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OCTOBER

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Gertrud Koch — *The Body's Shadow Realm*

Slavoj Žižek — *Looking Awry*

Joan Copjec — *The Sartorial Superego*

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$7.50/Fall 1989

Published by the MIT Press

OCTOBER

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OCTOBER (ISSN 0162-2870) (ISBN 0-262-75200-X)
is published quarterly (Summer, Fall, Winter, Spring) by the MIT Press, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142, and London, England.
Subscriptions: individuals $25.00; institutions $55.00; students and retired $20.00. Foreign subscriptions outside USA and Canada add $9.00 for surface mail or $17.00 for air mail. Prices subject to change without notice.
Address subscriptions to OCTOBER, MIT Press Journals, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142.
Manuscripts, in duplicate and accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelope, should be sent to OCTOBER, 19 Union Square West, New York, NY 10003. No responsibility is assumed for loss or injury.
Second class postage paid at Boston, MA, and additional mailing offices. To be honored free of charge, claims for missing copies must be made immediately upon receipt of the next published issue.
POSTMASTER: send address changes to OCTOBER, MIT Press Journals, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142.
OCTOBER is distributed in the USA by B. Deboer, Inc., 113 East Centre Street, Nutley, New Jersey 07110.
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JONATHAN CRARY, a founding editor of *Zone*, teaches art history at Barnard College and Columbia University, where he is a fellow in the Society of Fellows in the Humanities. His *Techniques of the Observer* will be published as an OCTOBER book by the MIT Press.

GERTRUD KOCH teaches at the University of Frankfurt and the Berlin Film Academy. She is coeditor of the feminist film journal *Frauen und Film* and of *Babylon*, a journal devoted to contemporary Jewish issues. Her book *"Was ich erbeute sind Bilder": Zum diskurs der Geschlechter im Film* was published in Frankfurt this year.

ANDREW ROSS teaches in the English Department at Princeton University. He is the author of *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (Routledge, 1989) and *The Failure of Modernism* (Columbia University Press, 1986) and the editor of *Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism* (University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK, of the Institute of Sociology at the University of Ljubljana (Yugoslavia), is the author of several books on philosophy, psychoanalysis, and popular culture. The most recent of these are: *Tout ce que vous avez toujours voulu savoir ce Lacan, sans jamais oser le demander à Hitchcock* (Paris, Navarin, 1988), *Le plus sublime des hystériques: Hegel passe* (Paris, Point-hors-Ligne, 1988), *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London, Verso, 1989). The essay published here is part of his forthcoming book *Looking Awry: Lacan Explained through Popular Culture* (an OCTOBER book, MIT Press).

The Body's Shadow Realm

GERTRUD KOCH

translated by JAN-CHRISTOPHER HORAK and JOYCE RHEUBAN

On the History of Pornographic Films: Cinema in Brothels, Brothels in Cinema, Cinema in Place of Brothels

The history of film is also the history of its limitations, supervision, regimentation, judicial constraint, and examination of norms. Reviewing chronologies of film history, we see the extent of the censor's alarm system, which would monitor the flow of cinematographic production, classified and catalogued into acceptable and unacceptable areas:

> According to a police directive, censorship cards will be instituted and censorship jurisdiction will be transferred to the chief of police of each of Berlin's police precincts. (May 20, 1908)[1]
>
> All members of the Seventh District Court appeared at Berlin police headquarters for the screening of a film which has caused a public scandal. This is the first judicial review of a film in Germany. (December 12, 1909)
>
> In March, the Peoples Institute of New York and Dr. Charles Sprague Smith established the "National Board of Censorship" as a film review board. (1902)[2]
>
> In Sweden, film censorship is instituted at the request of the film industry. (1911)
>
> According to a German municipal ordinance, every film must be

1. Heinrich Fraenkel, *Unsterblicher Film. Die grosse Chronik von der Laterna Magica bis zum Tonfilm*, Munich, Kindler, 1956, p. 380.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 382.

> submitted for certification to the appropriate precinct office twenty-four hours before public screening. (1911)[3]
>
> Through the founding of the Hays organization's "Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America," the American film industry sets up a form of voluntary self-regulation. (1922)[4]

Although these historians do not mention the rules then in effect for banning a film as offensive, we know from another source that the censorship authorities collected pornographic films:

> For the most part, the supervising authorities, the police, know about this class of films, films fated to lead a humble and obscure life. We define pornographic films as the cinematic depiction in an obscene form of whatever concerns sexual life, and these include just about everything human fantasy can possibly invent in the area of sexuality. The films pass directly from the producer to the consumer, thus steering clear of the censor, and with good reason. Nevertheless, the police archives are filled with films such as chance and vigilance have brought their way.[5]

Even though the invention of cinema was soon followed by institutionalized censorship, pornographic films still had time to become widespread. Unencumbered by censorship, which wasn't established until 1908, film pornography was already in full bloom in Germany by 1904. Short pornographic films—of up to a minute in length—furthered the technical development already seen in photographic pornography in such apparatuses as the stereoscope and mutascope. By 1904, such films had grown to four acts and ran twenty minutes. Early pornographic movies thus kept pace with most of cinema's developments, which raises the questions: what kind of aesthetic development did this genre undergo? can we in fact even speak of a genre? and what would define its particular aesthetic?

To answer these questions we have to look to the few available sources describing early pornographic films and their modes of reception:

> In most cases, these sotadic films were screened in private societies or in mens' clubs founded for this purpose. In Germany, the entry price ranged from ten to thirty marks. The distribution of tickets was handled by prostitutes, pimps, cafe waiters, barbers, and other persons in contact with the clientele, who knew they could earn a tidy profit by marking up the price. Since these vendors usually knew their clientele

3. *Ibid.*, p. 385.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 408.
5. Curt Moreck, *Sittengeschichte des Kinos*, Dresden, Paul Aretz, 1956, p. 173.

and their preferences, there was little danger of coming into conflict with the police.[6]

For the most part, pornographic films were bought and screened by brothels, which hoped to entice customers with filmic come-ons while also earning money by charging for the screenings. At first, the pleasure offered by pornographic films was expensive, reserved for the well-to-do customers who frequented such establishments in European metropolises from Paris to Moscow. Abroad, both Buenos Aires and Cairo offered international tourists the opportunity to visit pornographic cinemas. In *Die Schaubühne* Kurt Tucholsky describes an experience in a porn house in Berlin:

> Nobody spoke out loud, since everyone was a bit anxious; they only murmured. The screen turned white; a fragile, mottled silver-white light appeared, trembling. It began. But everyone laughed, myself included. We had expected something bizarre and extravagant. We saw a meow-kitty and a woof-doggy romping on the screen. Maybe the exporter had tacked the scene on to fool the police — who knows? The film ran without music, rattling monotonously; it was gloomy and not very pleasant. . . .
>
> Things remained *gemütlich* in the cinema. We didn't realize that even Tristan and Isolde would seem ridiculous in this setting, or that Romeo and Juliet, viewed impartially from another planet, would seem a comic and straight-laced affair.
>
> No, nothing of the sort among the patrons. The only reason they didn't play cards was because it was too dark. An atmosphere of healthy and hearty pleasure prevailed. You had to say to yourself — all this phony business — at least here you knew. . . . The ending was so obscure that when it was over everyone thought there was more to come — it just goes to show, that's how it is with sex. The men stood around feeling self-conscious and embarrassed, remarking on the lack of values here and in general. And then we pushed through narrow passageways into an adjoining establishment where the music was loud and shrill, and everyone was strangely quiet and excited. I heard later that the proprietor had ordered twenty call girls.[7]

The atmosphere of this occasion in Berlin — with the camaraderie of male bonding, uneasy and secret arousal, and forced jocularity — was apparently not unique. Norbert Jacques provides an illustration from Buenos Aires, one that enriches the steamy Berlin-beer flavor with sadomasochistically tinged exotic stereotypes:

6. *Ibid.*, p. 175. (The adjective *sotadic* derives from Sotades [323–247 B.C.] who wrote coarse satires and travesties of mythology in a peculiar meter which bears his name.—ed.)
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 178–180.

> One night in Caracas, walking along the harbor wall where the long, low Platte River steamers slept, I reached a point beyond the criminal quarter. An odd but impressive scaffolding stopped me in my tracks. . . . While I was looking up into its towering height, I saw a boat under me with a light, tied to the harbor wall. A man on the boat called out something to me. This man and I were totally alone there. He rushed up to me and pointed across the harbor, saying: "Isla Maciel!" and blurted out in an international language, "Cinematografo. Nina, deitsch, frances, englishmen, amor, dirty cinematographico!" . . . A large arc lamp radiated harshly over a sinister-looking shack on the other side.
>
> The man rowed me over there past the ships. . . . I came to a lonely trail, and one hundred meters up ahead of me was the glaring arc lamp. . . . On my left was a hedge; on the right, an impenetrable gloom of dirty shacks and dark corners; and on both sides, the breath of sudden, quick, raw, silent criminality. . . . I came to the house with the arc lamp. A large sign declared: "Cinematografo para hombres solo." The scene at its best! Before I went in, two local police at the door searched my pockets. It was like a scene out of a detective yarn.
>
> The show was in progress. It was a large hall with a gallery running around the sides. A screen hung from the ceiling, on which the cinematographic theater played out its scenes. . . . While stupid pricks chased each other around up there, women roamed among the guests. They were mostly Germans. The dregs of the world's brothels. . . .
>
> It was so stupid, so unbelievably dull and absurd, these idiotic, tired, and insolent wenches and the pretend vices on the screen overhead, which were supposed to enflame the customers' passions. It was all so insane, so nonsensically perverse. Here is this modern technical device, lighting up the faces of men staring up out of the darkness, acting as a pacesetter for a cat house, by speeding up the nervous, excited procession to the rooms. Men and hookers disappeared noisily and quickly up the dark steps.[8]

It seems that in viewing pornographic films one has to overcome a certain kind of shyness. Which has nothing to do with the legal or moral condemnation of pornography, nor with the obvious reason for pornographic films' being suited to the brothel. Even today, when pornographic films are shown in public theaters and no longer connected to the business of a brothel, a palpable sense of shame still attaches to the experience, which cannot be fully explained by the few remaining moral taboos. The same atmosphere of uneasiness and shame, excite-

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 180–182.

ment and repulsion is also revealed in historical documents encountered in more recent reports. Günter Kunert, for example, describes a visit to a porn house as follows:

> Kino Rondell. Silent men in darkness. No women. No throat-clearing. No coughing. Not even the proverbial pin drop could be heard. A gathering of the living dead, so it seems, sitting on folding chairs, always two at a table, whose greasy top has a list of drinks lit up from underneath, and a call bell. . . .
>
> A trailer for next week's feature is playing: a fat, aging "Herr Robert," whose voice lags behind the picture, snaps his fingers out of sync, followed by quick cuts of more or less (mostly more) naked girls parading across the screen in more or less (mostly less) seductive poses, displaying out-of-proportion bodies and faces radiating an aura of stupidity.
>
> Now a brandy! No one orders. No one smokes. No one breathes louder or heavier. In front of the rows of seats the celluloid nymphs twist and turn and seem more alive than the live audience, which, later, after the feature—a Danish production on the complexities and peculiarities of sex—leaves the Kino Rondell as silently as they had occupied it: without a laugh, without audible approval or disapproval.
>
> A kind of erotic phantom fades away quickly and quietly, condemned to take on corporeal existence once again, when the bell sounds for the next performance.[9]

If the porn cinema clientele is made up of human beings who act like zombies, voyeuristic pleasure in these cinemas clearly must have something in common with the secrecy of the peeping tom. The voyeur likes to look, but doesn't like to be seen. Displeasure in the porn house apparently results from the displeasure in being seen while looking. Where the connection between "cinema and brothel" still exists, and a "modern technical device" acts as a "pacesetter" for cat houses, then this displeasure and this shame in erotic relations will be channeled into "healthy and hearty pleasure." Pornographic films fulfill this function still, not only as a kind of G-rated masturbatory cinema, but also in brothels and prostitution. Along with this type, however, another type of pornographic film has developed which has no other intention, no other purpose than that of satisfying voyeuristic desire. In these films, the specialized sense of sight, regarded in the other type of pornographic cinema as fulfilling a subordinate function in foreplay, asserts its autonomy as isolated, unadulterated voyeuristic pleasure.

Only by assuming such a specialized mode of viewing can we explain the

9. Gunter Kunert, *Ortsangaben*, Berlin (East), 1970, pp. 123–124.

tremendous success of public pornographic movie houses, in spite of the displeasure they inflict on the zombielike voyeur. The language of our age of visual culture, in which the active subjugating eye wins out over the passive receptive sense organs, such as the ears, finds an apt metaphor in the recent divorce of cinema from brothel, pornography from prostitution. Since the workplace has long since demanded nothing more of the body than keeping a watchful eye on the control board, perhaps the private peep-show booth will soon offer the porn theater visitor a serviceable leisure-time retreat. It may be that over the history of pornographic cinema the films themselves have not changed so much as the organization of the senses. It may be that films' effects are more directly related to the social environments in which the films are presented than to the films' form and content. In other words, the audience's sexual orientation defines the way the product is consumed.

Although it is not certain whether pornographic films for heterosexuals are, aesthetically speaking, better or worse than those for homosexuals, they obviously encompass different modes of reception and consumption. Kurt Tucholsky described audience response in the days when the business of heterosexual pornography was still linked to prostitution: "Shouts, encouragements, grunts, applause, and rooting cheers rang out. Somebody compares his own private ecstasy. There was a lot of noise and yelling."[10]

Brendan Gill rediscovered a similar scene in a New York porn theater in the 1970s: "A large portion of the audience at both heterosexual and homosexual blue movies is Oriental. Unlike white males, Oriental males come into the theatre by two's and three's and talk and laugh freely throughout the course of the program."[11] Gill also describes a connection between gay porn theaters and erotic practice that is hardly ever encountered in public heterosexual porn houses:

> For the homosexual, it is the accepted thing that the theater is there to be cruised in; this is one of the advantages he has purchased with his expensive ticket of admission. . . . Far from sitting slumped motionless in one's chair, one moves about at will, sizing up possibilities. Often there will be found standing at the back of the theatre two or three young men, any of whom, for a fee, will accompany one to seats well down front and there practice upon one the same arts that are being practiced upon others on the screen.[12]

We also see that in the course of time, settings, stereotypes, and characters change even in pornographic cinema in order to conform to newer fashions, especially about what is considered sexy. Early pornography, for example,

10. Moreck, p. 179.
11. Brendan Gill, "Blue Notes," *Film Comment*, vol. 9, no. 1 (1973), p. 11.
12. *Ibid.*

attempted to please its well-to-do clientele by presenting erotic scenes involving servant girls and masters, thus capturing an everyday erotic fantasy, while in more recent pornographic films these roles give way to other trades. Newer films produced for public screening and sale also differ from older ones in that they follow the letter of the law more strictly; they avoid showing certain erotic activities that *were* shown earlier, since the early films were illegal anyway. According to Curt Moreck's description of pornographic films of the '20s and earlier, individual films could be distinguished according to country of origin and target audience:

> Pornographic films reveal something about different erotic preferences in different countries. Thus French pornography presents excretory acts with striking frequency and indulges in lengthy depictions of preparatory maneuvers, while the sex act itself often doesn't occur at all or is shifted behind the scenes. England, which produces such films mainly for South Africa and India, favors flagellation scenes and sadistic abuse of blacks. . . . Italy, whose southern location already overlaps into the zone of "Oriental" sexuality, cultivates the depiction of acts of sodomy as a specialty, while scenes of sexual union between humans and animals and scenes of animals mating are also popular. It has been said that Germans sin without grace. German pornographic films lend some credence to that assumption. Without exception they show well-executed, realistic scenes of coitus. On the other hand, erotic scenes with animals are totally absent. Now and again something kinky is thrown in to broaden their appeal.[13]

Apparently, early pornographic films were also divided into those with quasi-realistic settings—thus bearing some relation to the customer's everyday life—and those set in a world of fantasy or using stock settings associated with forbidden sexuality or foreign exoticism. The "realistic" films depicted masters and servants in bourgeois surroundings—the home of an officer, for instance. The escapist ones were acted out in harems, cloisters, and so forth. This dichotomy apparently still holds true: consider, on the one hand, the "Housewife Reports" (pornographic serials about housewife affairs with the postman, gasman, etc.) and, on the other, racist excursions into exotic domains—Thailand in *Emanuelle*, for example.

The blue movie genre has meanwhile obviously become more professional, unintentional comic relief and unbelievable plots having given way to a routinely crafted product. Cinematography has become more skillful and the overall construction more sophisticated, with cutting for suspense and other formal procedures turning straightforward illustrations into cinematic images. Even if we

13. Moreck, p. 183.

assume that some ironic observations were employed by historical commentators as defense mechanisms against their own shame and excitement, we still come to the conclusion that early porn films were awkward and amateurish, made with little thought to achieving cinematic effect:

> Now came *Scenes in a Harem*. The wallpaper in the empty room, along with the carpet and curtains, suggested that the location was a red-light district, like Schlesisches Tor in Berlin. Fatima danced. The depraved girl took off her extravagant lingerie and danced—that is, she turned around casually by herself while everyone admired her. She danced in front of her sultan, who was lolling about listlessly in other harem girls' laps. He was a bon vivant. The women fanned him with large Japanese paper fans, and on a table in front of them stood a glass of *Weissbier*. . . .
>
> *Secrets of the Cloister* and *Anna's Sideline* came on next: Two "perverse beauties" rolled around on a carpet. One of them, I found out, was a certain Emmy Raschke, who laughed continuously, probably because she thought the whole thing a bit funny. Well, they were all there, cool and very businesslike, to act out (if the audience is any guide) the most exquisite things, while the cameraman yells directions at them. . . .
>
> *The Captain's Wife* was playing upstairs. It was pornography come to life. While the worthy officer cheated on his wife with the lieutenant's wife, the captain's wife made good use of the time with her husband's orderly. They are caught in the act, and it leads to blows. Say what you like, the film was true to life, even though the life of French soldiers does seem a little strange: things happen so fast. In any case, there were two or three moments where the actors played their roles to the hilt.[14]

Here, Tucholsky describes the kind of porn films that abstain from so-called perversions and limit themselves to that which Curt Moreck called typical for German blue movies: "well-executed, realistic scenes of coitus" and "sin without grace."[15]

Comic moments, described by Tucholsky as unintentional, occur often in the genre. We cannot assume that these comic aspects of old porn movies are merely an effect of historical distance. Even today, many sex films function as farce, dirty jokes, and witty commentary. So too, in popular older forms, comic moments played a significant role:

> The comic element naturally plays an important role in pornographic

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 178–179.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

> films, since most people have a humorous attitude toward certain sexual practices rather than a serious or even pathetic one. Films make use of this fact by showing people in sticky situations, interrupted or embarrassed while tending to bodily needs, or getting caught in awkward positions through some droll mishap while having sexual relations.[16]

A "humorous attitude toward certain sexual practices" probably arises out of sexual repression and anxiety; laughter and nervous giggling are often indications that a taboo has been violated. It seems as if the persistence of comedy as a pornographic form has to do with the pleasure of looking, with voyeurism itself: we laugh at the secret exposure of others. This can also be seen in the fact that TV producers and viewers concur in considering as "comedy" shows, such as *Candid Camera*, that involve watching people with hidden cameras.

The Knowing Look and the Pleasure of Looking: On the Autonomy of the Senses

What is new in pornographic cinema is obviously its existence as a voyeuristic amusement park. It promises nothing more or less than it advertises: the pleasure in looking, erotic activity without social contact. This new pornographic cinema is found not only in the large industrial metropolises but also in small towns and in the daily programs of staid resorts. Those who, with good and honorable intentions, reproach blue movies for deceiving the poor consumer—instead of delivering the genuine product, "real" sex, these films palm off on him a phony substitute—are missing the point. Such critics assume the primacy of genital pleasure over that which arises out of the "component instincts," one of which is voyeurism, visual sensuality, *Schaulust*.

The consumer who buys his ticket at the door doesn't expect and probably doesn't even want to experience sexual gratification with another person. Like Mr. Chance in Hal Ashby's film comedy *Being There* (1980), the porn movie patron is "just looking." Criticism of pornography thus misses the mark when it assumes that the customer has been cheated because he expects and pays for something he doesn't get. Customer fraud would hardly explain the success of pornographic movies. While having improved on their heavy-handed and awkward predecessors, the quality of today's porn films explains this success even less, since these films do not begin to come up to the formal standards of other genres. Recent attempts to have porn "taken seriously" by enhancing the genre with stars, festivals, and directors should probably be seen not so much as a gimmick to attract a wider audience as an effort by an association of craftsmen to

16. *Ibid.*

gain credibility. Meanwhile, even apart from the hype, the porn film trend keeps on growing. The bids for credibility may help overcome the last bastions of resistance to pornographic films, but they won't do much for box office.

In my view this trend toward pornographic movies involves a more far-reaching development in society's organization of our senses. Porn houses are not the motor but the chassis. An explanation for the growth of pornographic cinema can be found in its function within prevailing sexual organization. Walter Serner, overwhelmed by this new invention of cinema, already proposed such an idea in *Die Schaubühne* in 1913:

> All the likely reasons somehow don't add up to an explanation of the movies' unprecedented success everywhere one looks. The reason must lie deeper than we think. And if we look into those strange flickering eyes to find out why people spend their last penny to go to the movies, they take us way back into the history of humankind. There we find, writ large: *Schaulust*. It is not merely harmless fascination with moving images and color, but a terrifying lust, as powerful and violent as the deepest passions. It's the kind of rush that makes the blood boil and the head spin until that bafflingly potent excitement, common to every passion, races through the flesh. . . .
>
> This ghastly pleasure in seeing atrocities, violence, and death lies dormant in us all. It is this kind of pleasure which brings us, hurrying, to the morgue, to the scene of the crime, to every chase, to every street fight, and makes us pay good money for a glimpse of sodomy. And this is what draws the masses into the cinemas as if they were possessed. Cinema offers the masses the kind of pleasure which, day by day, is eroded by the advance of civilization. And neither the magic of the stage nor the tired thrills of a circus, music hall, or cabaret can attempt to replace it. In cinema, the masses reclaim, in all its former glory, the sensuousness of looking: *Schaulust*.[17]

Serner prophetically anticipates that cinema's appeal lies in a Nero-like diversion: being able to participate from the bleachers in the atrocities of an epoch. Acknowledgment of this aspect of the pairing within popular culture of "sex and violence," as the critics call it, has been suppressed. While societies have long permitted the depiction of brutal violence, hatred, war, crime, destruction, and death, this has not applied to the presentation of naked bodies and sexuality. It is no wonder that, with the relaxing of sexual taboos, cinema has now seized upon sexuality as a voyeuristic object. Up to now you could see just about every possible way of killing a person. Now we can also see 99, or 150, or "x" ways of making love. *Schaulust*, which Serner describes as a violent, volatile passion, and

17. Walter Serner, "Kino und Schaulust," *Die Schaubühne 9*, 1913. Quoted in Anton Kaes, ed., *Kino-Debatte*, Munich, Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1978, pp. 53–54.

to which he ascribes an ultimately corruptive influence, is itself neither outcome nor origin. Rather it arose and took shape on its own out of the processes involved in the establishment of a highly rationalized and thoroughly organized society. The success of the porn house in its present form is the expression of this cultural-historical development rather than of a primal passion:

> The eye is an organ constantly under stress, working, concentrating, always unequivocally interpreting. The ear, on the other hand, is more diffuse and passive. Unlike an eye, you don't have to open it first.[18]

> The eye has adapted to bourgeois rationality and ultimately to a highly industrialized order by accustoming itself to interpreting reality, a priori, as a world of objects, basically as a world of commodities; the ear has achieved nothing similar.[19]

> Such a division of labor between the various receptive faculties of human beings, a specialization of the senses, was necessary for a particular stage of capitalist production, the same stage of the production process that is singled out by "Taylorism."[20]

In the age of Taylorism, a dramatic rise in the dissemination of pornography was observed in Victorian England. It remains to be demonstrated that this sudden interest is strictly the result of the notoriously repressive Victorian society, that is, that it was conceived as an outlet for dammed-up passions. Rather, the dissemination of pornography is connected to specific social aspects of modernization, as well as to parallel changes in the perceptual apparatus and intrapsychic mechanisms. In a certain respect pornographic cinema is both the symptom of this development and its expression. Training the eye means adapting the sense of sight to strategies of rationalization and modernization. An expansion of voyeurism at the level of the organization of the drives corresponds to this social/perceptual development, thereby bringing sexuality in line with it.

The connection between power, control, and sexuality can only be made through changes in sexuality itself. Pornography may be one of those sieves through which power seeps into the inner regions of sexuality while sexuality flows out and becomes a part of this power. Michel Foucault analyzes the inter-

18. Theodor W. Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Komposition für den Film*, Munich, Roger & Bernhard, 1969, p. 43.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
20. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung. Zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1972, p. 237. Frederick Winslow Taylor developed a system of rationalizing the work process, a conception which was widely adopted and applied to shape industrial design and management practices.

meshing of power and sex in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, without, however, viewing the matter in terms of a simple oppressor/victim relationship of repression:

> This implantation of multiple perversions is not a mockery of sexuality taking revenge on a power that has thrust on it an excessively repressive law. Neither are we dealing with paradoxical forms of pleasure that turn back on power and invest it in the form of a "pleasure to be endured." The implantation of perversions is an instrument-effect: it is through the isolation, intensification, and consolidation of peripheral sexualities that the relations of power to sex and pleasure branched out and multiplied, measured the body, and penetrated modes of conduct. And accompanying this encroachment of powers, scattered sexualities rigidified, became stuck to an age, a place, a type of practice. A proliferation of sexualities through the extension of power; an optimization of the power to which each of these local sexualities gave a surface of intervention: this concatenation, particularly since the nineteenth century, has been ensured and relayed by the countless economic interests which, with the help of medicine, psychiatry, prostitution, and pornography, have tapped into both this analytical multiplication of pleasure and this optimization of the power that controls it. Pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement.[21]

The history of sexuality, according to Foucault, is inscribed in the "will to knowledge," meaning power. Pornography thus becomes nothing other than the "will to knowledge"—the night school for sex education—where, by means of voyeurism's cognitive urge, the discourse of power is begun. In fact, some studies of the social history of pornography offer evidence that these films were only too happy to be thought of as a contribution to research on sexuality and its various forms. Then came the recent wave of porn films whose opening credits declared their intention to offer practical advice for living, to be purveyors of knowledge. Examples of these are the Oswald Kolle series, or *Helga*. The classification of formal knowledge by category still attaches to an unending series of "Film Reports," often presenting sexual behavior according to various occupations. Even early porn films displayed a lexicographic tendency, as an eyewitness noticed:

21. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, New York, Vintage Books, 1980, p. 48.

> A special flavor is given to obscene films through the scrupulously realistic presentation of every imaginable perversion. Although life itself very often offers the connoisseur a view of simple vice, the chance to enjoy real perversity as a spectator is much rarer; in this case, film tries to fill the void. There are some films in this genre which seem to have been staged directly from Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, as a manual of abnormal sexual operations for civilized man.[22]

> All the vices of man flickered by on the screen. Every one of the hundred and fifty ways from the old *Treatise on the Hundred and Fifty Ways of Loving* was demonstrated, with occasional interruptions for lesbian, pederast, and masturbation jokes. All that was harmless. Sadists and masochists waved their instruments, sodomy was practiced, coprophagous acts were on display. Nothing was held back, everything occurred in a banal reality, all the more infuriating for its technical crudity.[23]

The "will to knowledge" activates the eye, which in turn casts its gaze upon sexuality—*Schaulust* as an instrument of cognition, cognition as *Schaulust*: pornography discovers its social role. Psychoanalytic theory established the notion of a relationship between curiosity, cognitive activity, and voyeurism in the developmental history of the individual even before pornography revealed this connection by becoming a typical product of our society. The optical organization of reality implies control, from the vigilant eye of the hunter to "the great eye of the government" (Foucault). Jean-Paul Sartre notes in *Being and Nothingness*:

> In addition the idea of discovery, of revelation, includes an idea of appropriative enjoyment. What is seen is possessed; to see is to *deflower*. . . . More than this, knowledge is a hunt. Bacon called it the hunt of Pan. The scientist is the hunter who surprises a white nudity and who violates by looking at it. Thus the totality of these images reveals something which we will call the *Actaeon-complex*. . . . : a person hunts for the sake of eating. Curiosity in an animal is always either sexual or alimentary. To know is to devour with the eyes.[24]

Let us assume the correctness of Foucault's thesis that the history of sexuality is based on a will to knowledge and concede that pornography is a conduit for

22. Moreck, p. 182.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
24. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness. An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, New York, Philosophical Library, 1956, p. 578.

this transmission of sex and power. If, in addition, we consider another point made by Sartre, we might be able to explain why pornographic cinema today is a medium for conveying knowledge (in Foucault's sense) rather than a medium for aesthetic experience. Sartre assumes a difference between art and cognition that is based on their different relationships to appropriation. Works of art resist appropriation: "The work of art is like a fixed emanation of the mind. The mind is continually creating it and yet it stands alone and indifferent in relation to that creation."[25] Cognition, on the other hand, is constituted as an act of appropriation, thus incorporating the object of cognition and assimilating it: "Knowledge is at one and the same time a *penetration* and a *superficial* caress, a digestion and the contemplation from afar of an object which will never lose its form."[26]

Sartre analyzes cognition as assimilation, whose end is reached when desire destroys its object, rather than preserving it through appropriation—you can't have your cake and eat it too! It seems to me that Sartre's analysis of cognition as penetration and as detached observation also characterizes the appropriation process in pornographic films. If the viewer allows himself to be carried away by the desire to possess—thus relinquishing the position of a detached observer—he must sacrifice his *Schaulust* in order to take in a specific moment or image; in the meantime, subsequent images and sensations have already appeared on the screen. Thus, the viewer is caught between two modes of appropriating: perception and cognition. It is like Buridan's hungry ass of old caught between two tasty piles of hay:

> When I look at a porn magazine, I don't care about the way the scene is visualized, even if the men and women are ugly or something else isn't quite right. In my fantasy they exist in a way that excites me. Besides, it's up to me which picture I choose to look at, and I can always turn the page or go back to a certain picture. . . . The viewer of a porn film always remains alienated from the situation he's observing, because he has to keep his clothes on and can't touch, even though the pictures arouse him. He becomes confused.[27]

This description of a user experience points to the key difference between the two pornographic mediums and raises the question: why, despite such a frustrating situation, have so many people developed a distinct preference for pornographic movies? Perhaps the reaction of the regular viewer of porn films is not one of confusion at all; maybe the person like Mr. Chance, who only wants to look, is quite common. It is possible that inside the porn theater desire actually becomes transformed into the fetishism of the aficionado, who only needs to

25. *Ibid.*, p. 578.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 579–580.
27. Beate Klöckner, "Hörst du mein heimliches Rufen? Die 'gute' und die 'böse' Lust," *Strandgut*, no. 26 (March 1980), p. 17.

know what is available, then sits back down to watch—the ultimate triumph of the eye over the body.

This theoretical notion seems to be supported by the evidence of amateur pornographic films, like those that Robert van Ackern includes with other kinds of home movies in his scathing compilation film *Germany in Private* (1980). The films, though formally far inferior to commercial porn films, nevertheless draw on them for their fantasies. Pornographic ideas and mise-en-scène are recorded by a Super-8 camera in a totally naturalistic fashion; in fact, in contrast to more polished professional porn, one has the distinct impression that the events are taking place only for the sake of the camera. An agitated woman sprawls out on a kidney-shaped coffee table in a living room; another models sexy underwear. Pleasure in the actions themselves seems minimal; the liveliest thing about these bodies is their lascivious gaze into the camera. The recording camera creates the show. It's like Mr. Chance thinking he can turn off unpleasant reality with a flick of his TV remote control. Once again the assimilation of filmed pornographic fantasies becomes alienated from erotic practice. What is assimilated is not the sexuality that is represented but the representation of sexuality. Pornographic movies beget pornographic movies.

The Realm of the Pornographic Film: Shadows, Shock, Scarcity, and Plenty

In the beginning of this essay I discussed the ways in which liberalization through penal code reforms led, in most Western countries, to the emergence of a varied system of pornographic cinemas. This development was understood as the result of the permeation of sexuality by social power. It was also suggested that in pornographic cinema instrumental reason tailors sensuality to its own measure. The image of the human being in pornographic films is one of the body as a mechanism for experiencing and maximizing pleasure, and of the person as monad—as defined by bourgeois ideology in its strictest sense—as one whose actions are guided by self-interest, specifically, in experiencing as much pleasure as possible.

The perpetual motion of desire is choreographed for us in pornographic cinema, and is constituted out of its arsenal. Everything becomes an instrument for sensual pleasure: the body, a hair brush, a dildo, a banana. Every situation leads to sex: a flat tire, the beach, the carwash, or an office party. Bodies are linked with one another according to mathematical equations; orgies are conducted like a game of dominos. What Horkheimer and Adorno have to say about Sade also applies to porn movies.

> What Kant grounded transcendentally, the affinity of knowledge and planning, which impressed the stamp of inescapable expediency on every aspect of a bourgeois existence that was wholly rationalized,

> even in every breathing-space, Sade realized empirically more than a century before sport was conceived. The teams of modern sport whose interaction is so precisely regulated that no member has any doubt about his role, and which provide a reserve for every player, have their exact counterpart in the sexual teams of *Juliette*, which employ every moment usefully, neglect no human orifice, and carry out every function.[28]

In fact, newer pornographic films demonstrate significant advances, especially in the area of gymnastic-artistic formations. Technique has evolved from presentations of "perverse beauties rolling around on a carpet" to orgies of group sex that demonstrate athletic control of the body along with simultaneous sexual feats. The aesthetic of the pornographic film relies on an underlying metaphor of the body as a machine: editing makes it possible to replace tired bodies with fresh ones, or with those that have been replenished in the interim. Or else in a pinch, when nothing more can be exhorted from these sexual athletes, editing can be used to create movement artificially. The performers' interchangability and anonymity function as a material correlative to the ideology they express. There's no longer room for the old-fashioned clumsiness of a giggling Emmy Raschke. Now we have high performance professionals who, in the manner of Taylorization, contribute specialized physical skills to the completion of the final product. Meanwhile, maintenance crews with spare parts stand ready to take care of breakdowns. These production maneuvers are of no interest to the viewer, who pays as little notice to the rapid relay of aroused penises, wide-open mouths, spread thighs, and drawn labia as he or she does when the female performer changes wigs—from a blonde equestrienne to a red-headed lesbian.

The most sophisticated porn films are structured in such a way that the keyhole perspective of the voyeur is built right into the film. This device allows for several "numbers" at the same time, shown through parallel editing, and helps counteract the fatigue that invariably sets in when an entire coition is presented without interruption in a single take. The latter usually gives the impression of being hard work rather than pleasure. Pornographic cinema emerges at the end of a developmental process in a society of specialization and differentiation. Pornography itself contributes to this specialization by promoting the autonomy of *Schaulust*. The differentiation of pornography as a product parallels developments in society, as producers speculate on the consumer's current and projected needs and taboos. Male homosexuality doesn't turn up in a heterosexual porn house and vice versa, anal eroticism only takes place between men and women, and the only way a man comes close to another man is when a

28. Max Horkheimer and Theodore W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, New York, Continuum, 1987, p. 88.

woman, who lies between them, is entered both vaginally and anally. Lesbian sex does not appear either; when women caress each other, it is only because they are waiting for a man or performing for a male voyeur.

But criticism of pornography is still clearly ill at ease with its newer forms, especially its filmic forms. Despite the routine way in which the socialization of sexuality is pursued, some quality still clings to pornographic cinema which places it into the category that Siegfried Kracauer called "phenomena overwhelming consciousness":

> Elemental catastrophes, the atrocities of war, acts of violence and terror, sexual debauchery, and death are events which tend to overwhelm consciousness. In any case they call forth excitements and agonies bound to thwart detached observation. No one witnessing such an event, let alone playing an active part in it, should therefore be expected accurately to account for what he has seen. Since these manifestations of crude nature, human or otherwise, fall into the area of physical reality, they comprise all the more cinematic subjects. Only the camera is able to represent them without distortion. . . .
>
> The cinema, then, aims at transforming the agitated witness into a conscious observer. Nothing could be more legitimate than its lack of inhibition in picturing spectacles which upset the mind. Thus it keeps us from shutting our eyes to the "blind drive of things."[29]

Kracauer suggests that only through the alienation of the image is it possible to imagine a reconciliation with objects and their recuperation from mere functionalism. The one-dimensionality of the optical appropriation of the world is mirrored in the flat screen of pornographic cinema, and somehow makes it even more scintillating and enticing than any ideological criticism—no matter how well-intentioned or well-founded—has been able to account for.

> One must learn to read between the lines of gaping flesh and labia, as if these constituted a code of prohibition and denial. . . . But the whole iconography of unlived life, of antieroticism in capitalist systems is only revealed to the person who remains sensitive to pornography's debasement, dirtiness, vulgarity, and brutality, who has seen its leering grin.[30]

Those who, like Peter Gorsen in the above quotation, learn to read pornographic films against the grain will find in it not only "a code of prohibition and denial"—in the sense that the cinema supplies what reality denies. They will also

29. Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, London and New York, Oxford University Press, 1960, pp. 57–58.
30. Peter Gorsen, *Sexualästhetik. Zur bürgerlichen Rezeption von Obszönität und Pornographie*, Reinbek, Rowohlt, 1972, p. 104.

recognize the wounds that "the code of prohibition and denial" have inflicted on desire itself—wounds that are not external to but within the iconographic system, a system that expresses rather than represses. Even with the machinelike availability and interchangability of bodies in pornographic films, their crude naturalism harbors a wish for a realm beyond renunciation where milk and honey flow. In his study of sexuality and pornography in Victorian England, Steven Marcus traces the historical context of the era's imagery to its economy:

> The fantasies that are at work here have to do with economics; the body is regarded as a productive system with only a limited amount of material at its disposal. And the model on which this notion of semen is formed is clearly that of money. . . .
>
> Furthermore, the economy envisaged in this idea is based on scarcity and has as its aim the accumulation of its own product. And the fantasy of pornography, as we shall have ample opportunity to observe, is this idea's complement, for the world of pornography is a world of plenty. In it all men are limitlessly endowed with that universal fluid currency which can be spent without loss. Just as in the myth Zeus descends upon Danae in a shower of gold, so in pornography the world is bathed, floated, flooded, inundated in this magical produce of the body.[31]

The Victorian pornographic fantasy of abundance complemented real poverty in the external world. The wealth that pornographic cinema commands today had yet to be amassed. Thus, now, the endless flow of semen, the bodies of women doused in sperm, allude to one particular scarcity: that of the body itself. Pornographic fantasy invariably refers us back to the world of machines, of interlocking systems and cogs, in which everyone, ultimately, is caught up. But the fantasy alludes, above all, to the subjugation of the body, which suffers from want in the midst of material plenty.

Today pornographic film no longer refers to meanings lying outside its own subject matter; it refers primarily to itself by relying on what can be seen on the screen: bodies and their passions. Now we must reconsider the problem of voyeurism addressed above and pose the question: What is it that is seen? what aspects of sexuality can be visualized? I will attempt to answer this question in the next section, which deals with the iconography of the visible (the phallus) and the invisible (the vagina) in gender-specific pornographic imagery. But first I want to examine further that distance between observer and observed which, according to Kracauer, is created by the camera.

Kracauer believes distance is necessary to lessen the shock that would result from the spectator's direct confrontation with certain phenomena. Pornography

31. Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians. A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England,* London, Corgi Books, 1964, p. 22.

obviously plays off a certain fear of crudity, coarseness, and undisguised, unsublimated sexuality. Only through the image can the observer confront that which would otherwise frighten him or her. The same process occurs within the individual in the dream-work. In the case of pornographic cinema, the camera becomes a device for creating distance and the medium of a harmless voyeurism:

> Like a camera, I observe but am not involved. In a narrow place in a dark cave I look through the camera and film a scene. I see a huge scorpion, while somebody outside tries to kill it. It's four or five feet long. The guy outside uses his hands and feet to throw sand into the cave, moving it fast, back and forth—so sexual. He hurls a cold, poisoned lobster's tail as bait, so the scorpion won't bite him. Jesus, what a dream! I filmed the battle between these two jokers. It's dangerous and disturbing.[32]

This dream, as related by a patient to his psychoanalyst, provides a good description of the discharge mechanism inherent in this camera-voyeurism. The dream is interpreted by the psychoanalyst as fear of sexuality. (The camera played a role not only in the dreams of this patient, but also in his actual sexual life. He made slides from photos that he took of his girlfriend during their sex games.) Parallels with the procedures of pornographic voyeurism can thus be found at the level of individual psychology. Such everyday examples demonstrate just how deeply embedded are these organizational forms of the perceptual apparatus. Thus the idea of a bad "influence" originating in the simple content of pornographic cinema—an idea often used by political conservatives as an argument for censorship—is not a viable one.[33]

Looking, as a form of sexual curiosity that probes an undiscovered sexuality, requires distance in order to mitigate the fear of the unknown—the Kracauerian shock. Some literary works employ shadow metaphors to create the necessary distance between observer and observed. The following example from literature demonstrates, from a different perspective, the same need for distance in sexual looking that we see in pornographic cinema:

> The shadow of the housekeeper's legs, as she lay with her back on the table, rose up with bent knees over the coachman's creeping shadow, and the shadow of the coachman, resting on his knees, rose above the shadow of the housekeeper's stomach. The shadow of the coachman's hands reached under the shadow of the housekeeper's skirts, the shadow of the skirt slipped down and the shadow of the coachman's abdomen burrowed into the shadow of the housekeeper's exposed thighs. The shadow of the coachman's arm dug into the shadow of his

32. Leon L. Altman, *Praxis der Traumdeutung*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1981, p. 121.
33. In connection with these problems compare Volkmar Sigusch's summary of the *Pornography Report*, quoted in Gorsen, pp. 108–110.

> crotch and pulled out a polelike shadow, which in its shape and position matched his tool; he thrust this protruding shadow into the big, well-rounded shadow of the housekeeper's belly after the shadow of the housekeeper's legs had raised themselves above the shadow of the coachman's shoulders.[34]

The schematic, the stereotypical, the elaboration of persons and identities through the movements of their bodies—thus does Peter Weiss capture the voyeuristic experience in a literary form in which the action dissolves into endless genitives. As a characteristic of pornographic film, the voyeuristic experience is presented at face value and is not problematized. The transformation of persons into patterns which comport themselves according to a preconceived design refers even in pornographic cinema to the longing for a sexual life that is not predicated on the identity of "mature personality" and "genital sex":

> One experiences a glimpse of sexual utopia when one doesn't have to be oneself, and when one doesn't merely love one's lover for herself: it is the negation of the ego principle. It undermines that invariable aspect of bourgeois society, in its broadest sense, which defines identity as integration. . . .
>
> The advancing social reinforcement of genitality brings about greater repression of the component instincts, as well as their representative forms in genital relations. What remains of those instincts is cultivated only in the socialized voyeurism of foreplay. Voyeurism exchanges union with one person for observation of all, and thus expresses sexuality's tendency to socialization, which is itself an aspect of sexuality's deadly integration.[35]

The constant change of locations encompassed in the domain of the porn movie, the make-up and costumes that are the trappings of anonymous passion, are perhaps the last traces of a search for nonidentity in sex. The appearance in a porn movie of a proletarian captain of a steamer on the Elb promises a two-fisted ingredient in *Firm Grip*. In *The Duchess of Porn* a black evening gown offers a touch of French decadence; and *Convent Girls* hints at sadomasochistic flagellation orgies in hair shirts. The component instincts conceal their desires in the secret code of the films' settings, desires obscured in the films themselves by the hearty gymnastic primacy of genital sex.

34. Peter Weiss, *Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers,* Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1964, pp. 98–99.
35. Theodore W. Adorno, "Sexualtabus und Recht heute," in *Eingriffe. Neun kritische Modelle,* Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1963, pp. 104–105.

The Secret of the Missing Phallus and Woman's Other Place

Criticism of pornographic cinema, originally leveled by conservatives on moral grounds, is now exercised, after widespread easing of controls and liberalization, primarily in feminist political action and analysis. But the feminist critique of pornographic film is fundamentally distinguished from that of conservative moralists in its intent. Feminists see in pornographic cinema not the erosion of existing norms but rather their expression and confirmation. Pornographic cinema reduces sexuality to the measure of a male perspective, one grounded in patriarchal myths about female sexuality and the phallus. In short, pornographic cinema is sexist. Feminists argue that sexism prevents the emancipation of sexuality, an emancipation that would liberate women's sexual fantasies and prepare the way for a well-deserved end to phallocentric primacy in the prevailing sexual order. The intent of these arguments is, therefore, not a conservative preservation of existing values but revolutionary change. The arguments arise out of the strategies of the women's sexual and political liberation movement.

The disturbing state of sexuality today makes it difficult to object to the goals of feminist criticisms of pornographic film. One can, however, object to arguments that posit a direct connection between viewing pornographic films and engaging in certain sexual acts, the argument, for example, that whoever views sadistic porn movies sees in them a possible way of behaving and an invitation to rape and sadistically torture women; or that whoever sees phallic fantasies of omnipotence endorsed on the screen will hardly be prepared to act differently in reality. It has never been proven that filmed events have a direct effect on human behavior. It is my conviction that we can only conceive of such a connection in a broad, collective sense, not as a direct relationship as defined by behavioral psychology. In contrast to the above argument, I assume that pornography is less an expression of prevailing male sexual *practice* than an expression of its deficiency, the rehabilitation of damaged fantasies. Although legislative and executive regulation and prosecution is no longer widespread, the subculture of pornographic movies still maintains an aura of the secret and forbidden, the sensational and the never-before-seen; it is therefore promoted not as something ordinary or potentially ordinary, but as something "extraordinary." A porn house in London displayed the following notice in front of the theater: "WARNING: This cinema is showing pornographic films depicting close-ups of sexual intercourse, oral sex, and male and female masturbation and is not for the easily shocked."[36]

The shock, the sense of alarm used here as a promotion, recalls Kracauer's "phenomena overwhelming consciousness." This element of shock seems to be a

36. John Ellis, "On Pornography," *Screen*, vol. 21, no. 1 (Spring 1980), p. 103.

constituent of voyeuristic pleasure in pornographic cinema. But what is it that is so terrible to see? Are sex organs and copulating couples really terrifying? Where does this terror that leads to fascination come from? Feminist arguments overlap with psychoanalytical ones in answering this question, because both proceed from the assumption of the primacy of male sexuality in pornographic films.

According to Freud's analysis, there is a close connection between *Schaulust* and fear of castration: A male child who sees a woman's sex organ for the first time in his life is amazed that no penis is attached. Disturbed by the fact that an object so important for him is missing from the female organ, he imagines a number of equally anxiety-laden possibilities: a) the female organ is the result of castration, or b) the woman is hiding her penis. The second possibility, "b," is already a working through of the fears aroused by possibility of "a." It is this aspect of the castration complex that gives rise to the persistent voyeuristic mania to look at the female organ, constantly and as closely as possible, in order to uncover the secret of the missing penis. The adult viewer of pornographic films seeks a confirmation of his childhood sexual theory—the phallic myth about the female organ. Because this mania is the result of the castration complex, seeing lots of penises confirms their durability and intactness; castration anxiety is also reduced by inducing the feeling of phallic omnipotence. The restless search for something that can't be found—the woman's penis—is compensated by an appeasing display of erections and potency. The endless merry-go-round of sex orgies, the reduction of a person to his or her sex organs, the mechanical, compulsive repetition in the action of pornographic films thus arise out of the male sexual organization, rather than from a lack of imagination on the film-makers' part. A secret rite conjures up a naked body at any moment and around every corner. The fantasy world of the adult is like the magical, archaic world of the child, where time and space are freed from the constraints of physical reality. It is as if, with a magic word, an ordinary place becomes a secret site of sexuality. The world of pornographic films builds pyramids of gymnasts on an archaic foundation: on a childhood sexual theory.

John Ellis has shown that in the voyeuristic realm of pornographic films the invisible female phallus must be transformed into a visible fetish, so that pleasure can overcome the fear of castration:

> The fetish offered by these representations is no longer a fragment of clothing, or even the deceptively smooth body of the phallic woman, it is now the woman's sexual pleasure. The woman nevertheless has the phallus in sexual pleasure; the woman's lack of a phallus is disavowed in her orgasm. . . . In orgasm woman no longer is the phallus, she has the phallus. Films currently produced within the pornographic sector gain their impulsion from the repetition of instances of female sexual pleasure, and male pleasure is perfunctory in most cases. The films (and photographs) are concerned with the "mise-en-scène" of the

> female organs; they constantly circle around it, trying to find it, to abolish the spectator's separation from it.[37]

The transformation of the empirical penis into a mythic, symbolic phallus, into a fetishistic image signifying the existence of female orgasm, also signifies the process of transformation whereby something invisible becomes visible in the fetish. It is true that many pornographic films give particular weight in their mise-en-scène to signifiers of female orgasm. But this raises another problem in the relationship of visible and invisible. For the place where the woman "possesses" a phallus and is supposed to have the orgasm is no more visible than the phantom phallus the man seeks to find in her.

Because of the expressive poverty of its naturalistic style, pornographic film necessarily reaches its limit literally *ante portas*, before achieving its goal of seeing the secret place where woman's pleasure resides. Dennis Giles outlines this problem in a psychoanalytic essay on pornographic films:

> The interior space she encloses (identified as the woman *in essence*) is an *invisible place* . . . it cannot be possessed by visual knowledge. In order to emphasize its separation from the *known* space of the pornographic film, I call this central interior the Other place.[38]

The invisible, other place, affirmed by pornographic films without showing it, can be made visible through pornographic language. Steven Marcus impressively affirms it in a description of the female body as a landscape, rendered in a Max Weberian construction of an ideal-typical "Pornotopia":

> Farther down, the scene narrows and changes in perspective. Off to the right and left just two smooth snowy ridges. Between them, at their point of juncture, is a dark wood—we are now at the middle of our journey. This dark wood—sometimes it is called a thicket—is triangular in shape. It is also like a cedar cover, and in its midst is a dark romantic chasm. In this chasm the wonders of nature abound. From its top there descends a large, pink stalactite, which changes in shape, size, and color in accord with the movement of the tides within. Within the chasm—which is roughly pearshaped—there are caverns measureless to man, grottoes, hermits' caves, underground streams—a whole internal and subterranean landscape. The climate is warm but wet. Thunderstorms are frequent in this region, as are tremors and quakings of the earth. The walls of the cavern often heave and con-

37. *Ibid.*, p. 103. Ellis's analysis takes its cue from Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."
38. Dennis Giles, "Pornographic Space: The Other Place," "Film-Historical Theoretical Speculations," *The 1977 Film Studies Annual*, Pleasantville, New York, 1977, Part II.

> tract in rhythmic violence, and when they do the salty streams that run through it double their flow. The whole place is dark yet visible. This is the center of the earth and the home of man.[39]

In film this literary utopian other place remains invisible. Woman's pleasure is not only signified, it is also simulated by external signs; only the penis is visible in pornographic films, and it must bear the burden of proof. We hardly ever see a coition that doesn't end with a penis ejaculating on a woman. The abundance of sperm once again becomes a sign of inadequacy, an inadequacy of representation. Still, the sight of an ejaculating penis seems to be pleasurable for the straight male viewer, because to him it is a sign of intactness, an assurance that the vagina, imagined as insatiable and dangerous, has once again yielded its victim, unscathed, to see the light of day. Another reason for the choice of a naturalistic style of depiction in pornographic films is that it confers perceptual certainty on the films' guarantee of "uncastratedness." This convention therefore sacrifices the woman's pleasure, since the actress has to simulate orgasm after the penis is no longer inside her.

The psychic codification of sexuality can thus be seen even in the naturalistic habits of pornographic films. Films are never transparent, pure images, they are always a symbolic structuring of that which is portrayed. Thus we can now extend the definition encountered above—pornographic cinema as an instrument of the "will to knowledge"—to the intrapsychic level: pornographic cinema is the night school of the sexual theories of children. Even though, ultimately, any such definitions remain inadequate, an analysis that measures pornographic films with the yardstick of psychopathology and concludes they involve infantile, perverse male sexual fantasies is, in a clinical diagnostic sense, entirely correct. This argument offers the feminist critique of pornographic film its strongest support.

Yet psychopathological analyses, based exclusively on a reconstruction of the male sexual perspective, cannot explain the fact that, "with disgusted and fascinated gaze,"[40] and in spite of well-founded moral and critical indignation, women are fellow travelers on the road to "Pornotopia."[41]

39. Marcus, pp. 274–275.

40. Marie-Françoise Hans and Gilles Lapouge, *Die Frauen—Pornographie und Erotik*, Neuwied, Luchterhand, 1979, p. 204.

41. If one strictly defines pornographic cinema as a medium oriented solely toward the depiction of male sexuality, then one still has to explain why women are not necessarily turned off by such depictions. They will hardly find an image of their own sexuality, unless we accept Freud's assumption of penis envy, which presupposes that the heterosexual, phallically oriented female identifies with the penis and its pleasure. The penis envy thesis, so vehemently opposed by feminist theoreticians, will not be discussed further here, although I'm inclined to accept its historical, if not its universal, anthropological validity. It might be helpful to look at Freud's assumption regarding a constitutional bisexuality, which characterizes not only men but also women. In his late works Freud









The pleasure of looking, as an exploration of a strange sex as well as one's own, is certainly a pleasure common to both sexes. Likewise, it is not only male desire that is expressed in the longing to return to the womb and in narcissistic fusion and exchange fantasies. The idea of promiscuous abundance, which saturates the images of pornographic films, is present not only at the level of symbolic abstraction—in the sense that all those visible, concrete penises and vulvas represent only a single symbolic phallus. Although always bound within a symbolic, social discourse, film images never quite free themselves from the resistance offered by the concrete world of objects, which those images transfer to the world of symbols.[42] If all these genitalia and individual bodies symbolize a single meaning, it may be because they are experienced through the abstract, generalizing mania of male perception—that is, only within the systematic context of the symbolic organization of a phallocentric world. Nevertheless, they still also exist as images of particular things whose substantiality is also real and empirical, as the naturalistic style of pornographic film never tires of reminding us. It may be that female perception is not actually integrated within a phallic discourse which can never be woman's own. It may be that women, through their own more concrete organization, can undo the fantasy in order to move about outside the inscribed symbolic discourse. Pornotopia would become a world of fragments, disclosing the gap between the sexes, something the phallus nervously denies. Pornotopia then becomes the empire of a phallic ruler, who is powerless against the woman's gaze at specific objects; it partitions his empire according to its own preferences. The woman's gaze at pornographic films, "disgusted and fascinated," doesn't have to search for and find a phallus behind every penis. The fact that women react ambivalently to pornographic films, torn between fascination and disappointment, may not always be because of a prudish upbringing, which forbids an open view and leads to repulsion and a defensive attitude toward sexuality. It may still be possible for women, in spite of their criticism, to take a utopian view of Pornotopia. This may come to pass if they are able to recognize

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went so far as to state that biological bisexuality might contradict his penis envy theory. If we imagine that the strict schism between male/female, phallus/vulva is actually a relationship, whereby each sex incorporates repressed elements of the other, then we might have an explanation of why women can discover at least a portion of themselves in "Pornotopia." Viewing a penis would then also imply a degree of pleasure for women, and would thus not only mean subjugation by phallic power or identification with the oppressor. This would of course mean that we women would have to free ourselves from such constructs as "evil," "destructive," and "misogynist" perversions, while at the same time attempting to study the utopian and antiestablishment contents of these perversions before clinically disqualifying them.

42. Compare Kracauer, pp. 57–58. Kracauer's essentialist film theory, based as it is on phenomenology, is centrally concerned with the idea of film as a redemption of physical reality, as found in the "flow of life." Even if one doesn't agree with Kracauer's philosophical precepts, one can hardly disregard Kracauer's having defined one of the basic tenants of film aesthetics: the preservation of the physical representation of objects, which film captures as a physical image, not an imaginary image as, for example, painting might. According to Kracauer, film is—and this definition seems to me to hold true for pornography—"the shimmering sky reflected in a dirty puddle."

that utopian plentitude is not to be found in a phallocentric generalization, but rather in the details of a quivering world of objects; and if, with their gaze, they manage to create, out of the shadow world, bodies of flesh and blood. Concrete criticism and reception of pornographic cinema, as demonstrated in interviews conducted with women by Marie-Françoise Hans and Gilles Lapouge,[43] indicate something more than merely women's insufficient understanding of the objective content of pornographic movies; the concrete approach also turns up a different kind of appropriation, one which is reflected in fragments. Even when women smash pornographic cinema into pieces, they bring more to light in these fragments than the whole can possibly offer: an alternative sexuality, which is as much a part of the radical feminist negative critique of pornographic movies as it is of the "uncritical," appropriating gaze of its female patrons.

This article was initially published in Lust und Elend: Das erotische Kino *(Munich and Lucerne, C.J. Bucher, 1981), a collection of essays on erotic film. In the period between its writing and its English-language publication, the increasingly liberal attitudes toward pornography that the essay discusses have been reversed by the coming to power of conservatives in both Germany and the US. Moreover, the changes in pornography's production, distribution, and reception brought about by the advent of the home video market also occurred during this intervening period.—ed.*

43. See note 40. Compare Gertrud Koch, "Von der weiblichen Sinnlichkeit und ihrer Lust und Unlust am Kino. Mutmassungen über vergangene Freuden und neue Hoffnungen," in Gabriele Dietze, ed., *Die Überwindung der Sprachlosigkeit,* Neuwied, Luchterhand, 1979, pp. 116–138. (Koch's theoretical essays on women's responses to film have been published in English in *Jump Cut*. See "Why Women Go to the Movies" [no. 27] and "Female Sensuality: Past Joys and Future Hopes" [no. 30]).

Hans Holbein the Younger. **The Ambassadors.** *1533.*



Looking Awry

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

In her story "Black House," Patricia Highsmith exemplifies perfectly the way fantasy space functions as an empty surface, as a kind of screen for the projection of desires: the fascinating presence of its positive contents does nothing but fill out a certain emptiness. The action takes place in a small rural town where men gather in the evenings in the local saloon and nostalgically recall memories and local myths, usually of their own youthful adventures, which are always somehow associated with a desolate old building on a nearby hill. There is a certain malediction that hangs over this mysterious "black house"; a tacit agreement is in force between the men, according to which one is not allowed to approach it too closely; entering it is supposed to entail mortal danger (it is rumored that the house is haunted, that there is a lonely lunatic living in it who kills every intruder, etc.). At the same time, however, the "black house" is the place that links all their adolescent memories, the place of their first "transgressions," above all those concerning sexual experience (the men retell endlessly their memories of how, years ago, they had sexual intercourse in the house with the prettiest girl in town, how they smoked their first cigarette there. . . . The hero of the story is a young engineer who has just moved into town. After listening to all the myths about the "black house" in the saloon, he announces to the company his intention to survey this mysterious house on the following evening. The men present react with silent but nonetheless intense disapproval. Next evening, the young engineer visits the house, expecting something terrible or at least something unexpected to happen to him. With strained attention, he approaches the dark old ruin, climbs up the creaking staircase, examines all the rooms, but finds nothing except a few decaying mats on the floor. He immediately returns to the saloon and triumphantly declares to the gathered men that their "black house" is just an old, filthy ruin, that there is nothing mysterious or fascinating about it. The men are horrified, and when the engineer leaves the saloon, one of them wildly attacks him. The engineer is unfortunately knocked to the ground and soon afterward dies.

Why were the men in the saloon so horrified by the act of the newcomer? We can grasp their resentment by means of the difference between reality and

the "other scene" of the fantasy space: the "black house" was forbidden to them because it functioned as an empty space on which they could project their nostalgic desires, their distorted memories. By publicly stating that the "black house" is nothing but an old ruin, the young intruder reduced their fantasy space to an everyday, common reality; he annulled the difference between reality and fantasy space, depriving the men of the place in which they were able to articulate their desires.

The look of the men in the saloon—capable of discerning the fascinating contours of the object of desire where usually there is seen nothing but a trivial everyday object—is literally a look capable of seeing Nothingness, i.e., of seeing an object "begot by nothing," as Shakespeare says in a small scene in *Richard II*, one of his most interesting plays. That is to say, *Richard II* proves, beyond any doubt, that Shakespeare had read Lacan. The basic problem of the drama is that of the *hysterization of a king*, a process whereby a king loses the second, sublime body which makes him a king and is confronted with the void of his subjectivity outside the symbolic mandate-title "king." He is thus forced into a series of theatrical, hysterical outbursts, from self-pity to sarcastic, clownish madness.[1] Our interest is, however, limited to a short dialogue between the queen and Bushy, the king's servant, at the beginning of Act II, Scene 2. The king has left for a war expedition, and the queen is full of bad presentiments, of a sorrow for which she herself does not have a reason. Bushy attempts to console her by pointing out the illusory, phantomlike nature of her grief:

Bushy: Each substance of a grief hath twenty shadows.
Which show like grief itself, but are not so.
For sorrow's eye, glazed with blinding tears,
Divides one thing entire to many objects;
Like perspectives, which rightly gaz'd upon
Show nothing but confusion; ey'd awry
Distinguish form: so your sweet majesty,
Looking awry upon your lord's departure,
Finds shapes of grief more than himself to wail;
Which, look'd on as it is, is nought but shadows
Of what is not. Then, thrice-gracious queen,
More than your lord's departure weep not: more's not seen;
Or if it be, 'tis with false sorrow's eye,
Which for things true weeps things imaginary.
Queen: It may be so; but yet my inward soul
Persuades me it is otherwise: howe'er it be,
I cannot but be sad, so heavy sad,

1. See Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957.

As, though in thinking on no thought I think,
Makes me with heavy nothing faint and shrink.
Bushy: 'Tis nothing but conceit, my gracious lady.
Queen: 'Tis nothing less: conceit is still deriv'd
From some forefather grief; mine is not so,
For nothing hath begot my something grief;
Or something hath the nothing that I grieve:
'Tis in reversion that I do possess;
But what it is, that is not yet known; what
I cannot name; 'tis nameless woe, I wot.

By means of a metaphor of the way anamorphosis functions in painting, Bushy tries to convince the queen that her sorrow has no foundation, that its reasons are null, but the crucial point is the way his metaphor splits, redoubles itself, i.e., the way he entangles himself in contradiction. First ("sorrow's eye, glazed with blinding tears, / Divides one thing entire to many objects"), he refers to the simple, commonsense opposition between a thing as it is "in itself," in reality, and its "shadows," reflections in our eyes, subjective impressions multiplied because of our anxieties and sorrows. When we are worried, a small difficulty assumes giant proportions; we see the thing as far worse than it really is. The metaphor at work here is that of a glass surface sharpened, cut in such a way that it reflects a multitude of images; instead of the tiny substance, we see its "twenty shadows." In the following verses, however, things become complicated. At first sight it seems that Shakespeare only illustrates the fact that "sorrow's eye . . . divides one thing entire to many objects" with a metaphor from the domain of painting ("Like perspectives, which rightly gaz'd upon/Show nothing but confusion; ey'd awry/Distinguish form"), but what he really accomplishes is a radical change of terrain. From the metaphor of a sharpened glass surface he passes to the metaphor of anamorphosis, the logic of which is quite different. A detail of a picture that "rightly gaz'd," i.e., from a straightforward, frontal view, appears a blurred spot, assumes clear, distinct shapes once we look at it "awry," from aside. The verses which apply this metaphor back to the queen's anxiety and sorrow are thus profoundly ambivalent: "so your sweet majesty, / *Looking awry* upon your lord's departure, / Finds shapes of grief more than himself to wail; / Which, look'd on as it is, is nought but shadows / Of what is not." That is to say, if we take the comparison between the queen's look and the anamorphic look literally, we would be obliged to state that *precisely by "looking awry," i.e., from aside, she sees the thing in its clear and distinct form,* in opposition to the "straightforward," frontal view which sees only an indistinct confusion (and, incidentally, the further development of the drama fully justifies the queen's most sinister presentiments). But, of course, Bushy did not "want to say" this. His intention was to say quite the opposite: by means of an imperceptible subreption, he returned to the *first* metaphor (that of a sharpened glass) and "wanted to say"

that, because her view is distorted by sorrow and anxiety, the queen sees causes for alarm where a closer, matter-of-fact look attests that there is next to nothing in it.

What we have here are thus two realities, two "substances." On the level of the first metaphor, we have the commonsense reality as "substance with twenty shadows," as a thing split into twenty reflections by our subjective view; in short, as a substantial "reality" distorted by our subjective perspective (inflated by our anxiety, etc.). If we look at a thing straight on, from a matter-of-fact perspective, we see it "as it really is," while the look puzzled by our desires and anxieties ("looking awry") gives us a distorted, blurred image of the thing. On the level of the second metaphor (anamorphosis), however, the relation is exactly the opposite: if we look at a thing straight on, i.e., from a matter-of-fact, disinterested, "objective" perspective, we see nothing but a formless spot. The object assumes clear and distinctive features only if we look at it "from aside," i.e., with an "interested" look, with a look supported, permeated, and "distorted" by a *desire*. This is precisely the Lacanian *objet petit a*, the object-cause of desire, an object which is, in a way, posited by the desire itself. The paradox of desire is that it posits retroactively its own cause, i.e., an object that can be perceived only by the look "distorted" by desire, an object that *does not exist* for an "objective" look. In other words, the *objet petit a* is always, by definition, perceived in a distorted way, because, outside this distortion, "in itself," *it does not exist,* i.e., because it is *nothing but* the embodiment, the materialization of this distortion, of this surplus of confusion and perturbation introduced by desire into so-called "objective reality." *Objet petit a* is "objectively" nothing, it is nothing at all, nothing of the desire itself which, viewed from a certain perspective, assumes the shape of "something." It is, as is formulated in an extremely precise manner by the queen in her response to Bushy, her "something grief" begot by "nothing" ("For nothing hath begot my something grief"). Desire "takes off" when "something" (its object-cause) embodies, gives positive existence to its "nothing," to its void. This "something" is the anamorphic object, a pure semblance that we can perceive clearly only by "looking awry." It is precisely (and only) the logic of desire that belies the notorious wisdom that "nothing comes from nothing." In the movement of desire, "something comes from nothing." It is true that the object-cause of desire is a pure semblance, but this does not prevent it from triggering off a whole chain of consequences which regulate our "material," "effective" life and deeds.

It was no accident that Shakespeare was so attentive to these paradoxes of "something begot by nothing" (the same problematic lies at the very heart of *King Lear*), for he lived in a period of the rapid dissolution of precapitalist social relations and of the lively emergence of the elements of capitalism. That is, he lived in a period when he was able daily to observe that a reference to "nothing," to some pure semblance (speculating with "worthless" paper money, which is only a "promise" of its value as "real" money, for example), triggers off the

enormous machinery of a production process that changes the very surface of the earth.[2] It is this that accounts for Shakespeare's sensitivity to the paradoxical power of money, which can convert anything into its opposite, which procures legs for a cripple, makes a handsome man out of a freak, etc.—all those memorable lines from *Timon of Athens* quoted again and again by Marx. Lacan was justified in modeling his notion of surplus enjoyment (*le plus-de-jouir*) after the Marxist notion of surplus value. Surplus enjoyment has the same paradoxical power to convert things (pleasure objects) into their opposite, to render disgusting what is usually considered a most pleasant, "normal" sexual experience, to render inexplicably attractive what is usually considered a loathsome act (torturing a most beloved person, enduring painful humiliation, etc.).

Such a reversal engenders, of course, a nostalgic yearning for a "natural" state in which things were only what they were, in which we perceived them only from an objective point of view in which our gaze had not yet been distorted by the anamorphic spot. But far from announcing a kind of "pathological fissure," the frontier separating the two "substances," i.e., the thing that appears clear to an objective look and the "substance of enjoyment" that can be perceived clearly only by "looking awry," is precisely what *prevents us from sliding into psychosis*. Such is the effect of the symbolic order on the visible. The emergence of language opens up a hole in reality, and this hole shifts the axis of our look; language redoubles "reality" into itself and the void of the Thing that can be filled out only by an anamorphic gaze from aside.

Pornography

The supreme proof of this fact is cinema, shot with an "objective" camera, which by definition views things straight on. The first association that comes to mind here is, of course, *pornography*, the genre supposed to "show everything," to hide nothing, to register "all" with an objective camera and offer it to our view. It is nevertheless precisely in pornographic cinema that the "substance of enjoyment" perceived by the view from aside is *radically lost.* Why? Let us take as our starting point the antinomic relation between the eye and the gaze as it was articulated by Lacan in his *Seminar XI*: the eye viewing the object is on the side of the subject, while the gaze is on the side of the object. When I am looking at an object, the object is always already gazing at me, and from a point at which I cannot see it:

> In the scopic field, everything is articulated between two terms that act in an antinomic way—on the side of things, there is the gaze, that is to say, things look at me, and yet I see them. This is how one should understand those words, so strongly stressed in the Gospel, *They have*

2. See Brian Rotman, *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1987.

eyes that they might not see. That they might not see what? Precisely, that things are looking at them.[3]

This antinomy of eye and gaze is lost in pornography. Why? Because pornography is inherently *perverse*; its perverse character lies not in the obvious fact that it "goes all the way and shows us all the dirty details"; its perversity is, rather, to be conceived in a strictly formal way. In pornography, the spectator is forced a priori to occupy a perverse position. According to Lacan, perversion is defined by the fact that, as a stratagem to evade his constitutive splitting, the subject itself assumes the position of an object instrumental to the enjoyment of the Other. To exemplify this perverse position, let us take *Manhunter* (1986), a film about a police detective famous for his ability to enter intuitively, by a "sixth sense," the mind of perverse, sadistic murderers. His task is to detect a particularly cruel mass-murderer who slaughtered a number of quiet provincial families. The detective reruns again and again super-8 home movies shot by each of the slaughtered families in order to arrive at the *trait unaire*, the "unique" trait, at the feature common to all of them that attracted the murderer and thus directed his choice. But all his efforts are in vain so long as he looks for this common feature on the level of content, i.e., in the families themselves. He finds a key to the identity of the murderer only when a certain inconsistency strikes his eyes. The investigation at the scene of the last crime determined that to enter the house, i.e., to break open the back door, the murderer used a kind of tool that was inappropriate and even unnecessary. The old back door had been replaced a few weeks before the crime with a new type of door. To break open the new door, another kind of tool would have been far more appropriate. So how did the murderer get this wrong—or, more precisely, out-of-date—information? The old back door could be seen clearly in the scenes from the super-8 home movie. The only common feature of all the slaughtered families, it turns out, are *the home movies themselves*. The murderer had to have had access to these private movies; there is no other link connecting them. Because these movies are private, the only possible link between them is the laboratory where they were developed. A quick check confirms that all the movies were developed in the same laboratory, and the murderer is soon identified as one of the workers in the lab.

Wherein lies the theoretical interest of this denouement? The detective looks for a common feature that will enable him to get at the murderer in the content of the home movies, thus overlooking the form itself, i.e., the crucial fact that he is all the while viewing a series of home movies. The decisive turn takes place when he becomes aware that through this very screening of the home movies, *he is already identified with the murderer*, that his obsessive gaze, surveying every detail of the scenery, coincides with the murderer's gaze. The identifica-

3. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, London, Hogarth Press, 1977, p. 109.

tion is on the level of the gaze, not on the level of content. There is something extremely unpleasant and obscene in this experience of our gaze as already the gaze of the other. Why? The Lacanian answer is that such a coincidence of gazes defines the position of the pervert. (Herein consists, according to Lacan, the difference between the "feminine" and "masculine" mystique, between, let us say, Saint Theresa and Jacob Boehme. The "feminine" mystique implies a non-phallic, "not-all" enjoyment, whereas the "masculine" mystique consists precisely in such an overlap of gazes, by which we experience the way our intuition of God is at the same time the view by means of which God looks at Himself.) The final irony of *Manhunter* would then be the following: confronted with a perverse-sadistic content, the detective is able to arrive at a solution only by taking into account the fact that his very procedure is, on a formal level, already "perverse." It implies a coincidence between his gaze and the gaze of the other (the murderer).

This overlap, this coincidence of our view with the gaze of the other, brings us back to pornography. In pornography we have a kind of short circuit between the two; instead of being on the side of the viewed object, the gaze falls into ourselves, the spectators, which is why the image we see on the screen contains no spot, no sublime mysterious point from which it gazes at us. It is we who are gazing stupidly at the image that "shows all." Contrary to the commonplace according to which, in pornography, the other (the person shown on the screen) is degraded to an object of our voyeuristic pleasure, we must stress that it is the spectator him- or herself who effectively occupies the position of the object. The real subjects are the actors on the screen trying to rouse us sexually, while we, the spectators, are reduced to a paralyzed object-gaze.[4]

Pornography thus misses, reduces the point of the object-gaze in the other. This miss has precisely the form of a missed, failed encounter. That is to say, in a "normal," nonpornographic film, a love scene is always built around a certain insurmountable limit; "all cannot be shown"; at a certain point, the image blurs, the camera moves off, the scene is interrupted, we never see directly "that" (the penetration of sexual organs, etc.). In contrast to this limit of representability which defines the "normal" love story or melodrama, pornography goes beyond, "shows all." The paradox is, however, that by trespassing the limit, it always already *goes too far*, i.e., it *misses* what remained concealed in the "normal," nonpornographic love scene. This paradox is the same as that noted in the well-known phrase from Brecht's *Threepenny Opera:* if you run too fast after happiness, you might overtake it and leave happiness behind. If we proceed too

4. It is precisely because in pornography the picture does *not* gaze back at us—i.e., because it is "flat," without any mysterious "spot" that must be looked at "awry" in order to assume distinct form—that the fundamental prohibition determining the direction of the look of the actors on the screen is suspended. In a pornographic film, the actor—usually a woman—in the moment of intense sexual pleasure, looks directly into the camera, addressing us, the spectators.

hastily "to the point," if we show "the thing itself," we necessarily lose what we were after. The effect is extremely vulgar and depressing (as can be confirmed by anyone who has seen hard-core movies). Pornography is thus just another variation on the paradox of Achilles and the tortoise, which, according to Lacan, defines the relation of the subject to the object of its desire. Naturally, Achilles can easily outdistance the tortoise and leave it behind, but the point is that he cannot come up alongside it, rejoin it. The subject is always too slow or too quick, can never keep pace with the object of its desire. The unattainable/forbidden object approached but never reached by the "normal" love story—the sexual act—exists only as concealed, indicated, "faked." As soon as we "show it," its charm is dispelled, we have "gone too far." Instead of the sublime Thing, we are stuck with a vulgar groaning and fornication. The consequence of this is that harmony, the congruence between the filmic narrative (the unfolding of the story) and the immediate display of the sexual act, is structurally impossible. If we choose one, we necessarily lose the other. In other words, if we want to have a love story that "takes," that moves us, we must not "go to the end" and "show it all" (the details of the sexual act), because as soon as we "show it all," the story is no longer "taken seriously." It starts to function only as a pretext for introducing acts of copulation.

We can further pinpoint this gap via a kind of "knowledge in the real," which determines the way actors act in different film genres. The persons included in the diegetic reality always react as if they knew in what genre of film they were. If, for example, a door creaks in a horror film, the actor will react by turning his head anxiously toward it; if a door creaks in a family comedy, the same actor will shout at his small child not to sneak around the apartment. The same is true to an even greater degree for the porno film: before we pass to the sexual activity, we need a short introduction, a normally stupid plot serving as a pretext for the actors to start to copulate (the housewife calls in a plumber, a new secretary reports to the manager, etc.). The point is that already by the manner in which they enact this introductory plot, the actors divulge that this is for them only a stupid, although necessary formality that has to be gotten over with as quickly as possible to be able to tackle the "real thing."[5]

The fantasy ideal of a perfect work of pornography would be precisely to preserve this impossible harmony, the balance between narration and explicit

5. This paradox of the "impossible knowledge" inscribed into the way persons react on screen is far more interesting than it may appear at first sight. For example, it offers us a clue to the logic of Hitchcock's cameo appearances in his own films. In *Topaz*, without doubt his worst film, Hitchcock appears in a wheelchair in an airport lounge, as if wishing to inform us that his creative power is crippled. In his last film, *Family Plot*, he appears as a shadow on the windowpane of the death registry office, as if wishing to inform us that he is already close to death. Every one of his cameo appearances reveals such an "impossible knowledge," as if Hitchcock were capable of assuming for an instant a position of pure meta-language, of taking an "objective look" at himself and locating himself in the picture.

depicting of the sexual act, i.e., to avoid the necessary *vel* condemning us to lose one of the two poles. Let us take an old-fashioned, nostalgic melodrama like *Out of Africa*, and let us assume that the film is precisely the same as was shown in cinemas, the only change being an additional ten minutes. When Robert Redford and Meryl Streep have their first love encounter, the scene is not interrupted, the camera "shows it all," details of their aroused sexual organs, penetration, orgasm, etc. Then, after the act, the story goes on as usual. We are back in the movie we all know. The problem is that such a movie is structurally impossible. Even if it were to be shot, it simply "would not function"; the additional ten minutes would derail us; for the rest of the film we would be unable to regain our balance and follow the narration with the usual disavowed belief in the diegetic reality. The sexual act would function as an intrusion of the real undermining the consistency of this reality.

Nostalgia

In pornography, the gaze qua object falls thus onto the subject-spectator, causing an effect of depressing desublimation. Which is why, to extract the gaze-object in its pure, formal status, we have to turn to the opposite pole of pornography: nostalgia. Let us take what is today probably the most notorious case of nostalgic fascination in the domain of cinema: the American *film noir* of the '40s. What, precisely, is so fascinating about this genre? It is clear that we can no longer identify with it. The most dramatic scenes from *Casablanca, Murder, My Sweet,* or *Out of the Past*, provoke laughter today among spectators, but nevertheless, far from posing a threat to its power of fascination, this kind of distance is its very condition. That is to say, what fascinates us is precisely a certain gaze, the gaze of the "other," of the hypothetical, mythic spectator from the '40s who was supposedly still able to identify immediately with the universe of *film noir*. What we really see when we watch a *film noir* is this gaze of the other. We are fascinated by the gaze of the mythic "naive" spectator, the one who was "still able to take it seriously," in other words, the one who "believes in it" for us, in place of us. For this reason, our relation to a *film noir* is always divided, split between fascination and ironic distance—ironic distance toward its diegetic reality, fascination with the gaze.

This gaze-object appears in its purest form in a series of films in which the logic of nostalgia is brought to self-reference: *Body Heat, The Driver, Shane*. As Fredric Jameson has already observed in his well-known article "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,"[6] *Body Heat* reverses the usual nostalgic procedure by which the fragment of the past that serves as the object of nostalgia is extracted from its historic context, from its continuity, and inserted

6. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, no. 146 (July-August 1984), pp. 53–92.



Jacques Tourneur. Out of the Past. *1947.*

in a kind of mythic, eternal, timeless present. Here, in this *film noir*—a vague remake of *Double Indemnity*—which takes place in contemporary Florida, the present itself is viewed through the eyes of the *film noir* of the '40s. Instead of transposing a fragment of the past into a timeless, mythic present, we view the present itself as if it were part of the mythic past. If we do not take into consideration this "gaze of the '40s," *Body Heat* remains simply a contemporary film about contemporary times and, as such, totally incomprehensible. Its whole power of fascination is bestowed upon it by the fact that it looks at the present with the eyes of the mythical past.

The same dialectic of the gaze is at work in Walter Hill's *The Driver*; its starting point is again the *film noir* of the '40s, which, as such, *does not exist*. It started to exist only when, in the '50s, it was discovered by French critics (it is no accident that even in English the term used to designate this genre is the French *film noir*). What was in America itself a series of often low-budget B-productions

of little critical prestige, was miraculously transformed, through the intervention of the French gaze, into a sublime object of art, a kind of film pendant to philosophical existentialism. Directors who had in America the status, at best, of skilled craftsmen became *auteurs*, each of them staging in his films a unique tragic vision of the universe. But the crucial fact is that this French view of *film noir* exerted a considerable influence on French film production, so that in France itself, a genre homologous to the American *film noir* was established; its most distinguished example is probably Jean-Pierre Melville's *Samurai*. Hill's *The Driver* is a kind of remake of *Samurai*, an attempt to transpose the French gaze back to America itself—a paradox of America looking at itself through French eyes. Again, if we conceive of *The Driver* simply as an American film about America, it becomes incomprehensible; we must include in it the "French gaze."

Our last example is *Shane*, the classic western by George Stevens. As is well known, the end of the '40s witnessed the first great crisis of the western as a genre. Pure, simple westerns began to produce an effect of artificiality and mechanical routine; their formula, it seemed, was exhausted. Directors reacted to this crisis by overlaying westerns with elements of other genres. Thus, we have *film noir* westerns (Raoul Walsh's *Pursued*, which achieves the almost impossible task of transposing into a western the dark universe of *film noir*), musical comedy westerns (*Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*), psychological drama westerns (*The Gunfighter*, with Gregory Peck), historical epic westerns (the remake of *Cimmaron*), etc. In the '50s, André Bazin baptized this new, "reflected" genre the *meta-western*. The way *Shane* functions can be grasped only against the background of the meta-western. *Shane* is the paradox of a western the "meta-" dimension of which is the *western itself*. In other words, it is a western that implies a kind of nostalgic distance toward the universe of westerns, a western that functions, so to speak, as its own myth. To explain the effect produced by *Shane*, we must again refer to the function of the gaze. That is to say, if we remain on a commonsense level, if we do not include the dimension of the gaze, a simple and understandable question arises. If the meta-dimension of this western is the western itself, what accounts for the distance between the two levels? Why does the meta-western not simply overlap with the western itself? Why do we not have a western pure and simple?" The answer is that, by means of a structural necessity, *Shane* belongs to the order of the meta-western: on the level of its immediate diegetic contents, it is of course a western pure and simple, one of the purest ever made. But the very form of its historical context determines that we perceive it as meta-western; i.e., precisely because, in its diegetic contents, it is a pure western; the dimension "beyond western" opened up by the historical context can be filled out only by the western itself. In other words, *Shane* is a pure western *at a time when pure westerns were no longer possible*, when the western was already perceived from a certain nostalgic distance, as a lost object. Which is why it is highly indicative that the story is told from a child's perspective (the perspective of a little boy, a member of a farming family defended against violent



cattle breeders by Shane, a mythic hero appearing suddenly out of nowhere . . .). The innocent, naive gaze of the other that fascinates us in nostalgia is in the last analysis always the gaze of a child.

In nostalgic retro films, then, the logic of the gaze qua object appears as such. The real object of fascination is not the displayed scene, but the gaze of the naive "other" absorbed, enchanted by it. In *Shane*, for example, we can be fascinated by the mysterious apparition of Shane only by proxy, through the medium of the "innocent" child's gaze, never immediately. Such a logic of fascination by which the subject sees in the object (in the image it views) its own gaze, i.e., by which, in the viewed image, it "sees itself seeing," is defined by Lacan (in Chapter VI of his *Seminar XI*) as the very ...sion of perfect self-mirroring that characterizes the Cartesian philosophical tra...tion of the subject's self-reflection. But what happens here with the *antinomy* between eye and gaze? The whole point of Lacan's argument is to oppose to the self-mirroring of philosophical subjectivity the irreducible discord between the gaze qua object and the subject's eye. Far from being the point of self-sufficient self-mirroring, the gaze qua object functions like a blot that blurs the transparency of the viewed image. I can never see properly, i.e., include in the totality of my field of vision the point in the other from which it gazes back at me. Like the extended blot in Holbein's *Ambassadors*, this point throws the harmony of my vision off balance.

The answer to our problem is clear: the function of the nostalgic object is precisely to *conceal* the antinomy between eye and gaze, i.e., the traumatic impact of the gaze qua object, by means of its power of fascination. In nostalgia, the gaze of the other is in a way domesticated, "gentrified"; instead of the gaze's erupting like a traumatic, disharmonious blot, we have the illusion of "seeing ourselves seeing," of seeing the gaze itself. In a way, we could say that the function of fascination is precisely to blind us to the fact that the other is already gazing at us.

In Kafka's parable "The Doors of the Law," the man from the country waiting at the entrance to the court is fascinated by the secret beyond the door he is forbidden to trespass. In the end, the power of fascination exerted by the court is dispelled. But how, exactly? Its power is lost when the doorkeeper tells the man that this entrance was meant only for him from the very beginning. In other words, he tells the man from the country that the thing that fascinated him was, in a way, gazing back at him all along, addressing him. That is, the man's desire was from the very start "part of the game." The whole spectacle of the Door of the Law and the secret beyond it was staged only to capture his desire. If the power of fascination is to produce its effect, this must remain concealed. As soon as the subject becomes aware that the other gazes at it (that the door is meant only for it), the fascination is over.

In his Bayreuth production of *Tristan und Isolde*, Jean-Pierre Ponelle introduced an extremely interesting change in Wagner's original plot, a change that concerns precisely the functioning of the gaze as object of fascination. In Wagner's libretto, the denouement simply resumes the mythic tradition. The

George Stevens. Shane. *1953.*

wounded Tristan takes refuge in his castle in Cornwall and waits for Isolde to follow him. When, because of a misunderstanding concerning the color of the sail of Isolde's vessel, he becomes convinced that Isolde will not arrive, he dies in agony. Thereupon, Isolde arrives, together with her lawful husband, King Marke, who is willing to forgive the sinful couple, but it is too late. Tristan is already dead. In ecstatic agony, Isolde herself dies embracing the dead Tristan. What Ponelle did was simply to stage the last act as if the end of the "real" action were Tristan's death. All that follows—the arrival of Isolde and Marke, Isolde's death—is just Tristan's mortal delirium; in reality, Isolde has simply broken the vow to her lover and returned, repentent, to her husband. The much-celebrated end of *Tristan und Isolde*, Isolde's love-death, appears thus as what it effectively is: the *masculine* fantasy of a finally accomplished sexual relationship in which the couple is forever united in mortal ecstasy, or, more precisely, in which the *woman* follows her man into death in an act of ecstatic self-abandonment.

But the crucial point for us is the way Ponelle staged this delirious apparition of Isolde. Because she appears to Tristan, we would expect her to stand *in front of* him and thus fascinate his gaze. In Ponelle's mise-en-scène, however, Tristan looks directly at us, the spectators in the hall, while the dazzlingly illuminated Isolde glows luxuriantly *behind* him, as that which is "in him more than himself." The object at which Tristan stares in fascination is thus literally *the gaze of the other* (embodied in us, the spectators), the gaze that sees Isolde, i.e., the gaze that sees not only Tristan but also his sublime other, that which is in him more than himself, the "treasure," *agalma*, in him. At this point, Ponelle adroitly made use of the words sung by Isolde. Far from plunging into a kind of autistic trance, she continually addresses the gaze of the other: "Friends! Do you see, can't you see, how he [Tristan] glitters more and more?"—that which "glitters more and more" in him being, of course, *herself* as the illuminated apparition behind him.

If the function of nostalgic fascination is thus to conceal, to appease, the disharmonious irruption of the gaze qua object, how is this gaze *produced*? Which cinematic procedure opens up, hollows the void of the gaze qua object in the continuous flow of images? Our thesis is that this void constitutes the necessary leftover of *montage*, so that pornography, nostalgia, and montage form a kind of quasi-Hegelian "triad" concerning the status of the gaze qua object.

Montage

Montage is usually conceptualized as a way of producing from fragments of the real—pieces of film, discontinuous individual shots—an effect of "cinematic space," i.e., a specific cinematic reality. That is to say, it is universally acknowledged that "cinematic space" is never a simple repetition or imitation of external, "effective" reality, but an effect of montage. What is usually overlooked,

however, is the way this transformation of fragments of the real into cinematic reality produces, through a kind of structural necessity, a certain leftover, a surplus that is radically heterogeneous to the cinematic reality but nonetheless implied by it, part of it.[7] That the surplus of the real is, in the last resort, precisely the gaze qua object is best exemplified by the work of Alfred Hitchcock.

Pascal Bonitzer has already pointed out that the fundamental constituent of the Hitchcockian universe is the so-called "spot": the stain upon which reality revolves, passes over into the real, the mysterious detail which "sticks out," which does not "fit" into the symbolic network of reality, and which, as such, indicates that "something is amiss" (the most notorious example is the windmill turning in the wrong direction in *Foreign Correspondent*, "denaturing" the idyllic image of the Dutch countryside). The fact that this spot ultimately coincides with the threatening gaze of the other is confirmed in an almost too obvious way by the famous tennis-court scene from *Strangers on a Train*, in which Guy watches the crowd watching the match. The camera first gives us a long shot of the crowd; all the heads turn alternatively left and right, following the path of the ball, all except one, which stares with a fixed gaze into the camera, i.e., at Guy. The camera then approaches this motionless head quickly. It is Bruno, linked with Guy by a murderous pact. Here we have in a pure, as it were, distilled form the stiff, motionless gaze, sticking out like a strange body and thus disturbing the harmony of the image by introducing a threatening dimension.

The function of the famous Hitchcockian tracking or traveling shot is precisely to produce a spot. In the tracking shot, the camera moves from an establishing shot to a close-up of a detail which must remain a blurred spot, the true form of which is accessible only to the anamorphic "view from aside." The shot slowly isolates from its surroundings the element which cannot be integrated into symbolic reality, which must remain a strange body if the depicted reality is to retain its consistency.[8] But what interests us here is the fact that under certain conditions montage intervenes in the tracking shot; i.e., the continuous approach of the camera is interrupted by cuts. What are these conditions? Briefly, the tracking shot must be interrupted when it is "subjective," when the camera shows us the subjective view of a person approaching the object-spot. That is to say, whenever, in a Hitchcock film, a hero, a person around whom the scene is structured, approaches an object, a thing, another person, anything that can become uncanny in the Freudian sense, Hitchcock usually alternates the "objective" shot of this person in motion, his or her walking toward the uncanny Thing, with the subjective shot of what this person sees, i.e., with the subjective view of

7. This problematic was first articulated by Noël Burch in his theory of *hors-champ*, i.e., of a specific exterior implied, constituted by the very interplay of the *champ* and *contre-champ*; see Noël Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, London, Praeger, 1973.
8. See Slavoj Žižek, "Hitchcock," *October*, no. 38 (Fall 1986), pp. 99–111.

the Thing. This is, so to speak, the elementary procedure, the zero-degree of Hitchcockian montage.

Let us take a few examples. When, toward the end of *Psycho,* Lilah climbs the hill to the mysterious old house, the presumed home of "Norman's mother," Hitchcock alternates the objective shot of Lilah climbing with her subjective view of the old house. He does the same in *The Birds*, in the famous scene analyzed in detail by Raymond Bellour, when Melanie, after crossing the bay in a small rented boat, approaches the house where Mitch's mother and sister live. Again, Hitchcock alternates the objective shot of the uneasy Melanie, aware of intruding on the privacy of a home, with her subjective view of the mysteriously silent house.[9] Of the innumerable other examples we might cite, let us mention just a short, trivial scene from *Psycho* between Marion and a car dealer. Here, Hitchcock uses his montage procedure several times (when Marion approaches the car dealer; when, toward the end of the scene, a policeman approaches who has already stopped her on the highway the same morning, etc.). By means of this purely formal procedure, an entirely trivial, everyday incident is given an uneasy, threatening dimension that cannot be sufficiently accounted for by its diegetic content (i.e., by the fact that Marion is buying a new car with stolen money and thus fears being exposed). The Hitchcockian montage elevates an everyday, trivial object into a sublime Thing. By purely formal manipulation, it succeeds in bestowing on an ordinary object the aura of anxiety and uneasiness.[10]

In Hitchcockian montage, two kinds of shots are thus permitted and two forbidden. Permitted are the objective shot of the person approaching a Thing and the subjective shot presenting the Thing the way the person sees it. Forbidden are, inversely, the objective shot of the Thing, of the "uncanny" object, and—above all—the subjective shot of the approaching person from the perspective of the "uncanny" object itself. Let us refer again to the above-mentioned scene from *Psycho* depicting Lilah approaching the house on the top of the hill. It is crucial that Hitchcock shows the threatening Thing (the house) exclusively from the point of view of Lilah. If he were to have added a "neutral," objective shot of the house, the whole mysterious effect would have been lost. We (the spectators) would have to endure a radical desublimation. Suddenly we

9. It is by no means a pure coincidence that, in both cases, the object approached by the hero is a *house*. For *Notorious*, Pascal Bonitzer developed a detailed theory of the house as a place of an incestuous secret in Hitchcock's work; see Pascal Bonitzer, *Le champ aveugle*, Paris, Gallimard, 1982.

10. In his ironic, amiably sadistic teasing of the spectator, Hitchcock takes into account precisely this gap between the formal procedure and the content it is applied to, i.e., the fact that anxiety results from a purely formal procedure. First, by means of formal manipulation, Hitchcock bestows upon an everyday, trivial object the aura of mystery and anxiety. Afterwards, it becomes clear that this object effectively *is* just an everyday object. The best-known case is to be found in the second version of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*: On a suburban London Street, James Stewart approaches a stranger. As they silently exchange glances, an atmosphere of tension and anxiety is created. It seems that the stranger is threatening Stewart, but soon afterwards we discover that Stewart's suspicion was entirely unfounded. The stranger was just an accidental passer-by.



Alfred Hitchcock. Psycho. *1960.*

would become aware that there is nothing uncanny in the house as such, that the house is—like the "black house" from Patricia Highsmith's short story—just an ordinary old house. That is, the effect of uneasiness would be radically "psychologized," we would say to ourselves, "This is just an ordinary house, all the mystery and anxiety attached to it is just an effect of the heroine's psychic turmoil!"

The effect of uncanniness would also be lost if Hitchcock had immediately added a shot "subjectifying" the Thing, i.e., a subjective shot from inside the house. Let us imagine that, as Lilah approached the house, there had been a trembling shot showing Lilah through the window curtains, accompanied by the sound of hollow breathing, indicating thus that somebody from the house was watching her. Such a procedure (used regularly in standard thrillers) would, of course, intensify the strain. We would say to ourselves, "This is terrible! There is somebody in the hosue (Norman's mother?) watching Lilah, she is in mortal danger without knowing it!" But such a subjectivization would again suspend the status of the gaze *qua object*, reducing it to a subjective point-of-view of another

diegetic personality. Sergei Eisenstein himself once risked such a direct subjectivization in a scene from *The Old and the New* (1929), a film celebrating the successes of the collectivization of Soviet agriculture in the late '20s. It is a somewhat Lysenkist scene demonstrating how nature itself finds pleasure in subordinating itself to the new rules of collective farming, how, for example, even cows and bulls mate more ardently once they are included into *kolkhozes*. In a quick tracking shot, the camera approaches a cow from behind, and in the next shot it becomes clear that this view of the camera is that of a bull mounting a cow. Needless to say, the effect of this scene is so obscene that it is almost nauseating. What we have here is really a kind of Stalinist pornography.

So it would therefore be wise to return to the Hollywood decency of Hitchcock; let us again take the scene from *Psycho* in which Lilah approaches the house where "Norman's mother" presumably lives. In what does its uncanny dimension consist? Could we not best describe the effect brought about by this scene precisely by rephrasing the words of Lacan and say that, in a way, *it is already the house which gazes at Lilah*? Lilah sees the house, but nonetheless she cannot see it at the point from which it gazes back at her. Here the situation is the same as that in Lacan's recollection from his youth reported in chapter VIII of *Seminar XI*. As a student on holiday Lacan joined a fishing expedition. Among the fishermen on the boat, there was a certain Petit-Jean, who pointed out an empty sardine can glittering in the sun, tossed around by the waves, and said to him, "You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!" Lacan's comment: "If what Petit-Jean said to me, namely that the can did not see me, had any meaning, it was because, in a sense, it was looking at me, just the same."[11] It was gazing at him because, as Lacan explains, using a key notion of the Hitchcockian universe, "I was rather out of place in the picture." Among these uneducated fishermen, he was, effectively, "the man who knew too much."

The Death Drive

The examples we have analyzed thus far were purposefully elementary, so let us conclude with an analysis of a scene in which Hitchcockian montage is part of a complex totality, the scene from *Sabotage* (1936) in which Sylvia Sidney kills Oscar Homolka. The two characters are dining together at home; Sylvia is still in a state of shock, having learned recently that Oscar, her husband, is the "saboteur" responsible for the death of her younger brother, blown up by a bomb on a bus. When Sylvia brings the vegetable platter to the table, the knife on the platter acts as a magnet. It is almost as if her hand, against her will, is compelled to grab the knife, yet she cannot make up her mind. Oscar, who up to this point has

11. Lacan, p. 95.

pursued banal, everyday table conversation, perceives that she is spellbound by the knife and becomes aware of what it may mean to him. He stands up and walks round the table toward her. When they are face to face, he reaches for the knife but, unable to complete the gesture, lets *her* grab it. The camera then moves in tighter showing only their faces and shoulders, so that it is not clear what is happening with their hands. Suddenly Oscar utters a short cry and falls down, without our knowing whether she stabbed him or he, in a suicidal gesture, impaled himself upon the blade.

The first thing that deserves notice is the way the act of murder results from the encounter of two thwarted threatening gestures.[12] Both Sylvia's move forward with the knife and Oscar's move toward it correspond to the Lacanian definition of the threatening gesture: it is not a gesture that is interrupted, i.e., a gesture intended to be carried out but prevented from reaching its goal by an external obstacle. It is, on the contrary, something that was already begun in order *not* to be accomplished, not to be brought to its conclusion.[13] The very structure of the threatening gesture is thus that of a theatrical, hysterical act, of a split, self-hindered gesture, of a gesture that cannot be accomplished not because of an external obstacle but because it is in itself the expression of a contradictory, self-conflicting desire—in this case, of Sylvia's desire to stab Oscar and, at the same time, of the prohibition that blocks the realization of this desire. Oscar's move (when, after becoming aware of her intention, he stands up and comes forward to meet her) is again contradictory, split into his "self-preserving" desire to snatch the knife from her and master her, and his "masochistic" desire to offer himself to the stab of the knife, a desire conditioned by his morbid feeling of guilt. The successful act (the stabbing of Oscar) results thus from the encounter of the two failed, hindered, split acts. Her desire to stab him is met by his own desire to be killed and punished. Apparently, Oscar moves forward to defend himself, but this move is at the same time supported by the desire to be stabbed. So, ultimately, it is of no importance which of the two "really" carried out the crucial gesture (did she push the knife in or did he throw himself on the blade?). The murder results from the overlap, from the coincidence of his and her desire.

In relation to the structural place of Oscar's "masochistic" desire, we should refer to the logic of fantasy elaborated by Freud in "A Child Is Being Beaten." Freud explains here how the final form of the fantasy scene ("A child is being beaten") presupposes two previous phases. The first phase is "My father is beating the child (my brother, somebody who is my rival double)." The second is the "masochistic" inversion of the first, "sadistic" one ("I am being beaten by my father"). The third phase, the final form of the fantasy, renders indistinct,

12. See Mladen Dolar, "L'agent secret: le spectateur qui en savait trop," in Slavoj Žižek, ed., *Tout ce que Vous avez toujours voulu savoir sur Lacan, sans jamais oser le demander à Hitchcock*, Paris, Navarin, 1988.
13. Lacan, p. 114.

neutralizes the subject ("who is doing the beating?") as well as the object ("which child is being beaten?") in the impersonal "A child is being beaten." According to Freud, the crucial role belongs to the *second*, "masochistic" phase. This is where the real trauma lies, the phase that is radically "repressed." We find no trace of it in the child's fantasizing. We can only *construct* it retroactively on the basis of "clues" pointing to the fact that *there is something missing* between "My father is beating the child" and "A child is being beaten," i.e., that we cannot immediately transform the first form into the third, definite one; an intermediate form must intervene:

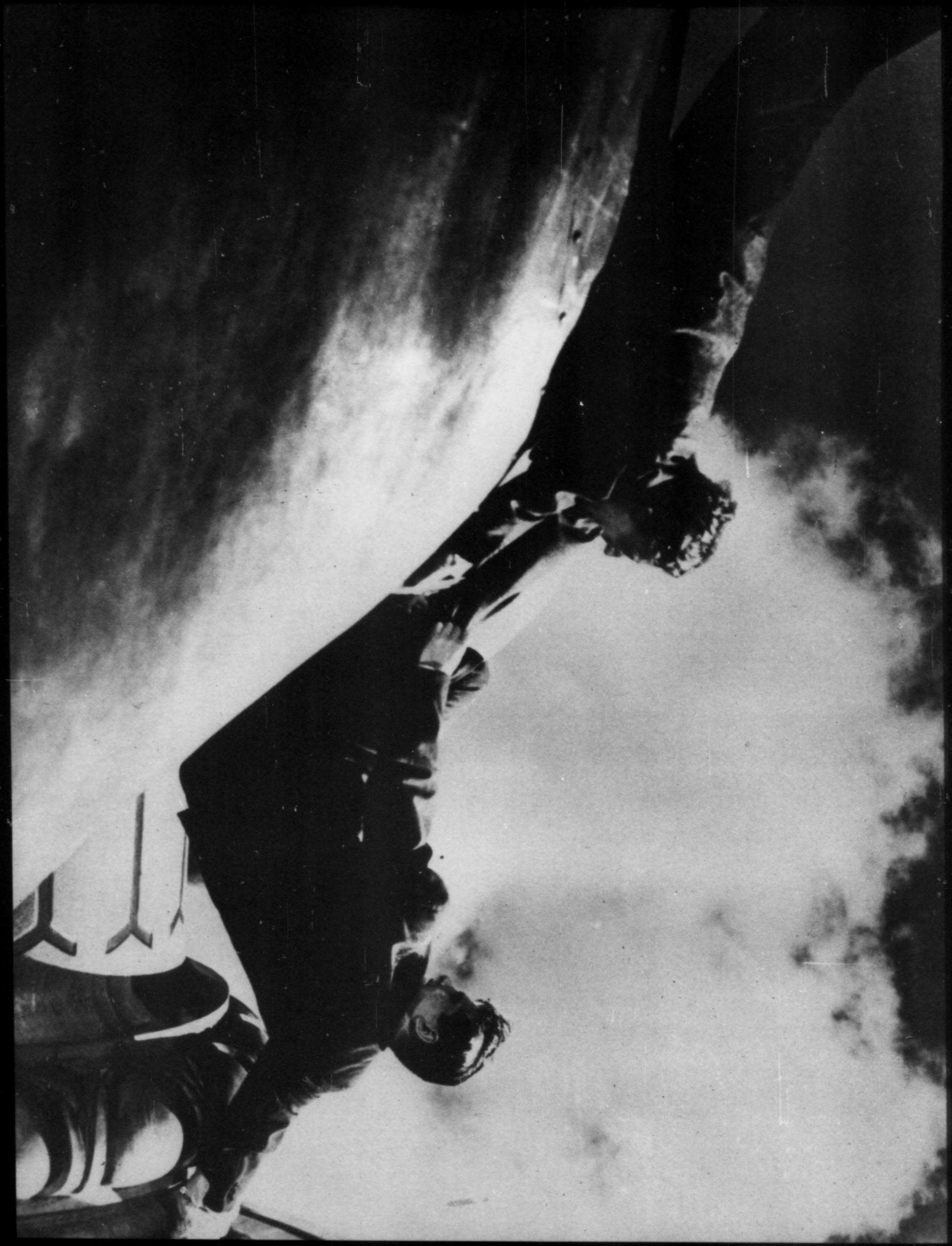
> This second phase is the most important and the most momentous of all. But we may say of it in a certain sense that it has never had a real existence. It is never remembered, it has never succeeded in becoming conscious. It is a construction of analysis, but it is no less a necessity on that account.[14]

The second form of the fantasy is thus the Lacanian real: a point which never took place "in (symbolic) reality," which was never inscribed into the symbolic texture, but which must nonetheless be presupposed as a kind of "missing link" guaranteeing the consistency of our symbolic reality. And our thesis is that Hitchcockian murders (in addition to Oscar's murder in *Sabotage,* let us mention at least the final fall of the saboteur from the Statue of Liberty in *Saboteur* and Gromek's murder in *Torn Curtain*) are governed by a homologous fantasy logic. The first phase is always "sadistic"; it consists in our identification with the hero, who finally has the opportunity to have done with the villain. We cannot wait to see Sylvia finish off the evil Oscar, to see the decent American push the Nazi saboteur over the railing, to see Paul Newman get rid of Gromek. The final phase is, of course, the compassionate inversion. When we see that the "villain" is really a helpless, broken being, we are overwhelmed with compassion and guilt; we are punished for our previous "sadistic" desire. In *Saboteur*, the hero tries desperately to *save* the villain suspended by his sleeve, the seams of which tear one by one; in *Sabotage*, Sylvia compassionately embraces the dying Oscar, preventing him from hitting the floor; in *Torn Curtain*, the very long duration of the act of murder, the clumsiness of Paul Newman, and the desperate resistance of the victim render the whole affair extremely painful.

At first it may seem that it is possible to pass directly from the first to the last phase, i.e., from sadistic pleasure at the imminent destruction of the villain to a sense of guilt and compassion. But if this were all, Hitchcock would be simply a kind of moralist, presenting us with the price to be paid for our "sadistic" desire: "You wanted the villain to be killed, now you've got it and can suffer the consequences!" But there is in Hitchcock always an intermediate phase. The

14. Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, trans. James Strachey, London, Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1955, vol. XVII, p. 185.

Alfred Hitchcock. Saboteur. *1942.*



"sadistic" desire for the villain to be killed is followed by a sudden awareness that it is actually already the "villain" himself who is, in a stifled but nonetheless unequivocal way, disgusted with his own corruption and wants to be "delivered" from this unbearable pressure through his own punishment, his own death. This is the delicate moment in which we become aware that the hero's (and thus our, the spectators') desire to annihilate the "villain" *is already the desire of the "villain" himself.* In *Sabotage*, for example, it is the moment at which it becomes clear that Sylvia's desire to stab Oscar overlaps with Oscar's desire to exculpate himself through his death. This constant implicit presence of a tendency to self-annihilation, of an enjoyment found in provoking one's own ruin, in short, of the "death drive," is what bestows upon the Hitchcockian "villain" his ambiguous charm, and it is at the same time what prevents us from passing immediately from an initial "sadism" to a final feeling of compassion for the villain. The compassion is based upon the awareness that the villain himself knows about his guilt and wants to die. In other words, the compassion arises only when we become aware of the *ethical* attitude contained in the villain's subjective position.

What is meant here by "ethics" can be elucidated by a reference to another case of what a director did with classic opera. I refer to the famous Peter Brooks version of Bizet's *Carmen*. My thesis is that, by means of the changes he introduced into the original plot, Brooks made of Carmen not only a tragic figure but, more radically, an *ethical* figure who is to be placed in the lineage of Antigone. Again, at first it seems that there could be no greater contrast than that between Antigone's dignified sacrifice and Carmen's debauchery, which leads to her destruction. Yet the two are connected by the same ethical attitude, which we could define (according to Lacan's reading of *Antigone* in the seminar on ethics) as an acceptance without restraint of the "death drive," as a striving for radical self-annihilation, for what Lacan calls the "second death" going beyond mere physical destruction, entailing the effacement of the very symbolic texture of generation and corruption. Brooks was quite justified in making the aria about *la carte impitoyable* ("the merciless card") the central musical motif structuring the whole work. The third-act aria about the card that "always shows death" designates the precise moment at which Carmen assumes ethical status, accepting without reserve the imminence of her own death. The cards which, in their accidental throw, always predict death are the "little piece of the real" to which Carmen's death drive clings. And it is precisely at the moment when Carmen not only becomes aware that she—as a woman marking the fate of the men she encounters—is herself the victim of fate, a plaything in the hand of forces she cannot dominate, but also fully accepts her fate, "does not cede her desire"—it is at this moment that she becomes a "subject" in the strict Lacanian sense of this term. For Lacan, *subject* is, in the final analysis, the name for this "empty gesture" by means of which we freely assume what is imposed on us, the real of the death drive. In other words, up to the aria about the "merciless card," Carmen was an object for men; her power of fascination depended on the role

she played in their fantasy space; she was nothing but their symptom, although she lived under the illusion that she was effectively "pulling the strings" and manipulating them. When she becomes an object *also for herself,* i.e., when, finally, she experiences the fact that she is just a passive element in the interplay of libidinal forces, she "subjectifies" herself, she becomes a "subject." In the Lacanian perspective, "subjectivization" is thus strictly correlative to experiencing oneself as an object, a "helpless victim"; this is a name for the gaze by means of which we confront the utter nullity of our narcissistic pretentions.

To prove that Brooks was fully aware of this, it suffices to mention his most ingenious intervention, the radical change of the denouement of the opera. Bizet's original version is well known. In front of the arena in which the toreador Escamillo pursues his victorious fight, Carmen is approached by the desperate José, who begs her to live with him again. His demand is met with a rebuff, and while the song in the background announces another triumph for Escamillo, José stabs Carmen to death—the usual drama of a rejected lover who cannot bear the loss. With Brooks, however, things turn out quite differently: José resignedly *accepts* Carmen's final rebuff, but as Carmen is walking away from him, the servants bring over the dead Escamillo—he lost the fight, the bull has killed him. It is Carmen who is now broken in spirit. She leads José to a hiding place near the arena, kneels down and offers herself to José to be stabbed. Is there a denouement more desperate than this? Of course there is: Carmen could have left with José, this weakling, and continued to live her miserable everyday life—in other words, we could have been given what we call the "happy ending."

We might also approach from this perspective the figure of the femme fatale in *film noir*—ruining the lives of men and at the same time victim of her own lust for enjoyment; obsessed by lust for power, endlessly manipulating her partners, and at the same time slave to some third, ambiguous person, sometimes even to an impotent or sexually ambivalent man. What bestows on her an aura of mystery is precisely the fact that she cannot be clearly located in the opposition between master and slave. When she seems permeated with intense pleasure, it suddenly becomes apparent that she suffers immensely. When she seems to be the victim of some horrible and unspeakable violence, it suddenly becomes clear that she enjoys it. So we can never be quite sure if she enjoys or suffers, if she manipulates or is herself manipulated. Thus the deeply ambiguous character of those moments in *film noir* (or in the hard-boiled detective novel) when the femme fatale breaks down and becomes the victim of her own game. Let us mention only the first model of such a breakdown, the final confrontation between Sam Spade and Brigid O'Shaughnessy in *The Maltese Falcon*. When she begins to lose her firm grasp of the situation, Brigid suffers a hysterical breakdown. Passing immediately from one strategy to another, she threatens, then cries and maintains that she did not know what was really happening to her. Suddenly she again assumes an attitude of cold distance and disdain, etc. In short, she dons the whole inconsistent array of hysterical masks. This final breakdown

of the femme fatale, the moment when she appears as an entity without substance, as a series of inconsistent masks without a coherent ethical attitude, this moment when our fascination with her changes suddenly into a feeling of aversion at such a filthy, amorphous, slimy being, i.e.—to refer again to Shakespeare's *Richard II*—when we see "nought but shadows of what is not" where, previously, we had seen a clear and distinct form exerting tremendous seductive power—this moment of reversal is at the same time the moment of triumph for the hard-boiled detective. Now, when the fascinating figure of the femme fatale disintegrates into an inconsistent bric-a-brac of hysterical masks, he is finally capable of gaining a kind of distance toward her and of rejecting her.

The destiny of the femme fatale in *film noir*, her final hysterical breakdown, exemplifies perfectly the Lacanian proposition that "Woman does not exist." She is nothing but "the symptom of man." Her power of fascination masks the void of her nonexistence, so when she is finally rejected, her whole ontological consistency is dissolved. But precisely as nonexisting, i.e., at the moment at which, through the hysterical breakdown, she *assumes* her nonexistence, she constitutes herself as a "subject." What is waiting for her *beyond* hysterization is the death drive at its purest.

In feminist writings on *film noir* we often encounter the thesis that the femme fatale presents a mortal threat to the man (the hard-boiled detective), i.e., that her boundless enjoyment menaces his very identity as subject. By rejecting her at the end, he regains his sense of personal integrity and identity. This thesis is true, but in a sense that is the exact opposite of the way it is usually understood. What is so menacing in the femme fatale is not the boundless enjoyment overwhelming the man and making of him woman's plaything or slave. It is not Woman as the object of fascination causing us to lose our sense of judgment and moral attitude but, on the contrary, that which remains hidden beneath this fascinating mask, what appears when the mask falls off—the dimension of the pure subject fully assuming the fact of the death drive. To use Kantian terminology, woman is not a threat to man insofar as she embodies pathological enjoyment, insofar as she enters the frame of a particular fantasy. The real dimension of the threat is revealed when we "traverse" the fantasy, when the coordinates of the fantasy space are lost through hysterical breakdown. In other words, what is really menacing about the femme fatale is not that she is fatal for *men* but that she presents a case of a "pure," nonpathological subject fully assuming *her own* fate. When the woman reaches this point, there are only two attitudes left to the man. Either he "cedes his desire," rejects her, and regains his imaginary, narcissistic identity (Sam Spade at the end of *Maltese Falcon*), or he *identifies* with the woman qua his symptom and meets his fate in a suicidal gesture (the act of Robert Mitchum in what is perhaps the crucial *film noir*, Jacques Tourneur's *Out of the Past*).[15]

15. The fact that this had to do with a postfantasy "purification" of desire is attested by an

But what has all this to do with Hitchcockian montage? Let us return to the scene from his *Sabotage* analyzed above. The decisive feature of this scene is that, although its emotional center is Sylvia, her terrible tension, she is the object and Oscar the subject. It is *his* subjective perspective, the rupture in this perspective, that articulates the rhythm of the scene, spells its deployment, so to speak. In the beginning, Oscar pursues the usual dinner conversation and entirely fails to notice Sylvia's extreme inner tension. When Sylvia becomes transfixed by the knife, the astonished Oscar glances at her and becomes aware of her desire. This introduces the first scansion. It is the end of the empty chatter; it becomes clear to Oscar that Sylvia is at the point of stabbing him. Thereupon, he stands up and steps forward to meet her. This part of the action is shot in the manner of Hitchcockian montage, i.e., the camera first shows us Oscar approaching Sylvia, then Oscar's view of the paralyzed, inflexible Sylvia, staring at him with a desperate look, as if asking him to help her make up her mind. When they find themselves face to face, he himself is paralyzed and lets *her* grab the knife. Then we pass to a shot of their heads exchanging intense glances, i.e., we do not see what is going on below their waists. Suddenly, he utters an incomprehensible cry. Next shot: a close-up of her hand holding the knife plunged deep into his chest. Thereupon she embraces him, as in an act of compassion, before he collapses to the floor. So he helped her indeed: by moving close to her, he lets her know that he has accepted her desire as his own, i.e., that he also wants to die. No wonder, then, that afterward, Sylvia embraces him compassionately. He has, so to speak, met her halfway, delivered her from an unbearable tension.[16]

The moment of Hitchcockian montage—the moment at which Oscar advances toward Sylvia—is thus the moment at which Oscar accepts her desire as his own, or—to refer to the Lacanian definition of the hysteric's desire as the desire of the other—the moment at which Oscar is hysterized. When we see Sylvia through Oscar's eyes, in the subjective shot of the camera approaching her, we witness the moment at which Oscar becomes aware that her desire overlaps with his own, i.e., that he himself yearns to die—the moment at which he takes upon himself the lethal gaze of the other.

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ingenious detail. In the final scene, the wardrobe of Jane Greer unmistakably resembles that of a nun.

16. It was François Truffaut who not only pointed out that this scene "almost suggests suicide rather than murder," but also drew the parallel between Oscar's and Carmen's deaths: "It's as if [Oscar] Homolka were allowing himself to be killed by Sylvia Sidney. Prosper Merimée staged Carmen's death on the same dramatic principle, with the victim thrusting her body forward to meet the slayer's fatal stab" (François Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1984, p. 77).



All photographs in this essay by G. G. de Clérambault, courtesy Musée de l'homme, Paris.

The Sartorial Superego

JOAN COPJEC

G. G. de Clérambault was a well-known and respected French psychiatrist who, through his concept of mental automatism, completely revised our notion of psychosis and dismantled the category of effort or will upon which the study of the psyche had been based since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Yet, immediately after his death in 1934, the newspapers saluted his memory by publishing "a handful of hasty and inaccurate gossip."[1] Reporting, above all, an "astonishment" at his "taste for rare cloth, Indian madras, Oriental fabric brocaded with gold and silver" and at his possession of the several wax mannequins that were found in his home, a journalistic fantasy fashioned Clérambault as a "new Caligari."[2] The gossip ended only when interest in him waned.

But interest in Clérambault — whom Jacques Lacan once hailed as his "only master"[3] — has recently reawakened, and not without raking up at the same time all the old smirky astonishment, the old fantasy of the public figure with a very private perversion. Catherine Clément, for example, in her *Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, feels justified in summarizing Clérambault thus: "a rather unusual psychiatrist who was mad about fabrics and woolens";[4] and a few years ago the book *La passion des étoffes chez un neuro-psychiatre* was published, treating us at last to a documentary look at this eponymous passion.[5]

The case of *La passion des étoffes* is instructive. What the book does is intersperse several "speculative" essays with documentary evidence of

1. Joseph Kessel, "Un soir, rive gauche . . .," *Le Figaro*, December 4, 1934; reprinted in Yolande Papetti, Bernard De Fréminville, Françoise Valier, and Serge Tisseron, *La passion des étoffes chez un neuro-psychiatre. G. G. de Clérambault*, Paris, Solin, 1981, p. 112.
2. "Le docteur Clérambault médecin chef de l'infirmerie spéciale du Dépôt s'est donné la mort," *Le Figaro*, November 20, 1934; reprinted in Papetti, *et al.*, p. 111.
3. Jacques Lacan, "Propos sur la causalité psychique," *Ecrits*, Paris, Seuil, 1966, p. 168.
4. Catherine Clément, *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, New York, Columbia University Press, 1983, p. 55. Clérambault is given a bit more attention in Elisabeth Roudinesco's *La bataille de cent ans: Histoire de la psychanalyse en France*, Paris, Seuil, 1986, and in David Macey's amazingly hasty *Lacan in Contexts*, London, Verso, 1988.
5. See note 1.

Clérambault's passion; fragments of lectures, case studies, obituaries, a number of photographs are all exhibited to the reader. But despite this documentary alibi, one cannot fail to see that it is around what is not—and, it is suggested, *cannot*—be placed in evidence that the book ultimately turns. Although the essays by the editors are, ostensibly, attempts to analyze the data, they seem to delight in posing many more questions than they themselves believe are answerable: Clérambault, dispassionate observer or impassioned fetishist? aesthete or man of the world? his suicide, was it motivated by his failing sight, dwindling finances, or rising insanity? A swarm of questions form the obscure center of each aspect of Clérambault's life: they indicate the limit points of our knowledge. Conspicuously, it is the unfortunate loss of so much of the record (lectures never published, witnesses never located) that makes these questions unanswerable, but one senses that there is an underlying presumption that no amount of documentation, however extensive, will ever resolve them. For it is the very undecidability of any and all evidence that is at the core of this particular construction of Clérambault, which we will now title the "psychological construction."

Confronted with the possibility of any fact's being able to provide proof not only of a specific psychological intention but also of its contrary, unable to extract from any single or mass of facts a guarantee about our suspicions concerning the person these facts surround, the psychological construction supposes a subject behind the facts who has unique access to his or her own psychological intentions, who uniquely knows by virtue of being the living experience of those intentions. The psychological fantasy constructs an *inscrutable* subject, a kind of obstacle to all archival work, a question that historical research will never be able to answer.

This psychological construction is one that psychoanalysis sets out to disperse, its primary target being the supposed subject of knowledge. Against this supposition psychoanalysis argues not that we can ultimately penetrate what had previously seemed the unfathomable secret of the subject, but that there is nothing to fathom; the subject has no secret knowledge, or, to quote the famous Hegelian quip: the Egyptian secrets were also secret from the Egyptians themselves.[6] What does this mean in the terms of our argument so far? Psychoanalysis, just as the psychological fantasy, acknowledges that no fact is unequivocal. This is so because no fact exists outside a signifying chain and no signifier is unequivocal. And since this is so, psychoanalysis reasons, the subject, effected by the facts of its life, is effected by meanings that it never lives, never experiences. This is what psychoanalysis means when it speaks of the overdetermination of the subject: the subject is subject to the equivocations of the signifier. It is for this reason that Freud was led to defend constructions of analysis, those analytic suppositions

6. Quoted by Slavoj Žižek in ". . . Le plus sublime des hystériques," in *Hystérie et obsession: Recueil des rapport de la Quatrième Rencontre internationale*, Paris, Navarin, 1985, p. 335.

about events that effected the subject even though they never happened *as such*, were never experienced, and thus could never be remembered *as such*.

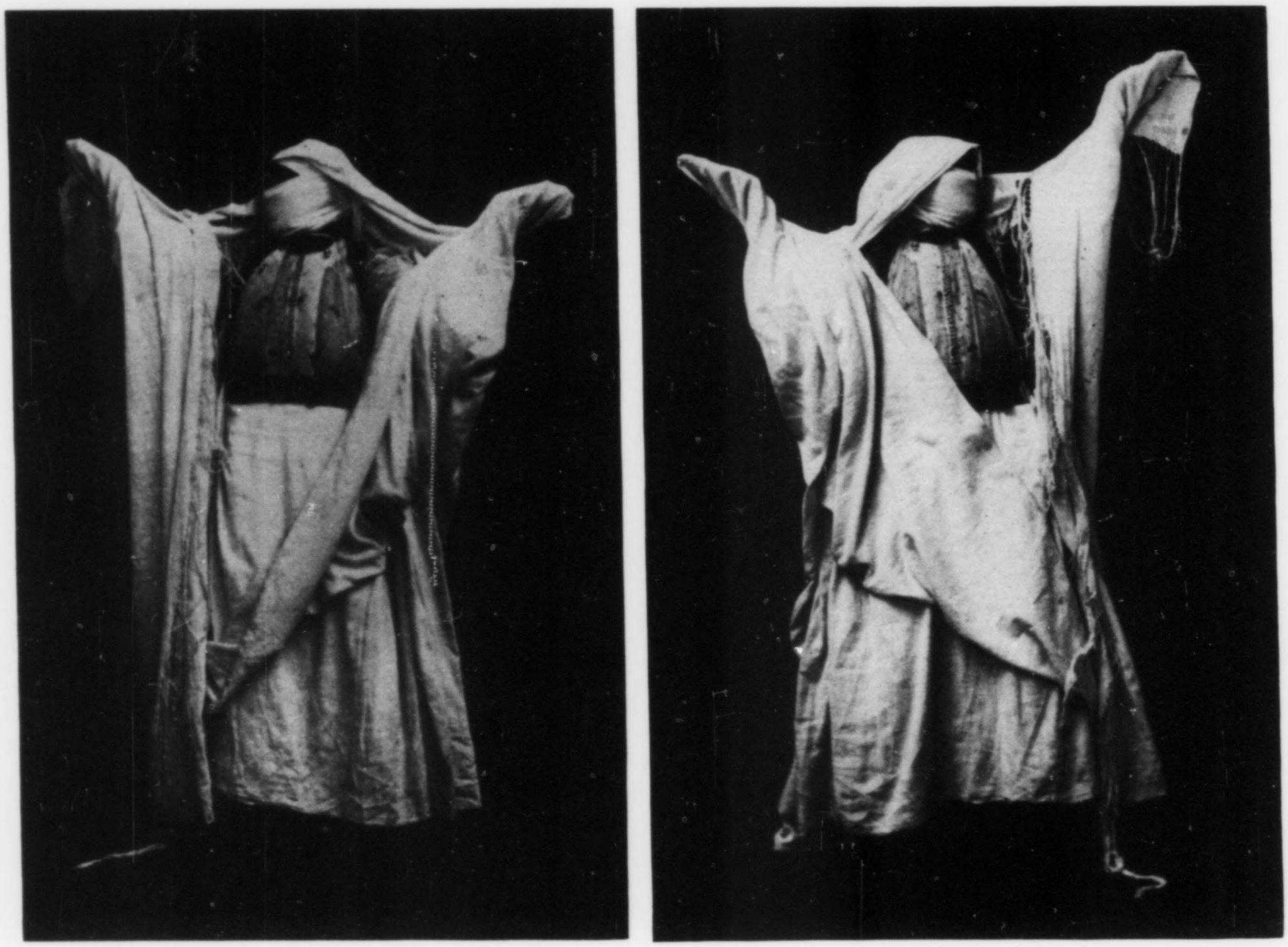
Needless to say, not only will the subject be unable to bear direct witness to such constructed events, no other such witness or document will ever be found to perform this task either. This does not mean that psychoanalysis renounces history to maintain a truth that no history can uncover. Psychoanalysis requires history; it can only begin by gathering the facts. What it renounces is what we can now term the "historicist construction." Historicism is faulted not because it is, in fact, not possible to recreate historical experience (this is, again, a psychologistic objection), but because this construction operates with the belief that it is *experience* that must be recreated, that the truthful and logical statements we make about a historical period are empirical generalizations about the ways in which people thought. A new historicism has, in recent years, provided detailed accounts of the everyday life of the *pathological*[7] subject, but it has been unable to account for—or describe the everyday life of—the subject inasmuch as it resists this reduction to the pathological. We know now more concretely than ever before what goods men and women of various classes were supposed to find pleasurable, which of these were denied them, which allowed, and how the inequalities in the distribution of goods affected the actions of these men and women. We learn nothing, however, of the historical effects of the fact that men and women often act to *avoid* pleasure, to shun these goods.

Having stated these distinctions, I would like to return to the case of Clérambault to see if history will allow us to dislodge the fantasmatic notion of his "nasty secret" that is even now being revived. At the literal center of this fantasy (i.e., reproduced in the middle of *La passion des étoffes*) are a series of photographs that Clérambault took between 1914 and 1918, while he was in Morocco recuperating from a war wound. During these years in Morocco Clérambault learned Arabic and began a study of Arab dress; these photographs are obviously a part of that study.

The photographs, in other words, were taken at the very height of the "golden age" of French colonialism. Our postcolonialist knowledge of this fact and of this historical period is relied on to form the backdrop of the current revival of the Clérambault "scandal." *La passion des étoffes* offers constant invocations of familiar Orientalist myths, but it neither clarifies Clérambault's relation to them nor deconstructs them. Thus, the image of exotic sexuality these myths create becomes something Clérambault vaguely "participated" in. The historical period is so sketchily recalled and so underexamined that it cannot be conceived to wield any real determining force.

If we, on the other hand, would like to delineate the relation between the

7. I am using this word in Kant's sense to refer to the empirical subject who *suffers* a range of feelings and sentiments in relation to everyday objects.



photographs and French colonialism, its *production* of myths, we might best begin by comparing Clérambault's to other photographs that have been exhibited as emblematic of this production. In *The Colonial Harem*, for example, postcards of Algerian women are narratively ordered as a kind of striptease, though the running commentary argues, of course, that the stripping is performed by the colonialist gaze acting out a will to knowledge and power that had been temporarily obstructed by the women's veils.[8] In the light of this very familiar scenario of the colonialist project, Clérambault's photographs may seem to exemplify a sort of failure of the "will to unwrap," an unaccountable defaulting of desire or

8. Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, trans. Myena and Wlad Godzich, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986. In her *Images of Women. The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East 1860–1950* (London, Quartet Books, 1988), Sarah Graham-Brown presents Clérambault's photographs as a simple reverse striptease in which the body is gradually covered up rather than revealed; this interpretation misses the essential difference between Clérambault's photographs and those displayed in *The Colonial Harem*. Incidentally, Graham-Brown produces the same distortion that we find in *La passion des étoffes*: both lead us to believe that Clérambault took photographs only of women. This is not so; he also took many photographs of Moroccan men.





halting at the initial stages of the complete sexual scenario. Although there is a clear difference between Clérambault's and these other photographs, the terms of this difference, I will argue, are not these. Nor should the mere recognition of this difference, of this discrepancy between our expectations and the photographs themselves, be used to sustain the psychologistic argument: that the very opacity of the images indicates the opacity of the man who took them—his idiosyncratic passion for cloth.

Colonies and Colonnades

In opposition to this, I will claim that Clérambault's passion was not a purely idiosyncratic phenomenon, but one conditioned by historical circumstances, and I will begin my historical investigation, then, by focusing on the year 1923. This was the year that Clérambault began a series of courses—which would go on regularly until 1926—at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. As a renowned psychiatrist and spellbinding teacher, Clérambault thrived in the atelier mode of the Ecole;



his were the most popular courses offered.[9] The subject of these courses was—drapery. Clérambault would arrive at the lecture hall carrying a valise from which he would pull out wax dolls and a variety of cloths with which he would, during the course of the lecture, drape the dolls. He would often also use live models—whom he would drape with the same materials and whom he would ask to execute certain movements of the arms or body—in order to demonstrate his points.

The next question, of course, arises automatically: what were these points? It is here that the record is most wanting, for the Beaux-Arts lectures were never published. But two addresses made to the Société d'Ethnographie were published, and they provide important clues to the historical dimension of his fascination with fabric. In one of these addresses, Clérambault demonstrated that a characteristic North African manner of fastening cloth, a ligature, was, in fact,

9. Elisabeth Renard, *Le Docteur Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault: Sa vie et son oeuvre (1872–1934)*, Paris, Librarie le François, 1942, p. 63.





also used by classical Greeks and Romans and was reproduced in their sculpture.[10] Before his discovery, this fastening of the tunic was incorrectly interpreted as a fibula. In addition, Clérambault was able conclusively to demonstrate, by pointing to a marginal thickness in some of the bas-reliefs at the Louvre, that scalloped hems existed in Greek drapery. This finding directly contradicted the pronouncements of the most prominent scholar of antique costumes, who had been formally denying that Greeks used hems.[11] In the resumé of the second address,[12] we are given a clearer sense of the larger outlines of Clérambault's ambitious ethnographic project. The nature and originality of this project is indicated by one of his contemporary defenders: "Clérambault," he insisted,

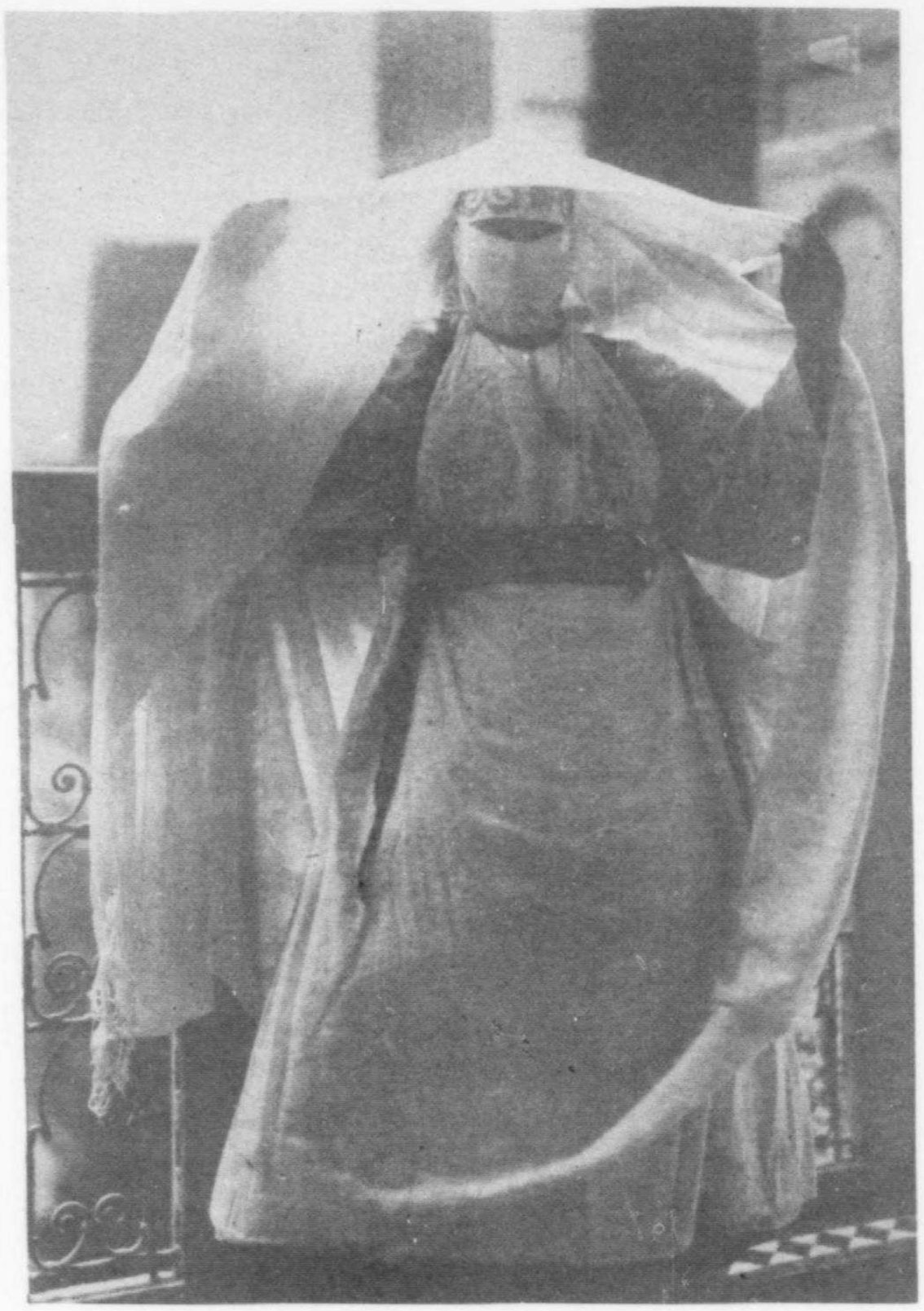
10. G. G. de Clérambault, "Recherches technologiques sur le drapé," published originally in *Bulletin de la Société d'Ethnographie de Paris*, April 15, 1931, and reprinted in Papetti, *et al.*, pp. 52–57.
11. This "master of classical dress" was, according to Renard (p. 62), a man named Heuzey.
12. G. G. de Clérambault, "Classification des costumes drapés," address delivered on May 5, 1928; the resumé of this lecture is reprinted in Papetti, *et al.*, pp. 49–52.



"was the first to consider the flowing folds of clothes as the signature of a race, a tribe. He conducted his research on Assyrian tunics, Greek chlamys, Roman togas, Arab cloth. He studied their curve and their sense; he made them speak."[13] Although this project may seem from our vantage point dismissably bizarre, an absolute novelty, it was, as we shall see, consonant with a range of concerns of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

Every year the Ecole set a different project for the Grand Prix competition; in 1923, the year Clérambault began his course on drapery, the project was a residence for the representative of France in Morocco.[14] Once, in 1862, in a very famous incident, the Ecole had been attacked for specifying in the program, and awarding the prize to, a design rendered in the classical style, even though the project was a palace for the governor of Algeria, for which some thought an

13. Kessel, "Un soir, rive gauche . . .," p. 112.
14. For a list of Grand Prix designs, see Donald D. Egbert, *The Beaux-Arts Tradition in French Architecture*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980.



indigenous Islamic style would have been more appropriate.[15] But in 1923 the Ecole still steadfastly favored the classical style, which it had so long championed and so "magnanimously" disseminated throughout France and its colonies.

There is no doubt that the Beaux-Arts obsession with classical architecture and sculpture sprang, in part, from its conviction that Greece and Rome represented the imperial origins of France's high degree of civilization, or that this myth of origins helped propel France's imperialist, civilizing mission. No doubt that the transposition of neoclassical architecture to the sites that had become the *goals* of this mission euphemized the brutal process of the erasure of the colonies' own beginnings. Nor is there any doubt that Clérambault's lectures and photographs assisted this process. Moroccan drapery was not merely being used to reinterpret classical sculpture, classical sculpture was also being used to reinter-

15. It was Viollet-le-Duc who initiated the attack; the winning entry, submitted by F. W. Chabrol, triumphed over two designs in the Islamic style, submitted by Emmanuel Brune and A. F. V. Dutert.

pret Moroccan drapery—to reinvent it for the West. But this superficial description of the relation between an interest in drapery and the advance of colonialism not only leaves much about this relation and about Clérambault's photographs unexplained, it also simplifies the notion of origins that operated in this context.

It is necessary to pinpoint, then, what I take to be a more fundamental beginning for our understanding of the photographs; it is Clérambault's succinct pronouncement that "a draped costume must be defined by the scheme of its construction."[16] At the end of the lecture in which this pronouncement is delivered, Clérambault notes that this mode of definition "leaves open" the question of genesis, but by this point in the presentation we will have noticed that description of drapery in terms of its structure or construction actually vacates this question; his mode of analysis *replaces* description of the genesis and of the sensuous or symbolic characteristics of costume. Instead Clérambault will attempt to correlate a description of dress with a description of national identity on the basis of a relatively new manner of describing clothing type. My claim is not only that Clérambault's passion for cloth was a passion (in some measure) socially shared, but also that it was a residue of the revolution in the definition of "type."

Let us, by way of explanation, take up the discussion again where we left off, with the year 1923. This was the year that Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture* was published, along with its critique of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. It might seem that by beginning his lectures at the very moment when Corbusier and other modernists were making the Ecole an anachronism, Clérambault was showing himself to be merely "an adept lingerer in [the] nineteenth century,"[17] spouting an ideology and participating in a project whose end had already arrived. But in terms of one matter at least, modernism must be seen as a *culmination* or *variation* of (rather than the break from) the Beaux-Arts tradition; this matter is the appropriate manner of characterizing buildings.

Far more fundamental than the differences between the modernism Corbusier represented and the academicism he attacked was the rupture introduced at the beginning of the nineteenth century by a completely new notion of building type, one that would operate continuously not only throughout the century, but also throughout modernism. One architectural historian has dramatized this rupture by contrasting a classification of buildings written in the middle of the eighteenth century with one written at the beginning of the nineteenth. The first, taken from Jacques-François Blondel's *Cours d'Architecture*, lists these architectural genres: "light, elegant, delicate, rustic, naive, feminine, grandiose, audacious, terrible, dwarfish, frivolous, licentious, uncertain, vague, barbaric, cold, poor, sterile or futile"; the second, from J.-N. L. Durand's *Collection and*

16. G. G. de Clérambault, "Classification," p. 49.
17. Even Paul Guiraud, a supporter of Clérambault, concedes this description of him in the "Preface" to G. G. de Clérambault, *Oeuvre psychiatrique*, Paris, PUF, 1942.

parallel of buildings of every genre, ancient and modern, offers a much different list: "amphitheaters, aqueducts, triumphal arches, . . . baths, bazaars, belltowers, libraries, . . . colleges, . . . granaries, grottoes, . . . villas, markets, . . . pagodas, palaces, . . . lighthouses."[18] Between the first list and the second, there has clearly been a revolution in thinking building kinds. Adjectives providing sensuous description of a building, its character or physiognomy, are surrendered and replaced by nouns designating a building's *use*; at the beginning of the nineteenth century, for the first time in history, a building's nature is thought to reside not in its relation to some primitive or ideal form, not in its symbolic value, but in its function. From this point on, utility will define architectural type, and all questions of form, construction, and ornamentation will refer themselves to and resolve themselves according to the dictates of use.

The isolation of utility as the essential parameter of a building's definition resulted not only in assigning to style and ornament the task of *expressing* this essential definition, of linking themselves to use, it resulted as well in the underlying assumption that obliged this task: namely, that style and ornament were separate from and secondary to function. It is at this point that style and ornament began to be considered precisely as *clothing*; their connection to the building, in other words, was taken as arbitrary rather than necessary, and they were thus viewed, for the first time, as the wrapping or covering of an otherwise nude building. It was, of course, their altogether inessential status that made them vulnerable to the obsessive economy that ruled functionalism; ornament was eventually banished as crime, and stylistic eclecticism (the borrowing of styles from different historical periods) was outlawed by architecture's cultivation of a new indifference to all history except that of the building's own process of construction; style, in short, disappeared as an independent entity as it merged with construction. Functionalism, in the form of architectural purism, peaked, then, in a rending of clothing. Nevertheless, between this conclusion and the early nineteenth-century introduction of utility as the criterion of classification, fabric was for architecture not only an issue passionately pursued, but a concept that owed its very existence to that of utility.

Eschewing any discussion of the symbolic power of cloth, focused instead on its construction, its articulation of structural and functional elements, Clérambault would not have been out of place in the architectural world of the 1920s. Clothing style (Moroccan, Greek, Roman) had for him, it is clear, no existence apart from the structure of clothing's technical composition. Drapery is defined as what it does. Clérambault divided and subdivided the "scheme of [the drapery's] construction" into basic elements whose combination determined the

18. Cited in Demetrius Porphyrios, "The 'End' of Styles," *Oppositions*, no. 8 (Spring 1977), p. 120. My discussion of architectural "type" is derived primarily from this essay; from Anthony Vidler's "The Idea of Type," published in this same issue of *Oppositions*; and from Vidler's "The Third Typology," *Rational Architecture*, Brussels, Archives d'architecture moderne, 1978.



costume's appropriate classification. Three orders of elements are noted: 1) the principle point of support (e.g., the head, neck, shoulders, etc.); 2) the movement of the cloth from this point; 3) the zones of the body covered and the various means of fastening, twisting, and folding the cloth.[19] The awkward and unnatural poses of the figures in many of the photographs attest to Clérambault's determination to analyze the articulation of these elements. In the photographs and in the written reports, description remains fixed on this matter of technical form charged, ultimately, with the carrying out of a specific function: the wrapping of the body or (as Clérambault says of head drapery in one of the rare moments when his commentary goes beyond the dry tabulation of minute differences and myriad combinations) protection against the sun or against the weight of various burdens.

Now, while this focus on the union of utility and construction may partially account for the Moroccan photographs—especially those in which the form of the clothed body is visible—it does not yet fully account for them. Those in which the bodily form has completely disappeared retain their enigmatic quality, for what is thus obscured in these cases is the very prop on which the drapery's purpose hangs. And though his desire for scientific exactitude—his stated fear that photographs taken without an analytic goal will fail to register all the components of the cloth's structure—may explain why Clérambault took a great number of photographs of draped costumes, no one, I believe, will feel that it justifies his taking 40,000 of them!

Guilty vs. Useful Pleasures

Corbusier once noted that in French the word *type* has a double sense; it refers not only to a kind, of building, say, but also to a man: a *type* is a "man." But it was more than this pun that allowed him to argue that:

> From the point that the type becomes a man, we grasp the possibility of a considerable extension of the type. [This is] because the man-type is a complex form of a unique physical type, to which can be applied a sufficient standardization. According to the same rules one will establish for this physical type an equipment of standard habitation.[20]

What makes these statements possible is the historical fact that at the very moment when buildings were being reclassified according to their use, man was undergoing a similar reclassification. Sensations had ceased not only to provide

19. Clérambault, "Classification," p. 49.
20. Corbusier in *L'architecture vivante*, August 1927, cited by Vidler, "The Third Typology," p. 30.

the basic facts about buildings, they had also ceased to be seen as the basic facts of the mind that considered these buildings. The rise of the industrial regime initiated a privileging of "the industrious character of the human species"[21] that resulted in utility's becoming a *psychological* as well as an architectural principle. This meant that effort or *will* (rather than sensation) would henceforth be taken as the basic fact of the human mind and man himself would be seen as a tool, his vocation: "to be set in his place and to be set to work,"[22] like a machine. Man was seen as that being who directs himself toward work, not, as was formerly thought, toward contemplation.[23] This led to a kind of externalizing of the psyche, for it proposed that the mind could not apprehend itself directly, but rather perceived itself reflected in the traces left behind by its efforts. This definition of man was thus well-suited to empiricism.

And in the human sphere, as in the architectural, this redefinition occasioned considerable attention to questions of clothing.[24] Before the debut of industrialization, clothing had been an important indicator of social status; it had served to mark the division of classes into distinct groups. But once "man" became vested with a functional definition, the old vestiary regime collapsed and man was submitted to a new one. Sartorial distinctions among men were abol-

21. Georges Canguilhem, "What is psychology?" *Ideology & Consciousness*, vol. 7 (1980), p. 46.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 47. Although Canguilhem privileges utilitarianism in his discussion, he sees it as forwarding a definition of man more as tool*maker*, than *tool*. But he does not consider the issue of pleasure, which was central to utilitarianism and is the basis of our claim that utilitarianism was already, and not just a prelude to, instrumentalism.
23. This is a point often underlined. Canguilhem makes it, as does Jacques Lacan (in *Le Séminaire VII: L'éthique de la psychanalyse*, Paris, Seuil, 1986) and the fictional Teufelsdröckh (in Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus, The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh*, published serially in *Fraser's Magazine*, 1833–1834): "The end of Man is an Action, and not a Thought." See also Edmond Doutté, *Missions au Maroc*, Paris, Paul Geuthner, 1914, in which a journey to Morocco is presented precisely as an undertaking engaged more as an effort of *will* than as a search for knowledge (p. ix).
24. The literature on this subject is extensive; I cite here only a few recent and particularly relevant examples: Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985; Peter Wollen, "Fashion/Orientalism/The Body," *New Formations*, no. 1 (1987); Kaja Silverman, "Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse," in Tania Modleski, ed., *Studies in Entertainment*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1986; Annie Ochonisky, "La mode et le vêtement," *L'Evolution Psychiatrique*, vol. 52, no. 1 (1987).

The history of modern fashion begins around 1850, as, essentially, "feminine" fashion. Charles Frederic Worth opened his store in Paris in 1858, thus beginning the phenomenon of "haute couture." But by the 1920s there were increasing demands that women also renounce their interest in individual clothing styles and adopt a more uniform appearance. In England, for example, the Fashion of the Month League made recommendations about what women should wear, and there were several proposals for a Ministry of Fashion which would steer women toward the proper social attire. The most sinister aspect of this movement arose from its becoming linked up with eugenics; at this point the argument for the adoption of a simpler style of dress was that it would prevent those with unattractive bodies from disguising them and thus of gaining the (sexual) opportunity of reproducing them. See, for this argument, J. C. Flugel, *The Psychology of Clothes*, 3rd ed., London, The Hogarth Press, 1950. One sees here the principle of egalitarianism careening grotesquely off course, all the while supported by a principle of maximum happiness: the body, it is argued, must be duly valued, not necessarily for its own sake, but for that of future generations (p. 223).

ished and all classes accepted a uniformity and simplification of style. The egalitarianism that defined the political agenda of the day and permitted man to define himself through his work rather than his birth was thus evidenced in the leveling and unmarking of his clothing.

But we must be careful to note that it was, in fact, specifically *man* (and not actually mankind) who was defined by his labor, and that he alone was required to choose his wardrobe by its fitness for work. Woman, on the other hand, came at this same time to be subjected to a new, modern notion of fashion: the rapid and seasonal renewal of clothing before any functional wearing out. From the middle of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the image of the modern woman was defined and redefined several times over by the vicissitudes of vestiary codes. While the image of man remained steady and stable, hers was constantly reshaped behind the accelerated changes of clothing styles.

This modern history of clothing is detailed most famously in a book called *The Psychology of Clothing* written in 1930 by J. C. Flugel. This book is best known for its designation and analysis of "the great masculine renunciation"—by which man surrendered the field of fashion to women and came to occupy, instead, that of function. What has, however, received little attention is the following corollary of this renunciation: "In sartorial matters," Flugel writes, "modern man, because of his devotion to principles of duty, has a far sterner and more rigid conscience than modern woman."[25] Now, what is to account for this surging up of the superego in the sartorial field? What is the logic of this encounter between ethics and dress? Flugel's surprising observation depends on there being a connection between duty and dress, while we have so far only discussed the relation between dress and *function* or *use*. Though it is clear that the equation of man's plain and uniform costume (his functional attire) with his stern and rigid conscience hinges on our accepting use and duty as equivalent, it is also clear to us that *duty* has an ethical sense that *use* does not, at least not necessarily. So, either his argument is simply sleight of hand, or *use* had acquired, at the time Flugel wrote, a sense that was ethical. The latter turns out to be the case. The sleight of hand is demonstrably historical.

We now know how Freud must have felt when in *Civilization and Its Discontents* he complained that the discussion of the superego spoiled the framework of his paper, for all of a sudden it seems that our previous discussion has implicated us in an ethical dimension that has so far gone unacknowledged. Looking back, we see that one concept in particular—that of pleasure—has been elided, and yet this is precisely the concept that presided over the conversion of functional issues into issues of morality. Let me illustrate:

Having made the historical claim that an ethics of clothes must proceed by evaluating their function, Flugel spells out in bold what their ultimate function must be: "to secure the maximum of satisfaction in accordance with the 'reality

25. Flugel, p. 113.

principle.'"[26] In this case, it turns out that the reality principle is that principle which allows us to abandon a false, narcissistic pleasure in favor of the true pleasure that only a love of others can bring. It turns out, in other words, that Flugel's reality principle is a principle of (maximum) pleasure.

We began, you remember, by citing the work of Durand. In architecture it is he who is credited with inaugurating the redefinition of type in terms of use. Turning to his famous *Précis des leçons d'architecture*, we stumble almost immediately over a statement that will now be impossible to disregard: "In all times and in all places, the entirety of man's thoughts and actions have had their origin in two principles: the love of well-being and the aversion to every sort of pain."[27] Well, then, does man's construction of architecture, like everything else, have its origins in the principles of pleasure and pain; or does it originate, as we said earlier, in the principle of use? Durand answers economically that it originates in both, and he thereby erects modern architecture on the same equation that Jeremy Bentham used to formulate his utilitarianism.

Durand may not have wavered, as Bentham did, on the question of whether to call his founding precept the principle of utility or the principle of pleasure, but he was far from dismissive of the necessity for pleasure in architecture. Contrary to all the criticism that we have heard about the failure of functionalism, or modernism, to consider the importance of pleasure, it would be more accurate to say that pleasure was from the beginning taken as fundamental—*as long as it could be used*. To state it in this way, however, is to give too much away too soon. Durand did not start out from the proposition that pleasure is usable; he began his *Précis* instead with the assumption that use is pleasurable. His argument is essentially this: because we seek pleasure, we therefore seek to surround ourselves with useful things, since they alone can and do necessarily provide us with pleasure—or, at least, with the only pleasure worth considering. For, in fact, there is more than one pleasure in Durand's text; though only one is accepted as legitimate, the other is discounted as a false pleasure.

Like Bentham, Durand attempts to justify his principle of utility by imagining its subversion. Putting us in mind of the Medici Venus and the Farnese Hercules, he conjures up a person who thinks the head of one is more graceful than that of the other and who thus places the head of Venus on the body of

26. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

27. J.-N. L. Durand, *Précis des leçons d'architecture données à l'Ecole Royale Polytechnique*, Paris, 1819, p. 6. Of the historical studies I have read of this period in architecture, only one mentions this aspect of Durand's theory—Alberto Perez-Gomez (*Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1984) calls this statement "terrifying": "This materialistic premise became the basis of the ethics and aesthetics of technology, and it still underlies the most popular historical and ideological conceptions inherited from the nineteenth century. Only after Durand would it be important for architecture to provide 'pleasure' or that it be 'nice' rather than truly meaningful" (p. 299). But it is, unfortunately, from a phenomenological perspective that Perez-Gomez finds this notion problematic.

Hercules and vice-versa.[28] The result, he says, would be ridiculous. It is easy to see that the strategy here is to make the alternative to utility seem as self-evidently stupid as possible, to reduce it to an absurdity. It is also easy to see that this argument for functionalism relies on our having already accepted the necessity and appropriateness of familiar, finished forms. In fact, we can say that our belief in functionalism follows from our belief in total form, that *it is only by imagining a determinate goal or form that utility can even be thought.*

Bentham's defense of utility proceeds in a similar way. The alternatives to utility are presented as purely destructive *or* as purely capricious. Finally, however, Bentham argues that all alternative principles are one, all—he says, using a term that coalesces the two sorts of objections—are "despotic."

One of the virtues of Lacan's seminar on ethics is that it allows us to see Bentham's charge as an instance of the kettle calling the despot black. Like Durand, Bentham begins descriptively, with the observation that man finds use pleasurable. Man seeks those things that are most useful in maximizing his own pleasure and minimizing his own pain. Bentham then converts this description of what is into a prescription of what should be: pleasure, he says, must be maximized and pain minimized. We must convert man's self-interest into dutiful commitment to the common good—the greatest happiness for the greatest number. The maximization of pleasure becomes a duty. Society can only be held together if men can be made to sacrifice their gratifications. Now, it is precisely this maneuver that occasions the attack by Lacan, who sees it as the source of utilitarianism's unethical "penchant for expansion";[29] and, in a similar vein, Jacques-Alain Miller will later speak of the "despotism" of utility.[30]

These attacks on utilitarianism find immediate support in already familiar observations. We understand to what Lacan and Miller refer when we recall that colonialism was the historical partner of functionalism's rise. We think of the "extensive benevolence" of industrialized nations, the "civilizing mission," the desire to dispense "charity and humanity" that carried imperialism forward. We picture the "international style" as the attempt panoptically to house the whole world under the same roof. But the Lacanian critique of utilitarianism goes beyond these standard observations by locating the mainspring of use's elasticity

28. Durand, p. 20.

29. Lacan, *Le Séminaire VII*, p. 230. In this seminar utilitarianism is seen not as a minor and somewhat quaint English theory concerned merely with the distribution of goods, but rather as the clearest articulation of the basic principle of the modern notion of ethics that, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, replaced the Aristotelian conception. It is in this broader sense that I use the term *utilitarianism* throughout this paper.

30. Jacques-Alain Miller, "Jeremy Bentham's Panoptic Device," *October*, no. 41 (Summer 1987); first published as "Despotisme de l'utile," *Ornicar?*, no. 3 (May 1975).

in its allied principle of pleasure. Lacan's seminar on ethics allows us to see at work beneath utilitarianism's proposition that use is pleasurable a second proposition: pleasure is usable. It is because it imagines that it can place pleasure in the service of the common good, the social whole, that utilitarianism becomes 1) so much a matter of technique and 2) so extensible.

Once it was decided that the goal of man was known (that goal being pleasure), utilitarianism thought it could regulate and manipulate man through this goal, or motivation. The belief that man is basically and infinitely manageable turned the utilitarian into an engineer, a designer of machines that would quadrate man's pleasure with his duty. It is surely this entangled belief that troubled Corbusier's previously cited sentences. While the designer of "machines for living" was arguing that buildings must be tailored for man's use, he was simultaneously saying that man himself could be tailored by buildings. The social project of functionalism (Corbusier's "revolution or architecture") was, like that of utilitarianism, based on the notion that man was fundamentally *ruly*. Corbusier's own words accurately state the precondition of functionalism's utopian agenda: "the possibility of a considerable extension of the *type*."

Bentham's derivation of ethics from a descriptive psychology is often described as the derivation of *ought* from *is*. It now seems more fitting to say that, in utilitarianism, *ought* is derived from *ought*. The imperative to extend benevolence infinitely stems from the notion that man can be counted as zero. Defined as essentially pleasure-seeking, he becomes total compliance. Once his motive is established, his manipulability is assured. The ambitious imperialism of functionalism does not expect to encounter resistance. Since it arrives bearing what man wants—happiness—it expects its subjects to submit to its embrace. For this reason, French colonialism adopted a policy of "assimilation."

Lacan's seminar should be read as a critique not only of utilitarianism, but also of the "liberal" criticisms aimed at functionalism and utilitarianism. The problem is not simply that it is presumptuous to think we know what another man—a colonial subject, for example—wants, because only he can know that for himself. Nor can we say that the problem is that man is *more* than the rationalist engineers will allow. Lacan does not begin by adding qualities, filling out the picture of man, but rather by noting that man is *less* than the utopians realize. What makes him less is the fact that he is radically separated from and cannot know what he wants. The difference between the utilitarian and the Lacanian subject is the difference between zero and minus one, between a subject who is driven to seek the maximization of its pleasure in its own greater social good, and a subject for whom pleasure cannot function as an index of the good, since the latter is lost to it. The psychoanalytic subject, in short, being subject to a principle *beyond* pleasure, *is not driven to seek its own good*. This obliges psychoanalysis to reformulate its ethics on the basis of another principle, that of the death drive. This Freud does, adducing the superego from the collapse of utilitarian logic. He begins "The Economic Problem of Masochism" (1924) with

one of his characteristically concise and devastating observations: if the *aim* of life were the obtaining of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, then the pleasure principle itself would become dysfunctional, and masochism, including the "moral masochism" which rules our ethical conduct, would be incomprehensible. This reasoning is extended in *Civilization and Its Discontents,* where Freud founds his ethical principle not on some "oceanic" impulse to merge our own destiny with the destiny of others (i.e., to seek our happiness in the happiness of all), but in the horrified *recoil* from this impulse, in the moral revulsion it elicits in us.

Beyond the Good Neighbor Principle

We can most profitably pursue the psychoanalytic critique of utilitarianism by returning simultaneously to our discussion of Clérambault and his Moroccan photographs. We were, recall, troubled by the fact that our account of the historical privileging of utility did not generate an adequate description of the photographs; too much was left unexplained. What was it that thwarted our project?

In 1924, immediately after beginning his Beaux-Arts course on drapery, Clérambault published his first—and, basically, definitive—description of what he called *mental automatism.*[31] He was, almost from the beginning, uncomfortable with the term, which he treated as a kind of found object. For awhile he simply abbreviated it to "A.M.," but eventually he substituted a term of his own invention, *syndrome of passivity,* which he in turn abbreviated to "S." Yet, if Clérambault did first think through his theory under the borrowed term, this is because it designated the key concept of French psychiatry at the time he wrote, and his thought—however much it would diverge from that of his contemporaries—was initiated by the problem this concept signaled.

In the nineteenth century, as we have said, mind was defined as will, in the sense of effort, work. This definition reversed the supposed relation between the body and the mind. Where formerly man had been understood as "an intelligence served by organs," he was now understood as "a living organization served by an intelligence."[32] The mind was primarily something that served—it became

31. G. G. de Clérambault, "Définition de l'automatisme mental," in *Oeuvre Psychiatrique,* pp. 492–494. Clérambault had, however, been elaborating this concept in his teaching since 1919; three case studies, dated 1920 and accompanied by commentary, are also published in his collected works. This is not the place for a discussion of this important concept, but the crucial point is that while the whole of psychiatry was busy tracing psychic automatism to delirious *ideas,* Clérambault argued that these ideas (of persecution, hypochondria, etc.) were secondary *effects* of the illness, provoked as reactions to the morbid state. For a helpful discussion of mental automatism, see Jacques-Alain Miller, "Teachings of the Case Presentation," in Stuart Schneiderman, ed. and trans., *Returning to Freud: Clinical Psychoanalysis in the School of Lacan,* New Haven, Yale University Press, 1980.

32. Canguilhem, p. 44. The work of Charles Darwin is, of course, relevant here, for, with the

an instrument with a function. But once it had, through this definition, brought the mind more in line with a machine, psychiatry was very quickly beleaguered by doubts and questions about where to draw the boundaries *between* mind and machine. It is this still troubled situation which placed "psychic automatism" at the top of the docket of French psychiatric theory in the early part of the twentieth century. The fact that discussions of the ambiguity of the word *automatic*—which can mean either "operating by itself, on its own volition, spontaneously, as in acts of creation or invention" *or* "an implacable unfolding, mechanical, without consciousness or will"—were almost *de rigeur* in theoretical essays of the time, is only one of the most handy signs that psychiatry was having a great deal of difficulty negotiating a definition that did not threaten to lose the mind altogether—to its own definition.[33]

Although the attempts to resolve this difficulty preoccupied much of psychiatric theory and produced a number of different positions, the predominant direction of resolution lay in conceiving the mind as hierarchically structured and thus as ranging from lower levels of tension and synthesizing power to higher levels, from lesser to greater levels of will. Pathological automatism resulted when, because of a weakening of tension, or a failure of will, the mind regressed to a lower, more lax level of operation. At the lower levels, the mind produced habitual, mechanical responses; at the higher levels, creative willful ones. This hierarchy provided the means by which psychiatry thought its own self-defined object: "the pathology of freedom."[34] Freedom was considered as an essential and *positive* characteristic of the forward-moving will, which became shackled only when the psyche fell ill and regressed to a lower level of energy.

Yet even with this solution, the boundary between willful and mechanical functioning could not be easily or consistently drawn by psychiatric theory—which is not to say that it was more easily drawn elsewhere. With the advent of the industrial revolution in his definition, it was no longer possible to be sure that man was *other* than machine, and thus the concept of *counterfeitable* man, of man as that which could be simulated by a machine, was soon derived from his primary definition.[35] In fact, in 1950, Alan Turing would demonstrate that if

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publication in 1859 of *The Origin of the Species*, the mind was also conceived as a crucial instrument in the struggle for survival.

33. See, for example, Charles Blondel, "L'activité automatique et l'activité synthétique," in Georges Dumas, ed., *Nouveau traité de psychologie*, vol. IV, Paris, Alcan, 1934.

34. The French psychiatrist Henry Ey is one of the most prominent exponents of this notion and of the "evolutionary" psychiatry to which it belongs. His "Outline of an Organo-dynamic Conception of the Structure, Nosography, and Pathogenesis of Mental Diseases," published in *Psychiatry and Philosophy* (Maurice Natanson, ed., New York, Springer, 1969) is a clear statement of the position Lacan attacks in "Propos sur la causalité psychique."

35. See Hugh Kenner, *The Counterfeiters*, New York, Doubleday, 1973, for an extremely lively exposition of this thesis.

one proceeded axiomatically from this definition, one could devise a game which would prove that the differences between man and machine were undetectable.[36]

The simple point is that from the moment man was submitted to redefinition according to use, he was also submitted to the trauma of the fact that this definition would not definitively, unambiguously enclose him. In part, he escaped definition. There opened up, then, in the heart of the symbolic universe of utilitarianism a gap, a hole through which man, at least partially, slipped. If a volatile ambivalence characterized our relation to technology during the first half of this century, this is due not simply, as the familiar account has it, to the fact that it was associated both with progress and—through war, industrial and railway accidents, etc.—with destruction. The traumatic collision of the concepts of man and machine robbed man of a little bit of his existence, and technology, I would suggest, came to be symbolized as the embodiment of the very impossibility of man's complete identity. Technology incarnated the limit of man not merely because of its role in actual events, but—in a more primary way—because it interfered with man's comprehension of himself.[37]

Though this fundamental failing of comprehension may always, as here, attach itself to historically contingent conditions, it is, nonetheless, a structural necessity, and, as Freud argues in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, it is what falsifies the principle on which the utilitarian project is based. Confronted with utilitarianism's moral command: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," Freud reacts with undisguised and unabashed *incomprehension*, with feelings of "surprise and bewilderment"—"Why should we . . . ?"[38] One should not mistake this reaction for a lack of altruism. Freud does not hesitate to agree with Bentham that we are basically altruistic, that we would be willing to sacrifice for the other. But would the other be willing to sacrifice for us? This is the question upon which the ethics of psychoanalysis turns.

This question does not remain in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, however, an empty point, a simple void in our understanding; rather, it is filled out with a shocking, a scandalous image—that of a malign, noxious neighbor who will spare us no cruelty in the accrual of its own pleasure. This neighbor, Freud tells us, is our superego, sadistic source of our moral law. He thus shatters all our

36. One of the purposes of Turing's article was to show up the question "Can machines think?" as meaningless; since man was defined by what he did rather than what he thought, what sense would there be in comparing man and machine in terms of their ability to think?

37. Andreas Huyssen has shown, in "The Vamp and the Machine: Technology and Sexuality in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*" (*New German Critique*, nos. 24–25 [Fall/Winter 1981–1982]), that while androids were, in the eighteenth century, seen as a tribute to the genius of man, they were treated, in the literature of the nineteenth century, as threats to man's existence. As Huyssen says, "It is not hard to see that this literary phenomenon reflects the increasing technologization of human nature and the human body which reached a new stage in the early 19th century" (pp. 225–226).

38. Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, London, The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, vol. XXI, p. 109.

images of a humane and equitable law that would proscribe acts of violence and oblige acts of charity and installs in their stead this principle—strictly outlawed by Bentham as *un*principled—of caprice, arbitrariness, destruction. Moral order is established, according to psychoanalysis, not in obedience to some reasonable or compassionate command to sacrifice our pleasure to the state, but because we recoil before the violence and obscenity of the superego's incitement to *jouissance*,[39] to a boundless and aggressive enjoyment. The recoil before the commandment to love our superego as ourself does not open up the floodgates of our aggression or our enjoyment; on the contrary, it erects a barrier against them and places out of reach the object of our desire. In resisting the superego, then, we insist on separating ourselves from, rather than surrendering to, this incomprehensible part of our being; we insist, in other words, on prolonging the conflict with ourselves. The sole moral maxim of psychoanalysis is this: do not surrender your internal conflict, your division.

This is an extraordinary account of moral law, which we can understand only by continuing to clarify its opposition to utilitarianism. We passed perhaps too quickly over the utilitarian rejection of caprice. Recall Durand's example of the person who would tamper with classical sculpture. Finding the head of one preferable to that of another, this person would switch them; admiring the form of one of the limbs, he or she would then multiply it, producing, for example, a statue with four arms or four legs, creating, as Durand says, a "monster." What is it that is being rejected here and on the basis of what assumptions? Clearly the horror evoked is that of an erratic instability; one which depends not only on an image of arbitrary change, the possibility that some form already familiar to us could suddenly and whimsically be altered, but also on the disequilibrium of the altered form itself, its upsetting of classical proportions and its "unfair" (inexact and improper) distribution of limbs. This is a horror of disharmony produced by what? An untrammeled will. The underlying assumption is that individual will, left to its own devices, would result in the disordering of society. Ethics then becomes a matter of the reconciliation of the equality of men—the freedom of their individual wills—with the equilibrium of society.

Reciprocity is offered as the resolution of this ethical conundrum. Durand's example implicitly relies on the symmetry of the bodily form to establish the rightness of reciprocity; it also relies on there being a consensus of opinion about the value of classical sculpture, on its seeming, therefore, to be *objectively* preferable to whatever form would be confected by the whimsy of personal taste. Similarly, Bentham argues in *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* that caprice is as a principle inferior to utility, since only utility is subject to public debate and verification; caprice insists on unfounded and non-

39. The Foucauldian emphasis on the "incitement to discourse" functions by forgetting this other critical command.

discussable tastes. The communities of Bentham and Durand are, in short, intersubjective orders bound together by the sharing and exchange of objects: language, opinions, property, services, and—most notoriously—women. Claude Lévi-Strauss makes use of this same modern model of ethics when, in his famous analysis of kinship relations, he conceives the incest taboo as a kind of utilitarian command: man must renounce the *immediate* pleasure of endogamy for the greater pleasure of exogamy and the social stability his sacrifice avails him.

Psychoanalysis's opposition to this ethical model is predicated on a very different understanding of the prohibition of incest. Unlike utilitariansim, which tacks onto the interdiction of pleasure a list of rewards—extended kinship relations, women, property, trade routes. Unités d'Habitation, *Seidlungen,*[40] happiness itself—psychoanalysis detaches its interdiction from any promise of pleasure, it razes the ethical field, sweeps away all good objects. The psychoanalytic interdiction does not make reward the *condition* of sacrifice; one must obey the interdiction unconditionally. *Pleasure is*, then, *of no use* in securing commitment to moral law.

What is crucial for psychoanalysis is not the reciprocity of individual subjects in their relations to a contingent realm of *things*, but the nonreciprocal relation between the subject and its sublime, inaccessible *Thing*; i.e., that part of the subject that exceeds the subject, its repressed desire. Nor is the figure of the woman central to moral law the daughter who will be exchanged, who will be made accessible to the larger community, but rather the mother who is and must remain, according to the interdiction, inaccessible to the subject. The moral interdiction bears, in other words, on an *impossible* object (not, as in utilitarianism, on an actual object that one might otherwise possess), the mother, who is impossible because she is already unattainable. It is because the good object is *already* lost, desire has *already* been repressed, that the law forbids access to it. This means that repressed desire is the cause, not the consequence of moral law. The subject does not *surrender* its desire in order to gain the rewards society offers as incentives, instead the subject *maintains* its desire rather than succumb to these "pathological" motives for giving it up. Far from offering any benefit, the sadistic law of psychoanalysis offers the subject only further suffering, a prolongation of its separation from the object of its desire.

What happens, in this account, to the notion of psychical will? No longer conceived as a purely positive force opposed or manipulated by external conditions or social laws, will come to be conceived as a force in which law is always already immanent. It is not the facile opposition between individual will and social world that rules moral order, but rather the opposition internal to will, by

40. Unité d'Habitation is a semi-communal apartment complex designed by Corbusier; *Seidlungen* are workers' housing complexes.

which it turns against its own fulfillment. This is a morbid will, but one whose morbidity is essential rather than accidental. It cannot be understood in terms of evolutionary psychology's notion of a "pathology of freedom," whereby the basic freedom of will is restricted through some accident.

Psychoanalysis looks askance at this notion of a freedom that is not only regularly infringed, but also *defined*, by contingent causes and conditions. For this freedom is always conceived as the subject's ability to act in its own best interest, while this interest is always determined by specific circumstances. It is freedom itself that is reconceptualized by the psychoanalytic concept of will: the subject's only freedom consists precisely in its ability to *disregard* or free itself from all circumstances, causes, conditions, all promises of reward or punishment for its actions. The subject determines itself not by "choosing" its own good (an illusory freedom, since the good determines the choice, not the other way around), but by choosing *not* to be motivated by the conditions that define its self-interest and thus by acting contrary to its own good—even to the point of bringing about its own death.

It will be obvious to many that Freud was not the first to define the freedom of the ethical subject in this negative way as the ability to resist the lure, the conditions, of the pleasure principle and to submit oneself freely to the death drive. Kant paved the way for psychoanalysis by placing the ethical imperative in a realm radically beyond the phenomenal and thus by splitting the subject between two realms, one subject to the determinations of historical conditions, the other not. Yet he also partially sealed up again the gap he so dramatically opened. Treating the categorical imperative, correctly, as a statement, he abridged linguistic law by neglecting to consider the statement's enunciating instance. While utilitarianism argued that one must act in such a way that everyone would benefit from one's actions, Kant argued that one must act in such a way that no one would benefit. In fact, psychoanalysis tells us, someone—the Other—always benefits from the sacrifice of pleasure—and always at the subject's expense. By making this point, psychoanalysis means to reinstate the superegoic Other as the enunciator of the moral law and to restore the division of the subject that Kant's gesture threatens to conjure away. For, when the marks of enunciation are erased from a statement and it thus appears to come from nowhere, its addressee can presume to occupy the vacant enunciative position: the addressee takes itself as the source of the statement. This is precisely what happens in Kant. He supposes that the ethical subject hears the voice of conscience as its own.[41]

41. I rely for this comparison of Kant and Freud on Lacan's "Kant avec Sade" (in *Ecrits*, Paris, Seuil, 1966). Emile Benveniste's distinction between *histoire* and *discours* underlies Lacan's urgings that the discursive nature of the moral imperative must not be overlooked. For the film theoretical implications of this distinction: "If the traditional film tends to suppress all the marks of the subject of enunciation, this is in order that the viewer may have the impression of being that subject him-

Why does psychoanalysis take such pains to expose the cruel enunciator, the sadistic superego, who speaks the moral law? Because it wishes to demonstrate the ethical necessity of hearing the otherness of this voice and of maintaining our distance from it. It is always and only this division of the subject on which psychoanalysis insists, not simply because the attempt to establish an ethics on the basis of its disavowel is *mistaken*, but—more importantly—because it is *unethical*. The principle of the maximization of happiness on which the ethics of utilitarianism is based is a product of this disavowal; it is also responsible for some of the most violent aggressions against our neighbors.

Fantasy and Fetish

In a finely argued essay on "The Nuclear Sublime,"[42] Frances Ferguson deals with the same relationship that concerns us here: that between the egalitarianism that propelled the utilitarian demand for an extension of property relations and the aesthetics/ethics of the sublime relation of the subject to an "extimate"[43] object which is in the subject, yet more than the subject. As part of her argument, Ferguson offers a fascinating reading of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, in which she suggests that Victor Frankenstein's invention of his sublime monster must be seen against the background of his family's "philanthropic, territorial imperialism," its steady assimilation of more and more wards into the family. In this light it seems that the invention of Frankenstein represents his attempt to construct an object that cannot be shared, an inalienable object that would depend solely on his consciousness and would thus attest to its uniqueness. The invention of the monster, in other words, bespeaks a dissatisfaction with the limitations imposed by the "labours and utility" of the overcrowded world of the nineteenth century at a point when the "rights of man" had been so massively extended that "Victor seems to imagine his identity ebbing because his rights, his freedom have to be shared." "Recoil[ing] at the way the notion of individual freedom seems stretched too thin to accommodate its various claimants,"[44] Frankenstein flees the claustrophobic world fostered by utilitarian values and seeks refuge in the sublime "dream of self-affirmation." It is more broadly suggested that Frankenstein's path is paradigmatic, that the sublime becomes in

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self, . . . a pure capacity for seeing" (Christian Metz, "History/Discourse: Note on Two Voyeurisms," *Edinburgh '76 Magazine*). In "Sur le pouvoir politique et les mécanismes idéologiques" (*Ornicar?*, no. 34 [1985]), Slavoj Žižek uses Lacan's distinctions for a definition of ideology.

42. Frances Ferguson, "The Nuclear Sublime," *Diacritics*, Summer 1984, pp. 4–10; despite my disagreements, this is an exceptionally fine article.

43. Derived from the term *extimité*, coined by Jacques-Alain Miller to describe the internal, but nonintimate relation between the subject and its repressed desire; a sublime relation.

44. Ferguson, pp. 9, 8. It is interesting to note that Hugh Kenner also sees the sublime as an attempt to transcend the limiting world of facts (see Kenner, p. 69).



the nineteenth century a kind of escape from the Gothic overcrowding of the intersubjective world of property relations.

Following Freud, I will argue that the reverse is true. What the nineteenth- (and twentieth-) century world of "labours and utility" recoils from—primarily—is not the nearness of its neighbor, but the principle that moral law must be founded on a recoil from the Neighbor. It is, in other words, precisely its attempt to flee the sublime law inflicted by the superego, to elude the cruel rigors of the immanent law of morbid will which defines the social world of utilitarianism. The utopian dream of a society in which relations of exchange would be harmonious and universal was dreamt up in the nineteenth century as an evasion of the recognition of the failed—and forbidden—relation of the individual subject to its terrifying, superegoic Other—its Neighbor. Rather than recoiling from the obscene/sublime part of itself, utilitarianism refused to recognize it, setting itself up on the erasure of its self-contesting aversion.

What is in question here is not the observation that we have experienced, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, a steady increase in our sense of intersubjective claustrophobia. What is in question is the account of the genesis of this social hell. For, if a proliferation of the rights of individuals has made the world seem stiflingly overpopulous, this is due to the way these rights have



defined the individual and *not* to a sheer increase in the number of other subjectivities.

It might be helpful at this point to recall that, in the 1930s, Walter Benjamin attributed the modern perception of a contraction of space to the decay of the aura. Defining the aura as "the unique manifestation of a distance, however near [an object] might be,"[45] Benjamin initially seems to celebrate this decay. Since the loss of distance can be considered the loss of the priority and authority a thing has over others, this loss becomes a sign of the dawn of an era in which the universal equality of things was being sought. To celebrate the decline of the aura is to embrace the new ethical order based not, as formerly, on a master/acolyte model, but on the equality and sovereignty of individuals.

Yet it is clear from the start that Benjamin is ambivalent about the disappearance of this auratic quality, that he would like to see it restored in some way. Through his notion of the "optical unconscious"—which bears witness to something in the photograph, the film, the person that lies beyond the photograph, film, or person—he begins to give back to the object its aura, its distance. And in his description of Atget's photographs, his ambivalence appears especially acute.

45. Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," *Screen*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1972), p. 20.

Praising them for initiating a liberation of the object from the aura, he pinpoints the power of these photographs of empty locations in terms that suggest their *possession* of an aura. He likens these locations to scenes of crimes, to places that harbor some guilty secret. Notice, these photographs contain no *evidence* of crime; it is precisely of evidence that they are empty. This lack does not lessen our suspicions about the crime, rather it is the source of them, or, to put it another way, it is not the evidence of suspense but the suspension of evidence that grips us in these photographs. Benjamin finds the photographic practice of Atget exemplary, makes it the proper definition of the task of the photographer, which he gives as follows: "to uncover guilt . . . in his pictures."[46]

Benjamin thus calls for the inscription of what Lacan refers to as a symbolic relation. For what is Benjamin describing if not the very phenomenon Lacan invokes thus: "With a machine, whatever doesn't come on time simply falls by the wayside and makes no claims on anything. This is not true for man, the scansion is alive, and whatever doesn't come on time remains in suspense."[47] Through language, the human subject maintains a symbolic relation to the world, which is to say that the subject comes to believe in a real that *exceeds* all its traces. If a friend does not show up at the appointed hour, we wait for her and wonder where she is. Our waiting does not depend on prior evidence of her existence; it is not empirical evidence—but rather the symbolic—that lends her her stability and thus leads us to expect her when there is no sign of her presence. When Parrhasios painted a veil on the wall, thus causing Zeuxis to wonder what was behind it, he demonstrated the fact that we require no evidence of a thing in order to anticipate its existence. Through the symbolic relation, we are able to take a certain distance from the evidence immediately presented to us, supposing the real to have recessed from it as well.

It is precisely this symbolic relation—this aura, or distance—that was in decline in the nineteenth century. Why? Because of the utilitarian definition of the subject which declared that the subject was indeed equal to its traces, that it could be fully grasped in its use or function. Not only did work democratize society, it also "exposed simulation."[48]

Now, the condition of this utilitarian definition is not simply—as the usual complaint would have it—its elimination of the subject's *interiority*, but more exactly its elimination of the subject's *interior lack*, or fault. Utilitarianism is not incompatible with a notion of interior will, as we have seen; it is, however, incompatible with a notion of a will that would impede itself, block its own realization. What utilitarianism flees from, above all, is the fact of repressed desire—or, for that matter, the crime whose scenes Atget photographed—for

46. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
47. Jacques Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, New York, Norton, 1988, pp. 307–308.
48. Canguilhem, p. 46.

they do not exist, even though we see clearly their effects: in the subject's feeling of guilt and in the photographs. Because desire and the crime are posited *retroactively* as causes of these effects, and never did exist in any realized form, this cause/effect relationship is *not* an indexical—that is, not an existential—one. Such a relation confounds utilitarianism, which depends on seeing in every effect evidence of some actually existing cause.

The functional definition of the subject, therefore, is also a definition of the subject as a pure, positive drive toward realization and self-affirmation. When Ferguson describes, then, the flight *toward* the sublime as a flight toward self-affirmation, she makes the sublime consubstantial with this utilitarian definition, the *cause* of claustrophobia and not, as she argues, the means of escape from it. For claustrophobia, or the decay of the aura, results not only from the fact that a definition according to use reduces our distance from the real by seeing the object as *present* in its traces, but also from the fact that the



guilt thus internally denied the subject returns to saturate its surroundings. Because the guilt has not been uncovered in and beyond the photographs of empty environments, the environment itself becomes filled with blame. That which exists outside the subject threatens, by virtue of the fact that it is outside, to oppose the subject's drive toward fulfillment.

From the nineteenth-century phobia of crowds[49] to our current obsession with the dangers of passive smoking (a symptom Ferguson aptly points out), it is clear that the historic deterioration of the symbolic relation has forced our environment—the space, people, things around us—to carry the burden the modern subject will not internally bear. We feel the pressure of other people because they are part of this environment, not simply because they are other people. The rise, since the nineteenth century, of historicism, biologism, sociologism are all indications of this modern suspicion—paranoia, even—about a context that has been handed the power to corrupt us.

Paradoxically, then, the utilitarian fantasy of the maximization of pleasure, of the universalization of the principle of the sovereign and equal rights of individuals, seems to be sustained by the structural suspicion that somewhere—in the other—the principle has defaulted. Included, and necessarily so, in the fantasy of a perfect reciprocity of social relations is the negation of the principle that produces the fantasy. For someone—the other—must structurally be supposed to oppose this principle, by the very assertion of its own will. The system of utilitarianism only constitutes itself as such, only thinks its totality by including within itself an element that gives positive form to the impossibility it otherwise excludes. This element is the positive will of the other; it is, in psychoanalytic terms, utilitarianism's symptom.[50]

Nowhere is this symptom more visible than in the well-documented fantasy of an erotic and despotic colonial cloth. For, on the margins of the utilitarian renunciation of useless enjoyment and all but functional clothes, on the borders of the whole cloth of the greatest happiness, there emerged a fantasmatic figure —veiled, draped in cloth—whose existence, posed as threat, impinged on our consciousnesses. There are countless witnesses to this fantasy, countless accounts of the special fascination colonial cloth held for Western eyes and of the singular and sustained effort of imperialism to remove the veils that covered its colonial neighbor.[51]

49. The fear and study of crowds developed hand-in-hand with utilitarianism; for a good, general history of this period, see Robert A. Nye, *The Origins of Crowd Psychology: Gustave Le Bon and the Crisis of Mass Democracy in the Third Republic*, London and Beverly Hills, Sage Publications, 1975.

50. In "Woman as Symptom" (in *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, London, Verso, 1986), Jacqueline Rose analyzes the way the institution of cinema closes itself off by including the woman in this same way.

51. Two of the most compelling witnesses are Frantz Fanon ("Algeria Unveiled," in *A Dying Colonialsim*, New York, Grove Press, 1967) and Fatima Mernissi (*Beyond the Veil*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987.)

Several self-contradictory reasons, ranging from the humane to the strategic, are given for this effort. Yet no rational explanation will account for this fantasy, which can only be understood as the positive bodying forth of the lack utilitarianism denied. What was capital in this fantasy was the surplus pleasure, the useless *jouissance* which the voluminous cloth was supposed to veil and the colonial subject, thus hidden, was supposed to enjoy. Every effort to strip away the veil was clearly an aggression against the bloated presence of this pleasure that would not release itself into the universal pool. Isn't this fantasmatic figure of the veiled colonial subject a kind of objectified, sartorial form of the Freudian superego? Hasn't the obscene, superegoic neighbor, abandoned by utilitarianism, returned in the symptomatic form of those who lived in literal proximity to its project, its colonial neighbors?

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All that remains is for us to consider the relation of this figure to the photographs taken by Clérambault. Does this historical fantasy of colonial cloth underlie his photographs? Do we see in them not, as some of them seemed earlier to suggest, a cloth defined by its utility but rather by the way it curtains off an inaccessible pleasure? There is some reason to believe that this is so, for we discover in Clérambault's work the rudiments of just such a fantasy.

Cloth was of interest to Clérambault not only as an ethnographic issue, but also as a clinical one: for in the course of his psychiatric studies, he noticed that several of his women patients expressed a peculiar passion for cloth. On the basis of these observations, he isolated this passion as a definable clinical entity: a specifically female perversion that resembled, in many respects, the male perversion of fetishism. Clérambault wrote very confidently, however, about why the two perversions ought not to be collapsed, stating the fundamental distinction thus: while for the male, fetishism represents an "homage to the opposite sex," and thus puts into play an entire fantasy of love, of union with the opposite sex, the perverse female passion for cloth is rooted in the very refusal of this fantasy. The dream of union, of shared love, plays no role either in the genesis or in the sustaining of the perversion. "With no more reverie than a solitary gourmet savoring a delicate wine,"[52] the woman enjoys the cloth—*for itself*, not for any imagined connection it might have with the opposite sex, not because it has any existential or symbolic relation to a male object of desire.

In other words, Clérambault conceived the female passion for cloth as selfish. The perversion that simply *uses* cloth to obtain orgasmic pleasure is seen as useless in terms of its ability to secure the common happiness of men and

52. Clérambault, "Passion érotique des étoffes chez la femme" (1908), partially reprinted in Papetti, *et al.*, p. 34.

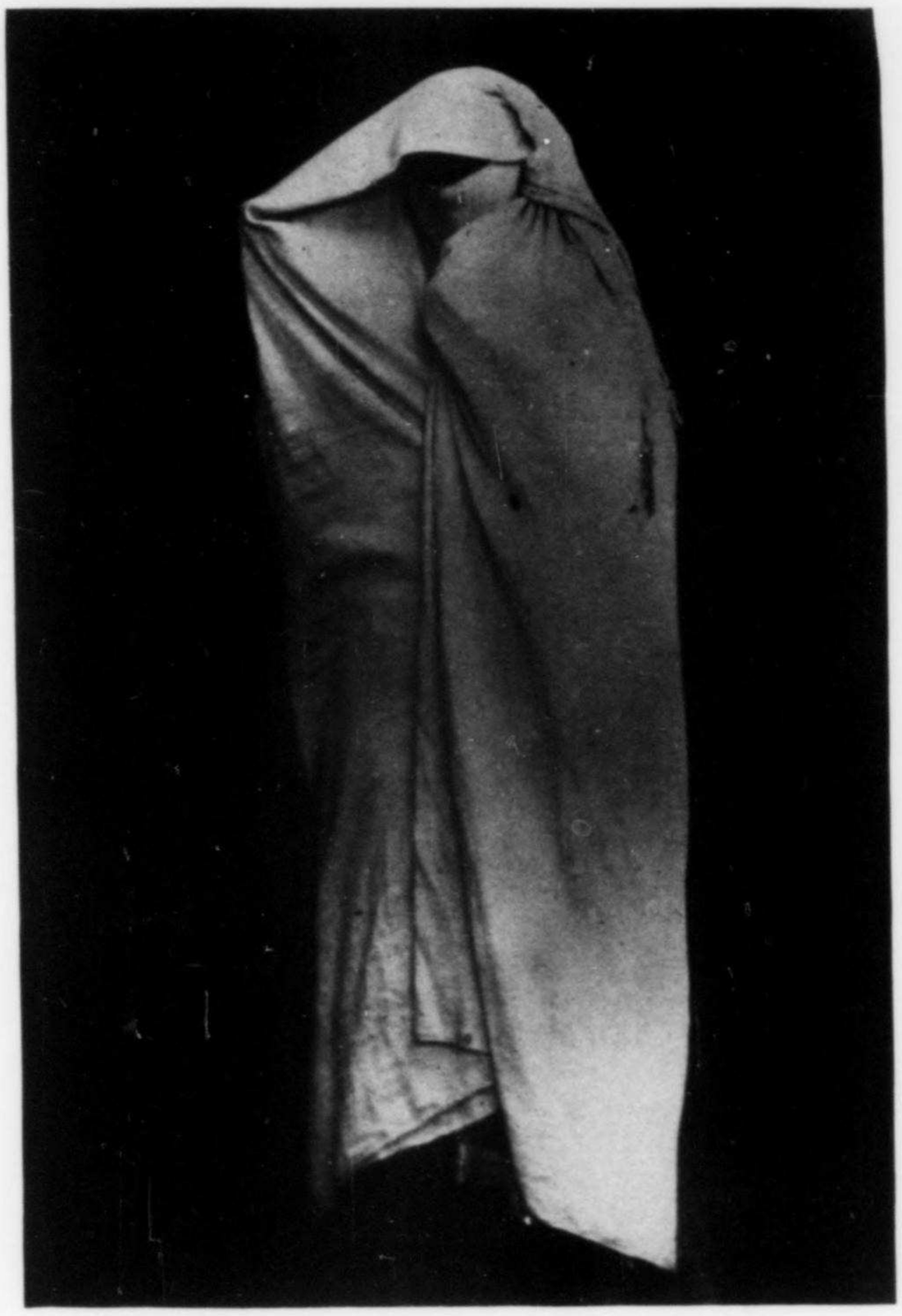


women. It is for this reason that Clérambault refers to the perversion as an *asexual* fetishism; what is missing from it is the sexual relation.

Is this not, mutatis mutandis, a clinical version of the colonialist fantasy of a cloth that acted as barrier to union? Is this symptom not the *exception*, the surplus sexuality that makes the utilitarian dream of reciprocal relations possible? And are we not, then, presented with this very fantasy in Clérambault's photographs? My brief answer is: yes and no. Although this fantasy does indeed provide the historical basis of the photographs, we find in them, I would argue, not only another version of the fantasy, but additionally and precisely a *perversion* of it. For these 40,000 photographs focused on one rigidly adhered to object-choice —cloth—betray not simply a fantasy of cloth, but a fetishization of it. But how is such a distinction to be drawn?

Freud formulated an exact, if too concise, definition of the difference between neurosis and perversion: neurosis, he said, is the *negative* $\not S$ of perversion. It is perhaps this definition that Lacan had in mind when he distinguished neurotic fantasy and perversion thus: perversion, he said, is "an inverted effect of the phantasy. [In perversion] the subject determines himself as object in his





encounter with the division of subjectivity."[53] The formula for fantasy: $\$ < > a$, i.e., the split subject ($\$$) in some form of relation ($< >$) to an object (a), can be simply inverted to obtain the formula for perversion: $a < > \$$. But what does this mean?

In the fantasy, the subject establishes a relation to the object-cause of its desire (a), to an object that "presentifies" the subject's loss. Although this loss is presented in an externalized form and therefore represents a misrecognition of the subject's internal impossibility, the subject does, nevertheless, constitute itself in relation to this objective lack. In the colonialist fantasy of cloth, for example, the utilitarian subject maintains a desire to see what lies behind the veil or to end the excess pleasure concealed by it.

The pervert, however, refuses all recognition of his own lack, even in

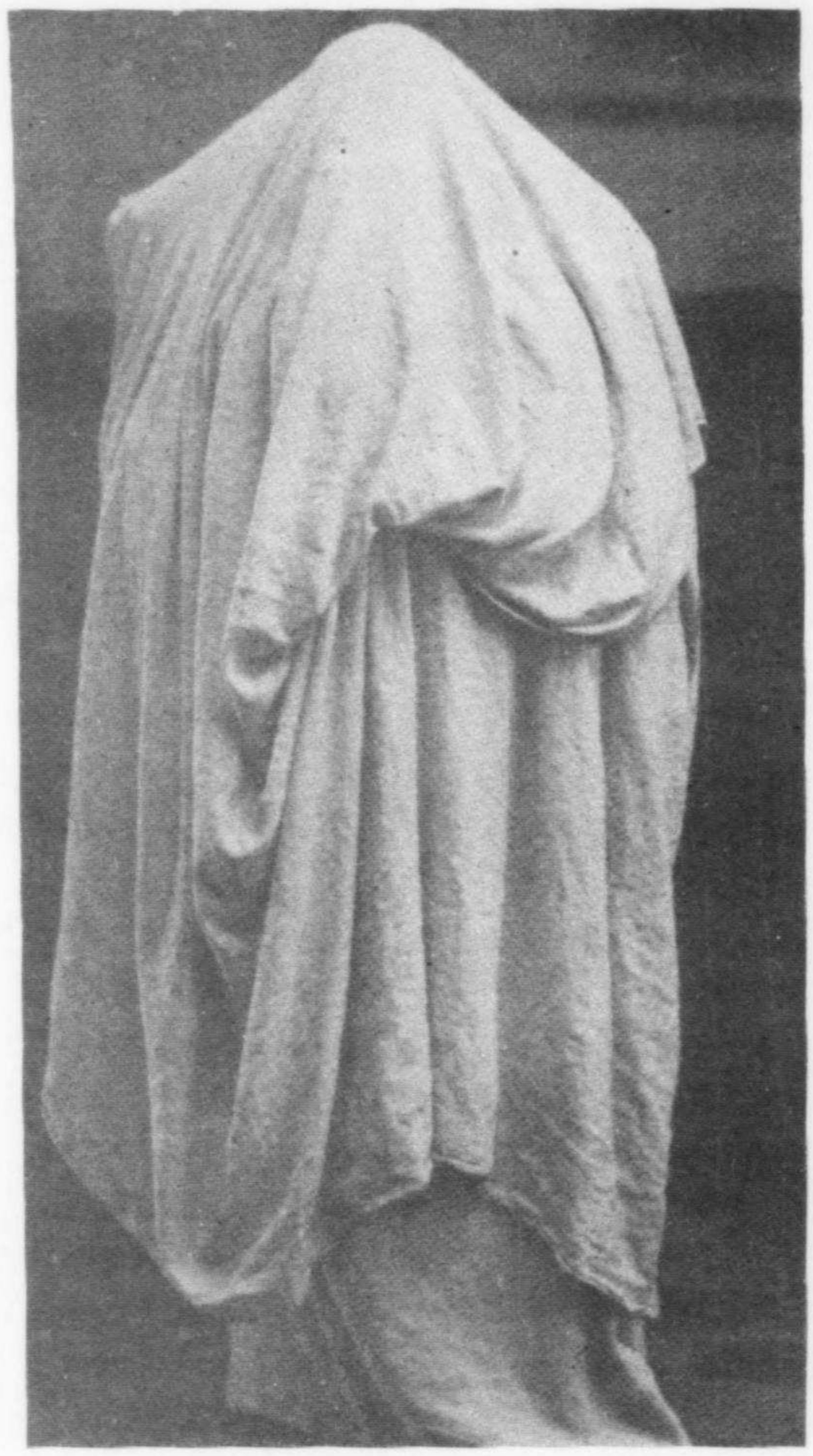
53. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, London, The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1977, p. 185.



external form. The pervert places himself in the position of "never being deprived with regard to knowledge, and most particularly knowledge concerning love and eroticism."[54] Or, as Freud says of one variety of pervert: "The fetishist has no trouble in getting what other men have to woo and exert themselves to obtain," for he is certain about love, about what the Other wants. The pervert, then, places himself in the real, the only place where nothing is lacking, where knowledge is certain. That is, rather than position himself in relation to the imaginary form of the object a, he positions himself *as* the object a, in its real form.

While imagining itself whole, the neurotic subject of the fantasy becomes split in relation to the doubled form—imaginary and real—of the object a. The pervert, on the other hand, evades this division by making himself the *agent* of a division outside himself. This is why fetishism is, as Freud claimed, "particularly

54. Jean Clavreul, "The Perverse Couple," in *Returning to Freud*, p. 224.





favourable"[55] for studying the splitting of the ego in the process of defense; as a perversion, it *ex-planes* it, unfolds the split onto a single surface and thus conveniently displays it for the analyzing eye. "I know very well, but just the same [I] . . ."—here we see laid out before us the splitting of the two I's in the *statement*, but what we do not see is the *instance of enunciation*, the pervert, who positions himself on another plane, other than that of the division. To take another example: if the Chinese man mutilates the woman's foot *and* reveres it, it is the foot that wears the mark of this division, not the Chinese man.

My thesis is that in taking his photographs, Clérambault did *not* always position himself as the colonialist subject confronted with an obstacle to his vision or knowledge, that is, with an objectified image of his own loss. He instead often placed himself as the gaze of the Moroccan Other. (This must not be interpreted in a psychologistic sense as an instance of empathy or compassion for one's

55. Freud, *S.E.*, vol. XXIII, p. 203.

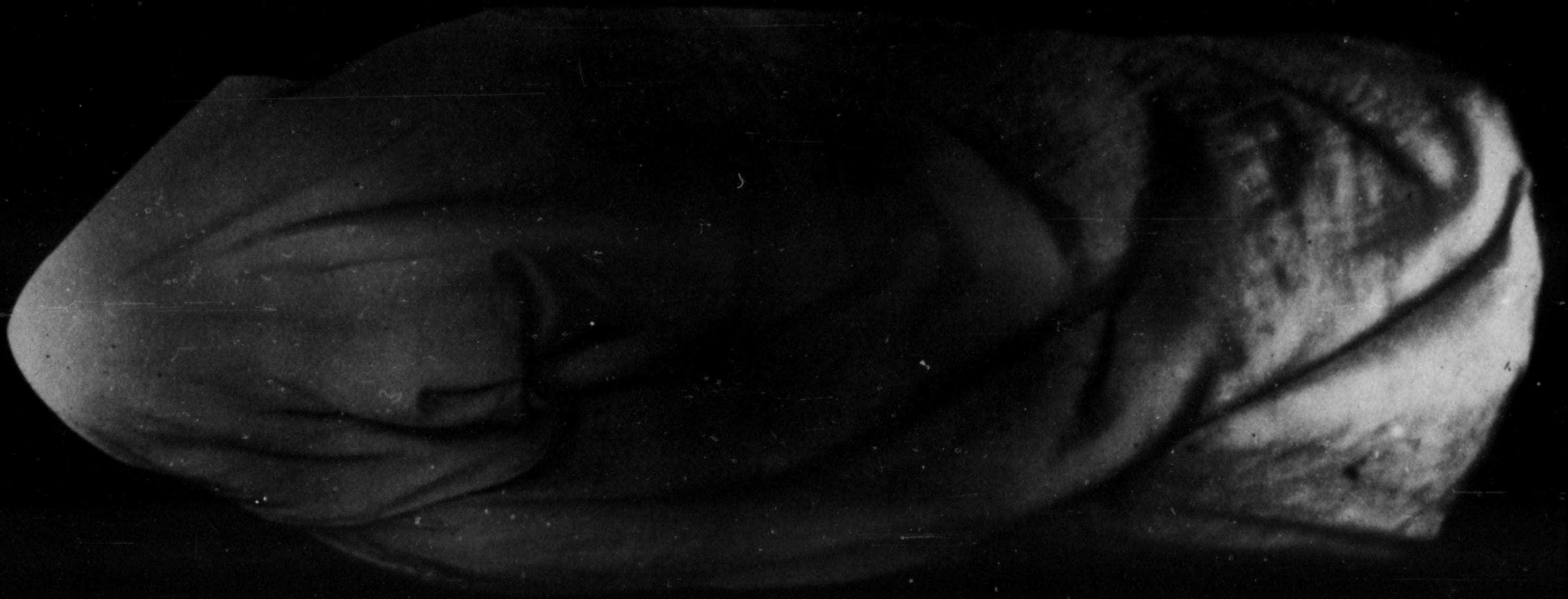
neighbor. It must first of all be recalled that this Moroccan neighbor is a structural *supposition*, not a reasonable or compassionate presumption. Secondly, it is a disavowal of lack, not a feeling of "fraternity" that precipitates the perverse positioning.) Entering into a kind of complicity with this Other, photographing the cloth to meet the satisfaction of its gaze, Clérambault turned himself into an instrument of the Moroccan neighbor's enjoyment.

Clérambault was certain about just what sort of cloth the Other preferred: usually it was silk, not for whatever "connotative" value silk had, but for its *stiffness*. Stiffness, solidity, these were the characteristics most consistently sought. Clérambault recorded his admiration of the North Africans for the way they left their clothes out after washing them, allowing them to become stiff and dry.[56] This same admiration is expressed, apparently, in the photographs, for here we see not a cloth that flows from or hugs the outline of the body, not a cloth elaborately embellished, symbolically erotic, but a material whose plainest, best-photographed feature is its stiff construction.

Viewed from the vantage of the supposed Moroccan Other, from this perverse, fetishistic position, the cloth of the photographs is *not* (as it is in the fantasy) the object-cause of desire; it does not beckon us to peer behind it, or to imagine a hideous enjoyment concealed by it. This is why there are no photographs of the unveiling of the figure or, indeed, of any action taken toward them. There is no—or strikingly little—"fantasy space" in these photographs, that is, no virtual space suggested by the figures. No promise of a further knowledge to which they may provide the key. The photographs are precisely *cut off* from such a space, since they are images not of a lack that may be overcome and thus may open onto another space, but rather of a solid *presence*, a barrier against any recognition of loss. If the perverse beholder of these images remains still, inert, before them, this is due not to a failure of any will to know, but, on the contrary, to a refusal of failure, a refusal of subjectivity that turns the pervert into an inert object devoted to fulfilling the will of the Other.

But if Clérambault, as fetishistic photographer, refused to assume his subjective division, he did—in typical perverse fashion—make himself, through his photographs, the *agent* of this division. Who—or what—became the subject of this split? In order to answer this question, it is important to recall Freud's several warnings against possible misunderstanding of the fetish's role: the construction of the fetish does not itself reveal, except in certain "very subtle"[57] cases, the pervert's simultaneous affirmation and denial of loss. Rather, the split usually occurs between the disavowal that produces the fetish and the avowal that allows the subject to do without it. In Clérambault's photographs we see just such a

56. Renard, p. 63.
57. Freud, *S. E.*, vol. XXI, p. 156.



division—between fetishized images of cloth and images in which the "nonfetishized" cloth illustrates the characteristics of its utilitarian construction.

What these photographs *ex-plane*, I am now claiming, what they display for us is the utilitarian fantasy itself. The fantasy, we have said, is ultimately supported by the supposition that there is an Other who enjoys a certain and useless pleasure. We might say, then, that this *useless* pleasure becomes *useful* in securing and sustaining the utilitarian effort. In other words, the pleasure of the Other is "very subtly" affirmed and denied when, in the utilitarian fantasy, it is retroactively posited as the cause of the subject's desire. This simultaneous affirmation and denial is what splits the subject of the fantasy.

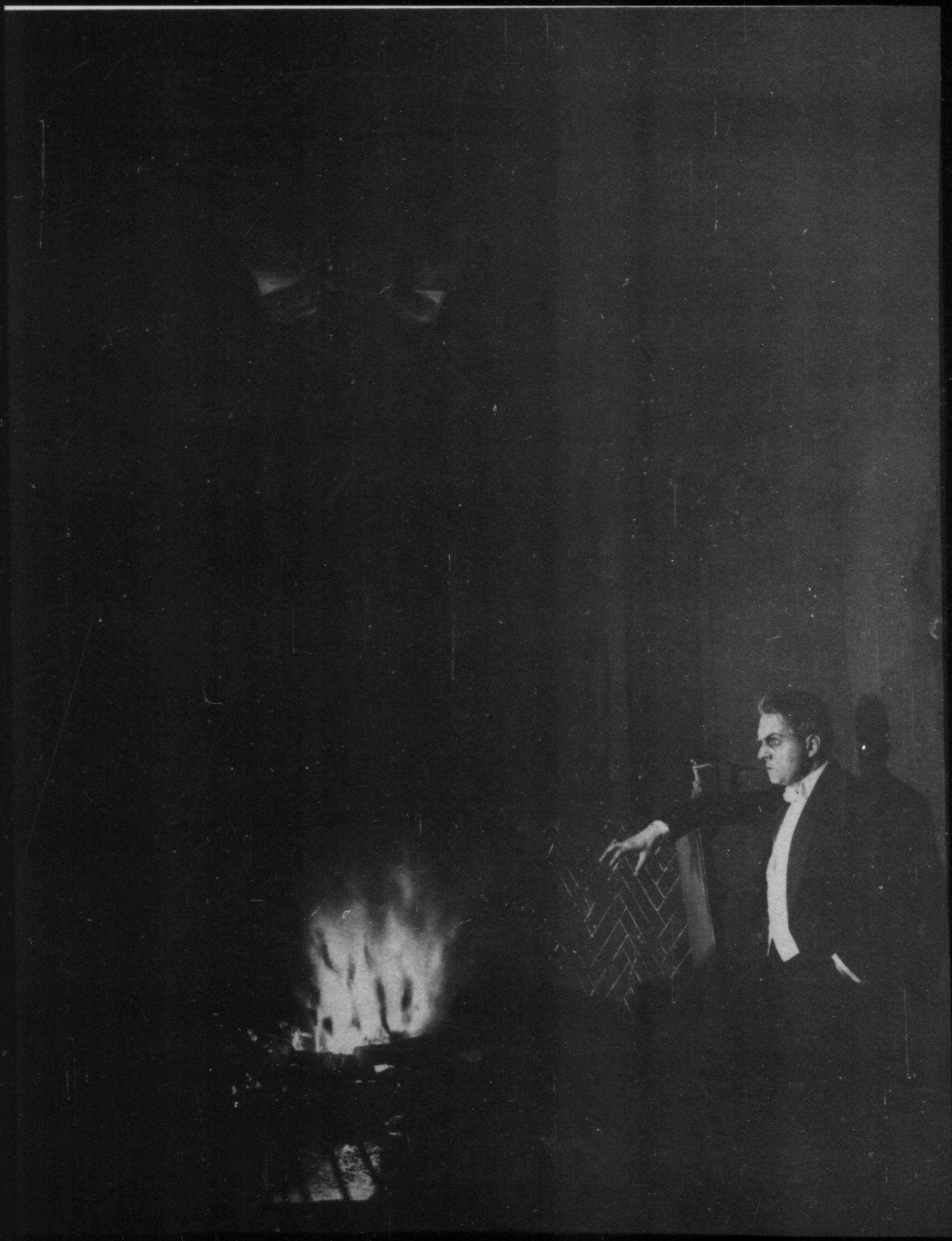
In the fetishistic photographs of Clérambault, however, the enjoyment of the Other is only affirmed; it is not turned to Clérambault's, the beholder's, advantage. For these photographs are, like all fetish objects, "marked with the seal of uselessness."[58] The whole point of the construction of the fetish is to satisfy the Other, not oneself. The fetish, then, must be "rigorously of no use" to the pervert, who makes no claims on any rights to pleasure and who busies himself with them only for the sake of the Other. What becomes split over the broad range of these photographs, therefore, is not Clérambault, but the utilitarian fantasy. For the division of these photographs into two groups—those that demonstrate the usefulness of cloth and those that rigorously deny it any usefulness—corresponds to the division between the statement or fantasy of utilitarianism (of the ethical value of our useful pleasure) and the useless pleasure of our neighbor, which enables, at the same time as it is negated by, the fantasy. By not converting the Other's supposed pleasure into an image useful to utilitarianism, by laying the two alternatives side by side, the photographs taken by Clérambault expose what the fantasy obscures: its strict dependence on the supposition of the Other's obscene enjoyment. Not an enjoyment that can be corralled by use, but one threateningly outside the bounds of utility. This is not to say that these photographs constitute a radical, deconstructive practice. Clearly, they participate in the utilitarian project; but they do so in a way that makes one of the fantasy's necessary preconditions more obvious—less subtle.

In 1926, three years after it began, Clérambault's course on drapery was abruptly cancelled by the authorities at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Since the popularity of the lectures had not diminished, Clérambault was at a loss to understand his dismissal. He therefore wrote an incredulous letter to the authorities in which he reiterated the full scope and originality of his project. His teachings, he stressed, aimed not merely at a comprehension of the drapery, but also at an exact rendering of the Fold![59] (*Fold* was capitalized in that curious way Clérambault had of allowing ordinary words to pop up in upper case.) From their

58. Clavreul, p. 226.
59. Renard, p. 64.

refusal to revoke their decision, we can only guess that the authorities saw only too clearly what Clérambault meant, that his doubling and splitting of his project into a consideration of cloth's usefulness and his fetishization of its useless, overbearing presence was precisely the problem. Clérambault's lectures, his explanations were perhaps too painfully clear in their demonstration of a split to which utilitarianism would rather have remained blind.

I would like to thank Rachel Bowlby and Abigail Solomon-Godeau for assisting me with the photographic research for this paper and for their helpful comments.



Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory

JONATHAN CRARY

Whether or not the term *spectacle* was originally taken from Henri Lefebvre's *Critique de la vie quotidienne*, its currency emerged from the activities in the late 1950s and early 1960s of the various configurations now designated as presituationist or situationist.[1] The product of a radical critique of modernist art practice, a politics of everyday life, and an analysis of contemporary capitalism, its influence was obviously intensified with the publication of Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* in 1967.[2] And twenty-two years later, the word *spectacle* not only persists but has become a stock phrase in a wide range of critical and not-so-critical discourses. But, assuming it has not become completely devalued or exhausted as an explanation of the contemporary operation of power, does it still mean today what it did in the early '60s? What constellation of forces and institutions does it designate? And if these have mutated, what kind of practices are required now to resist their effects?

One can still well ask if the notion of spectacle is the imposition of an illusory unity onto a more heterogenous field. Is it a totalizing and monolithic concept that inadequately represents a plurality of incommensurable institutions and events? For some, a troubling aspect about the term *spectacle* is the almost ubiquitous presence of the definite article in front of it, suggesting a single and seamless global system of relations. For others, it is a mystification of the functioning of power, a new opiate-of-the-masses type of explanation, a vague cultural-institutional formation with a suspicious structural autonomy. Or is a concept such as spectacle a necessary tool for the figuration of a radical systemic shift in the way power functions noncoercively within twentieth-century modernity? Is it an indispensable means of revealing as related what would otherwise appear as disparate and unconnected phenomena? Does it not show that a patchwork or mosaic of techniques can still constitute a homogenous effect of power?

1. This paper was originally presented at the Sixth International Colloquium on Twentieth Century French Studies, "Revolutions 1889–1989," at Columbia University, March 30–April 1, 1989.
2. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, Detroit, Red and Black, 1977.

Fritz Lang. Dr. Mabuse the Gambler. *1924.*

A striking feature of Debord's book was the absence of any kind of historical genealogy of the spectacle, and that absence may have contributed to the sense of the spectacle as having appeared full-blown out of the blue. The question that concerns me is, then: assuming the spectacle does in fact designate a certain set of objective conditions, what are its origins? When might we say it was first effective or operative? And I don't ask this simply as an academic exercise. For the term to have any critical or practical efficacy depends, in part, on how one periodizes it—that is, the spectacle will assume quite different meanings depending on how it is situated historically. Is it more than just a synonym for late capitalism? for the rise of mass media and communication technology? more than an updated account of the culture or consciousness industry and thus chronologically distinct from these?

The "early" work of Jean Baudrillard provides some general parameters for what we might call the prehistory of the spectacle (which Baudrillard sees as having disappeared by the mid-1970s). For Baudrillard, writing in the late '60s, one of the crucial consequences of the bourgeois political revolutions was the ideological force that animated the myths of the Rights of Man: the right to equality and the right to happiness. What he sees happening in the nineteenth century, for the first time, is that observable proof became necessary to demonstrate that happiness had in fact been obtained. Happiness, he says "had to be *measurable* in terms of signs and objects," signs that would be evident to the eye in terms of "*visible* criteria."[3] Several decades earlier, Walter Benjamin had also written about "the phantasmagoria of equality" in the nineteenth century in terms of the transformation of the citizen into consumer. Baudrillard's account of modernity is one of an increasing destabilization and mobility of signs beginning in the Renaissance, signs which previously had been firmly rooted to relatively secure positions within fixed social hierarchies.[4] Thus, for Baudrillard, modernity is bound up in the struggle of newly empowered classes to overcome this "exclusiveness of signs" and to initiate a "proliferation of signs on demand." Imitations, copies, and counterfeits are all challenges to that exclusivity. The problem of mimesis, then, is not one of aesthetics but one of social power, and the emergence of the Italian theater and perspective painting are at the start of this ever-increasing capacity to produce equivalences. But obviously, for Baudrillard and many others, it is in the nineteenth century, alongside new industrial techniques and forms of circulation, that a new kind of sign emerges:

3. Jean Baudrillard, *La société de consommation: ses mythes, ses structures*, Paris, Gallimard, 1970, p. 60. Emphasis in original.

4. A well-known passage from the "later" Baudrillard amplifies this: "There is no such thing as fashion in a society of caste and rank since one is assigned a place irrevocably. Thus class-mobility is non-existent. A prohibition protects the signs and assures them a total clarity; each sign refers unequivocally to a status. . . . In caste societies, feudal or archaic, the signs are limited in number and are not widely diffused. . . . Each is a reciprocal obligation between castes, clans, or persons" (*Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss, New York, Semiotexte, 1983, p. 84).

"potentially identical objects produced in indefinite series." For Baudrillard "the relation of objects in such a series is equivalence and indifference . . . and it is on the level of reproduction, of fashion, media, advertising, information and communication (what Marx called the unessential sectors of capitalism) . . . that the global process of capital is held together." The spectacle then would coincide with the moment when sign-value takes precedence over use-value. But the question of the location of this moment in the history of the commodity remains unanswered.

T. J. Clark offers a much more specific periodization in the introduction to his book *The Painting of Modern Life.* If one agrees with Clark, not only do the origins of modernism and the spectacle coincide, but the two are inextricably related. Writing about the 1860s and '70s, Clark uses the spectacle to explain the embeddedness of Manet's art within a newly emerging social and economic configuration. This society of the spectacle, he writes, is bound up in "a massive internal extension of the capitalist market—the invasion and restructuring of whole areas of free time, private life, leisure and personal expression. . . . It indicates a new phase of commodity production—the marketing, the making-into-commodities of whole areas of social practice which had once been referred to casually as everyday life."[5] In Clark's chronology, then, the spectacle coincides with the early phase of modern Western imperialism, with two parallel expansions of a global marketplace, one internal, one external.

Although he calls "neat temporality" impossible, he does place the onset of the spectacle in the late 1860s and '70s, citing the emergence of commercialized aspects of life and leisure that are themselves due to a shift from one kind of capitalist production to another. This shift, he says, was "not a matter of mere cultural and ideological refurbishing but of all-embracing economic change." But what are Clark's examples of this sweeping change? "A move to the world of *grands boulevards* and *grands magasins* and their accompanying industries of tourism, recreation, fashion, and display." Surprisingly, Clark then reminds his readers that the spectacle was designed "first and foremost as a weapon of combat" in the 1960s.[6] Does he mean to suggest that the political and economic structure of this world of boulevards and department stores is essentially *continuous* with what Debord described as the contested terrain in 1967? And that the cultural politics of the 1960s occurred within a set of conditions isomorphic with those of the 1870s? This implication of a single spectacle common to both the Paris of Manet and of Debord is problematic to say the least.

Working with one of the most familiar examples of modernization in the nineteenth century, Haussmann's rebuilding of Paris, Clark presents it as part of a transformation from small entrepreneurial capitalism to increasingly monopo-

5. T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 9.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

listic forms. And the new post-Haussmann Paris becomes for him the visible expression of a new alignment of class relations. But this way of deploying the spectacle posits it as a form of domination imposed onto a population or individual from without. The kind of change he delineates remains essentially exterior to the make-up of an individual subject, preserving for the latter a detached position from which the spectacle could be, however imperfectly, recorded and represented. By periodizing the spectacle in this way, Clark disregards the possibility that spectacle may be equally about a fundamental reorganization of the subject, about the construction of an observer who was a precondition for the transformation of everyday life that began then. Making the society of the spectacle more or less an equivalent for consumer society, Clark dilutes its historical specificity and overlooks some features of the spectacle that were crucial to the political practice of situationism in the 1960s: the spectacle as a new kind of power of recuperation and absorption, a capacity to neutralize and assimilate acts of resistance by converting them into objects or images of consumption.

Guy Debord himself has very recently given a surprisingly precise date for the beginning of the society of the spectacle. In a text published in 1988 Debord writes that in 1967, the date of his original book, the spectacle was barely forty years old.[7] Not a more approximate kind of number like fifty, but forty. Thus, 1927, or roughly the late 1920s. Unfortunately he doesn't provide an indication as to why he singles out this moment. It made me curious about what he might have meant by designating the late '20s as a historical threshold, thus placing the origin of the spectacle some half-century later than did Clark. I offer, then, some fragmentary speculations on some very dissimilar events that could possibly have been implicit in Debord's remark.

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1. The first is both symbolic and substantive. The year 1927 saw the technological perfection of television. Vladimir Zworikin, the Russian-born, American-trained engineer and physicist, patented his iconoscope — the first electronic system of a tube containing an electron gun and a screen made out of a mosaic of photoemissive cells, each of which produced a charge proportional to the varying light intensity of the image focused on the screen. Right at the moment when an awareness arose of the age of mechanical reproduction, a new model of circulation and transmission appeared that was to exceed that age, one that had no need of silver salts or permanent physical support.[8] The spectacle was to become

7. Guy Debord, *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle*, Paris, Editions Gérard Lebovici, 1988, p. 13.
8. The historian of science François Dagognet cites the revolutionary nature of this development in his *Philosophie de l'image*, Paris, J. Vrin, 1986, pp. 57–58.



Television transmitter sending a picture of the woman seated directly in front of the apparatus, c. 1929.

inseparable from this new kind of image and its speed, ubiquity, and simultaneity.

But equally important was that by the late 1920s, when the first experimental broadcasts occurred, the vast interlocking of corporate, military, and state control of television was being settled. Never before had the institutional regulation of a new technique been planned and divided up so far in advance. So, in a sense, much of the territory of spectacle, the intangible domain of the spectrum, had already been diagrammed and standardized before 1930.

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2. Perhaps more immediately significant, the movie *The Jazz Singer* premiered in 1927, signaling the arrival of the sound film, and specifically *synchronized* sound. This was not only a transformation in the nature of subjective experience; it was also an event that brought on the complete vertical integration

of production, distribution, and exhibition within the film industry and its amalgamation with the corporate conglomerates that owned the sound patents and provided the capital for the costly move to the new technology.[9] Again, as with television, the nascent institutional and economic infrastructure of the spectacle was set in place.

Specifying sound here obviously suggests that spectacular power cannot be reduced to an optical model but is inseparable from a larger organization of perceptual consumption. Sound had of course been part of cinema in various additive forms from the beginning, but the introduction of sync sound transformed the nature of *attention* that was demanded of a viewer. Possibly it is a break that makes previous forms of cinema actually closer to the optical devices of the late nineteenth century. The full coincidence of sound with image, of voice with figure, not only was a crucial new way of organizing space, time, and narrative, but it instituted a more commanding authority over the observer, enforcing a new kind of attention. A vivid sign of this shift can be seen in Fritz Lang's two Mabuse films. In *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler,* a 1924 silent film, the proto-fascist Mabuse exercises control through his gaze, with a hypnotic optical power; while in *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1931) an incarnation of the same character dominates his underlings only through his voice, emanating from behind a curtain (which, it turns out, conceals not a person, but recording technology and a loudspeaker).

And from the 1890s well into the 1930s one of the central problems in mainstream psychology had been the nature of attention: the relation between stimulus and attention, problems of concentration, focalization, and distraction. How many sources of stimulation could one attend to simultaneously? How could novelty, familiarity, and repetition in attention be assessed? It was a problem whose position in the forefront of psychological discourse was directly related to the emergence of a social field increasingly saturated with sensory input. Some of this was the work of James McKeen Cattell, whose experiments on students at Columbia University provided the classical data for the notion of range of attention. Initially much of this research was bound up in the need for information on attention in the context of rationalizing production, but even as early as 1910 hundreds of experimental laboratory studies had been done specifically on the range of attention in advertising (including titles such as "The Attention Value of Periodical Advertisements," "Attention and the Effects of Size in Street Car Advertisements," "Advertising and the Laws of Mental Attention," "Measuring the Attention Value of Color in Advertising," the last a 1913 Columbia dissertation).

9. See Steven Neale, *Cinema and Technology: Image, Sound, Colour,* Bloomington, Indiana, 1985, pp. 62–102; and Douglas Gomery, "Toward an Economic History of the Cinema: The Coming of Sound to Hollywood," in Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath, eds., *The Cinematic Apparatus,* London, Macmillan, 1980, pp. 38–46.

The year 1927 was also when Walter Benjamin began his Arcades Project, a work in which he would eventually point to "a crisis in perception itself," a crisis that is the result of a sweeping remaking of the observer by a calculated technology of the individual, derived from new knowledge of the body. In the course of writing the Arcades Project, Benjamin himself became preoccupied with the question of attention and the related issues of distraction and shock, and he turned to Henri Bergson's *Matter and Memory* for a way out of what he saw as the "standardized and denatured" perception of the masses. Bergson had fought to recover perception from its status as sheer physiological event; for him attention was a question of an engagement of the body, an inhibition of movement, a state of consciousness arrested in the present. But attention could become transformed into something productive only when it was linked to the deeper activity of memory:

> Memory thus creates anew present perception . . . strengthening and enriching [it]. . . . If after having gazed on any object, we turn our eyes abruptly away, we obtain an "after-image" [*image consécutive*] of it. It is true we are dealing here with images photographed on the object itself, and with memories following immediately upon the perception of which they are but the echo. But behind these images which are identical with the object, there are others, stored in memory which only resemble it. . . . [10]

What Bergson sought to describe was the vitality of the moment when a conscious rift occurred between memory and perception, a moment in which memory had the capacity to rebuild the object of perception. Deleuze and Guattari have described similar effects of the entry of memory into perception, for example in the perception of a face: one can see a face in terms of a vast set of micromemories and a rich proliferation of semiotic systems, or, what is far more common, in terms of bleak redundancies of representations, which, they say, is where connections can always be effected with the hierarchies of power formations.[11] That kind of redundancy of representation, with its accompanying inhibition and impoverishment of memory, was what Benjamin saw as the standardization of perception, or what we might call an effect of spectacle.

Although Benjamin called *Matter and Memory* a "towering and monumental work," he reproached Bergson for circumscribing memory within the isolated frame of an individual consciousness; the kind of afterimages that interested Benjamin were those of collective historical memory, haunting images of

10. Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer, New York, Zone Books, 1988, pp. 101–103.
11. See, for example, Felix Guattari, "Les machines concrètes," in his *La révolution moléculaire*, Paris, Encres, 1977, pp. 364–376.

the out-of-date which had the capacity for a social reawakening.[12] And thus Benjamin's apprehension of a present-day crisis in perception is filtered through a richly elaborated afterimage of the mid-nineteenth century.

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3. Given the content of Debord's work, we can also assume another crucial development in the late 1920s: the rise of fascism and, soon after, Stalinism, and the way in which they incarnated models of the spectacle. Important, for example, was Goebbels's innovative and synergetic use of every available medium, especially the development of sound/image propaganda, and his devaluation of the written word, because reading implied time for reflection and thought. In one election campaign in 1930, Goebbels mailed 50,000 phonograph records of one of his own speeches to specially targeted voters. Goebbels also introduced the airplane into politics, making Hitler the first political candidate to fly to several different cities on the same day. Air travel thus functioned as a conveyor of the image of the leader, providing a new sense of ubiquity.

As part of this mixed technology of attention, television was to have played a crucial role. And as recent scholarship has shown, the development of television in Germany was in advance of that of any other country.[13] German TV broadcasting on a regular basis began in 1935, four years ahead of the United States. Clearly, as an instrument of social control, its effectiveness was never realized by the Nazis, but its early history in Germany is instructive for the competing models of spectacular organization that were proposed in the 1930s. A major split emerged early on between the monopolistic corporate forces and the Nazi Party with regard to the development of television in Germany. The Party sought to have television centralized and accessible in public screening halls, unlike the decentralized use of radio in private homes. Goebbels and Hitler had a notion of group reception, believing that this was the most effective form of reception. Public television halls, seating from 40 to 400, were designated, not unlike the subsequent early development of television in the USSR, where a mass viewing environment was also favored. According to the Nazi director of broadcasting, writing in 1935, the "sacred mission" of television was "to plant indelibly the image of the Führer in the hearts of the German people."[14] Corporate

12. "On the contrary he [Bergson] rejects any historical determination of memory. He thus manages above all to stay clear of that experience from which his own philosophy evolved or, rather, in reaction to which it arose. It was the inhospitable, blinding age of big-scale industrialism" (Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, New York, Schocken, 1969, pp. 156–157).
13. I have relied on the valuable research in William Uricchio, "Rituals of Reception, Patterns of Neglect: Nazi Television and its Postwar Representation," *Wide Angle*, vol. 10, no. 4, pp. 48–66. See also Robert Edwin Herzstein, *The War That Hitler Won: Goebbels and the Nazi Media Campaign*, New York, Paragon, 1978.
14. Quoted in Uricchio, p. 51.

power, on the other hand, sought home viewing, for maximization of profit. One model sought to position television as technique within the demands of fascism in general: a means of mobilizing and inciting the masses, whereas the agents of capitalism sought to privatize, to divide and molecularize, to impose a model of cellularity.

It is easy to forget that in *Society of the Spectacle* Debord outlined two different models of the spectacle; one he called "concentrated" and the other "diffused," preventing the word *spectacle* from simply being synonymous with consumer or late capitalism. Concentrated spectacle was what characterized Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia, and Maoist China; the preeminent model of diffused spectacle was the United States: "Wherever the concentrated spectacle rules so does the police . . . it is accompanied by permanent violence. The imposed image of the good envelops in its spectacle the totality of what officially exists and is usually concentrated in one man who is the guarantee of totalitarian cohesion. Everyone must magically identify with this absolute celebrity—or disappear."[15] The diffuse spectacle, on the other hand, accompanies the abundance of commodities. And certainly it is this model to which Debord gives most of his attention in his 1967 book.

I will note in passing Michel Foucault's famous dismissal of the spectacle in *Discipline and Punish:* "Our society is not one of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images one invests bodies in depth."[16] But the spectacle is also a set of techniques for the management of bodies, the management of attention (I am paraphrasing Foucault) "for assuring the ordering of human multiplicities," "its object is to fix, it is an anti-nomadic technique," "it uses procedures of partitioning and cellularity . . . in which the individual is reduced as a political force."[17] I suspect that Foucault did not spend much time watching television or thinking about it, because it would not be difficult to make a case that television is a further perfecting of panoptic technology. In it *surveillance* and *spectacle* are not opposed terms, as he insists, but collapsed onto one another in a more effective disciplinary apparatus. Recent developments have confirmed literally this overlapping model: television sets that contain advanced image recognition technology in order to monitor and quantify the behavior, attentiveness, and eye movement of a spectator.[18]

But in 1988 Debord sees his two original models of diffused and concentrated spectacle becoming indistinct, converging into what he calls "the integrated society of the spectacle."[19] In this deeply pessimistic book, he describes a

15. Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, sec. 64.
16. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, Pantheon, 1976, p. 217.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 218–219.
18. See, for example, Bill Carter, "TV Viewers, Beware: Nielsen May Be Looking," *The New York Times*, June 1, 1989, p. A1.
19. Debord, *Commentaires*, pp. 17–19.

more sophisticated deployment of elements from those earlier models, a flexible arrangement of global power adaptable to local needs and circumstances. In 1967 there were still marginalities and peripheries that escaped its reign: today, he insists, the spectacle has irradiated into everything and has absolute control over production, over perception, and especially over the shape of the future and the past.

As much as any single feature, Debord sees the core of the spectacle as the annihilation of historical knowledge—in particular the destruction of the recent past. In its place there is the reign of a perpetual present. History, he writes, had always been the measure by which novelty was assessed, but whoever is in the business of selling novelty has an interest in destroying the means by which it could be judged. Thus there is a ceaseless appearance of the important, and almost immediately its annihilation and replacement: "That which the spectacle ceases to speak of for three days no longer exists."[20]

In conclusion I want to note briefly two different responses to the new texture of modernity taking shape in the 1920s. The painter Fernand Léger writes, in a 1924 essay titled "The Spectacle," published soon after the making of his film *Ballet Mécanique*,

> The rhythm of modern life is so dynamic that a slice of life seen from a café terrace is a spectacle. The most diverse elements collide and jostle one another there. The interplay of contrasts is so violent that there is always exaggeration in the effect that one glimpses. On the boulevard two men are carrying some immense gilded letters in a hand cart: the effect is so unexpected that everyone stops and looks. There is the origin of the modern spectacle . . . in the shock of the surprise effect.[21]

But then Léger goes on to detail how advertising and commercial forces have taken the lead in the making of modern spectacle, and he cites the department store, the world of fashion, and the rhythms of industrial production as forms that have conquered the attention of the public. Léger's goal is the same: wanting to win over that public. Of course, he is writing at a point of uncertainty about the direction of his own art, facing the dilemma of what a public art might mean, but the confused program he comes up with in this text is an early instance of the ploys of all those—from Warhol to today's so-called simulationists—who believe, or at least claim, they are outwitting the spectacle at its own game. Léger summarizes this kind of ambition: "Let's push the system to the extreme," he states, and offers vague suggestions for polychroming the exterior of factories and apartment buildings, for using new materials and setting them in

20. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
21. Fernand Léger, *Functions of Painting*, trans. Alexandra Anderson, New York, Viking, 1973, p. 35.

motion. But this ineffectual inclination to outdo the allure of the spectacle becomes complicit with its annihilation of the past and fetishization of the new.

But the same year, 1924, the first Surrealist Manifesto suggests a very different aesthetic strategy for confronting the spectacular organization of the modern city. I am referring to what Walter Benjamin called the "anthropological" dimension of surrealism.[22] It was a strategy of turning the spectacle of the city inside out through counter-memory and counter-itineraries. These would reveal the potency of outmoded objects excluded from its slick surfaces, and of derelict spaces off its main routes of circulation. The strategy incarnated a refusal of the imposed present, and in reclaiming fragments of a demolished past it was implicitly figuring an alternative future. And despite the equivocal nature of many of these surrealist gestures, it is no accident that they were to reappear in new forms in the tactics of situationism in the 1960s, in the notion of the *dérive* or drift, of *détournement,* of psychogeography, the exemplary act, and the constructed situation.[23] Whether these practices have any vitality or even relevance today depends in large measure on what an archaeology of the present tells us. Are we still in the midst of a society that is organized as appearance? Or have we entered a nonspectacular global system arranged primarily around the control and flow of information, a system whose management and regulation of attention would demand wholly new forms of resistance and memory?[24]

22. Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street,* trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, London, New Left Books, 1979, p. 239. Christopher Phillips suggested to me that the late 1920s would also likely be crucial for Debord as the moment when surrealism became coopted, that is, when its original revolutionary potential was nullified in an early instance of spectacular recuperation and absorption.
23. On these strategies, see the documents in Ken Knabb, ed., *Situationist International Anthology,* Berkeley, Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981.
24. See my "Eclipse of the Spectacle," in Brian Wallis, ed., *Art After Modernism,* Boston, David Godine, 1984, pp. 283–294.

The Rock 'n' Roll Ghost

ANDREW ROSS

Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century, *by Greil Marcus, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1989.*

Who can resist a smile at recalling that, in Zurich in 1916, Lenin lived across the street from the Cabaret Voltaire? And who would not like to imagine that he kept firmly to his ascetic regimen at Spiegelgasse 6, stopping up his ears to stave off the cacophonous assault issuing from the gaudy tavern at number 1? According to dada mythology, Lenin occasionally dropped in, to see the world turned upside down, and to offer his ambivalent views about art and music. Dada's menu of ranting and posturing had little in common with the wholesome diet of scientific socialism, and besides, Lenin had long voiced his misgivings even about traditional aesthetics; of Beethoven's *Apassionata* he once said to Gorky that although he loved it, he couldn't listen to it: "It affects your nerves, makes you want to say stupid nice things and stroke the heads of people who would create such beauty while living in this vile hell. And now you mustn't stroke anyone's head—you might get your hand bitten off. You have to hit them on the head, without any mercy." On one of his unverified visits to the Cabaret Voltaire, he confided to Marcel Janco, again by legend, his desire that art should be in the business of producing "new facts." Within a decade the Soviet avant-garde had forged its own version of this desire, celebrating the cult of factography and productivism in ways that may not have comforted Lenin and yet were still quite removed from the necromantic rites of their European contemporaries who, in the same space of time, had followed dada's revolutionary letter, if not always its negating spirit. In 1916, however, two worlds were colliding rather than passing in the heady Swiss night—the world of the tightly organized Party, and the world of dada, partying down: social poetry in the service of revolution, on the one hand, and revolution in the service of an antipoetry, on the other. Even then, Hugo Ball was asking the important dialectical question: "Is Dadaism something of a mark and gesture of a counterplay to Bolshevism? Does it oppose to the

destruction and thorough settling of accounts the utterly quixotic, unpurposeful, incomprehensible side of the world?"[1]

Ball's question still haunts our attempts to make sense of cultural politics in recent years. It is a crucial question for anyone, for example, who wants to see the organized activist movements of the New Left as necessarily linked to, rather than in debilitating conflict with, the discordant range of utopian languages espoused by the counterculture of the 1960s. And the question may be just as vital for the new social movements of today, where an expansive, libertarian culture of often "politically incorrect" desires continues to command a deep social power that meshes uneasily with the more purist and essentialist definitions of culture advanced by activists hewing to the imaginative dictates of political theory alone. In the realm of contemporary popular culture, the example of punk music—its shock aesthetic counterposed to the politics of unemployment—has come to stand as a celebrated test case of the problematic of cultural politics. For more than a decade now, punk culture has inspired a flood of commentary that has recently reached the higher citadels of art and learning—for example, *Impresario*, New York's New Museum show about Malcolm McLaren in the fall of 1988, and *Lipstick Traces*, Greil Marcus's new book from Harvard University Press. In the meantime, the Anglo-American audience attracted to the traveling situationist exhibition—*On the Passage of a Few People through a Brief Period of Time*, shown at Beaubourg, the ICA in London, and the ICA in Boston—may include many who first learned about situationism through the activities of the architects of punk, McLaren and design artist Jamie Reid.

Even at its debut, it was widely known, and overtly acknowledged by its active subculture, that punk wore its dadaism on its sleeve. On the other hand, punk's debts to the situationists were less conspicuous, largely because of the willful resistance of Guy Debord and his cohorts to media self-promotion, but these debts have slowly come to public consciousness in all their starkly just relevance, and Marcus's book will surely solidify this knowledge. The given wisdom today, then, is that punk culture consciously invoked dadaism in its iconography and its "bad attitudes," while its architects learned and successfully applied the situationist lessons about exploiting the media's hunger for spectacle. What is arguably more important, however, is the perception that punk located both Ball's question about dialectics and Debord's critique of the spectacle in a place which neither Ball nor Debord could have imagined as likely ground for the seeds of social action—at the core of the pop music industry, and against its glittery backdrop of commerce and desire.

It is possible, for example, to see, in the notorious contempt of punk performers for their audiences, for the conventional rock standards of musical

1. Hugo Ball, *Flight out of Time: A Dada Diary*, trans., Ann Raimes, New York, Viking, 1974, p. 117.

integrity, and for the ethics of rock taste, not to mention "public morality," all of the replayed elements of outrage visited upon the audiences at the Cabaret Voltaire. One might even suggest that the alternative "Leninist" tradition of socialist performance, with its ultimate aim of redefining the relationship between producers and audiences in the direction of participation, audience loyalty, and communitarian solidarity, had been most successfully embodied in the West in the performance codes of authenticity espoused by the rock counterculture—in other words, exactly the ideology of naturalism that punk, with its scorn for all celebratory expressions of well-being, set out to demolish. So too, it is possible to see punk as a series of situations, carefully constructed, as Debord had willed it, "on the ruins of the spectacle," whereby its authors rode the back of the media hype monster to its limits, feeding off the surplus value generated by its publicity machine, while transforming themselves and their works into a new and potent iconography of cultural rebellion.

But neither of these perspectives can adequately describe the social facts of punk culture if they merely show it revelling in the anxiety of influence. Elucidations of dada and situationist influence, respectively, are too formalistic in themselves to explain how and why these facts become social and historical. (The avant-garde's propensity to abolish or erase history in the heat of its mission of ex nihilo reinvention does not mean that this mission itself should not be seen as a response to certain social and historical forces.) To accept that punk culture and all of its social effects were the successful result of conscious media manipulation admixed with a strategic application of radical art history is to end up with a simple inversion of the Frankfurt School theses about the conspiratorial manipulation of "mass culture."[2]

What is excluded in such an analysis? First, the grounds of the widely circulated perception that punk was a popular form of "dole-queue rock," as opposed to the cognoscenti view that it was just another arty stunt, if not particularly *artful*, in the long tradition of British art-college rock that began with the Beatles and the Stones and is now threatened by Thatcher's assault on the art colleges. Second, the popular resonance of punk's negationist antiwork ideology in a political milieu that *predated* the Thatcherist declaration of class war, a milieu which was therefore still pervaded by the moribund (productivist) labor ethic of the last Labor Government. Third, the popular nature of punk's intervention into the balance of relations, in the mid-'70s, between rock audiences and a culture industry grown fat on its profitable cultivation of rockist values

2. The goal of depicting McLaren as a master of publicity—a supremely *conscious* artist for modern times—was one of the more overt aims and effects of the New Museum show, a goal chronicled in many of the catalogue essays: "The art of Malcolm McLaren is so deeply and invisibly embedded in the popular culture of today that we have failed to see him as an artist" (Paul Taylor, "The Impresario of Do-It-Yourself," in Paul Taylor, ed., *Impresario: Malcolm McLaren and the British New Wave*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1988, p. 29.

about the authentic noncommodifiability of rock music, values that punk exposed as historically bankrupt by way of its do-it-yourself, amateurist ethic of music-making. Fourth, and most inscrutable, the brilliant, popular hunger generated by the music itself, for which the cliché that it "struck a chord" in the hearts and minds of a generation must be given fresh credence every time it is pronounced. Each of these factors, and the list is far from exhaustive, speaks to considerations of the role of popular desires at a particular time and in a particular place, a role that is *never guaranteed in advance,* and which, unfortunately, can only be bloodlessly reconstructed in retrospect. That avant-garde cultural theory, whether Frankfurt or situationist, has neither the will nor the analytic power to include the nature or configuration of popular desires in its reckoning, except to present these desires as falsely constructed, is a testament to the historical and political blindness of the avant-garde in this century.

Readers of the long-awaited *Lipstick Traces*, Greil Marcus's extraordinary genealogy of punk culture, are unlikely to complain that he has neglected the conditions of popular hunger. For over two decades now, Marcus has been one of the most passionate interpreters of rock 'n' roll's capacity to deliver an immediate sense of what utopia feels like, as opposed to the more articulate obligation to say what utopia looks like or thinks like. The classical form of this affective offering is the "fantasy utopia of a three-minute single," and *Lipstick Traces* contains many moments of felt attention to the phenomenology of utopian listening. Here, for example, is Marcus riffing on the black harmony group, the Orioles:

> The Orioles sound reached the listener as the voice of another world: it demanded that you finish the sound, fill in the silences with your own wishes, fears, fantasies. With its falling sighs, its constant hesitations, the sound implied that against every accepted promise, everything was in doubt. . . . Framed by high, drifting moans that faded almost before they could be registered, [Sonny] Til's fragile tenor was so emotionally distant, so aurally crepuscular, that it did not sound like singing at all. It was a voice that seemed to treat the forming of a word as a concession, a voice less of someone singing than of someone thinking about the possibility of singing, as if to say, "What would it mean to care? . . . [Til] communicated the notion that the real world could be different from the apparent—that the apparent world, the world of ordered rhythms and distinct words, was not real. (259)

Marcus performs the same service, with less tenderness of course, for Johnny Rotten, in whom we are made to feel viscerally "the sudden gulp of social life into the throat of a hunched boy calling himself an antichrist" (58). The isolation and recall of such moments is consistent with the Lebfebvrian or situationist version of history, which locates meaning not in the objective structures of social and economic life—the grand mimetic narratives of scientific socialism, for

example—but rather in the utopian epiphanies of everyday life, where a surprising reinvention of the ordinary, the trivial, and the marginal is creatively transformed into a volatile micropolitics. Espousing this theory of utopian moments allows its user conscious access to the full spectrum of feelings that are encountered and mobilized in daily life. The guiding hope is that these moments and feelings, grounded as they are in the desires of the present, are the grammatical raw materials for a new kind of political language that would be both popular and mutable, and that could learn a millenarian vocabulary as easily as it could master the local dialect of wildcat cultural strikes.

Lipstick Traces tells another utopian story, however, which goes well beyond rock 'n' roll, and which has everything and nothing to do with history. In the grain of Johnny Rotten's menacing voice, Marcus hears "a secret history of ancient wishes and defeats" (441), a tumult of voices and lost moments from history that have left no concrete social traces but which, because they harbor unfinished impulses and unsatisfied desires, carry an immense, cumulative power that has no conventional or legitimate political name. Driven underground, these voices do not form anything like the systematic logic of a Jamesonian political unconscious, but are instead transmitted across the centuries in unfathomable ways. For Marcus, moments, like the moment of Rotten's voice, which blasphemously negate all current social facts, are moments of "true poetry" which, in the situationist phrase, bring all of "the unsettled debts of history back into play" by resurrecting the power of this secret history. Any punk song contains all of the raving voices of free spirits that Marcus summons up, from medieval heretics and carnivalesque Communards, to stammering dadaists and apocalyptic lettrists.

In one astonishing metonymic leap, for example, he displaces the reader's attention from John Lydon (aka Rotten) to John of Leyden, the Dutch Anabaptist heretic who fleetingly ruled the beseiged Münster of 1534, and who abolished money, time, private property, sin, and work in the name of absolute freedom. In an equally swift change of scenery, Marcus demonstrates how the anarchic power of medieval gnostic chants and heretics' prayers has insinuated its way across the centuries into the nonsense lyrical repertoire of Little Richard ("Tutti Frutti," "A Wop Bop A Loo Bop, A Lop Bam Boom"), whose passion for glossolalia, we are told, was learned in a Southern church where Pentecostal creeds are still infused with fragments of the Anabaptist heresy. (Equally memorable transitions include jump-cuts from the Jacksons' Victory Tour of 1984 to the Sparticist uprising in Berlin in 1919, and from the social architecture of Reagan's prescriptions for National Renewal to the broad, atomizing effects generated by Haussmann's post-Commune redesign of Paris.) Following out the trajectory of Nietzsche's aphorism that "nothing is true, everything is permitted," Marcus looks back to the twelfth-century millenarian Levantine Assassins like Rashid al-Din Sinan and Hasa i-Sabbah II, who rejected the Koran, turned their backs on Mecca, and feasted during Ramadan. Invoked, in turn, from the pages of one of the situationists' favorite books, Norman Cohn's *Fanatiques de*

l'apocalypse, are those groups of heretics like the Cathars, the Brethren of the Free Spirit, the Lollards, and the Ranters, who unknowingly rearticulated the spirit of the Assassins in announcing the end of history and its laws, as their contemporaries knew them, and declaring a life of eternal pleasure and perfect enjoyment, without work and sin—a garden of earthly delight where the roads of excess inevitably lead to the palace of wisdom. While Marcus has no ultimate use for its consequences, he cannot resist acknowledging Debord's perception that millenarianism is always revolutionary class struggle speaking the language of religion for the last time.

In allowing these free spirits to congregate together, Marcus is not so much tracing connections between them—drawing up genealogies of influence—as making them bear witness; his secret history is a series of maps of feeling, infused with spirit, not an accurate map of meaning, true to historical logic. Absolute free speech, for absolutely free spirits, is not and never will be a legitimate political language, and we therefore ought to expect little in the way of justice for it from scholarly historians. But readers who are nonetheless sympathetic to the notion that any loyal history of anarchist/libertarian thought must display its own spontaneism will still be required, in reading *Lipstick Traces*, to take a leap of faith that many will not be prepared for. They will have to accept that it is an inspirational book, written with a different kind of quirky evangelical zeal than that which normally possesses those committed to "keeping the faith" of rock 'n' roll culture. It is this zeal which sets Marcus off on his neo-Jungian search for the most "primitive voices" of rock 'n' roll, resolute in the belief that the historical specificity of the music's origins, in the full flush of advanced consumer culture, is only a small, sublunary part of the story. And it is the same zeal that sees the social impulse behind British punk as "so old and so foreign" (442), and dada as a "gnostic myth of the twentieth-century" (194). In presenting both punk and dada as the reappearance of timeless acts of negationist will, crying out for the company and support of ancestral voices prophesying war against modernity's vision of happiness and good living, Marcus comes close to concluding that there is nothing new under the sun.

Because of its bad faith with history, *Lipstick Traces* has no alternative, then, but to present a history that can only be taken on faith. This decision has particular and often unfortunate consequences. If, for example, you see dada as a gnostic revival, spoken in an unintelligible language that is reinvented from scratch every century or so, then you are unlikely to be able seriously to address Ball's question about the dialectical relation between dada and Bolshevism, regardless of how you conceive the answer to that question. Neither will it be possible to see how the cult of originary self-creation fashioned by dada and other twentieth-century avant-garde movements might be similarly linked to the new mechanical processes of mass cultural production; or to consider how their cults of the "new man" owe as much to contemporary codes of technocratic radicalism as to the messianic vocabularies with which they sing the body electric; or to ask

why those same avant-gardes' various appeals to irrationality are first spoken at the height of the bloodiest of all the wars fought in the name of Western humanist rationality; or how the current of primitivism and *sauvagerie* stands in relation to a more manifest cause of the war—a territorial contest over the economic and cultural underdevelopment of Europe's colonies.

One way of putting this is to say that those who speak about unknown, and unknowable, tongues run the risk of ending up speaking in such a tongue—a truism that runs parallel with Nietzsche's warning (a favorite of Marcus's) that "those who fight against monsters should take care that they don't turn into monsters themselves." But Marcus has no real interest in taking such precautions; he wants to be true to his own sense of the apocalyptic . . . or nothing at all. Finally, *Lipstick Traces* must be seen in this light, as a "situation without a future" for scholarship, a situation constructed on the ruins of scholarship, especially the scholarship responsible for the respective histories of avant-garde and popular culture which are familiar to us. Marcus's chief debt in this assault on socio-historical standards is to the lettrists/situationists, to whom he devotes by far the largest portion of his book. Indeed the publication of *Lipstick Traces* comes at a time of germinating interest in the recovery of the situationist critique of everyday life, so comprehensively passed over by Anglo-American scholars since the '60s in favor of structuralism and its various derivatives. As Alice Kaplan and Kristin Ross have pointed out, this body of theory and practice, "so intimately tied up with lived experience and political struggle, would obviously not find the same American audience as structuralist discourse, which viewed its arena as textual" and thus of more direct efficacy to institutional and pedagogical needs.[3] In the wake of the postmodernist debates about commodity culture, we may be about to see a massive revival of situationist thought on the part of those looking for a more critical, pre-Baudrillardian description of media culture. If so, it will be a fresh affirmation of the strange American conviction that solutions to modern cultural problems can always be found in Paris, accompanied, of course, by a fresh elision of native experience, native thought, and native activism.

Marcus is right to confess that reading Debord today produces an effect at once "familiar and weird, plain and paranoid, obvious and occult" (105). Perhaps this is because media culture has long since absorbed and recycled elements of Debord's critique of the spectacle first advanced in the mid-'50s. What ought to attract increasing attention, however, and hopefully will as a result of Marcus's book, are the situationist theses about work and leisure, poverty and abundance, all springing from the conviction that it was the world of leisure and consumption, and not the world of labor and productivity, that constituted a potentially new revolutionary arena. Situationism was only possible in a postscarcity world of abundant commodities, where desires could be taken for reality and society thereby reinvented by making use of its surplus values and energies. Art founded

3. Alice Kaplan and Kristin Ross, introduction to "Everyday Life," a special issue of *Yale French Studies*, no. 73 (1987), preface.

on the poverty of art or the poverty of philosophy could not produce a modern politics. By that same token, a politics that identified with the victims of poverty, a politics to which intellectuals are prone, was doomed to misunderstand the real utopian desires of "class victims" to identify with abundance. If intellectuals today continue to construct a cultural politics exclusively around themes of deprivation, survivalism, oppression, victimage, and alienation, then they will never be able to speak, in a radical accent, the popular language of our times, which is the language of pleasure, adventure, liberation, gratification, and novelty. By that same token, modern intellectuals' affirmative version of the "public sphere," a concept that we see increasingly and unfailingly dragged out of retirement for yet another nostalgia tour, will continue to be haunted by the ascetic regime of its architects and only true practitioners—European bourgeois men in the eighteenth century. The situationists, at least, were speaking to a popular vision of modernity and everyday life when they claimed, in the first issue of *Internationale Situationiste*, in 1958, that their mission would be to "execute the judgment that contemporary leisure is pronouncing against itself."

The corollary of these theses about the permanent revolution of everyday life was the rigorous antiwork ethic that the SI leveled against organized socialist bureaucracy's "dictatorship of productivity." Every call for labor productivity was a call to wage slavery, whether in the socialist countries, in the celebration of the cult of labor, or in capitalist countries, in the modern labor movement's assertion of the right to work. The religious idea of labor as a redemptive activity has too long debilitated Left political thought, and has contributed to the ideology of unrestrained growth, development, and expansion that is everywhere being called into question by ecologists. Again it is unfortunate that the overriding effect of Marcus's "secret history" is to see the modern antiwork ethic as a subversive reiteration of ideas that first found their voice in gnostic heresies. A more accountable response would be to view this ethic in the context of the unique labor conditions created by capital's attempts to evade its "social responsibility," precisely by exploiting the productivist ideology of the labor movement. In fact, the story of the modern labor movement is one that shows how, over the course of a century, an original set of demands for shorter hours and a "social wage" with which to guarantee "free time" has been replaced by the increasingly prevalent wisdom of higher wages for higher productivity (a wisdom much more friendly to consumerist capitalism than to any socialist advocacy of "free time"). In that space of time, as Stanley Aronowitz has pointed out, not one minute has been clipped from the standard eight-hour day. Unwork, in an age of unemployment and the low-wage service-sector revolution, has become a viable option, most conspicuously for deindustrialized white male workers and for young American blacks excluded from the official labor force and subsisting quite profitably in the alternative drug economy.[4] Increasingly, as new labor-saving

4. See Stanley Aronowitz, "Why Work?" *Social Text*, no. 12 (Fall 1985), pp. 19–42.

technology proves to be capital's only way of regaining control over the labor process, the struggle over defining "free time" has come, and will continue, to be the major area of contestation of our age.

These, surely, are quite different circumstances from those under which the gnostic claims about the "right not to work" were first advanced. Inasmuch as they are recognizable, they are more or less the conditions expressed through the ritualized despair of the punk subculture, for whom the symbolic rejection of a working future combined with a protopolitical focus on the boredom of "dead" leisure time conspired to present a caricature of an exhausted working class, impoverished by the imposition of false postindustrial desires. No solutions, however ephemeral, to the real contradictions or structural impasses of capitalist society were ever offered. Nonetheless, it is clear that the symbolic power of the punk negation of daily leisure time posed a real threat to the business of social reproduction, which then had repercussions in less marginal cultures and segments of the population more closely delimited by the wage relation. A crisis in the definition of "free time" was temporarily exposed, a moment for which the situationist slogan—"Live Without Dead Time!"—might be seen as a provocative precursor.

The difference was that this critique of free time had now, as Marcus puts it, "made the charts." For Marcus, however, this difference, while worthy of celebration, does not raise any further questions about the displacement of the critique from an avant-garde to a pop milieu. Finally, for him, it is more or less the same critique, as resonant in the mouths of Debord and Rotten as it was in the mouths of medieval heretics. Against Marcus's weak perception that this continuity is "transcendentally odd" (19), it may be necessary to point out that the critique achieved a form of popular recognition only by attaining a recognizably popular form. Punk culture addressed the fate of sensuality in an advanced consumer culture by theatrically taking the impoverishment and subordination of desire at its literal face value. But, by the time of punk, this was only possible in the setting of rock 'n' roll culture itself, which, for twenty brilliant years, had been speaking a popular version of the language of real sensual needs, in however "alienated" a fashion, but which had never heard this particular dialect being vocalized in this way. When punk came, at the moment that it came, it could only have made immediate sense in relation to the well-established rhetoric of pop music culture. The weird ancestry would be written up in retrospect.

Punk, in many respects, then, was the moment when it became inescapably clear that the traditional concerns of the avant-garde would henceforth be addressed and worked through in relation to popular culture. By comparison, the situationist imperatives of just twelve years before would come to seem like symptoms of the kind of obsolete cultural politics which they themselves, in the name of their collective cadre persona, were so practiced at disparaging:

> The first ventures in constructing situations must be the work/play of the revolutionary avant-garde; people who are resigned in one or

> another respect to political passivity, to metaphysical despair, and even to being subjected to an artistic pure absence of creativity, are incapable of participating in them.[5]

The righteous froth of infallibility, the conviction of being a few prophetic years "ahead" of others, and the contempt for and misrecognition of popular pleasure —these are elements of the "advanced consciousness" of avant-garde cultural movements that would not survive the twentieth century, even as their collective memory harbored the not-so-secret history of scary protofascism in this century, as embodied, for example, in the absolutist confession of Ball, which seems to both disgust and exhilarate Marcus: "I could not live without the conviction that my own personal fate is an abbreviated version of the fate of the whole world."

Finally, perhaps, the most significant lines in *Lipstick Traces* are these: "From 1952 through May 1968, through all the furious, step-by-step demolitions of every dominant image of the good, behind them, all the obscure intimations of a new way of walking and a new way of talking, that was the situationist project—that was all it ever was" (398). Marcus is not paying tribute here to the modesty of the situationists' advanced agenda (there is no quality that even approaches modesty to be found in their writings). In invoking the pop lyric of a "new way of walking and a new way of talking" he is trying to persuade us of the situationists' historical continuity with a cultural formation attuned to changes in the popular rhythm of events. But this cultural formation, in the realm of popular music, was simultaneously making its own history under conditions not at all of vanguardist making. Consequently, there is a whole account of the *distinctive* conditions of pop and avant-garde culture that is glossed over in the rhetorical sleight of "that was all it ever was." By that same token, Marcus's secret history of negation could be reduced to the logic of another pop lyric— "the same as it ever was." It is true that Isidore Isou, the high priest of lettrism, did indeed *look* like Elvis Presley—Marcus notes that Isou's "field of action may have been high art . . . physically, instinctively he was a hound dog" (249)— but there are many material explanations as to why he was not and could not have been Elvis Presley. These explanations are part of a not-so-secret history of the twentieth century, which now, largely because of Marcus's book, remains to be written about and fully debated.

5. "The Avant-Garde of Presence," in Ken Knabb, ed., *Situationist International Anthology*, Berkeley, Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981, p. 110.

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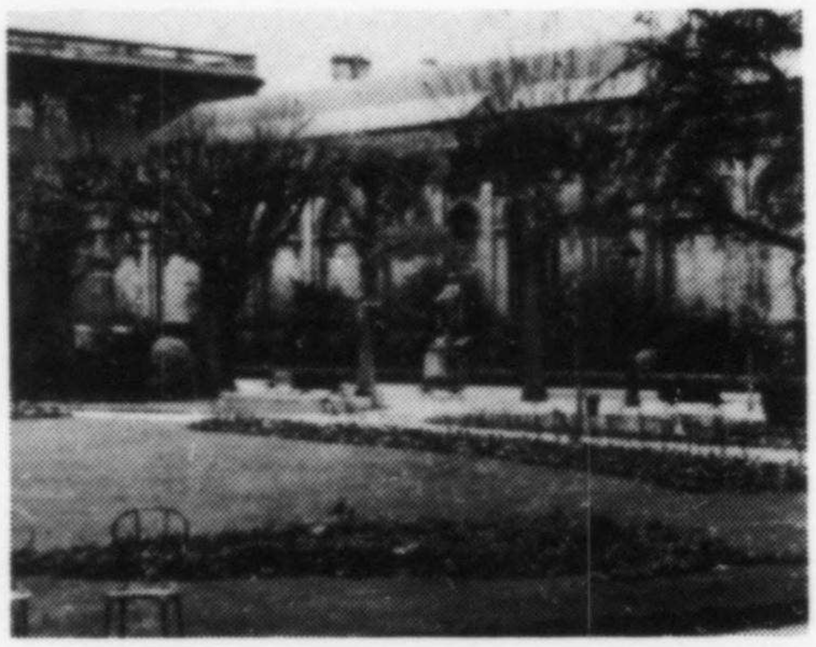
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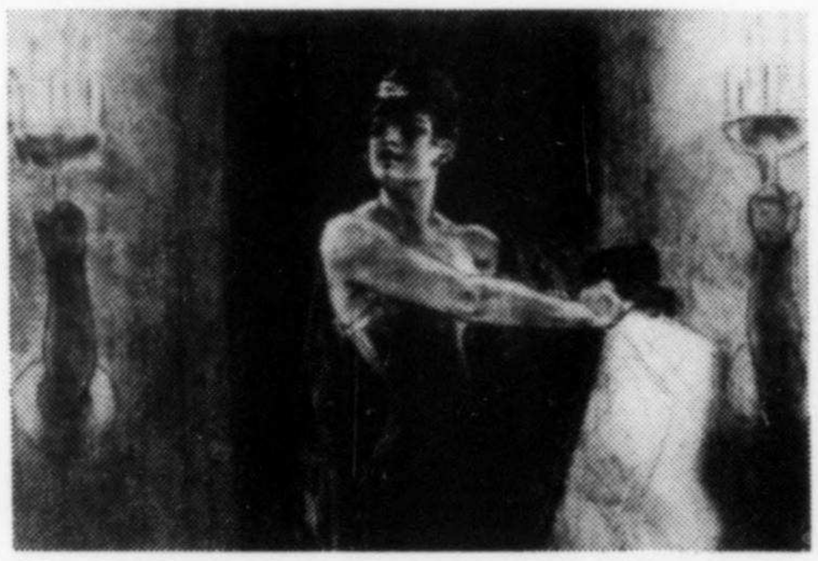
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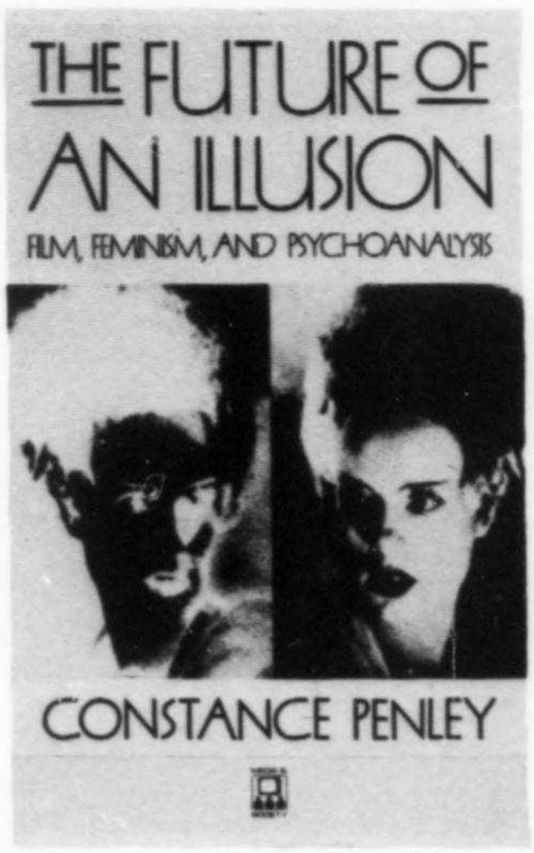
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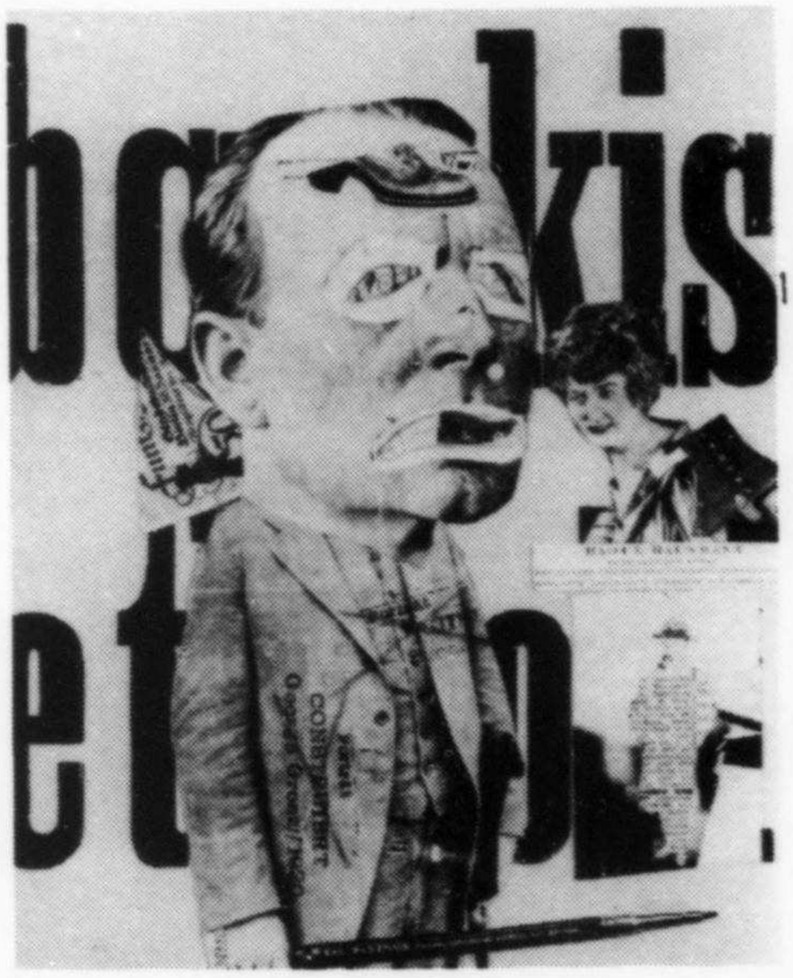
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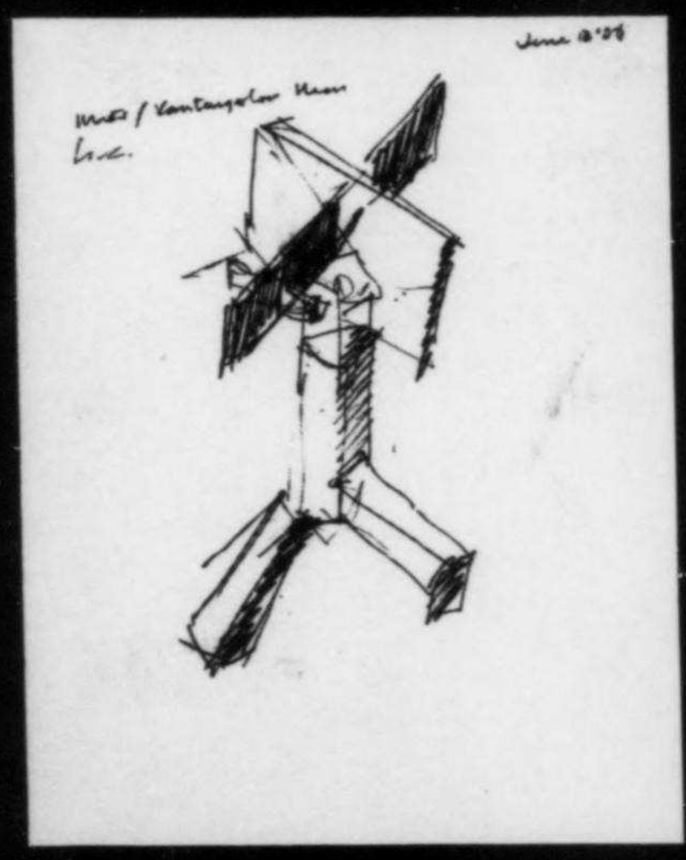
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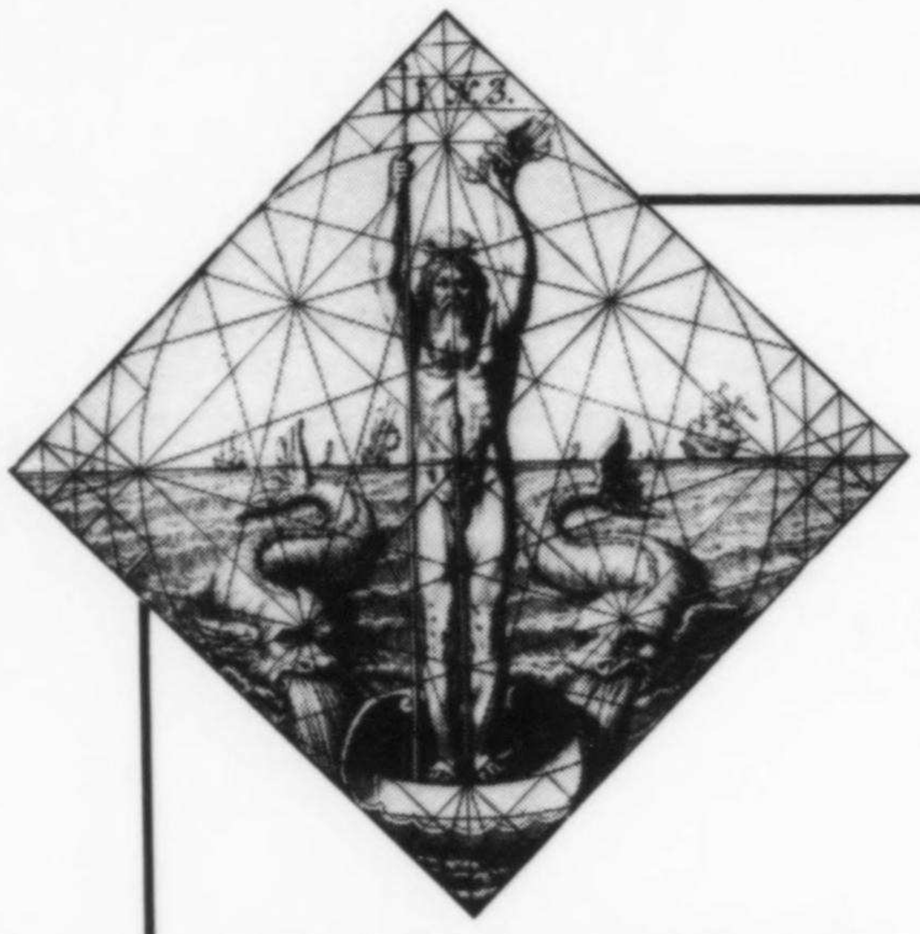
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