk of prostituting thinking by turning it into a depraved form of literature, the classical mode of philosophical inquiry, in turn, runs the constant risk of making thinking the pure auxiliary of sleeping. Most of the time, indeed, thinking can be reduced to a form of protection against a possible encounter with the Real. Thinking helps the subject to keep dreaming while being awake. Nonetheless, or

See also Georges Bataille, “Les conséquences du non-savoir,” in OC VII, where Bataille writes, “C’est la position de celui qui ne sait pas ce qu’il y a dans une malle cadenassée qu’il n’a pas la possibilité d’ouvrir. C’est à ce moment que l’on emploie un langage littéraire ou il y a plus que ce qu’il est nécessaire de dire. Seul, le silence peut exprimer ce que l’on a à dire, donc dans un langage trouble, dans un état d’esprit de parfait désespoir, dans un sens au moins, non comparable à celui qui cherche quelque chose et qui ne l’a pas ; c’est un désespoir beaucoup plus profond, que nous avons toujours connu, qui tient à ceci que l’on a un projet en tête qui ne peut aboutir, que l’on est sur le point d’être frustré alors que l’on tient essentiellement à ce qui en est l’objet” (192-193).

“Je ne cédais pas vraiment, je ne traduisais pas ma fatigue en présuppositions fondée sur une facilité sentimentale, mais je m’exprimais sur le mode de ceux qui cèdent” (OC VIII, 583).

“La pensée cohérente fait nécessairement la place à la nécessité de dormir” (OC VIII, 583).

“Rien ne me semble plus important que de ne séparer jamais la cohérence de cette discordance continue sans laquelle la cohérence laisserait son objet au dehors” (584).
paradoxically so, underlines Bataille, a true state of awakening can only be achieved as the result of a prior effort made to achieve a form of systematization. Otherwise, such a state goes right back to pure laziness. This is why Bataille adds, in his note, that Lacan's opinion condemning his book was agreeable to him. And I shall add, perhaps, that Lacan also very much agreed with Bataille when, years later, he gave to the Real the definition of the impossible, that is to say, that the Real as the point of impossibility of a given system of knowledge. What is “serious,” then, in Bataille's *inner experience* is not the thought expressed in it, but the truth about what makes thinking impossible, which is really not that far, as we will see in Chapter Five, from Lacan's definition of thinking as *mental debility*. But before being able to fully explain why Lacan and Bataille’s definition of thinking can be compared, let’s take a closer look at the way in which the conference “I Speak to the Wall” rearticulates the question of knowledge, non-knowledge, truth and jouissance.

Ignorance and Knowledge
Reversing Bataille’s definition of non-knowledge, Lacan opens his lecture *I Speak to the Walls* by asserting that ignorance is a passion that is linked to knowledge. Ignorance is defined by Lacan as the way in which a certain knowledge becomes established, that is to say, no longer questioned by the person who is learning it. By defining ignorance thus, Lacan is of course not

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384 “Les conséquences du non-savoir” in *OC VII*. Bataille writes, “Pour cette raison, l'opinion de mon ami condamnant mes livres m'agréee, et l'accueil qui leur est fait le plus souvent me serait odieux... si la cohérence de la pensée n'avait généralement pour objet ce qu'elle hait, qui pour autant cesse purement d'être détestable, que l’article de Sartre était une belle saloperie.” (OC VIII, 584)
defining it as Nicholas of Cusa did it in his *De Docta Ignorancia* (1440),\textsuperscript{385} which explicitly made of ignorance the end result of a process of learning. Reversing even this definition, Lacan makes of ignorance, here, what prevents someone from questioning everything he knows and, perhaps even more, what prevents someone from learning or creating anything new. Psychiatrists from Saint-Anne, for example, as Lacan remembers them when he arrived for the first time in this institution, were full of themselves, and full of their knowledge. As a result, they were so passionate about what they thought they knew that they were incapable of remaining critical about their own knowledge. They were thus in a position of complete ignorance in relation to what they knew, and in a position of complete impotence with regard to the possibility of creating anything new. In other words, knowledge had been reduced, for them, to an act of memorization and repetition.

Nowadays, it is unfortunately not that different, laments Lacan. Although the movement of *antipsychiatry* founded by David Cooper and described in his book *Psychiatry and Anti-Psychiatry* (1967)\textsuperscript{386} dared to criticize the psychiatric world for being cruel, archaic and, as such, still ignorant of what mental illness is, such a movement did not really change the relationship between passion, knowledge and ignorance for Lacan. It just displaced the ignorance onto a different passion: a passion for freedom (mostly on the side of the psychiatrist, and not so much on the side of the patient). This is why Lacan ends up saying: “the question of mental madness or, to say it better, of psychosis, is not at all resolved by antipsychiatry.” (13) The antipsychiatry


movement, argues Lacan, was just a “revolution” within the field of psychiatric knowledge, simply a way to go back to a state of primitive ignorance regarding the links between madness and the needs of a certain social order. It is, as such, not that different from any other psychiatric knowledge developed before. It is even perfectly aligned with what Foucault described in his *History of Madness* (1967).[^387]

Faced with this situation, the knowledge of the psychoanalyst (as it is different from the knowledge of the psychiatrist), unfortunately, cannot be said to occupy, at first glance, a better position. Most psychoanalysts for Lacan are also caught in a form of automatism of repetition. They are not open to the future, not open to any changes for the simple reason that they are already caught up in a pre-existent knowledge that they keep repeating like automatons. Only Lacan’s students, Lacan dared to say, and not even all of them but only a few (not even Laplanche or Pontalis), will end up producing something that will not be the simple repetition of pre-existent knowledge.[^388] The only problem is that those students have misunderstood Lacan on a crucial point about his late teaching. They have equated what Lacan said about knowledge and ignorance to what Georges Bataille said about non-knowledge. Let’s reread, for a second time, what Lacan said about Bataille during his conference *I Speak to the Walls*.

Those who [the good students] have heard me quite well – or at least as best as they could —when I talked about knowledge as being the correlate of ignorance, and this idea tormented them a little. And there are some among them that have been poked by God


[^388]: One could think, here, about Luce Irigaray, or about Felix Guattari, who both attended the *Seminar* of Lacan, and who both created a completely new approach to psychoanalysis.
knows which fly, a literary fly of course, things that can be found in Georges Bataille’s writings, because, otherwise, I don’t think they would have thought about it. I am talking about non-knowledge.

Georges Bataille gave a conference on non-knowledge one day, it might be found in two or three different places in his writings. God knows that he did not make a fuss of it. And especially the day he gave his conference in the Salle de Géographie de Saint-Germain-des-Prés, which you must know because it is a renowned place of culture, he did not utter a word, which was not a bad way to show his own non-knowledge.

People laughed, but they were wrong because now, it is very fancy, the non-knowledge. It can be found all over the place in the mystics, it is even from them that the notion comes from, it is with them that the notion has a meaning. And also, people know that I have insisted on the difference between knowledge and truth. Thus, if truth is not knowledge, it must then be non-knowledge. Aristotelian logic: everything that is not black is the non-black. (16)

It is a discovery this non-knowledge. One could not find a better way to introduce a definitive confusion on a delicate subject matter, the point in question in psychoanalysis being what I called the sensible frontier between truth and knowledge. (16-17)

But what does the term non-knowledge mean within Lacan's teaching? How should it be situated, and its function described? To elucidate this question, I will make reference to an unpublished Seminar from Jacques-Alain Miller, “Le Banquet des analystes,” where Miller explains the evolution of the articulation of the notions of Truth and Knowledge within Lacan’s
entire teaching. More specifically, I will make reference to two excerpts from this Seminar that have been published in Lacanian Ink. The text is called “Logic of Non-Knowledge in Psychoanalysis.”

From Ignorance to Naivety: the Two Meanings of Zero
To understand what the notion of non-knowledge means for Lacan, one has to interrogate the nature of the negation that is affecting the term knowledge in the signifier “non-knowledge.” What is the status and the function that determines the prefix non, in the notion of “non-knowledge”? Lacan gave many different statuses and meanings to negation in his teaching. He constructed a table of three binaries oppositions to order them. The first opposition is the one that opposes ignorance to naivety. While ignorance is a lack of knowledge at a place where a specific knowledge should have been, naivety marks the absence of judgment upon an experience and thus a kind of lack of knowledge that opens onto the possible acquisition of new knowledge. In other words, if ignorance is the failed experience of acquiring a knowledge, naivety is the subjective position that is required to be taught by experience, and thus to be able to acquire a new knowledge. From this opposition it then becomes possible to understand the two statuses that Lacan gave to the notion of zero in mathematics.

On the side of ignorance, zero is the mark of an incompetency, the mark of a privation, of an absence. Zero in this case indicates that the element that should have been marked into a certain set cannot be granted its entry into it for lack of conformity to the norms that defines that

set. On the side of naivety, the zero indicates a form of positivity. It is the mark of what is to come. Another way to distinguish these two kinds of zero is to say that zero, on the side of naivety, is a zero that is a relative zero. It is a zero that is initial and arbitrary, but it is also a zero from which it becomes possible to build in the sense that it introduces a difference between the Real as what is completely unmarked, and the Real as what can be marked. In this sense, the zero is like a point of orientation. It is a zero that opens up the rest of the procedure of knowledge to take place. On the contrary, on the side of ignorance, the zero is a neutral element, just like the zero in mathematical addition. One can add as many zeros to any number as he wants, no changes will happen to the original number. The zero is simply a neutral element, something that does not count, that has, strictly speaking, no impact whatsoever.

Expanding on this distinction, Miller then argues that it is from there that Lacan was able to make a distinction between the void and nothingness. The void, in Lacan's theory, is what can contain the empty locus that can receive something, while nothingness is the content of this primordial void. Nothingness is thus, one could argue, the equivalent of the neutral zero, while the void is the equivalent of the relative zero upon which everything else can be built. When the void is reified, when one refers to it as a something, it then becomes nothingness. And in order for it to become nothingness, it has to be localized. In other words, one has to be able to say, “There should have been roses,” as in the famous eponym short-story of Jacobsen, the Danish poet, in order to make nothingness appear.\(^\text{390}\) Nothingness is the name of a localized lack, the

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\(^{390}\) Jens Peter Jacobsen, “There Should Have Been Roses” in *Mogens and Other Stories*, trans. Anna Grabow, New York, Acterna Edition, 2011, 40-44. The short story starts thus: “There should have been roses of the large, pale yellow ones. And they should hang in abundant clusters over the garden-wall, scattering their tender leaves carelessly down into the wagon-tracks on the road: a distinguished glimmer of all the exuberant wealth of flowers within. And they should have the delicate, fleeting fragrance of roses, which cannot be seized and is like that of unknown fruits of which the senses tell legends in their dreams. Or should they have been red, the roses?” (40)
name of a place that can be filled with a presence, or hollowed out, like in the case of Jacobsen story. Such an articulation of the two notions, nonetheless, cannot be considered a fully satisfying definition of the two terms, for it leaves outside of its scope the possibility that the void could be limitless. The void, indeed, in the previous articulation, is always already posited as a limited void that can be instantly converted into a container, that is to say, into a locus.

But the void can also be equated to the infinite, and the limitless. And it's the notion of the limitless void, one could say, that is at the root of the ambiguities that circulates around the notion of non-knowledge, and that is at the root, also, of the differend, in the sense that Lyotard gave to this word, between Bataille and Lacan. If one gives to the void the sense of the limitless, it then becomes the support of a limitless non-knowledge à la Bataille, while if one gives to the limitless void the meaning of the zero, as Frege did in his Begriffsschrift (1879), it then becomes possible to posit the relative zero, that is to say, the void as the primitive set, the very framework that will shelter the future development of the natural number, and by extension, the future development of knowledge (as explained in the Theory of the Subject in Chapter Two). In order for the void to become the support of knowledge, and not the justification of an ultimate and definitive non-knowledge, one has to reduce the limitless void to a limited void that can be equated to a concept once reduced to its very core, i.e, to the dimension of a mathematical set. The void becomes then the relative zero as it acquires the qualities of a locus, and through this quality, the mathematical properties of a set. This is why Miller can write, taking a stand against a possible confusion between Lacan's notion of non-knowledge, and Bataille definition of non-

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knowledge,

Even if it is a short cut, one can say already, from the point that we have reached, that psychoanalysis is not a mystique of non-knowledge, and that in this disposition one makes room for non-knowledge of the analyst at the beginning, but one does not consider that for the reason non-knowledge is the *culmen* of experience.\textsuperscript{392} (my translation, 171)

While, for Bataille, the movement goes from knowledge to non-knowledge, it goes from non-knowledge to knowledge in Lacan.

**CONCLUSION: TO INVENT A KNOWLEDGE ABOUT NON-KNOWLEDGE**

It is precisely to go from non-knowledge to knowledge that Lacan invented all of his mathemes and, towards the end of his teaching, what he named *the Pass*. The Pass, as an analytic procedure, is the moment when an analysand, after having battled for years with his or her non-knowledge (with his or her unconscious truth), proposes to transmit to others the knowledge that he has acquired about his or her own non-knowledge, that is to speak about his or her unconscious. As such, the end point of analysis is what makes each unique case something that can be compared, from the point of view of the pass, to the others. Consequently, the notion of non-knowledge is not disconnected from the notion of knowledge in Lacan’s late apprehension of the end of the psychoanalytic treatment.

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\textsuperscript{392} “Même si c’est un court-circuit, on peut donc déjà dire, au point où nous en sommes, que la psychanalyse n’est pas une mystique du non-savoir, et que dans cette disposition on fait place au non-savoir de l’analyste au départ, on ne considère pas pour autant la non-savoir comme le *culmen* de l’expérience” (171).
The Opposition Between Bataille and Lacan

There is, even, a strict articulation in between non-knowledge and knowledge in Lacan's late work. Lacan wrote, in his “Proposition of 9 October 1967 on the Psychoanalyst of the school”

What he has to come to know can be traced out upon the same relationship “in reserve” according to which all logic worthy of the name operates. This does not mean anything in “particular,” but it is articulated in chains of letters that are so rigorous that provided not one of them is left out, the un-known is arranged as the framework of knowledge. (trans. Russell Grigg).

In this proposition, argues Miller, Lacan actually introduced a displacement in his definition of the unconscious. This proposition suggests, indeed, that the unconscious should no longer be considered as the “truth” about the truth of the subject—as it were in Freud’s work—but that it should be defined, on the contrary, in terms of knowledge. In other words, what is secretly at stake, in Lacan’s confrontation to Bataille’s notion of non-knowledge, is a shift of the definition that needs to be given to the unconscious, and the consequences that such a shift have on the relation between truth and knowledge. While, at first, Lacan defined the unconscious as what speaks, and what speaks as what is telling the truth without knowing it393 (“I, the Truth, speak” Lacan famously said), the late Lacan redefined the truth as the “lying truth” (la varité), as I will explain in detail in Chapter Five, and redefined knowledge as something that would no longer be opposed to the truth of the unconscious, but as that which could give to such a truth a form of

393 Lacan, “Science and Truth”, in *Ecrits*, “This is precisely why the unconscious, which tells the truth about truth, is structured like a language, and why I, in so teaching, tell the truth about Freud who knew how to let the truth—going by the name of the unconscious—speak. This lack of truth about truth—necessitating as it does all the traps that metalanguage, as sham and logic, falls into—is the rightful place of Urverdrangung, that is, of primal repression which draws towards itself all the other repressions—not to mention other rhetorical effects that we can recognize only by means of the subject of science.” (737)
Commenting on this shift, which goes from a definition of truth as a pathetic non-knowledge, to the definition of truth as what can be structured logically, Miller writes, in “Le paradoxe d’un savoir sur la vérité”:

It [the promotion of knowledge] proposes on the contrary, to order truth, to not take as a reference the dialectical progression of non-knowledge, to not take as a reference the interrogating Socrates or the pithy out of herself – all these admirable figures, ranked, and about which the pathetic effects no longer need to be demonstrated – but to take as a reference the logic of mathematic. The definition of the unconscious as a depathologized truth makes it shift on the side of the matheme and even, precisely, on the side of mathematics or, at least, of this mathematical effort to grasp and to empty out truth from its emotional charge. (my translation, 128)

It is thus only when the pathological charge that is attached to the truth of the unconscious has been emptied out, which is to say detached from its link to jouissance (thanks to the catharsis that the analytical process is able to produce) that something like a mathematical knowledge of truth can be elaborated at the place where a prior pathetic non-knowledge was, and that a new conception of the truth and the unconscious can emerge.

The above delineation of the confrontation between Bataille and Lacan on the question of

394 Such a movement, which brings knowledge where the truth was, is what will also be at the fore in Lacan’s formalization of the discourse of the analyst since, in this discourse, what comes to occupy the place of truth is, precisely, the symbol of knowledge. In other words, it is only within the analytic discourse that a superposition of truth and knowledge can become possible. Otherwise, truth and knowledge remain apart from one another—even in the discourse of University, which places knowledge in the position of the Agent (who ignores, or has repressed the Truth that makes it speak).

non-knowledge enables us to locate, with great precision, what separates the two thinkers. While the position of Bataille culminates in a form of ecstasy of non-knowledge, where the Real of jouissance emerges as the hidden truth of knowledge (and knowledge as the defense mechanism against the truth about jouissance), Lacan’s theorization of the end of analysis leads, on the contrary, to an ultimate rehabilitation of knowledge. To go even further, one could say that Lacan built his last teaching to fight against Bataille, as well as Cixous’ pathetic approach of the Real (through the patheme), an approach that not only valued jouissance over knowledge, but which also was about to become—through Bataille’s spiritual children396—the new dominant way to approach the Real.

WORK CITED

——-. Bataille, Georges. “Socratic College” in The Unfinished System of Non-knowledge, 5-17.

396 I am thinking here about all the post-structuralist thinkers, such as Philippe Sollers, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Hélène Cixous, Jean-Luc Nancy, etc.


—. “La science et la vérité.” in *Ecrit I*, 855-878.


CHAPTER FIVE: DECONSTRUCTING PSYCHOANALYSIS
Or the Late Lacan at Joyce’s School.

The Real, I will say, is the mystery of the speaking body, the mystery of the unconscious.

Jacques Lacan

The last teaching starts when the formula that grounds the entire teaching of Lacan is denied, renounced, abjured. And that formula is being replaced by another formula, not said per se, but that goes as follow: the unconscious belongs to the speaking body.

Jacques-Alain Miller

Freud's Oedipus Complex is a Dream
The late teaching of Lacan, which goes from Seminar XX, Encore (1971-1972) to Seminar XXV, Le moment de conclure (1977-1978) is, as much a destruction of the previous teaching of Lacan, as the destruction of psychoanalysis itself. While the early Lacan tried, through his “Return to Freud” (1953-1972) to give psychoanalysis a scientific status by rewriting Freud’s Oedipus complex in linguistic terms, the late Lacan, following the literary path of James Joyce, declared that Freud’s Oedipus complex was nothing but a dream397, and the practice of psychoanalysis

nothing but a scam.398

If the Oedipus complex is, for the late Lacan, nothing but “Freud’s dream,” it is because it reduces the unconscious to the analytic setting in which the analyst is placed in the position of a “subject supposed to know,” and the analysand in the position of the one believing in the analyst knowledge. And since the truth that is revealed about one’s unconscious in such a setting remains bound to the framework of the Oedipus complex, and since this setting is linked to the desire that Freud had to save the figure of the father, and thus the power structure of patriarchy, it is the practice of psychoanalysis that becomes, for the late Lacan, a scam. To put it differently, while the early Lacan took Freud’s structure of the Oedipus complex at face value and built on it his own version of the complex, it is the very function of Freud’s Oedipus complex that became the question for the late Lacan. Commenting on this idea in his Seminar XXII, RSI (1974-1975), Lacan said,

In Freud there is an elision of my reduction of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real, as all three of them knotted (or stitched) together. What Freud established with the Name-of-the-father, which is identical to the psychic reality, to what he calls psychic reality (i.e. to the religious reality), it is through this function, through this dreamlike function, that Freud established the link between the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real. (My Translation, 99)399

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399 The French version goes, “Dans Freud il y a une élision de ma réduction de l’Imaginaire, au Symbolique, au Réel, comme noués tous les trois entre eux, et que ce que Freud instaure avec son Nom-du-Père, identique à la réalité psychique, à ce qu’il appelle la réalité psychique, nommément à la réalité religieuse, c’est ainsi par cette fonction, par cette fonction de rêve que Freud instaure le lien du Symbolique de l’Imaginaire et du Réel” (99).
Freud, indeed, made of the Oedipus complex the myth in charge of connecting, within his theory of the human psyche, the realm of nature to the one of culture. On the side of nature, he developed in his *Three Essay of the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) the idea of the polymorphous perverse sexuality of children. On the side of culture, he took the form of the patriarchal family, where men are supposed to be the head of the household, and women reduced to their role of mothers, and made of it the model in charge of explaining the precarious transformation of the polymorphous little infant into a “normal” heterosexual man or woman. In other words, while Freud spend the first half of his life de-constructing normativity, he spent the second half of his life re-constructing it through the elaboration of the Oedipus complex.

**Freud's Anthropological and Philosophical Mistake**

More problematically, Freud grounded his re-construction of normativity in a series of anthropological studies in which he tried to prove the universalism of the Oedipus complex. In the first of them, *Totem and Taboo: Some points of Agreement between the Mental Life of*

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400 The first reference to the myth of Oedipus occurs in a letter to Fliess. In this letter, Freud writes, “A single idea of general value dawned on me. I have found in my own case too, [the phenomenon of] being in love with my mother and jealous of my father, and I now consider it a universal event in early childhood, even if not so early in children who have been made hysterical (similar to the invention of parentage [family romance] in paranoia – heroes, founder of religion). If this is so, we can understand the gripping power of *Oedipus Rex*, in spite of all the objections that reason raises against the presupposition of fate, and we can understand why the later “drama of fate” was bound to fail so miserably” (*Letter to Fliess*, 272).

401 Commenting on Freud’s theory about infantile sexuality, Lacan said, “All human sexuality is perverse, if we carefully follow what Freud says. He never managed to conceive of sexuality except as something perverse, and this is precisely why I question the fruitlessness of psychoanalysis.” (132).

402 The Four texts that Freud devoted to anthropological questions are *Totem and Taboo* (1913); *The Future of an Illusion* (1927); *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930); *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). The relation of Freud to anthropology is complex and crucial to understand the articulation between his theory of infantile sexuality and his theory of the Oedipus complex. For a very good introduction to the subject, see Wallace, Edwin R. “Freud and Anthropology: A history and reappraisal” (1983), *Psychological issues, monograph 55. Freud and anthropology: A history and reappraisal*. Madison, CT: International Universities Press, 1983.
Savages and Neurotics (1913), Freud explained the origin of human society and religion through an analogy with the structure of the mental life of modern neurotics. He took the model of the Oedipus complex, where the father stands as the source of castration (and as the model of the one who is not castrated) and the mother as the primary sexual object (forbidden by the father), and imagined that the same complex could explain the birth of human society and religion. Freud argued that at the origin of human society there existed a horde governed by a single dominant male (the urfather) who was keeping all the females for himself, and who thus was leaving the other males frustrated. As a result, Freud imagined that the sons united against this dominant male (admired as much as feared) to kill him and liberate themselves from his tyranny. However, after having eaten their “father,” the brothers felt guilty and decided to make amends by ensuring that the same situation would not repeat itself through a series of preventative laws. This is how Freud imagined resolving the question of the passage from nature to culture, which is to say the birth of a society centered on a Totem (which represents the dead father, as well as the prohibition to kill him again), and organized by the rule of exogamy (through the prohibition of incest).

What Freud attempted to prove in Totem and Taboo was that all the Symbolic structures at the root of human society and religion were, in fact, deducible from the two unconscious and repressed desires at the core of the Oedipus complex, i.e., the desire to kill the father, and the

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404 It is interesting to point out, here, that Freud wrote Totem and Taboo right after the creation of the I.P.A, which means right after the moment when Freud himself was no longer the Urfather of a primitive horde of analysts, but the father that had been already attacked and abandoned by Alfred Adler, Karen Horney, and soon by Gustave Jung. Freud wrote Totem and Taboo as an answer to Jung’s book The Psychology. For more details, see Roudinesco, “Totem et Tabou.” Dictionnaire de la psychanalyse. Paris: Fayard, 1997, 1057-1062.
desire to sleep with the mother. Freud argued that it was in order to counter balance their desire to kill the father that the horde of sons invented the Totem and its laws. Likewise, Freud suggested that it was in order to counterbalance their desire to sleep with their mother that the horde of brothers invented the prohibition of incest. Freud’s theory, however, turned out to be not only wrong from an anthropological point of view, but also highly contestable in its psychoanalytical roots. Indeed, by inventing such a myth, Freud did not only turn his own neurotic structure (the one of an obsessive) into a universal one, but he also made of them the very root of human culture. As such, he elevated the heterosexual male desire to the level of a universal, and he reduced women to the status of objects of exchange between men.

The Late Lacan Beyond Freud

Lacan, it is well known, supposedly made the same mistake when he developed, in his Seminar III, *On Psychosis* (1955-1956) the concept of the Name-of-the-Father, or when he proposed a logical rereading of the structure of the Oedipus complex in his Seminar IV, *La relation d’objet* (1956-1957). And it is true that the function of the Name-of-the-Father, for the early Lacan,

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405 Even though the anthropological critique of *Totem and Taboo* is not my primary goal in this chapter, it is important to note that many anthropologists and ethnologists have criticized Freud’s theory. A very renowned scholar such as Alfred Kroeber in “Totem and Taboo, an ethnologic psychoanalysis” (1920) accused Freud of being in dialogue with dated evolutionist theories, and of having based his theory too heavily on myth and folklore tales, while the discipline of anthropology, at that time, was finally becoming more concerned with the scientific studies of real primitive cultures. It is also around the theory defended by *Totem and Taboo* that Malinowski, Ernest Jones and Karen Horney decided to create, perhaps in a more “feminist” manner, a new form of anthropological psychoanalysis. Finally, as Paul Laurent Assoun has argued, one could reproach Freud, from a strictly psychoanalytic point of view, of having taken the two male desires that structure the neurosis of an obsessinal neurotic, and of having turned them into a universal structure. For more details on this question, see, Assoun, Paul-Laurent. *Freud et les sciences sociales : psychanalyse et théorie de la culture*. Paris: Armand Collin, 2008.


had the charge to secure, at the level of the Other, something non-deceptive, and thus reassuring and lovable. As such, the Name-of-the-Father was what was linking, in Lacan’s early teaching, Freud’s conception of the Oedipus to the Judeo-Christian tradition which posited, for the first time in history, not only a single God, but a single non-deceiving God as a foundation of the world. Freud argued, indeed, in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), that the Judeo-Christian tradition not only implemented the belief in a single God, but also the belief that beyond all the evil in the world stands a non-deceiving God which obeys certain laws. Of course, the Judeo-Christian tradition did not invent the idea of the non-deceiving Other as such, but it was the first tradition that detached this idea from any concrete reference to the external world. Unlike the empirical system of Aristotle, for example, where it is the concrete observation of the sky and the movement of the planets and suns that is guaranteeing such a possibility, the Judeo-Christian tradition was the first one to posit such guarantee as an abstract principle: the principle that God is not deceiving us.

However, it is precisely this principle, as Chapters One, Two and Three demonstrated, that Lacan tirelessly questioned throughout his “Return to Freud,” and that he tried to bypass first with his conceptualization of the feminine not-all, and that he explored in a radically new manner during his last teaching, taking as high point of departure the work and the psychic structure of James Joyce, and more broadly of psychosis (which is why it is so important to approach the last teaching of Lacan having Lacan's confrontation with Bataille in mind). Lacan writes, in his *Seminar XXIII*,

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409 See, in particular, “On a god who does not deceive and on one who does.” in *Book III on Psychosis, Op. Cit.*, pp. 59-72. I will come back to this question in the *Épilogue.*
The hypothesis of the unconscious, and Freud underscores this, is something that can only hold up by presupposing the Name-of-the-Father. Presupposing the Name-of-the-Father, which is certainly God, is how psychoanalysis, when it succeeds, proves that the Name-of-the-Father can just as well be bypassed. One can just as well bypass it, on the condition that one makes use of it. (116)

Stated clearly, one could say that the question that Lacan raises in his late teaching is the one concerning the possibility of knotting the three registers of the Imaginary, the Real and the Symbolic without having to use, as Freud did, the myth of the Oedipus complex. Lacan said during his Seminar XXIII The Sinthome (1975-1976), “I will ask this year, if I may say so, the question about the knotting of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real, in order to know if one needs this supplementary function of one more torus, the one about which the consistency is to be referred to the one of the Father” (102). For it is thanks to the function of the father, and even more so, thanks to the love perversely (père-versement) oriented toward the father as the bearer of castration that Freud intuitively resolved the mystery of the knotting of the three dimensions of the subject. But it is precisely this intuition, which Lacan judged to be perversely oriented towards the father that the late Lacan tried to bypass through his invention of the Borromean knots. Lacan said, at the end of his Seminar XXIII, “I’ve been trying to flesh out this intuition

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410 See, for an early definition of the three registers, Lacan, Jacques. “The Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real” (1953) published in The Names-of-the-Father, trans. Bruce Fink, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013. And for a quick definition of them, see Jacques-Alain Miller “The Real is Without Law.” In this text, Miller writes, “What are these registers? One could say—to give an image—they are kinds of drawers, terms which Damourette and Pichon, who made a reading of Lacan concerning the structure of language, made use of in their inspired grammar. Let’s say that they are sets. Let’s suppose that they are sets and that there are a certain number of elements of which we consider a certain number to belong to R, other to I, and again others to S. Am I going to define these sets? I will content myself with saying of R, that it is always what is of the order of the given, which has a certain raw value, that I is what is represented, the representation being conceived as image, and that S is what is articulated and structured as a language” (55).
[Freud’s intuition] in a different way with my *Node Bo* [Borromean knots], which is so very apt to evoke Mount Nebo or, as they say, the Law—Law which has absolutely nothing to do with the laws of the real world, these laws being moreover a matter that remains completely open. The law at issue on this occasion is simply the law of love, that is to say, père-version” (130).

The Real as the Mystery of the Speaking Body
What is at stake with Lacan’s late teaching is thus neither the problem of psychosis as such, nor the one of the critique of the Oedipus (as it was for the early Lacan) but, rather, what Lacan formulated in a closing sentence of his *seminar XX, Encore* when he said “The Real, I will say, is the mystery of the speaking body, the mystery of the unconscious” (Encore, 126). For if the knotting of the three registers represented a mystery, in Freud’s Oedipus complex and Lacan’s early teaching, it was only insofar as the knotting of the three registers had not yet emerged as a problem in and for itself. While in the early Lacan, the knotting of the three registers was described as a mystery that was engendered by the *Paternal Metaphor*, it is what became, for the late Lacan, a problem that needed to be studied for itself through the metaphor of the Borromean knot.

To make understandable how Lacan managed to flesh out differently Freud’s intuition about the father, while giving to it a potentially very “queer turn,” this chapter proceeds as follows. First, I put forth all the Freudian concepts related to the Oedipus complex, as well as all the concepts of the early Lacan, in regard to the notion of the Real. I show how Lacan’s notion of the Real, in his late teaching, enables him to produce a radical critique of his early teaching, and
more broadly, of psychoanalysis itself. Next, I explain why Lacan invented, in order to go
beyond this critique and the risk that it implies of turning psychoanalysis into an elegy of
psychosis (as Deleuze and Guattari did in *The Anti-Oedipus*), instead, a new form of writing (the
one of the Borromean knots) through which the knotting of the three dimensions of the speaking
being becomes approachable beyond the limits assigned to their knotting by the Oedipus
complex. Third, I discuss how Lacan used the case of James Joyce to develop his concept of the
*sinthome* and the *escabeau*, which defines what makes possible, at the level of the individual,
and through an invention, the stitching of the three dimensions outside any reference to the
Oedipus complex. Finally, I present the series of paradoxes that the late Lacan produces in
regards to the “normal” functioning of psychoanalysis, and the ways in which theses paradoxes
can be surmounted through a new approach of interpretation, and more broadly, of writing and
poetry.

I. RETHINKING PSYCHOANALYSIS THROUGH THE REAL

Miller, in the opening lesson of his *Seminar, Le tout dernier Lacan*, remarks that, during his
*Seminar XXIII, The Sinthome* (1975-1976), Lacan said, that “it was inasmuch as Freud had really
made a discovery—and to the extent that this discovery is true—that one can say that the Real is
my symptomatic answer to it” (132). The category of the Real, as Lacan posited it at the very
opening of his teaching is not, as one might think, a Freudian category, but Lacan’s own
invention, which is to say Lacan’s symptomatic answer to Freud discovery of the unconscious.
Commenting on this idea in his *Seminar XXIII*, Lacan said:
This is something which I can say I consider to be nothing more than my symptom. I mean that it is my own particular way of carrying Freud's lucubration to its degree of symbolism, to the second degree—if indeed there is such a thing as may be termed Freud's lucubration. Let's say that it is to the very extent that Freud articulated the unconscious that I react to it. (…) It is to the very extent that Freud made a discovery—supposing this discovery to be true—that it may be said that the real is my symptomatic response. (113)411

The Real is thus, to put it simply, the product of Lacan’s reaction to Freud’s discovery and, one could even add, the product of the trauma that Freud’s discovery produced on Lacan himself. The trauma that Freud’s discovery provoked in Lacan is linked to the fact that Freud’s theory of the unconscious, in its most radical implications, produces a “hole” at the level of universal discourse inasmuch as it attacks, or puts in jeopardy the very notion of truth that supports it. But it is precisely this “attack” on the notion of truth, and the implications of such an “attack” that Lacan took seriously, while the rest of the psychoanalytical institution and especially the branch of ego-psychology that became, at the death of Freud, the dominant branch of psychoanalysis in

411 The French version states, “En d’autres termes, l’instance du savoir que Freud renouvelle, je veux dire rénove sous la forme de l’inconscient, ne suppose pas du tout obligatoirement le réel dont je me sers” (132). “C’est là quelque chose dont je peux dire que je le considère comme n’étant rien de plus que mon symptôme. Je veux dire que c’est ma façon à moi de porter à son degré de symbolisme, au second degré, l’élucubration freudienne – si tenté qu’il y ait ce que l’on puisse appeler une élucubration Freudienne. Disons que c’est dans la mesure où Freud a articulé l’inconscient que j’y réagis” (132).
America, tried very hard not to take into account.412

The Unconscious, the Truth and the Real
In classical Freudian psychoanalysis, as well as for the early Lacan, there is a primordial connection between the unconscious and the possibility of its interpretation. It is inasmuch as the discourse of an analysand can be interpreted by the analyst that the unconscious of the analysand comes into existence.413 This very process is itself rendered possible by the dynamic of transference which established the analyst in the position of “the subject supposed to know,” which is to say in a position that makes of him (or her) a subject capable of interpreting “truthfully” the discourse of the analysand.414 In other words, in classical Freudian psychoanalysis, as in the early Lacan, the very existence of the unconscious is related to transference and the possibilities of interpretation that are attached to it. To put it in a formula: without transference, no unconscious. Lacan said,

What Freud sustains as the unconscious always presupposes a knowledge, and a spoken knowledge as such. The unconscious is wholly reducible to a knowledge. This is the minimum that is presupposed by the fact that the unconscious may be interpreted. It is

412 As Mitchell and Black have it, in *Freud and Beyond: a History of Psychoanalytic Modern Thought*, “Prior to the development of ego psychology, the clinical goal of psychoanalysis had been the release of trapped, unconscious energies. Freud had stressed a non-directive, non-suggestive approach. Removing the debris clogging the stream was the task, not strengthening the channel through which it flowed” (35). But it is according to this new orientation that psychoanalysis, under the guise of ego-psychology, took over the I.P.A after the Second World War and spread in America, under the influence of Hartmann, Ernst Kris and Rudolph Loewenstein, and then in France under the influence of Marie Bonaparte. And it is this highly conservative re-reading of Freud, which for example considered homosexuality as a perversion and femininity as an essence that the first generation of feminist thinkers like de Beauvoir, Friedan, Millet and Firestone criticized psychoanalysis so harshly, and rightly so.


414 See Lacan, Jacques. *Seminar XXIII, The Sinthome* (1975-1976). Lacan said, “the unconscious is wholly reducible to a knowledge. This is the minimum that is presupposed by the fact that the unconscious may be interpreted” (112).
quite clear that this knowledge has the minimum requirement of two supports, which are called terms and which are symbolized with letters, hence my way of writing knowledge as supported by S subscript 2, S₂.(112)

Reversing this perspective on the relations between knowledge and the unconscious as always-already interpretable, Lacan introduced, in “The Preface to the English Publication of Seminar XI,” the idea of a Real unconscious (opposed to the transferential unconscious) by saying:
“When the space of a lapsus no longer carries any meaning (or interpretation), then only is one sure that one is in the unconscious. One knows” (vii). The Real unconscious, opposed to the transferential unconscious, implies a disjunction between the unconscious and its interpretation. While a lapsus usually implies, in order to be read as a lapsus, its connection to the signifier of its interpretation, it is here disconnected from any interpretation and remains thus as a detached signifier, which is to say as a signifier all alone. This disconnection of the unconscious and its interpretation, in turn, presupposes an absence of transference between the one who is producing the lapsus, and the one who is hearing it. And this absence of transference is precisely what is “known”—as an inner certitude—by the person who produces the lapsus. To put it otherwise, it is because one “knows” that his lapsus is not related to any possible transference between him and the one who is hearing it that such a thing as the Real unconscious can emerge. In other words, the Real unconscious is the product of a particular knowledge—the knowledge of what

415The French version goes, “(…) ce que Freud supporte comme l’inconscient suppose toujours un savoir, et un savoir parlé. L’inconscient est entièrement réductible à un savoir. C’est le minimum que suppose le fait qu’il puisse être interprété. Il est clair que ce savoir exige au minimum deux supports, qu’on appelle des termes, en les symbolisant de lettres. D’où mon écriture du savoir comme se supportant de S indice d’un petit 2, S₂” (131).

Jacques-Alain Miller calls, in his very last Seminar, the knowledge of “the one all alone.” This knowledge of the “one all alone” is a knowledge that is more of the register of an inner certitude than a knowledge as we usually define this term.

The notion of truth, in psychoanalysis, is generally defined as the harmonious conjunction between the process of free association (on the side of the analysand), and the process of interpretation (on the side of the analyst). It is also what Lacan, at the beginning of his teaching, called “parole pleine,” which is to say an utterance where the subject of the enunciation and the subject that supports the act of enunciation is but one thing. This very conjunction, however, is what Lacan defines as a “lying truth” insofar as it presupposes a form of “friendship” between the one that speaks and the other that listens and interprets. Miller, commenting on this idea in his Seminar, Choses de finesse en psychanalyse (2008-2009) writes,

When Freud and the post-Freudians spoke of defense and the need to analyze the defenses, they had the idea that one had to go beyond the lying truth, that there was something beyond the semblants of the signifier, that interpreting repression was not sufficient and that a function of another order was at stake, one that concerned the relation of the subject to jouissance—a certain relation of refusal, of rejection, of “obstaclisation” in relation to jouissance. One particular consequence of this reasoning is

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418 I have discussed this notion of inner certitude in Chapter Four when I compared Lacan’s late teaching to Bataille’s notion of inner experience and non-knowledge.

to make of the kind of speech that psychoanalysis authorizes and encourages what Lacan called a *lying truth*. This truth, I specify it—it is my own doing—I am trying it—is *lying about jouissance*. One cannot say the truth about jouissance. (my translation)

This is why Freud himself, suggests Lacan in “Preface to the English-Language Edition” (a text he wrote at the end of Seminar XXIII), aware of this conflicted relation between truth and jouissance, invented psychoanalysis as a solitary practice, even though now it is always practiced in pairs. And this solitary practice (which does not presuppose a transferential link) is not resting on transference, but on what Lacan calls a feeling of emergency. Such a feeling is what brings an analysand to therapy, and what pushes him (or her) to start talking before any transferential link has been established between the analyst and the analysand. This feeling of emergency is, one could say, the therapeutically oriented version of what Lacan called, during his early teaching, *the function of the haste*. And it is always-already therapeutically oriented in the sense that it generally leads to its own *Aufhebung* (sublation) into the process of speech and transference, which is to say into the process of the “lying truth” of the transferential unconscious.

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420 The French version goes, “Il est certain que quand Freud et les post-freudiens évoquaient la défense et qu’il fallait finalement analyser les défenses, ils avaient bien idée en effet qu’il fallait passer au-delà de la vérité menteuse, qu’il y avait quelque chose au-delà des semblants du signifiant, qu’interpréter le refoulement ça ne suffisait pas, et qu’il y avait en jeu une fonction d’un autre ordre et qui tenait au rapport du sujet à la jouissance : un certain rapport de refus, de rejet, d’obstaculisation par rapport à la jouissance. (…) Une conséquence est en particulier que la parole, qu’autorise et qu’incite le discours analytique relève de ce que Lacan a appelé la vérité menteuse, *la vérité*, je précise – c’est de mon cru, je l’essaye – *menteuse sur la jouissance*. On ne peut pas dire vrai sur la jouissance. Si on ne peut pas dire *toute la vérité*, c’est parce qu’il y a une zone, un domaine, un registre – de quoi ? – de l’existence, où la vérité n’a pas cours, et ce registre serait celui de la jouissance, de ce qui satisfait. Et, si on suit Lacan là-dessus, la jouissance est ce qui satisfait un corps” (lesson XII, the 18th of March 2009).

421 Lacan writes, “It should be noted that psycho-analysis has, since it has ex-sisted, changed. Invented by a solitary, an incontestable theoretician of the unconscious (which is not what one imagines it to be—the unconscious, I would say, is Real), it is now practiced in couples. To be fair, the solitary was the first to set the example. Not without abusing his discipline (for they were disciples only because he knew not what he did)” (*Seminar XI*, vii).

As a result, one can say that when truth is related to the transferential unconscious through the act of interpretation, it condemns truth to be constantly changing. Lacan called this phenomenon in French “Varité,” which is the union of the word truth (vérité) and the word variety (variété). Lacan said, in his Seminar XXIV, L’insu que sait de l’un bevue s’aile a mourre, “One should try to open himself (or herself) to the dimension of truth as variable, which is to say to what... by condensing the two words... I would call “varité” [the variable-truth], with a little “é” swallowed from ‘variété’” (my translation).423

Through this notion of “lying truth,” Lacan wanted to make visible that truth, within the transferential unconscious, was reducible to a fictitious construction. Consequently, one could add that in the late Lacan the more the category of truth is being apprehended for what it is—a purely fictitious construction—the more the category of the Real is being elevated not only as what is opposed to truth, but also as what does not lie. And if the Real does not lie it is because it has nothing to do with truth, and thus with the variety of its lies. On the contrary, even, the Real is what has no meaning, what excludes meaning. Lacan said, in his Seminar XXIII, “If you look more deeply into what I mean by this notion of the Real, it appears that the Real is grounded in that it bears no meaning, in that it excludes meaning, or, more accurately, in that it settles in a

deposit on account of being excluded from meaning” (51). This is why, also, concludes Miller in “The Real Unconscious,” it is as if Lacan tried to do away with the category of truth in his late teaching, as if he tried to eradicate from the practice of psychoanalysis the need to believe in the idea of truth. Because truth is what is common between Freud’s conception of psychoanalysis and discourse of religion, and perhaps also to the discourse of philosophy, as Alain Badiou argues in his Seminar on Lacan. It is, as Kierkegaard would say, either the path of religion, philosophy and truth, since both of them imply believing in a certain ordering of the discourse, or the path of psychoanalysis and anti-philosophy.

Lacan developed this idea about religion in his conference The Triumph of Religion (1974) when he said that one has to make a choice between religion and its required belief in the existence of an ultimate truth and psychoanalysis, which requires letting go of the belief in truth. And one could add that it is precisely to do away with the idea of truth, and to put in

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424 Lacan said, during his Seminar XXIII, “N’est vrai que ce qui a un sens” (116). “Quelle est la relation du réel au vrai ? Le vrai sur le réel, si je puis m’exprimer ainsi, c’est que le réel, (…), n’a aucun sens” (116). “(…) si vous creusez ce que je veux dire par cette notion de réel, il apparaît que le réel se fonde pour autant qu’il n’a pas de sens, qu’il exclut le sens, ou, plus exactement, qu’il se dépose d’en être exclu” (65). “Je parle du réel comme impossible dans la mesure où je crois justement que le réel – enfin, je crois, si c’est mon symptôme, dites-le-moi – le réel est, il faut bien le dire, sans loi. Le vrai réel implique l’absence de loi. Le réel n’a pas d’ordre” (138). “Le réel, celui dont il s’agit dans ce qu’on appelle ma pensée, est toujours un bout, un trognon autour duquel la pensée brode, mais son stigmate, à ce réel comme tel, c’est de ne se relier a rien. C’est tout du moins ainsi que je conçois le réel” (123). I will come-back to this question later in this chapter.


427 See, for more details, the conference “The Triumph of Religion” that Lacan gave as an introduction to his lecture “La Troisième.” By true religion, Lacan means Christianity. Christianity is the true religion inasmuch as it is the only Religion that focuses exclusively on the question of resentment, and that pretends to have found the “true” subjective answer to it, i.e., “Love thy Neighbor as thyself.” (I will define precisely this notion in the Epilogue). Opposed to such pretension, psychoanalysis is, for Lacan, a discourse that aims at showing that there is no such thing as an ultimate truth. This is why, for Lacan, one has to make a choice between religion, and its required belief in the existence of an ultimate truth, and psychoanalysis, which requires letting go of the belief in truth. It is, as Kierkegaard would say, either the path of religion and truth, or the path of psychoanalysis. Unfortunately, as Lacan underscored, the path of psychoanalysis is also clearly the hardest one since it implies, at least on the side of the psychoanalyst, the adoption of an impossible position.
place a non-religiously oriented type of psychoanalysis that Lacan invented the Real. And this replacement of truth by the Real, it is important to underscore it, was already on its way at the beginning of Lacan’s text “Television” (1973), which is to say at the very beginning of his late teaching, when he said that truth could only be half said for obvious material reasons (words are lacking to say it all).\footnote{Lacan, Jacques. \textit{Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment}. Trans. Joan Copjec, New York: Norton, 2007.} In other words, in between truth and the Real, there is an impossibility: the impossibility to say it all; and a refusal: the refusal to reduce psychoanalysis to form of religion, being the religion of science.\footnote{See, Lacan, Jacques. “Télévision,” in \textit{Autres Écrits}, 509-546. Lacan said, “Je dis toujours la vérité: pas toute, parce que toute la dire, on n’y arrive pas. La dire toute, c’est impossible, matériellement : les mots y manquent. C’est même par cet impossible que la vérité tient au réel” (509).}

Hystory and Lying Truth
Finally, beyond this attack on truth, what is also attacked by the last Lacan is the very principle that permits linking one signifier ($S_1$) to another signifier ($S_2$), since such a link, in the end, is at best a fictitious construction, a convention about which people agree upon. This distinction is also what enables Lacan to point to the fact that between Freud’s “Reality Principle” and his own idea about the Real there is an epistemological radical difference. To illustrates this idea, one just need to go back to the figure of the hysteric, and to point to the fact that, as Miller as it, “hystera is a psychopathological structure where can be seen in its pure form the impact of the discourse of the Other on the subject, and perhaps, too, the impact of the desire of the Other” (\textit{Le tout dernier Lacan}, lesson 3).\footnote{See Miller, Jacques-Alain. \textit{Le Tout dernier Lacan} (2006-2007), unpublished. Third Lesson, 29th of November 2006.} And within this structure, which represents par excellence the
condition under which a transferential unconscious is possible, the very nature of the unconscious, as well as the very nature of the “cure” that psychoanalysis offers, is reducible to a will to organize, under the guiding supervision of the analyst, the life of the analysand in a coherent story (histoire).

Within the framework of classical psychoanalysis, as well as for the early Lacan, the unconscious as transferential is nothing but “a hystory” (a word that combines “history” and “hystoria”) that the analysand is telling to himself with the help of the analyst in order to make sense of what remained previously at the level of the unknown. Miller writes, “For instance, in analysis, it is the desire that the subject pays attention, that the subject says the truth and, by doing so, that he lies, that he tells a story. It is the value of the written neologism that Lacan introduced by writing: hystory--with the y of hysteria” (my translation). It is such an “hystoire” and the kind of “friendship” that it implies (on the behalf of the analyst), as well as the kind of truth that it posits in the “Real” that is attacked by the late Lacan as a “lying truth.” And if this truth is called a “lying truth,” once again, it is precisely because it covers and hides the Real by turning it into an inchoative process of hystoricisation. In sum, within the paradigm of the transferential unconscious, there is no Real for the subject but only a Reality already translated into a hystory, which itself implies the existence of a “signifying chain,” grounded on the law of language, i.e., grounded on the laws of metaphor and metonymy as Lacan described

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them in “The function and the Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis.”

The Real Unconscious and its Relations to Psychosis

Contrary to this approach of the unconscious through the notion of language, truth, transference and, to summarize them all, hysteria, the notion of the Real unconscious is directly linked to the early definition that Lacan gave of the phenomenon of psychosis in his text “On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis” (1958-1959). Lacan said, “What is the psychotic phenomenon? It is the emergence, in reality of an enormous meaning that has the appearance of being nothing at all—insofar as it cannot be tied to anything, since it has never entered into the system of symbolization—but under certain conditions it can threaten the entire edifice” (60). Just like in the case of the Real unconscious, “where a lapsus no longer carries any meaning” (Preface, vii), the psychotic phenomenon presents itself as a detached signifier that cannot be integrated within the Symbolic structure of a subject. This is why, one can argue that Lacan’s definition of the Real unconscious as what “has no law,” is not, strictly speaking, an invention of the late Lacan but, rather, a generalization of a phenomenon that was already present in Lacan’s comprehension of the psychotic phenomena.

In the case of the Wolf Man, for example, it is quite clear that his hallucination, as Lacan underlines it in “Response to Jean Hyppolite’s Commentary on Freud’s “Verneungung” (1954),

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434 For a full explanation of the notion of the “Real without law,” see Miller, “The Real is Without Law.” lacanian ink, #47, 2016, 50-78.
puts into question the very possibility of *hystoricization*. Hallucination, indeed escapes any process of *hystoricization* insofar as the very process of *hystoricization* relies on the previous symbolization of the elements that need to be organized, while psychotic phenomenon is the direct consequence of the foreclosure of such possibility. The notion of foreclosure, in Lacan’s early teaching, is precisely meant to express this specific situation in which an element of the life of the subject has escaped the process of symbolization and cannot be reintegrated in a coherent story as such. Lacan said, in his *Seminar III, on Psychosis*,

> In the subject's relationship to the symbol there is the possibility of a primitive *verwerfung* [foreclosure], that is, that something is not symbolized and is going to appear in the Real. It is essential to introduce the category of the Real, it is impossible to neglect it in Freud's text. I give it this name so as to define a field different from the Symbolic. From there alone it is possible to throw light on the psychotic phenomenon and its evolution. (81)\(^{436}\)

Reciprocally, one can say that a hallucination is the mark of a Real that has bypassed the construction of truth. A hallucination is without any Other, is not made for any Other nor determined by it. It is as if something was speaking all alone. Miller, commenting on this proximity between psychosis and the *Real unconscious*, writes, “All alone, it is an adjective about which we know now how to give to it its value. It is an adjective that signals that we are not in *hystory*, nor in hysteria but, on the contrary, on the side of the solitary, on the side of a


Real that speaks all alone” (*Le Tout dernier Lacan*, Lesson Three, my translation). However, to go beyond the opposition between the meaninglessness of the *Real unconscious* (and the inner-certitude that goes with it), and the transferential unconscious (and the presence of the Other that it implies), Lacan, during the lesson IX of his *Seminar XXIII, The Sinthome*, suggested that beyond the opposition between being understood by the Other, and speaking for oneself, there is a third possibility that would coincide, for him, with the possibility of inventing a kind of “writing without word” (“une écriture sans parole”) that could be, at the same time, useful to understand better what the notion of the Real is. Lacan said, “One has to break oneself up, if I may say so, with a new Imaginary that establishes sense. This is what I am trying to establish with my language, which has the advantage of wagering on psychoanalysis inasmuch as I try to institute it as discourse, that is to say, as semblance at its most plausible” (*Seminar XXIII*, 102-103).

But how should we imagine or understand what a writing that does not speak means?

A Discourse without Speech
Writing since antiquity (as we saw in Chapter Two, Section I and II), has always been associated with the practice of reading (and most of the time of reading aloud), and through the practice of reading, with the “art” of interpretation. A writing, normally, is always made to be read, that it to say, to be deciphered in order to extract from it a certain meaning. But this definition, or approach of the written is only valuable when it comes to written texts that have been written

\[\text{\textsuperscript{437}}\text{ Lacan writes in *Seminar XXIII*, “Il faut se briser, si je puis dire, à un nouvel imaginaire instaurant le sens. C’est ce que j’essaie d’instaurer avec mon langage, qui a l’avantage de parier sur la psychanalyse en tant que j’essaie de l’instituer comme discours, c’est-à-dire comme semblant le plus vraisemblable” (122).} \]
from the start with the intention to be read and to communicate a certain meaning. However, there exists another form of writing. This form of writing, as we saw in Chapter II’s conclusion, is what Lacan called in “Lituraterre” (1971) the writing as a mark, the writing as a trait (un trait), and even more to the point, the writing as a unary trait (le trait unaire). The idea of unary trait comes from Freud. It translates, in Lacan’s language, what Freud called Einseiger Zug, which is to say, the unary elements of identification. To simplify the distinction between the two-forms of writing, Lacan named the first one signifier and the second letter.

Of course, within Lacan’s theory, those two modes of writing are interconnected. For example, the writing of the graph of desire (presented in Chapter I), which belongs to the second kind of writing, is also always connected to the first mode of writing, which is there to give meaning, to interpret the second mode of writing. In this sense, the first mode of writing, which is the one that speaks, is comparable to a body since the body is what is being read and interpreted by the soul just like a text is being read by its reader. Opposed to such a mode of writing and reading there is the second mode of writing that cannot be read and, consequently, cannot be converted into meaning. (The title that Lacan gave to the collection of his articles “Ecrits” can be understood, somehow ironically, in this second sense.)

Given this double mode of writing, Lacan said that the unconscious is, first and foremost, what can be read, what can be deciphered; and reciprocally that the (Freudian) unconscious is what excludes the second mode of writing (i.e., the letter) because of its structure. The kind of meaning that the unconscious is producing is, however, very deceiving. It is a meaning that can lie inasmuch as the unconscious can contradict itself, and then produces a series of arguments to
justify its own contradiction. This is why Lacan concluded, in “Lituraterre,” that the transferential unconscious is more of a rhetorician than a proper logician. This is why, also, the symptom and the operation of meaning making are to be placed on the side of semblance, while the letter as detached from any meaning should be placed on the side of the *Real unconscious*, that is, on the side of what is unilateral, i.e., detached from any connection to S₂.

As what follows will show, the writing of the Borromean knot is of that order. It is a unilateral writing, which means a writing that is not a *semblant*. The writing of the Borromean knots, in this specific sense, should not be confused with the other use that Lacan made of little letters in his other *Graph*, like the *Graph of Desire*, for example, where all the letters are taken as signifiers that have a specific meaning. Those previous *graphs* describe the “cage” of meaning that makes of every discourse a *semblant*. But it is precisely because Lacan described so accurately the nature of every discourse as a *semblant* that he was able to start elaborating a discourse that would not be a *semblant*. Lacan said,

One has to break oneself up, if I may say so, with a new Imaginary that established *sens*. That is what I am trying to establish with my language, which has the advantage of wagering on psychoanalysis inasmuch as I try to institute it as discourse, that is to say, as semblance as its most vraisemblable, its most plausible. All in all, psychoanalysis is nothing more than a short-circuit via meaning, via *sens* as such. Just now I defined this as the copulation of language – since it is by means of this that I sport the unconscious – with our body.” (102-103)
Commenting on this sentence in his *Seminar, Detached Pieces*, Miller said, “this is what we see the efflorescence of in the *Seminar XXIII, The Sinthome*. It is what Lacan has built; he has built a discourse while trying not to make of it a semblant, that is to say to make of the letters a use that would not be the one of the signifier, but one that would bring back the signifier to the letter that supports it” (50, my translation). Let’s thus study how Lacan managed to build such a discourse that would not be of semblance.

**II. THE BORROMEAN CHAIN: A NEW WRITING FOR THE REAL**

It is in his *Seminar XXII, RSI* that Lacan introduced the metaphor of the Borromean chain in order to think anew the articulation of the three registers of the Imaginary, the Real and the Symbolic. The Borromean chain is a chain of a minimum of three rings attached to one another, and that gets broken as soon as one of the rings is detached from the others. Lacan said, during the first lesson of his *Seminar XXII*: “The definition of the Borromean knot takes its departure from three. It means that if, of the three, you break one of the rings, they are free, all three of them, which means that the two others rings are set free” (14). What is the most important element to understand in the construction of the Borromean geometry is that it is made to give to the Real—which is strictly irrepresentable—a form of writing that could render it thinkable, or at least inscribable in a form of writing. But how shall we describe this writing of the Real, and which status should be given to it?

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439 The French version says “La définition du nœud borroméen part de trois. C’est à savoir que si des trois, vous rompez un des anneaux, ils sont libres tous les trois, c’est-à-dire que les deux autres anneaux sont libérés” (15).
A Geometry against the Imaginary
The writing of the Real, in the late Lacan, is not a direct writing but an indirect one that depends on the structure of the “Borromean chain.” The metaphor of the Borromean chain is the metaphor of the link that unites the three registers of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real in a way that would be different from the way in which the metaphor of the psychic energy, developed by Freud in his *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1948), or in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (19), does. Lacan said, in “From the Unconscious to the Real,” “What is known as energetics is none other than the handling of a certain amount of numbers from which a constant number is extracted. In referring to science such as it was conceived of in his time, Freud took this as a reference point. He just turned it into a metaphor” (111). For Freud, there exists, metaphorically speaking, two forms of psychic energy, a first kind linked to the primary process, free and in need of an immediate and full discharge; and a second kind of energy, linked to the secondary process, which can accumulate itself within a certain neuronal configuration—this configuration being the material substratum of Freud’s conception of the ego. The ego being, precisely, as Miller puts it, “the name given to a certain mass of neurons maintaining the investment of a certain amount of psychic energy in a frozen state” (*Le dernier Lacan*, Lesson 4).

Lacan’s Real, and its writing under the guise of the *metaphor* of the Borromean chain, is what Lacan invented to replace Freud’s psychic energy, and more broadly Freud’s distinction between the Pleasure principle (to which the psychic energy of the primary process corresponds),

and the Reality principle (to which the psychic energy of the secondary process corresponds). And Lacan was able to do so inasmuch as he first managed to treat Freud’s concept of psychic energy not as something properly grounded in observations, but as something that was, just like his own writing of the Borromean chain, at the level of a metaphor. Of course, the Freudian metaphor is a metaphor that seems “real” insofar as it is still mostly aligned with the dominant Imaginary of our time (everyone knows what a neuron “is”) while, quite on the contrary, Lacan’s metaphor of the Borromean chain is anything but simple to imagine or to manipulate. Lacan said,

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\text{Not that my aim was to traumatize anyone, especially not my audience, whom I have no reason whatsoever to be mad at to the point of causing them a trauma. Let’s say that this is the forcing of a new kind of writing, which possesses, through metaphor, a scope that really has to be called Symbolic. It is also the forcing of a new type of idea, if I may say so, an idea that does not burgeon spontaneously from the simple doing of that which forms meaning, that is to say, from the Imaginary. (112)}
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This is why the writing of the Real in the form of a Borromean chain is not an idea in the classical sense of the term (i.e., an idea that can be easily imagined, and thus explained and communicated). On the contrary, it is an idea that is more of the order of a trauma, which is to say an idea that makes a hole in our common way of thinking and, at a more radical level, an idea that separates the way in which the Imaginary and the Symbolic are usually linked to one another. Commenting on this difficulty, Lacan said, at the opening of his *Seminar XXIII*, “Pondering commonly happens with eyes shut. When one ponders the knot—you can have a go

\[441\] See in particular “From the Unconscious to the Real,” in *Seminar XXIII*, 110-120.
If the geometry of the Borromean knots owes nothing to the Imaginary it is because the Imaginary is what makes the operation of thinking difficult, what creates all the confusions at the level of the Symbolic. This is why, also, as Miller aptly points out in Detached Pieces, in order to achieve a proper writing of the Real the Imaginary and the Symbolic need to be separated first.

Nonetheless, if the Imaginary and the Symbolic are not naturally joined, as they are in Freud’s work, it also means that they need to be reconnected. And it is to establish a new connection between the two that Lacan invented his category of the Real. In other words, Lacan’s notion of the Real, in order to be needed (to have a “place” and a function as Derrida would say), implies a disjunction of the Imaginary and the Symbolic.

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442 Lacan writes, in Seminar XXIII, “Il faut se briser, si je puis dire, à un nouvel imaginaire instaurant le sens. C’est ce que j’essaie d’instaurer avec mon langage, qui a l’avantage de parier sur la psychanalyse en tant que j’essaie de l’instituer comme discours, c’est-à-dire comme semblant le plus vraisemblable.” (122); “Penser au nœud, chose qui s'opère le plus communément les yeux fermés, vous pouvez en faire l'essai, c'est très difficile.” (28) ; “La cogitation de cette nouvelle géométrie fait éprouver à l'imagination une résistance qui me frappe pour l'avoir moi-même éprouvée.” (49) ; “Celle-ci est constituée par une géométrie que l'on peut dire interdite à l'imaginaire, car elle ne s'imagine qu'à travers toutes sortes de résistances, voire de difficultés. C'est là ce qui substantifie le nœud en tant qu'il est borroméen” (31).

443 See, Miller, Jacques-Alain. Detached Pieces, Lesson IV. During this lesson, Miller argued that contrary to what one may think, the Borromean knots are not made to be tied. On the contrary, they have been designed to be united, which means that they have been designed first to disjoin what the early Lacan had united under the concepts of the Name-of-the-Father and the Paternal metaphor: the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary.

444 In Seminar XXIII, Lacan defines the notion of the Real, “(...) si vous creusez ce que je veux dire par cette notion de réel, il apparaît que le réel se fonde pour autant qu'il n'a pas de sens, qu'il exclut le sens, ou, plus exactement, qu'il se dépose d'en être exclu” (65). “Je parle du réel comme impossible dans la mesure où je crois justement que le réel – enfin, je crois, si c’est mon symptôme, dites-le-moi – le réel est, il faut bien le dire, sans loi. Le vrai réel implique l’absence de loi. Le réel n’a pas d’ordre” (138).
The Real as a Detached Piece

The “natural” junction, as well as the “natural” functioning of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, is what Lacan calls Reality. Reality, of course, is what is relativized or opposed by the notion of the Real, which implies, precisely, the disjunction of the Imaginary and the Symbolic and their new linkage through the Real. The Real is thus what can link the Imaginary and the Symbolic beyond the link that the “natural” functioning of Reality imposes on them. At a purely abstract level, one could even say that the Real is the pure necessity of the link itself, while Reality is the actual and meaningful connection between the two. Even more so, the difference between the Real and Reality can be evaluated according to the status that a discourse gives to the Other. While, on the side of Reality, the Other is well defined and well known, on the side of the Real, the Other, although not not at all there, is nonetheless in a very precarious position. When one speaks for oneself, for example, one is generating some meaning for oneself, but this meaning is perhaps not understandable by the other.

The precariousness of the Other, within the perspective of the Real can also be glimpsed through the psychotic phenomenon of strangeness linked to one’s body. This phenomenon of strangeness—which refers to the moment when a subject feels that he is totally disconnected from his body—is related to the disjunction of the three rings of the Borromean chain—the body, in this case, corresponding to the category of the Imaginary.445 It is, it has been well commented, this disconnection that Lacan noticed in the passage in James Joyce’s A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916) where Stephen describes the ways in which he felt his body and the feelings

that were attached to it peeling off him like the skin of an orange.\textsuperscript{446} This disconnection between the Symbolic and the Imaginary is also what produces the collapse of the notion of Reality in psychotic phenomenon. It is, indeed, insofar as the relationship between the Imaginary and the Symbolic are no longer functioning that the sense of Reality disappears and that something as the Real (as a collection of detached pieces) starts to emerge in the speech of psychotic patients. In other words, Reality in the late Lacan is associated with what is operational, what functions, what is successful. On the contrary, the Real is associated with what fails, what collapses, what confuses.

Between Reality and the Real, the difference is thus not so much a difference of “function” (as they are both supposed to create a link between the Imaginary and the Symbolic), but a difference in terms of results and efficiency. Lacan is clear about it: “The truthful is a fact of saying in conformity with reality. On this occasion, reality is what functions, what functions truthfully” \textsuperscript{447} As such, the Real should not be seen as a subcategory of Reality but, on the contrary, as representing all the other possibilities of linkage between the Symbolic of the Imaginary that have been discarded in the name of Reality, which is to say for their lack of efficiency. In this sense, one could even add that the Real, as well as the unconscious as Real can ex-sist only insofar as the axiom “there is no Other of the Other” has been posited prior to it.

Lacan insists on it, “I draw a firm distinction between, on the one hand, the supposed real, which is that organ, so to speak, that has nothing whatsoever to do with an organ in the flesh, by which

\textsuperscript{446} I will come back to the details of this event in the next part of this chapter.

\textsuperscript{447} Lacan writes, in \textit{Seminar XXIII}, “Le vrai est dire conforme à la réalité. La réalité est dans l’occasion ce qui fonctionne, fonctionne vraiment. Mais ce qui fonctionne vraiment n’a rien à faire avec ce que je désigne du réel. C’est une supposition tout à fait précaire que mon réel” (132).
Imaginary and Symbolic are tied together in a knot, and, on the other hand, that which plays its part in grounding the science of reality” (114). On the contrary, the Freudian hypothesis of Reality can exist only insofar as the axiom “there is an Other of the Other” has been posited under the guise of the Name-of-the-Father first, and then under the guise of God. Miller writes, opposing the Lacanian *Real unconscious* to the Freudian *transferential unconscious*,

> We have here the Lacanian hypothesis that it is the hole in the Real, which is constituted by the absence of the Other of the Other, that could be the support of the unconscious, while the Freudian hypothesis, in reverse, presupposes the Other of the Other under the guise of the Name-of-the-Father which is God.” (*Le tout dernier Lacan*, Lesson 5, the 13th of December 2006)

Building on this distinction, it then becomes possible to understand Lacan’s late axiom: “Presupposing the Name-of-the-Father, which is certainly God, is how psychoanalysis, when it succeeds, proves that the Name-of-the-Father can just as well be bypassed. One can as well bypass it, on the condition that one makes use of it” (116). For if the steady connection between the Symbolic and the Imaginary is no longer assured by the presence of the Name-of-the-Father, nor by God, such a connection can nonetheless still be created at the level of the individual (and not at the level of the universal). And this link will be—so to speak—verified through the work it can produce, through the functions it can accomplish. To state it differently, the difference between the pure state of psychosis where the disjunction of the Symbolic and the Imaginary produces a gap, and the universal linkage of the two by the Name-of-the-Father, provides a third way to link the Symbolic and the Imaginary without having to use the universal tool of the
Name-of-the-Father. The whole problem here is to make sure that the gap that separates the Imaginary and the Symbolic, once the Name-of-the-Father is missing, is being nonetheless crossed, and that an articulation between the Imaginary and the Symbolic remains possible without the reassuring presence of the God hypothesis (the hypothesis that “there is an Other of the Other). Such a possibility, of course, implies installing the subject in a position where the Other has no influence anymore, where the subject is all alone.

However, there is no need to be an exceptional figure, like the figure of James Joyce, or the figure of a psychotic, to achieve this position. On the contrary, such a position is what Lacan conceived as the “first” end of the psychoanalytic treatment and that he named “the pass.” The “pass,” according to Lacan, is the name of the point of exit of the transferential unconscious. It designates a moment, within an analysis, when the transference to the analyst disappears. It is at this moment that the space of the Real unconscious opens and that “the space of a lapsus no longer carries any meaning (or interpretation)” (Preface to the English Edition, vii). It is also the moment when the forever changing mirage of the “lying truth” goes away and that a form of Real satisfaction is supposed to emerge in the life of the analysand.

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448 See “Proposition du 9 octobre 1967 sur la psychanalyse de l’Ecole,” in Autres Ecrits, 243-260. Lacan developed the notion of the “pass” as a new way to think, conceptually and concretely, about the end of an analysis. With the “pass,” the end of analysis is no longer associated with the Symbolic, as it was within Lacan’s “Return to Freud,” but associated with the Real. However, to assign to the end of analysis, the Real, is also to promise to the analysand, a form of “subjective destitution,” which means the destitution of what was grounding at an Imaginary level his ego. Lacan writes, “N’irions-nous à l’annoncer, décourager les amateurs? La destitution subjective inscrite sur le ticket d’entrée… n’est-ce point provoquer l’horreur, l’indignation, la panique, voir l’attentat, en tout cas donner le prétexte à l’objection de principe?” (252) To assign to the psychoanalytic process the goal of obtaining the “subjective destitution” of the patient’s ego is, indeed, to place psychoanalysis in opposition to what the I.P.A. defines as the proper ending of a didactic psychoanalysis, i.e., the identification to the psychoanalyst’s ego.
The Satisfaction of the Real Body

This *Real satisfaction*, which could be opposed to an *Imaginary satisfaction*, emerges at a moment when an analysand is supposed to have learned how to manipulate his symptom so that, instead of suffering from it (as it was the case when he started his analysis), he has learnt how to extract from it as much satisfaction as possible. As such, the pass represents what can be expected from an analysis when it achieves its goal, i.e., when it enables the analysand to not only extract from his symptom a form of satisfaction but, also, when it gives to the analysand a way to make of his singularity the basis of his social recognition. Beyond this point, which could also be named a point *beyond the Oedipus*, Lacan thought that the analysand could only analyze himself in solitude, while coming back, from time to time, to the setting of the transferential unconscious as a way to verify his pass. This is also why, within Lacan’s late teaching where the Other is destitute and the “subject” is only posited through the structure of the three rings of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real, the consistency of the subject, renamed for the occasion the “speaking being,” is no longer assured by the Name-of-the-Father but by the *Body as Real* (as opposed to the *Imaginary body*).

The neologism “speaking being” (Parlêtre) is a word that Lacan introduced towards the end of his teaching to emphasis the fact that it is not because God has created humans different from the rest of the animal kingdom that they are “humans,” but because they are creatures that speak. It is, in other words, because one has to express one’s needs, and answer the needs of others in and through language, that one is not, purely and simply, an animal obeying its instinct, but an animal that has lost its contact with nature and acquired, in exchanged, a *Real Body*, made of drives. Lacan said, in *Seminar XXIII*, “the drives are the echo in the body of a fact of
saying” (9). Commenting on this shift, Miller writes: “At the place of the Other, there is the body. Not the body of the Other, but one’s own body [corps-propre], as we used to say” (Le tout dernier Lacan, Lesson 7, my translation). It is in relation to the Body as Real, or to the One-Body, as Miller names it, that Lacan will reframe his understanding of the formation of the ego, and not, as he did during his early teaching, in relation to the three procedures of identification isolated by Freud to think about the formation of the ego. Lacan, indeed, in his Seminar XXIII, The Sinthome, argues that the speaking being, unlike the Freudian subject, is not governed, at the end of the Oedipus by his love towards the father and his desire for his mother, but by the ways he loves his own body. Lacan said, “the speaking being adores his body” (66). And this adoration of one’s body is what Lacan will then posit as the root of the Real imaginary as well as what will put in motion all the other operations of thinking in his late teaching. In other words, within the late Lacan, thinking becomes a process that takes its departure in the Imaginary, while the Imaginary itself is grounded in the speaking being’s adoration of his own body.

To Have a Body, and not to Be a Body

In the perspective of the late Lacan, the body ceases to be reduced to the Imaginary and the

449 It is, indeed, through his constant return to Freud’s concept of identification that Lacan was able to elaborate some of the major concepts of his early teaching that relate to the notion of the Other. Through the first identification to the father, which is of the order of love, Lacan developed his concept of transference. Through the hysteric identification, which is an active participation in the life of another, Lacan developed his concept of hystorisization. Finally, through the third mode of identification of the Unary Trait, Lacan developed his concepts of The-Name-of-the-Father (which is at the basis of the Symbolic stabilization of reality).

450 Lacan writes, in Seminar XXIII, “Il faut bien que vous réalisez que ce que je vous ai dit des rapports de l’homme à son corps, et qui tient tout entier dans le fait que l’homme dit que le corps, son corps, il l’a. Déjà dire son corps, c’est dire qu’il le possède, comme un meuble, bien entendu. Ça n’a rien à faire avec quoi que ce soit qui permette de définir strictement le sujet, lequel ne se définit d’une façon correcte que de ce qu’il est représenté par un signifiant auprès d’un autre signifiant.” (154) ; “Ce nœud, qualifiable du borroméen, est inextricable sans dissoudre le mythe du sujet – du sujet comme non-supposé, c'est-à-dire comme réel – qu'il ne rend pas plus divers que chaque corps signalable du parlêtre, lequel corps n'a de statut respectable, au sens commun du mot, que de ce nœud” (37).
Imaginary to the visual idea of form. Instead, the body becomes an isolated entity, something that functions on its own. As a consequence, every speaking being is said to “have” a body in the late Lacan—and not to be a body, as Lacan had it previously (Lacan said, in *Encore*, “Being is a body”). The stakes of such a shift between being and having revolve around the function that “being a body” played previously in the “mystery” of the knotting of the three registers. While the body as an image was supporting, so far, the very “being” of every speaking being, it becomes, within the late Lacan, a problem. The body is what needs to be analyzed and not what can be taken as a “mysterious” solution.

The example of Joyce here is very important. For it is Joyce that proves that a speaking being does not need to “be” his body in order to be properly knotted. Lacan, indeed, pointed during his *Seminar XXIII*, to an event that happened to James Joyce during his childhood during which he felt his body (i.e., the image of his body) peeling off him like the skin of an orange, and that this fundamental trauma is what Joyce managed to bypass through his writing. Commenting on this articulation between Joyce’s trauma and Joyce art of writing, Lacan said,

> Something happened to him that made what is commonly called the Ego play a role that for him was altogether different from the simple role – a role that one imagines to oneself simple – that it plays in the common run of those who are quite rightly termed mortals. The Ego fulfilled a function for him that I can only account for through my mode of writing.

> It is well worth taking the trouble of pointing out what it was that put me on this path. It is that writing is essential to his Ego. (127)
Just like the Ego for a normal person, the function of writing, for Joyce operates what Lacan calls a “certain mode of framing” (127). In the case of the trauma that happened to Joyce, this framing concerned an event when Joyce received a beating that Joyce narrates in *A Portrait of the Artist of as Young Man.* Lacan, commenting on this passage, suggested that, thanks to his art of writing, Joyce manage to metaphorize “his relationship to his body” (128). However, through the metaphor that Joyce used, he made explicit that contrary to most people, who are affected when violence is done to their body, Joyce felt nothing. Quite on the contrary, even, he used the metaphor of the fruit peel, to describe the way in which he felt his anger falling off him, and through his anger, the image of his body as an Ego image. By doing so, Joyce made clear that, contrary to what one might think, it is possible to have a relationship to one’s body as if it was a foreign body. And it is precisely this dropping of the image of the body that normally characterizes the phenomenon of psychotics, and that Joyce, according to Lacan, managed to supplement with his art of writing. To put it simply, Joyce’s art of writing played, in regard to his psychic structure, the function of knotting back Joyce’s dropped Imaginary to the Symbolic and the Real. This is why, perhaps, Joyce’s style is enigmatic, a riddle. As Lacan suggested, “the enigma raised to the power of writing is something that deserves to give us a pause. Might not this connection that is so poorly made give rise to the consequence that it is an Ego of enigmatic function, of reparatory function?” Joyce, in a work like *Finnegans Wake* went even further and

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451 See, Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, pp.86-87. Joyce writes, “While he was still repeating the Confiteor amid the indulgent laughter of his hearers and while the senses of the malignant episode were still passing sharply and swiftly before his mind he wondered why he bore no malice now to those who had tormented him. He had not forgotten a whit of their cowardice and cruelty but the memory of it called forth no anger from him. All the descriptions of fierce love and hatred which he had met in books had seemed to him therefore unreal” (87).

452 Lacan writes, “When one reads Joyce’s text, and above all his commentators, what’s striking is the number of riddles it contains. Not only do they abound, but one may say that Joyce played on this, knowing full well that there would be Joycians for two or three hundred years to come” (132).
managed to disjoin his writing production from his symptom, and as such produced a form of writing that was no longer interpretable from the perspective of the unconscious. But this disjunction from the unconscious also led him to give a new place to his jouissance. Joyce shows us how the notion of jouissance and the notion of the unconscious can be disjoined.

This is why the question of the knotting in the late Lacan becomes: what is doing the knotting of the three registers if we admit that they are fundamentally disjoined? Is it the symptom itself that imposes its own order (a symptomatic order instead of a Symbolic one), or is it the Sinthome that can provide such an order? And to this question, Miller answers:

In any case, Lacan validates the notion that one can free oneself from the symptom. I assure you of this. One can free oneself from the symptom on the condition that the analytic operation make the three hold together. Joyce is strictly speaking the one who can be said to remain the prisoner of the Sinthome. And there, as Being, he founds his art.

(Spare Parts, 108)

Naming not Communicating
To understand what is at stake with Joyce, one needs to understand the difference that Lacan makes between the process of naming, and the process of communication. In the process of communication, what comes first is the Other that one addresses. There is a form of subordination of what is being said to the expectations of the Other. It is, for example, how teaching proceeds. It is entirely subordinated to whom it is being addressed. The entire early and mid-Lacan was founded on such a preeminence of the Other in a model of communication in
which speech prevails over writing. In Lacan’s late teaching, it is no longer communication that
comes at the fore, but the operation of Naming. The operation of naming, for the late Lacan, is an
operation that focuses on the Real. The operation of naming is described by Miller thus. “To
name is to establish a relation, to install this relation between meaning and the Real. Not to reach
an understanding with the Other with respect to meaning, but to add to the Real something that
makes sense (Detached Pieces, 111). But if to name is to give meaning to something that is part
of the Real, where does the accord between the Real and the Symbolic comes from? Normally, to
finds this accord, one turns to God, or to The Name-of-the-father. For it is the Name-of-the-
Father that is normally supposed to give names to things. In other words, while it was the Name-
of-the-Father that was providing the quilting point between the Real and the Symbolic in the
early Lacan, it is now the operation of naming that provides such a quilting point between the
Symbolic and the Real. This is why, also, the meaning that the Symbolic is producing through
words becomes a pale approximation of the “real content” that the speaking being finds in
relation to his One-Body.

Exiting from One’s Unconscious
This “pale approximation” can be apprehended through the dialectical relationship that unites
(and disjoins) the Real and the category of truth within the late Lacan. Miller, during lesson
seven of his Seminar Le tout dernier Lacan, describes this dialectic as follows. First, one has to
emphasize that there is no truth outside meaning since to access truth, one needs to go through
meaning, which is to say through the transferential unconscious and its procedure of
interpretation. Second, one has to notice that while opening an access to truth, the category of
meaning opens also the possibility of lying and errors. As such, the very notion of truth implies the presence of errors or falseness that, in turn, are where the Real emerges from within the category of meaning.453 “Thus the thesis,” writes Miller in his Seminar, *Le tout dernier Lacan*, “that the Real is located in the muddle of truth” (Lesson 7, the 17th of January 2007, my translation). In other words, to access the Real, when one is not psychotic, one needs to construct, first, a *Hystory* through the *transferential unconscious*, in order to access, through the muddle of truth the *Real unconscious*. A second consequence of this dialectic between truth and the Real is that truth, as the process of meaning making elaborated during an analysis unfolds, is what is capable of poking a hole within itself, which is to say of pointing towards a beyond of its own register through its repeated muddling. Such a property of truth is then what Lacan will try to isolate within the *One-Body* and its holes. Finally, a third consequence is to render self-evident Lacan’s famous axiom “there is no sexual relationship” since the absence of sexual relationship comes here as a direct consequence of the disappearance of the Other and as the emergence of the *Real unconscious* which, itself, implies the solitude of the one who has subtracted himself from any transferential relationship.454 Within this situation the very possibility of installing a sexual relationship between two speaking beings can only be found in what Lacan called an alterity internal to the structure of the speaking being. And this alterity, within the structure of the speaking being, is precisely what implies the detachment of the speaking being from the adoration of his *One-Body*. It is, as we will see, inasmuch as the speaking being manages to

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453 Lacan said, “Le réel se trouve dans les embrouilles du vrai. C'est bien ce qui m'a amené à l'idée du nœud, qui procède de ceci que le vrai s'auto-perfore du fait que son usage crée de toute pièce le sens, de ce qu'il glisse, de ce qu'il est aspiré par l'image du trou corporel dont il est émis, à savoir la bouche en tant qu'elle suc” (85).

disentangle himself from this almost autistic adoration of his own body that something like a
sexual relationship can be established beyond narcissism. I will come back to this question in the
Epilogue.

What the late Lacan posits, as what can establish a sexual relationship between two
speaking beings that are both encapsulated in the adoration of their own body, is *lalangue*. Lacan
used the word for the first time during a series of conferences that he gave at Saint Anne on the
knowledge of the psychoanalyst.\(^{455}\) He then reintroduced it in his *Seminar XX, Encore*, which is
to say at the very beginning of his late teaching.\(^{456}\) Through the invention of this neologism,
Lacan wanted to isolate, within the realm of language, what is purely material in it, i.e. its
phonation. This is why *lalangue* is disconnected from grammar, as well as from syntax and,
reciprocally, why *lalangue* is opened to all the equivocations possible. As such, *lalangue*, just
like the notion of the *One-Body*, is defined by its relationship to its materiality. This notion of
materiality is fundamental in the late Lacan. It is, indeed, through this reference that Lacan can
posit a “new” principle of identity outside meaning. To take only one example, one can say that it
is exclusively through his relation to the materiality of his body that a speaking being can be said
to have an identity outside any *hystorisization*, which is to say an identity outside the three
modes of identification that grounds the *transferential unconscious*. More importantly, it is
thanks to his study of James Joyce that Lacan fully explored the connection between the *Real*


dictionnaire, quel qu’il soit. Le dictionnaire a affaire avec la diction, c’est-à-dire la poésie et avec la rhétorique par
exemple. Ce n’est pas rien, hein? Cela va de l’invention à la persuasion. C’est très important, seulement ce n’est pas
sans doute est fait de *lalangue*. C’est une élucubration sur *lalangue*. Mais l’inconscient est un savoir, un savoir-faire
avec *lalangue*. Et ce qu’on sait faire avec *lalangue* dépasse de beaucoup ce dont on peut rendre compte au titre du
langage” (127).
unconscious, the One-body, and the question of sexual difference under the notions of the sinthome and the escabeau.

III. JOYCE AND THE ONE BODY OF JOUISSANCE

To explore the notion of the sinthome, and the way in which it can be manipulated, Lacan did not follow Freud and his theory of the unconscious, but he chose to follow a new guide: James Joyce, and more specifically, the way in which Joyce practiced his art of writing. Joyce, one could even say, in a Kantian manner, awoke Lacan from his “dogmatic slumber” inasmuch as he showed to Lacan what it means to “incarnate the symptom.” The notion of incarnation, of course, is a notion that refers directly to the notion of the body, and more specifically to something that belongs to a mode of thinking that is trying to make its way into the body. In other words, what is incarnated is what is being embodied. The notion of symptom, likewise, refers normally in the early Lacan, as well as for Freud, to a formation of the unconscious, which is to say to a part of the discourse of the Other that is rendered visible on the surface of the body. In other words, the symptom is, just like language, split in two: on one side it has to do with the signifier, and on the other it has to do with jouissance. As such, the symptom belongs to the order of the mind, as well as to the body. But it is important to note that Lacan not only changed the spelling of the word symptom during his Seminar XXIII, The Sinthome, but that he gave to it a complete new definition.457

Joyce the Sinthome

The *sinthome*, written with this “old” spelling, is not a formation of the unconscious, but it names what is properly singular in each individual. The Freudian unconscious, as well as the old definition of the symptom, on the contrary, implied a form of universalism. The very notion of diagnosis, for example, tends to reduce any manifestation of symptoms to three or four kinds of symptoms (Hysterics, Perverse, Psychotic and Autistic). The notion of *sinthome* aims at underlining the absolute singularity of one’s own *sinthome*, this singularity being not linked to the Other, but to a One-Body.

The two notions, the symptom and the *sinthome*, although distinct, can nonetheless be linked. And it is this link that Lacan discovered in Joyce and that he named, in his *Seminar XXIV*, “L’insu que sait de l’une bêvue s’aile à mourre,” “l’une bêvue” (the-One-Mistake)—which is a way to re-write phonetically the Freudian word for unconscious, *Unbewusst*. Through this phonetical rewriting of the Freudian unconscious, Lacan tried to introduce a notion that could link the two effects of the two types of unconscious (the transferential and the Real one): the symptom and the *sinthome*.

This articulation of the two levels of the unconscious as well as the two effects that they produce is a complex one. If the *Real unconscious* of the One-Body precedes logically the emergence of the transferential unconscious, the Real unconscious is only accessible retroactively through an exit of the transferential unconscious, i.e., through the “Pass.” In the first lesson of his *Seminar XXIV, De l’une bêvue…*, Lacan argues, “we believe that we’re saying

458 Lacan said, “J’ai dit qu’il y avait - au sens de l’usage en français du partitif - qu’il y avait « de l’une-bêvue ». C’est une façon aussi bonne de traduire l’*Unbewusst* que n’importe quelle autre, que l’inconscient en particulier, qui en français, et en allemand aussi d’ailleurs, équivoque avec inconscience.” (First Lesson)
what we want to say” (my translation). In other words, we generally tend to believe in our intentions. But while we’re believing in what we’re saying, there is a second register in what we’re saying that escapes intentionality. This second register, because of its lack of intentionality, is removed from any possibility of interpretation insofar as the very possibility of interpretation is thinkable only through its relationship to intentionality. What grounds the notion of intentionality is, generally—at least in Freud—the Ego. But it is precisely the notion of the Ego that starts to be put under critical scrutiny within the late Lacan and his emphasis on Joyce.459

A New Ego
Instead of talking about the Ego to locate the origin of intentionality, Lacan goes back to the notion of the Other. Lacan says: “we believe that we’re saying what we want to say, but it is what the others wanted, even more so, what our family who spoke to us wanted” (Seminar XXIV,

459 Lacan writes, in Seminar XXIII, “La psychose paranoïaque et la personnalité n'ont comme telles pas de rapports, pour la simple raison que c'est la même chose. En tant qu'un sujet noue à trois l'imaginaire, le symbolique et le réel, il n'est supporté que de leur continuité. L'imaginaire, le symbolique et le réel sont une seule et même consistance, et c'est en cela que consiste la psychose paranoïaque” (53). “Avoir rapport à son propre corps comme étranger est certes une possibilité, qu'exprime le fait de l’usage du verbe avoir. (…) Mais la forme, chez Joyce, du laisser tomber du rapport au corps propre est tout à fait suspecte pour un analyste, car l’idée de soi comme corps a un poids. C’est précisément ce que l’on appelle l’ego” (150). « Quelque chose lui est arrivé qui fait que, chez lui, ce qu’on appelle couramment l’ego a joué un tout autre rôle que le rôle simple – qu’on s’imagine simple – qu’il joue dans le commun de ceux qu’on appelle à juste titre mortels. L’ego rempli chez lui une fonction dont je peux rendre compte que par mon mode d’écriture” (147). “Si l’ego est dit narcissique, c’est bien parce que, à un certain niveau, il y a quelque chose qui supporte le corps comme image. Dans le cas de Joyce, le fait que l’image ne soit pas intéressée dans l’occasion, n’est-ce pas ce qui signe que l’ego a chez lui une fonction toute particulière ?” (150) “L’écriture est essentielle à son ego” (147). “Dans ce qu’il écrit Joyce en passe toujours par ce rapport à l’encadrement” (152). “Stephen, c'est le Joyce que Joyce imagine. Et comme Joyce n'est pas un sot, il ne l'adore pas, bien loin de là. Il suffit qu'il parle de Stephen pour ricaner. Ce n'est pas très loin de ma position quand je parle de moi, ou en tout cas de ce que je vous jaspine” (64). “Stephen c'est Joyce en tant qu'il déchiffre sa propre énigme. Il ne va pas loin parce qu'il croit à tous ses symptômes. C'est très frappant. Il commence par croire à sa race” (69).
The family is perhaps the simplest example of what the notion of the Other stands for in the early Lacan. And the impact of the family on the formation of an individual is also what can illustrate how the contingency of life (what happens outside meaning on the side of the One-Body) is turned into a fate, that is to say, into an hystorisization. It is, indeed, insofar as the contingency of life and its impact on a One-Body is “interpreted” as a hystory by an Other that it is turned into a “fate”. But if one wants to put back at the fore the One-Body, one will have to think anew the relationship of the One-Body to its transferential unconscious. And it is precisely what Joyce accomplished in a work like Finnegans Wake. In it Joyce managed to write a piece of literature that seems to have no clear intention, and that cannot be interpreted. Lacan summarized Joyce’s paradoxical position as being “unsubscribed from the unconscious,” which means, for Lacan, that Joyce managed to incarnate—to give a body (of work)—to what was the most singular in his symptom. This incarnation is precisely what implies the abolition of the symptom in the first sense of the term. Miller writes: “There is here a radical “to each one his sinthome” that takes its distance from any form of sympathy, any form of communication or

460 Lacan also said, about Joyce, “Comment est-ce que nous ne sentons pas tous que des paroles dont nous dépendons nous sont, en quelque sorte imposées? C'est bien en quoi ce que l'on appelle un malade va quelque fois plus loin que ce que l'on appelle un homme bien portant. La question est plutôt de savoir pourquoi un homme normal, dit normal, ne s'aperçoit pas que la parole est un parasite, que la parole est un placage, que la parole est la forme de cancer dont l'être humain est affligé. Comment y en a-t-il qui vont jusqu'à le sentir ? Il est certain que là-dessus Joyce nous donne un petit soupçon” (95).


462 Lacan writes, in Seminar XXIII, “Joyce a un symptôme qui part de ceci que son père était carrent, radicalement carrent – il ne parle que de ça. J'ai centré la chose autour du nom propre, et j'ai pensé – faites en ce que vous voudrez, de ma pensée – que c'est de se vouloir un nom que Joyce a fait la compensation de la carence paternelle.” (94) ; “L’incroyable, c’est que Joyce (…) n’ait pu trouver que cette solution, écrire Finnegans Wake, soit un rêve qui, comme tout rêve, est un cauchemar, même s’il est un cauchemar tempéré. A ceci près, dit-il, et c’est comme ça qu’est fait ce Finnegans Wake, c’est que le rêveur n’y est aucun personnage particulier, il est le rêve même.” (125) ; “C’est en cela que Joyce glisse, glisse, glisse, au Jung, glisse à l’inconscient collectif. Il n’y a pas de meilleure preuve que Joyce, que l’inconscient collectif, c’est un sinthome, car on ne peut dire que Finnegans Wake, dans son imagination, ne participe pas de ce sinthome” (125).
generality, and which invites grasping each one as an absolute One, which is to say as separated”

(Le tout dernier Lacan, Lesson 9).463

This emphasis on the sinthome, as well as on what escapes the register of the Other and its hystories, could be seen, of course, as a desire to do to the discipline of psychoanalysis what Joyce did to literature, which is to say to put an end to the dream of coherency and meaningfulness that supported it since its inception. Likewise, the elevation of the Real unconscious could be seen as a way to do away with the transferential unconscious and, as such, with the discourse of the Other that is all too often reduced to the discourse of the family of the analysand. But this moving away from the Other is also what allowed Lacan to put psychoanalysis in touch with the register of the One, and even more so, with the absolute sinthome of the One. In other words, the kind of psychoanalysis that the late Lacan wants to put into place is a practice that proceeds from the One-Body, and no longer from the Other. And through this new practice, what Lacan wants to access is no longer the identity of a subject that is being spoken by the Other (by its family), but the consistency of the absolute singularity of one’s sinthome. Such a goal can be summarized in the idea that the analysand needs, at the end of analysis, to identify with his symptomatic identity, which is to say with his sinthome. This is why Lacan’s late approach to psychoanalysis can be said to be deeply anti-normative, and thus also radically queer.

However, to identify with his (or her) sinthome, an analysand needs, first, to recognize

463 Lacan writes, in Seminar XXIII, “Pourquoi Joyce est-il illisible ? Il faut tacher de s’imaginer pourquoi. C’est peut-être parce qu’il n’évoque en nous aucune sympathie. Mais quelque chose ne pourrait-il pas être suggère dans notre affaire par le fait, lui patent, qu’il a un ego d’une toute autre nature ?” (151) “Voilà exactement ce qui se passe, et où j’incarne l’ego comme correcteur du rapport manquant, soit ce qui, dans le cas de Joyce, ne noue pas borroméenement l’imaginaire à ce qui fait chaine de réel et d’inconscient. Par cet artifice d’écriture, se restitue, dirai-je le nœud borroméen” (152).
what in his symptom has been generated by the Other. It is only after this recognition that what is left can be taken as the *sinthome*, and not the symptom. In other words, the very possibility of identifying with one *sinthome* implies, first, the possibility for an analysand to be able to make a distinction between what belongs to the symptom (and the Other), and what belongs to the *sinthome* (and the One-Body). It thus implies, first, a form of exit from the *transferential unconscious*. Of course, one could argue that the psychotic structure presents itself as being immediately outside the transferential unconscious, and thus immediately identified with the *sinthome*. However, such an immediate relationship to the *sinthome*, argues Lacan, is also what makes it impossible, in case of psychosis, to learn how to have the right distance from it, and through this distance, to learn how to manipulate it.

A Step-stool for Mental Debility
If it is true to say that the late Lacan takes as its point of arrival the structure of psychosis (and not neurosis), it would be wrong to conclude that the late Lacan celebrates psychosis as such. On the contrary, Lacan wants to develop, through the notion of the *sinthome*, a form of psychoanalysis that could help the analysand, once he (or she) has isolated his *sinthome* from his symptom, to know how to deal with his *sinthome*, to know how to make the best use of it. This emphasis on manipulation is the direct consequence of the fact that the *sinthome* cannot be removed, or displaced, or reduced by the process of transference and interpretation. As part of the *Real unconscious*, the *sinthome* can at best be manipulated and put at the service of the
It is from this perspective that one can understand why the proper name James Joyce, in Lacan’s *Seminar XXIII*, designates a singularity that coincides with an extreme: the extreme of incarnating the symptom. To incarnate the symptom is the opposite of giving meaning to it, of reducing it to a form of the universal. Joyce, indeed, in his last book *Finnegans Wake*, managed to abstract his symptom from the system of interpretation through which he should have been understood. As such, Joyce stopped wanting to say anything and thus unhooked himself from the Other, and thus from meaning. And by doing this, Joyce showed the most fundamental relation that every speaking being has with language, i.e., a completely contingent and traumatic relationship to it. Nonetheless, Joyce managed to make out of this contingent and traumatic relation with language what Lacan called an *escabeau*, which is to say a step-stool or a stepladder for his own ego.

The concept of the *escabeau* (stepstool) is a concept that Lacan developed exclusively during his late teaching. An *escabeau* for Lacan is first something that one needs to create by taking as its point of departure its symptom, i.e., what affects the body beyond the conscious grasp that one can have on it. In other words, what interests Lacan in Joyce’s case, is the way in

464 Lacan writes, “En quoi l'artifice peut-il viser expressément ce qui se présente d'abord comme symptôme ? En quoi l'art, l'artisanat, peut-il déjouer, si l'on peut dire, ce qui s'impose du symptôme? A savoir, la vérité?” (22). “(...) là est l’artisan, en tant que par la conjonction de deux signifiants, il est capable de produire ce que j’ai appelé l’objet petit a” (23). “Tout le problème est là – comment un art peut-il viser de façon divinatoire à substantialiser le sinthome dans sa consistance, mais aussi bien dans son ex-sistence et dans son trou?” “On est responsable que dans la mesure de son savoir-faire” (61). “Qu'est-ce que c'est que le savoir-faire? C'est l'art, l'artifice, ce qui donne à l'art dont on est capable une valeur remarquable, parce qu'il n'y a pas d'Autre de l'Autre pour opérer le jugement dernier. Du moins est-ce moi qui l'énonce ainsi” (61). “Ceci implique, au grès de la pensée, que, en ce sens où responsabilité veut dire non-réponse ou réponse à côté, il n'y a de responsabilité que sexuelle, ce dont tout le monde, en fin de compte, a le sentiment. En revanche, ce que j'ai appelé le savoir-faire va bien au-delà, et y ajoute l'artifice – que nous imputons à Dieu tout à fait gratuitement, comme Joyce y insiste (...)” (64). “L'Autre de l'Autre réel, c'est-à-dire impossible, c'est l'idée que nous avons de l'artifice, en tant qu'il est un faire qui nous échappe, c'est-à-dire qui déborde de beaucoup la jouissance que nous en pouvons avoir. Cette jouissance tout à fait mince, c'est ce que nous appelons l'esprit” (64).
which he managed to make something out of what touched and affected his body. Joyce, to put it differently, helped Lacan to answer the following question: how can one make of something completely contingent and traumatic (such as the beating that Joyce received) what will remain, after his death, as a lesson that can potentially be of some interest for someone else. Commenting on this idea in his *Seminar, Detached Pieces*, Miller writes:

> How, from the singular event, from this contingent trauma, from this event which affects each speaking being in his singularity, to go about extracting something that can be valid as a lesson, and which will be valid for others, which they will take up, in ages to come, and potentially to infinity. How, from this misfortune, from this mediocre misfortune, to go about by making something that people have called beau and which is but *escabeau*.

(my translation, 92)

But to be able to extract something of value from a mediocre trauma, to be able to make something out of it, one has first to extract himself from the delusional meaning one attributed first to his symptom, in order to reach what is unreadable in it. Because it is only from this unreadable left over that one can start to create one own work.

To illustrate this idea one can use the very concept of the “pass” that Lacan invented to talk about the end of analysis. The “pass,” for the late Lacan, does not mark the end of a process but the moment when an analysand can start to do something with the unreadable remainders of his symptom. As such, the “pass” is not to be understood as an exit or as the mark of the end of a process of understanding or normalization but, quite on the contrary, as the development of a “knowing how to do” with what is unreadable and meaningless in one own symptom. In the
particular case of Lacan one can suggest that Lacan’s late teaching is “the pass” of the early Lacan in the sense that Lacan tried, within his late teaching, to do something with his own symptom—the Real. Lacan himself declared, in the first lesson of his Seminar XXI, that the “the non-duppe-errent” has to be seen as a “pass,” i.e. as what comes after “the end” or, as what comes to take the place of a “beyond” the end once one has already passed through the end. And this beyond is also what gives to what came before the end its proper importance. As such, the non-duppe-errent” designates first an “erre,” which is the space that can be still discovered once the process of propulsion has stopped. To put it differently, Lacan’s late teaching is what comes after the end of his first teaching (oriented towards the Symbolic and the process of meaning making), and what tries to elaborate a practical way to deal with what escapes the realm of truth.

As such, Lacan’s late emphasis on the Real is but an escabeau that tries to do something with the unreadable leftover from his first conceptual elaboration. This is why, to build an escabeau, one has to remain faithful to his singular mode of jouissance while being able to not let himself be ruled by it. And this is why the process of psychoanalysis offers itself first as a reduction of one’s mode of jouissance to a certain meaning. But this meaning should only be there to access what has no meaning within one’s symptom. For it is this leftover that presents what is the most singular and what it the most precious in one person. It is what makes of a person a unique individual and what can give to this person the occasion of making something out of this uniqueness. Commenting on this idea, Miller says:

This leftover is not the failure of psychoanalysis but is strictly speaking what constitutes your worth, if indeed you find out how to transfer it into the state of an oeuvre. It is
doubtless in this respect that everyone flounders, stumbles and hobbles along, but this is also what makes for the difference and nobility of each and every one of you. Lacan spoke of the bar on the S of his subject as a trait of noble bastardy. (96)

And it is this “noble bastardy,” I would say, that makes the late teaching of Lacan a very Queer one, since everyone flounders and stumbles on the ground of each one’s nobility.

From Interpretation to Astonishment
But if one gives to psychoanalysis such a goal, what then is at stake in psychoanalysis is no longer a question of deciphering the symptom through the process of interpretation, nor a question of reintegrating it within a certain Hystory, but a question of going beyond any form of intentionality—and thus beyond any sense of destiny or fate for the analysand—in order to recover the notion of the sinthome, the escabeau and the One-Body. But how can one learn how to manipulate his sinthome if the very “active” dimension of analysis—transference—is gone?

As I already suggested, it is by substituting for the notion of interpretation the one of suggestion, and then the one of suggestion with the one of astonishment [sidération] and in this way the late Lacan tried to solve this dilemma. Suggestion and astonishment are, indeed, the only two possible forms of “communication” left between an analysand and an analyst once the transference has disappeared. Astonishment [sidération], compared to suggestion, could even be said to be superior to suggestion inasmuch as it implies a form of “annihilation” of the process of understanding within the analysand and, thus, a clear and complete exit from the transferential

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465 Lacan writes, in Seminar XXIII, “(…) en fin de compte, nous n'avons que ça, l'équivoque, comme arme contre le sinthome. (...) En effet, c'est uniquement par l'équivoque que l'interprétation opère. Il faut qu'il y ait quelque chose dans le signifiant qui résonne” (17).
unconscious. This exit from the transferential unconscious by astonishment is not deprived, however, of any direction or orientation, quite the contrary. As Miller puts it, the exit from the transferential unconscious, in order not to become the equivalent of a fall into a state of psychosis, needs to remain oriented towards the pleasure principle, and not towards the death drive and its excess of jouissance. Miller said,

It is instructive to notice that Lacan brings back here the principle of pleasure, and that he attributes to it a place at this stage of the One. This principle, almost animalistic, this *acephalic* principle—if one defines it as a way to suffer as little as possible—is what never ceases to happen, not even a single second. One can even say that it is the only law at the level of the *sinthome* (*Le tout dernier Lacan*, Lesson 9, my translation).

In other words, at the level of the *sinthome* and the *Real unconscious*, the ultimate goal of psychoanalysis is to constantly bring back, by using suggestion and astonishment [sidération], the *sinthome* on the side of the pleasure principle. Thus, one could say that while the early Lacan stands on the side of a Being and posits all the notions that structure Being: i.e. the Other, the Name-of-the-Father, Meaning, Transference, Desire, etc.; the late Lacan stands on the side of the One and posits all the notion that goes with it: *Lalangue*, the *One-Body*, Jouissance, Solitude, Matter, etc.466 And one could also add that if Lacan ends his teaching on the side of the One it is because, contrary to the “lying truth” of Being, the materiality of the *One-Body* (or of *lalangue*)

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466 There is thus not an opposition between the early and the late Lacan but a relation of implication. It is inasmuch as Lacan's early teaching made of the articulation between the Imaginary and the Symbolic a problem to be analyzed, rather than a natural point of departure (as was the case in Freud's Oedipus complex), that the late Lacan can think the ex-sistence of the Real. In other words, and contrary to what might be tempting to think, Lacan's category of the Real is not a category that precedes logically or supports empirically the articulation between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, but a category that comes to existence only as the result of the prior construction of the articulation of the two others.
is incapable of lying or, even more to the point, because matter ("materiality") is what is the most opposed to the very possibility of lying. However, this opposition between the early Lacan and the late Lacan is also what makes the late teaching of Lacan appear to be full of paradoxes which, eventually, makes psychoanalysis itself looks like a “scam” (une escroquerie). But those paradoxes are not the product of any inconsistency on the behalf of Lacan himself. Quite the contrary, they spread out from a single antinomy: the antinomy between the end goal of psychoanalysis and the way in which it is being practiced.467

IV. PSYCHOANALYSIS AGAINST PSYCHOANALYSIS

There is an absolute antinomy between the goal of psychoanalysis, which coincides with the entrance in the Real unconscious and the daily practice of psychoanalysis, which condemns the analysand to remain trapped with the dream of an endless pursuit of a truth that can only be half said. In some ways, one could summarize this antinomy through the idea that psychoanalysis is a practice that aims at exposing the semblant that truth is—including the semblant that the practice of psychoanalysis itself is. And when it reaches this stage, psychoanalysis ceases to be psychoanalysis as we know it and becomes what Jacques-Alain Miller calls: absolute psychoanalysis.468 And this absolute psychoanalysis is but the logical (although paradoxical) conclusion that his previous stand on psychoanalysis obliged Lacan to reach. It is psychoanalysis against psychoanalysis: the Real against the Symbolic, the sinhōme against the symptom,


468 See, Miller, Jacques-Alain. “Pure Psychoanalysis, Applied Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy,” in lacanian ink, #20. In this text, Miller develops all the antinomies that spread out of the confrontation between pure psychoanalysis and applied psychoanalysis.
astonishment [sidération] against interpretation, the One all alone against the Hysterics.

A Debasement of Meaning
In the realm of absolute psychoanalysis it is the very core of what supports any kind of semblant that is under attack, which is to say the very concept of meaning. Anything that presents itself as having a meaning is immediately suspected to be of the order of a semblant, to be of the order of the process of hystoricisation and, as such, to be part of what the late Lacan calls the “lying truth.” In other words, within absolute psychoanalysis there is an equivalence between the idea of semblant and the idea of meaning: everything that is of the order of meaning is but a semblant.

Of course, such a stand on meaning makes the late teaching of Lacan a very postmodern doctrine. However, differing from many postmodern philosophers, such as Georges Bataille or Jacques Derrida, for example, the late Lacan did not only attack meaning and the notion of semblant as such, but he did it in the name of the Real. It is, indeed, because the Real excludes meaning that meaning can be equated by Lacan, no matter what kind of meaning is being elaborated, to a semblant. However, the antinomy between the goal and the practice of psychoanalysis raises a fundamental question: what can guarantee that the Real is not itself a product of the semblant? Or worst, even, how can one be sure that the Real is not, in Lacan’s late teaching, itself a semblant?469 To escape this question, one has to be able to locate how the Real can really be emptied out from any meaning—even the negative meaning of what excludes meaning. In other words, it is a question of not reifying the Real as what has the meaning of not

\footnote{469 Lacan said, in \textit{Seminar XXIII}, “Là se soulève la question de la critique du vrai. Qu'est-ce que le vrai sinon le vrai réel? Et comment distinguer le vrai réel du faux?” (85)}
having any meaning and, consequently, of maintaining the Real as a constantly moving target.

The Two False Meanings of the Real
The most obvious temptation to attribute a meaning to the Real is to associate it to the One, and perhaps even more to the One-Body. Of course, some links exists between the Real and the One-Body, just as there exists some links between the process of meaning making and the Other. But it is precisely by disconnecting the two, and at a more fundamental level, by disabling any possibility of connection between one signifier (S₁) to another signifier (S₂) that one enters into the domain of absolute psychoanalysis. In the domain of absolute psychoanalysis, which itself is the product of the radical disconnection between signifiers that marks the entrance into the Real unconscious, the One-Body should be seen as a remainder: as what is left once the disconnection has been accomplished. In this sense, the One-Body is the ultimate station before reaching the absolute non-meaning of the Real. It is, in a way, the ultimate thing that ex-sists at the level of the Real unconscious. Even more to the point, the One-Body is the only thing, in the late Lacan, that subsists outside meaning and semblant. The difficulty, here, is to be able to use meaning as an instrument in order to go beyond meaning. It is thus a question of forcing meaning to go beyond meaning and thus to force the practice of psychoanalysis, which is anchored in meaning and interpretation, to aim at a beyond meaning, i.e. to aim at the Real outside meaning that Lacan, as early as the elaboration of his graph of desire, named: S (A).471


The matheme $S(\mathbb{A})$ is the way in which Lacan writes the absence of an Other of the Other in his first teaching, which is to say the idea that there is something always interrupted within the connections between one signifier and another. Even more to the point, $S(\mathbb{A})$ formalizes the fact that there is a knowledge ($S_2$) that is missing in the Other which makes of the “Che Voi” (the question What do you want?) that the subject addresses to the Other (at the very top of the Graph of Desire) a question without any answer. As such, $S(\mathbb{A})$ can be said to represent a subject facing the absence of the answer of the Other, i.e. its absence or disappearance. Lacan summarized this situation in a formula: “I am waiting, but I am not hoping for anything to come”. When a subject does not hope, or long for any form of answer to come from the Other, when his $S_1$ does not expect to be completed by the $S_2$ of the Other, such a subject is then bound to constantly start anew and fall short in anything he wants to do. Such a situation, remarks Miller, is what can explain why Lacan kept starting anew his own teaching at least every year, and even sometimes from one week to another. Likewise, it is the reason why Lacan claimed that the “pass” needs to always be retaken and reaffirmed.

Psychoanalysis: A Truthful Scam
To extract himself from this endless cycle, Lacan advanced the thesis, in his Seminar XXV, \textit{Le moment de conclure} (1977-1978) that psychoanalysis is a scam that is nonetheless truthful when
it comes to the signifier.\textsuperscript{472} In other words, psychoanalysis becomes more than a scam when it
manages to produce an effect of signification that is not of the order of \textit{semblant}, but that is
aiming at the Real. To understand how such an effect of signification is possible, one has to
distinguish two modes of relations between the Symbolic and the Real. The first relation is the
one that grounds the position of science and which presupposes that \textit{the Symbolic is in the Real},
which is to say that there is an overlapping between the Symbolic and the Real. Such a position
can be summarized by the Galilean formula: “Nature is written in mathematical language”. The
second relation is the one that Lacan develops in his late teaching and that denies such a
possibility. It is a position that aims at reducing the first position to the level of a \textit{semblant}, which
is to say to make of the discourse of science itself a “lying truth.”\textsuperscript{473} To this “lying truth” of the
Symbolic in the Real, Lacan opposes, in his late teaching, what is \textit{symbolically Real}, which is to
say the idea that there is something Real, something that does not lie like anxiety within the
Symbolic. The Real within the Symbolic is what the first Lacan in \textit{Seminar X, Anxiety}
(1962-1963) called \textit{object a}, and which he associated with the affect of anxiety. But it is also at
the same place that the last Lacan situates the symptom as what does not lie, and what does not

\textsuperscript{472} Lacan said in \textit{Seminar XXIV}, “Ce que j’ai à vous dire je vais vous le dire, c’est que la psychanalyse est à prendre
au sérieux bien que ça ne soit pas une science. C’est même pas une science du tout. Parce que l’ennuyeux, comme
l’a montré surabondamment un nommé Karl Popper, c’est que ce n’est pas une science parce que c’est irréfutable.
C’est une pratique. C’est une pratique qui durera ce qu’elle durera. C’est une pratique de bavardage. Aucun
bavardage n’est sans risques. Déjà le mot « bavardage » implique quelque chose. Ce que ça implique est
suffisamment dit par le mot « bavardage ». Ce qui veut dire qu’il n’y a pas que les phrases - c’est-à-dire ce qu’on
appelle les propositions - qui impliquent des conséquences, les mots aussi. « Bavardage » met la parole au rang de
baver ou de postillonner. Elle la réduit à la sorte d’éclaboussement qui en résulte. Voilà. Ça n’empêche pas que
l’analyse a des conséquences : elle dit quelque chose” (Seminar XXV, lesson one).

\textsuperscript{473} “Je voudrais vous faire remarquer que ce qu’on appelle « le raisonnable » est un fantasme. C’est tout à fait
manifeste dans le début de la science. La géométrie euclidienne a tous les caractères du fantasme. Un fantasme n’est
pas un rêve, c’est une aspiration. L’idée de la ligne, de la \textit{ligne droite} par exemple, c’est manifestement un fantasme.
Par bonheur, on en est sorti. Je veux dire que la topologie a restitué ce qu’on doit appeler \textit{le tissage}. (…) Pour que
l’Imaginaire s’exfolie, il n’y a qu’à le réduire au fantasme. L’important est que la science elle-même n’est qu’un
fantasme et que l’idée d’un réveil soit à proprement parler impensable” (Seminar XXV, Lesson one).
The symptom, in Lacan’s last teaching, is what keeps a meaning in the Real. An illustration of this idea can be found in the fact that an interpretation, which belongs to the order of the “lying truth,” can only have an impact on what in the symptom is of the order of the semblant, and not on what is of the order of the Real. In other words, what is symbolically Real within a symptom is what keeps its meaning beyond any effects of interpretation. It is what remains once the symptom has been stripped bare by the process of interpretation of all its alien elements.

Poetry as Interpretation
If poetry is elevated by the late Lacan as the one and only interpretation that can touch the Real, it is because only poetry is able to produce an effect of meaning and a hole effect in meaning. In other words, poetry uses meaning and its “lying truth” to go towards the hole of the Real, and not the semblant of meaning. It is because poetry uses meaning as a way to go beyond meaning that it can poke a hole in the Symbolic and access, to a certain extent, the Real. The way in which poetry obtains such an effect is related to a form of disconnection between two signifiers (S₁ and S₂). In the case of poetry, indeed, S₁ is followed by a S₂ but the S₂ is not the one that should follow the S₁. It is an inappropriate S₂. It is as if the S₂, instead of producing an effect of meaning, was opening up two new possibilities of interpretation. This effect is what Lacan called the imaginary Symbolic, which is to say a Symbolic that is included in the Imaginary (which explains why poetry can be seen as “torturing” the regular structure of speech).
Poetry is what shows the connection between meaning and the Imaginary insofar as it goes beyond what is falsely taken as “reality” in common sense (since this “reality” is only a reified Imaginary), which is to say that poetry reveals how common sense is made out of an Imaginary that has been imposed, at a political level, on the lawlessness of the Real. This is why Lacan can even go as far as saying that poetry is linked to truth in the exact measure that it makes, through the manipulation that it operates on language, its Imaginary root visible. To go even further, Miller says that common sense is grounded on a symbolic Imaginary, i.e., on a Symbolic dominated by the common use of language. And it is insofar as the Symbolic is dominated by the Imaginary that meaning can be generated and communicated. Reciprocally, it is insofar as the Imaginary is dominated by the Symbolic that truth can be accessed as what goes beyond meaning. Of course, the notion of truth, here, does not refer to the notion of a supposed adequatio between what is, and what is represented, but to the “truth” revealed by the practice of psychoanalysis, which is to say the truth that Lacan formulated in his now famous formula, “there is no relationship between the sexes.”

This conception of poetry is what can give us an idea about how interpretation should proceed when it aims at the Real. Normally, interpretation, as Lacan defined it in his Seminar V, Les Formations de l'inconscient (1957-1958), aims at helping the patient to make a distinction between Demand and Desire, which is to say at substituting to the complaint of Demand, the recognition of Desire and of object a as what causes desire. But this form of interpretation can only work within the paradigm of the Symbolic where the subject is defined as represented by a

signifier (S1) for another signifier (S2). As opposed to such a way to practice interpretation, the kind of interpretation that is required within the late teaching of Lacan needs to go beyond meaning, and thus, beyond any value.

The notion of value is irremediably linked to the notion of usage and exchange. To attribute value to something is always to measure its use-value within a given system of exchange. Within the late Lacan, the interpretation cannot have a value inasmuch as it should be disconnected from any form of exchange, from any form of friendship. Nonetheless, the act of interpretation needs to keep its usefulness, which is to say needs to have an impact, in one way or another on the symptom. As such, the notion of usefulness needs to be redefined beyond the notion of exchange (outside a relation of twos), which is to say, as something absolutely adjusted and singularized for the analysand.

To Manipulate, not to Interpret
In order to give a new definition of interpretation, Lacan proposed, during his late teaching, a new way to approach the articulation between the notion of interpretation and poetry in order to think anew the relationship between language (as a written form) and speech (as a system of communication). While the notion of speech, as well as the notion of communication were absolutely central to the “early” and the “later” Lacan, it is the notion of writing that comes at the fore during his late teaching. Lacan’s radical new approach of the notion of writing emerged at the moment when he started to use the writing of the Borromean chain. The specificity of the

475 Lacan defines the signifier in his Seminar XX, thus: “le signifiant, c’est ce qui représente le sujet pour un autre signifiant.”
writing of the Borromean chain is that it is completely detached from speech. In Lacan’s sense, one could say that it is a form of writing that gives a materiality to the immateriality of speech. It is, as such, radically removed from any form of utterances. In other words, while writing is generally seen as a materialization of speech—a process that Lacan describes in his text “Lituraterre” as a condensation of signifiers that could be compared to the traces that rain leaves on the earth\textsuperscript{476}—the Borromean writing is more like a mix of logic and drawing. The writing of the Borromean knot is a mix a logic and drawing to the extent that Lacan uses them to show what is possible, and what is impossible regarding the nature and the kind of manipulation that the Borromean knots allow. The term logic, in this specific Lacanian sense, becomes thus the science of what is impossible, which makes of it, adds Miller at the very end of his \textit{Seminar}, something like “the science of the Real.”

The new notion of interpretation, as Lacan develops it in his last teaching, has to be related to this new form of writing inasmuch as it requires a form of manipulation, as well as a sense of what is possible, and what is impossible regarding one specific analysand. In other words, the act of interpretation becomes, within the last teaching of Lacan, an art of manipulation which operates through the practice of equivocation, which is to say through a subtle dialectic of effects of meaning which generates within the analysand a hole in his knowledge.\textsuperscript{477} Of course, underlines Miller, a difference needs to be made between the notion of equivocation as Lacan

\begin{footnotes}
\item[477] See Lacan, “L’Etourdit”, in \textit{Autres Ecrits}, pp. 449-496. See also \textit{Séminaire XXV, Le moment de conclure} (1978-1979), when Lacan said, “Ce que j’ai appelé le rhéteur qu’il y a dans l’analyse - c’est l’analyste dont il s’agit - le rhéteur n’opère que par suggestion. Il suggère, c’est le propre du rhéteur, il n’impose pas d’aucune façon quelque chose qui aurait consistance et c’est même pour cela que j’ai désigné de l’« ex » ce qui ne se supporte que d’ex-sister. Comment faut-il que l’analyste opère pour être un convenable rhéteur ? C’est bien là que nous arrivons à une ambiguïté.” (lesson one)
\end{footnotes}
defined it in his early teaching (i.e., as a way to produce some echoes or resonances within the
analysand’s speech), and the ways in which the same notion is supposed to produce holes in the
analysand’s knowledge, i.e. interpretations that resonate not at the level of meaning but at the
level of the body. In the latter, the concept of interpretation is related to Lacan’s new definition of
the drive in his *Seminar XXIII, The Sinthome* when he said: “Drives are the echoes in a body of
the fact that there is a something being said,” which is a way to emphasize the impact of speech
at the strict level of the body. In other words, while Lacan’s early approach of interpretation
posits meaning as the third category that links the body and speech, the later approach to
interpretation posits the Real as the third category that links the body and speech.

The notion of the Real, at this late stage of Lacan’s thinking, relates to the notion of the
hole in the Symbolic, i.e., to what is of the order of the Real within the Symbolic. The notion of
meaning, on the other hand, relates to what is of the order of the Imaginary within the Symbolic,
while the notion of jouissance ends up being defined as what floats between what is Real in the
Symbolic, and what is Imaginary within the Symbolic, engendering the question that haunts the
late teaching of Lacan: how can interpretation have an effect on jouissance? Through this
question, it is, once again, the status of the unconscious that becomes paradoxical. How is it
possible to be sure that an analysand is no longer in the transferential unconscious, but that he
has reached the *Real unconscious*? Is the difference perceivable at the level of the body, i.e. in
the ways in which the resonance of an interpretation takes place not at the level of meaning, but
at the level of the body? And if it does takes place at the level of the body, how is it possible to
explain how an effect of meaning can affect the *One-body* beyond the Imaginary echoes that an
interpretation can produce in it?
CONCLUSION: THE LATE LACAN OR THE IMPOSSIBLE AWAKENING

To conclude, one could say that in Lacan’s last teaching, it is the very idea of an awakening (which was associated in the early Lacan with the moment of the traversal of the fantasy) that becomes a dream.\footnote{Lacan said, in his \textit{Seminar XXV, Le moment de conclure}, “L’important est que la science elle-même n’est qu’un fantasme et que l’idée d’un réveil soit à proprement parler impensable” (first lesson).} The idea that the awakening is impossible implies that, in one way or another, it is impossible to extract oneself from meaning and with meaning from the “lying truth” that it implies. To put it otherwise, every speaking being in Lacan’s last approach of psychoanalysis is locked within a process of meaning making that aims at getting outside meaning while this “getting outside” is, strictly speaking, impossible. This impossibility is what makes, at a fundamental level, every speaking being not a tragic being, as Freud thought, but a comical one, as in Bataille’s thinking.\footnote{Lacan said, in his \textit{Seminar XXV, Le moment de conclure}, “La vie n’est pas tragique, elle est comique et c’est pourtant assez curieux que Freud n’ait rien trouvé de mieux que de désigner du \textit{complexe d’Œdipe}, c’est-à-dire d’une tragédie, ce dont il s’agissait dans l’affaire. On ne voit pas pourquoi Freud a désigné - alors qu’il pouvait prendre un chemin plus court - a désigné d’autre chose que d’une comédie ce à quoi il avait affaire, ce à quoi il avait affaire dans ce rapport qui lie le \textit{Symbolique}, l’\textit{Imaginaire} et le \textit{Réel}” (first lesson).} But the comical aspect of every speaking being is not linked to the discovery of the void, as Bataille, but to the fact that there is no way for a speaking being to find a way out of his \textit{sinthome}, which is to say a way out of what, in his \textit{One-Body}, is not touchable or modifiable through the process of interpretation. The only thing that can be done, at the level of the \textit{sinthome}, is to know why one is entangled in it. This is why the notion of knowledge, in Lacan’s late teaching, is itself degraded to the level of a fantasy.

However, it is precisely to go beyond this fantasy that the late Lacan invented the writing of the Borromean chain as what makes it impossible to reduce the Real to its Symbolic representation, or the Symbolic to the Imaginary of common sense. Reciprocally, the writing of
the Borromean chain is what is supposed to make it possible to imagine differently the Real since the Borromean chains, as concrete objects, do have certain properties that can be explored and known through their careful manipulation. As such, the Borromean knots are, for the late Lacan, a way to materialize the operation of thinking while forcing the imagination to go beyond the ways in which it is normally used to imagine what is. Lacan says “The consistency, for the speaking being, for the being-that-speaks, it is what is fabricated, what is invented. For instance, it is the knot inasmuch as one has braided it” (95). In other words, Lacan did not try, in his late teaching, unlike Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in The Anti-Oedipus, to advocate for a complete disappearance of the function of the father, and thus of the function of stitching. On the contrary, he tried to invent a new form of thinking, beyond the Imaginary, that could keep the three registers stitched (and thus not in a state of psychosis) without having to reduce such a stitching to the “psychic reality” of religion or patriarchy.

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Without a sadistic understanding of an incontestably thundering and torrential nature, there could be no revolutionaries, there could only be a revolting utopian sentimentality.\textsuperscript{481}

Georges Bataille

I have already referred to what it is that arouses Freud’s horror, arouses the horror of the civilized man he essentially was. It derives from the evil in which he does not hesitate to locate man’s deepest heart.\textsuperscript{482}

Jacques Lacan

A Perverse Fascination for Death and Jouissance

For the sake of spending a night with a woman, no one would be mad enough to accept an outcome that would be fatal to him, since it isn’t a question of combat but of death by hanging. For Kant, the answer to this question is in no doubt. (…) But it is important to note that one only has to make a conceptual shift and move the night spent with the lady from the category of pleasure to that of jouissance, given that jouissance implies precisely to accept death—and there’s no need of sublimation—for the example to be ruined. In other words, it is enough for jouissance to be a form of evil, for the whole


thing to change its character completely, and for the meaning of the moral law itself to be completely changed. Anyone can see that if the moral law is, in effect, capable of playing some role here, it is precisely as a support for the jouissance involved; it is so that the sin becomes what Saint Paul calls inordinately sinful. That’s what Kant on this occasion simply ignores. (Lacan, SVII, 189)

To the simple question “Is sex worth dying for?” Kant’s answer is clear. No rational man, applying to his action the moral maxim of his pure practical reason, would be willing to die for a good lay. Who would be crazy enough, indeed, to give up his entire life for one night of sexual pleasure? No rational subject would do such a thing since it would be irrational, against common sense. Nonetheless, according to Lacan, it would suffice to substitute for the idea of pleasure attached to the one of “spending the night with a woman,” the one of jouissance for the whole example to be ruined. Of course, the word jouissance, here, should not be approached from a legal or philosophical perspective, but from a strictly psychoanalytic point of view.

While the notion of jouissance, when approached from a legal and philosophical perspective, represents a strictly negative notion—what needs to be limited since it has no utility and no values; the notion of jouissance, when approached from a psychoanalytic point of view, represents an imperative to enjoy.483 Jouissance, from a psychoanalytic perspective, does not

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483 Lacan defines, in his Seminar XX, Encore (1972-1973), the notion of jouissance, from the point of view of the Law, as follow. “J’éclaircirai d’un mot le rapport du droit et de la jouissance. L’usufruit – c’est une notion de droit, n’est-ce pas ? – réunit en un mot ce que j’ai déjà évoqué dans mon séminaire sur l’éthique, à savoir la différence entre l’utile et la jouissance (11)” “L’usufruit veut dire qu’on peut jouir de ses moyens, mais qu’il ne faut pas les gaspiller. Quand on a l’usufruit d’un héritage, on peut en jouir à condition de ne pas trop en user. C’est bien là qu’est l’essence du droit – répartir, distribuer, rétribuer ce qu’il en est de la jouissance (11). “Qu’est-ce que c’est que la jouissance ? Elle se réduit ici à n’être qu’une instance négative. La jouissance c’est ce qui ne sert à rien” (11). Opposed to this definition of jouissance in terms of « usufruct », Lacan defines the notion of jouissance from the point of view of psychoanalysis, thus: “Je pointe la réserve qu’implique le champ du droit-à-la-jouissance. Le droit n’est pas le devoir. Rien ne force personne à jouir, sauf le surmoi. Le surmoi, c’est l’impératif de la jouissance – jouis ! C’est bien la que se trouve le point tournant qu’interroge le discours psychanalytique” (11).
designate the satisfaction of the drives under the supervision of the pleasure principle but, precisely, the kind of deviation and excess that happens to the drives once they have been impacted by language. In other words, jouissance is what happens to the drives when a certain chain of signifiers comes to structure them at an unconscious level and requires then to obtain satisfaction according to these new unconscious coordinates. This is why the notion of jouissance is primarily linked to the notion of the super-ego for Lacan. Jouissance is the name of what can force an individual to enjoy, even when to enjoy means to suffer! Such is the paradox that lies at the very heart of the notion of jouissance, and thus at the very heart of the moral subject too since it makes of jouissance, just like of Kant’s moral maxim, the heir of the super-ego. This is why also Kant's example, once approached from the perspective of jouissance, comes up short since the idea of “spending one night with a lady” is not an idea that could be evaluated rationally, but an idea that imposes itself on the subject of jouissance as a categorical imperative, just as Kant’s moral maxim imposes itself on the moral subject.

A Tragic Disdain For Love
Unfortunately, it is precisely this paradox that many recent queer scholars, belonging to what Jack Halberstam has called “the Anti-Social Turn in queer studies,” have clearly overlooked when they used Lacan’s notion of jouissance to argue in favor of their right to “opt out,” which is to say when they argued against the lgbtiq++ movement and its effort to gain more rights for gay and lesbian communities, in favor of their right to “die for a good lay.”

The best representative of this position is Lee Edelman’s *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. In this book, Edelman rejects all the fantasies about a better future, all the fantasies of progress that supports the development of neo-liberalism and the mainstream of lgbtq++ identity politics. Edelman calls the hope that supports this position, “reproductive futurism,” a hope which itself subordinates the vision of the future to a set of values that Edelman summarizes in the notion of "reproductive futurism," which is to say a vision of the future centered around the figure of the child. For Edelman, the point at stake is to make visible that queer theorists who want to escape this vision of the future, which is entirely subordinated to a certain vision of the common good, need to posit a sense of ethics that departs radically from any categories of right and wrong. Likewise, Michael Warner’s “*Why Gay men are Having Risky Sex*” (2003), Leo Bersani *Is the Rectum a Grave* (2010), Lynne Huffer *Are the Lips a Grave?* (2013), or Scott O’Hara “*Safety First,*” to only mention the most important of them, have all argued, in one way or another, that to remain true to the radical non-normativity defended by queer theory one has to defend the idea that “sex is worth dying for” against any other form of queer “normalization.485 Foucault himself, who had unprotected sex many times in his life and who died out of AIDS, wrote in his *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*:

The Faustian pact, whose temptation has been instilled in us by deployment of sexuality, is now as follows: to exchange life in its entirety for sex itself, for the truth and the

sovereignty of sex. *Sex is worth dying for.* It is in this (strictly historical) sense that sex is indeed imbedded with the death instinct. When a long while ago the West discovered love, it bestowed on it a value high enough to make death acceptable; nowadays it is sex that claims this equivalence, the highest of all. (Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 156)

If (same) sex is worth dying for today, according to Foucault, it is because it has come to occupy—at least for a part of the libertines, the dandy, and the queer community today—the place that love formerly occupied in the West.

Love, in the tradition of courtly love, for example, was the reason why people would put their life at risk and accept a premature and unjust death. It was also the main reason why people would suspend their personal quest for pleasure and impose on themselves the abstract demands of an Other. Finally, love was also, in its most ravishing forms, what was capable of undoing the self-mastery of the rational subject, what was capable, in a word, of a radical subversion of all the values attached to the rational subject. But love, as Foucault points out in his text, is not considered subversive anymore, just as it was not considered so during the 18th century among libertines. Many feminist and queer scholars, as a result, have launched a war on love and put in its place sex and, perhaps even more than sex, the experience of perversion. Leo Bersani and Adam Philips, for example, in *Intimacies* (2010), argue that the potentially masochist jouissance contained in sex (and especially in the position of the one who is being penetrated) is the only

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486 See, for example, Cusset, Catherine. "Editor's Preface: the Lesson of Libertinage." *Yale French Studies,* 94 (1998): 1. Print. In this essay, Cusset suggests that “the opposite of libertinage is love, as a deep, long-lasting sentiment.”
true force that can perform the task of undoing the coherent-self and is, as such, the one and only true subversive experience that should be not only defended, but promoted as the only truly non-normative and thus subversive way to think a defiant subject. This is why sex, and more broadly perversion, has come to occupy such an important position within a large part of contemporary queer theory. It has even become, for a scholar like Cindy Patton, the center of what queer defiant and non-normative agency is.487

Of course, from the perspective of capitalism and patriarchy, it is better that you are married than you cruise sex clubs until 4am. Marriage, as such, is the oldest institution that was created to channel sexual energy into specific pathways in order to protect the economic order by submitting sexuality and jouissance to the “performance principle” that is guiding the system of neo-liberalism. Foucault, in The Birth of Biopolitics also saw in marriage a biopolitical tool used by power to use sexuality as a way to control the unruliness of jouissance, to channel it in order to put it at the service of the community, and not at the service of the individual.488 Laura Kipnis, in Against Love (2003), suggests that within a neo-liberal context, one has to work on his marriage, on his sex-life, as one has to work to make money since marriage is an investment that requires work, like everything else.489 As such, marriage is the negation of jouissance and its instant reward. Kipnis also argues that the ideology of romantic love that supports the ideology of marriage is what has created, in the first place, “the modern notion of the soul,” and with the


notion of the soul, the submission of the one that loves to a series of images or ideals that reinforce its submission to the power in place. To love, according to Kipnis, is always to love according to certain idealized images that have certain values on the neo-liberal market.

Similarly, Jessica Benjamin, in *The Bonds of Love* (2006), argues that love, in a patriarchal context, is nothing but a tool of subordination used by patriarchal men to keep women in a vulnerable and masochist position. This is why the “anti-social turn” in queer studies has promoted the notion of jouissance and the death drive (and not the notions of desire and love) in order to maintain, within the field of queer theory, a radical non-normative orientation.

However, one could argue, as Slavoj Zizek does in *Neighbors and Other Monsters* that, today, we are in fact constantly “bombarded from all sides by the different versions of the super-ego injunction, “Enjoy,”” (52) which means that compared to a prior stage of capitalism, neo-liberalism does not repress jouissance or sexuality as such but, on the contrary, uses it to increase the productivity of its workers, or to create new markets. As long as jouissance or sexuality is contained with the boundaries of a certain kind of “sur-plus-jouissance,” as Lacan has it, jouissance is valued as something "good" and, even, as one of the motors of late capitalism. To take only the example of the porno industry, it has become quite clear that neo-liberalism uses

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492 Lacan, in *Seminar XVI* writes: “Le discours détient les moyens de jouir en tant qu’il implique le sujet. Il n’y aurait aucune raison de sujet, au sens où l’on dit raison d’État, s’il n’y avait au marché de l’Autre ce corrélatif, qu’un plus-de-jouir s’établisse qui est capté par certains. Démontrer comment le plus-de-jouir tient à l’énonciation, qu’il est produit par le discours, et apparaît comme un effet, exigerait sans doute un discours assez poussé. Mais aussi bien n’est-ce pas là chose si nouvelle à vos oreilles si vous m’avez lu, car c’est l’objet de mon écrit *Kant avec Sade*. La démonstration y est faite de la totale réduction du plus-de-jouir à l’acte d’appliquer sur le sujet ce qu’est le terme *a* du fantasme par quoi le sujet peut être posé comme cause-de-soi dans le désir” (48-49).
libido itself, with its polymorphous perversity, to fuel new porno markets. As long as the perversity of the drives does not threaten directly the lives of others, it is used as a potential "niche" to create new products, new consumers, new markets, and why not, new addictions! Therefore, one can wonder if such an elevation of the category of unsafe sex, and most of the time through this category, of every other perverse (BDSM) or kinky practices, as the true category capable of subverting the notion of self-hood, does not hide a profound misunderstanding of the psychoanalytic notions of jouissance and perversion.

Consequently, the goal of this epilogue is to provide a critique of the false usage of the notion of jouissance that the “anti-social turn,” in the contemporary field of “queer theory,” has propagated. To do so, the chapter proceeds as follow. It starts by showing how Freud, in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1931), after having isolated at the heart of the human mind a sadistic component, used it to justify, in a very Christian way, why civilization was actually in need of returning in a masochist way this violence onto each of its member so that civilization would not to be in constant danger of disappearing. The chapter then shows how Georges Bataille, through his use of Sade’s work, foreshadowed, in many ways, the “anti-social” position defended by Edelman, while already pointing at some of its inner paradoxes. Finally, I show how Bataille’s stand against morality, in the name of sadism, furnished the urtext upon which Lacan built his own critique of perversion, and then his own conception of ethics. Lacan’s ethics is an ethics that is, at the same time, an ethics that takes into account jouissance and its ties to the death drive, and which is thus in agreement with the non-normative goal of gender and queer studies. But it is also an ethics that is capable of “limiting” the perversity and the morbidity

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contained in jouissance by grounding the subject in an experience of love and desire that implies the existence of the Other—even if degraded at the level of a semblant.

I. IS MASOCHISM A NECESSITY? FREUD’S DIAGNOSTIC OF CIVILIZATION

Freud, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, argues that the main problem that civilization is facing is to know how to put the energy of the libido not at the service of a restricted community of lovers—which eventually becomes what isolates individuals from one another—but to put it at the service of a larger community. It is thus a question of knowing how to derive some energy from love and sexuality (which is at the service of the individual or at the service of the community of lovers), in order to put it at the service of society and its larger network of sociality.

A Desire for Aggression
A society could not resist if it was only grounded on utility and reason. It would be wiped away by the strength of the drives and their autistic dimension. It is thus, according to Freud, an absolute necessity for civilization to be able to turn some of the energy of the libido into the ground of an extended form of friendship, that is, to turn a part of the libido into something that can be used to enlarge the social bond. Freud writes: “The masses of men must be bound to one another at a libidinal level, necessity alone, the advantage of common work, would not hold them together. The natural instinct of aggressiveness in man, the hostility of each one against all and of
all against each one, opposes the program of civilization” (102). What opposes such a view, and more so the possibility of using the libido to indifferently “love one’s neighbor” is that there are variations in one’s neighbor appreciation of what is good and what is evil. Even more so, there is, within one’s neighbor a form of wickedness that is inescapable, and that Freud called a desire for aggression. Freud writes:

The bit of truth behind all this—one so eagerly denied—is that men are not gentle, friendly creatures wishing for love, who simply defend themselves if they are attacked, but that a powerful measure of desire for aggression has to be reckoned as part of their instinctual endowment. The result is that their neighbor is to them not only a possible helper or sexual object, but also a temptation to them to gratify their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without recompense, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him. (85)

If it is impossible to love one’s neighbor, for Freud, it is because there is, in human beings, a desire for aggression. This desire for aggression, that Freud called the death instinct in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), is also what is at the center of Sade’s vision of sexuality, and what is used to think the ethical problem anew by Bataille and Lacan. How is it possible to love

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494 One could remark, here, that the way in which Freud is problematizing the articulation between love and sociality is the reverse of what Bataille will do in Eroticism or in The Moral of the Summit! What Bataille wants, is to use the energy contained in the community of lovers in order to think of an experience that goes beyond the experience of the ego, an experience that breaks the solitude of each lover’s ego through the intensity of their encounter. It is thus an experience that goes back toward the primitive affective ego described by Freud at the opening of his book. And not the product of the secondary ego. What Freud wants, on the contrary, is to avoid this situation. And in order to avoid this situation, he wants to use the extra amount of energy that may have led the lovers to reach ecstasy and to put it at the service of a homoerotic friendship, a homoerotic friendship that will become the root, it has been argued by feminist and queer scholars, the basis of capitalism and patriarchy.

oneself, and to love one’s neighbor once one has accepted this horrible truth: the truth that there is, at the heart of men, a tendency towards aggression? And it is this tendency that makes the demands of civilization on the drives a necessity, and what makes also the Christian commandment an impossible one to apply. Freud writes: “Culture has to call up every possible reinforcement in order to erect barriers against the aggressive instinct of men and hold their manifestation in check by reaction-formations in men’s mind” (86). The most important conclusion drawn by Freud from this “realization” is the necessity, for culture, to take into account this desire for aggression. The same conclusion will also constitute the point of departure of Bataille and Lacan. Culture and civilization, instead of denying or fully repressing this desire needs to organize its expression within symbolic and imaginary spaces. How should the theory of the drives be revisited once the “desire for aggressiveness” has been fully recognized? It is thanks to this discovery that Freud elaborated, in *The Ego and the Id* (1923), his Second Topic.496 The main point of this second topic is to think anew the articulation between narcissism, the pleasure principle and the reality principle once the desire for aggression has been posited at the center of men’s lives.

Hunger and Love
In his second topic, which will become the point of departure of *ego-psychology*, Freud isolates two sources of energy within the organism: hunger and love. These sources of energy, in turn, are associated to two opposite forms of instincts. The side of hunger is associated with what Freud called the ‘ego instincts,’ instincts that work towards the self-preservation of the organism. One could argue here that this is also the side of Bataille’s moral of the decline, that is to say the side

of the possible, of reason, of the mundane world, etc.. The side of love, on the contrary, is
associated with the ‘object instincts,’ instincts that work towards the acquisition of an external
object suited for the satisfaction of the sexual drive. However, within the instincts that belongs to
the object, there is one—the sadistic instinct—that is strangely working hand in hand with the
ego, that is, in agreement with its desire for mastery, while being oriented, strictly speaking,
towards an object. In other words, sadism stands, within the realm of love, as the solution that an
autistic ego has found to have a relationship with an external object without being threatened by
this external object. Freud writes:

One of these object instincts, the sadistic certainly stood out from the rest in that its aim
was so very unloving; moreover, it clearly allied itself in many of its aspects with the ego
instincts, and its close kinship with instinct of mastery without any libidinal purpose
could not be concealed, but these ambiguities could be overcome; in spite of them,
sadism plainly belongs to sexual life—the game of cruelty could take the place of the
game of love. (95)

It is to solve this apparent riddle that Freud reworked his theory of narcissism. In a paper called
“On Narcissism,” (1914) Freud introduced the idea that the libido (which was supposed to be
exclusively turned towards an external object) is first cathected by the ego for its own profit (this
is what Freud, and then Klein will call: primary narcissism).497 As such, the libido’s
headquarters, remarks Freud, is the ego, and not the Id. It is only during a second phase (the
secondary narcissism) that the narcissistic libido can turn in the direction of an object (becoming

thus a libido-object) before, in case of neurosis, turning back again in the direction of the ego (returning to the ego-libido position). As a consequence, it is the very concept of libido that is at stake once the desire for aggression has been posited. How is it possible to maintain such a concept while its domain of expression and the extension of its validity seem to have vanished in the air?

According to Freud, the simplest way to solve this problem is to introduce an opposition of two instincts at the very core of life: an instinct of self-preservation, and an instinct towards destruction. However, while the instinct of self-preservation is easily observable, the one of self-destruction is way more difficult to study, except when it manages to express itself outward, as in the case of sadism. Given the alternative between an instinct of destruction that expresses itself silently within one’s own organism (as in masochism), and an instinct of destruction that manages to express itself outward, i.e. onto an external object (as in sadism), the difference is not in the nature of the violence expressed, but in the form and in the visibility that is given to it. It is thus within the realm of eroticism—which will become the very field of study of Bataille—that Freud isolated, for the first time, the impact of the death drive onto human’s love relations. When directed outward, against an external object, the desire for aggression is called sadism; when it is directed inward, against oneself, it is called masochism. But the desire for aggression goes further than eroticism for Freud. It can also be observed in non-sexual relationships. What are the tools and means through which civilization has tried, so far, to put in check the desire for aggression? How can a desire for aggression be rendered innocuous?

498 “In sadism, where it bends the erotic aim to its own will and yet at the same time gratifies the sexual craving completely, we can obtain the clearest insight into its nature and its relation to Eros” (101).
The Dread of Losing Love
The simplest solution, argues Freud, is to make sure that the aggression, instead of being expressed outward, is introjected, which is to say redirected against the ego itself. Through this process a division is created within the ego between the ego itself, and the super-ego. The super-ego is the part of the ego that represents consciousness, and through consciousness guilt. The super-ego, in this sense, is what “exercises the same propensity to harsh aggressiveness against the ego that the ego would have liked to enjoy against others. The tension between the strict super-ego and the subordinate ego we call the sense of guilt; it manifests itself as the need for punishment” (105). Civilization gains some control over the desire for aggression by using it to install, within the potentially sadistic ego of everyone, an even crueler super-ego that is in charge of exploiting the desire for aggression in the name of some “superior values.” The origin of the feeling of guilt is located by Freud in a very simple phenomenon: “the dread of losing love” (107).

It is because humans are in need of one another for their survival (and especially children) that the possibility for them to lose the love of the ones they are depending on is so important. They thus fear or dread losing this love and are ready to give up some immediate satisfaction in order to keep it. But it is only when this dread, which is produced by a real external threat, is being interiorized in the manner of a “super-ego” that the difference between doing evil and thinking about doing evil is erased and that moral masochism is born. Freud writes:

A great change takes place as soon as the authority has been internalized by the development of the super-ego. The manifestations of consciousness are then raised to a
new level; to be accurate, one should not call them conscious and sense of guilt before this. At this point the dread of discovery ceases to operate and also once for all any difference between doing evil and wishing to do it, since nothing is hidden from the super-ego, not even thoughts. (108)

Once the fear for punishment has been interiorized, the subject can no longer find any form of inner peace, since his ego cannot hide from his super-ego any desire for aggression that his ego may have wanted to commit towards someone else. It becomes thus an impossible situation where people with the highest moral standards are also the people who are constantly judging themselves guilty.

The circle of moral life, as Freud describes it, is thus a vicious circle that takes as its aims and recipient of its impossible demands the ego which, in turn becomes more and more the victim of its own ideals. This is why Lacan will even go as far as saying that once the super-ego has been posited, there is nothing that can limit its cruelty against the ego. There is no inner limit to its inner cruelty. All the bad luck in life, all the misfortunes can become fuel for the super-ego’s aggression. Freud writes: “It [the super-ego] simply carries on the severity of external authority which it has succeeded and to some extent replaced” (111). One could conclude, from there, that the passage from the presence of an external authority, to an inner authority is what provokes, in the human psyche, the most important displacement; a displacement that makes impossible, for a human being, to access satisfaction without feeling guilty.
II. IN PRAISE OF TRANSGRESSION: BATAILLE’S MORAL OF THE SUMMIT

To go beyond this feeling of guilt, while still taking into account all of Freud’s insights about sadism, masochism and perversion, I turn now to the work of Georges Bataille. Bataille used the figure of Sade to build a double approach of ethics that is, at the same time, an ethics that makes room for Freud’s concern about the natural aggressiveness of human nature, but that also tries to go beyond it, in a manner that is not without link with the “anti-social” position defended by Lee Edelman or Leo Bersani.

Sade for the Jederman
It is in a letter called “The Use-Value of D.A.F. de Sade (an Open Letter to My Current Comrades)” that Bataille laid out, for the first time, his vision of Sade, and the way in which his teaching could have an influence in the realm of ethics. The teaching of Sade, argues Bataille—its *use-value*—is not easy to grasp. It is a teaching that is not addressed to the “normal man” (the *jederman* is Freud’s term) insofar as the “normal man,” submitted to “fear,” and more broadly to the castration complex, can only feel but disgust towards the vision of the world developed by Sade. In other words, Sade’s teaching is only addressed to a type of men that did not exist, at the time when Bataille was writing, but that will surely appear once the current forms of the social bonds—the forms created by the Oedipus complex—are undone (which means now). For the “normal man” Sade represents what should be condemned the most in human behaviors. Bataille writes:

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The figure of Sade is certainly unsympathetic to people moved by need and by fear. The sympathies and the dreads—the cowardice too, one must add—which determine man’s usual behavior are diametrically opposed to the passion responsible for the sovereignty of the voluptuary. (179)

The proper attitude, thus, when one wants to talk about Sade, is to acknowledge first the reaction of the “normal man.” For it is only at the condition of acknowledging the reason why the “normal man” rejects Sade, that one could eventually gain the chance to see what challenges Sade is proposing to a “future” man that would stand beyond the limits imposed on the “normal man” by society. In other words, to understand Sade, one has to adopt the opposite reaction than the one of Breton who saw in Sade a revolutionary hero.

For Bataille, among others ejected surrealists, the problem with Breton’s reading of Sade was that he tried to use it as an idealist, that is, as a person who wanted to critique the values of bourgeoisie by introducing, through an Icarian complex, higher values that were impossible to put in practice or to detach from reality. For example, when Breton in his Second Manifesto of Surrealism (1929) invited every madmen to kill his psychiatrist, or to go out in the street and start shooting, the French psychiatrists institutions accused Breton of being completely

| 500 | When Breton started to eject many surrealists from the group and publicly insulted them in his Second manifesto (1929) Bataille managed to write, with the help of all those ejected surrealists, a counter manifesto called “Un Cadavre” (1930) – “A Dead Body” which was also a reference to Breton’s Manifesto “Un Cadavre” (1924) written about Anatole France’s funeral. The manifesto was composed of ten texts: one written by Bataille (“A castrated lion”, cf. “Un lion châtré” in OC I, p. 218.), and the others by Queneau, Leiris, Desnos, Prevert, and some other disgraced surrealists. To say the least, the manifesto “Un Cadavre” was first made to attack Breton’s nepotism and pope-like attitude towards what he alone thought was the « true » surrealism (Breton would soon join the communist party—and, by an interesting twist, would also apply Stalin's rule to its own “party,” i.e., “A party gets stronger by “purging” itself.”). Ironically, Breton himself was expelled from the communist party in 1933. |
irresponsible vis-à-vis those who were actually mad, and not only surrealists like him. Another example of such an idealistic and irresponsible way to go beyond the values of the bourgeois’ world is to be found in the way in which Breton talked about the figure of Le marquis de Sade. When Breton attacked Bataille in his *Second Manifesto*, he argued that while Sade had the right to write what he wrote, Bataille had none because he was only a librarian and not a man who spent most of his life in prison for his ideas. In other words, while Breton praised Sade for being a great revolutionary thinker and writer, he accused Bataille of being a pervert and a sick man.502

To counter such a harsh judgment, Bataille accused Breton of being a coward and a hypocrite who was praising Sade while never considering him in his poetical or political works. In other words, Breton's admiration towards Sade was hypocritical for Bataille inasmuch as it had no theoretical or practical consequences for him. Additionally, his admiration for the marquis de Sade made of him a special case instead of one that would have forced Breton to include him in his way of thinking about human sexuality and sadistic violence. As such, Breton, for Bataille, did to Sade what primitive cultures do to their king: he admired him in order to eject him outside the safe space of mundanity. Breton's admiration for Sade is also what Bataille's called, using his heterological concepts, an excretion. “The behavior of Sade’s admirers resembles that of

502 André Breton wrote, “M. Bataille fait profession de ne vouloir considérer au monde que ce qu'il y a de plus vile, de plus décourageant et de plus corrompu et il invite l'homme, pour éviter de se rendre utile à quoi que ce soit de déterminer, « à courir absurdement avec lui – les yeux devenus tout à coup troubles et chargés d'inavouables larmes – vers quelque provinciale maison hantée, plus vilaines que des mouches, plus vicieuses, plus rancées que des salons de coiffure.” S'il m'arrive de rapporter de tels propos c'est qu'ils ne me paraissent pas seulement engager M. Bataille mais encore ceux des anciens surréalistes qui ont voulu avoir leurs coudées libres pour se commettre un peu partout. Peut-être M. Bataille est-il de force à les grouper et qu'il y parvienne, à mon sens, sera très intéressant. Prenant le départ pour la course que, nous venons de la voir, M. Bataille organise, il y a déjà : Desnos, Leiris, Masson, Vitrac. Je dis qu'il est extrêmement significatif de voir à nouveau s'assembler tous ceux qu'une tare quelconque a éloignés d'une première activité définie parce qu'il est très probable qu'ils n'ont que leur mécontentement à mettre en commun. Je m'amuse d'ailleurs à penser qu'on ne peut sortir du surréalisme sans tomber sur M. Bataille, tant il est vrai que le dégoût de la rigueur ne sait se traduire que par une soumission nouvelle à la rigueur. Avec M. Bataille, rien que de très connu, nous assistons à un retour offensif du vieux matérialisme antidialectique qui tente, cette fois, de se frayer gratuitement un chemin à travers Freud” (122).
primitive subjects in relation to their king, whom they adore and loath, and whom they cover
with honors and narrowly confine” (56). Consequently, it is always better, for Bataille, to be part
of the group of people who are clearly scandalized by Sade's writing, than being part of Breton's
group that praised Sade's writing while rejecting the real consequences at stake in such a
judgment, i.e. the practical and theoretical consequences contained in such praise.

Apathy, or the Paradox of Sade’s Position
If one wants to praise Sade, one has to learn how to think with Sade, which means that one has to
learn how to think about the human condition by putting at its very core the presence of sadistic
urges. Bataille writes:

> Without a profound complicity with natural forces such as violent death, gushing
blood, sudden catastrophes and the horrible cries of pain that accompany them,
terrifying ruptures of what had seemed to be immutable, the fall into stinking filth of
what had been elevated–without a sadistic understanding of an incontestably
thundering and torrential nature, there could be no revolutionaries, there could only
be a revolting utopian sentimentality. (*The Use-Value-of-Sade*, 157)

But to be able to think with Sade (or, as we would say in French, “à hauteur de Sade”), it is
necessary, Bataille argued in *Eroticism, Death and Sensuality*,\(^{503}\) (1957) to understand that Sade’s
experience is grounded on a paradox. This paradox, put in a syllogism, goes as follow. If life is
the pursuit of pleasure, and if the intensity of pleasure is a direct ratio of the destruction of life,
then life can only reach its highest intensity through a monstrous denial of its own principle. To

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make the paradox more vivid, it is important to connect the first part—the pursuit of pleasure—to the fact that Sade’s heroes are always entirely self-centered in the sense that they deny any right at all to their partner. Even more to the point, they always count for less the suffering that they are inflicting on their victims than the pleasure that they are getting from them. In this sense, Sade’s heroes are denying the very fact that they are the product of a certain society that, itself, is the result of a certain configuration of the social bond. They are, to say the least, radically unhinged from the demands of the Other, and thus radically outside the limits of the kind of social bounds that the Oedipus complex generally-establishes between people (they are outside the Oedipus, but not beyond).

Sade’s heroes to put in motion their “quest for the most intense pleasure” have to deny first the fact that they are themselves not only “separate beings,” but also members of a given society. In order to put into operation such a denial, they simply generalize the idea of excess—that goes beyond reason—at the expense of the concrete presence of the social bond (which is the expression of reason). Such a movement is visible in Sade’s characters boundless quest for pleasure. For such a quest for pleasure, seen from a rational point of view, is mostly extravagant. Bataille writes, “One can see how the excesses of pleasure lead to the denial of the rights of other people, which is, as far as man is concerned, an excessive denial of the principle upon which his life is based” (169). Consequently, Sade’s heroes have first to destroy all the limits that society imposes on man to regulate their inclination towards an unlimited jouissance. Second, they have to come to term with the “odd” fact that they have to apply to themselves the very principle that they have used to subject others to their quest of pleasure. Sade called this ultimate paradoxical moment of his quest for pleasure apathy. Apathy, for Sade, is the result of a rejection of all the
feelings that would have attached a man (or a woman) to the rest of the group and, as such, a rejection of all the feelings that would have stopped such an isolation. In other words, to deny fully the existence of others, Sade’s heroes have to repress within themselves feelings of love, tenderness, pity and gratitude. For it is only at that condition that Sade’s world becomes not only a world divided into victims and torturers, but a world where each torturer accepts, in the name of his own pleasure, to be the victim of someone else’s pleasure. Sade’s world, as such, is a world where victim and torturer exchange roles not in the name of desire (and the repression it implies), but in the name of their radical singularity and its right to unlimited jouissance.

Sade’s paradox is thus, according to Bataille, that there exists a hidden link between the quest for unlimited sexual pleasure and death. How would it be possible to put this hidden truth not at the service of a Sadean apathy, but at the service of what Bataille called “communication”. How could the link between eroticism and death (which will become jouissance with Lacan) be used as a trampoline to reach a new form of social bond, and not as what will fuel, secretly, the super-ego and apathy? In order to grasp how Sade’s paradox had a direct influence on Bataille’s stand on morality, one need to study the conference that Bataille gave, right after the publication of his first theoretical book, Inner Experience (1943), called The Summit and the Decline! (1944) in which he developed in a very systematic fashion the kind of hyper-moral that unfolds from thinking with Sade, that is to say, by placing the urges for excretion at the center of the question of morality, and by putting them at the service of an experience of “communication” and not at the service of apathy.

504 See also Chapter Five, and the notion of the Sinthome and the One-Body.

The Moral of the Summit
From a “normal” perspective—i.e., from the perspective of the “natural man”—the notion of Good relates to the idea of what is good for a being, and the notion of Evil to what is bad for a being. In other words, Good goes with the respect of the integrity of a being, and Evil with the violation of this integrity. Nonetheless, counter to such “normal” evidence, Christianity inverts this “normal” perspective in order to claim that the source of Evil lies in the principle of individuation that the former position takes as its point of departure. From a Christian moral perspective, indeed, the idea of Good is not associated with what is good for a being, but with what can disrupt the selfishness at the root of the “natural” perspective. The famous Christian solution to this apparent paradox (which opposes paganism to Christianity) is, as everybody knows, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” which is to say that a being needs to look for the good of others in order to look for his own good. Such a solution, however, is not satisfying for Bataille inasmuch as it implies the maintaining of the principle of closeness and oneness in the form of Salvation over what shatters and opens the self.

To move beyond the “natural” perspective on ethics, as well as to move beyond the Christian stand on morality, Bataille proceeds to introduce a distinction between two new kinds of morals. A moral of the summit to which he associates moments of excess and exuberance of forces, and a moral of decline, to which Bataille associates moments of exhaustion and fatigue. Instead of thinking the opposition between a “natural” morality, and Christian morality from a purely transcendent and idealistic perspective, Bataille wants to problematize such an opposition by connecting it to the kind of energy that morality has to order. In the case of an excess of energy, morality has to deal with a problem of excretion. In the case of exhaustion, it has to deal
with a problem of appropriation. But in both cases, it has to deal with the fundamental problem of installing, between human beings, a form a “communication” that would break their isolation —and not a form of apathy as Sade’s position implies. Bataille writes, “It is by ruining in myself as in others the integrity of being that I open myself to communication, that I access the moral summit. And the summit is not to suffer evil, but in wanting it” (my translation, *Discussion sur le péché*, 65). This is why the only authentic moral position, for Bataille, would be a position that could combine the Christian goal of shattering the self, and the sadistic means of using the other without any limits. As such, the real moral commandment should be “Don’t be afraid to hurt your neighbor,” which would mean, do not be afraid to place yourself in the position of those who nailed Christ on his cross. Bataille writes:

> Humanity attains the summit of evil in the crucifixion. But it is precisely in having attained this summit that humanity ceased being separated from God. From here we understand that communication cannot take place from one full and intact being to another: communication wants being with their beings at stake, placed at the limit of death, of nothingness; the moral summit is a moment of risk taking, of the suspension of being beyond itself, at the limit of nothingness. (28)

The summit, in order to become moral, needs to be what opens the possibility for isolated beings to “communicate” with one another, to shatter their integrity. The very structure of sacrifice, when it is placed under such a light, goes as follows. The agent of the crime (like Judas in Christ sacrifice) shatters the integrity of the victim by trying to break, in it, the very principle of its oneness, and the victim shatters the integrity of the agent of the crime through the potential guilt
that his crime can generate within him. In both cases, thus, what is at stake is the search of what
stands beyond the oneness of a being, which is to say, the search for “nothingness,”
“nothingness” being defined by Bataille as an ontological concept that situates that which is
beyond being (discussed in more detail later).

To illustrate this point, Bataille refers to the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. Christians,
indeed, generally see this sacrifice as the summit of evilness. Through this sacrifice, indeed,
humans not only killed an innocent man, but they killed the Son of God himself. However,
Bataille emphasizes, that it is through this crime that the being of God was wounded by men for
the first time, and that the being of men, in return, got wounded by God through the culpability
that His murder generated in them (Felix Culpa!). In other words, it is thanks to the wound
inflicted to God by the sacrifice of Christ that God and mankind broke their isolation and started
to “communicate” with one another, that is to say to mutually break their isolation. Bataille,
commenting on this phenomenon, writes: “It thus becomes visible from here that the
“communication” between separate beings is rendered possible by evil. Human beings, without
the presence of evil, would be encapsulated within themselves, locked up in their independent
sphere” (my translation, 56). Human beings are thus facing an “impossible” moral situation.
They can either persevere in their own being at the price of maintaining their fundamental
isolation from one another (which leads them to a form of spiritual death), or they can try to
“communicate” with one another by taking the risk of violating the integrity of the other human
beings that they want to communicate with.

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506 For a full analysis of Bataille’s reading of the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, see Frederic-Charles Baitinger,
“De l’innocence de la victime aux délices angoissées du sacrificateur: Georges Bataille, René Girard et la question
du sacrifice.” in Les Représentations du Sacrifice et du Don, Editor Irene Chassaing, Juliette Valcke and Ziyang
There is thus a risk to be taken by those who want to go beyond the isolation of beings, and a risk of annihilation to be faced once the movement of “communication” between two beings have started to take place. The agent of the crime (like Judas in Christ’s sacrifice) shatters the integrity of the victim by trying to break, in it, the very principle of its oneness, and the victim shatters the integrity of the agent of the crime through the potential guilt that his crime can generate within him. In both cases, thus, what is at stake is the search of what stands beyond the oneness of a being.

Sovereign Desire and Nothingness
What pushes people to enter this movement of “communication” is, according to Bataille, desire. Desire is defined by Bataille as a “sovereign desire,” that is to say, as “what engages a being, my being, in a search for that which is beyond it: nothingness” (Discussion on Sin, 29). In other words, and as will we see in the next part of this epilogue, Bataille defines “sovereign desire” not as Lacan does—i.e. as the desire of the Other—but, precisely, as what pushes a human being to go beyond such a desire (entirely caught up in the Hegelian dialectic of recognition). As such, one could say that Bataille’s “sovereign desire” is here playing the function of what Lacan, in his teaching, calls jouissance. This sliding between desire and jouissance can be grasped through the way in which Bataille is connecting his definition of “sovereign desire” to the notion of nothingness. The term of nothingness requires all our attention here. Jean Hyppolite, indeed, during the conversation that followed Bataille’s presentation on The Moral of the Summit!, asked him if he was locating this nothingness inside or outside being. Hyppolite said:
I would simply like to know if this need to go beyond the self, which was consequently
the negation of our own being, locates nothingness in our desire or beyond our desire.

There are two opposed perspectives here depending on whether it is we who are
nothingness, if desire is within us, if nothingness is in the desire itself or, on the contrary,
depending whether we go into nothingness to escape ourselves. (Discussion on Sin, 50)

The perspective that makes of nothingness a part of desire itself is, in fact, the perspective
defended by Heidegger in *What is Metaphysics* (1927)\(^{507}\) as well as the perspective defended by
Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* (1943).\(^{508}\) But contrary to this phenomenological perspective,
Bataille’s answer remained firmly attached to an ontological plane, that it to say, attached to the
idea that nothingness, strictly speaking, is what is opposed to the notion of being and, as such,
what stands beyond this notion. Bataille answered Hyppolite thus: “When I talk about
nothingness, I put myself on the ontological plane, and by this I am referring to that which is
situatd beyond the limits of being” (50). In other words, contrary to the position defended by
Heidegger and Sartre, Bataille wants to maintain a strict opposition between being and
nothingness by placing nothingness outside being, and thus outside desire (which, in a way,
reinforces the idea that Bataille’s “sovereign desire” is nothing but Lacan’s jouissance).

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\(^{507}\)“Le Néant ne reste pas l’opposé indéterminé à l’égard de l’étant, mais il se dévoile comme *composant* l’être de cet

\(^{508}\)“L’être est antérieur au néant et le fonde. Par quoi il faut entendre non seulement que l’être a sur le néant une
préséance logique, mais encore que c’est de l’être que le néant tire concrètement son efficace. C’est ce que nous
exprimions en disant que le néant hante l’être”, Jean-Paul Sartre, “Le problème du néant,” in *L’Être et le néant*,
The Ego and the Void
The notion of being, in Bataille’s position, is also worth defining. By being, Bataille means the ego. Consequently, if being is equated to the Ego for Bataille, and nothingness to what stands beyond the Ego, the movement towards the summit is, as Hyppolite underlined it, “a movement to escape the self” that is to say, a movement where nothingness provokes the annihilation of being, but also a point at which being annihilates itself. As such, Bataille’s articulation of being and nothingness is the exact reverse of Sartre’s stand on the question. While Bataille posits nothingness outside being, and makes of the movement towards the summit a way to escape the self through a confrontation of nothingness, Sartre establishes nothingness inside being, and makes of the desire to annihilate the self a desire to escape nothingness. Summarizing this split, Sartre said, during the conversation “These are the two possible positions: either we are plenitudes and what we seek is nothingness, or we are voids and what we seek is being” (52). Sartre argued that Bataille, by positing nothingness outside being, posited in fact not nothingness per se, but something that is more like a “nothing” or a void, i.e., something that doesn’t imply a form of negation or privation but, on the contrary, something like a “positive” absence. Sartre, indeed, argued:

If desire isn’t in a sense nothingness, if in yourself you don’t have the possibility of making nothingness appear, what is outside of you is in a sense nothing. It is equally a plenum. You cannot name it or make it appear. (…) During your [Bataille’s] presentation, you seemed to present being as a full being and to present what is outside as a void. (52)

To answer Sartre’s critique, Bataille proceeded to integrate Sartre’s opposition into a larger

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509 “When I speak of being, I am speaking of a particular being and I am designating myself in particular and generally the egos of others as well” (*Discussion on Sin*, 50).
dialectical movement that goes as follow. First, Bataille admitted that the movement of being
towards a beyond does not have nothingness as its object first, but more likely so, another
being.\footnote{In sensuality as in death, nothingness \textit{itself} is, moreover, not that which attracts us any more than it captivates the corpse as such. It is to the artificial aspects—the apparent severity of the dead—that pious respect, calm veneration is bound” (\textit{Discussion on Sin}, 29).} This other being, however, in order to not be reduced to the status of an object of desire, can only be attained through an experience of nothingness. And this experience of nothingness implies, in turn, a “depreciation of the being that desires,” (53) an experience that implies a kind “annihilation of the being that desires” (53). Otherwise, remarks Bataille, the Ego (i.e. the subject of desire) would remain trapped within himself, and thus entirely defined by its relationship to boredom—just like in Heidegger’s existential analytic—and through this relationship to boredom, attached to the void that is in him. It is thus not a question of escaping one’s nothingness, for Bataille, but a question of using the void at the core of the Ego to gain access to a beyond of the Ego and its boredom. As such, I would argue, here, the Bataille is giving a pre-definition of what Lacan calls in his early teaching “the crossing of the phantasy,” and then “the Pass” in his late teaching. Bataille writes:

\begin{quote}
The question of being is at risk in the dialectic I talked about, which opposes the ego and the other, and it is correct that I always envision the other as the object of a desire, that the ego is the subject of desire and that this subject of desire is a priori a contestation of itself inasmuch as it is the desire of another. (53)
\end{quote}

To sum up, I would say that while Sartre remains faithful to Heidegger and to Hegel’s phenomenological description of the dialect of recognition as he developed it in

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}
Phenomenology of Spirit (1807), Bataille through his reversal of perspective is trying to think of an ethical experience that would go beyond the ego. And by doing so, Bataille is also fostering a sense of ethics that goes beyond the subject of desire and its enslavement to the desire of the other, and that foreshadows, at the same time, Lacan’s ethics of psychoanalysis, grounded on an experience of jouissance that could be called queer since the act it requires is neither to perform a “gender,” nor an identity, but precisely an act that undoes both.

III. IN PRAISE OF DESIRE: LACAN’S ETHICS OF DESIRE

Lacan’s notion of ethics of desire, as he developed it in his famous text “Kant with Sade” (1962), takes its departure from Bataille’s interpretation of Sade’s ethical paradox. Echoes of this ethics can also be found in the third part of Lacan’s Seminar VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis (1959-1960). And also in two conferences that Lacan gave in front of a Catholic audience, “Regarding Morality, Freud Has What it Takes,” and “Can Psychoanalysis Constitute the Kind of Ethics Necessitated by our Times” in which Lacan produces a fundamental critique of Kant’s categorical imperative, and more broadly, a critique of morality as being secretly linked, in one way or another, to Sade’s position.

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512 See, for an illustration of this movement at the level of a love relationship between two people, Georges Bataille, L’amour d’un être mortel, Luud, 1989, pp.26. where Bataille describes with great precision such a movement. But see also Shannon Winnubst, “Bataille’s Queer Pleasure” in Reading Bataille Now.


Das Ding and Christian Morality

Lacan opened his first conference addressed to the Catholics by arguing that the notions of “Sin” and “Grace,” which are of central importance in Christian morality, should no longer be left at the discretion of theology or faith but, on the contrary, placed at the very center of psychoanalytic investigation. For Lacan, just as for Bataille, the Christian notion of sin, instead of being considered an “obsolete category” is, on the contrary, what renders visible the articulation between evil and the Law. Thus taking a position in the debate that opposed Bataille and Sartre on this question, Lacan endorses Bataille’s position by stating that “there is a paradox involved in practically excluding from the debate and from analysis things, terms and doctrines that have been articulated in the field of faith, on the pretext that they belong to a domain that is reserved to believers” (“the death of god,” 171).

To go beyond this paradox, Lacan substituted for the notion of sin, the one of the The Thing (Das Ding), which enabled him to rearticulate, in a very precise manner, the notion of Law and desire as St. Paul did, but within the coordinates of psychoanalysis. Das Ding, of course, should not be approached as a “thing,” that is, as an object. Quite the contrary, das Ding is the correlate of the subject at the moment of his fading under the signifying chain. Das Ding is what, in every speaking being, marks the place of the effects of the signifier onto a living creature.516

Lacan writes: “Das Ding is thus what, in a living being that comes to inhabit discourse, no matter what it is, and that uses words to speak about itself, marks the place where this living being

suffers about the fact that language has effect in the world.” As such, das Ding is the very reason why speaking beings cannot have sexual relationships that are anchored in any form of “biological” norms, but are all haunted by a Thing (a das Ding) that prevents them from reaching any point of complete satisfaction. Nonetheless, adds Lacan, such a discovery did not push Freud to propose a solution to this “structural” discontent, nor did it prevent him (or most of his students) from trying to build certain norms around which could be mapped the different “pathological development” (what Freud called the different stages of development of the libido) of human sexuality. Opposing such a temptation, Lacan writes, “Unfortunately, is it the task of psychoanalysis to repress the fundamental perversion of human desire in the Hell of the pre-genital, as a mark of affective regression? Is it his job as psychoanalyst to make one forget the truth that was being confessed during the antique mysteries, i.e., that ‘Eros is a black God’?”

The Truth about Monotheism
According to Lacan, although Freud was a materialist and an atheistic person who did not believe in God or in any revealed Truth—“it was literally a dead letter for him” (171)—he remained for the most part entrenched in a Judeo-Christian tradition inasmuch as the question of morality was at stake for him. Indeed, when Freud provided in Totem and Taboo (1913) and

517 “La Chose est donc ce qui, dans le vivant quel qu’il soit que vient habiter le discours et qui se profère en paroles, marque la place où il pâtit de ce que le langage se manifeste dans le monde” (55).

518 Lacan writes, “Hélas, est-ce au psychanalyste de refouler la perversion foncière du désir humain dans l’enfer du prégénital, comme connoté de régression affective ? Est-ce à lui de faire rentrer dans l’oubli la vérité avouée dans le mystère antique, que “Eros est un dieu noir” ?”

519 Lacan writes: “La méditation de Freud autour de la fonction, du rôle et de la figure du Nom-du-Père, comme toute sa référence éthique, tourne autour de la tradition proprement judéo-chrétienne et y sont entièrement articulables” (33).

twenty-five years later in “Moses and Monotheism” (1939) an anthropological account of the birth of human society, he argued that it was around the figure of a primordial father and his murder that the whole problem revolved. Such a paradox, according to Lacan, can be easily explained in the sense that even if the “letter” of the Catholic faith was a “dead letter” to Freud, it was nonetheless a letter that was definitely well articulated for him, i.e. a letter that was producing very precise effects. In other word, although Freud was a non-believer, he nonetheless had at its disposal “what it took,” that is to say, he was well aware of the articulation at stake in the revealed Truth of Judeo-Christianism. Lacan writes,

> You only have to open the little book entitled Moses and Monotheism that Freud cogitated over for some ten years, for after *Totem and Taboo* he thought of nothing but that, of Moses and the religion of his fathers. And if it weren’t for the article on the *Spaltung* of the ego, one might say that the pen fell from his hands at the end of *Moses and Monotheism*. (*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 171-172)

According to Freud, the message carried by monotheism is important because it has a super value over any other non-monotheistic religious system. What is the most opposed to monotheism is, in a way, the conception of the sacred defended by some kind of caricature of Bataille, that is to say, a conception of the sacred where the sacred is attached to a kind of “riotousness, drunkenness, and anarchy born of divine passion” (172). And this form of passion, in turn, is what produces what Lacan calls “the laughter of the Olympian” and its complement, the disembodied seriousness of the philosophers.

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Opposed to this state of anarchy born out of divine passion stands monotheism.

Monotheism, according to Freud, has a double origin. Contrary to what most historians of his time thought about the origin of Judaism, Freud defends the thesis, in “Moses and Monotheism,” that there have been, in fact, not one Moses, but two: one that is noble and elevated, and the other that is not. The elevated one can be found in the figure of Moses the Egyptian. Moses the Egyptian was the first figure in history who started to rationalize our understanding of the world through the use of a single principle (the Sun) and of reason.\(^{522}\)

Opposed to this figure stands Moses the Midianite, the son-in-law of Jethro who, according to Freud, has been confused with the other Moses.

Moses the Midianite is the one who claimed to have heard, in the burning bushes (that Lacan compares to Moses’ Thing) the words of a hidden and jealous God, who said about himself “I am what I am”. It is also thanks to Moses the Midianite that the Ten Commandments—which correspond to the laws of speech for Lacan\(^{523}\)—were transmitted to the Jewish people. There is thus, for Freud, a strict opposition between Moses the Egyptian, who is the bearer of the message of one rational God, and Moses the Midianite who is the inspired and obscurantist one. But this opposition is somehow resolved by Freud when he argued, in *Moses and Monotheism*, that the transmission of the message of Moses the Egyptian was assured by Moses the Midianite, that is to say, that the message of reason was transmitted through the obscurantist thanks to the following logic. First, Moses the Egyptian is murdered. And then, through the promulgation of

\(^{522}\) “Moses the Egyptian is the Great Man, the legislator, the politician, the rationalist, the one whose path Freud claims to discover with the historical appearance in the Fourteenth century B.C. of the religion of Akhenaton” (173).

\(^{523}\) Lacan writes: “Given that these commandments turn out to be proof against anything – and by that I mean that whether or not we obey them, we still cannot help hearing them – in their indestructible character they prove to be the very laws of speech, as I tried to show you” (174).
the Ten Commandments, the murder of this Great Man is being remembered, and used as a tool to transmit efficiently the message of reason of Moses the Egyptian. This is why, according to Lacan, Freud’s double theory on the origin of Monotheism is very close to the Christian symbol of the death of Christ on the Cross and, also foreshadows Rene Girard’s theory on the question he has developed it in his books *The Violence and the Sacred* (1972). Lacan said: “It is because the murder of the Great Man reemerges in a second murder that in a sense translates and brings it to light, the murder of Christ, that the monotheistic message is complete” (174). There is thus a very strange Christo-centrism within Freud’s thought.

“*God is Dead*”: Nothing Is No Longer Permitted!

However, the idea of the “death of God,” contrary to what one could be tempted to imagine, is a phenomenon that carries with it no real “liberation.” On the contrary, the “death of God” signifies primarily that nothing is permitted. Freud went even as far as constructing, in *Totem and Taboo*, a dialectic between desire and the law that borrowed most of its articulation from Saint Paul’s analysis of the symbol of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. When Freud argued in *Totem and Taboo*, a dialectic between desire and the law that borrowed most of its articulation from Saint Paul’s analysis of the symbol of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. When Freud argued in *Totem and Taboo*.

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524 Rene Girard, “The Gods, the Dead, the Sacred, and the Sacrificial Substitution,” in *The Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979, 250-274. In this chapter, Rene Girard argues that the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross was the necessary crime without which the innocence of the victim sacrificed could not have been revealed. Likewise, one could argue that when Freud argued that in order for Moses the Egyptian to be admired and respected for his greatness, it was necessary for him to be killed first, and then to commemorate the positive effect that his death produced in the society of his time. But while, for Freud and Lacan, what the murder of the father hides is the fact that his murder did not open the way for a full satisfaction of jouissance (for the sons who killed him), it hides, for Rene Girard, the very mechanic of violence and scapegoating that such murder is the product of.

525 See Jacques Lacan, “The Death of God”, in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, Seminar VII*, Trans. Dennis Porter, Norton & Company, New York, 1986. pp. 167-178. “All the mystery is in the act. It is designed to hide something, namely, that not only does the murder of the father not open the path to jouissance that the presence of the father was supposed to prohibit, but it, in fact, strengthens prohibition. The whole problem is there; that’s where, in fact as well as in theory, the fault lies. Although the obstacle is removed as the result of the murder, jouissance is still prohibited, not only that, but the prohibition is reinforced” (176).
and Taboo that the father could only forbid desire efficiently inasmuch as he was dead, he actually proposed to modern man who no longer believes in God a renewed version of the “death of God” as it had been already staged in Christianity. In order to maintain desire, to preserve it, a figure of authority such as a primordial father was needed. Even more to the point, Freud suggested that the more a desire was forbidden, the more intense it was bound to become and, reciprocally, that the less a desire was repressed, the less intense it was bound to be. In the case of the modern man, this idea becomes vivid at the end of the Oedipus complex that can only happen as the correlate of the “murder” and the grieving process of the imaginary Father. As such, it is a process that implicates an unleashing of desire that, in turn, triggers an even bigger need to forbid it. This is why, argues Lacan, the main outcome of the Oedipus complex is the birth of an all too powerful super-ego that ends up taking the place of the dead father. In other words, the “death of God” as Lacan describes it, far from liberating humanity from its discontent, increases it in the rise of the super-ego. Lacan said: “Whoever attempts to submit to the moral law sees the demands of his superego grow increasingly meticulous and increasingly cruel” (176).

Lacan extended his understanding of Freud’s reading of “the death of God” in the chapter XIII of his Seminar VII called “The death of God”. In this chapter, Lacan articulates the Christian notion of the “death of God” to his own conception of desire, and more specifically to his matheme S(A) that represents the inconsistency of the Other at a Symbolic level. As such, S(A) is the sign of the Other’s own death, or the Other’s own disappearance in Lacan’s early teaching. And this self-erasure of the Other is itself related to the paradox that no one can either fully fulfill or transgress the Law which he or she is in relation to. Lacan said:
Situated as you know in the upper left section [of the Graph of Desire] it [S (A)] signifies the final response to the guarantee asked of the Other concerning the meaning of the Law articulated in the depth of the unconscious. If there is nothing more than a lack, the Other is wanting, and the signifier is that of his death. (193)

Only Christianity, in fact, through the symbolism of the death of Christ on the cross, gave to this phenomenon (the self-erasure of the Other) its full representation. And it is also Christianity who linked this phenomenon of self-erasure to the “Hegelian” notion of *aufhebung* of the Law. Christ indeed, by dying for us on the cross, brought the commandment of the Law to the level of the commandment: “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” In other words, the notion of the death of God, and the Christian commandment are linked to one another. It is precisely because Christ died on the cross that he has, one the one hand, abolished the Law (that was previously impossible to accomplish) and that he has given to it its new formulation: “You should love your neighbor as yourself”. But, as Freud underlined it in his book *Civilization and Its Discontent* 526 (1929), the commandment “love your neighbor as yourself” is inhuman, that is to say impossible to put in practice. 527 Freud linked this impossibility to five arguments, the main one being that violence and aggressiveness are at the very core of the human condition. This violence, according to Freud (as well as for Lacan, as we will see) is not so much related to a human’s nature as to a human’s aspiration towards happiness.

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527 See also, for a very thorough analysis of this idea, see Ernest Wallwork, “Thou Shalt Love Thy Neighbor as thyself: The Freudian Critique,” The Journal of Religious Ethics, vol. 10 n 2 (Fall 1982), 264-319.
It is, indeed, because each one of us wants to be happy that we cannot love our neighbor as ourselves without feeling that the neighbor is becoming our rival in our quest for happiness. To love your neighbor, and to look for the maximization of your own pleasure are two antagonistic demands. This is why, according to Freud, unconscious aggressiveness is always what prevents a subject from going towards his own jouissance. Even more to the point, Lacan argued that the less a subject was able to express his aggressiveness, the stronger his super-ego was bound to become. Reciprocally, the stronger the super-ego, the stronger the need for an external Law capable of stopping the super-ego from gaining more power over the Ego. This is why, for Lacan, the super-ego should not be seen, like Freud did, as the source of the moral imperative, but as a basic aggressiveness turned towards the ego.  

This is why the Christian formula “Love your neighbor as you love yourself” is, as we will see in more detail, an inverted Sadean maxim for Lacan, which is to say a form of masochism. While it presupposes a primary love for oneself, it only fuels, in fact, a primary hate against oneself. Lacan said “I retreat from loving my neighbor as myself because there is something on the horizon there that is engaged in some form of intolerable cruelty. In that sense, to love one’s neighbor may be the cruelest of choices” (194).

IV. LOVE THY NEIGHBOR IS A SADIAN MAXIM

In order to problematize the cruelty that is at the heart of the Christian’s commandment “Love thy neighbor,” Lacan relates it to the work of Sade. And through this articulation, Lacan’s implicit goal, as I will try to demonstrate, is to oppose Bataille’s reading of Sade as developed in his text *The Use Value of Sade*.

The Misunderstanding with Sade

Lacan said right at the opening of his lecture:

I would like at least during this lecture to clear up the misunderstanding that might occur because we are dealing with Sade, and it might be thought that that constitutes a wholly external way of looking upon ourselves as pioneers or militants embracing a radical position. Such a view implies that, as a result of our function or profession, we are destined to embrace extremes, so to speak, and that Sade in this respect is our progenitor or precursor, who supposedly opened up some impasse, aberration or aporia, in that domain of ethics we have chosen to explore this year, and that we would be well-advised to follow him.

It is very important to clear up that misunderstanding, which is related to a number of others I am struggling against in order to make some progress here before you (191).

It is pretty easy to identify, under the periphrasis “militant embracing a radical position,” not only all the surrealists who praised Sade after Breton, but even more so, Bataille himself who was the only one, as noted in the opening of this chapter, to follow Sade into his aberration by
developing first his theory of *heterology*, and then his *moral of the Summit*.

To understand what Lacan is reproaching in Bataille’s reading of Sade and, indirectly, what Lacan would have reproached in the “anti-social turn” in queer theory, one has to understand the relationship between the notion of jouissance and the one of transgression; and perhaps even more, the relation between the Christian commandment (“Love thy neighbor”) and what is most opposed to it: the aspiration towards happiness and jouissance. This relation can be articulated through the following question: what stops us from transgressing on our way to jouissance?

For Lacan, we are stopped on the road towards transgression when we start to imagine the bad consequences that our action will have on others (i.e., when we’re not apathetic). Lacan said: “And we retreat from what? From assaulting the image of the other, because it was the image on which we were formed as an ego. Here we find the convincing power of altruism” (195). Altruism and pity are thus not the product of a natural inclination towards the good, as it is generally argued, but they are rooted in fear of hurting the image into which our ego was formed. This is why Lacan, just like Bataille, can criticize altruism and pity as being fundamentally the expression of a narcissistic ego and, as such, the expression of a “revolting utopian sentimentality.” Consequently, this narcissistic image of the ego is precisely what prevents men to go beyond their condition and, by implication, what prevents them from discovering the empty place that God occupies within their system of belief. Just like the relationship to the Other, the relationship to God is entangled in a narcissistic illusion. And it is precisely at this crossroad that Sade becomes interesting. Sade, as Bataille had already pointed it out, was the first one to go
beyond this narcissistic illusion, i.e., where God becomes an empty space and the image of man starts to fade in the dark—just like Bataille’s vision of a future *Acephalic* man.

This is why, argues Lacan, Sade’s work on evil could be said to have cleared the way for Freud's atheistic approach to the pleasure principle. For Lacan, indeed, science is never detached from the realm of ethics. Quite the contrary, in order for science to be possible, a certain ethical position has to be reached first. Otherwise, the discourse and the work of science cannot take place. In the case of the pleasure principle, the ethical position that predominated within the history of philosophy and theology was the correlation between pleasure and Good. For most philosophers and theologians, humans are spontaneously attracted to Good. And only a perversion in humans can disentangle this association. But, thanks to Sade, the idea that pleasure and pain could be tightly associated became a common idea in the 18th century, and an idea developed and popularized under the slogan: “happiness in evil” in the 19th century. As such, Lacan goes even as far as saying that Sade himself has been rendered possible by Kant. Lacan's thesis is that Sade's *Philosophy in the Boudoir* (1795) completes and tells the truth about Kant's universal imperative.

Kant is dreaming in Sade’s Boudoir
Kant's approach to morality detaches morality from any form of emotions or affect. Kant, indeed, has been the first one to proclaim that men are spontaneously attracted to evil and repelled by the good. Worse, humans are never inclined to do well, but always on the lookout for evil. In Freud's

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pleasure principle, the pleasure that is named is not a pleasure that refers to the notion of Good, but a pleasure that refers to the notion of well-being. The Good stands beyond any form of pleasure or well-being. The Good should no longer be attached to the notion of pleasure, but strictly referred to an inner voice, which is the moral voice that is calling upon the subject. The Good, according to Kant, is strictly opposed to any emotions or feelings, or inclinations that could attract a subject towards someone or something. Because all those emotions, according to Kant, are pathological. Which means that they are the reasons why humans are attracted to evil. The Good, as defined by Kant, is thus not a “positive” power that can help the subject to act according to the Good. It is, rather, something that helps that subject to feel repulsed by his ordinary pleasures. To put it differently, the Good can diminish the value of evil, but has no attractiveness in itself. But why does the Good have no object in the world that could give to it an attractive content? To give a proper answer to this question, Lacan, first, recommends rereading the *Critique of Practical Reason*, by Kant, and then to follow him into his reading of *Philosophy in the Boudoir*.

*Philosophy in the Boudoir* contains, right in the middle of it, a pamphlet within the pamphlet called: “Français, encore un effort si vous voulez être républicain.” Sade, in it, advocates in favor of an unlimited right to jouissance. And he wants to give to this right the universality that Kant gives to his moral maxims. Everyone has the right to say to me: I have the right to enjoy (jouir) your body. And this right has no limit. With such a maxim, Sade attempts to subordinate everyone, although such a maxim, underlines Lacan, is at best just black humor.
(humor noir). But it is this drop of black humor, according to Lacan, that gives to Kant's
universal maxim its proper meaning. Of course, no one will imagine that Sade's maxim
surrounding jouissance will ever become real, or will ever become strictly speaking universal.
But, Lacan notices one thing that is striking in it: its lack of reciprocity. Like Kant's maxim,
Sade's maxim is not grounded in any object, or emotion, or passion, or even less compassion for
the object that suffers. Consequently, between Kant and Sade there is a symmetry and an
inversion. There is a symmetry in the sense that the ethical experience is asymmetric. But there is
a reversal in the sense that, in Kant, it is the subject which does not enjoy its ethical experience,
while in Sade, it is the object which does not enjoy its ethical experience. Sade says that the
universal declaration of human rights, which says that no man can be the property of someone
else, does not mean that people cannot be used by everyone for their sexual enjoyment.530
Nonetheless, the hardest thing, with Sade's maxim, is to be able to apply it to yourself as the
object of use of the other and not as the one who is enjoying the other. The hardest thing, then, in
Sade's maxim, is the difference between the subject of enunciation, and the one who is saying the
sentence. For the one who is saying the sentence can become the “victim” of his own maxim.

Lacan’s Synthetic Sense of Morality
To go deeper into Lacan's consideration on this specific inversion of Kant and Sade’s position,

530 Interestingly enough, Sade uses here the argument made by the mendicant order founded by St Francis of Assisis,
when they argued that although their founder forbade them to own anything; he did not prevent them from using or
enjoying anything. Consequently, although the order was not supposed to own any private property, they managed to
give their property to another order while enjoying the use of it (which is exactly what the word “jouir de quelque
chose” means in French).
Miller’s text called “A discussion on Lacan’s Kant with Sade” is useful. In this text, Miller comes back first to Lacan's comments and inversion of Jarry's exclamation: “Long live Poland, because without Poland there would be no Poles”. Against such a claim, Lacan wants to disconnect the existence of Poland from the existence of particular Poles. Lacan “disconnects the set and the members of the set. Polishness is independent from Poland. Poland has ceased to exist and yet Poles remain, hoping for the second coming of Poland” (225). It means that in spite of the logical and linguistic relationships that links together Poland to the Poles, historically speaking, there can be Poles without Poland.

Just as in Jarry's statement about the Polish, Kant's stand on ethics is a kind of bulldozer that clears the way for a universal ethics that would do away with the old link between the Supreme Good and the Supreme Truth on which the tradition of antiquity (of discriminating taste for various kinds of objects) was grounded. Kant's ethic is thus a kind of Terror because, in it, the world disappears. And, in its wake, it creates a void. “The void of all that is ‘pathological’ in the subject. Pathological meaning, here, pathos, emotion, all the subject's sensory interests, everything that gives pleasure” (228). And the consequence of this void is to make appear an inner “voice” (the voice of the super-ego) as what is left after the subject has subtracted from himself all pathological emotions and desires.

In Kant's work, the remainder is a voice, the voice which appears at the very moment that it makes the object disappear. What remains is the voice of consciousness a voice which

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has something of the signifier about it, because it's a voice with a formulation, a voice that says something (230).

The Voice formulates an imperative. And the subject is bound to obey it. The voice commands the subject. But while this voice, for Kant, is an auto-affection of the subject, it will precisely become, for Lacan, the voice of the super-ego. This is why, according to Kant, the logical criterion for morality is analytic and not synthetic. It means that such a criterion is directly accessible by anyone who possesses reason. It is, by the virtue of its definition, universal.

Contrary to Kant's logical reduction of the field of morality, Lacan wants to introduce the idea “that we could come up with a more synthetic foundation for moral law, synthetic being the opposite of analytic” (229). It is precisely what the reversal of Jarry's sentence of the relationship between Poland and Poles is illustrating. For Lacan, the relationship between the two is not only analytic, but also synthetic in the sense that Poles do exist, historically, while Poland does not.

On the contrary, with Kant, we have the inverted situation. We do have a very precise definition of what is “Moral land,” but we are not sure that there is any person living in that Land. That is to say; we do have Poland, but might not have any Poles. A Pole without Poland is a Pole that is dreaming of Poland. A Pole that loves the idea of Poland. Miller writes, “You describe him as motivated by a kind of Courtly love for Lady Poland” (229). Which means that, at this level, there is no use at looking into a dictionary to define what is a Pole. There is no analytical judgment that can help us to make this definition clear. Because this very definition is now linked to every single Pole's desire. Commenting on this reversal, and bringing it back to Sade’s case, Miller writes:
Hence, my client is much more honest than Kant. Kant leads us to believe that the subject is speaking to himself, enunciating a law that terrorizes him. Whereas Sade presents us with a formulation in which the distinction between subject and other is explicit. He reveals the division of the subject, whereas Kant makes us think it is an auto-, non-division affectation. (Miller, 234)

If Sade's moral maxim is more moral than Kant's voice within, it is because it acknowledges the division of the subject that is needed in order to function. Also, it makes the sadistic component of the superego visible, and not hidden in the depth of the moral subject. In the formulation, “I have the right to enjoy any parts of your body,” the “I” is not the one of the one speaking, but the “I” of the one who will abuse. This is why the subject is split in two parts. Thus, the subject is no longer S, but $ as it is split between the Other and itself. Law is thus the inverse of desire and vice versa since what we call duty (moral duty) is connected to the drives and libidinal enjoyment. But if this is true, one could legitimately wonder, as Miller does in a text called Duty and the Drives,533 “where does the surplus value go if the libido is sacrificed?” Miller answers the question by arguing that “all the libido sacrificed is being accumulated at the same place where the duty speaks” (10), i.e., in the superego. In other words, all the libido gets concentrated in ideals. Thus, the stricter the voice of duty, the greater the corruption. “The authority of duty derives from the libidinal energy of the drive, and it is the same thing” (12). That is why Freud can say, in “The Economic Problem of Masochism”, that Kant's moral imperative is the direct heir of the Oedipus complex. Freud speaks directly about the sadism of the superego. This is why the superego is never satisfied but keeps asking for more. God, in Christianity, and as it is clear

in the story of Abraham, is animated by a will to enjoy at your expense. Superego is what makes you renounce your desire and repays you with a high sense of guilt.

**CONCLUSION: TOWARDS AN ETHICS OF JOUISSANCE**

Lacan’s ethic of psychoanalysis is not to be confused with the ethic of the Good, nor with the ethic of social duties. It does not ask the question, did you act in agreement with what you were supposed to do, but did you act in agreement with your most fundamental desire? However, to emphasize this non-normative aspect of Lacan’s ethics does not imply that Lacan mixes, as sometimes some queer theorists with an “anti-social edge” do, desire and jouissance.

A Queer Lacanian Ethics of Desire

It is true, on the one hand, that Lacan’s ethics, far from implying a form of correction of the subject, aims at almost forcing the subject to “stop” acting in conformity with his social duties if such a conformity goes against the affirmation of its own desire. As such, one could even say that there is a strict opposition between what ethics normally requires from a subject, and what Lacan wants to build as an ethic of psychoanalysis, since the morality of power, at the service of the Good, always goes as follows: as far as desires are concerned, come back later. Make them wait. One could thus conclude, on a very basic level, that Lacan’s ethics is in agreement with the non-normative dimension of the anti-social turn. However, Lacan does not believe, unlike most scholars of the anti-social turn, that the liberation from the desire of the Other comes from jouissance, or at least from jouissance itself. Quite the contrary, Lacan’s ethics resides on this
awareness. And this awareness is itself the product of the psychoanalytical knowledge that jouissance is always secretly tied to the super-ego. Lacan writes:

This is where the experience of human action resides. And it is because we know better than those who went before how to recognize the nature of desire, which is at the heart of this experience, that a reconsideration of ethics is possible, that a form of ethical judgment is possible, of a kind that gives this question the force of a last judgment: have you acted in conformity with the desire that is in you? (Seminar VII, 314)

Following this definition, one could argue that Lacan, just like Bataille, or the anti-social queer, is not trying to build an ethic of private happiness inasmuch as, in order to not “give ground to one’s desire,” one has to be able to go beyond fear and pity, or public shame like in the case of Antigone or Oedipus.

At the same time, such an ethics of desire should not be confused with Bataille’s moral of the Summit, nor with Edelman’s definition of queerness since, in between the two, lies the passage from the model of the tragic hero—which goes all the way onto death by being ready to pay the full price for it—to the model of the tragi-comic hero, who has learnt how to make something socially constructive with his excessive and opaque jouissance. The difference between Lacan and the anti-social can also be seen, for example, in the movement that goes from jouissance to desire, and then from desire to the sinthome in Lacan, and in the one that goes from jouissance to anxiety, and from anxiety to ecstasy in Bataille or Edelman. While, on the side of Bataille and Edelman, there is no reconciliation possible—but only an encounter with the absolute non-sense of life—there exists a way, within Lacan’s ethics of desire, to achieve a form
of sinthomal redemption of the Other through a redeeming of the notion of dupery and semblant.

Secondly, while Bataille’s moral of the Summit, or Edelman’s rejection of futurity aims at the dissolution of the ego, Lacan’s ethics of desire aims at helping the subject at traversing his ego by freeing it from its excessive and sometimes morbid jouissance. As such, on could say that, even if Bataille’s or the anti-social turn’s stand on morality do not fall on the side of the happiness script, and neither, strictly speaking, on the side of the super-ego (either the masochist or the sadistic one), they do maintain at an essential level a tie to jouissance and its demands for transgression. While, one the contrary, on the side of Lacan, because desire represents essentially the structure of the signifying chain that composes the subject, desire has the function of verifying that the subject is, actually, in agreement with the structure of its chain, or if it is obstructing this chain in the name of jouissance, and under the command of its superego.

To Live as if Death Was Pushing Us to Be
Thirdly, the difference between Bataille and Lacan is also visible when it comes to the function that death plays in both thinkers position. For Bataille, the moral of the Summit represents the accomplishment of the movement of eroticism, which is defined as the affirmation of life all the way onto death. Lacan’s definition of desire implies, on the contrary, the idea of wholeness that the idea of death brings to a subject when he sees it as the end point of its personal life. It is,

534 “In the definition of sublimation as satisfaction without repression, whether implicitly or explicitly, there is a passage from not-knowing [non-savoir] to knowing, a recognition of the fact that desire is nothing more than the metonymy of the discourse of demand. It is change as such. I emphasize the following: the proper relation between one signifier and another that we call desire is not a new object or a previous object but the change of object in itself” (293).
indeed, only through the perspective of its own death, insists Lacan that a subject can
legitimately ask himself if he has acted in agreement with his desire, i.e., if he has acted in
conformity with the structure of his or her signifying chain. Lacan said:

What I call ‘giving ground relative to one’s desire’ is always accompanied in the destiny
of the subject by some betrayal—you will observe it in every case and should note its
importance. Either the subject betrays his own way, betrays himself, and the result is
significant for him, or, more simply, he tolerates the fact that someone with whom he has
more or less vowed to do something betrays his hope and doesn’t do for him what their
pact entailed—whatever the pact may be, fated or ill-fated, risky, shortsighted, or indeed
a matter of rebellion or flight, it doesn’t matter. (320-321)

Of course, to affirm one’s own desire can lead to very tragic consequences, like in the case of
Antigone or Oedipus, but it does not have to be so. Oedipus is the best figure to show what
happens to a man when he starts to renounce his social duty in order to follow his desire. The
result is his banishment from the city, then his own mutilation, and then his death in dishonor.
The example of Oedipus shows us, thus, that the jederman, the normal man should always
choose to submit to his social duty and to give up his desire in order to avoid the bad
consequences that Oedipus had to face. The jederman, the second he encounters difficulties on
the road towards the affirmation of his desire always chooses a certain living death (the service
of the Good) in order to avoid the other death, the real one.

This is why, when life is lived through the perspective of death, it can be approached in
two opposite ways. It can be approached tragically, as it is mostly the case in Bataille (even
though he developed a form of tragic laughter) or in Edelman, or it can be approached comically, as it is the case with Lacan’s ethic of psychoanalysis. In the case of Bataille or Edelman, it shows the triumph of the being-onto-death, as is the case with Oedipus when, at the very end of *Oedipus at Cologne*, he says “Me Funai” “Better not to be born” (although let’s not forget that Bataille said, not long before he died “I don’t hate life”). In the case of Lacan, it is not the triumph of the being-onto-death that is being portrayed, but a way to learn how to laugh about the structural failure of any possible coincidence between our action and our true intentions. It is as if, like in a comedy, life was constantly showing how we cannot do otherwise but to slide beyond what we should have done, how we keep escaping the order of the our signifying chain while, nonetheless, remaining alive and more eager than ever to pursue our desire.

**WORK CITED**


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