Art | *Theory* | *Criticism* | *Politics*

OCTOBER

58

Rendering the Real
A Special Issue

Edited by Parveen Adams

Mladen Dolar	*"I Shall Be with You on Your Wedding-Night": Lacan and the Uncanny*
Joan Copjec	*Vampires, Breast-Feeding, and Anxiety*
Slavoj Žižek	*Grimaces of the Real, or When the Phallus Appears*
Michel Chion	*Quiet Revolution . . . and Rigid Stagnation*
Parveen Adams	*The Art of Analysis: Mary Kelly's* Interim *and the Discourse of the Analyst*
Emily Apter	*Fetishism and Visual Seduction in Mary Kelly's* Interim
Catherine Millot	*The Real Presence*

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PARVEEN ADAMS teaches in the Department of Human Sciences at Brunel University (England). She was cofounder and editor of *m/f* from 1978 to 1986. She has written many articles on psychoanalysis and feminism and edited *Language in Thinking* (Penguin, 1972) and *The Woman in Question* (MIT Press/*October* books, 1990) with Elizabeth Cowie. She is currently working on a book on contemporary masochism, cultural productions, and the psychoanalytic subject.

EMILY APTER teaches in the Department of French and Italian at University of California, Davis. She is the author of *Feminizing the Fetish: Psychoanalysis and Narrative Obsession in Turn-of-the-Century France* (Cornell University Press, 1991).

MICHEL CHION is a composer of electronic music and founder of *Sono-Concept*, which elaborates individual sound projects. He is also a theoretician of film who has explored the sonorous dimension of cinema in a trilogy of books published by Cahiers du cinéma/ Éditions de l'Étoile: *La voix cinéma* (1982), *Le son au cinéma* (1985), and *La toile trouée* (1988).

MLADEN DOLAR is a lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Ljubljana. He has published in both German and Slovenian and is the author of a book on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and of a study of fascist discourse. He is also an editor of *Wo Es War*, a German Lacanian journal.

CATHERINE MILLOT is a practicing psychoanalyst and Maître de Conférence at the University of Paris VIII. Her books include *Freud: Anti-Pedagogue* (Bibliothèque d'Ornicar?, 1977); *Horsexe* (Point Hors Ligne, 1983); *Nobodaddy* (Point Hors Ligne, 1988); and *La vocation de l'écrivain* (Gallimard, 1991).

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK, a philosopher and researcher in the Institute of Sociology at the University of Ljubljana, is currently a Fulbright Fellow at the Center for the Study of Psychoanalysis and Culture, SUNY, Buffalo. He is the author of several books on psychoanalysis, philosophy, and popular culture, including *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (Verso, 1990) and *Looking Awry* (MIT Press/ *October* books, 1991). His most recent book, *They Know Not What They Do*, will be published this fall by Verso.

Introduction

The encounter between art and psychoanalysis has frequently been banal. Naive musings on creativity, reductive speculation about authorial motivation, sentimental redescriptions of aesthetic experience, all these have played too great a part in psychoanalytic studies. What indeed would a psychoanalysis of art be except another way of maintaining the category of art? Critical analysis would do well to sidestep these issues.

Where psychoanalysis can intervene is within contemporary debates about forms of subjectivity, identity, politics, and cultural production. Frequently, these circle around the problem of the "subject." It is often held against psychoanalysis in these debates that its conception of the subject is ahistorical and irrelevant to politics and should yield to a conception of the subject which is adjusted to the historical and cultural conditions of experience. We disagree with the way this problem is formulated and this issue is devoted to the attempt to demonstrate the pertinence of psychoanalytic analysis to the politics of representation. To this end we have concentrated on Lacanian theory and the concept of the real, seeking to show how the concept can elucidate the space and the effects of certain cultural productions. We have attempted both to elaborate this concept and to put it to work.

The form in which the real is rendered, the way that it never ceases *not* to inscribe itself, is the object of analysis of several of these papers. Hence the centrality of the concept of object small *a*. This object is the leftover of the real, what remains of *jouissance* after the entry into language; it is what links the subject to the real. One of the themes developed here is that the relationship does not just describe an abstract psychical relation, but designates a certain historical reality of the object within modernity. This provides a psychoanalytic gloss on the category of modernity as it appears in historical and philosophical discourse. The subject of modernity is defined by the relation between the $, the divided subject of language, and the *a*, the object which is the other side of the subject. This psychoanalytic approach to modernity is the context for some particular analyses in this issue—Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past,* Edvard

Munch's *The Scream,* Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera,* and indeed the eighteenth century's advocacy of breast-feeding—and its relation to the figure of the vampire.

In terms of the politics of identity and representation, this re-poses the question of the "effects" that define the relation between the object and the subject. The "object" that is the object of analysis here cannot be specified externally to the space of the artist/writer or the spectator/reader. All three categories operate simultaneously in a way that subverts the traditional oppositions of work and author, work and reader. But it also subverts the rationalist diktat which forbids fantasies about the production and about the consumption of the work. It enables us to make an analogy between the structure of experience within an exhibition, here Mary Kelley's *Interim,* and that of psychoanalysis. In the very moment of undoing any stable referent of identity, the concept of object *a* yields a novel account of spectatorship. The advantages of this can be seen with respect to the insistent problem of the relation between gender and the politics of representation. Of course, the concept of object *a* is prior to gender, but at the same time it enables the question of female spectatorship to find new bearings. The scene of the art object exceeds the conditions imposed upon it by aesthetics from one side and political meaning from the other.

PARVEEN ADAMS

"I Shall Be with You on Your Wedding-Night": Lacan and the Uncanny

MLADEN DOLAR

The dimension of the uncanny, introduced by Freud in his famous paper, is located at the very core of psychoanalysis.[1] It is the dimension where all the concepts of psychoanalysis come together, where its diverse lines of argument form a knot. The uncanny provides a clue to the basic project of psychoanalysis. And yet Freud appears to be somewhat at a loss about how to make use of this clue. Although he enumerates a number of instances of the uncanny, giving an array of examples embellished with theoretical reflections, he leaves us in the end with only a sketch or a prolegomenon to a theory of the uncanny. Exactly how the different pieces fit together remains unclear.

The Extimate

Freud starts off with a lengthy linguistic discussion of the German term *das Unheimliche*. It was fortunate for Freud that such a paradoxical word existed in the German language, and perhaps it gave him the idea for the paper in the first place. The word is the standard German negation of *heimlich* and is thus supposed to be its opposite. But it turns out that it is actually directly implied by *heimlich*, which means familiar, homely, cozy, intimate, "arousing a sense of agreeable restfulness and security as in one within the four walls of his house"; by extension, what is familiar and securely tucked away is also hidden, concealed from the outside, secret, "kept from sight . . . withheld from others"; and by a further extension, what is hidden and secret is also threatening, fearful, occult, "uncomfortable, uneasy, gloomy, dismal . . . ghastly"—that is, *unheimlich*, uncanny.[2] There is a point where the two meanings directly coincide and become undistinguishable, and the negation does not count—as indeed it does not count

1. Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny' " (1919), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, ed. James Strachey, vol. XVII (London: Hogarth Press, 1955).
2. Ibid., pp. 221, 222, 225.

in the unconscious.[3] The English translation, "the uncanny," largely retains the essential ambiguity of the German term, but French doesn't possess an equivalent, *l'inquiétante étrangeté* being the standard translation. So Lacan had to invent one, *extimité*.

This term aims directly at the essential dimension of psychoanalysis. Putting this simply, one could say that traditional thought consisted of the constant effort to draw a clear line between the interior and the exterior. All the great philosophical conceptual pairs—essence/appearance, mind/body, subject/object, spirit/matter, etc.—can be seen as just so many transcriptions of the division between interiority and exteriority. Now the dimension of *extimité* blurs this line. It points neither to the interior nor to the exterior, but is located there where the most intimate interiority coincides with the exterior and becomes threatening, provoking horror and anxiety. The extimate is simultaneously the intimate kernel and the foreign body; in a word, it is *unheimlich*. Freud writes, "the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar."[4] And it is this very dimension beyond the division into "psychic" and "real" that deserves to be called the real in the Lacanian sense.

Freud then proceeds in an "inductive" way, somewhat haphazardly enumerating different instances of this strange dimension—the paradoxical realm between the living and the dead (what Lacan will later call the area "between two deaths"); the anxiety provoked by the double, the point where narcissism becomes unbearable; "the evil eye" and the dimension of the gaze; the series of coincidences that suddenly bear a fateful meaning (where the real, so to speak, begins to speak); cut off limbs; etc. It is obvious that the different cases have a simple Lacanian common denominator which is the irruption of the real into "homely," commonly accepted reality. We can speak of the emergence of something that shatters well-known divisions and which cannot be situated within them. (This holds not only for the classical divisions subject/object, interior/exterior, etc., but also for the "early" Lacanian division symbolic/imaginary.) The status both of the subject and of "objective reality" is thus put into question.

In dealing with the different instances, Freud is gradually forced to use the entire panoply of psychoanalytic concepts: castration complex, Oedipus, (primary) narcissism, compulsion to repeat, death drive, repression, anxiety, psychosis, etc. They all seem to converge on "the uncanny." One could simply say that it is the pivotal point around which psychoanalytic concepts revolve, the point that Lacan calls object small *a* and which he himself considered his most important contribution to psychoanalysis.

3. "The way in which dreams treat the category of contraries and contradictories is highly remarkable. It is simply disregarded. 'No' seems not to exist so far as dreams are concerned. They show a particular preference for combining contraries into a unity or for representing them as one and the same thing." *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), in *The Standard Edition*, vol. IV, p. 318.
4. Freud, "The 'Uncanny,' " p. 220.

It seems that Freud speaks about a "universal" of human experience when he speaks of the uncanny, yet his own examples tacitly point to its location in a specific historical conjuncture, to the particular historical rupture brought about by the Enlightenment. There is *a specific dimension of the uncanny that emerges with modernity.* What I am interested in is not the uncanny as such, but the uncanny that is closely linked with the advent of modernity and which constantly haunts it from the inside. To put it simply, in premodern societies the dimension of the uncanny was largely covered (and veiled) by the area of the sacred and untouchable. It was assigned to a religiously and socially sanctioned place in the symbolic from which the structure of power, sovereignty, and a hierarchy of values emanated. With the triumph of the Enlightenment, this privileged and excluded place (the exclusion that founded society) was no more. That is to say that the uncanny became unplaceable; it became uncanny in the strict sense. Popular culture, always extremely sensitive to the historical shifts, took successful hold of it—witness the immense popularity of Gothic fiction and its romantic aftermath.[5] It has often been pointed out that the Gothic novel was being written at the same time as the French Revolution. There was an irruption of the uncanny strictly parallel with bourgeois (and industrial) revolutions and the rise of scientific rationality—and, one might add, with the Kantian establishment of transcendental subjectivity, of which the uncanny presents the surprising counterpart.[6] Ghosts, vampires, monsters, the undead dead, etc., flourish in an era when you might expect them to be dead and buried, without a place. They are something brought about by modernity itself.

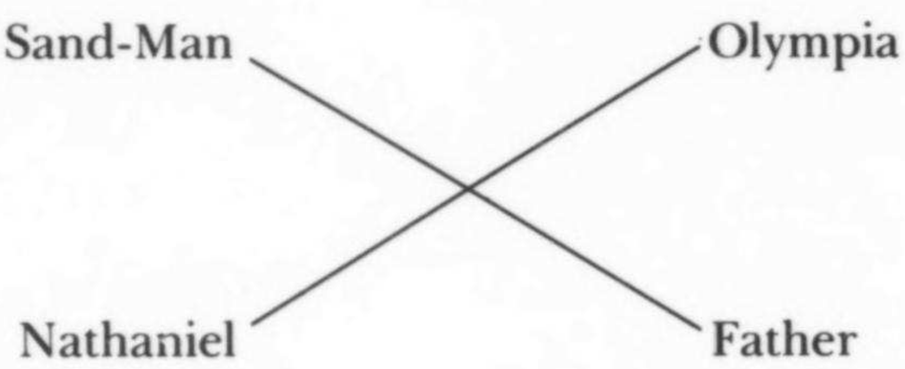
Freud, in his paper, gives a somewhat misleading impression when he says that the uncanny is the return of something long surmounted, discarded, and superseded in the past. Just as Lacan has argued that the subject of psychoanalysis is the subject of modernity based in the Cartesian cogito and unthinkable without the Kantian turn, so one has to extend the argument to the realm of the object, the object *a.* It, too, is most intimately linked with and produced by the rise of modernity. What seems to be a leftover is actually a product of modernity, its counterpart.

The Quadruple

Let us see how the Lacanian "simplification"—the introduction of a common pivotal point—affects Freud's formulations on the uncanny. Freud takes as the paradigmatic case the well-known short story "The Sand-Man" by E. T. A. Hoffmann, an example suggested by Jentsch and which serves Freud's

5. See James Donald's excellent account, "The Fantastic, the Sublime and the Popular; or What's at Stake in Vampire Films?" in *Fantasy and the Cinema,* ed. James Donald (London: British Film Institute, 1989).
6. See Slavoj Žižek's article in this issue.

purpose very well. Freud's account of the story hinges upon two relations: the one between the student Nathaniel, the hero of the story, and Olympia, the young girl of angelic beauty who turns out to be a doll, an automaton; the other between the Sand-Man figure, in his various guises as the lawyer Coppelius, the optician Coppola, and the Father (later partly substituted by Professor Spalanzani).[7] One is tempted to place the four characters on the two intersecting diagonals of the sort of L-scheme proposed by Lacan:



Of course this diagram doesn't correspond at all to Lacan's original intention and illustrates a different point. The L-scheme was introduced in order to situate the imaginary ego produced by the mirror phase in relation to the symbolic, to the Other of the symbolic order, and to a subject that is not an ego. So the entire tension of Lacan's diagram, the drama it represents, is between the imaginary and the symbolic diagonals. In our case, both the "imaginary" line (Nathaniel-Olympia) and the "symbolic" one are haunted by the intrusion of the real, the dimension that was not yet elaborated in early Lacan and had no assigned place in the L-scheme, or which was present there only in an implicit way. With its introduction, both diagonals become troubled and presage a disaster.

Nathaniel falls madly in love with this beautiful girl who seems remarkably silent and reticent. It is true that she dances and she sings (as one can hear in Offenbach's *Hoffmann's Tales*), but in a very mechanical way, keeping her beat too accurately. Her vocabulary is rather limited; she only exclaims "Oh! oh!" from time to time and says "Good night, love!" at the end of long conversations in which he is the only speaker. Her eyes gaze into emptiness for hours on end. Nathaniel never tires of watching her through his spy glass, and this is sufficient for bringing about the folly of love: "She says but a few words, that is true,"

7. Hélène Cixous points out in "La Fiction et ses Fantômes: Une lecture de l'Unheimliche de Freud," *Poétique* (1972), vol. 10, pp. 199–216, that Freud makes some arbitrary cuts in Hoffmann's story and doesn't take into account the subtlety of his narrative strategy. Although this is true to some extent, one could show that those elements do not contradict Freud's reading. It seems that Cixous tries to prove too much; for the very act of interpreting operates by arbitrary cuts and the alleged wealth of the object interpreted is a retroactive effect of the very interpretation that seemed to reduce it. Here, rather than claiming any fidelity to an original textual wealth, I proceed by taking up only one essential point that interests me.

remarks Nathaniel, "but these few words appear as genuine hieroglyphs of an inner world full of love and a higher knowledge of the spiritual life in contemplation of the eternal Beyond." "Oh you glorious, profound nature, only you, you alone understand me completely!"[8] A blank screen, empty eyes, and an "Oh!": it is enough to drive anybody crazy with love. There is a strange reversal in this situation: the problem is not simply that Olympia turns out to be an automaton (contrived by the Sand-Man figure Coppola, who contributed the eyes, and Spalanzani, who took care of the mechanism) and is thus in the uncanny area between the living and the dead; it is that Nathaniel strangely reacts in a mechanical way. His love for an automaton is itself automatic; his fiery feelings are mechanically produced ("his senseless obsessive [*zwanghafte*, compulsory] love for Olympia," says Freud).[9] It takes so little to set up that blank screen from which he only receives his own message. The question arises as to who is the real automaton in the situation, for the appearance of the automaton calls for an automatic response, it entails an automatic subjectivation.

Hoffmann's ironical twist, the social parody implied in the episode, highlights the role socially assigned to the woman: it is enough to be there, at the appropriate place, at the most to utter an "Oh!" at the appropriate time, to produce that specter of The Woman, that figure of the Other. The mechanical doll only highlights the mechanical character of "intersubjective" relations. It is the character exploited by the position of the analyst: the analyst, too, utters at the most an "Oh!" here and there (and perhaps a "Good night, love!"); he makes himself an automaton in order to give rise to the dimension of the Other, the real interlocutor of the patient's "monologue," and also in order to produce that strange kind of love, perhaps love in its strictest and purest sense, which is transference love. Nathaniel's lengthy conversations with Olympia prefigure the analytic session.

But Olympia is both the Other to whom Nathaniel addresses his love and his amatory discourse (like the Lady of courtly love) and his narcissistic supplement (love can after all be seen as the attempt to make the Other the same, to reconcile it with narcissism). Like him, she is in the position of a child toward the father figures: "Her fathers, Spalanzani and Coppola, are . . . nothing but new editions, reincarnations of Nathaniel's pair of fathers."[10] She is his sister-image, the realization of his essential ambivalence in relation to the father figure—the attempt to identify with the father on one hand, and to make oneself an object for him, to offer oneself as the object of his love on the other (what Freud calls the "feminine attitude"): "Olympia is, as it were, a dissociated complex of Nathaniel's which confronts him as a person."[11] She is his "better

8. E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Tales of Hoffmann* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), pp. 117 and 118.
9. Freud, "The 'Uncanny,' " p. 232.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.

half," the missing half that could make him whole, but which turns out to be the materialized, emancipated death drive. She presents the point where the narcissistic complement turns lethal, where the imaginary stumbles on the real.

Olympia's position is conditioned by the tension of the second diagonal that connects the two father figures, the father and the Sand-Man. The threat of a loss of sight, the menace to one's eyes, which is the red thread of the story and for Freud the main source of its uncanny character, is immediately connected with the castration complex, the threat of the loss of what is most valuable. Hoffmann's story treats this complex in the simplest and most classical way, with the duplication of father figures. The father is split into the good father, the protector and the bearer of the universal Law, and the bad father, the castrater, the menacing and jealous figure that evokes the father of the primal horde, the father linked with terrible *jouissance*. The good father protects Nathaniel's eyes; the bad one threatens with blinding. The good father is killed by the bad one, who takes the blame for it, thus resolving in a simple way the essential ambivalence toward the father, the subject's love for him and his death-wish against him. But the tension between the two fathers is irresolvable: behind the father who is the bearer of the Law, and as such reduced to the "Name-of-the-Father" (i.e., the dead father), there is the horrible castrating figure that Lacan has called the "father-*jouissance*," the father who wouldn't die and who comes to haunt the Law (and actually endows it with its effectiveness). The Sand-Man is the bearer of this terrible and lethal *jouissance*.

For Freud, the uncanny effect depends on castration, which also links together the two diagonals and centers them on the relation to the object. The Sand-Man as the castrating figure and the figure of *jouissance* "always appears as the disturber of love [*Störer der Liebe*]." He is the intruder who always emerges at the moment when the subject comes close to fulfilling a "sexual relation," to find his imaginary supplement and become a "whole."[12] It is because of the appearance of the father-*jouissance* on the symbolic diagonal that the completion fails on the imaginary one. One could say that in this first approach, the uncanny is precisely what bars the sexual relation; it is the dimension that prevents us from finding our Platonian missing halves and hence imaginary completion; it is the dimension that blocks the fulfillment of our subjectivity. The objectal dimension at one and the same time opens the threat of castration and comes to fill the gap of castration. The uncanny emerges as a reality, but one which has its only substance in a positivization of negativity, a negative existence, castration. The positive presence of the objectal dimension is the "positive expression" of what Lacan, in one of his most famous dictums, has called the absence of sexual relation ("*Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*").

12. "He separates Nathaniel from his betrothed and from her brother, his best friend; he destroys the second object of his love, Olympia, the lovely doll; and he drives him into suicide at the moment when he has won back his Clara and is about to be happily united to her" (Ibid., p. 231).

The Double

The dimension of the double, another source of the uncanny, simplifies the quadruple scheme of the Sand-Man into a dual relation where the tension appears between the subject and his double. Freud dwells on the omnipresence, the obsession with the theme of the double in Hoffmann's work, and mentions the then-recent example of Stellan Rye's film *Der Student von Prag*. The exhaustive studies by Otto Rank and more recently by Karl Miller have shown the very extensive use of this motive in literature (and elsewhere), particularly its incredible proliferation in the romantic era.[13] The authors range (apart from Hoffmann) from Chamisso (Peter Schlemihl), the Gothic novel, Andersen, Lenau, Goethe, Jean Paul, Hogg, Heine, Musset, Maupassant, Wilde, etc., to Poe (William Wilson) and Dostoyevsky (Golyadkin).

There are some simple structural features of these stories that can themselves have a number of complex ramifications with different outcomes. The subject is confronted with his double, the very image of himself (that can go along with the disappearance, or trading off, of his mirror image or his shadow), and this crumbling of the subject's accustomed reality, this shattering of the bases of his world, produces a terrible anxiety.[14] Usually only the subject can see his own double, who takes care to appear only in private, or for the subject alone. The double produces two seemingly contradictory effects: he arranges things so that they turn out badly for the subject, he turns up at the most inappropriate moments, he dooms him to failure; and he realizes the subject's hidden or repressed desires so that he does things he would never dare to do or that his conscience wouldn't let him do. In the end, the relation gets so unbearable that the subject, in a final showdown, kills his double, unaware that his only substance and his very being were concentrated in his double. So in killing him he kills himself. "You have conquered, and I yield," says Wilson's double in Poe's story. "Yet henceforward art thou also dead—dead to the World, to Heaven, and to Hope! In me didst thou exist—and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself."[15] As a rule, all these stories finish badly: the moment one encounters one's double, one is headed for disaster; there seems to be no way out. (In clinical cases of autoscopia—meeting or seeing one's double—the prognosis is also rather bad and the outcome is likely to be tragic.)[16]

Otto Rank gives an extensive account of the theme of the double in different mythologies and superstitions.[17] For all of them the shadow and the

13. Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study* (London: Karnac-Maresfield Library, 1989) and Karl Miller, *Doubles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).
14. The heroes of these stories are always male. As will appear later, the double is also a device to avoid a relationship to femininity and sexualilty in general.
15. Edgar Allen Poe, *Selected Writings*, ed. David Galloway (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979).
16. See Eric Blumel, "L'hallucination du double," *Analytica* 22 (1980), pp. 35–53.
17. Rank, *The Double*.

mirror image are the obvious analogues of the body, its immaterial doubles, and thus the best means to represent the soul. The shadow and the mirror image survive the body due to their immateriality—so it is that reflections constitute our essential selves.[18] The image is more fundamental than its owner: it institutes his substance, his essential being, his "soul"; it is his most valuable part; it makes him a human being.[19] It is his immortal part, his protection against death.

In a way, psychoanalysis would agree. After all, this is what Lacan's theory of the mirror-phase aims at: it is only by virtue of one's mirror reflection that one can become endowed with an ego, establish oneself as an "I." My "ego-identity" comes from my double. But the trouble with the double springs from the fact that he seems to stand for all three instances of Freud's "second topic": he constitutes the essential part of the ego; he carries out the repressed desires springing from the Id; and he also, with a malevolence typical of the superego, prevents the subject from carrying out his desires—all at one and the same time. So how do the three instances fit together?

There is a moment in the legend of Narcissus when the blind seer Tiresias makes a prophecy to the beautiful boy's mother: "Narcissus will live to a ripe old age, provided that he never knows himself."[20] The prophecy seems directly to contradict the old philosophical dictum "Know thyself!" Instead, for Tiresias, an essential ignorance appears as the condition of a long and happy life. In fact, Narcissus *will* come to know himself, *will* prefer the philosophical maxim to the prophet's offer, and that knowledge will be fateful for him. The legend foretells of the loss that is always already implied by the minimal narcissistic mechanism presented by the mirror phase.

To put it simply: when I recognize myself in the mirror it is already too late. There is a split: I cannot recognize myself and at the same time be one with myself. With the recognition I have already lost what one could call "self-being," the immediate coincidence with myself in my being and *jouissance*. The rejoicing in the mirror image, the pleasure and the self-indulgence, has already been paid for. The mirror double immediately introduces the dimension of castration—the doubling itself already, even in its minimal form, implies castration: "This invention of doubling as a preservation against extinction has its counterpart in the language of dreams, which is fond of representing castration

18. There is also the traditional "animistic" belief that what befalls the image will befall its owner—for example, the superstition which is still alive concerning cracked mirrors. See Heine, as quoted in Rank: "There is nothing more uncanny than seeing one's face accidentally in a mirror by moonlight" (p. 43). This explains why ghosts, vampires, etc., don't cast shadows and don't have mirror reflections: they are themselves already shadows and reflections.

19. That is why trading one's image in a kind of "pact with the Devil" or with some occult substitute always ends badly: the Devil knows the importance of the image, and the subject overlooks it.

20. Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 2 vols. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960).

by a doubling or a multiplication of a genital symbol."[21] The multiplicity of snakes on Medusa's head, to take another example from Freud, is there to dissimulate the lack; the One, the Unique is missing. So the doubling, in the simplest way, entails the loss of that uniqueness that one could enjoy in one's self-being, but only at the price of being neither an ego nor a subject. The doubling cuts one off from a part, the most valuable part, of one's being, the immediate self-being of *jouissance.* This is what Lacan will later add to his early theory of the mirror phase: the object *a* is precisely that part of the loss that one cannot see in the mirror, the part of the subject that has no mirror reflection, the nonspecular. The mirror in the most elementary way already implies the split between the imaginary and the real: one can only have access to imaginary reality, to the world one can recognize oneself in and familiarize oneself with, on the condition of the loss, the "falling out," of the object *a.* It is this loss of the object *a* that opens "objective" reality, the possibility of subject-object relations, but since its loss is the condition of any knowledge of "objective" reality, it cannot itself become an object of knowledge.

We can now see the trouble with the double: the double is that mirror image in which the object *a* is included. So the imaginary starts to coincide with the real, provoking a shattering anxiety. The double is the same as me plus the object *a,* that invisible part of being added to my image. In order for the mirror image to contain the object *a,* a wink or a nod is enough. Lacan uses the gaze as the best presentation of that missing object; in the mirror, one can see one's eyes, but not the gaze which is the part that is lost. But imagine that one could see one's mirror image close its eyes: that would make the object as gaze appear in the mirror. This is what happens with the double, and the anxiety that the double produces is the surest sign of the appearance of the object. (It can also be brought about in the opposite way, by the disappearance of one's mirror image, technically dubbed "the negative autoscopia," an example of which is to be found in Maupassant's *Le Horla.*) Here the Lacanian account of anxiety differs sharply from other theories: it is not produced by a lack or a loss or an incertitude; it is not the anxiety of losing something (the firm support, one's bearings, etc.). On the contrary, it is the anxiety of gaining something too much, of a too-close presence of the object. What one loses with anxiety is precisely the loss—the loss that made it possible to deal with a coherent reality. "Anxiety is the lack of the support of the lack," says Lacan; the lack lacks, and this brings about the uncanny.[22]

The inclusion of the object also entails the emergence of that lost part of *jouissance.* The double is always the figure of *jouissance:* on one hand, he is somebody who enjoys at the subject's expense; he commits acts that one wouldn't

21. Ibid., pp. 356–57.
22. See Blumel, "L'hallucination," p. 49.

dare to commit, he indulges in one's repressed desires and makes sure that the blame falls on the subject. On the other hand, though, he is not simply someone who enjoys, but essentially a figure that commands *jouissance*. The double is a "disturber of love": he typically springs up at the moment when one is about to touch, or to kiss, the girl of one's dreams; he springs up when the subject comes close to the realization of his wishes, when he is on the brink of attaining full enjoyment, the completion of the sexual relation. But while the double appears to be the one who spoils and obstructs, what is significant is the choice of the object. It is myself who prefers the double, the one who retains the object and who can provide *jouissance* and being, to the beautiful girl who can give me pleasure. Only the alter ego can offer the true *jouissance* that I am not willing to give up in favor of pleasure. The magnificent young girl is rather the obstacle to my privileged relation to myself; she is the real spoiler in this game, the spoiler of narcissism, so one has to get rid of her (and the double takes care of this) in order to join my real partner, my double. He retains that lost primordial object for which no woman can be a substitute. But of course joining one's *jouissance*, regaining one's primordial being, is lethal. The subject can only attain it by his death.

The appearance of the object in reality doesn't make it an object of possible "objective" knowledge. As a rule, it appears only to the subject; the others don't see it and therefore don't understand the subject's peculiar behavior. It cannot become a part of accepted intersubjective space. It is the privileged private object accessible only to the subject, his incorporated self-being.

The double, retaining the object, also immediately introduces the death drive. The original function of the double (as the shadow and the mirror image) was "an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an 'energetic denial of the power of death' . . . and probably the 'immortal soul' was the first 'double' of the body."[23] Yet what was designed as a defense against death, as a protection of narcissism—one's mortality is that *ananke* which most immediately contradicts and limits the narcissistic wholeness—turns into its harbinger: when the double appears, the time is up. One could say that the double inaugurates the dimension of the real precisely as the protection against "real" death. It introduces the death drive, that is, the drive in its fundamental sense, as a defense against biological death. The double is the initial repetition, the first repetition of the same, but also that which keeps repeating itself, emerging in the same place (one of the Lacanian definitions of the real), springing up at the most awkward times, both as an irruption of the unexpected and with clockwork precision, totally unpredictable and predictable in one.

But the intrusion of the real in stories about the double is drastic and dramatic, and is not part of everyday experience. It can spring up for a

23. Graves, *The Greek Myths,* p. 356.

moment—as in that highly unpleasant experience of Freud's when he met his mirror double in the very cozy and homely setting of a *wagon-lit* compartment while alone in his dressing gown and traveling cap.[24] The world was out of joint, for that instant, with the apparition of the intruder, an elderly gentleman dressed just like him, until he recognized his own mirror reflection. But "normally" the lack implied in narcissism is the pivotal point between the mirror phase and the Oedipus—that which can give it a "normal" outcome. What happens with the Oedipus, which is the entry into the symbolic, is the shift in which the loss entailed by the mirror reflection is inscribed into the register of the Name-of-the-Father. The father's Law is what now denies the subject his self-being, the immediacy of his *jouissance,* as well as the access to that primordial object of completion which is the mother. The father takes responsibility for the loss, which makes him an ambiguous figure, subject to a lack and split into a "good" and a "bad" father, producing the object that cannot fit into the paternal law. The Law offers words instead of things (instead of the Thing); it guarantees the objective world instead of the object. This is the only way it is possible for the subject to deal with the loss, although this operation necessarily produces a remainder which will come to haunt reality as it is instituted. The immediate appeal of the theme of the double lies in the fact that it points to that remainder. In fact, we are never rid of the predicament of the mirror reflection.

The theme of animism is closely connected to narcissism; it is its prolongation. The reality that is opposed to narcissistic sufficiency is conceived as subject to the same "psychological" laws as interiority—it is animated, inhabited by spirits, etc. One gives up part of one's omnipotence to those spirits, but since they are of the same nature as the ego, one can influence them, seduce them, trade with them. The underlying assumption is the omnipotence of thought; "the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced . . . a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes."[25] There is the class of phenomena where a series of coincidences and contingent events suddenly starts to signify and take on a fateful meaning, or conversely, a chance event seems to realize one's thought, thus confirming the belief in its omnipotence. "I know that thoughts can't kill, but nevertheless . . . I believe they do." Here too, the source of the uncanny is the reappearance of a part that was necessarily lost with the emergence of the subject—the intersection between the "psychic" and the "real," the interior and the exterior, the "word" and the "object," the symbol and the symbolized—the point where the real immediately coincides with the symbolic to be put into the service of the imaginary. So what is uncanny is again the recuperation of the loss: the lost part destroys reality instead of completing it.

24. Ibid., p. 371.
25. Ibid., p. 367.

The Unique

So far I have considered the uncanny on a rather general level, following Freud's examples, which are, although he never explicitly mentions it, historically situated. Hoffmann, the sudden emergence of the doubles in the romantic era, the extraordinary obsession with ghosts, vampires, undead dead, monsters, etc., in Gothic fiction and all through the nineteenth century, the realm of the fantastic—they all point to the emergence of the uncanny at a very precise historical moment. It is Frankenstein, however, that is perhaps the best example of this.

I started with a quadruple scheme in Hoffmann's tale, which was then reduced to a dual relationship with the double. Now we can undertake a further simplification or condensation of the problem by reducing it to a single element best presented by the theme of the monster.

It appears at first sight that Frankenstein is the direct opposite of the theme of the double: the creature created by Frankenstein is a monster without a name, and his basic problem in the novel is precisely that he cannot find his double.[26] It is a creature without filiation or a genealogy, without anybody who would recognize or accept him (not even his creator). His narcissism is thus thwarted from the outset, and the main part of the plot actually springs from his demand for a partner, somebody like him, a wife, so that he could start a line, a new filiation. He is One and Unique, and as such he cannot even have a name—*he cannot be represented by a signifier* (which absence is often "spontaneously" filled in by his "father's" name), he cannot be a part of the symbolic. The story itself had the strange fate of becoming a "modern myth," a very rare occurrence indeed. The huge number of different versions in which the original is virtually lost testifies to this fact. All these versions turn around the same fantasmatic kernel, retranscribing it to infinity. It is a myth in the Lévi-Straussian sense of the word: the myth as "a logical model to resolve a contradiction (an insoluble task if the contradiction is real)"[27]—ultimately the contradiction between nature and culture.

The myth has its starting point in scientific discourse. Shelley's "Introduction" takes up Erasmus Darwin as the witness, along with the background of research into electromagnetic occurrences, galvanism, etc. The possibility of creating a human being seems to be just a small extension of the seemingly limitless possibilities of the new science. But the connection with the Enlightenment goes much further.

26. I am greatly indebted to two recent analyses: Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) and Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Frankenstein: Mythe et Philosophie* (Paris: P.U.F., 1988). But I concentrate on only one line of argument, neglecting other possibilities offered by the material.

27. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology,* trans. Monique Layton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

The subtitle, "The Modern Prometheus," was probably directly borrowed from La Mettrie's *L'Homme-Machine*.[28] La Mettrie praises the craft of Vaucanson, the famous French constructor of automatons (a highly successful flute player, to say nothing of the digesting duck). It seems that he was not far from being able to produce a speaking being—"the machine which should not be considered as impossible any more, especially in the hands of a new Prometheus"[29]—with which La Mettrie only gives voice to a fantasy that was then very much alive: if Descartes could think of animals as machines, somewhat more complicated than human products, if he could see the human body as essentially a mechanism, a machine like a watch, it was only to highlight the difference between the *res extensa* and the spirit. The Galilean revolution in physics opened the perspective of the cosmos as a mechanism (hence the ubiquitous presence of billiard balls and clockwork in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) and put in question the autonomy of the spiritual. A hundred years later La Mettrie's point was precisely to do away with that difference, to see the automaton not only in the body, but also in the spirit. It was the age of fascination with automata, still at work in Hoffmann, Poe, etc. What was at stake was the link between matter and spirit, nature and culture. The notion of the subject of the Enlightenment was all along an attempt to provide this link. This is what joins together its different facets: Locke's *tabula rasa, le bon sauvage, l'homme-nature,* Condillac's statue gradually acceding to the senses, the blind man—a major figure of the Enlightenment (cf. Molyneux's famous problem for which all the philosophers of the time proposed a solution, Diderot's *Letter on the Blind,* etc.; one could go so far as to say that the subject of the Enlightenment was blind), then Rousseau's Emile (who was an orphan), etc. What they all have in common is the quest for a "zero degree" of subjectivity, the missing link between nature and culture, the point where the spiritual would directly spring from the material. They all seem to aim at a subject beyond the imaginary, singularly deprived of a mirror phase, a nonimaginary subject from which the imaginary support in the world has to be taken away (this is particularly clear with the blind) in order to reconstruct it, in its true significance, from this "zero" point.

Frankenstein's creature demonstrates this in a particularly poignant way: it is the realization of the subject of the Enlightenment, the missing link produced by its scientific project. He is created, so to speak, *ex nihilo,* and he has to recreate the whole complexity of the spiritual world *ex nihilo.* And we have, in the most extraordinary central part of the book, a first-hand account of his

28. La Mettrie, *L'Homme-Machine* (Paris: Denoël Gonthier, 1981).

29. Ibid., p. 143. It seems that the parallel was first established by Voltaire in 1738, some ten years before La Mettrie:

> Le hardi Vaucanson, rival de Promethée
> Semblait, de la nature imitant les ressorts,
> Prendre le feu des cieux pour aimer les corps.

subjectivation, a first-person narration of the passage from nature into culture. He is the zero point of natural subjectivity, and herein lies his paradox: as the embodiment of the natural zero state, he is counter to nature, a monster, excluded from nature and culture alike. Through his tragedy, culture only gets back its own message: his monstrosity is the monstrosity of culture. The noble savage, the self-educated man, turns bad only because the culture turns him down. By not accepting him society shows its corruption, its inability to integrate him, to include its own missing link. Culture judges by nature (that is, by his looks), not by culture (that is, by his good heart and sensitivity). The creature as the Unique only wants a social contract, but being refused one he wants to destroy the contract that excludes him and so to vindicate himself. Since he cannot found a family—a minimal contract with his like—he exterminates the family of his creator, who wouldn't recognize his offspring, his only link with culture. In the end all the figures of the novel are dead (except for Walton, who lives to tell the story).

The paradox of the creature lies in the fact that this embodiment of the subject of the Enlightenment directly disrupts its universe and produces its limit. The creature, that small extension of scientific endeavor, would fill the missing link and make it exist; it would bridge the gap. With its addition, "the great chain of being" would be complete; one could pass without a break from matter to spirit, from nature to culture. There was an empty space between the two that the monster comes to fill, but what we get with this continuous, full universe is the opposite of the traditional *horror vacui*; it is a *horror plenitudinis*, the horror of an unsplit world. Frankenstein brings to humanity, like Prometheus, the spark of life, but also much more: there is a promise to provide it with its origin, to heal the wound of castration, to make it whole again. But filling the lack is catastrophic—the Enlightenment reaches its limit by realizing it, just as the appearance of the double, in another context, produced the lack of lack.

The emergence of this limit of the Enlightenment is then open to a variety of interpretations. The religious one is closest to hand: Frankenstein, who interferes with God's business, has to be punished for his presumption and his rebellion against the divine order, the presumption and the rebellion of the Enlightenment itself, which has gone too far. But there is an opposite, romantic interpretation, a positive view of the monster, which not only exhibits a compassion for the inherent goodness of his nature betrayed by society, but also admires the sublimity of his horrible outlook—he appears against a background of spectacular natural scenery (Mont Blanc, the Arctics), along with its unfathomable wildness, being thus the embodiment of this other nature. Not the one written in mathematical language and that functions like clockwork, a mechanism, but the one that was lost with this mechanical scientific view of nature, the one that became the lost object of scientific endeavor and that can only be present as that effort to represent the unrepresentable, the Kantian definition

of the sublime. One can also see a political dimension in it: the story takes place at the time of the French Revolution, which was already labeled as "monstrous" by Burke (another theorist of the sublime) and which produced, in a whole generation of young English intellectuals and poets, a mixture of enthusiasm and horror. Mary Shelley was best placed to draw the consequences of this situation: both her parents, Mary Wollstonecraft as the "founder" of feminism and William Godwin as the "founder" of anarchism, placed themselves in a radical line of revolutionary demands—"Englishmen, one more effort"—to realize the revolutionary thrust, the effort paradoxically accomplished by their daughter. One could see in it the birth of the proletariat and the horror that provokes—and conservative discourse very soon took hold of the monster as a metaphor of workers' upheavals and demands, a personification of the mass, "the rule of the mob."[30]

It is not that these interpretations are not correct; they are all plausible, and evidence can be found to support them. The point where the monster emerges is always immediately seized by an overwhelming amount of meaning —and that is valid for the whole subsequent gallery of monsters, vampires, aliens, etc. It has immediate social and ideological connotations. The monster can stand for everything that our culture has to repress—the proletariat, sexuality, other cultures, alternative ways of living, heterogeneity, the Other.[31] There is a certain arbitrariness in the content that can be projected onto this point, and there are many attempts to reduce the uncanny to just this content. The important thing from a Lacanian point of view, however, is that while this content is indeed always present in the uncanny to a greater or a lesser degree, it doesn't constitute it. The uncanny is always at stake in ideology—ideology perhaps basically consists of a social attempt to integrate the uncanny, to make it bearable, to assign it a place, and the criticism of ideology is caught in the same framework if it tries to reduce it to another kind of content or to make the content conscious and explicit. This criticism is always on the brink of a naive effort to fix things with their proper names, to make the unconscious conscious, to restore the sense of what is repressed and thus be rid of the uncanny. The constant resurgence of "right-wing" ideologies that find support in the uncanny always comes as a surprise—the fascination won't vanish, the historicization fails, the "hidden contents" do not exhaust it. Thus the criticism of ideology helplessly repeats the modernist gesture—the reduction of the uncanny to its "secular basis" through the very logic that actually produced the uncanny in the first place as the objectal remainder. Psychoanalysis doesn't provide a new and better interpretation of the uncanny; it maintains it as *a limit to interpretation.* Its interpretation tries to circumscribe the point where inter-

30. See Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders* (London: Verso, 1983).
31. Ibid., p. 236.

pretation fails, where no "more faithful" translation can be made. It tries to pinpoint the dimension of the object in that tiny crack before different meanings get hold of it and saturate it with sense, the point that can never be successfully recuperated by the signifying chain. In other words, psychoanalysis differs from other interpretations by its insistence on the formal level of the uncanny rather than on its content.

Lacan's specification that the best presentification of the object is the gaze doesn't contradict this formal level of analysis. It seems that it names the object and thus assigns it a place, but the gaze in its formal structure is rather a device to open a "non-place," the pure oscillation between an emptiness and a fullness. Frankenstein's story again reveals this simply and efficiently. The principal source of the uncanniness of the monster, for Frankenstein, is precisely the gaze. It is the being of the gaze. The point that Frankenstein cannot endure, during the creation of the monster, is the moment when the creature opens its eyes, when the Thing renders the gaze—it is this opening that makes it the Thing. When seeing those "watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same color as the dun-white sockets in which they were set," Frankenstein runs away in horror.[32] But the gaze comes to pursue him in his bedroom; the monster comes to his bedside—"his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were set on me."[33] The emergence of this impossible subject is the emergence of the gaze—the opening of a hole in reality which is immediately also that which comes to fill it with an unbearable presence, with a being more being than being, *vacuum* and *plenitudo* all in one, the plenitude as the direct consequence of the emptiness. One could say that the monster's terrible appearance is only a mask, an imaginary cover to provide a frame for his gaze. The same traumatic presence of the gaze can also be pinpointed in the second "primal scene," the attempted creation of the monster's bride in a Scottish cottage, the scene that is interrupted precisely because of the appearance of the gaze. It finishes with the announcement of the reappearance of the gaze in the third "primal scene": "I shall be with you on your wedding-night."[34] And he will. The bearer of the gaze will turn from a creature—that is, something created, an offspring, a son—into the figure of the father-*jouissance*.

The gaze that occurs with such precision in all the "primal scenes" of the novel is an impossible gaze. Jean-Jacques Lecercle has already pointed out that it is situated as the presence of the gaze at the subject's own conception.[35] It emerges together with the emergence of the subject, in the moment of its conception, as an *hors-corps* and an *hors-sexe*. It is this object that would make

32. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, in *Three Gothic Novels*, ed. Peter Fairclough (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 318.
33. Ibid., p. 319.
34. Ibid., p. 438.
35. Lecercle, *Frankenstein*, p. 99.

the subject a *causa sui* if it could be integrated—the missing cause of subjectivity, the missing link of its emergence.

The Fantastic

Before concluding, let us consider briefly Tzvetan Todorov's "theory of the uncanny" in his classical analysis *The Fantastic.*[36] His account seems to come very close to the Lacanian one, yet it differs from it in the most important respect.

For Todorov, the main source of "the fantastic" (roughly the realm of the uncanny, to simplify matters) lies in an "intellectual uncertainty."[37] In Lacanian terms it is the eruption of the real in the midst of familiar reality; it provokes a hesitation and an uncertainty and the familiar breaks down. Of course this hesitation is structural—it affects the internal, implicit reader who is inscribed in the text, not the empirical or psychological one. For Todorov, in the last instance, the fantastic has to be explained and dissolved. The hesitation cannot be maintained indefinitely: either the unexplainable turns out to be just odd—the hero was deluded, mad, victim of a conspiracy, etc.—or the supernatural really exists, in which case we exchange our reality for another one with different rules (a mythical world, the world of fairy tales, etc.). In both cases, the real obtains a sense, it is allotted a meaning, and it thus evaporates. The uncanny could only subsist in the narrow middle ground that exists before the uncertainty as to its nature is dissipated. And it was only in that no-man's-land that it could produce anxiety and doom the subject to utter insecurity, to floating without a point of anchor. Todorov then admirably draws the implications of this simple starting point, shows a number of supplementary conditions that spring from it, and demonstrates it on a number of convincing examples.

The strength of this theory lies in its simplicity and especially in its purely formal character. It also offers an immediate link with the Lacanian view that the real can never be dealt with directly, that it emerges only in an oblique perspective, and that the attempt to grasp it directly makes it vanish. Nevertheless, one could say that this theory covers both too much and too little. Too much because its formal description applies also to a much broader area which one could call *the logic of suspense.* In its simplest form, it consists in the mechanism whereby an essential piece of information (e.g., the identity of the murderer) is withheld from the (implicit) reader and is disclosed only at the end. That delay makes the hero and the reader uncertain as to what is actually going on without necessarily producing the effect of the uncanny. Most detective and

36. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre,* trans. R. Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973).
37. Ibid., p. 29.

crime fiction is based on this, but with the advance certainty that events will have a plausible natural explanation (the certainty embodied in that subject supposed to know, who is the detective).[38] Too little, since not only does it leave out a great number of instances of the fantastic, but also because, ultimately, the main source of the uncanny is not at all a hesitation or an uncertainty.

The instances not accounted for by this theory are easily found. A large part of "fantastic literature" has no intention of making the reader hesitate as to the true nature of events but is built on the assumption from the outset of a "supernatural" postulate. In *Frankenstein* we have to assume, for the duration of the narrative, the possibility of a "synthetic" production of "human" beings; in Stephen King's *Pet Sematary,* to take a contemporary example, we find the possibility of the "resurrection of the dead" under certain conditions. Once we have accepted this hypothesis, no hesitation occurs, and yet those stories are definitely uncanny. The firm knowledge that "such things don't normally occur" doesn't diminish the uncanny effect. The question may then arise of why we are so easily inclined to swallow an improbable hypothesis that runs counter to all usual experience and be so easily duped into anxiety by horror.

In his book on jokes, Freud quotes Lichtenberg's sentence: "Not only did he disbelieve in ghosts; he was not even frightened of them."[39] Clearly, the uncertainty belonging to knowledge has to be distinguished from the area of unconscious belief. "I know very well, but all the same . . . I believe," the formula so admirably pinpointed by Octave Mannoni in his classic paper, is at the basis of this fabrication of the uncanny.[40] The knowledge doesn't contradict the belief, nor does the belief simply lose its force through knowledge, since it is fundamentally situated in relation to the object—which is not the object of knowledge.

We have a second, more basic distinction to make. The knowledge, and its (un)certainties, is to be distinguished from the terrible certainty on the level of the object. It is a certainty that goes beyond any certainty which science can provide, or better, it is only here that we reach the level of certainty, whereas science can only yield exactitude and remains subject to doubt, questioning, and proof. *Only the object can give certainty,* as it is only the object that provides one's being. One can easily see this in good fantastic literature (or its modern version, "horror fiction"): the logic of its uncanniness is even directly opposed to the logic of suspense—what is horrible is that one knows in advance precisely what is bound to happen, and it happens. One could say that on this level the certainty

38. See Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).
39. Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), *The Standard Edition,* vol. VIII, p. 92.
40. "Je sais bien . . . mais quand même," in *Clefs pour L'Imaginaire ou L'Autre scène* (Paris: Seuil, 1969).

is opposed to the unconscious belief as well. The fateful events seem unavoidable from the very outset, yet unconsciously one doesn't believe that the unavoidable will happen.[41] So there is a passage from "I know very well . . . yet I believe" to "I don't really believe . . . yet I am certain." The mechanism of uncanniness doesn't leave you any space for uncertainty and hesitation. If there is a structural hesitation, or floating, attached to it, it comes from the impossibility of espousing the terrible certainty—it would ultimately entail psychosis, an annihilation of subjectivity. The apparent oscillation between knowledge and belief is rather a strategy of postponement to defer the encounter with the Thing (a strategy similar to obsessional neurosis). So for Todorov the fantastic comes from a lack of certainty and is dissipated when certainty is restored. From a Lacanian perspective the uncanny comes from too much certainty, when escape through hesitation is no longer possible, when the object comes too close.

Todorov deals with a well-circumscribed corpus of texts, a clearly cut realm of the fantastic. Its beginning coincides roughly with the advent of modernity and its scientific background; its closure, somewhat surprisingly, coincides with the advent of psychoanalysis: "Psychoanalysis has replaced (and thereby made superfluous) the fantastic literature."[42] What appeared indirectly through the fantastic can be dealt with directly by psychoanalysis. So psychoanalysis appears to be the most fantastic of all fantastic tales—the ultimate horror story.

Such a conclusion seems rather abrupt, but there is a sense in which one might agree. Psychoanalysis was the first to point out systematically the uncanny dimension pertaining to the very project of modernity, not in order to make it disappear, but in order to maintain it, to hold it open. It is true that modern literature had to develop other strategies to deal with it, as Todorov points out.[43] But what is currently called postmodernism—and this is one way to disentangle the growing confusion around this term—is a new consciousness about the uncanny as a fundamental dimension of modernity.[44] It doesn't imply a going beyond the modern, but rather an awareness of its internal limit, its split, which was there from the outset. Lacan's object *a* may be seen as its simplest and most radical expression.

41. See Žižek, *Looking Awry*, pp. 70–71.
42. Todorov, *The Fantastic*, pp. 168–69.
43. Todorov gives the paradigmatic example of Kafka's "Metamorphosis," where the source of the uncanny is actually the very absence of uncanny effects following any uncanny event: the supernatural is treated as natural, thus becoming "doubly" uncanny (p. 183). One could add that Joyce uses the inverse strategy in *Ulysses*: the very commonplace everyday events of an entirely "uneventful" day in Dublin are endowed with the dignity of the Thing by their complex treatment through language: the natural becomes "supernatural."
44. Again, it is contemporary popular culture that displays the greatest sensitivity to this shift by its insistence on and "working through" the "fundamental fantasies." The "return of the uncanny" currently appears to be its prevailing feature.

Henry Fuseli. The Nightmare. *1781.*

Vampires, Breast-Feeding, and Anxiety

JOAN COPJEC

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*:

> Do you wish to bring everyone back to his first duties? Begin with mothers. You will be surprised by the changes you will produce. Everything follows successively from this first depravity [i.e., mothers who despise their first duty and no longer want to feed their children]. The whole moral order degenerates. . . . But let mothers deign to nurse their children, morals will reform themselves, nature's sentiments will be awakened in every heart, the state will be repeopled. This first point, this point alone, will bring everything back together.[1]

Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters with Reflections on Female Conduct in the more important Duties of Life*:

> I conceive it to be the duty of every rational creature to attend to its offspring. . . . The mother (if there are not very weighty reasons to prevent her) ought to suckle her children. Her milk is their proper nutriment, and for some time quite sufficient.[2]

Let these two—probably the most prominent—examples stand as indications of a phenomenon that was widespread in the eighteenth century, an insignia, we might even say, of Enlightenment thought: the advocacy of breast-feeding. This phenomenon is currently the subject of much speculation by historically informed literary theorists intent on establishing its links with the political, philosophical, and literary themes of the period. While I, too, will urge a consideration of these links, I do not propose to attempt an explication of either the external causes or the meaning of the phenomenon. For to do so would be

1. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, ed. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 46.
2. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters with Reflections on Female Conduct in the more important Duties of Life* (Clifton, New Jersey: Augustus M. Kelley Publ., 1972), p. 3.

to ignore its most essential aspect: *the aura of anxiety that surrounds it.* It is this aspect that allows us to observe the historical coincidence and close correspondence between this phenomenon and a form of literature which emerged in the eighteenth century. I am speaking, of course, of vampire fiction, in all its Gothic forms. I will argue that the political advocacy of breast-feeding cannot be properly understood unless one sees it for what it is: the precise equivalent of vampire fiction.

It is necessary, first of all, to say something about anxiety. If its cause cannot be determined, this is because it is the most primitive of phenomena. It is that which nothing precedes. One could also say, conversely, that that which nothing precedes, that which follows from nothing, is what awakens anxiety. Anxiety registers the non sequitur, a gap in the causal chain. It was the difficulty of trying to think this very priority of anxiety that made *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* the confused text that it is, with Freud switching from his "first theory" (in which repression precedes anxiety) to this "second theory" (in which anxiety precedes repression) and back—several times—and quarreling with Otto Rank about whether or not birth can be the occasion of anxiety. Freud says that it cannot, but he also seems to incorporate Rank's arguments at points.

And yet a definition does clearly emerge from Freud's text: anxiety is a signal of danger. This signal is extraordinary because it works without the use of any signifiers. Since a signifier can always be negated, the message it sends can always be doubted. Rather than a signifier, then, anxiety, is an affect—a special sort of affect—and as such it cannot be doubted. Common usage notwithstanding, anxiety is connected to certitude rather than doubt. This is also a way of saying that what anxiety signals is real. As we have just remarked, Freud—like Kant, who gave both respect, the signal of moral law, and terror, the signal of the sublime, a special status—sets anxiety apart from all the other affects, feelings, sentiments that are caused by objects acting on the subject.[3] If anxiety can be considered a presentiment, it is only in the etymological sense of that term; it appears *prior* to any sentiment in the "normal," "pathological" sense.[4]

Anxiety—again, like respect and terror—is not only not caused by any object, it is not even caused by any loss/lack of object (which is why anxiety can be distinguished from disappointment, say, or grief). Rather than an object or its lack, anxiety signals a lack of lack, a failure of the symbolic reality wherein all alienable objects, objects which can be given or taken away, lost and refound, are constituted and circulate. Somewhat perversely, however, Lacan does refer

3. As Sigmund Freud says ("The Uncanny," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* ed. James Strachey [London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis], p. 219), the uncanny is accompanied by "a special core of feeling." The specialness of this feeling of anxiety is made conceptually explicit by Lacan.

4. The pun on *presentiment* is made by Lacan in his unpublished seminar on anxiety (1962–63).

to this encounter with a "lack of lack" as an encounter with an *object*: object small *a*. But this object is unique; it has neither an essence nor a signification. It cannot be communicated or exchanged. It has, in short, no *objectivity*. The danger that anxiety signals is the overproximity of this object *a*, this object so *inalienable* that like Dracula and all the other vampires of Gothic and Romantic fiction it cannot even be cast as a shadow or reflected as a mirror image, and yet so *insubstantial* that like Murnau's Nosferatu it can disappear in a puff of smoke.

Now, if the signal of anxiety cannot lie, if we cannot be misled as to its message, it stands to reason that any *interpretation* of anxiety is superfluous and inappropriate. But if interpretation is not the proper response, what is? The best way to answer this question is to look once again at that overinterpreted anxiety dream, the dream of Irma's injection. Lacan's commentary on this dream is designed to demonstrate how we must act—and how we must not act—in the face of anxiety.[5] The dream is divided by Lacan into two parts, each of which is marked by its own climax. In the first part, Freud appears as a man free of any "Oedipus complex"; his research is driven entirely by his desire to know, whatever the cost.[6] Propelled by this desire, he stalks his party guest, Irma, and struggling against her resistances, peers curiously down her throat, only to make his truly horrible discovery. What he witnesses is the very "origin of the world," the equivalent of the female genitals. It is clear that the uncanny appearance of what ought to have remained hidden is a sickening, noxious sight. But what is it, really? "A large white spot . . . curled structures . . . white-gray scabs." Almost nothing. This is the climax of the first part of the dream, the anxiety-filled encounter with the object *a*.

After this encounter the dream abruptly switches into another mode. The dream space becomes fantasmatically populated with Freud's doctor friends: Dr. M., Otto, Leopold; in other words, the space becomes "Oedipalized." By this I mean, first of all, that the second part of the dream is defined by a *turning away from* the object *a* which erupted in the first part. In the second part, Freud no longer wants to know; his primary desire is a desire *not* to know anything of the real that provoked in him so much anxiety. The abruptness of the transition indicates that Freud *flees* from the real—Irma, her white scabs, the unconscious—into the symbolic community of his fellow doctors.

So, the proper response to anxiety is, according to this dream, flight. But is it not the height of absurdity to say that the founder of psychoanalysis, of

5. The discussion of this dream appears in Jacques Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York and London: Norton, 1988), pp. 146–71. Erik Erikson's analysis of the same dream is found in "The Dream Specimen of Psychoanalysis," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, vol. 2 (1954), pp. 5–56.

6. Lacan claims in his anxiety seminar (July 3, 1963) that "Oedipus did not have an Oedipus complex; his sin was that he wanted to know."

the study of the unconscious, based the whole of this discipline (recall how proudly Freud thought of a future commemoration of this dream, as though it were the cornerstone of the edifice of psychoanalysis) on a turning away from the unconscious? On a desire to know nothing about it? Some further clarification of the character of the consequent, Oedipalized space is necessary before this suspicion can be allayed. Filled with paternal figures, this space is infused with an air of interdiction, of rules, regulations, and prescriptions, and yet it offers relief from the constricted, asphyxiating space that *zusammenschnüren,* that chokes, Freud as well as Irma. In what, then, does this relief consist, and how is it secured? Most simply put, it consists in the setting up of the symbolic as rampart against the real; the symbolic *shields* us from the terrifying real. The climax of the second part, the triumphant pronouncement of the word *trimethylamine,* indicates that it is the word itself, or the symbolic itself, which is our salvation.

But in order for the symbolic to evict the real and thereby establish itself, a judgment of existence is required, i.e., it is necessary to *say* that the real is absented, to *declare* its impossibility. The symbolic, in other words, must include the negation of what it is not. This requirement is not without its paradoxical effects, for it means ultimately that the symbolic will not be filled with only itself, since it will also contain this surplus element of negation. According to this reasoning—which is to be found in Freud's 1919 essay "Negation"—*that which is impossible must also be prohibited.*

It should be evident right away that this negation of the real by the symbolic presents a special problem. The real that is to be negated cannot be represented by a signifier, since the real is, by definition, that which *has* no adequate signifier. How, then, can this negation take place *within* the symbolic as the requirement demands? The answer is: through repetition, through the signifier's repeated attempt—and failure—to designate itself. The signifier's difference from itself, its radical inability to signify itself, causes it to turn in circles around the real that is lacking in it. It is in this way—in the circumscription of the real—that its nonexistence or its negation is signified *within* the symbolic.

This is also the explanation of the Lacanian thesis that *doubt is a defense against the real.* Doubt—which emerges from the signifier's noncoincidence with itself, its incapacity to guarantee itself—registers the impossibility of the real and thereby defends us against its intrusion into the symbolic. Dr. M., Otto, Leopold, the three sorry figures of authority in the dream of Irma's injection, will illustrate this argument. Their supposedly professional probings and pronouncements are simply ridiculous. Whatever principle of diagnosis one may represent is quickly transgressed by the other, who proposes a different and contradictory principle. These fellows are simply not credible as standard-bearers of their profession. But have we not entered here into that place so often evoked by Lacan, the place where tracks are made *in order to be taken as*

false? As so many, including Foucault, have noted, laws are made to be broken, prohibitions to be transgressed, but through its very violability the law simply binds us closer to it. The law has an irrefutably *positive* force to which every transgression, which defines itself in terms of the law while dreaming itself beyond it, attests. It is wrong to assume, however, as so many, including Foucault, have, that the fundamentally *negative* character of the law is in this way refuted. For the transgression of the law's interdiction of specific, named acts in no way violates the law's other, more basic interdiction—of the real. This interdiction, unlike the first type, is never *named* by the law, but is inscribed in it nevertheless: in the law's very inability to authorize itself.[7] The Foucauldians have simplified the Freudian thesis about negation by rendering it as "that which is negated must be named" and by failing to realize that that which is impossible must be negated *without being named.*

In the psychoanalytic version, the symbolic order defends against the real by substantifying its negation in the interdictions and doubts that define symbolicity as such. We have thus described the space of the second half of Freud's dream as an Oedipalized space both because it instantiates an avoidance of the real, a desire not to know anything about it, and because this avoidance necessitates an important, violable (i.e., Oedipal) law. It is now necessary to confess a considerable complication of this argument. We have called that from which Freud takes flight the object *a*, but though we have refrained until now from saying so, that which marks his avoidance of this traumatic point, the absence of the real, is also called object *a*. The object *a* is both real and a positivization of the symbolic's failure to say the real; it is both real and imaginary. What is the explanation for this terminological conundrum? If the symbolic must inscribe its lack of foundation in the real, the inaccessibility to it of some knowledge of this real, then, we are obliged to admit that it also thereby inscribes the real itself, since it is precisely there where we do *not* know, that enjoyment, *jouissance* (a pleasure in the real), arises. *Jouissance* is a kind of "secondary gain" obtained where knowledge fails.[8] As Lacan says at the beginning of *Television*, "Saying it all is literally impossible: words fail. Yet it's through this very impossibility that the truth holds onto the real."[9] This statement demonstrates a Möbius strip kind of logic, for in the last analysis it means that the real *is* its own negation,

7. Among the ten commandments you will not find one that tells you that you must not sleep with your mother, and yet these commandments have no other aim than to hold you at a distance from the incestuous relation with your mother; they are as a whole the positivization of this interdiction—this is the point made by Lacan in *L'éthique de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1986), p. 84.

8. Kant also notes that a nonpathological, i.e., a *negative* satisfaction, often accompanies one's adherence to the law.

9. Jacques Lacan, *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment* (New York and London: Norton, 1990), p. 3.

its own prohibition. The real encounters itself in its own lack, its exclusion from the system of signifiers.[10]

In his dream of Irma's injection, then, Freud does not simply flee from the unconscious or from the real of Irma's desire: *he holds onto them.* This is the reason psychoanalysis can claim to found itself on the unconscious and on the desire of the woman, precisely because it so rigorously registers their inaccessiblity. We could say, then, using the Lacanian definition of sublimation, that psychoanalysis "raises" the unconscious and the woman's desire "to the dignity of the Thing." It is in its refusal to interpret them that psychoanalysis maintains them, for there where they are interpreted they cease to be.

But if in order to preserve itself psychoanalysis has to register its own radical inability to know, does it not consign itself to scepticism? Must we place Freud among his foolish mentors, equal to them in his ignorance of the truth? No, psychoanalysis is not a scepticism. By not declaring merely that the good (which would be a standard of our actions) *cannot* be known, but insisting further that it *must* not be known, psychoanalysis commits itself to what Lacan refers to as a "belief without belief," to a belief in an Other whose very existence is dependent on our lack of knowledge.

"It's because we cannot be content with the idea that some good person is able to dictate man's obligations that the problem of evil is worth raising. The exalted representation of evil will safeguard the greatest revolutionary value."[11] It's because radical doubt undermines the position of every would-be master that the problem of radical evil must be raised. Psychoanalysis shares this position with a certain strain of Enlightenment thought, which celebrated evil while attempting to secure the individual subject's freedom from authority. For both psychoanalysis and this mode of thinking that originated in the eighteenth century, the exalted evil referred to is synonymous with the subject itself, since it is the subject that seems to pose the greatest threat to the established social order. But one should not be too quick to equate this conception with the standard reading of the Romantic opposition between the individual and society. Romantic notions are fundamentally recast by this conception, which neither sees the subject as the external cause of society's corruption, nor society as the corrupter of the pure, innocent subject. Instead of an external opposition between the subject and society, we must learn to think their necessary interrelation: the very existence of the subject is simultaneous with society's failure to integrate, to represent it.

10. On the "*coincidentia oppositorum*" of the contradictory definitions of the real, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), pp. 169–73. Also see Jacques-Alain Miller, "Suture (elements of the logic of the signifier)," *Screen,* vol. 18, no. 4 (Winter 1977–1978), pp. 24–34, for its influential explication of this logic of negation.
11. Lacan, in *L'éthique de la psychanalyse,* p. 85, is quoting from a poet-friend.

It is its rendering of this peculiar interrelation that makes *Frankenstein* such an exemplary text and Frankenstein's monster such a paradigmatic example of the modern subject. While it gives reign to the fantasy that things might have turned out otherwise, that society would have been spared the monster's maleficence if only it had treated him with more kindness, if only the young De Lacey had not burst into the cottage just as the monster was about to reveal his true character to the old, blind De Lacey, *Frankenstein* also exposes the truth on which this fantasy depends: the monster is, constitutionally, he whose character cannot be revealed. He, like the modern subject in general, is located there where knowledge of him is omitted. His monstrosity is therefore structural, not accidental.

This is why the common belief that Victor Frankenstein invented the monster is in error. If the monster were, in fact, the product of a scientific invention, he would have awakened at the end of chapter four, but he does not; it is only at the very beginning of chapter five that the baleful yellow eye first opens. If Frankenstein had succeeded in his scientific project, this success would have been recorded as the climax of a series of steps and discoveries, as the end product of a causal chain of effort and effect. But at the end of the chapter in which these discoveries are recorded, the invention remains uninvented. That Frankenstein has failed is apparent in the opening of the following chapter where the thing that he strove to animate lies lifeless at his feet. It is only *then* and in the absence of any indication or sense of agency on Frankenstein's part—the inventor is described as a passive witness of the event—that the monster comes to life. There seems to be only one reading of this narrative pacing: Frankenstein's invention did not go awry, as the standard reading claims, it *failed*. It is only insofar as it failed, only inasmuch as Frankenstein's scientific efforts fell short of their goal, that the monster appears, the embodiment of this failure. It is therefore misleading to call the creature "Frankenstein's monster," as though it were the hero's botched invention rather than the botching of his invention, as though it were not precisely the *lack* of that "belong to me aspect so reminiscent of property" (in Lacan's phrase) which provided the creature with its essential definition—and made him so uncanny.

In response to anxiety's signal of danger, one flees or avoids the real. But one flees into a symbolic whose hedge against the real is secured only through its negation of the real, i.e., through its failure to coincide with itself, to guarantee itself. The subject—like the Frankenstein monster—*is* the failure that maintains the symbolic, prevents it from collapse. But we claimed earlier that in his discussion of the dream of Irma's injection, Lacan made clear not only the proper but also the improper manner of accomplishing this avoidance. Despite the many insights with which Lacan credits him, Erik Erikson is, to some extent, used to illustrate an improper response, a certain deafness, to the signal sounded by the dream. There is, of course, a major difference between Erikson and Freud regarding the characterization of the second space of the

dream. Lacan's understanding of this space as symbolic reality in its function as shield against the traumatic real, as being simultaneously salutary for the subject and the place of its *nonintegration*, would make no sense at all to Erikson, for whom reality is that into which the healthy ego is integrated. He therefore comprehends this space differently: as the place of the regression of the ego. Rather than focus on all the broad and basic differences between Lacanian psychoanalysis and ego psychology, however, let us note that Lacan chose to derogate Erikson's *interpretation* of Freud's dream with the term *culturalist*. What most disturbs Lacan is Erikson's digging into Freud's life and culture in the hopes of finding some additional facts that will push the interpretation beyond the limit demarcated by Freud. Against this endless ransacking of the archives, Lacan maintains not that history is unimportant, but that historicism can only bring about the destruction of history: that some limits are meant to be observed. In the middle of his making this point, something wonderful happens: a member of the audience intervenes to make the point for him, *a contrario*. At the very moment Lacan asks us to confront the horrifying real which threatens to choke Irma and Freud, the moment Lacan points to the suffocation, the gasping for breath that evidences the overwhelming presence of the real, Mme. X—we can give her a more descriptive name, Mme. Culturalist, or Mme. Historicist—interjects the following observation: "In the old days, three or four people were needed to pull on the laces of a corset to tighten it."[12]

Here we have a clear example of an avoidance of the real, but not of the sort at which we have been aiming. In place of a negative judgment of existence (the establishment of a second symbolic space which would announce its nonreal status: "I am no longer anything," is the way Lacan phrases it), Mme. Historicist offers *no judgment* on the real's existence. She *forecloses* rather than repudiates it. No anxiety disquiets her, nothing signals the danger that faces Irma and Freud. What Freud confronts in his moment of anxiety is a gap in symbolic reality, a point which interpretation, the logic of cause and effect, cannot bridge. In response, he does not bridge it; he records its unbridgeability and in this way circumscribes it. Mme. Historicist does not come up against a gap; she sees only an uninterrupted chain of signifiers which she interprets by assigning them a place in another causal chain.

Now, it is precisely this sort of historicist interpretation that we must guard against while considering the eighteenth-century advocacy of breast-feeding. For there is ample evidence that this advocacy expressed a profound anxiety, that it situated itself at the very limit of interpretation. If we return to

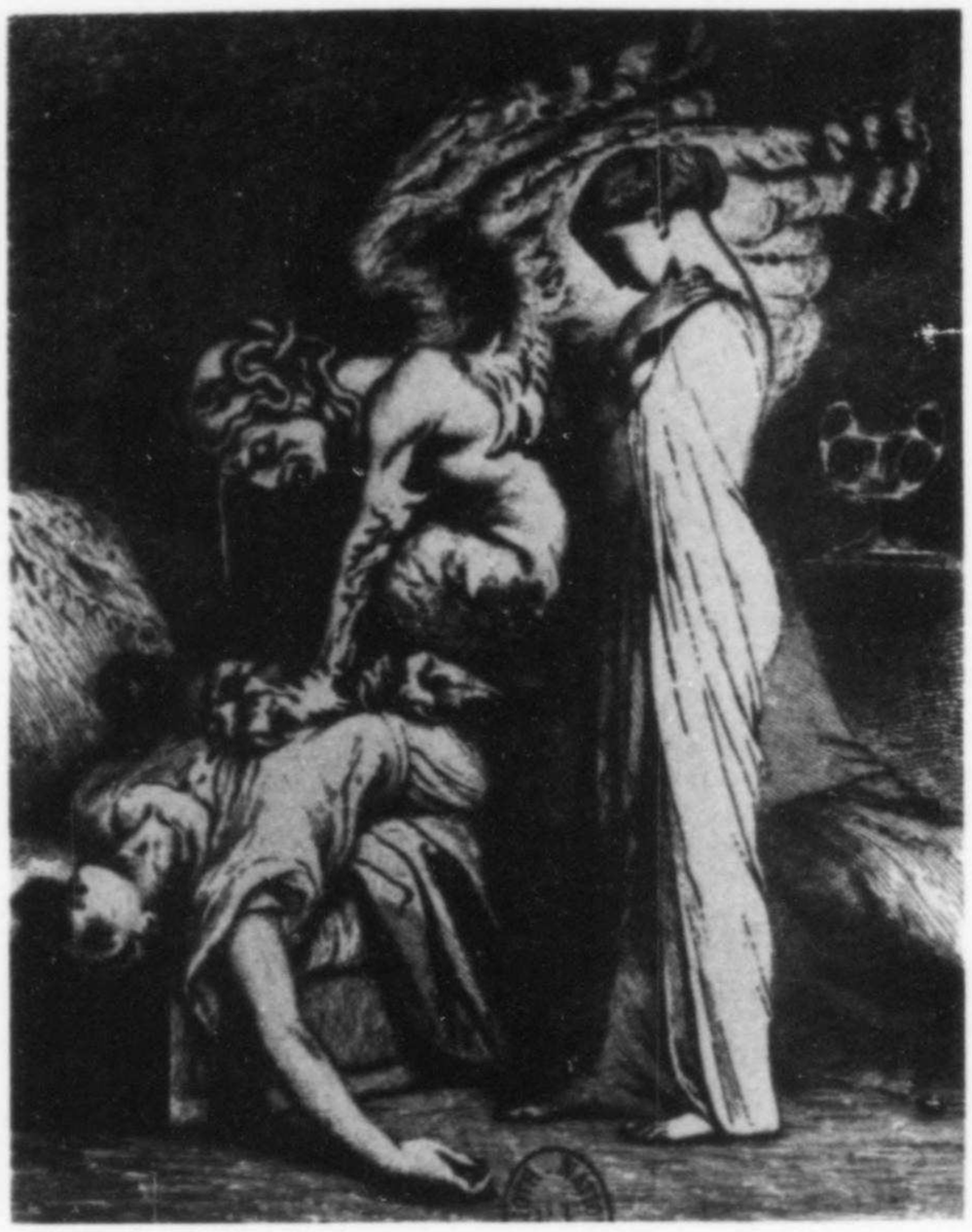
12. Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory*, p. 153.

the Rousseau and Wollstonecraft texts previously cited, we will find that each utters its plea for the maternal breast as a safeguard against what? Against the suffocation, the strangulation the child will suffer without it. Rousseau thus rails against the child's "being prevented from breathing," its being more cramped, more constrained, more compressed than "in the amnion," its being "garroted"—all as a result of its being deprived of its mother's breast.[13] And Wollstonecraft speaks of such a child as being "overloaded," as being in a state of unalleviated bodily pain, and later contends that "it is easy to distinguish the child of a well-bred person [i.e., of a mother who honors her duty to breast-feed her child] if it is not left entirely to the nurse's care. These women are of course ignorant, and to keep a child quiet for the moment, they humor all its little caprices. Very soon does it begin to be perverse, and eager to be gratified in everything."[14] Both Rousseau and Wollstonecraft understand the deprivation resulting from the mother's neglect of her "duty to breast-feed" as a *deprivation of deprivation.* This understanding is then reiterated in their subsequent warnings against the *excesses* of motherly devotion. It is a "cruel" mother, Rousseau warns, who "plunge[s her] children in softness." The encouragement of breast-feeding seeks to submit the child not to the mother, but—quite the contrary—to social law.

But we have promised to come to terms with this phenomenon by establishing its corollary in vampire fiction. That the encounter with the vampire is always anxiety-ridden would seem to be undebatable. And yet even this seemingly obvious fact is in danger of being lost by those analyses that attempt to define the Gothic depiction of this encounter as a form of either sentimental or sensation fiction. As we argued earlier, anxiety is not an affect or a sentiment like others; it has, for the reasons stated, an exceptional status. The Gothic world is, in fact, only conceivable as the elimination of sentiment. If vampirism makes our hearts pound, our pulses race, and our breathing come in troubled bursts, this is not because it puts us in contact with objects and persons—others—who affect us, but because it confronts us with an absence of absence—an Other—who threatens to asphyxiate us. And rather than making us more at home in our bodies, rather than anchoring us to bodies conceived as the agents of our intelligence, the makers of sense, vampirism presents us with a bodily double that we can neither make sense of nor recognize as our own.

In what, essentially, does the phenomenon of vampirism consist? The first thing to note is that it is a matter of an *oral relation,* of a *jouissance* attained through sucking. One might spontaneously think of the child in its oral-parasitic relation to its mother as the image of vampirism. But as Lacan—along with all the narratives and iconography of vampirism—makes clear, it is not the child

13. Rousseau, pp. 43–44.
14. Wollstonecraft, pp. 3 and 5.



After Tony Jahannot. Smarra. *1845.*

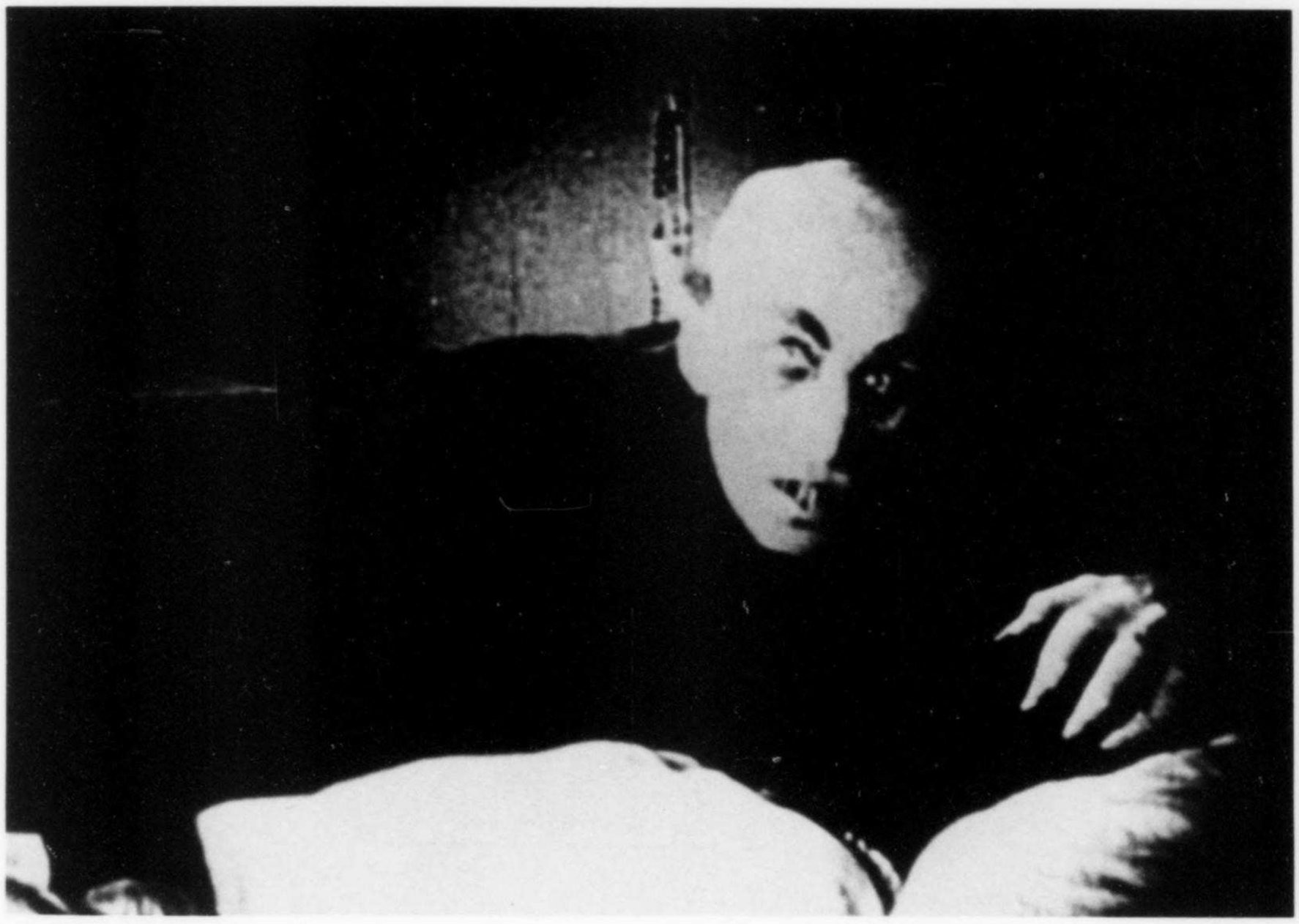
F. W. Murnau. Nosferatu the Vampire. *1922.*

who is the vampire.[15] The image of the child at the mother's breast is not one that elicits anxiety. Vampirism is located beyond this point where the child maintains itself in relation to a partial object, an object of desire. It is only at the point where the fantasy enabling this relation to the partial object no longer holds that the anxiety-ridden phenomenon of vampirism takes over, signaling, then, *the drying up of the breast as object-cause of desire,* the disappearance of the fantasy support of desire. The drying up of desire is the danger against which vampirism warns us, sending up a cry for the breast which would deliver us from this horror.[16]

The breast—like the gaze, the voice, the phallus, and the feces—is an object, an appendage of the body, from which we separate ourselves in order to constitute ourselves as subjects. To constitute ourselves, we must, in other words, throw out, reject our nonselves. Our discussion of the Freudian concept of negation has taught us, however, that this rejection can only be accomplished through the inclusion within ourselves of this negation of what we are not—within our being, this lack-of-being. These Freudian objects are, then, not only

15. Lacan's passing remarks on vampirism as an anxiety that profiles the "drying up of the breast" are found in his seminar on anxiety, May 15, 1963.

16. Although it usually specifies the neck as the bodily zone from which the vampire drains its victim, Gothic fiction retains the traces of the true target of attack both in the mode of the threat, sucking, and in the sex of the victim, female. Most visual images of vampirism center on the female breast.



rejected from, but also internal to the subject. In brief, they are *extimate*,[17] which means they are in us that which is not us.

It is precisely because the subject is defined in this way—or, as we will argue later, *when* the subject is defined in this way—that it stumbles into the dimension of the uncanny. The special feeling of uncanniness is a feeling of anxiety that befalls us whenever we too closely approach the extimate object in ourselves. In his theorization of the uncanny, Freud, influenced by the literary works on which he drew, underlined the privileged relation uncanniness maintained with the gaze. But as vampire fiction demonstrates, the uncanny can also manifest itself as an overproximity to the "extimate" breast.

Normally, when we are at some remove from it, the extimate object *a* appears as a lost part of ourselves, whose absence prevents us from becoming whole; it is then that it functions as the object-cause of our desire. But when our distance from it is reduced, it no longer appears as a partial object, but—on the contrary—as a complete body, an almost exact double of our own, except for the fact that this double is endowed with the object which we sacrificed in order to become subjects. This would mean that the vampire is not only a creature that menaces the breast as object-cause of desire, but that it is also a double of the victim, whose distorted bodily form indicates its possession of a

17. Jacques-Alain Miller, in his unpublished seminar on "Extimité" (1985–86), developed the term *extimité*, which appears a few times in Lacan, into a theoretical concept.

certain excess object: the breast once again, but this time as source of *jouissance*. The most vivid confirmation of this thesis concerning the double is given in Bram Stoker's *Dracula,* in that horrifyingly obscene moment when we are startled to witness Mina Harker *drinking from the breast of Dracula.* Desire, society itself, is endangered by Mina's intimacy with this extimate object. But it is Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca*—a twentieth-century version of an eighteenth-century form, the "female Gothic"[18]—which best illustrates the fact that the object which "completes" the subject, filling in its lack, is also always a disfiguring surplus. In this film the paradox functions as a plot device when the baby with which Rebecca was supposed to have been pregnant when she died is revealed to have been instead a fatal cancer.

The reference to *Rebecca* reminds us that the breasted, vampiric double is not only a creature with "too much" body, it is also a "body too much," that is, as a double of the subject, it always stands in the way of or crowds out the subject's own actions. In *Rebecca,* her personal possessions, her ubiquitous initial, the constant references to her talents and accomplishments create the sense of the continuing presence of Rebecca at Manderley. Because the dead-without-knowing-it Rebecca refuses to relinquish her place, the nameless Joan Fontaine character cannot assume hers—she is unable to enter the symbolic network of the household. What releases the younger woman, finally, is the *exteriorization* of her battle with the excess body, the double. That is, at the moment when Rebecca's body is found at the bottom of her boat, thus raising questions about the other body buried in her name and in her grave, at the moment when the "body too much" becomes objectivized as a narrative conflict rather than the psychical conflict it had been up until this point, the second Mrs. de Winter begins to escape the hold of the first. At this moment it becomes possible and necessary to reject one of the bodies as a false claimant.

One other film needs to be mentioned in this context, since it is one of the most compelling examples one will ever find of the anxiety that attends the experience of the uncanny. The film's title, *La Jetée* (Chris Marker, 1964), names the primary location of the narrative—the jetty at Orly Airport—as well as the danger that threatens completely to overwhelm not only the diegetic characters, but the diegesis itself: a "little piece of reality," a childhood memory which has not been rejected, thrown out, by the hero. Despite the fact that the film is often viewed as a film about the hero's need to remember, it is clear that the opposite is true; this is a film about the necessity of forgetting.[19] At the end of

18. The work on the "female Gothic" is extensive; I would like to acknowledge especially Mary Ann Doane's analysis of *Rebecca* (Doane, *The Desire to Desire* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987], pp. 123–75) and Claire Kahane, "Gothic Mirrors and Feminine Identity," *The Centennial Review,* vol. 24, no. 1 (1980), pp. 43–64.

19. The Freudian definition of consciousness as that which arises *instead* of a memory trace, and thus as a protective shield against trauma, is often understood *sociologically,* even by Freud himself.

World War III, the world in which the hero lives is on the edge of complete extinction; it cannot "take flight" and remains stuck in place. Why? The world has survived, barely, the nuclear war, but what it cannot survive is the hero's refusal to reject this memory. It is he who has condemned his world to destruction; the world is in danger as long as the memory endures.

On every level *La Jetée* reproduces the phenomenon of "running in place" so typical of the anxiety dream. Not only in its insistence on still, unanimated images (there is no illusion of movement in this "photo-novel" composed of still photographs, except at one point where the woman whose image the hero refuses to surrender opens her eyes to look at the hero—an image of desire rather than anxiety), but in the dark backgrounds that limit the visual field to a very small part of the frame, in the narrative suggestion that the world that has at least temporarily survived is restricted to the narrow corridors of an underground existence, and, finally, in the time-loop structure of the narrative itself. The hero travels back in time to a traumatic scene that he witnessed as a child; there he learns that he is the man whose death he witnessed. A primal scene, but one in which death is substituted for birth. Here, as in the primal scene, the problem is the presence of a body too much. Instead of $\not{S} \diamond a$, the formula for fantasy, we get $\not{S}\ a$: the shriveling up of the distance separating the two terms results in the collapse of the fantasy structure.

La Jetée should make it clear, however, that the procrastination or *postponement*,[20] again the phenomenon of running in place that typifies the reaction to the uncanny, is not to be understood, as theorists from Otto Rank on have understood it, in *epistemological* terms. The hesitation is not a matter of uncertainty, but of "illegality." The presence of the uncanny registers an abandonment of prohibitions, an unabandoned embrace of *jouissance*. In *La Jetée* the hero allows himself to enjoy the woman. But things do not work out very well for those who enjoy, for, as it turns out, when nothing is prohibited, then everything is prohibited. The negativism of psychotics is proof of this;[21] libidinal cathexis is withdrawn from the world, producing the psychotic experience of the "end of the world." Since every affirmation is founded on a negation, no future is possible in *La Jetée* as long as the hero clings to rather than negates the image of the woman.

That is, consciousness, "immediately abutting as it does on the external world" (Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," *S.E.*, vol. xviii, p. 26), is seen as a shield against shocks produced by the external world. The dream of Irma's injection allows us to see consciousness, rather, against the unconscious real.

20. See Freud ("Negation," *S.E.*, vol. XIX, p. 238): "Judging is the intellectual action which decides the choice of motor action, which puts an end to . . . postponement."

21. The distinction between negation and the negativism of psychotics is made by Jean Hyppolite in his commentary on Freud's *Verneinung*, published in Jacques Lacan, *Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953–1954*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York and London: Norton, 1988), pp. 289–97.

Officially, of course, I am not claiming that *La Jetée* is a vampire film, only that it is a pedagogically useful illustration of the anxiety, hesitations, postponements, digressions that characterize vampire fiction. But why *do* those superimpositions, those curious, distorting superimpositions of images (there is a frequent overlapping of images which produces a doubling *rather than* movement) so often assume those wing-like—bat-like—shapes?

One final point must be made concerning the phenomenon of anxiety, and I will make it by returning to *Rebecca*. Like so many of the "female Gothics" of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this film centers on a woman's encounter with a female double who haunts an old, ruined, or anachronistically styled house. The manner of haunting obeys a formula: while the whole house is rendered uncanny by the presence of the "undead" female double, there is one room in the house, one forbidden, barred room which is the *particular* site of uncanniness. One could understand this formula as exemplifying an *en abyme* structure: a part of the house, the closed-off room replicates in a miniaturized, condensed form the house as a whole. Thus, within it, the experience of the uncanny is particularly intense. But this reading misses the point entirely. In *Rebecca*, however, the point is more difficult to miss. Which is the forbidden room here? The first answer that suggests itself is the beach house. This is the one place that Max places off-limits. This answer is extremely odd, however, since the beach house is not a room, not, properly speaking, a part of the house; it is—strangely—a *supernumerary space* that has, as it were, *subtracted* itself from Manderley. But if this were so, if the beach house were subtracted from Manderley, then it follows that Manderley would be missing a space, that all the remaining rooms would fail to "fill up," to complete the house. This is precisely the case. Within Manderley there is one room, one exceptional space whose primary function is to mark this emptiness; this space is Rebecca's bedroom. Both the beach house and Rebecca's bedroom have an exceptional status, but while the beach house marks a surplus, Rebecca's room marks an absence, a deficiency.

By clearly delineating these two spaces, *Rebecca* simply reveals the paradoxical function of the forbidden room in Gothic fiction generally: this room marks simultaneously a surplus *and* a deficit, an outside *and* an inside, a particular room within the house *and* the house as a whole; that is, by withdrawing itself from the rest of the house, it marks the limit that allows the house to constitute itself as a whole—but a whole from which this room is absent. It is the opening up of this empty space that makes the wind whistle and the living dead blow through the uncanny house. It is also this loss which creates the sense peculiar to the ruined Gothic mansion that all its known rooms do not exhaust its space, that there is always one more room, one uncannily extra space lying hidden from sight. The unwitting witticism so often repeated by Lacan therefore bears repeating once again—"I have three brothers, Paul, Ernest, and me"—because it is an accurate description of this uncanny phenomenon of the barred

room that subtracts itself from the others only to appear among them in the form of an excess. To complete the argument begun a moment ago: the element, the room, does not *contain* the set, the house, by *reproducing* it in condensed form; it *constructs* the house by *negating* it. The barred room is an extimate object, the most horrible part of the house—not because it is a distillation of all its horrifying features, but because it is without feature, the point where the house negates itself.

But let us return to the two forbidden spaces in *Rebecca,* for their differences will help us to make our final point. The bedroom is ruled over by Mrs. Danvers, Rebecca's devoted private maid, who keeps everything just as her mistress left it. In one scene in the bedroom, Danvers encourages the new Mrs. de Winter to sit before the vanity as Rebecca always did upon her return from an evening out. A photograph of Max faces Rebecca's empty seat, her hair brushes are arranged within reach. As Danvers relates the details of how she would brush her mistress's hair, she begins to act out the gestures she describes. What is the effect of this scene?—A very strong sense of Rebecca's *absence.* A relation is set up between Danvers, all the personal items in the frame, and the seat in front of the vanity where Rebecca does *not* sit, that is, the place where her absence is signified. As we know from Saussure's famous example of the 8:45 Geneva-to-Paris train, something can only be registered as missing if it is assigned a place in a differential network; it is only absent as a signifier in relation to other signifiers. It is therefore not the unique presence of Rebecca that we miss in this scene, but the way she fits in with the other objects. If Danvers were fired, the room rearranged, we would no longer half expect Rebecca to return. She would then be fully dead, and not simply absent. Her absence, in other words, is registered as a matter of sense, of signification—not of being as such.

A parallel scene is played out in the beach house. Here as well things are as Rebecca left them—almost. Dust has settled on everything here, cobwebs have formed. The differential network has begun to deteriorate. Max begins to narrate to his new wife, the second Mrs. de Winter, the events of his final confrontation with Rebecca. So far the scene is strikingly similar to the one we just examined. But this time, instead of remaining stationary and allowing Max to act out his own movements (as Danvers had acted out hers), the camera acts out, i.e., it appears to "follow," the movements of Rebecca. The effect of this scene is quite different from the one in the bedroom, for here we have a sense not of the *absence* of something missing from its place, but of the *presence* of something that is out of place. This scene is, in the precise sense, uncanny. What makes it uncanny is not the fact that we do not see Rebecca, but the fact that the camera movement which indexes her presence *does not see us,* that is, it is a *unique* camera movement that does not "respond" to any establishable pattern of movement. It cannot be placed into any differential system of movements, any field/reverse field, moving/stationary, or other system. Without any

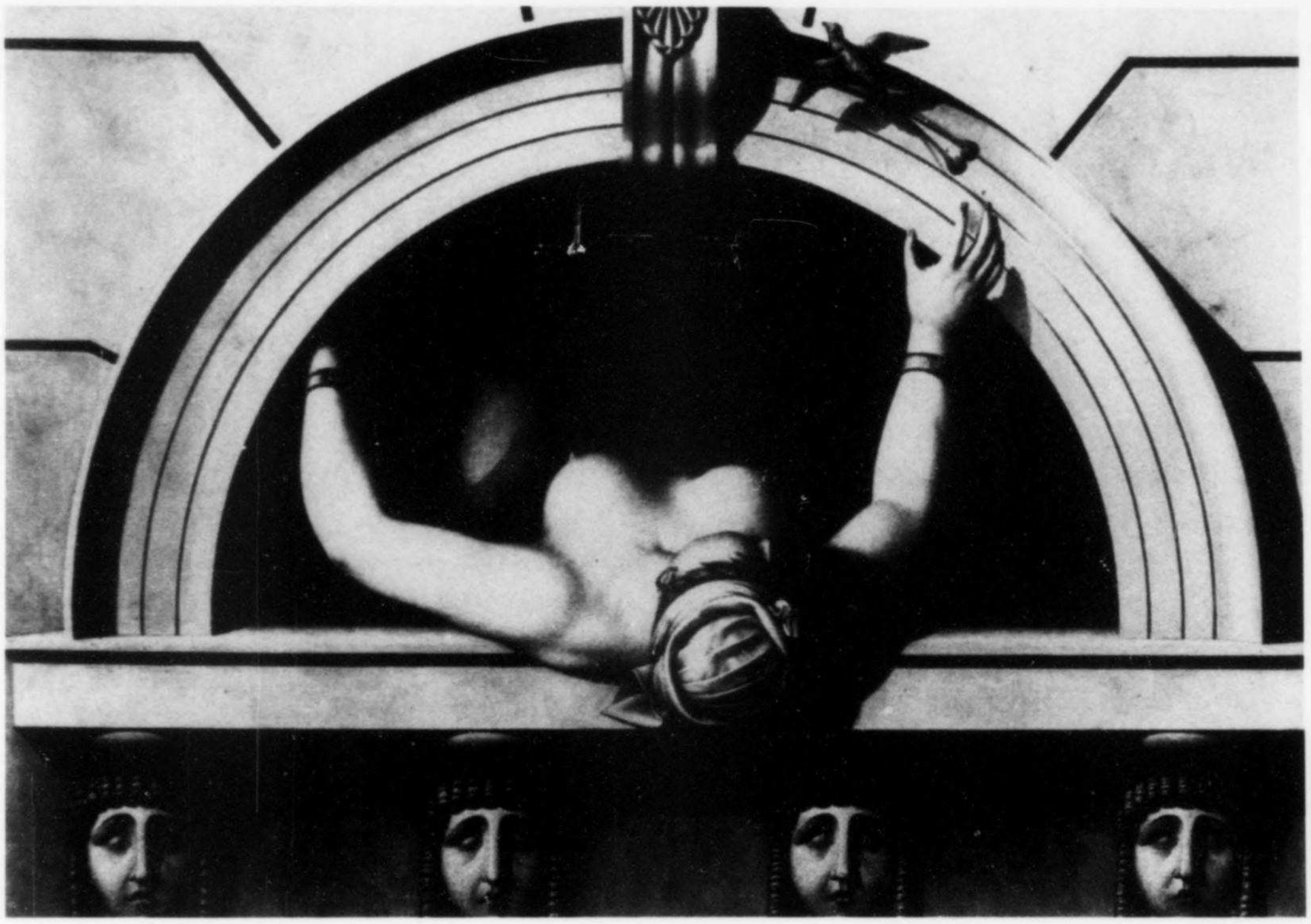
assignable position within such a system of differences, the movement is devoid of sense. This, then, is our final definition of the anxiety that attends the uncanny: it is an affect aroused in reaction to an existence, to *pure existence, without sense*. The camera movement that traces Rebecca's path is pure indication, it expresses a *purely thetic proposition*, "there is," and nothing more. If one were to fill this movement with meaning by inserting it into a differential system, the "there is," pure being would cease to be.

If the Frankenstein monster is—as most readers agree—the uncanny double of Frankenstein, why then is he allowed to speak, to try to make sense of his existence for us? Wouldn't speech, wouldn't the very signifying display of his existence destroy him?

Breast-Feeding and Freedom

In *Architecture civile,* a portfolio of drawings by the eighteenth-century "visionary" architect Jean Jacques Lequeu, we find the famous image of a rather robust woman lying on her back under an archway. The angle of the drawing is designed to profile her breasts; a bird in flight is visible at the top of the arch. The drawing, whose title is *He is free,* turns the image of vampirism inside out —replacing the terrifying vampire with the simple bird and the horror of the drying up of the breast with these full breasts—and returns us to our main concern: the relation between the advocacy of breast-feeding and a new, revolutionary definition of the subject as free. We have been arguing that this advocacy must be viewed as a manifestation of anxiety, especially similar to that expressed in vampire fiction. We have also argued that anxiety must not be interpreted, that we must not seek an external cause for it. This does not prevent us, however, from asking why there seems to have been so much anxiety in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, for we can answer this question without recourse to any external phenomenon. It was the very definition of the subject *as* free that insured this increase of anxiety. That is, the eighteenth century detached a double of the subject which it made inaccessible to annihilation;[22] this double, unlike older notions of the immortal soul, allowed the subject to become detached from the world without becoming attached to some other-worldly principle—the unfortunate consequence of the conception of the double as soul. Rather than as another principle, the Enlightenment double was conceived as nothing, nothing but the negation of the subject's attachment to the world. This double, then, guaranteed the *autonomy* of the subject, its freedom from a pathetic existence in which it could be manipulated by other things, persons, or traditions. But once this double was thus detached, once it was set

22. This last sentence is a paraphrase of Lacan's description of the function of suffering in Sade; Lacan, *L'ethique de la psychanalyse,* p. 303.



loose in the world, it was inevitable that the subject would occasionally "run into it," approach it a little too closely. Whenever this happens, anxiety signals us to take our distance once again.

This suggests that there are times when the real overtakes us *without* warning, that we are sometimes not provided with an opportunity to protect ourselves from it. Freud himself makes this suggestion: there are occasions, he says, when anxiety is omitted, when it does not arise to prepare us from the real's overproximity. In these cases, the results are always catastrophic. We would argue that anxiety increases with the emergence of the modern subject, that it is this inclusion of the real *within* the symbolic, this negation within reality that sounds the warning which not only unsettles society but also allows it to take steps against a more catastrophic confrontation.

The steps we must take have also already been spelled out: we must not stop writing the impossibility of the real, the impossibility of "saying it all." As Lacan pointed out in *L'éthique de la psychanalyse,* it is Kant's conception of the beautiful that writes this impossibility most eloquently. The symbolic world—the second space of Freud's dream of Irma's injection—is strictly parallel to the Kantian conception of the aesthetics of the beautiful. The question of aesthetics, as we know, assumed a priority during the eighteenth century. In the widespread investigations of this topic an important shift is discernible: the aesthetic field is regularly conceived as *excluding* the subject. Think, for example, of Diderot's influential dictum: "Act as though the curtain never rose," that is, subtract the subject from the aesthetic field and focus on establishing the field's unity and

Jean Jacques Lequeu. He is free. *1798–99.*

homogeneity. But while others excluded the subject in order the better to *affect* him/her, in order to attain the maximum emotional effect, Kant completely revolutionized aesthetic theory by excluding the subject in order to *protect* him/her—in order to hold onto the subject as free. This he did by defining the beautiful object as one that could not be subsumed under any determinate concept, as one about which we could not say all. Kant thus made the beautiful the signifier of a limit, a barrier against the real. With this the object *a*, the nothing that guarantees the subject's freedom, was prohibited from being spoken—and thus from being lost.

Before the Kantian revolution, as we know, the question of rights was determined "vertically"; rights were assigned and assured by a power beyond man. With the Kantian revolution, some have argued, this question was determined "horizontally"; it was assumed that the rights of one individual were only curtailed by those of another.[23] This made one subject the limit of his neighbor, that which prevented him from achieving all that he might. The problem with this conception of rights—which is, admittedly, *a* modern although not *the* modern conception, and certainly *not* the one that issues from the Kantian theorization of the subject—is that it perceives rights only as a series of *demands*, fully expressible in language and fully known to the subject who insists on them. This notion of rights pits one subject, one consciousness,[24] against another and decides all conflicts by determining which demand will best benefit the *general will*. What this reduction of rights to demands results in is the elimination of the question of the subject's desire. It eliminates the question of the subject's attachment to what language cannot say, to the unspeakable double which is the indestructible support of our freedom. For it is only if the "lonely hour" of the S_2, the final signifier that retroactively determines our meaning, "does *not* arrive" that our actions can be determined by anything other than self-interest.

So, if the advocacy of breast-feeding, as I have argued, is not to be understood as a demand, but as a cry for the object-cause of desire, then it could only have been properly answered by assurances of the subject's freedom. It would be naive to suppose, however, that the historicism which turns a deaf ear to anxiety is only a current danger; it is clear that this same historicist response was a possibility contemporaneous with the anxiety-filled cry itself. It is certain that there were many who understood this anxiety before the drying up of the breast as a demand that the woman be subsumed under the category of the

23. On the false choice between a vertical and a horizontal conception of rights, see Luc Ferry, *Rights—The New Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

24. In her article on "The Nuclear Sublime," *Diacritics* (Summer 1984), pp. 4–10, Frances Ferguson speaks of the modern proliferation of rights as producing this experience of "consciousness impinging on consciousness." I am arguing that this misperception is not the inevitable consequence of the *expansion* of the domain of rights, but that it depends further on the *reduction* of rights to demands.

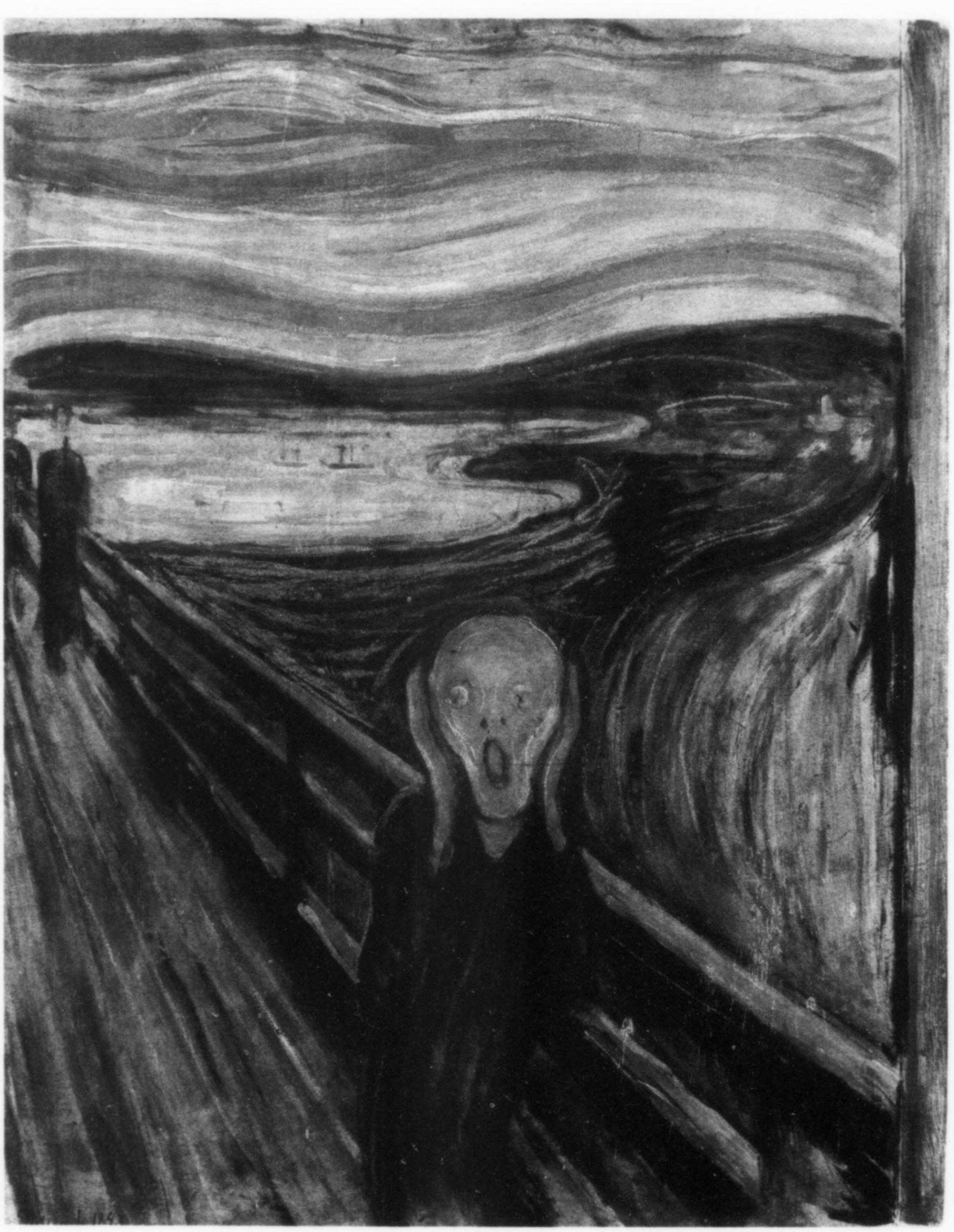
mother, that the biological family become the primary cell of society, even though these demands—that the woman cede her desire, that one place one's faith in the sexual relation—are absolutely antithetical to the political project whose possibilities had only just been opened up.

Victor Frankenstein is probably one of the most instructive illustrations of this sort of contemporary historicist reaction to the celebration of breast-feeding. As many critics have pointed out, *Frankenstein* is a novel about motherhood in which Frankenstein plays the role of an extremely bad mother. But what is it that makes him so bad? Not the fact that he refuses the demand of "his child," but that he interprets his cry as a demand. Earlier we asked, rhetorically, if the monster's attempt to justify his existence wouldn't entail the destruction of that existence—knowing well that it would. Now we must note that it is no coincidence that it is to Frankenstein that this justification is offered; it is he alone who hears the monster's long speech, the whole of which is set out in quotes, since it is from Frankenstein (and not the monster) that *we* (along with Walton) hear it. If Frankenstein is able to quote this long tale verbatim, we can only imagine that this is because *he takes the monster literally*; he refuses to question the words of the monster in order to tease out what he *wants* to say, what he desires.

In other words, to Frankenstein the monster is *not* the uncanny being we have taken him to be; to Frankenstein, the scientist, there is no pure being without sense, no desire. After the initial shock of seeing this monstrous embodiment of his failure, Frankenstein treats the creature as just another being whose rights threaten to abridge his own. It is no wonder, then, that he interprets the monster's cry as a demand, and of a very specific sort: a demand for a sexual relation. If he refuses to grant this demand, it is not because he doubts its validity or attainability. In fact we can surmise that he believes in this relation, that he believes that one subject must complement the other or engage him in a battle to the death. This last is the only relation he can imagine having with the monster, and so he refuses him, thinking the monster's profit can only mean his loss.

Under the circumstances, the novel could only have ended as it did—with Frankenstein's melancholy journeying to the ends of the earth. For, deprived of the ballast of the object *a*—the object-cause of desire which lends things their only value, their desirability—the subject is condemned to wander in pursuit of one thing after another, without any hope of freedom, that is, without any hope of choosing a path that is not dictated by the objects themselves. At one point Frankenstein refers to the monster as "my own vampire." We know that what he had in mind was closer to the vulgar image of the child sapping its mother's strength with its demands than to the horrifying Gothic image of the menacing double. We now see that he would have been better off had he felt some of the anxiety that vampires aroused in many of his contemporaries.

Edvard Munch. The Scream. *1893.*



Grimaces of the Real, or When the Phallus Appears

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

The "Phantom of the Opera": a Spectroscopy

The coincidence of motifs between high art (and theory) and mass culture has become a theoretical commonplace. Do we not find the clearest figuration of the famous *je suis un autre* in the mass-culture tradition of vampires and the living dead which "decenters" the subject, undermining its consistency and self-control from within?[1] The main problem with this resonance is the notion of a Zeitgeist as its interpretive device. One way to avoid this is to play high art and mass culture against each other—that is, to interpret each with the help of the other, like Lévi-Strauss's *Mythologiques*, in which myths interpret one another.

Let us take the "phantom of the opera," undoubtedly mass culture's central apparition, which has kept the popular imagination busy from Gaston Leroux's novel at the turn of the century through a series of movie and TV versions up to the recent musical. In what does the repulsive horror of his face consist? There are four features that define it:

The eyes: "His eyes are so deep that you can hardly see the fixed pupils. All you can see is two big black holes, as in a dead man's skull."[2] To a connoisseur of Alfred Hitchcock, this image instantly recalls the scene from *The Birds* in which, in a lonely farmhouse, Mitch's mother (Jessica Tandy) stumbles upon the corpse whose eyes have been picked out. At the sight of it she emits a silent scream. On those occasions when we do catch the sparkle of these eyes, they seem like two lighted candles deep within the head, perceivable only in the dark; these two lights somehow at odds with the head's surface, like lanterns burning at night in a lonely, abandoned house, are responsible for the uncanny effect of the "living dead." My first "free association" from the domain of high culture is Edvard Munch's paintings from the same period, primarily his *Evening*

1. For a detailed account of this parallel, see James Donald, "The Fantastic, the Sublime and the Popular; or, What's at Stake in Vampire Films? in *Fantasy and the Cinema*, ed. J. Donald (London: British Film Institute, 1989), pp. 233–52.
2. Gaston Leroux, *The Phantom of the Opera* (New York: Hippocrene Books Inc., 1990), p. 12.

From Claude Brunet. Le progres de la médecine. *1698.*

David Lynch. Elephant Man. *1980.*

on Karl Johan (1892), where the stream of ghostly pedestrians moves toward the spectator, their goggling eyes at odds with their death-mask faces.

The nose: "His nose is so little worth talking about that you can't see it side-face: and the *absence* of that nose is a horrible thing *to look at.*"[3] Is it necessary to recall that Freud, in his article on fetishism, uses exactly the same words to describe the horror of castration: what horrifies the child is the very *absence* of the penis, the fact that there is nothing to see there where the gaze expects something? On this point, there is an interesting divergence between Leroux's novel and the recent TV miniseries on the "phantom." In the novel, the phantom's primordial trauma was that, as a child, he was so ugly that even his own mother found him repulsive. When he approached her for an embrace, she pushed him aside with disgust and asked him to put on his mask.[4] But in the TV series, nobody could stand his distorted face *with the exception of his mother,* to whom he seemed nice and normal. She constantly caressed his face while entertaining him with her heavenly voice, and his later obsession with opera came out of a desperate search for the repetition of his mother's voice. Here one has to avoid the pseudoproblem of which version is "proper": they are to be read in the Lévi-Straussian manner as two complementary versions of the same myth that interpret each other. What did his mother see in his face

3. Ibid. The corresponding feature in Munch's paintings—if we are to continue the homology—is the absence of nose and ears from the homunculus's head in his most famous painting, *The Scream* (1893).

4. According to Lacan's classical definition, the function of the mask is "to dominate the identifications through which refusals of love are resolved" ("The Meaning of the Phallus," in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne,* ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose [New York: Norton, 1985], p. 85); it is therefore not difficult to conceive the phantom's compulsive mask-wearing—another of his features—as a strategy to counter the refusal of maternal love.

(in the second, TV version) that she found so irresistibly attractive, while the same face was so repugnant to the first mother? There is only one possible answer: *the exact opposite*—that is, an excessive phallic protuberance, repulsive to a "normal" gaze, in place of the absent nose—in short, the accomplishment of her (maternal) desire to obtain in the child her missing phallus, something resembling the case, famous during the eighteenth century, of the monster from Claude Brunet that has been analyzed by Alain Grosrichard.[5]

The amorphous distortion of the face: the flesh has not yet assumed definite features; it dwells in a kind of preontological state, as if "melted," as if deformed by anamorphosis. The horror lies not in his death mask, but rather in what is concealed beneath it, in the palpitating skinned flesh: anyone who catches sight of this amorphous life-substance has entered the forbidden domain and must therefore be excluded from the community. And herein consists the ultimate paradox of the "living dead": that death and the death stench it spreads are a mask sheltering a Life far more "alive" than our ordinary daily life. The place of the "living dead" is not somewhere between the dead and the living; it is precisely as the dead that they are "more alive than life itself," having access to the life-substance prior to its symbolic mortification. Lacanian psychoanalysis locates the cause of this deformity in the anamorphotic gaze, the gaze sustained by an incestuous enjoyment: the anamorphotic distortion of reality is the way the gaze is inscribed into the object's surface. One should recall here another case from the same period, that of the "elephant man," immortalized by David Lynch in the film of the same name. According to the mythology surrounding

5. See Alain Grosrichard, "Le cas Polyphème ou Un monstre et sa mère," *Ornicar?* 11 (1977), pp. 19–36, and 12/13 (1977), pp. 45–57.

this figure, the grotesque protophallic protuberance on his forehead (the "elephant's nose"), as well as the general deformity of his body, designate the inscription of the maternal gaze onto the bodily surface.

The myth of the "elephant man" is as follows: during a circus parade watched by his pregnant mother, an elephant went berserk and almost trampled her down; this "view from below" of the mad elephant affected the mother and caused the elephant-like distortion of the embryo.[6] We encounter the same anamorphotic deformity of the face in a series of Munch's paintings where the face seems to lose its contours and "melt down" into a whitish slime. Let it suffice to mention *Ashes, Vampire,* and *The Kiss,* three drawings in which, during sexual intercourse or in its aftermath, the man literally "loses his face."

The exceptional status of his voice: the phantom of the opera is first of all a being-of-voice. In the novel he is regularly addressed as "the man's voice," as if the "normal" relationship of voice and its bearer (its source) were inverted: instead of the voice appertaining to the body as one of its properties, it is the body itself that, in its distortion, materializes an "impossible," originally bodiless, and as such all-powerful (all-present) voice baptized by Michel Chion "*la voix acousmatique.*"[7] The first association here is again, of course, Munch's *The Scream.* In it, the energy of the hindered scream, which cannot burst out and release itself in the sound, finds an outlet (one is almost tempted to say "is acted out") in the anamorphotic distortion of the body in its "unnatural" serpentine windings, and in that of the coast and water beyond the bridge—as if these spiral lines are here to materialize sound vibrations in a kind of effect of *conversion* of the hindered sound into a distortion of matter.

The Voice Qua Object

In his seminar on anxiety (1960–61), Lacan referred to Munch's *The Scream* in order to exemplify the status of the voice qua object. That is to say, the crucial feature of the painting is the fact that *the scream is not heard.* The point here is not the obvious fact that "paintings do not speak"; indeed, there are paintings that are definitely resonant and call sounds to mind—the paintings of street scenes bursting with life, of dancing, of stormy nature, etc. It is rather that the very essence of this picture is that the scream we perceive is mute since the anxiety is too taut for it to find an outlet in vocalization (August Strindberg

6. There is a piquant detail as to the elephant man's "true story": when the historians examined the sources, they discovered that the myth of his origins has a surprising foundation in fact: a local newspaper from his native town contains a small note according to which—precisely at the time of his mother's pregnancy—an elephant went mad and almost trampled down a pregnant woman during a circus parade! See Michael Howell and Peter Ford, *The True History of the Elephant Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 1980).

7. As to the concept of the "*voix acousmatique,*" see Michel Chion, *La voix au cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1982).

totally missed the point when he prattled on about how, in order to enjoy Munch's paintings, one should imagine appropriate music to accompany them). As we have already pointed out, this structural muteness is indexed within the painting itself by the absence of ears in the desperate homunculus's head: as if these ears, foreclosed from the (symbolic) reality of the face, return in the real of the anamorphotic stain, the form of which recalls a gigantic ear. In everyday language, one could say that the scream "got stuck in the throat"; what is "stuck in the throat" is precisely the voice qua object, the voice that cannot burst out, unchain itself and thus enter the dimension of subjectivity. It is no accident that, in his *Seminar XI,* Lacan determines the object small *a* as the bone that got stuck in the subject's throat. If the exemplary case of the gaze qua object is a blind man's eyes, eyes which *do not see,* then the exemplary case of the voice qua object is a voice that remains silent, a voice that we *do not hear.*[8]

The most famous scream in the history of cinema is also silent: the scream of a mother who powerlessly watches her son being shot down by soldiers in the scene at the Odessa steps in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin.* In a tracking

8. The opposition of voice and gaze as objects corresponds to the antagonism of life drive and death drive: the voice vivifies whereas the gaze mortifies.

Sergei Eisenstein. Battleship Potemkin. *1925.*

shot the camera approaches the mother, who is clutching her head in desperation, and it almost enters the black hole of her open mouth. The entire effect is again based on the fact that we do not hear her scream. The scream "gets stuck in her throat" like the silent scream uttered by Mitch's mother upon encountering the corpse with its eyes pecked out. To this silent scream, which bears out the horror-stricken encounter with the real of enjoyment, one has to oppose the scream of release, of decision, of *choice*—the scream by means of which the unbearable tension finds an outlet. We "spit out the bone" in the relief of vocalization; in Hitchcock's oeuvre, the most famous case of this is Doris Day's scream in *The Man Who Knew Too Much,* a scream that, at the last moment, prevents the murder in the Albert Hall. One has to bear in mind here the contrast between this scream and the silent mother's scream from *Potemkin.* Although they are both placed within the mother-son relationship, the silent scream manifests the mother's resistance to cutting the umbilical cord that links her with the son, whereas the scream in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* signals that the mother, driven into a corner by a forced choice between her son and community, renounces the child and chooses community. This scream is therefore in its very coarseness "an act of civilization." In other words, the opposition between the silent and the vocalized scream coincides with that of enjoyment and Other: the silent scream attests to the subject's clinging to enjoyment, to his or her unwillingness to exchange enjoyment (that is, the object that gives body to it) for the Other, for the Law, for the paternal metaphor, whereas the vocalization as such corroborates the choice that is already made and the subject's place within the community.[9]

The voice that obsesses the phantom is, however, not a scream, but a hypnotic operatic air—he falls in love with Christine after he recognizes in her seductive singing the resonance of the lost maternal voice. In *The Man Who Knew Too Much,* this incestuous song that links the subject to the Thing (the maternal body), the song by means of which the Thing catches him with its

9. There is, however, a third type of scream that is neither silent nor vocal, but *vocalized with deferral.* We find it, among other examples, toward the end of Coppola's *The Godfather Part III*: it is uttered on the steps of Palermo's opera house by Michael Corleone (Al Pacino) after a mafia killer shoots his beloved daughter. At first the scream is silent; we witness the desperate opening of his mouth in complete silence. After a couple of seconds the sound strikes us with all its force. What is at work here is a kind of self-reflectivity, as if the scream were vocalized at the very moment when the subject perceives, becomes aware of, its silence. As long as the scream remains silent, we float in a kind of "stasis" of time (in Walter Benjamin's sense of this term)—the movement is suspended, the hero's entire life is condensed in three images superimposed in the timeless "now" (the murdered daughter, the murdered bride long years ago, the lost wife); when the scream resounds, Michael finds himself in the place homologous to that of Oedipus at Colonnus: by way of the scream, his "life force" evaporates, Michael is "emptied," his symbolic destiny is fulfilled—what remains of him is an empty shell, a burst soap bubble, a pure leftover of the real. It is therefore quite consistent that this scream is followed by a kind of reverse flashback, a jump into the unspecified future, when Michael, a lonely old man on a garden chair, suddenly falls down and drops dead: this utterly void figure drained of life is all that remains of him after the scream.

tentacles, is, of course, none other than the notorious "Que Sera, Sera" sung by Doris Day in the embassy where her son is kept prisoner. It is a song through which the mother reaches, "*catches,*" her son, that is to say, a song that expressly establishes the incestuous umbilical link (here Hitchcock makes use of a formal procedure whose audacity has not yet been fully perceived—the camera directly "tracks" the voice, "shows" its resonance on the staircase and its climb to the attic room where the son is locked up). Another crucial feature of this scene is the accentuated vulgarity and obscenity of Doris Day's singing—her voice is far too noisy, so that the distinguished guests at the reception avoid each other's gaze and look away, as if embarrassed by such an obscene exhibition. The third and final feature not to be missed is the content of the song itself, which directly exhibits its *superego* status: "Que Sera, Sera," what will be will be—how could one avoid noticing, in this answer to the child's question as to what will become of him when he grows up, the malevolent indifference that pertains to the very notion of the superego? This superego status is further confirmed if one locates "Que Sera, Sera" in the context of other Hitchcock films, as the middle term between *Rear Window* and *Psycho.* What we have in mind is, of course, a peculiarity of *Rear Window*'s soundtrack.[10] When, late in the evening, Grace Kelly approaches James Stewart, who is taking a nap in his wheelchair (first as an ominous shadow which overflows his face, then as "herself"), the background sounds—the rich texture of everyday noises—are suddenly suspended, and all we hear is the voice of an unknown soprano practicing scales, as if the mother is yet learning to sing (which is why she still tolerates the exchange of kisses between Stewart and Kelly). In *The Man Who Knew Too Much* the mother already knows how to sing; her voice finally reaches the son—the ultimate result of which is then shown in *Psycho*: a son dominated by the mother's voice, so that one is tempted to risk the thesis that the boy from *The Man Who Knew Too Much* is none other than Norman Bates in his childhood. In order to avoid the danger of the so-called "psychoanalytic interpretation of art" that lurks here (maternal superego as the "secret" of the voice-stain), one has to accomplish the properly dialectical reversal of the *explanans* into *explanandum.* The point is not to interpret the unfathomable "*acousmatique*" voice as the maternal superego, but rather to turn it around, to explain the very logic of the maternal superego by means of this vocal stain. What we call "maternal superego" is *nothing but* such a voice, which smears the picture and disturbs its transparency. Our procedure is therefore strictly allegorical—"mother" qua diegetic personality is ultimately an agency that, within the narrative content of Hitchcock's films, stands in for, holds the place of, a certain formal disturbance, a stain that blurs the field of vision.

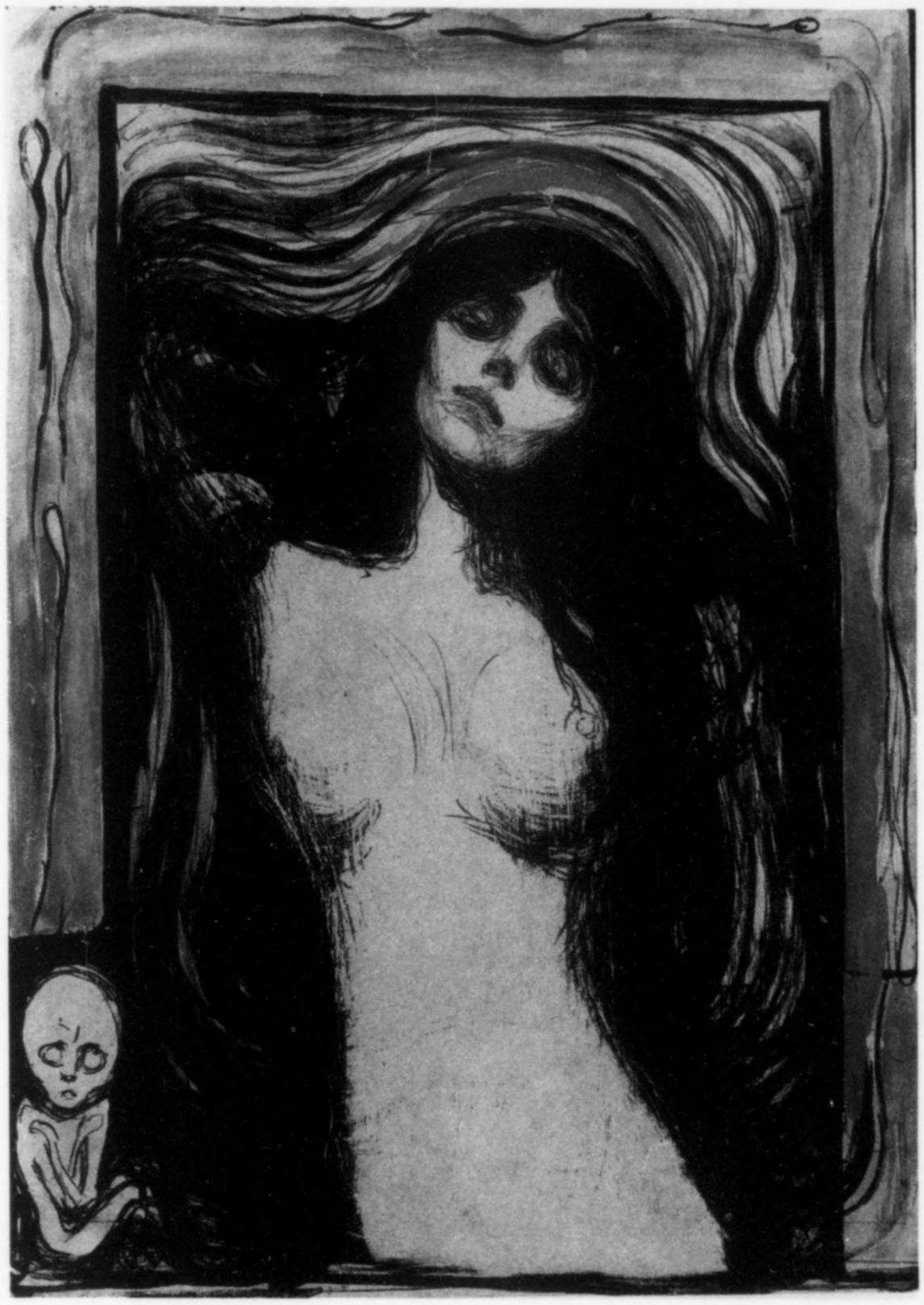
The scream and the song thus form an opposition: the status of the song

10. See Michel Chion, "Le quatrième côté," *Cahiers du cinéma* 309 (1980), pp. 5–7.

is that of a stain which materializes incestuous enjoyment, whereas the scream is—to put it simply—a horrified reaction to this stain. A cursory glance at Munch's *The Scream* reveals how its surface is "drawn": the right half is far more anamorphotically distorted than the left half; that is, the painting is "sucked" toward its center of gravity approximately two-thirds of the way up its right side, and the homunculus is seized with horror at being drawn into this whirlpool. The spiral lines of the distorted reality form a new shape vaguely suggestive of a gigantic ear or eye, a kind of paranoiac agency that "sees all and hears all"—bringing to mind Syberberg's *Parsifal,* where the depth of the visual field (the background) is often filled out by a flat rear projection that deliberately destroys the effect of perspective and sometimes directly figures a gigantic eye (like the eye-frescos from Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*). In Hitchcock's *Marnie,* the same role of a fantasy element that patches up the hole (the blank) in reality is played by the gigantic black hulk at the end of the street where Marnie's mother lives. It is evidently drawn and thus destroys the depth-effect. Therein consists the most elementary formal definition of psychosis: the massive presence of some real that fills out and blocks the perspective openness which is constitutive of "reality." This magnetic force that distorts the linear perspective on reality is of course enjoyment. Munch's *The Scream* depicts the intrusion of enjoyment into reality. The more we approach its vortex, the more the painting loses its "realist" character, the more its spiral lines of color strike us with the weight of their material presence; the illusion of the "reality" of the depicted content is thereby not simply undermined—it is far more appropriate to say that the depicted reality loses its free-floating, ethereal character and becomes loaded with a kind of substantial density. Considering that, according to Lacan, the only substance ascertained by psychoanalysis is enjoyment, it is not difficult to conceive how the material weight of Munch's stains bears out the density of enjoyment.

The Anal Father

The standard interpretation of *The Scream* as being about anxiety is therefore appropriate provided that we conceive the notion of anxiety in its strict Lacanian sense as the effect that registers the subject's panic reaction to the *overproximity* of the object-cause of desire. The little man's features clearly recall a homunculus or a fetus, that is to say, a subject not yet torn from the mother's body (the same homunculus is depicted in the lower left corner of Munch's *Madonna* (1895–1902), as part of the frame otherwise ornamented by spermatic trickles). The stain as such has the status of the object small *a* (surplus enjoyment). The same effect occurs at its clearest in two paintings from the turn of the century, *Girls on the Bridge* (1899) and *The Dance of Life* (1900): the background earth and trees in the first case, the contours of the dancing bodies in the second, transmute into extended sperm-like stains that encumber reality



with the substance of enjoyment. In *Starlit Night* (1893) the substantial mass of dark earth in the foreground directly evokes a blurred stain. These stains present a kind of visual correlate to the "*voix acousmatique*" in the cinema: they transgress the boundary outside/inside and lurk in the space between, like a mysterious plasm that disintegrates from within the consistency of "reality."

Here one could risk some general remarks on the relationship between modernism and postmodernism in terms of the status of paternal authority. Modernism endeavors to assert the subversive potential of the margins that undermine the father's authority and to assert the enjoyment that eludes the father's grasp, whereas postmodernism focuses on the father himself and conceives him as "alive," in his obscene dimension. The phantom-like object that hinders a "normal" sexual relationship is therefore a paternal figure, yet not the father who was *aufgehoben* in his name. It is not the dead symbolic father, but the father who is *still alive*—father insofar as he is not yet "transubstantiated" into a symbolic function, insofar as he remains what psychoanalysis calls a

Edvard Munch. Madonna. *1898–1902.*

"partial object." The father qua Name-of-the-Father, as a figure of symbolic authority, is always "dead" and "dead" (also) in the sense that *he does not know anything about enjoyment,* about life substance. The symbolic order (the big Other) and enjoyment are radically incompatible. This is why the famous dream, in Freud, of a son who appears to his father and reproaches him with "Father, can't you see I'm burning?" could be simply translated into "*Father, can't you see I'm enjoying?*"—can't you see I'm alive, burning with enjoyment? Father cannot see it because he is dead, whereby the possibility is open to me to enjoy not only *outside* his knowledge, that is, unbeknownst to him, but also *in his very ignorance.* The other, no less known Freudian dream about the father who does not know he is dead could thus be supplemented with "(*I, the dreamer, enjoy the fact that*) father does not know he is dead."[11]

What emerges under the guise of the phantom-like "living dead"—of the specter that hinders the "normal" sexual relationship—is, however, the reverse of the Name-of-the-Father, namely the "anal father" who definitely *does* enjoy: the obscene little man who is the clearest embodiment of the phenomenon of the "uncanny (*Unheimliche*)." (While what we are calling the "anal father" is customarily referred to as the "primal father," our term is meant to highlight the obscene nature of the father qua presymbolic "partial object.") He is the subject's double who accompanies him like a shadow and gives body to a certain surplus, to what is "in the subject more than subject himself." This surplus represents what the subject must renounce, sacrifice even—the part in himself that the subject must murder in order to start to live as a "normal" member of the community. The crucial point here is therefore that this "anal father" (Father-Enjoyment, "*Père-Jouissance,*" as Michel Silvestre calls it)[12] hinders the sexual relation—its stumbling block is not the "repressive" agency of symbolic Law (according to a Lacanian commonplace, the role of the Name-of-the-Father is precisely to *enable* the semblance of a sexual relationship), but on the contrary the excessive "sprout of enjoyment" materialized in the obscene figure of the "anal father." A whole series of Munch's paintings are to be conceived as variations on this motif, starting with the two *Mephistopheles* from 1935. *Mephistopheles I: The Duel* depicts a dark figure in the act of killing his white, shadow-like double, whereas in *Mephistopheles II: Split Personality* the same dark figure walks down the same street arm in arm with his almost transparent double and ignores a girl who turns round to cast a seductive glance at him. Here, one has to go beyond the standard "Lacanian" reduction of the motif of the double to

11. Therein consists, according to Lacan, the dissymmetry between Oedipus and Jocaste: Oedipus did not know what he was doing, whereas his mother knew all the time who her sexual partner was—and the source of her enjoyment was precisely Oedipus's ignorance. The notorious thesis on the intimate link between feminine enjoyment and ignorance acquires thereby a new, intersubjective dimension: woman enjoys in so far as her *other* (man) does not know.

12. See Michel Silvestre, "Le père, sa fonction dans la psychanalyse," in *Demain la psychanalyse* (Paris: Navarin Editeur, 1987), pp. 84–111.

the imaginary mirror relationship. For fundamentally, the double embodies the phantom-like Thing in me; that is to say, the dissymmetry between me and my double is ultimately that between the (ordinary) object and the (sublime) Thing. In my double, I don't simply encounter myself (my mirror image), but first of all what is "in me more than myself." The double is "myself," yet—to put it in Spinozist terms—conceived under another modality, that of the other, sublime, ethereal body, pure substance of enjoyment, it is exempted from the circuit of generation and corruption. Prior to his being "sublated" in his name, "father" designates such a Thing that is "in me more than myself."[13]

It would be wrong to draw the conclusion that the relationship to the double qua Thing has nothing whatsoever to do with the imaginary relationship between ego and ideal ego, its mirror image, that is, as Lacan writes in his "scheme L," a-a'. What one should render problematic in this mirror relationship is the apostrophe that distinguishes the image of a double (a') from "myself" (a): later, when a is no longer conceived as an imaginary other but as the real object-cause of desire, this comma becomes the object small a. In other words, object small a is the *unheimliches* surplus forever missing in the mirror image, that which is "unspecularizable." Yet it is precisely present in it in the shape of that unfathomable X on account of which the mirror image obtains its *unheimliches* character—the double is "the same as me," yet totally strange; his sameness increases his uncanniness. This is why the image of a double so easily reverses itself, so that, instead of experiencing the radical otherness of his double, the subject recognizes *himself* in the image of radical otherness. That is, he recognizes his equivalent in the amorphous mass of the real whose literary and cinematic versions reach from Maupassant's *Horlà* to the "alien" of Ridley Scott's film of the same name. In this sense, one could say that the Lacanian formula of fantasy, $\$ \diamond a$, the confrontation of the empty subject with the amorphous presence of the real, displays the "truth" of the mirror relationship a-a'. It is what confers on this relationship its antagonistic tension—another confirmation of how the real persists in the very heart of the imaginary. It is therefore clear why vampires are invisible in the mirror—they have read Lacan, and, consequently, know how to behave; they materialize object a which, by definition, *cannot be mirrored.*

What is crucial here, therefore, is the radical asymmetry in the relationship a-a', a Dorian Gray–like imbalance between myself and my mirror image: the price to be paid for retaining my image in all its harmonious consistency is that the entire horror of its amorphous leftover falls to me. This amorphous leftover is the material correlative to the gaze. When I find myself face-to-face with my double, when I "encounter myself" among objects, when "I myself" qua subject

13. The father qua Thing is what is originally prohibited, i.e., the part of himself that the subject must renounce in order to become "himself," to attain his symbolic identity. Since the symbolic universe is, on the other hand, "held together" by the Name-of-the-Father qua the agency of prohibition, the agent of symbolic *prohibition* is precisely the object that was originally *prohibited.*

appear "out there," what am I at that precise moment as the one who witnesses myself? I am precisely the gaze qua object, for the horror of coming face-to-face with my double is that this encounter reduces me to the object-gaze. In other words, the part missing in the mirror image of myself (the "′" of the axis *a*-*a*′) is my own gaze, the object-gaze that sees me out there. As a rule, one focuses on the horror of being the object of some invisible, unfathomable, panoptical gaze (the "someone-is-watching-me" motif), yet it is a far more unbearable experience to find *oneself* at this very point of pure gaze. The lesson of the dialectic of the double is, therefore, the discordance between eye and gaze. There certainly is in the mirror image "more than meets the eye," yet this surplus that eludes the eye, the point in the image that eludes my eye's grasp, is none other than *the gaze itself*. As Lacan puts it, "you can never see me at the point from which I look at you."

This is the way psychoanalysis subverts the usual opposition between the paternal and the maternal and brings out what has to be repressed, excluded, in order to establish this opposition. It brings out the *reverse* of the father, the "anal father" who lurks behind the Name-of-the-Father qua bearer of the symbolic Law. This "anal father" is the third element that disturbs the familiar narrative of the gradual prevalence of the paternal over the maternal in history as well as in the subject's ontogenesis, the narrative that even Freud seems to follow in his *Moses and Monotheism,* at least upon a superficial reading of it. The mad "anal father" is the nauseating debauchee, threatening yet ridiculously impotent, who does not fit into the system of the "complementary relationship between yin and yang" insofar as he short-circuits it, for he is the father who still carries the mark of his mother's desire. This extends Lacan's account of the Cartesian *cogito* and its inherent link with the God that guarantees its consistency. The Cartesian God—the correlate of the cogito—is, of course, none other than Lacan's "big Other," the place of the supposed symbolic knowledge (*le sujet suppose savoir*) that supplants the primordial Thing (Father-Enjoyment qua presymbolic Other). *Cogito ergo sum* is thus to be translated as: I think where enjoyment was evacuated; or, to give a deontological twist to it, if I am to think, the Other's enjoyment has to be suspended.

One can detect this subjective attitude in those moments in Raymond Chandler's novels when, exhausted by activity, Philip Marlowe disconnects from the frenetic run of things, lies down, and takes a rest. The glow of advertisements, the stench of alcohol and garbage, the intrusive noise of a big city, the rot and decay—all of which he has tried to escape by means of activity but which in fact are the substance of enjoyment—return to strike him in the face. There is no calm or reassurance in these moments; the passive thought, confronted with the nausea of existence, is, on the contrary, invaded by paranoia. Marlowe "thinks," yet his thought is not a free-floating, calm reflection, but rather sneaks and crawls under the watchful eye of a cruel superego: "I thought, and thought in my mind moved with a kind of sluggish stealthiness, as if it was

being watched by bitter and sadistic eyes" (*Farewell, My Lovely*). This is Marlowe's *cogito*: I think, therefore an obscene, sadistic superego specter is watching me. And what is this "phantom" if not the stumbling block to the "normal" sexual relationship? (In Leroux's novel, this relationship is between Christine Daaé and Vicomte de Chagny.) What is the phantom if not the so-called "pregenital" (anal) object that must be surmounted for the "normal" sexual relationship to realize itself? And one must avoid here the fallacy into which Freudian orthodoxy fell, according to which fixation on this anal object prevents the emergence of the "normal" (genital) sexual relationship. For

> the object is not what hinders the advent of the sexual relationship, as a kind of perspective error makes us believe. The object is, on the contrary, a filler, that which fills in the relationship which does not exist and bestows on it its fantasmatic consistency.[14]

The sexual relationship is in itself impossible, hindered, and the "phantom" qua object does nothing but materialize this "original" impossibility, this inherent hindrance; the "perspective error" consists in conceiving him as a stumbling block to the emergence of the "full" sexual relationship as if, without this troublesome intruder, the sexual relationship would be possible in its intact fullness.

What we encounter here is the paradox of *sacrifice* at its purest—the illusion of sacrifice is that renunciation of the object will render accessible the intact whole. In the ideological field, this paradox finds its clearest articulation in the anti-Semitic figure of the Jew—the Nazi has to sacrifice the Jew in order to be able to maintain the illusion that it is only the "Jewish plot" that prevents the establishment of the "class relationship" of society as a harmonious, organic whole. The Jew is the anal object par excellence, that is to say, the partial object-stain that disturbs the harmony of the class relationship. One is tempted, here, to gloss Jacques-Alain Miller's proposition: "The Jew is not what hinders the advent of the class relationship, as the anti-Semitic perspective error makes us believe. The Jew is, on the contrary, a filler, that which fills in the relationship that does not exist and bestows on it its fantasmatic consistency." In other words, what appears as the hindrance to society's full identity-with-itself is actually its positive condition: by transposing onto the Jew the role of the foreign body that introduces disintegration and antagonism to the social organism, the fantasy image of society qua consistent, harmonious whole is rendered possible.

This ambiguous object-impediment that guarantees fantasmatic consistency enables us to delineate the logic of the sublime reversal in the *Phantom of the Opera,* of the supreme melodramatic moment when the phantom who has hitherto *prevented* the fulfillment of the sexual relationship suddenly emerges

14. Jacques-Alain Miller, "D'un autre Lacan," *Ornicar?* 28 (1984), p. 55.

as the one who, by means of his sacrifice, *enables* it.[15] What we have in mind is, of course, the final moment when the phantom Eric sacrifices himself in order to make a happy life with Vicomte de Chagny possible for Christine. In terms of Propp's analysis of narrative, one could say that in this final reversal, the agent previously identified as villain suddenly changes into donor, into a "mediator" who, by means of his sacrifice, enables the hero's salvation. And it is perhaps the very experience of this reversal of the "condition of impossibility" into a "condition of possibility"—the experience of how "only the spear that smote you / can heal your wound" (to quote from Wagner's *Parsifal*)—that constitutes the core of what we call "dialectics."

Phallophany and the Image in Postmodernism

Let us return to the "secret" beneath the mask, so terrible that no one who sees it can survive. As Lacan recalls, apropos of the Greek mysteries, this "secret" is the *revealed phallus,* the phallus that is not yet "sublated" (*aufgehoben*) in the signifier. It is the *maternal* phallus, the phallus qua sign of the incestuous link. As Gilles Deleuze puts it: "*Si vous étiez pris dans le rêve de l'autre, vous étiez foutu*" (If you are caught in another's dream, you are done for). The revealed phallus, the phallic-anamorphotic distortion of the face, is a kind of brand attesting that the subject is caught in the desire of the other (mother), entrapped in her dream. In this precise sense, the phallus "appears" in the obscene protuberance on the elephant man's forehead and marks it with the brand of the mother's desire, as if it were struck by the whip of her gaze.

But what Lacan calls "phallic identification" is the exact opposite of this "phallophany," this revelation or appearing of the phallus as real presence, outside of any symbolic mediation. It is the identification with the phallus qua signifier of desire—the paradox of *identification with nonidentity,* with the gap that maintains desire. In phallic identification proper we identify with the element that functions as the signifier of its own opposite (in short, as signifier *tout court*). Let us just recall the Hitchcockian blonde (for example, Grace Kelly): in her figure, the opposition of frigid blonde and hot brunette is surmounted ("sublated," *aufgehoben,* in the precise Hegelian sense), so that the very surface coldness functions as a sign of its opposite—the more calm she is, the more this restraint attests to an underlying passion. It is the same with fury—we enter the phallic dimension when we surmount the external opposition of outbursts of noisy rage and of restrained silence, so that cold silence itself starts to function as something infinitely more threatening than violent roars. On

15. The same reversal characterizes the popular-culture figure of the villain, from the ambiguous status of the Hitchcockian villain up to Darth Vader in the *Star Wars* trilogy (who, one should not forget, also wears a mask concealing a distorted, amorphous face, i.e., who also plays the role of "anal father").

another level, it is the same with the dialectic of the leader. Political hagiographers know very well that the leader is to be depicted as fundamentally *alone* in his heights, since it is precisely in these moments of absolute solitude that, in a "deeper" sense, "he is with us all"—the leader is "us all" precisely as absolutely alone, as one. This is what Hegel calls "self-relating negation": the way effectively to negate and surmount frigidity is not to *supplant* it by its external opposite (passion), but to make it *designate* this opposite. Therein consists the ultimate paradox of what Lacan calls "the dialectic of desire"—the renunciation of desire as the very form of appearance of its fulfillment—the paradox that gets lost as soon as the phallus begins to "appear."

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David Lynch, whose *Elephant Man* features the above-mentioned historical case of phallophany at the onset of modernism, developed in *Blue Velvet* and *Wild at Heart* a style whose underlying premise is the expansion of the anamorphotic distortion into the ontological condition of reality as such. At the very beginning of *Blue Velvet,* the suspension of the paternal function (epitomized by the father's heart attack) is immediately followed by the intrusion of the real in the shape of a fragment of reality (a cutoff ear) that, as soon as one approaches it too closely, turns into a nauseating, crawling life substance (ants swarm over the ear). In Lynch's "ontology," the universe is a palpitating slime that continually threatens to blow up the settled frame of everyday reality. In *Wild at Heart* the counterpart to the cutoff ear is a repeated close shot of lighting a cigarette that then dissolves into a raging fire—through this opening in reality the substance of the real breaks in. All that remains of diegetic "reality" in *Wild at Heart* are narrative fragments from old cinematic genres (film noir, soft-porn, musical comedy, etc.)—a patchwork designed to prevent us from "burning our fingers" too much on the real.

Herein lies the fundamental ambiguity of the image in postmodernism: it is a kind of barrier enabling the subject to maintain distance from the real, protecting him or her against its irruption, yet its very obtrusive "hyperrealism" evokes the nausea of the real. It is a commonplace to the talk of the postmodern "society of the spectacle" whose reality is supplanted by an image of itself, and where, consequently, individuals lose the character of social agents and are reduced to external observers of the spectacle. Yet the other side of this "derealization" is the hypersensitivity to reality as something that can be hurt, for the inherently painful dimension of our contact with reality exists even at the most microscopic level—as if the subject were reduced to a pure receptive gaze precisely because he is aware of how every encroachment upon the world, even the most benevolent, *cuts into* the world, hurts it. "Edward Scissorhands," from Tim Burton's film of the same name, a failed, aborted, Frankensteinian monster with scissor-like hands, epitomizes the postmodern subject: a melancholic subject

condemned to pure gaze since he knows that touching the beloved will cause him or her unbearable pain. This link between "scopic drive" and violence characterizes also the figure of Norman Bates from *Psycho*: the reverse of his "voyeurism" is that the only proper "act" of which he is capable is slaughtering his neighbor.[16]

In the Lacanian notion of the real, the hard kernel that resists symbolization coincides with its opposite, the so-called "inner" or "psychic" reality.[17] Within postmodernism the same coincidence is reproduced in the shape of the tension between the obtrusive bodily density (one is tempted to say: the Heideggerian "earth") that overshadows the narrative frame and the view that reality itself is "something that exists only in our heads," a "product of the delirium of our brain"—"The most prudent and effective method of dealing with the world around us is to assume that it is a complete fiction—conversely, the one small node of reality left to us is inside our own heads."[18] One should recall here the series of great "postmodern" mise-en-scènes of Wagner's operas that transpose part of the action or all of it into the "head" of one of its protagonists. In Jean-Pierre Ponelle's *Tristan,* what follows Tristan's death (Isolde's return, etc.) is staged as the delusion of the dying Tristan; at the end of Hans-Juergen Syberberg's film version of *Parsifal* the entire content is twice "subjectivized," located first in Kundry's head, then in the head of Wagner himself.[19] However, the most indicative example is Harry Kupfer's staging of *Fliegende Holländer* (Bayreuth, 1977–85): the Dutchman is presented as Senta's

16. Yet one does not need to have recourse to cinematic fiction in order to epitomize this split attitude of the "postmodern" subject—it suffices to recall the mode of the presence of the West in Baghdad during the Gulf War: on the one hand, Peter Arnett of CNN reporting live yet reduced to a pure gaze, as if he was not speaking from the war zone but was himself watching the bombing on TV; on the other hand the total physical destruction of the country on which more bombs were dropped than on Vietnam.

17. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), chap. 5.

18. James G. Ballard, "Introduction to the French Edition," *Crash* (London: Triad/Panther Books, 1975), p. 8. This attitude finds its clearest expression in a series of recent films that stage the paradox of Zhuang Zi and his butterfly: what at first seems to be a dream (or a flashback memory) is retroactively shown to be "reality" itself, and vice versa, as in Adrian Lyne's *Jacob's Ladder,* at the very end of which the perspective of its hero, a Vietnam veteran persecuted by old war nightmares, is reversed, and the only "present" is Vietnam itself—scenes from America being nothing but the hero's death-bed delusions.

19. On a more general level, the very succession of three modalities in the staging of Wagner's musical dramas in Bayreuth epitomizes the Jamesonian triad *realism-modernism-postmodernism.* Modernism is of course the mark of the so-called "neo-Bayreuth" in the early fifties when Wieland Wagner threw off "realistic" swords, helms, and similar "Nordic" bric-a-brac and imposed an abstract ascetism: an empty stage with just some barren symbols on it, singers in white tunics, the interplay of light and darkness as the main generator of visual dramatic tensions (through the use of strong reflectors). Postmodernism's main exponent was Patrice Chereau in his legendary staging of the *Ring* in 1976–80: a return to the wealth of "realistic" details (including live horses in the first year of *Walkuere*) yet within the "hyperrealist" frame that suspends their "veracity" and posits them as moments of a nightmarish "psychic reality."

hysterical delusion, as the mode by which Senta "does not cede her desire" and refuses the poor and faithful Eric, the sexual partner at her disposal in "reality." Her final suicidal gesture is thus reinterpreted as a kind of reflective redoubling: Senta does not sacrifice herself for the Dutchman, she sacrifices herself to keep alive the fantasy of the Dutchman that gives consistency to her desire—she chooses death rather than accepting the dreadful reality of the provincial town where she "really" lives. The screen onto which Senta's fantasy is projected consists of a big black hulk strangely resembling the hulk in the shot from Hitchcock's *Marnie*; this hulk is located at the back of the stage, in the very place where the viewer's eye expects to meet the imaginary point of the infinite axis of perspective, that is, the Other's gaze, which confers on the field of vision its depth. The specter of the Dutchman appears when the gigantic hands that form the hulk spread and allow a view of its interior, the folded, vividly red real, the space of enjoyment not yet "colonized" by the sociosymbolic order.[20]

Class Struggle in the Opera

The Flying Dutchman, like Leroux's phantom, is an intruder preventing the "normal" sexual relationship between Senta and her poor Eric—literally a "phantom in the opera," a phantom-like apparition on the stage. The fantasy screen in the background holds the space open for the "ghosts of the past" for whom there is no place in the gray, utilitarian, bourgeois, everyday life that forecloses the very possibility of heroic sacrifice: Senta yearns for a world in which something akin to the Dutchman's tragedy is still conceivable. Yet if one is to avoid the historicist trap, one must apply here the materialist lesson of antievolutionist creationism that resolves the contradiction between the literal meaning of Scripture (according to which the universe was created just 4004 B.C.) and irrefutable proofs of its greater age (million-year-old fossils, etc.) not via the usual indulgence in the delicacies of an allegorical reading of Scripture but by the affirmation that while God indeed created the universe he built in false traces (fossils etc.) of the past.[21] The "past" is always actually synchronic with the present; the "past" is simply the way the universe thinks its antagonism. It is enough to recall the infamous role of the "remnants of the past" in accounting for the difficulties of the "construction of socialism."

20. This background also enables us to locate the fantasy power of the image of a "ghost ship" roving the seas like a black stain, as in Alistair Maclean's adventure thriller *The Wreck of Mary Deare*: is not the captain of the abandoned ship found by rescuers a new figuration of the Flying Dutchman?

21. See Stephen Jay Gould, "Adam's Navel," in *The Flamingo's Smile* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985). Incidentally, that was the mistake Friedrich Engels made in *Origins of the Family, State and Private Property*: he mistook the "punalua" family (all brothers in clan A married to all sisters in clan B, its counterpart), an ideological "fossil" fabricated by recent Indian society, for an effective past form of family.

In this sense, the phantom and his sexual rival, Vicomte de Chagny, form a kind of Kleinian opposition of "bad" and "good" aristocratic object: the phantom embodies the excess that aristocracy has to renounce in order to become integrated into bourgeois society. In other words, he is a kind of "fossil" created by the Enlightenment itself as a distorted index of its inherent antagonism. What was, prior to the Enlightenment, a sovereign expenditure, a glitter of those in power, a moment of their symbolic status, now undergoes a kind of anamorphotic distortion, falls out from the social space whose contours are defined by utilitarian ideology. It is now perceived as decadent and debauched, epitomized in the bourgeois myth of a corrupted demonic aristocrat.[22] The notion of "decadence" acquires here its full weight as the concept that "fantasizes the return of all the weirdest religious sects and cults, after the triumph of the secular, of *homo oeconomicus* and of utilitarianism. It is thus the ghost of the superstructure, of cultural autonomy itself, that haunts the omnipotence of the base."[23] This superego side of the phantom qua return of an archaic enjoyment is, however, supplemented by its opposite, which is inscribed into Leroux's novel by means of its very topography. Although "apolitical," the novel nevertheless establishes a mysterious link between the phantom and the Paris Commune, this ultimate trauma of French bourgeois society of the late nineteenth century; deep under the Opera, where the phantom has his premises, there were the secret torture chambers of the Communards. The political topography of the *Phantom of the Opera* thus consists of an extimate field, a field whose innermost center meets its radical exterior: the very heart of Parisian high society, the building of the Opera with its luxurious staircases, reveals—the moment we dive into its foundations—the traces of the traumatic "repressed" past, that is to say, of the historical moment that shook the foundations of the bourgeois state.

Such, then, is the social-ideological topography of the phantom: his figure constitutes an impossible "point of passage" at which the subversive power of the new (the working class) rejoins the return of the old (aristocratic decadence). In this precise sense, the phantom is a *fetish* that stands in for the class struggle: it disavows it by combining into one two quite different elements that undermine the established bourgeois order, aristocratic decadence and the coming proletarian subversion. It is therefore wrong to ask directly "What is the class equivalent of the phantom?"; its "class meaning" is contained in the very distortion that results from the "impossible" conjunction of opposites (as in fascist anti-

22. Georg Lukacs articulated a homologous shift apropos of Walter Scott's *Waverley*: from the perspective of "civil society," the romantic outcast is all at once perceived as a common criminal.
23. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 382. Note how the phantom exerts his power within the opera: he takes revenge on the new director for giving preferences to commercial over artistic considerations, i.e., he endeavors to impede opera's utilitarian commercialization.

Semitism where the "Jew" condenses in a unique figure the excessive nature of capitalism—its wild profiteering, etc.—as well as its proletarian subversion—the "Jewish-Communist plot"). This distortion betrays the work of "class desire," its effort to render invisible the actual contours of social antagonism and thereby pave the way for its "imaginary solution"; by means of his transformation from villain to donor the phantom becomes the "vanishing mediator," rendering possible the final reconciliation.

Convincing as it may appear, such a direct analysis of "ideological content" is nevertheless ultimately marked by a brand of ultimate arbitrariness, as are all analyses of this kind. Dr. Frankenstein's creature may be a metaphor for the monstrous results of man's manipulation of nature, for the horrors of the French revolution; Kaspar Hauser may epitomize the catastrophic results of the lack of family education; the elephant man may be cathected by the ideological problematic of the body-soul relationship ("Such a horrible body, and yet such a great soul!"); the killer shark in *Jaws* may signify anything from repressed sexuality to unbridled capitalism or the threat of the Third World to America. But it is not a question of deciding which of the meanings is "true." Rather, what one should do is to conceive the monster as a kind of fantasy screen where the multiplicity of meanings can appear and fight for hegemony. In other words, the error of content analysis is to proceed too quickly and to take for granted the fantasy surface itself, the empty form/frame that offers space for the appearance of monstrous content. The crucial question is not "What does the phantom signify?" but "How is the very space constituted where entities like the phantom can emerge?" Or, to return to Kupfer's *Fliegende Holländer,* the crucial question is not the meaning of Senta's fantasies but rather where the black hulk in the background of the stage comes from, so that Senta has a surface onto which she can project her fantasies. What we have here is the same *vel* as that of the well-known visual paradox of the vase or two faces; as soon as we perceive meaning(s), the form qua place of their inscription becomes invisible. So the fundamental gesture of a dialectical analysis must be precisely a step back from content to form, that suspension of content which renders form visible anew. The elementary ideological operation consists in this very "conversion of the form" by means of which the possible space for ideological meanings emerges. Or, as Fredric Jameson put it apropos of *Jaws*:

> The vocation of the symbol—the killer shark—lies less in any single message or meaning than in its very capacity to absorb and organize all of these quite distinct anxieties together. As a symbolic vehicle, then, the shark must be understood in terms of its essentially polysemous function rather than any particular content attributable to it by this or that spectator. Yet it is precisely this polysemousness which is profoundly ideological, insofar as it allows essentially social and historical anxieties to be folded back into apparently "natural" ones,

both to express and to be recontained in what looks like a conflict with other forms of biological existence.[24]

This "folding-back" is what Lacan calls "*point de capiton.*" The emergence of the shark as symbol does not add any new meaning; it simply reorganizes meanings that were already there by binding them to the same signifier—ideology works in this purely symbolic moment by making available a signifier that "quilts" the floating plurality of anxieties.[25] But what remains outside this formal symbolic moment, what resists absorption into meaning, is the horrifying power of fascination that pertains to the presence of the shark itself—its *enjoyment,* to use the Lacanian term for it. One should therefore reformulate the *vel* between content and form: *you cannot have both meaning and enjoyment.* The analysis that focuses on the "ideological meaning" of monsters overlooks the fact that, before signifying something, before serving as a vessel of meaning, monsters embody enjoyment qua the limit of interpretation, that is to say, *nonmeaning as such.*

The Subject of the Enlightenment

This empty form, this black stain in the very heart of reality, is ultimately the "objective correlate" of the subject himself. *By means of anamorphotic stains, "reality" indexes the presence of the subject.* The emergence of the empty surface on which phantasmagorical monsters appear is therefore strictly correlative to what Heidegger calls "the advent of Modern-Age-subjectivity," the epoch in which the symbolic "substance" (the "big Other" qua texture of symbolic tradition) can no longer contain the subject, can no longer bind him to its symbolic mandate. This cutting-off of substantial tradition is the constitutive gesture of the Enlightenment. In this sense, *the "monster" is the subject of the Enlightenment,* that is to say, it is the mode in which the subject of the Enlightenment acquires its impossible positive existence. This sheds a new light on the ill-famed problem of the "death of the subject." For the "eclipse" of the subject before the Thing—what has been (mis)perceived as the subject's "death"—is strictly equal to his emergence, since *the "subject" is precisely the void that remains after all substantial content is taken away.* The source of this customary confounding on the "death of the subject" really concerned another motif, that of the "death of man."

24. Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 26–27.

25. Let us recall, from the ideological domain proper, the way Juan Peron "held together" the movement that bears his name: Peronism was a profoundly heterogeneous movement; there was room in it for leftist trade unionism as well as for aristocratic militarism. Peron functioned as a name that did not reduce this heterogeneity but simply contained it as an empty vessel—the unity of Peronism was rendered possible by the fact that all its currents recognized themselves in a common signifier.

"Subject" and "human person" are strictly opposed; "subjectivization" entails a radical "evacuation," an emptying, of "man" qua substantial "person."

To exemplify this split between "subject" and "person," one only has to evoke one further figure in the series of legendary "monsters": Kaspar Hauser. On May 26, 1828, a young man appeared in the central square of Nuremberg, singularly dressed, with stiff, unnatural gestures. His entire language consisted of a few fragments of the Lord's prayer learned by heart and recited with grammatical errors, and of the enigmatic phrase "I want to become such a knight as was my father," the identification with the ego-ideal. In his left hand, he carried a piece of paper which bore his name—Kaspar Hauser—and the address of a captain of the Nuremberg cavalry. Later, when he learned to speak "properly," Kaspar told his story: he had spent all his life alone in a "dark cave" where a mysterious "black man" procured food and drink for him, until the day when he dressed him and took him to Nuremberg, teaching him a few phrases on the way. He was entrusted to the Daumer family, quickly "humanized" himself, and became a celebrity—an object of philosophical, psychological, pedagogical, and medical researches, and even of political speculation about his origin (was he the missing Prince of Baden?). After a few quiet years, on the afternoon of December 14, 1833, he was found mortally wounded, and on his deathbed he announced that his murderer was the same "black man" who had brought him to the central square of Nuremberg five years before.

Although the sudden appearance of Kaspar Hauser provoked the sort of shock that one associates with a brutal encounter with a real that seems to interrupt the symbolic circuit of cause and effect, the most surprising thing about this appearance was that, in a sense, *it was awaited*: precisely *as* a surprise, Kaspar arrived in time. It is not only that he realized the myth of a child of royal origins abandoned in a wild place and then found at the age of adolescence (cf. the rumor that he was the Prince of Baden). Nor is it the fact that he pathetically realizes the myth of a hero saved by the animals who take care of him (the only objects in his "dark cave" were a couple of figures of wooden animals). The point is rather that toward the end of the eighteenth century, the theme of a child excluded from human community became the object of numerous literary and scientific texts: it staged in a pure, "experimental" way the theoretical question of how to distinguish in man the part played by culture from that played by nature. Kaspar Hauser appeared, then, as the subject of the Enlightenment at its purest, as the very embodiment of the ideological problematic that pertains to the project of Enlightenment. This "Thing which speaks" with its "mechanical," abrupt, doll-like gestures, lacking the "depth" that defines someone as a person, was the pure subject ($) prior to subjectivization, freed from all imaginary lures. (Even the "black man," Kaspar's paternal substitute, was devoid of any positive features.) The Lacanian diagnosis of Kaspar can be succinctly put—he was the subject who had not been captured by his image in the mirror; in other words, he was *the subject without an ego.*

Kaspar Hauser was thrown straight into the symbolic network, bypassing the imaginary (mis)recognition that enables one to experience oneself as a "person." As is known from his story, Kaspar Hauser was not able to relate to his mirror image; he did not recognize "himself" in it—the same as with all monster figures, real or "fictitious," from Dr. Frankenstein's creature to the elephant man. This is the way the Enlightenment project went wrong: it wanted to pour the dirty water of corrupted civilization out of the bathtub and to retain the healthy, unspoiled natural child-ego; yet what they inadvertently threw out was precisely the ego and they were left with a dirty monster. In short, the pure "subject of the Enlightenment" is a monster that gives body to the surplus that escapes the vicious circle of the mirror relationship.

Consequently, if one bears in mind the fact that, according to Lacan, the ego is an *object,* a substantial "*res,*" one can easily grasp the ultimate sense of Kant's transcendental turn. It desubstantializes the subject which, even with Descartes, had remained a "*res* cogitans," a substantial "piece of reality." It is this very de-substantialization that opens up the empty space (the "blank surface") onto which fantasies are projected, where monsters emerge. In Kantian terms, because of the inaccessibility of the Thing-in-itself, there always remains a gaping hole in constituted, phenomenal reality; reality is never "all," its circle is never closed, and the void of the inaccessible Thing is filled out with phantasmagorias through which the transphenomenal Thing enters the stage of phenomenal presence. In short, prior to the Kantian turn, there can be no black hulk at the back of the stage. Of course, before Kant philosophers had doubted the capacity of man to know the infinite and had affirmed that we can only conjecture the infinite by means of improper metaphors. But Kant adds to it the crucial twist: man's finitude is not the simple finitude of an inner-worldly entity lost in the overwhelming totality of the universe. The knowing subject is a substanceless point of pure self-relating (the "I think") that is *not* "part of the world" but is, on the contrary, correlative to "world" as such and therefore *ontologically constitutive.* "World," "reality," as we know it, can appear only within the horizon of the subject's finitude. The black space of the Thing-in-itself is therefore something extremely dangerous to approach, for if one gets too close to it, "world" itself loses its ontological consistency, like the anamorphotic stain on Holbein's *Ambassadors,* where, when we shift our perspective and perceive it "as it is" (as a skull), *all remaining reality loses its consistency and turns into an amorphous stain.*

The subject is the nonsubstance; he exists only as a nonsubstantial self-relating subject that maintains its distance toward inner-worldly objects. Only in monsters does this subject encounter the Thing that is his impossible equivalent—*the monster is the subject himself, conceived as Thing.* Therein consists the paradox of the Lacanian mathem $\$ \diamond a$. The subject and the Thing are not two entities but rather the two sides, the two "slopes," of one and the same entity. The subject is "the same" as the Thing; he is, so to speak, its negative, the

trace of its absence within the symbolic network—Lacan's obsession with topological models of "folded" space in the last years of his teaching (the Möbius strip, the inverted 8, etc.) attests to his effort to articulate clearly this folding-back wherein the subject encounters its own reverse. Hegel radicalized Kant by conceiving the void of the Thing (its inaccessibility) as equivalent to the very negativity that defines the subject; the place where phantasmagorical monsters emerge is thus identified as the void of the pure self: "This night, the inner of nature, that exists here—pure self—in phantasmagorical presentations, is night all around it, here shoots a bloody head—there another white shape, suddenly before it, and just so disappears."[26]

To return to *The Scream* for the last time: one can say that the standard modernist reading that conceives it as the manifestation of a monadic subject, desperate at his inability to establish contact with the world, condemned to a solipsistic void—all this falls short insofar as it continues to conceive the subject as substance, as a positive entity whose adequate expression is hindered. Postmodernism discards the illusion of this perspective. What appeared, within modernism, as the limit that impeded the subject's self-expression is now perceived as the subject himself.[27] In other words, postmodernism passes from the "emptied subject" to the subject qua emptiness of the substance. This is homologous to the reversal from the matter qua substance that curves space into matter qua curvature of the space in the theory of relativity. In its most radical dimension, the "subject" is *nothing but* this dreaded "void"—in *horror vacui,* the subject simply fears himself, his constitutive void. Far from displaying the subject's horror at the prospect of losing himself, the scream is therefore the very gesture by means of which the dimension of subjectivity is inaugurated. That which, through the scream, will become the subject shrinks from what is "in him more than himself," from the Thing in himself, which is to say that he assumes a minimal distance towards it.

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If the ultimate "social mediation" of the monster figure is thus to be sought in the social impact of capital—this terrifying force of "deterritorialization" which dissolves all traditional ("substantial") symbolic links and marks the entire social edifice with an irreducible structural imbalance—then it is no accident that "monsters" appear at every break that announces a new epoch of capital —its rise (Frankenstein, Kaspar Hauser); its transformation into imperialism

26. Quoted from D. Ph. Verene, *Hegel's Recollection* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), pp. 7–8.
27. As to this notion of the subject, see Joan Copjec, 'The Orthopsychic Subject: Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan," *October* 49 (Summer 1989), pp. 53–71.

(the elephant man, the phantom of the opera); the emergence of "postindustrial" society (the revival of the motif of the "living dead"). This structural imbalance is inscribed into the very form of anamorphosis, namely its radical ambiguity. While anamorphotic distortions of reality, like the forehead-protuberance of the "elephant man," often function as repellent horror, it must also be noted that phallophany may also occasion an effect of sublime beauty, as the ethereal, refined sublimity of Virginia Woolf's face makes clear.

The status of sublimity is therefore ultimately that of a "grimace of reality" (as Lacan puts it in *Television*); Lacan's definition of the sublime ("an object elevated to the level of the Thing") could be rendered as "the sublime is an object, a piece of reality, into which the real of desire is inscribed by means of an anamorphotic grimace." The boundary that separates beauty from disgust is for that reason far more unstable than it may seem, since it is always contingent on a specific cultural space. The "anamorphotic" transformation of the tortured body that can exert such a fascination within a particular cultural space—the crippling of female feet in China, the protraction of the neck of the women of the Padaung of Burma—can evoke nothing but disgust in a foreign gaze. Have we not thus also delineated the contours of a *postmodern* criticism of ideology that instructs us to assume such a foreign gaze upon one's own ideological field, whereby the ideological anamorphosis loses its power of fascination and changes into a disgusting protuberance?

Quiet Revolution . . . And Rigid Stagnation*

MICHEL CHION

TRANSLATED BY BEN BREWSTER

Take a scene I noted in a recent film, a good film, rescreened on television last March (1986). It was *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*—not Don Siegel's 1956 original but Philip Kaufman's 1978 remake, with Donald Sutherland. The scene was the one where Donald Sutherland, at the height of the danger, is overcome by fatigue and falls asleep on a bench in the open air, which allows one of the giant pods from outer space that threaten the earth to begin its work, which will be to replace the human original with another Sutherland. This initiates the most impressive scene in the film. During the night—this is San Francisco, and it is clearly very hot—a plant-like thing opens up, and with an unobtrusive noise gives birth to a full-size human being, still damp and imperfectly shaped. The thing and Donald Sutherland, the original and the gradually approximating imitation, appear in the same shot.

The Sound Has Changed the Image

If at that moment, sitting in front of the small screen, I was vividly reminded of the impression the film made on my first viewing in the cinema, it was because of the sound.

This sound—how produced I do not know, but that doesn't matter—the sound of an unwrinkling, an unfolding of organs, of membranes detaching themselves from one another, and of a sucking, all at once, this sound, real and precise, clear and sharp in the high registers, tactile, you heard it as if you were touching it, like the touch of the skin of a peach, which gives some people the shivers.

It seems that fifteen years ago this did not exist, such a rendering—so concrete, so present, so sharp in the high registers, so haptic, i.e., touchable,

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altering our perception of the world of the film, making it more immediate, even precluding distance—did not exist in the cinema. And since the minor denizens of the high registers have entered films (even in standard mono versions), along with them has come another materiality, another rendering of life. I am not talking particularly of the spatial effects of stereo, or Dolby thunder, but of a micro-rendering of the hum of the world, which locates the film in the ultra-present indicative, declines it in the ultra-concrete. Something has shifted, and, like the substitutions narrated by the film, a change deriving from the sound, and not registered anywhere, has taken place and changed the status of the image: a quiet revolution.

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For if there is—as there certainly should be—an official history of the cinema, with its defeats and victories, its stars and its unknown soldiers, its battles of Marignan and its Treaties of Cateau-Cambrésis, its reference-point dates, on either side of which we place, for convenience, what happened before and after (the introduction of sound, neorealism, the *nouvelle vague*), a new history of the cinema might be written, uncovering the unnoticed events, the gradual technical, economic, and aesthetic mutations, the quiet revolutions. Revolutions, first of all, in the *rendering* of the real.

Now, a rendering is not a replication, that is, a mere imitation. Our starting point must be that the cinema, before it had what some call a "language," began

Don Siegel. Invasion of the Body Snatchers. *1956.*

by being a replication. A crude replication (a thousand points where reality offered a million), but miraculously a sufficiently convincing one. Except that this was not enough to keep films going. So codes of narration and representation were established; but this was still not enough. Fairly soon it was necessary to consider the rendering.

The Question of the Rendering

The term *rendering* implies that, because there is a transposition, a channeling via at most two senses, and with pretty poor sensory definition, of much more complex perceptions, to recreate the impact, the very appearance of an event, it is not enough to film and record it. Live perceptions are never purely auditory and visual. A change in the light is accompanied by a change in temperature. You are at the roadside, a car speeds past. You have: 1. the car in your field of vision; 2. the noise it makes in a wider field, before and after, heard by both ears (stereophonic sound); 3. the vibration of the ground under your feet; 4. a movement of the air against your skin. All together they make the global "impact" of the event, add up to a perceptual "lump." It is this *lump* that the cinema can recreate, "render," in black and white, two dimensions, and mono sound. With the help, of course, of a manipulation of the replication. For example, one would have to exaggerate the rate of increase and decrease of the sound, add a variation in the light, create an editing effect, precede it with a period of calm.

The canonic example of a rendering I have already discussed elsewhere: the sound of a blow or a gun. In fist- or sword-fight scenes, the sound does not attempt to reproduce the real noises of the situation, but to render the physical impact of the blow or the speed of the movement (a speed already hard for the eye to follow, given the obligatory temporal sampling of twenty-four images per second). The rendering is naturally linked to the texture of the auditory and visual material of the film, to their definition, but not necessarily in the sense in which a sharper and more "faithful" image (a more accurate replication) would ipso facto give a better rendering. For example, in the cinema a more detailed image gives an impression of reduced movement, becomes more inert. Hence the failure of certain French action films, burdened with an image overcharged with detail in the settings and the textures of objects.

Is "rendering" a matter of pure convention (coded expression), or does it physically reproduce a direct effect? An answer might be that rendering is located somewhere between code and replication. And that there is not always a break in the continuum from replication to rendering to code; one can slide from one to the other without realizing it.

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What has taken place in the technical nature of the replication? As everyone knows, the grain of the reproduction of the real has decreased, at every level, both the "temporal" grain, changing, as required by the reproduction of sound, from the sixteen-to-eighteen frames per second of the silent film to twenty-four-to-twenty-five frames per second, where it has remained, and the "spatial" grain, with the increasing definition of filmstock. As for sound, its dynamic range and its frequency range (the distance between the lowest and highest frequency) have increased, as has the sensitivity of its recording and reproduction.

All this did not occur at one go. Dolby is not a Jesus Christ, dividing an era before from one after. The change was more gradual. Compact (but often very beautiful) at the outset, restricted to a narrow band of frequencies into which it had trouble cramming all its constituents, voices, music, and sound effects, sound has slowly expanded. At the outset it was acoustically simplified, passed through a minute horn. This was life as seen by someone one-eyed and color-blind. When a voice spoke, sounds and noises had to cease. And in the French films of the first years of the talkies, which, from Duvivier (*La Tête d'un homme,* 1933) to Renoir (*La Chienne,* 1931), tried, unlike American films, to convey the sounds of life, the words sometimes became incomprehensible, confused.

The Minor Denizens of Sound

The expansion of the frequency range and the refinement of sound mixing techniques—linear quantitative transformations—have had unexpected qualitative effects. Notably by allowing polyphony, the cohabitation as equals of several layers of sounds. Whereas the cinema image, apart from a few, always occasional, experiments with split screens (De Palma) or protracted superimpositions, remains single, sound has always been plural. At least, it had formerly to be hierarchized; the noises of the world had to be suppressed during the dialogue and the music hushed. But in certain recent films (*Blade Runner*, Ridley Scott, 1982), there is sound in two, three, or four equally present layers, the image only constituting one more layer, and not always the main one. The image comes to float like a poor little fish in this vast acoustic aquarium.

But even before Dolby, throughout the history of the talkie, the sound slowly unfurled into the low and high frequencies, thickened, spread, and refined itself. No one noticed. No one said: the sound is different. Rather, the things on the screen were more concretely perceived, and above all, the film's time was felt more urgently. The appearance of high frequencies in the sound and of fine layers of ambient sound and details behind the voices have produced a sharper sense of the micro-present. Breaths, squeaks, clinks, hums—a whole noisy folk has patiently awaited its day, the minor denizens of sound. In certain cases they have perhaps won, shifting in their direction the locus of the film,

making the frame on screen not so much the privileged point but rather a frame for the surveillance of the situation, for detection, a "monitor"; they have pulled the cloth toward them without moving what was on the table.

On the screen everything seems to be in its place, but in the shot-division everything has changed. Instead of establishing space (sound now does this), the image selects viewpoints onto it. The full shot that Hitchcock was famous for reserving for the end of the scene (a guaranteed effect) might as well pack its things: the sound has already, in its own way, of course, defined a permanent full shot, bordered by remote ambiences. This is obvious in a film such as *The Mission* (Roland Joffée, 1986), which is structured even in those moments without music by a pop-video space built on the sound. All this is only tendential, rarely present in a pure fashion, and in most films it is combined without difficulty with the customary rhetoric of shot-division, which it is nevertheless gradually undermining.

The space defined by the sound is not the same as that once constructed by the image. It abounds in details; it is polyphonic but vague in its outlines and borders; it is, in other words, acoustic. Sound suppresses the notion of a point of view that can be localized. Where do we hear from? For the ear, the equivalent of a point of view would be a listening point. But if we are dependent on sound alone, without the confirmation of sight, a listening point is very vague. Consider a point source of sound in the middle of a room. A faithful reproduction will not even tell you, with your eyes closed, on which side of the room the microphone was placed. Sound does not indicate the outlines of the object from which it emanates. Nor does sound know Euclidean perspective, however hard we try to make it do so.

In the auditory space of Dolby sound, but also in that of the modern cinema, sounds are assembled and arranged as objects are in pre-Renaissance visual space: the void between these bodies is not constructed. But the temporal fineness of sound (the image, in contrast, is lethargic and passive; it is content with a crude, temporal sample) allows several layers of sounds to work on our attention at various levels of speed. The acoustic field is elastic (in contrast with the fixed edges of the image) and opens up to ever more polyphony: it dehierarchizes, delinearizes the film. The film becomes a multiple-ring circus, like the one Cecil B. DeMille displayed in *The Greatest Show on Earth* (1952).

All this is not without dialectic, not without moments of backlash, and not without a reaffirmation, twice rather than once, of the importance of the image. "You are going to see," says the image. But it has lost a lot of its structuring function for the space and the scene. The shot-division is no longer functional; the sequence of these shots is no longer a "drama" of itself, assigning their import to the actions that its shots serve to display.

Hence, being no longer functional or structuring, the image becomes interestingly idle; it becomes pretty, alluring, it adopts from the old cinema various "looks" as anachronistic trappings (those shadows of blinds with which

the most minor short feels obliged to decorate the least shot). Even if in some cases it is elaborated by original investigations of rhythm and texture (but not frame and shot-division), the cinematic image of today is not the theater of such great revolutions as might appear; it is deliberately conservative or citatory.

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And the image? Yes, let us talk of the image. How much talk there is of it! The word immediately recalls Wim Wenders, at Cannes: "We must improve our images of the world." And similarly, in Tokyo, in his film *Tokyo Ga* (1985), commiserating with his fellow-countryman Werner Herzog: "What are we doing here? There's nowhere left in the world to make an image." A touching and significant duo.

In the plural, "images" are serious, socio-historic, things that have to be important, "images of the world." In the singular, the image, as it is talked about today in the cinema, means immediately to me: the frame. I see it straight away as behind glass, framed, and sitting on a table or the piano, like a yellowing portrait. It is not surprising, then, that there is a European school of framing filmmakers, Chantal Akerman, Wim Wenders—I was going to say, maliciously, picture-framers, like the hero of *The American Friend* (1977). They frame the cinema. Whereas there are others who work in the style of old, the retouched photograph, so we are still in the domain of the souvenir behind glass. A frame around the image, a halo around the subject—everything is in the container, the wrapping. We talk of the image, but we no longer trust it to have any significance.

The Signifying Power of the Image: Eisenstein and Advertising

This is what struck me forcibly when watching (on a videocassette bought for 99 francs in a store) the cream separator sequence in Eisenstein's *The Old and the New* (1929): the fact that, over and above an aestheticism and an editing some people today would find absurdly reminiscent of a pop video or a commercial, there is in this brilliant film a great faith in the signifying power of the image. Not in *the* image (Eisenstein is no idolater, no worshiper of images), but in the fact that *an* image can say something and a certain way of editing together shots of an object from different angles can signify something. A faith which many pictorialist films today have lost, but traces of which survive in certain TV and cinema commercials.

Except that today's advertising also sells the look, the look of the image, and not necessarily the sensory impression of a product. To that extent it has ceased to believe in the signifying power of *an* image, as Eisenstein did, and has set out to imitate everything that moves, in particular *the* image, the cinema. The innovatory power, where images are concerned, of advertising has been

much exaggerated (an authentically creative figure like Jean-Paul Goude has been inventive more at the level of tone, look, and rhythm than at that of images properly speaking). Advertising, both old—citatory, nostalgic, second-degree—and young—insolent and provocative—is a living domain of the arts of the image, but it has the limits of advertising, and its advertising ideology, its readiness to show anything whatsoever in order to sell anything whatsoever (as, currently, an almost Nazi imagery, one would think, from Aryan bodies suffering in sporting feats to the ridicule of the weak, the exaltation of predatory animality, and the law of natural selection: hurrah for advertising). But where visual invention is concerned, some of the most antiadvertising of filmmakers are often not much better: if the beginning of *Paris, Texas* (1984) has been quoted so frequently in advertisements, music included, that is perhaps because it was itself already advertising, a framed image.

The Three Ages of Color

There is a lot of talk about the image in the cinema, but this is precisely because it has almost entirely ceased to be a domain of invention there. The case of one particular element of the image, color, provides an example. To simplify in the extreme, three major periods can be distinguished in the history of color in the cinema: the gaudy period, the antigaudy period, and the neogaudy period, which is the current one.

The first, the gaudy period, was concerned with turning the investment in color to profit. It therefore had to be clearly visible that the films were color films. The antigaudy period (also that in which black-and-white films gradually disappeared) wanted the colors to be ignored, and therefore subdued them, desaturated them, restricted them, made them discreet. Nothing was more carefully avoided than too much of a picture postcard, too blue a sky. This was particularly the case in the U.S.A., but it also occurred in France. The third period, more particularly European but also affecting those American filmmakers interested in Europe (Coppola, the great Scorsese), finds color once again proudly proclaiming itself, with blue midnights and red neons. But this is a color intended to quote that of a former cinema. It was cinephiles like Wenders and Scorsese who reintroduced the reds they liked in Minnelli or Nicholas Ray, but with different emulsions, a different world, and different reds. Nonetheless these reds are coded, referential. While the films of the first period deliberately referred, in their coloristic intentions, to painting, the color films of the third period refer to the cinema.

Alongside the neogaudy, however, another tendency has persisted and become more sophisticated, a tendency once discussed by Rohmer: what I would call color-catalog cinema, which the Americans in particular have pushed to a high level of virtuosity. In these works, thanks to technical improvements, a certain matching scale of colors, selected according to the subject, the climate,

and the look desired, is worked out for the film as a whole and then implacably observed from beginning to end, using all possible means: film stock, filters, set design and costumes, grading, etc. I say color catalog because it often seems as if the director has been allowed to pick his scale and the nature of his image from a big catalog like those used for choosing wallpaper, and he has pointed at one of the samples and said: I'll take this one.

An application of such a method is found in a good-looking recent film, *The Little Shop of Horrors* (Frank Oz, 1986), with its scale of plant colors and its superb fades to green, a film in which it is also, as it were, parodied in the heroine's dream of a family life furnished in matching colors, as in the decorators' catalogs that inspire her petty-bourgeois imagination.

All films with any pretensions are "personalized" in this way today; this is at once an enrichment (there seem to be an enormous number of possibilities) and an impoverishment, for it confines them in a bubble, perhaps limiting their expressive possibilities. Such, for example, as would arise from an irruption of something too blue or too red, something no longer "in key." Rohmer spoke of films in which, by contrast with the "palette films" described above, we remember certain details of the color that stand out strongly: the green dress of the lonely spinster in *Rear Window,* for example. Such things are rarely found nowadays, even in neogaudy films: the red Ferrari in *The Moon in the Gutter* (Jean-Jacques Beineix, 1983) is a cliché, not a color shock, and the same midnight blue is dragged out in film after film after film. In short, it is possible that the dazzling neogaudy films and pop videos do not escape the "matching palette" formula and are too constrained in their expressivity by good taste. And also, of course, by quotation.

Concern for Realism; Demand to Dream

At the same time, these modern "dream" images have to deal, to compromise, with the development of the cinema toward an increase in realism in the imitation of life, in rawness of situations, words, and gestures, and an increase in the sensitivity of the emulsion. They confront anew, in their use of color, the basic contradiction that Steve Neale, in his book *Cinema and Technology,* has correctly indicated as proper to this dimension of the image: color in the cinema is at once "an index of realism and . . . a mark of fantasy," an element pointing the way out of a realism that it otherwise helps to reinforce.[1] This contradiction, among others, stands out in a film like *Betty Blue,* where all roads meet. Its "pretty pictures" are also trivial ones, and the pink with which the hero and heroine repaint the bungalows is a concrete pink emerging from the paint can

1. Steven Neale, *Cinema and Technology: Image, Sound, Colour* (London: British Film Institute, 1985), p. 147.

they are using; it can no longer evoke a dream. So, in order to rediscover magic and distance, others resort to black and white, a black and white usually, alas, copied from the old, and, given the decline in the techniques, badly copied.

These contradictions between a concern for "realism" and a concern to profit by the definition of the emulsion and its increased range and sensitivity on the one hand, and the demand for dreams on the other, are expressed in the formulaic aesthetic dominant today. The naked formulaists are characterized by a trivial rendering of the model as well as by a contradictory attempt at idealization. This rather precise mixture of sharpness, of maniac rendering (the notorious "shoe buttons," "not one of which is missing"), and of diffusion, of cheap dreams, is clearly visible in Beineix's films, for example in the way he films the singer in *Diva* (1981): supposedly idealized, but promiscuously close, concrete. Moreover, the same contradiction recurs at every level: the word *stars* is used for people who are constantly seen chattering on the small screen and undressing on the large. Where is the distance that constitutes the stellar?

Thus "the image." Never more starified than it is today, TV has banalized it and brought it into promiscuity with the spectator. And it is more than ever caught in a contradiction between the call for "dreams" and the habit of and demand for realism. For, as all rivers flow down to the sea, all questions about cinema lead fatally to the question of realism. In which we re-encounter the question of replication.

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This was what in fact cinema began by being: a replication. A rudimentary one, of course, with neither colors nor sound at the outset, but one in which, as everything goes to show, the audience wanted to believe. Given this, an evolution in the direction of perfecting the replication was all the more inevitable in that it had been foreseen and described in advance. Synchronous sound and color were, of course, foreseen from the beginnings of the cinema as imminent improvements. Improvements in what sense? In the sharpness of the reproduction of reality (now that we have digital recording of both image and sound, this can be quantified) and in the number of dimensions of reality reproduced: relief, space, and—why not?—smell, climate, or the "touch-o-rama" humorously suggested in a film by John Landis?

Stocks, Speeds, and Formats

Take two examples of these "improvements." On the one hand, the sharpness of the image, the definition of the emulsion. Simply enough, this has globally advanced, but not so much as one might think; moreover, the evolution of the cinema shows that every opportunity to increase it was not seized. One of the ways to go further was to increase the area of the film, as with the 70mm,

which was abandoned fifteen years ago (it is now only used to sharpen up films shot in 35mm 'Scope, and to allow them to benefit from its magnetic soundtracks). This proves that audiences are perfectly satisfied with the usual definition, and even with a decline in definition, since the extra space gained in 'Scope (in width of the frame, at any rate) comes at the cost of a necessary loss of definition through being squeezed into a standard film image which then has to be spread out in the disanamorphosis. So the advance has not been a linear one and has been accompanied by retreats. Today's cinema is torn between a frequent need to impoverish the definition allowed by the support, which is often too coarse, and a tendency to stress the sharpness of the image, perhaps because of competition with television images.

But there is also another often forgotten definition of the image—its temporal sampling. In fact, it is sixty years since it was fixed at twenty-four frames per second, although much earlier, at the very beginnings of the cinema (as Noël Burch tells us in a book still unfortunately unpublished in French, *La Lucarne de l'infini*), there were several experiments with speeds such as forty frames per second by people sensitive to the flicker produced at sixteen to eighteen frames per second and willing to go to these lengths to obtain a more continuous reproduction.[2] It is also the case that, independently of the persistence of vision, an action filmed and projected at twenty-four frames per second (twenty-five on television) is not seen in the same way as at eighteen. I therefore await with great interest the installation in France of Douglas Trumbull's Show-Scan, which has several times been referred to in *Cahiers du Cinéma* and which uses a much finer temporal sampling together with a wide, 70mm stock, in order to assess its effect on the perception not only of movement but also of matter and space. After all, the cinema is movement, etymologically at least, and it is odd, to my knowledge, that there have been so few studies of the effects on the perception of a movement of its sampling at eighteen, twenty-four, or forty images per second.

Replication and Code

There was also 3-D, brought to a remarkable state of perfection in the 1950s (*House of Wax, Dial M for Murder*), but since fallen into disuse. This is because each of these undeniable improvements in replication was in contradiction with the stage of development of the cinematic language or code onto which it was grafted. *Grafted,* indeed, clearly: by what miraculous means, what Babylonian investment of money and ideas, could it have transformed everything all at once?

2. The English translation, *Life to Those Shadows* (London: British Film Institute, and Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990), does not contain the passage cited.

The fact is that everything which introduces replication into the cinema comes to be codified after a certain time as it becomes a conventional means of expression; the movement of the picture, the first achievement, initially perceived as an amazing presence of the world ("the leaves on the trees move"), quickly became, with familiarity and its absorption into narrative, a means of expression, inscribed in a code. The same thing happened with sound and color. But each arrival of an improvement in replication initially disturbed the established code. Audiences began once again to look too much at the details distinguished by the new rendering of reality, and thus to escape from the linearization of cinematic narrative, so well analyzed by Burch in the unfolding of the story over time, in order to explore spatially the replicated area.

I recall the 3-D version of *Dial M for Murder* rereleased by Les Studios Action in Paris, in which the props—lamps, brandy bottles—placed in the foreground in front of the actors, precisely so as to emphasize their three-dimensionality, became endowed with a comic presence as we caught ourselves watching them for themselves, in all their rotundity. I recall Grace Kelly and Ray Milland functioning for a few distracted seconds as a background for objects with a greater presence than theirs.

Every improvement in replication thus restores to the concrete reality reproduced its richness, its polyphony, and it returns to the spectators their pleasure in the spatial exploration of reality and hence in the loss of the linear thread of the story. This creates filmic objects that are necessarily clumsy and transitional, but which the cinephile of today tends to look on with an indifferent, academic, and uninquisitive eye: certainly, some films that contain experiments in replication (I am thinking precisely of Trumbull's *Brainstorm*) are uneven failures, but so what?

The Two Guys

But replication is not the problem for most young filmmakers; they are quite happy with the cinema as it is, and especially as it was, since they think nothing so beautiful as black and white. They are right to think things were better before . . . but in what they themselves were trying to do. However, it is as if a large part of modern cinema, of "young" cinema, having failed to see any prospect in transformations of replication—Dolby sound, new images, Show-Scan—which they regard as mere fairground phenomena (as indeed the cinema itself was regarded in its beginnings), were wedged between two guys. The first guy, wearing a dinner jacket, is classical cinema—handsome, idealized, perfect, mythical, sacred. The second, a rather brutal colossus in his shirt-sleeves, is the new technology, frequently ugly and shrill: video games, computer and synthetic graphics, TV, a whole new wriggling, swaggering, chirruping universe that is beginning to make certain inroads, especially in science-fiction film, shoving aside plot, construction, and psychology to make room for its

pyrotechnics. With the result that a large part of today's cinema has taken up toward all this an attitude of rigid stagnation. Entrenchments are being dug in the cinematic terrain. This is not surprising if one is nearly seventy and called Fellini; he is right to do so, for he is making the films of his age, and that is what is moving about them. When this is also the position of people of thirty or forty who are playing the lost generation, it is sad.

I am sorry, but Wenders in Tokyo, unable to find anything interesting there to film and moaning that there are no more pictures to take, I find ridiculous—the more so in that his position provides a model for lots of people ten or twenty years his juniors. As for the even more prestigious people who bore us all with the death of the cinema, "*invenzione senza avvenire*,"[3] let them join the vultures of *Studio:* the latter, attacked for only ever discussing things as dead or embalmed, have simply taken them literally. But if one wanted to be optimistic and to wish that cynical project *Studio* well, one could say that the girl in their ads is taking off her bandages and returning to life.[4] Well, there we are.

3. This Italian version of a phrase attributed to Louis Lumière in 1896 appears as a caption in Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Mépris.*

4. The glossy Paris film magazine *Studio* was promoted at its launch by a commercial showing a girl in a crypt, wrapped like a mummy in celluloid, and accompanied by the slogan: "*Studio*—what will remain of the cinema."

The Art of Analysis: Mary Kelly's *Interim* and the Discourse of the Analyst

PARVEEN ADAMS

Mary Kelly makes an exhibition of us. Though who we are I have less and less idea. The New Museum was showing Mary Kelly's *Interim,*[1] which I want to try to think about through psychoanalysis and through the question of love and identity—that is, through the category of transference. Now, Mary Kelly's work has always displayed the question of psychoanalysis. There it is, in *Post-Partum Document,*[2] in question and algorithm, making theoretical production and the infant's productions different moments of a representation. In *Interim,* the psychoanalytic glosses are minimal. But my argument is that the fundamental situation of *Interim*—that of the series, the spectator, the art work, and the fantasy of whatever goes under the name of Mary Kelly—finds its analogue in the analytic situation. I am suggesting that going to the exhibition is like going to analysis. Of course one is not a substitute for the other; I am not suggesting that you choose between going to analysis and going to see *Interim.* But I do think that the relation of transference helps to clarify what is going on in *Interim,* especially where the exhibition confronts that most delicate of issues, that of ways of going on.

Let me start with the famous question "What do women want?" As will become clear, I have nothing to add by way of an answer. I am not concerned with the answer, but the question, the question which itself needs to be questioned. Indeed, what is a question? Who questions? Who answers? What kind of answer is demanded by what type of question? What does the question want with us? Who does the question want us to be? How does the question want us

1. *Interim* was on show at the New Museum in New York during February–March 1990. *Interim* is made up of four major sections: *Corpus, Pecunia, Historia, Potestas.* I make reference to the first two: *Corpus* consists of photographs of five articles of clothing laminated onto perspex; each article is presented in three different foldings and each is accompanied by a framed text. *Pecunia* consists of four subsections, *Mater, Conju, Soror, Filia,* each consisting of five galvanized steel plates with silk-screened texts.

2. This has appeared in book form as Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).

to answer? What relation to truth does the question demand of us? For we can imagine the question "What do women want?" to be involved in radically *different* situations. There isn't one world in which the question is posed. We cannot even think about the question and its meaning until we think about the scene in which the question is posed.

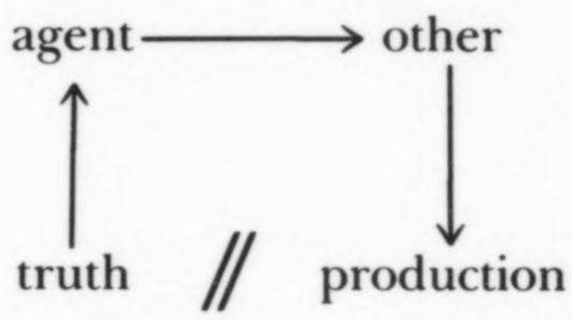
I feel helped here by Lacan's notion of discourses as a way of thinking how even the same question can mean and imply such fundamentally different situations.[3] For discourses describe the structures of different social bonds. Discourse is a fundamental apparatus which is prior to and which determines the whole relation of subjects to subjects and subjects to objects as they appear within that apparatus. Lacan develops this conviction by constructing four different discursive apparatuses to demonstrate how much hangs upon the situation of a discourse and how little on the semantics of a situation. They are the

3. The relevant seminar has been published recently: Jacques Lacan, *L'Envers de la Psychanalyse* 1969–70, *Le Seminaire* XVII (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1991).

Mary Kelly. Interim. *1984–89.*

discourses of the master, the university, the hysteric, and the analyst. Each of these is a possible apparatus that has entirely different effects upon the subject. When you are inserted into the apparatus in these different scenes, you are a person quite differently in each. For example, to be within the discourse of the master is to be within a fundamental structure. You can get a new master; you can change him for a mistress. It might be better, but you remain within the same structure. A change of sex doesn't undermine the place of the master, for that place is prior to gender. A structured change only occurs at the level of the discourse. Later I will suggest that what was on show at the New Museum was not the setting for the discourse of the master, or the university, or the hysteric. I will suggest that it was the setting for the discourse of the analyst, a discourse that structures the conditions under which questions and answers circulate.

But first we must follow Lacan's position in more detail. For him there are a number of elements that define a discourse, that is, the apparatus. There is the point from which speech is enunciated, the space of the *agent*. There is the point to which the speech is addressed, the *other*. When the agent acts upon the other, it sets up a third, the space of *production*. Lastly, any discourse has a dimension of *truth*. This space is necessitated by the psychoanalytic discovery that one does not know what one is saying. For a discourse to function in its own particular way, there is always something at the place of truth that remains masked. What counts as truth for the discourse itself is another matter. The four elements define the discursive machine in which the product is always separated from truth.

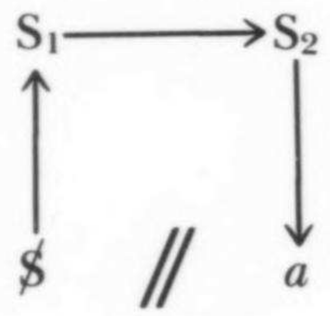


The person who speaks has to be fitted into this machine and there is more than one way this can be done. We cannot talk of the person who speaks as a unity; we have to disengage three terms that mark the person who speaks —$\not{S}$, S_1, and *a*. Let us start with a full subject S, and see how speech produces the subject as barred, for the subject is barred inasmuch as he speaks. Now, what is the Lacanian subject? It is a signifier. A signifier is a subject for another signifier. Let us call the first signifier S_1 and the second S_2. Although the signifier only exists through difference, S_1 is a single signifier. It is a signifier without signification; it is outside the chain of signifiers. This is the master signifier in the name of which the agent speaks. (Some of you will know Laplanche and

Leclaire's paper on the unconscious, in which they locate the originary signifier, the S_1, in the signifier *licorne*, the bit of unconscious non-sense to which the analysand Phillipe is subjected.) Now if the originary signifier *is* the subject for another signifier, it is the second signifier that engages the signifying chain. This is S_2, the signifying other. It is the place from where one speaks and it is also the place of knowledge. S_2 is the knowledge that S_1 activates. The subject, then, is represented in the relation of S_1 and S_2.

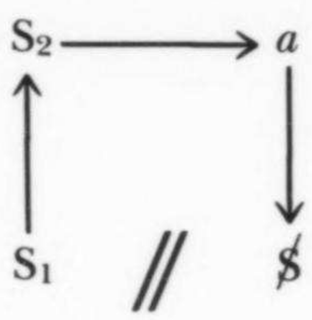
What has happened to the full subject S we started with? What has happened to the living body? In Lacanian theory language deprives the body of *jouissance,* which finds refuge only in the limited zones of the body that Freud called the erotogenic zones. The entry into language produces the barred subject by depriving the body of *jouissance.* It is thus the origin of the Lacanian *manque-à-être,* the lack-in-being. Now, what comes to take the place of this lack is the object, which Lacan designates object small *a.* In place of the original full subject we now have $\not S$ and object small *a,* the complement of being of the subject. We have the order of the signifier and another which is heterogeneous to it. Which is to say that there is no signifier of object small *a,* the leftover of *jouissance.* There is a hole in the signifying network. Analysis is of course the talking cure. Yet this object without a signifier has a key role in analysis. And I will show that it has a key role in *Interim.*

The four terms—$\not S$, S_1, S_2, and *a*—which I have just described fit the four places the apparatus provides to give us the discourse of the master, where S_1 is at the place of the agent, S_2 in the place of the other, and *a* is in the place of production. You can think of $\not S$ as the repressed term in the place of truth.

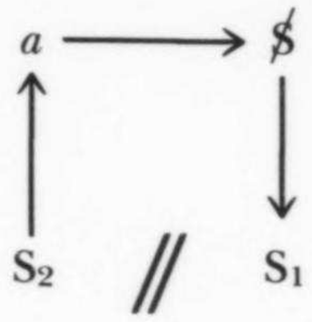


discourse of the master

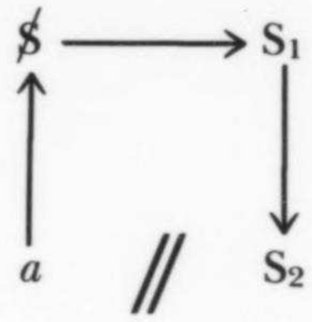
Now, in the discourse of the master the relation of speech introduces the social bond as mastery. But a great deal depends on how you distribute the terms across the four places which remain constant. If you rotate the terms counterclockwise through the four places, you get in succession what Lacan calls the discourse of the university, the discourse of the analyst, and the discourse of the hysteric. And being located in one discourse rather than another has radical consequences for speaking and being.



discourse of the university



discourse of the analyst



discourse of the hysteric

Let us see how these diagrams might be read. Take the discourse of the hysteric. In the hysteric the gap between subject and object is most visible, and she raises the question of the object that resists interpellation in demanding to know what her desire is. She addresses this demand to the man; typically, in the nineteenth century, to the medical man. You can see from the fact that the S_1 is in the place of the other that she addresses her demand to the master. The result is S_2, a knowledge about the hysteric. But the barrier between production and truth is here precisely the barrier between knowledge and object small *a*. The medical man can never succeed in telling her who she is; the hysteric forever taunts him and forever remains unmastered.

Now take the discourse of the analyst. Lacan often says that the discourse of the analyst hystericizes the analysand. The two discourses are only a quarter turn away from each other. You can see that where the hysteric was the barred subject at the place of the agent, the analysand is the barred subject at the place of the other. If we start with $, the terms follow in the same order, but it makes a great difference that they have changed their place. Although the subject of analysis is hystericized, the impasse between medical man and hysteric is not repeated. Moreover, if the medical man was master, the analyst is not; notice that he appears in the form of object small *a*. Finally, what does it mean that S_1 appears in the place of production? That analysis brings to light the originary signifier of the subject is clear; the question whether this is a new kind of master signifier remains open.

Let me finish this brief account of the four discourses by performing an experiment. Let us take a sentence and run the same sentence through each of the discourses as a way of demonstrating the power of the structure of the discourses to determine the situations we find ourselves in. Let us take a famous sentence, "I am that I am," and let it be the sentence enunciated by the agent in each of the discourses. To begin at the beginning with the master, for that is where he always begins. God says "I am that I am." Well, where does that leave us? He is announcing that he is the prime mover, not just as a fact but as a structure; or rather, the fact includes the fact that we are his subjects. He is the Way and therefore He is the Truth. Now let us move to the university. The professor lectures us with the example "I am that I am." The professor is

teaching us the logic that if p then not q. He is teaching us about propositions and their relation to Truth. Logic obeys the Truth as *knowledge;* although the situation does not avoid the S_1 of the master stalking the lecture hall. In the discourse of the analyst the situation is much stickier. Actually the analyst doesn't say "I am that I am," but this doesn't prevent the patient from hearing it. And what the patient has heard finds an echo in his longing. "If only I could say that" muses the patient. Yet this is not what actually comes to pass, for the patient may come to hear something different at the end of the analysis; may, if he is lucky, hear the analyst's version of "I am that I am" as "I am only what I am." He realizes that the analyst does not have what he wanted and at last he can make his lack his own. In the discourse of the hysteric, "I am that I am" is of course a question—"Who am I?"—a question put in a thousand exasperating ways that unman the master who is supposed to tell her.

Our experiment demonstrates that the sentence "I am that I am" can run all the way from revelation to question. We see that what comes to the place of the agent need be no master at all, and what is more, that elsewhere the master does not always have mastery. But we have not finished with our sentence. What happens if we shift the emphasis from the "I" of "I am that I am" to the "am"? "I" is about speaking; "am" is about being. What about the object in all this? In the discourse of the master, object small *a* is the remainder, the leftover of meaning; in the discourse of the university the object is acted upon and yields to meaning—the discourse produces the barred subject; in the discourse of the

Mary Kelly. Interim—Corpus. *1984–85.*

hysteric the object resists meaning—you cannot succeed in telling her who she is; only in the discourse of the analyst is the object asserted at the same time as meaning.

It is important to my argument that the analyst is not the master. What enables him to abdicate that position is this fact that the object is asserted at the same time as meaning. In the discourse of the analyst object small *a* and the barred subject occupy the places of agent and other. By virtue of this, the relation of the subject to the object can be worked on directly and modified, because there, between agent and other, is where the action is. What appears at these two places is crucial in the organization of a discourse, and if the discourse of *Interim* is like that of the analyst, we should be able to locate the spectator as barred subject and the artist as object in those places.

But first we must ask about what goes on in analysis to make the analyst appear as object small *a* and the analysand appear as the barred subject. I will call what goes on in analysis the textuality of the analyst on the one hand and the silence of the analyst on the other. By speaking of the textuality of the analyst, I refer to the fact that he interprets and that interpretation works on the analysand as the subject of the signifier. To the extent that it does, this interpretation does not, of course, produce the analyst as object small *a*. If interpretation were his only job, the analyst would remain the master, the subject supposed to know that the analysand takes him to be at the start. Interpretation per se does not make the subject any less subject to the signifier, and this is why the subject would be no less subject to the analyst who embodies the Other of language.[4] The analyst's interpretation draws out the signifiers of the subject's past history and puts them in a dominant place in the discourse. What was repressed yields to signification. So when the analyst detaches the subject's signifiers in this way, he reinforces their symbolic weight. In or out of the analytic situation the signifier offers shelter to humans. Signifiers supplied by social apparatuses yield humans the relief of an identity. The signifiers detached by the analyst are no exception.

The textuality of the analyst cannot be the whole picture. So let us look at a phenomenon of analysis that cannot be interpreted but that is crucial to the analytic relation, the phenomenon that brings the object into play: transference love. The analyst does not interpret transference love. But neither does he respond in the role of love object. Instead, he takes the form of object small *a* by responding with the silence of the analyst.

4. It should be noted that interpretation can also be conceived as a cut that produces the analysand as subject of desire. Through the equivocation of the analyst's signifiers, the weight of the presence of the object of desire emerges in the gaps between signifiers. So interpretation itself is one of the ways in which the full silence of the analyst is made present. In this article, mainly for purposes of exposition, I contrast interpretation and silence.

Let us start with the relation between subject and object that is found in transference love. We know from Freud that in love the overestimation of the love object is the same thing as narcissism. The loved object yields the subject a narcissistic satisfaction. Now to say that the loved object is overestimated is to say that it is put in the place of the ego ideal, that place where the subject is mapped in an ideal signifier. This ego ideal is necessarily involved in narcissism because the ego ideal is the point from which the subject feels himself to be satisfactory and loved. In other words, a symbolic identification with the place of the ego ideal precedes narcissistic identification. Lacan explains this when he speaks of

> the sight in the mirror of the ego ideal, of that being that he first saw appearing in the form of the parent holding him up before the mirror. By clinging to the reference point of him who looks at him in the mirror, the subject sees appearing, not his ego ideal, but his ideal ego, that point at which he desires to gratify himself in himself.

The story that follows puts the point very simply: "Not so long ago, a little girl said to me sweetly that it was about time somebody began to look after her so that she might seem lovable to herself."[5]

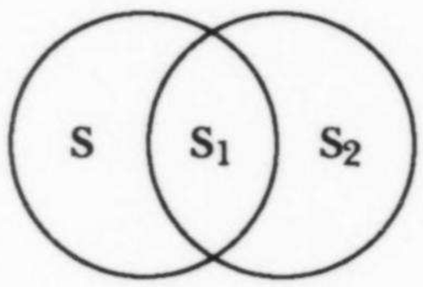
In transference love it is the analyst who is put at the place of the ego ideal; it is the analyst who is called to embody the capital I of identification of the ego ideal. It is from the place of the analyst that the analysand wants to see himself as satisfactory and loved. What this does is to make the analyst the master and analysis suggestion. It is what Jacques-Alain Miller mentions as the problem of clones—all the analysands who end up looking like each other by virtue of sharing an analyst.

How could that change? Put simply, the object has to be detached from the ego ideal. Because the object doesn't belong there. Let me explain why. We know that the analysand as barred subject lacks the object. What we have just seen is that he fills out this lack with the object that the Other, the analyst, is supposed to have. But this is to confuse the I of identification and object small *a*, cause of desire. You will remember that the lost object *qua* breast founds the Freudian wish. Lacan's formulation of this is that the lost object causes desire —object small *a*, cause of desire. The object comes *before* desire. Desire, which is always the desire of the Other, misrecognizes the object because when it pursues the object, it fails to recognize that the object is not in front of desire, but before it.

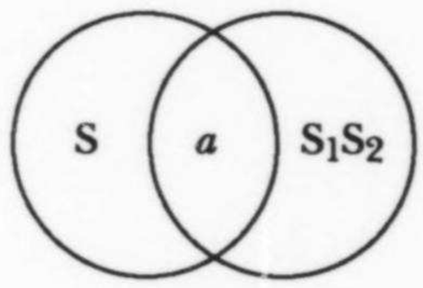
Desire is in the field of the Other and transference love merely increases the subject's alienation in the Other. Something has to happen to break the grip of the signifier. This something is what Lacan calls separation. The difference

5. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1964), trans. Alan Sheridan (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1977), p. 257.

in the two operations of alienation and separation is given very precisely in Jacques-Alain Miller's diagrams.[6]



alienation



separation

The diagram for alienation concerns the barred subject and the field of signification; object small *a* does not figure in it. In the diagram for separation the *a* appears in the intersection of the fields of the subject and the Other. But note that the *a* is quite outside the S_1 and the S_2 that constitute signification. What this diagram shows is that the Other is also lacking, that the object is separated from the Other, that the Other does not have a final answer. Here is the opening for the analysand: by identifying his own lack with the lack in the Other he can avoid total alienation in the signifier.

But for this to happen the analyst must fall from idealization and become the support of object small *a;* the analyst must embody the function of lack. It is notoriously difficult to pin down what Lacan meant by the desire of the analyst, but it is certainly something of this order—that the analyst be seen as desiring in the sense that the analyst also lacks. The analyst doesn't have it.

But how does the analyst show that he doesn't have it? By his silence. I borrow this answer from Michel Silvestre's paper on the transference where he describes this silence. I quote:

> Certainly not conventional silence, for it is indeed necessary to be silent in order to hear the other who speaks, but the refusal to respond there where the analyst would have something to say, but the leaden silence which comes to redouble that of the analysand, but again the mute question, anguished echo of the limit of the Other's knowledge. The being of the analyst is silent, through which he makes himself massive and enigmatic presence.[7]

It is only when the analysand realizes that the analyst doesn't have the object that he can live a life in which he is no longer completely locked into the desire of the Other but has a little bit of leeway.

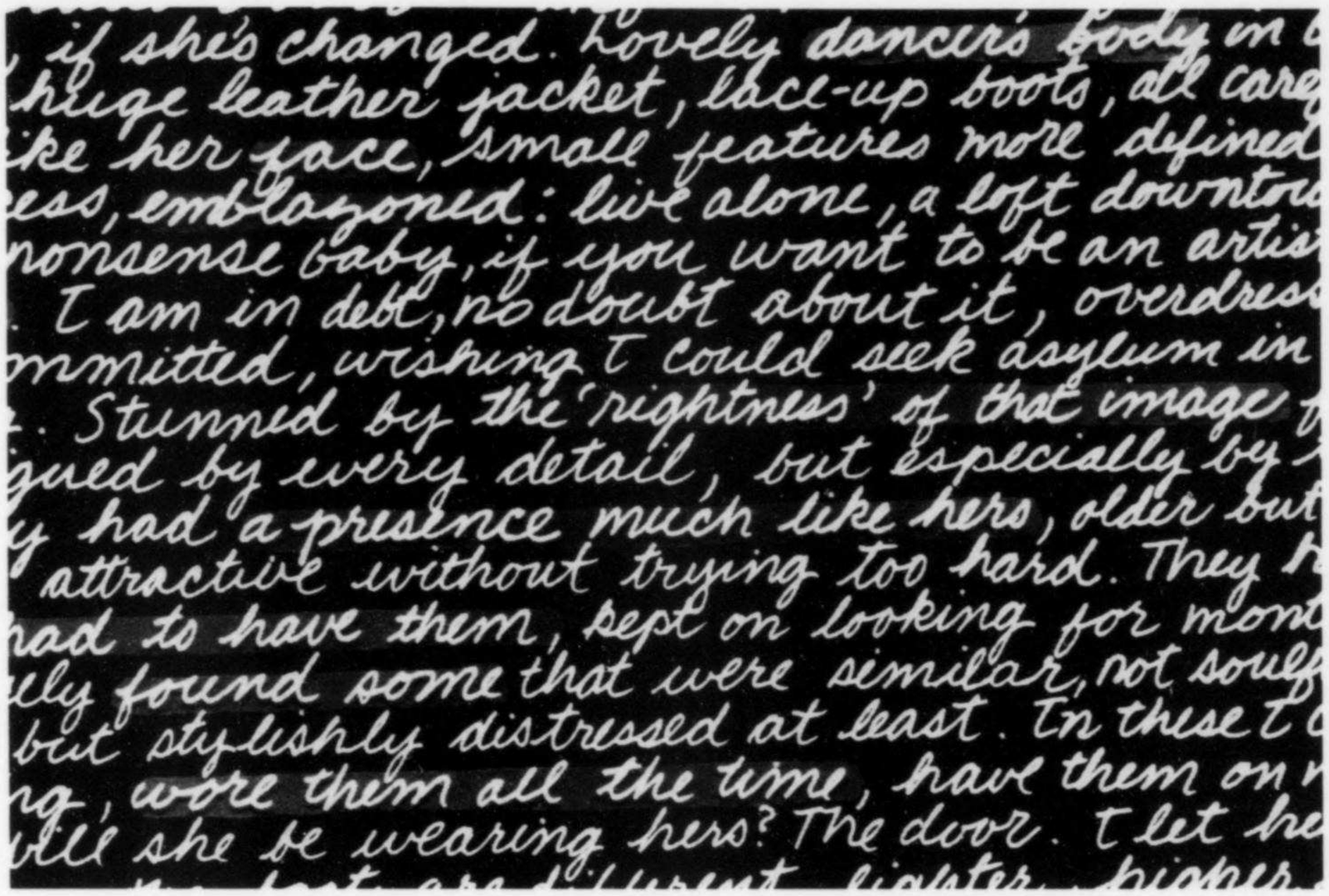
6. I am grateful to Mladen Dolar for this point, which Jacques-Alain Miller first made in an informal seminar in Paris.
7. "Le Transfert," in Michel Silvestre, *Demain la Psychanalyse* (Paris: Navarin, 1987), p. 76.

My argument about *Interim* is that there also something of textuality and something of silence engage the spectator so that the relation to the signifier and the relation to the object are both in play. And that there also the place of the master is left vacant.

I linked the textuality of the analyst with the activity of interpretation that he engages in. But you mustn't think that interpretations work on some unorganized raw material. They work on a textuality of the analysand that is itself a texture of interpretations. You can see this in the dream that the analysand takes to the analyst. Even when it seems nonsensical, his very telling of it already involves what Freud called secondary revision. It is in this sense that textuality and interpretation are inextricably bound. There is no recounting of a dream that is not also an interpretation; there is no interpretation that doesn't represent a text. Even if we wish to retain the separation of text and interpretation as different functions, in practice they always come together.

Now pictures are certainly texts, and they come impregnated with interpretation, as if the truth of the painting is also there in the painting, the truth which is stated by the artist supposed to know. We all know the errors of referring to the meaning of the picture as contained within the authorial intention to mean. But what interests me is that knowing this argument doesn't stop our fantasies about the artist, not so much as a person but as a function, the vanishing point at which the picture and its truth would intersect as the source of the picture's correct interpretation. We may call this fantasy of the artist the ego ideal of the spectator, the place from which the spectator's interpretations may be felt to be validated. At this point, when it works, we do indeed think we are looking at a masterpiece. For the spectator then, pictures are certainly texts that come impregnated with interpretation.

Before I speak of interpretation and transference love in *Interim,* I would like you to think of Aeneas. Perhaps you have forgotten that in one of the episodes of Virgil's *Aeneid,* Aeneas is a spectator before a picture, for he finds before him, on the walls of a temple in Dido's Carthage, scenes from the Trojan war. He is a special kind of spectator, one whose own past is laid out before him. The picture has an effect; Aeneas weeps. Does the picture just stir sad memories? Or is it that his story is being told? Is being told by one who knows, who exhibits the order of signifiers of arms and the man? In front of the picture Aeneas says, "Great valour has due honour; they weep here For how the world goes, and our life that passes Touches their hearts." His story is understood; he sees it as it is seen. Aeneas as subject of the signifier finds his past before him. There is a subject supposed to know and there is interpretation. Aeneas says, "Throw off your fear. This fame insures some kind of refuge." Is it too farfetched to say that this ordering of signifiers brings a certain peace of mind? Is it too farfetched to say that this is the trust in the subject supposed to know that Lacan speaks of? Finally, is it too farfetched to say that it is Dido, queen of Carthage, who is the point on which these effects converge?



For where there is a subject supposed to know there is transference and transference love. Of course in Virgil we are told at length about how Dido's passion for Aeneas is kindled by the boy god of love. Aeneas's passion for Dido is left unexplained. It is ascribed neither to her powerful position nor to her beauty. There is room to suggest that Aeneas's love is transference love. Transference love, we know, is real.

If there is an analogy here with the signifying side of analysis, it is clear that the ingredients on the side of the object, so important for an analysis, are missing. Dido is no analyst. Far from letting Aeneas liquidate the transference, she tries her utmost to keep him trapped in it. Dido demands love. So for Aeneas the object continues to coincide with the ego ideal and he tears himself away from Dido only when Jove himself intervenes to ensure that Aeneas sail away to fulfill his destiny in Italy.

Remember, we have been talking about the effects of a picture.

Now Aeneas is in trouble when he arrives in Carthage. Many of his ships and his men have been lost in a storm at sea, and he wants to know what he can expect in this strange land. The picture gives him his answer. And when you go to an analyst you also want to be told what things mean. Isn't there something of this when you go to see a picture in an exhibition? Of course the interpretation has to engage you before you set up a subject supposed to know and before there can be anything that can be called transference love. But then you do expect to be told about yourself.

This is what happens in *Interim.* I will speak of the inscribed stories of the *Corpus* section, stories which have been worked up from hours of conversation with feminist friends. The spectator can identify with the point of view from which these conversations have occurred. The spectator watches, if not her own history, then a history from which she can identify herself. The elements come

Mary Kelly. Interim—Corpus (Supplication). *1984–85.*

from something like her history, from something in respect of which she has a history. The stories are not so much quotations as a selection of signifiers, where selection is always an interpretation. But the selection is not a collusion or a simple sharing. For an interpretation always involves discomfort, the recognition that something else is at stake, something other than what we thought we said. Indeed, sometimes the most devastating interpretation *can* take the form of quotation. Indeed, how can we more efficiently persecute others than by reminding them of what they have said? Not that *Interim* persecutes us; but we probably don't feel comfortable. I am saying that the spectator recognizes as her own the reference to worry—a worry over fat legs, unflattering lighting, and so on. She may not like it, but she recognizes her subjection to these signifiers.

Now the grimace and the grin testify not just to the reference to getting older but also to something that lies behind this; what the signifiers represent is not just the wrinkles in reality but something absent behind the wrinkles. The signifiers hollow our spaces and intensify absences. The spectator realizes that signifiers are wanting; there is something that is not yet signified. In this sense *Interim* points to the absence behind identity.

Perhaps you go to analysis for a fresh identity; perhaps you go to a feminist exhibition to find positive images. Perhaps you go knowing that your identity is fictional and hoping for a new one. You make the same point as the philosophical critique of the fiction of identity, where fiction means error. But the psychoanalytic critique of the fiction of identity makes a different point. Psychoanalysis does not tell you that while your present identity is not really you, matters can be rectified by clothing you in more fitting attire. You pay your couturier for that original number that will express your identity, to run up something that is absolutely *you*. You don't pay the analyst for that. You pay the analyst for the dubious pleasure of the knowledge of the conditions under which that special outfit that we long to make our own has become the object of our desire. And that has to do with producing the place of the object as empty.

After all, what would happen if we demanded positive images? What is a positive image? It would be as if some images are in deficit of what we want to identify with as adequate representations. If that were so, we would want to escape from an order of signifiers that we could call a male order; we would want to free ourselves from imaginary capture by this order and construct, in accordance with a demand that might be called feminist, a feminine order of signifiers. This strategy would be to place on *Interim* the demand that we be captured by a feminine imaginary, the demand for a feminine gaze in which we might bask. Perhaps indeed, what *Interim* does is to whet your appetite for a feminine ego ideal, for a point of view from which we can feel satisfactory and loved.

But if I am right in drawing together the discourse of the analyst and the

space of production of *Interim,* then this promise won't be made good. Certainly the analyst talks, and this artist makes images. And at the limit of the analyst's speech there is silence, while at the limit of this artist's images there is emptiness. They both function to refuse the imaginary capture by a positive world in which identity is *prêt à porter.* They both seek to undo the confusion between the object and the ego ideal.

We have gone beyond interpretation and transference love. If interpretation were the goal of analysis, the analyst would simply be the master and I wouldn't be trying to argue that the art practice of Mary Kelly is like the discourse of the analyst. But the analyst vacates the place of the master and becomes the support of the separating *a.* Where is the object small *a* in *Interim*? How can a picture interrogate the object of desire and interrupt the movement of desire in its misrecognition of the object? How does *Interim* move from the signifier to something that is radically heterogeneous to it?

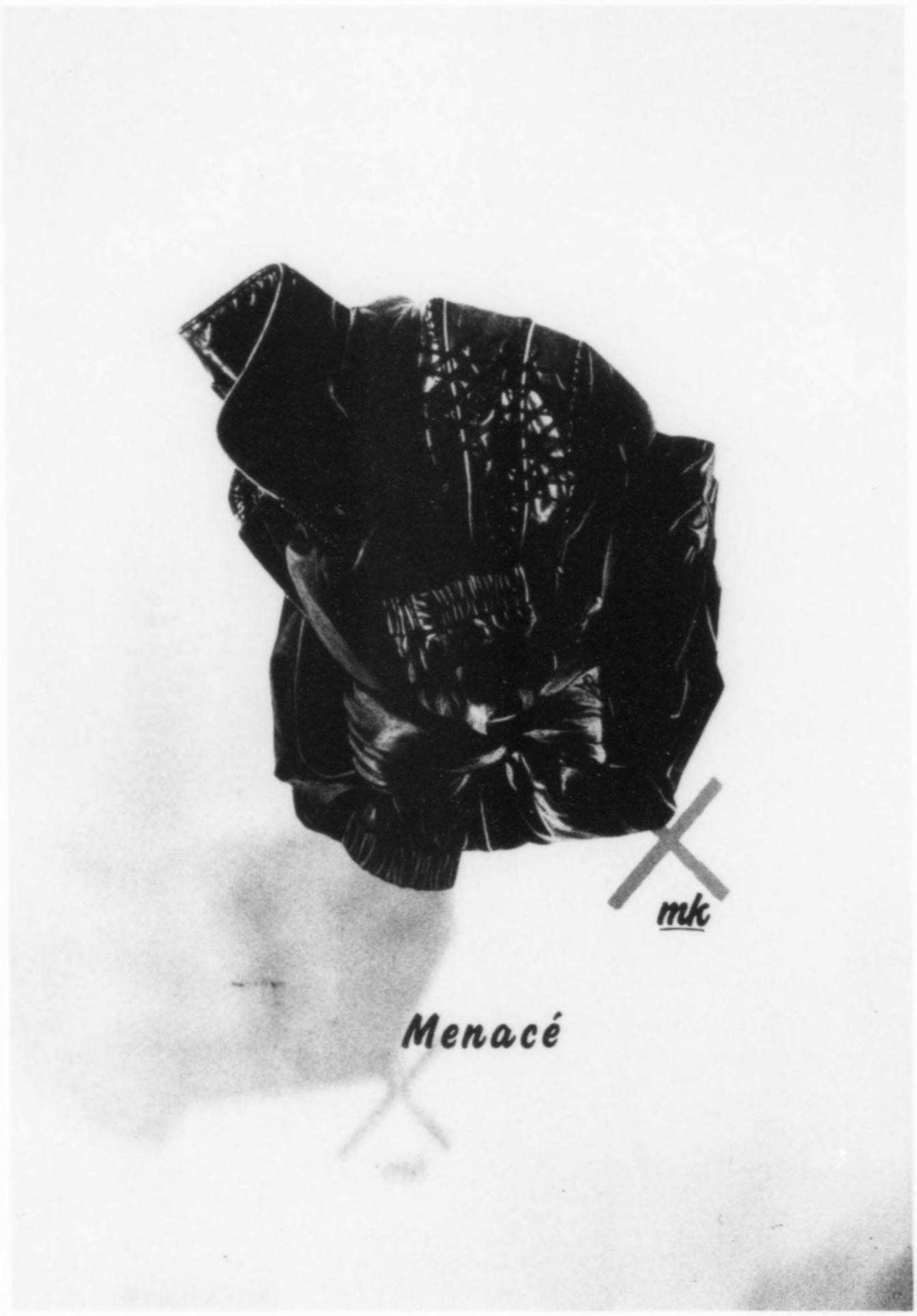
Well, there are pictures that give us images as the objects of desire, and there are pictures that work at the limit of the image. *Interim* gives us the place of the object small *a* at the limit of the image. Which is to say, at the limit of the symbolic. You might well ask how you are to think of this limit, and I will answer by saying that you think the limit through the notion of an apparition. An apparition is both sublime and horrible; an apparition is silent, being outside signification. I think Lacan draws a picture of an apparition in speaking about the "*toi*" that comes to our lips in an attempt to find the signifier of the remainder, that which cannot be signified. The "*toi*" is a reference to the Other of *jouissance,* a primal Other, a presymbolic Other—a very different Other than the Other of language referred to throughout this paper. Now this Other of *jouissance* is precisely a reference to object small *a,* the lack in the Other of language, the object that must figure in *Interim.* The picture Lacan draws might serve as a model for us.

> How can we represent the utterance, the articulation, the surging forth out of our self of this "*toi*" which can come to our lips in a moment of disarray, distress, of surprise in the presence of something that I will not too hastily call death but certainly another singling us out, around whom our major preoccupations turn and who troubles us nonetheless? I do not think that this "*toi*" is simple. I think that in it there is the temptation to win over the Other, the prehistoric Other, the unforgettable Other who ventures to surprise us all of a sudden, and to throw us from the heights of his appearing. "*Toi*" contains I know not what defense and I will say that at the moment when it is pronounced it is entirely in this "*toi*" and not elsewhere that that which I have presented to you in *Das Ding* resides.[8]

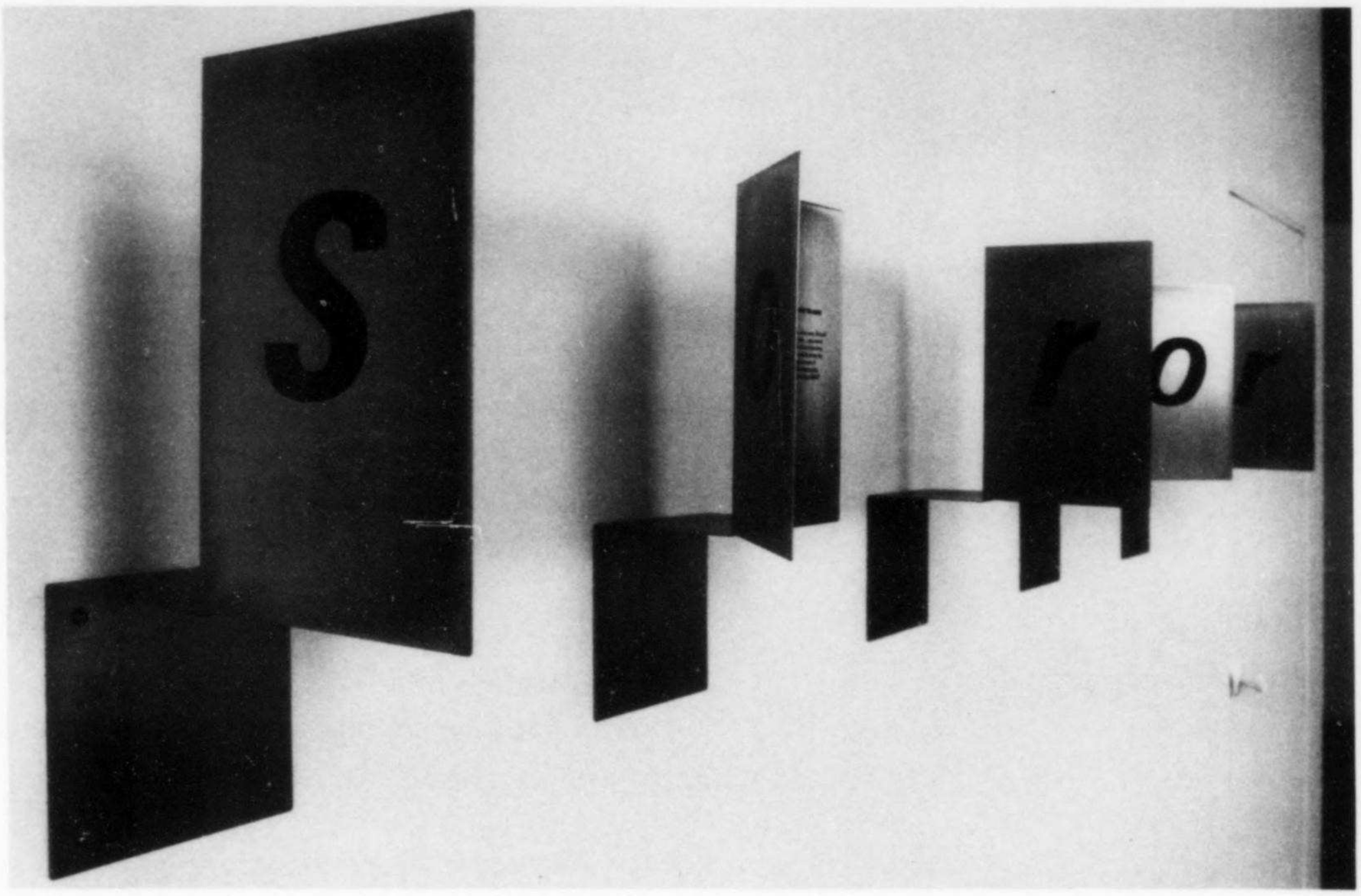
8. This passage is from *L'Ethique de la Psychanalyse 1959–60, Seminaire Livre* VII (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1986), p. 69.

I think this pictures an apparition. The Other of *jouissance* is awesome, silent, and threatening. He troubles us from "the heights of his appearing." His silence is the silence of the presymbolic, the silence of the Thing in itself.

Now let me tell you that when Slavoj Žižek, the Slovenian Lacanian, saw one of the leather jacket frames of *Corpus* in my house he let out a yell of terror. Did I expect him calmly to inhabit a room with that Thing in it? It takes an apparition to perturb loyal subjects of the signifier.



Mary Kelly. Interim—Corpus (Menacé). *1984–85.*



How then does *Corpus* produce its effect? Take the images of the leather jacket folded in three different ways. This section called the Body hasn't a body in sight. The body of fashion, the body of medicine, the body of romantic fiction are all absent. Not a fashion model, not a dissected organ, no pair of ethereal lovers. If these images of the leather jacket, these looming presences, yield a body, it is the real body, the awesome, silent *jouissance* of the body. I am saying that the images of *Corpus* take the form of the apparition. When *Corpus* was first exhibited in England the catalogue carried an image from Gray's Anatomy that shows the throat in section. Next to it was the second folding of the dress. The juxtaposition is startling. There is a decided resemblance between the folds of the dress and the muscles of the neck, but this play between the two is disturbing. The dress is not something that might clothe the neck. Nor is the dress a representation of the throat, for all the similarity of lines and wrinkles. When we look at the image of the dress we see neither a wrinkled dress nor a wrinkled throat. What we see are folds, wrinkles, hollowings, marks on the Plexiglas that take on a life of their own, a silent life, precisely outside any signifying network. This is the apparition at the limit of the symbolic. The field of the signifier is penetrated by something other.

Marks without meaning. We find them again in *Pecunia.* What is going on when we see a word like *Soror* punctuating the space of the gallery wall? From *Sister* to *Soror* to the string of letters S O R O R. From meaning to the letter. From meaning to the dimension of the lost object. For the letter is a signifier emptied of signification; it is the signifier as a mark. We have here a signifier that is not articulated to a system but has the value of a distinguishing mark, a badge. You can also call it a signature, an X. It is like a hieroglyph. It is at the

Mary Kelly. Interim—Pecunia (Soror). *1989.*

origin of the signifier though it is outside signification; but on its other side it is the mark of the loss of *jouissance,* the mark the subject makes to mark the loss of the object.

Since I have mentioned the signature, I cannot resist the temptation to comment on the *mk* that is found under each of the images of the third set of foldings in *Corpus,* those which make reference to the discourse of romantic fiction. I found this most puzzling. Does the artist's signature endorse something about romantic fiction? Do the knots of the images tell us that Mary has it all sewn up? The *mk* troubled me—as perhaps it did you. Now I am clearer: the signature has the function of the letter that marks the loss of the object. But nonetheless, why do the letters happen to be *mk*? And why does the signature *mk* appear in *Corpus* at the point where there is a reference to masochism? For in the set of third foldings there is always a tying—the arms of the jacket tied around itself, the laces of the boots tying one to the other, the sash of the dress knotted around its waist, and so on. I do not think these motifs of masochism lend the images a masochistic appeal. This is *not* a positive image waiting to confound my argument. Masochism can be no more or less of an answer to the question "What does a woman want?" than any other answer. In masochism the marks of flagellation *do* have an affinity with the *jouissance* of the body. But the masochist offers himself as an object of *jouissance* for the Other; he seeks to complete the Other. The knottings and tyings in these images from *Corpus* do not function in this way; they have the quality of the apparition that puts the image at the limit of signification. These images draw out the inconsistency between the object and the Other by emptying out the place of the object. Mary Kelly's signature endorses the apparition and the lack of the object in the artist herself: the *mk* in the subject supposed to image.

The artist does not have the object any more than the analyst has it. *Interim* does not provide a perspective from which the spectator can see herself as satisfactory and lovable. Without that perspective what do we see in the mirror? In *Corpus,* the nearest thing to a mirror is the reflecting plane of Plexiglas on which are the laminated photo positives, screen prints, and painting. Of course you may see yourself shadowed in the Plexiglas; but what is vivid is the image in which you cannot see yourself reflected, the image pushed to its limit, and the empty place of the object given at that limit. The mirror no longer adequately reflects; it produces as apparition the object that cannot be reflected in the mirror. A moment of blindness—the artist's analogue to the moment of the analyst's silence in the talking cure.

These moments allow desire to emerge in the subject. The empty place of the object will come to be occupied by new things among which may be the work of art itself.

Fetishism and Visual Seduction in Mary Kelly's *Interim*

EMILY APTER

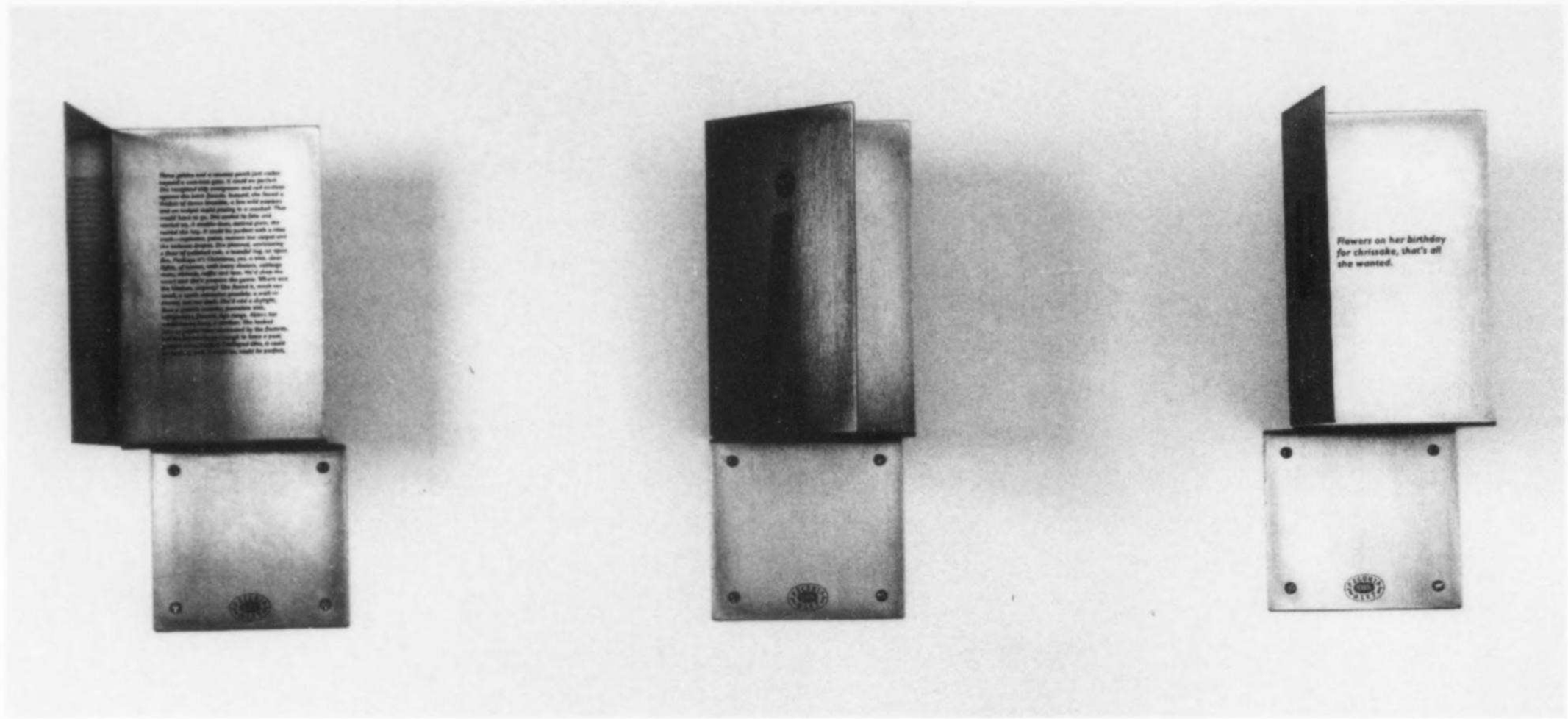
"How is a radical, critical and pleasurable positioning of the woman as spectator to be accomplished?"[1] This question, posed by Mary Kelly in an essay in 1984 and echoed by Griselda Pollock in her *Vision and Difference* of 1988, remains as vexing as ever in the 1990s. As before, the theorization of female spectatorship hinges on the old binaries: male subject, female object; masculine observer, feminine representation; active, sadistic look versus passive, masochistic stare; and so on. Seeking to circumvent these monotonous dyads, Pollock and others have looked for a reconfigured gaze in the work of paintings by and of women. Commenting on Mary Cassatt's *Woman Bathing* of 1891, Pollock wrote:

> The maid's simple washing stand allows a space in which women outside the bourgeoisie can be represented both intimately and as working women without forcing them into the sexualized category of the fallen woman. The body of woman can be pictured as classed but not subject to sexual commodification.[2]

Implicit in Pollock's sympathetic reading of Cassatt is the premise that the body of a woman that *has* been subject to sexual commodification is a body necessarily mediated by a male gaze. The fetishized, feminine Imago, conforming to a commercialized ideal of what seduces the eye, is thus barred to the female spectator. In this picture, there are no female fetishists.

Of course there are many reasons why feminist theorists have been inclined to distrust the seductive power of the image, particularly when that image historically attracts and pleasures the gaze by catering to a masculine viewer. The scopophilic look that fetishizes the female body through cutting, decortication, and hyperfocalization (all in an effort to thwart castration anxiety by

1. Mary Kelly, "Desiring Images/Imaging Desire," *Wedge* 6 (1984), p. 9.
2. Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 88–89.



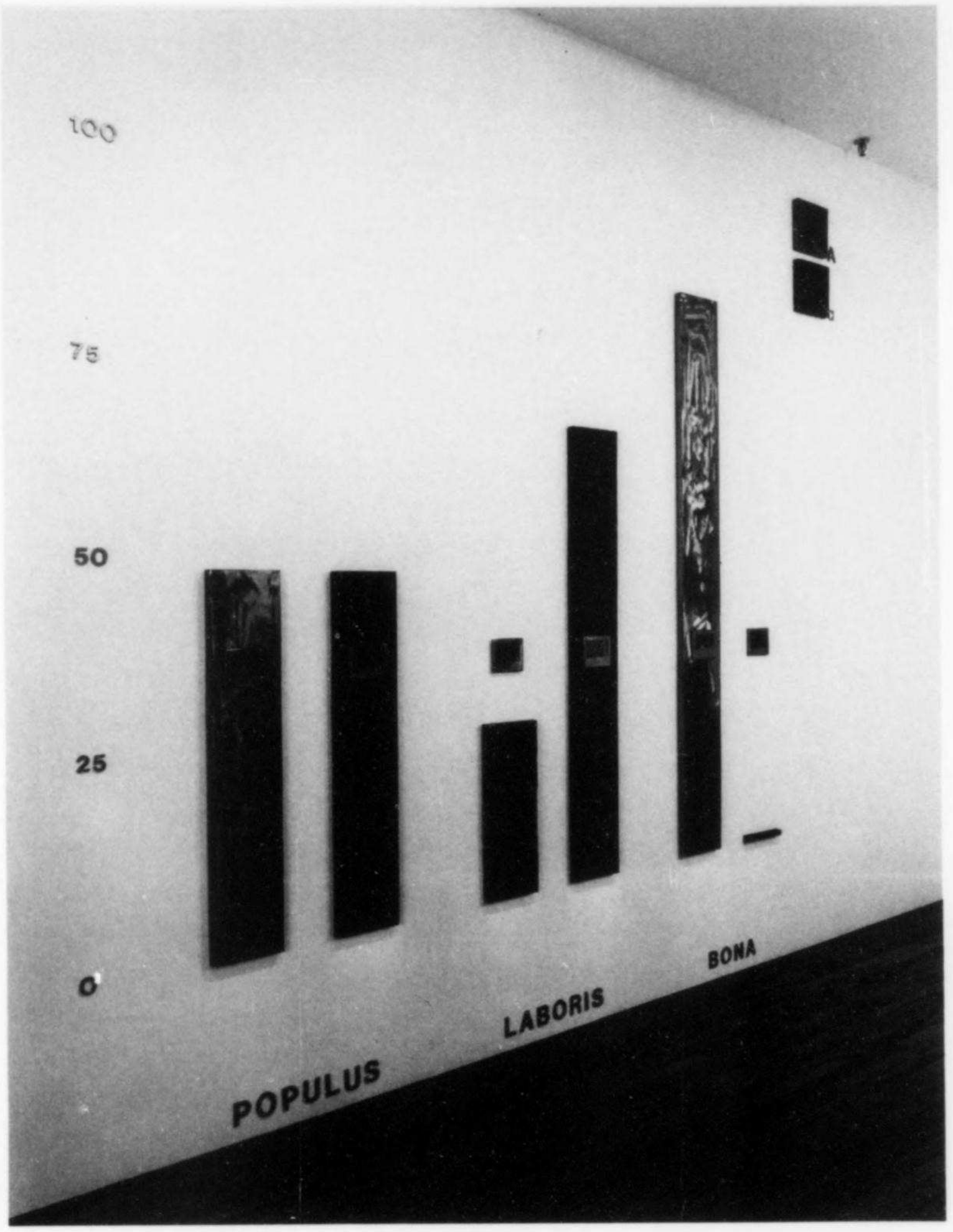
placing in view a displaceable prosthesis intended to stand in for the missing female phallus) inevitably impersonalizes its object, rendering subjectivity expendable. Feminism has sought to constitute a theoretical ontology of the feminine subject just as it has sought to challenge the poststructuralist "death of the subject."

More recently, however, psychoanalytic feminism has pursued a slightly different course: rather than use the notion of fetishism to rehash the evidence of visual exploitation of women by men, it has sought to revise the androcentric bias within the perversions themselves. Fetishism, with its implicit valorization of phallic potency, has, in this sense, been altered from within, but the politics of gendered looking, scopic seduction, and commodity fetishism remain far from being resolved.

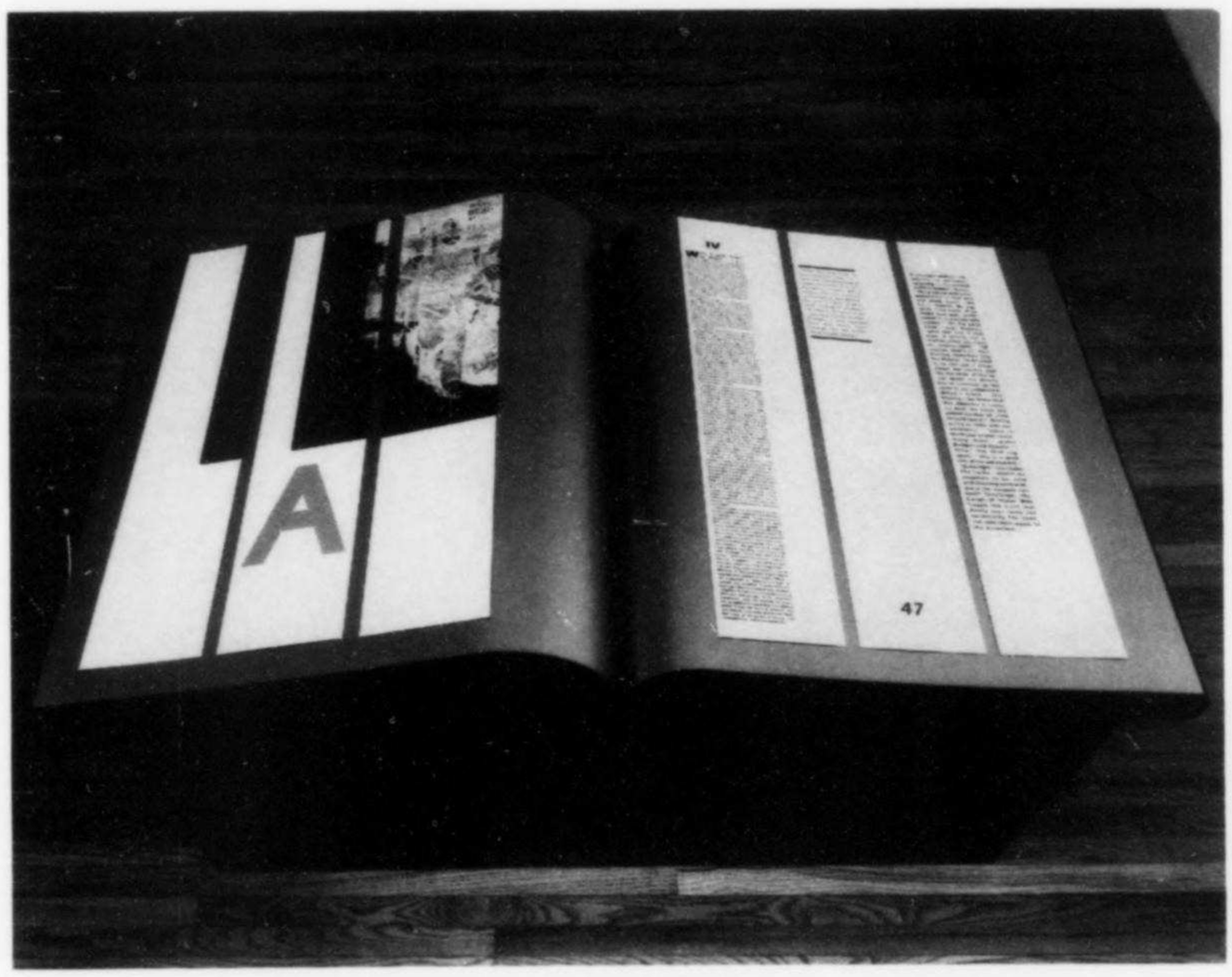
Mary Kelly figures strongly among the critics (Naomi Schor, Elizabeth Grosz, Teresa de Lauretis) who have challenged the status of the male fetishist gaze by attempting to posit a female fetishism where none existed within classical psychoanalysis. Often their more experimental formulations have led away from simplistic equations between fetishism and visual fixation and toward more nuanced understandings of what fetishism might come to mean in art and feminist theory. Certainly art, in its depiction of the female body, comes off historically as an essentially fetishistic enterprise, for it freezes into a prosthetic sham the so-called "natural" body of its subjects (particularly when this subject is female and nude). Against this, and explicitly anti-fetishistic in its rejection of painterly artifice, Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1976)—a museal gathering of intimate artifacts—nonetheless supplies a female fetishism that challenges Freudian psychoanalysis in its critical rereading of maternal cathexis.[3] Unlike many of her contemporaries who had used fetishism against itself (Ana

3. Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).

Mary Kelly. Interim—Pecunia. *1989.*



Mary Kelly. Interim—Potestas. *1989.*



Mary Kelly. Interim—Historia. *1989.*

Godel and Alexis Hunter, for example, deployed images of women's feet in high-heeled shoes to emphasize the dependency of male arousal on the shackling and bondage of, as Jean Fisher put it, "that part of a woman's body furthest removed from the head and therefore the personality"), Kelly's subversive move consisted in undermining and converting patriarchal psychoanalytical dogmas.[4]

In Kelly's later installation entitled *Interim* (1985–1990), female fetishism was returned in the assemblage of monumentalized greeting cards (*Pecunia*), bar charts of statistics on career women (*Potestas*), and plates commemorating historic turning-points in the women's movement (*Historia*). At the same time, the woman as consumer—a continuing motor of the commodity fetishism of late capitalism—was also placed in view. Meal plans, beauty secrets, shopping lists, and materialist fantasies formed a narrative counterpoint to *Corpus*'s striking series of photographed garments. In *Corpus,* sartorial ghosts were captured in Plexiglas boxes, their moody, feminine silhouettes—shoes in bondage, nighties and jackets anxiously tied up in knots—offering a chilling, masochistic beauty. *Corpus*'s riveting icons of femininity without face, of female bodies without breath, had the effect of bringing the allegorical representation of feminine seduction to crisis, to, as Parveen Adams noted, "the brink of visuality."[5] By absenting the lifelike female subject from the subject of femininity (just as she had occluded the photographic image of the child in the maternal reliquary of *Post-Partum Document*), Kelly made all the more visible the reifying regime of scopic masculinism.

Insofar as the "feminine" has been identified in western painting with sartorial objectification, nonheroic or nonepic historical attitude, period costume, ornamental or domestic detailism, and so on, *Corpus*'s apparitional vestments constitute a hermeneutical perplex, for in refusing the female figure they retain that extraordinary power of image historically ascribed to the female body in painting. The lone, dumpy handbag, fixed in its case like an entomological specimen, in no way forfeits its plaintive call to the eye. Commenting on the spellbinding effect of these dressed-up fetishes, Laura Mulvey noted that Kelly "seems to have transcended the seventies paranoia about visual pleasure." This work, she wrote when *Corpus* was first exhibited in Britain in 1986, is "unashamedly beautiful and satisfying to the spectator."[6]

Yet has this "seventies paranoia" been truly eroded? The debates currently surrounding the reception of work by Mary Kelly raise this question directly,

4. Parveen Adams, "The Art of Analysis: Mary Kelly's *Interim* and the Discourse of the Analyst," in this issue of *October.*

5. Jean Fisher, "Object of Fetishism," in *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970–1985,* ed. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (London: Pandora Press, Routledge, and Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 323.

6. Laura Mulvey, "Impending Time: Mary Kelly's *Corpus,*" in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 149.

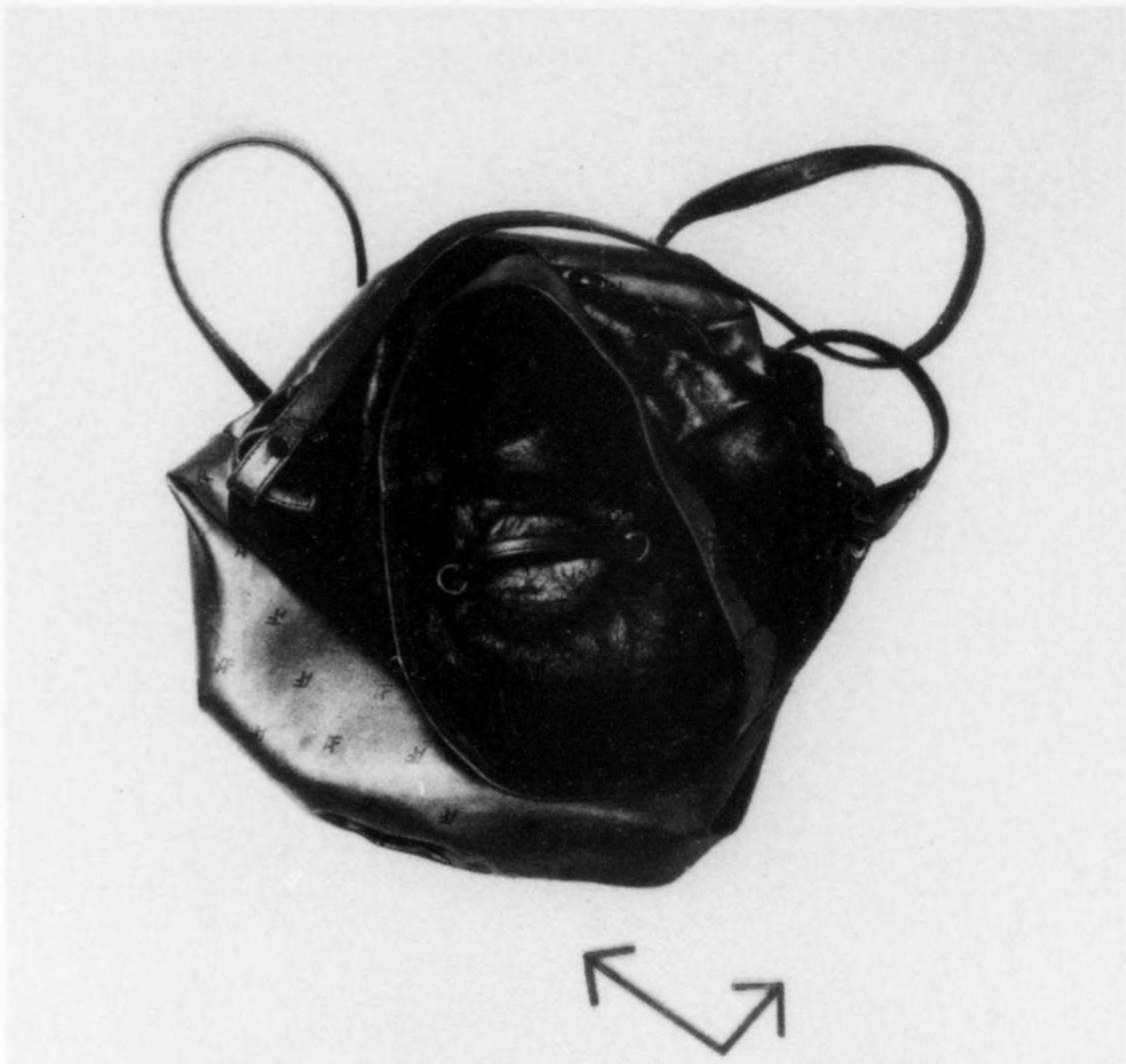


Fig. 2

APPEL

along with other more tangled theoretical issues arising from the relationship between what I am calling feminist antifetishism (a kind of puritanism of the eye translatable as *photophobia,* Karl Abraham's nomenclature for "avoidance of light" or the excessive "love of veiling" in a female patient) and visual seduction.[7] What I want to do is to move this debate away from certain rehearsed assumptions—namely, that visual seduction, in its complicity with male fetishism, necessarily makes for bad feminism—and to consider the problem in terms of the more complex relations between feminist politics and the aesthetics of femininity. I want to argue that there exists an optical sexuality deployed in certain works of art that unmasks masculinist ways of looking while keeping visual seduction alive and well. I want to argue for a recuperation of the seductive image (often flush with the image of female seduction) that escapes the brutalities of a commodifying fetishism, that successfully recirculates feminine glamour and desirability for the female viewer, and that "plays up" to the

7. Karl Abraham, "Restrictions and Transformations of Scopophilia in Psycho-Neurotics; with Remarks on Analogous Phenomena in Folk-Psychology" (1913), in *Selected Papers of Karl Abraham,* trans. Douglas Bryan and Alix Strachey (London: H. Karnac Ltd., 1979), pp. 169–233.

Mary Kelly. Interim—Corpus (Appel). *1984–85.*

scopophilic hunger of the gaze without necessarily compromising female subjectivity.[8]

Interim catalyzes these dilemmas by asking the question: can one seduce through an abstracted visual femininity while derealizing the female body in art? Many remain skeptical; indeed, at the crux of feminist antifetishism is the fear of what happens when the female corpus is left out. Reviewing Kelly's show, for example, Mira Schor faulted the work for its misguided response to the "traps of visuality." By criticizing ageism without actually showing aged female bodies, by "refusing to present the viewer with a seductive self-image" yet at the same time sustaining elegance of manufacture in the objects themselves, *Interim,* Schor claims, becomes mired in "inherent contradictions."[9] I think it safe to say, in response, that these contradictions are there for a reason. Kelly does indeed want to avoid any culturally fixated construction of feminine "self-image" (just as she would want to avoid what many feminists ask for, namely a "role model"). The seduction of image is left intact, but the seductiveness of feminine "self-image" (ironized through frozen poses and memorialized clothing) is subversively put into question. Placing "self" and "image" out of sync while keeping femininity and scopophilia in step seems to be one of the more interesting ways in which Kelly destabilizes a social gaze conditioned by essentialist codifications of gender, race, class, and age.[10]

It is in this context that one might situate Mary Kelly's presentation of object *a.* The algorithms, anamorphoses, and elliptical rhetorical conceits by which Lacan himself pictured the "cause of desire" or object small *a* are paradoxically corporealized in *Interim.* In *Potestas* the letters of the Other, big *A* and small *a,* are raised up; they are embossed on the wall above the vertical bars of the career woman's narrative. The latter, alternately qualified as a "lack-in-being" (*manque à être*), or deficit of desire, is, strictly speaking, unrepresentable. By placing small *a* transparently on the wall, Mary Kelly has, in a sense, made an object out of a pure sign. Small *a* "*fait signe*," or "shows itself," but, of course, in principle it is never supposed to do this quite so visibly. Small *a* usually passes unnoticed, is "misrecognized," or is caught out in the barest flash "at the limit of the image," as Parveen Adams has observed—that is, in a tear, rift, crinkle, *Spaltung,* or bar. "I am in the picture . . . I see myself seeing myself" says the subject. But it is precisely this narcissistic illusion of an ego ideal that Lacanian theory punctures on the screen through the punctiforms or little "no's" of object

8. Jane Gaines seems to be making a similar argument in her "Introduction: Fabricating the Female Body," in *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body,* ed. Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 1–27.

9. Mira Schor, "Troubleshooter," *Artforum* 28 (Summer 1990), pp. 17–18.

10. That *Interim* succeeds in destabilizing this social gaze for the male viewer is attested to by Norman Bryson, who in his catalog essay for *Interim* characterized as "diffraction" Kelly's refusal of a neat fit between vision and gender. See Norman Bryson, "Interim and Identification," in Mary Kelly, *Interim* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), p. 26.

a. A figure of "radical subjective destitution" according to Slavoj Žižek, small *a* functions as a reminder that the subject will always be subject to primordial demand and doomed to perpetual separation from the object: whether breast, feces, phallus, or ego ideal.[11]

Corpus stages the uncanny "apparition" of this nonpresentified object *a* again and again in the creases of leather bags, in the striations of jackets in bondage, in the oleaginous lipstick traces of missed erotic encounters. Both *Corpus* and *Potestas* deal with the representation of object *a*. But where *Corpus*, in its erasure of the female body and scotomization of the commodified visual signs of desire, represents small *a* true to Lacanian form (that is, on the sly), *Potestas* in some sense breaks the rules by placing it too clearly in view.

Both *Potestas* and *Pecunia* put object *a* into play in a way that allows gender and the masculine pleasure of the image to be put into question. Drawing on an arsenal of psychoanalytic works by women, from Joan Riviere's pivotal 1929 essay "Womanliness as a Masquerade" to Catherine Millot's "The Feminine Superego," Kelly in a sense re-genders the Lacanian model of desire without returning to the body.[12] True to her disavowal of "woman's art" but critically feminist nonetheless, Kelly makes an art that doubles as Lacanian revisionism by unmasking the masquerade of femininity. For Lacan, as Jacqueline Rose has argued, "masquerade is the very definition of 'femininity' precisely because it is constructed with reference to a male sign."[13] *Interim* rigorously records and dissects the genuflecting of feminine subject-positions to the invisible force fields of a male gaze, but the scenarios are injected with a politicizing irony that undercuts implicit phallocentrism. And in the hushed exchange of confidences from woman to woman, desire is diversified: feminine speech acts are eroticized, encouraged to be polymorphously perverse, sprung loose from heterosexualist *doxa*.

Orality and visuality converge and ghost each other throughout *Interim*. Kelly's use of language is visual in itself: her cursive script registers the ghostly tracery of the author much like the shadows falling beneath the empty clothes mime, nostalgically, the contours of a lost East Village fashion plate. She also uses foreign languages mimetically to distance the viewer from immediate verbal meaning. Refusing to translate Charcot's terms for the passional attitudes of hysteria, she activates the memory of early psychoanalysis, grounded as she reminds us in the French visual method of pointing to hystericized body parts. Plaster casts of the *pied tors* and the *pied bot*—indicative malformations of the

11. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 116.
12. See Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade" (1929), in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 35–44, and Catherine Millot, "Le Surmoi féminin," *Ornicar?* 29 (Summer 1984); translated by Ben Brewster as "The Feminine Superego," in *The Women in Question*, ed. Parveen Adams and Elizabeth Cowie (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 294–314.
13. Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso Books, 1986), p. 67.

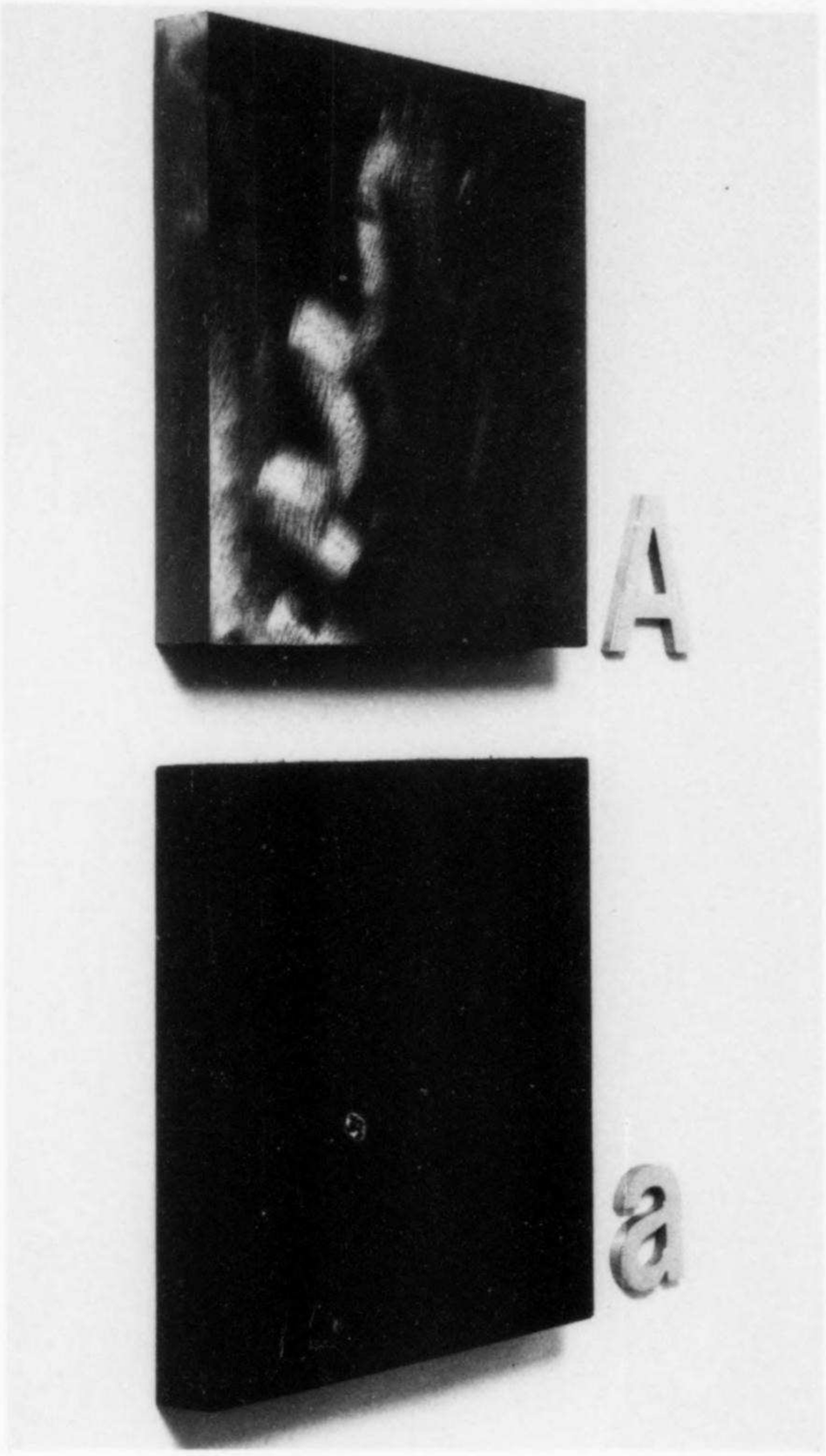
hysteric's anatomical extremities fashioned by Charcot's assistant Paul Richer—were typically complemented in the 1880s and '90s by scholarly treatises on the "hysterical breast" or the contracted "*pli fessier*" ("buttock fold"). The visual sign and its attendant verbal etiquette functioned, each for the other, as didactic pendants to the scopic regime of scientific method; and the hysteric's body, scrutinized in the textbook or on the amphitheater floor, took the *talion* punishment meted out by the male gaze in retribution for her overactive "masculinity complex."

Menacé, Appel, Supplication, Erotisme, Extase, these frozen signifiers also emerge as so many tropes, figures of speech that act out their lexical origins in Greek. Many tropes derive etymologically from roots designating specific physical attitudes; moments within the chorus, histrionic moves on stage. Insofar as these tropes refer to the gesticulations of female performers, we can read this hysterical talking *Corpus* as a model lexicon, replying to the demand of French feminists such as Luce Irigaray or Monique Wittig for a utopian, foundational, gynocentric language of her own.

The Latin inscriptions of *Pecunia* and *Potestas—Pecunia olet* (money smells) or *Populis, Laboris, Bona* (Population, Labor, Wealth)—also return us to the patriarchal language of Roman law: like institutional facades inscribed with hortatory sententiae or classical maxims, Kelly's gallery walls approximate a frieze of dead paternal letters. Coming from a feminist artist, the effect is counter-monumental, a spoof on the name of the Father, a joke on Moses's tablets.

Finally, Mary Kelly uses the verbal medium to literalize allegories of feminine "interiority" and what Julia Kristeva has termed "women's time." When one of the speakers in *Corpus* says "the image grates," the trope is literalized in the little red grid or grating that surfaces on the shoulder of the leather jacket. As another female voice laments over (what bourgeois society sees as) the unsightliness of pregnancy in middle age with the phrase "It's not becoming to come," the image of woman trying "to be come," that is, "to be" *jouissance* ("awesome, silent, and apparitional" as Parveen Adams says) flashes referentially before our eyes. When we see the word *Soror,* it reads like a homonym of "sorrow" or a rebus in which the signifying "S" of the fragile feminine subject hovers over a figure of undecidability: "or . . . or"—like the French "*ni ni*" of denegated repression and the Kierkegaardian "either/or" of ironical self-doubt. Even the signature *mk* subliminally sounds out the dominant consonants of the word "*m*aso*ch*ism"—that perversion which is not a perversion in women, according to classic psychoanalysis, but a symptom of woman's generically "passive nature."

The visual pun is particularly prevalent in *Potestas,* where it contains, I think, a specific reference to theories of the masquerade. At the top right of the installation Lacan's big *A* and small *a* appear as a key coded to the vertical "bars" in rusted or polished steel below. The polished panels corresponding to



big *A* sport brass plaques featuring narratives of women identified with masculine superegos: A female world leader, "a darling of third world democracy" (Benazir? Cory?), contemplates the spectacle of her presidency "thrust upon her." A faculty wife at high table wonders whether she should "spit out the olive pit or swallow it?" Big *A*, blessed with the appanages and insignia of power, seems to "be" the phallus, or at least to pass as a credible facsimile once she is armed with the dildo-like accoutrements of power and money. She resembles Joan Riviere's female masquerader defensively compensating for being phallic by impersonating a masculine ideal of the feminine ("She regards herself as a man who passes for a woman," according to Catherine Millot). Projecting her "femininity" as a camouflage, flirting with her male audience when she speaks at conferences, big *A* lives in fear of retaliation for impersonating a feminine superego, if such a thing were to exist (she apes nothing, but as we all know, "nothing" is "something").

In another plaque coded to *A*, the career woman avows that she is unsure of her license to play the role of the father. She says: "The proof was her

Mary Kelly. Interim—Potestas. *1989.*

Mary Kelly. Interim—Potestas (Populus). *1989.*

receipt, but did she have a Driver's License?" Here, even the artist's poetic license is not enough; the female speaker can't seem to make good on the paternalist loan, even though she has repaid in full. And when she "presses her lips into a narrow line," this narrow line, visually reiterated in the brass bar below, doubles as a rebus of the "barre." feminine superego. The same narratrice also makes a revealing slip of the tongue. As she describes how she "looked at them as if they were . . . she was . . . her father had . . . her friends or someone would . . . tell them who was who," we hear not only the profoundly subjunctive tense of the female subject-position, but also the classically repressed utterance of the female masquerader: "She was . . . her father . . ."

Here big *A*'s story interlocks with that of small *a*. The texts on the rust-colored panels suggest that *a* has a regressive tendency to return to an Imago of the pre-Oedipal mother. As Catherine Millot has argued:

> Identification with the father has as a corollary the fact that the paternal Other is reduced, precisely by that identification, to the status of a little other, while the mother is restored to the place of the big Other. Henceforth, the girl, identified with her father, will replay with her partners and with her own real mother, the history of her pre-Oedipal relations.[14]

We can see *a* enacting this desire to regress in "Pecunia," where, as Mary Kelly has said, the woman's "archaizing of the drives," her coprophilic attraction to objects that smell, render her insensitive to the attractions of odorless capital.

In *Potestas* small *a*'s struggle against maternal identification through "virile display" similarly breaks down. An academic lecturer attempts to strap on a phallic image—"How do you get your curriculum vitae, vitalis, vitabilis to look that long?" The woman at a board meeting, failing to insist when her male colleagues dismiss her attempt to enforce affirmative action, "remembers Guatemalan money: on the bills, the women were bare-breasted." It is as if the stain of mother's milk has left its compromising blot on the "clean" medium of exchange represented by the banknote. In this image of the culturally displaced bare breast, we have a particularly apparent instance of Kelly's revisionist approach to Lacanianism: the gender-neutral figuration of object *a*—that "stand-in" for desire's value—is soldered to a critique of female disempowerment in the global financial market. Capitalist speculation and the specular inflation of masculinity within femininity are thus thematically fused in *Potestas*.

Mary Kelly's unmasking of the masquerader mirrors, furthermore, her own refusal to adopt the "mistress" position of the "woman artist." Her invisible female subject denies the spectator a "positive image," or "feminine ego ideal." This abdication of the mistress position may be interpreted positively insofar as

14. See Millot, "The Feminine Superego," p. 304.

it foils the construction of facile feminism. Kelly's "thick descriptions" of loss, like her histories of feminism's lost illusions, are difficult, but this difficulty is part of the analytic process, part of the work's layered hermeneutic.

Loss and lack commingle in *Interim*'s mysterious materialization of object *a*. The effect is one of what Lacan calls "retroversion"—a turning back to go forward. Parveen Adams describes this effect when she speaks of how "desire, which is always desire of the Other, misrecognizes the object because when it pursues the object, it fails to recognize that the object is not in front of desire, but *before* it."[15] One could say, perhaps, that *Interim* gives us retroversion as "retrovision"—a revisionist looking backwards, a proleptic retroactivity ultimately leading up to death. In a late novel by Guy de Maupassant, *Fort comme la mort,* an aging mother experiences terror at having her face compared by her lover to its younger replica on the body of her daughter. *Corpus*'s sartorial ghosts may be seen as metonymies of just such a face; the creases in the empty clothes record the fault lines into which the youthful visage has disappeared. These wrinkles are a shorthand for the death of youth and a prediction of the grand death to come. They spell out a "little death"—*la petite mort,* that male postcoital melancholia which, when gender transposed, refers, as Adams has intimated, to the loss of *jouissance. Interim's* object small *a* thus foretells *objet petite mort,* what Mary Kelly has designated, quite frighteningly, by the letter X.

In focusing our attention on the status of Lacanianism in the work of art, Kelly's *Interim* raises larger issues pertaining to the merging of psychoanalysis, feminism, and art practice. How do women as artists and spectators provide a critique of the historic gender bias of psychoanalytic theory without resorting to the essentializing frames of "femininity" or "women's art?" How does one dislodge the scopic domination of women in the clinic or on the couch through an archive of images themselves placed "under the gaze?" How does one perform gender or "send up" masculinity and femininity so as to unfix, ironically, the reified codes of sexual identity while at the same time preserving the pathos and sorrow of a "different" female body growing older? How does one seduce visually without fetishizing the female body?

As if in response to such questions, *Interim* undermines feminism's more paranoid reading of the masculine super-gaze (if it is everywhere, then, by implication, *we* are *it*) by replacing the figuration of the female body with a scopic target which attracts; showing itself through history as "being seen," a figuration that opens onto the strictly nonfigural. Red lozenges, red circles, red grids, red check marks, red arrows, and red X's direct the scopic drive to fixed points on *Corpus*'s numbed but eloquent sartorial subjects. These points—images of *béance,* vertiginous disclosures of that gaping chasm opening onto "what you want and cannot have"—remind me of the power to arouse ascribed by

15. See Parveen Adams, "The Art of Analysis."

René Laforgue (Freud's French disciple and rival) to *scotomization* (from the Greek *skotos,* a "darkness" linked by Freud and Laforgue to visual castration). Unlike fetishism, which expresses desire through the verbal disavowal of lack, scotomization proposes a *reticulated* affirmation of lack, an image that manifests sex appeal by calling out to the sex in the gaze. By this means, lack no longer need be read as synonymous with deficiency.

Kelly's red markers, launched by the image and lobbed at the retina, may be read as so many techniques of seductive affirmation set out to rhyme with the unconscious visual after-echo of red words. Reappropriating scotomization (from male psychoanalysis) for feminist purposes, transforming the visual cut into an eye-catching visual object, Kelly produces an alternative to those traditional aesthetics of the feminine subject that depend on the "photophobic," veil-enveloped masquerade. No longer do we find "woman" presented as a shadowy after-image of the masked Lacanian phallus; in these photo-positive Plexiglas panels slashed in red, female fetishism or scotomization is actively employed as a "cutting-edge" probe of critical vision rather than passively inscribed as a masochistic ploy. Kelly's speaking sartorial fetishes work through psychoanalytic conundrums that scopically ensnare while challenging the commodity fetishism of figural female bodies. In its shattering beauty, *Interim* constructs a nonrepresentational picture of the optical sexuality of women. And though the object of visual desire adopts no fixed or permanent guise, its strategies of visual seduction figure, *in absentia,* the glamour of a feminine subject.

The Real Presence*

CATHERINE MILLOT

TRANSLATED BY JAMES B. SWENSON, JR.

"It was about this period that Bloch overthrew my conception of the world and opened for me fresh possibilities of happiness (which, as it happened, were to change later on into possibilities of suffering), by assuring me that, contrary to all that I had believed at the time of my walks along the Méséglise way, women never asked for anything better than to make love."[1]

All of the *Remembrance* is nevertheless constructed upon the impossibility of an encounter of desires. Moreover, the addition that follows indicates the narrator's irony with respect to Bloch's "revelation": "[Bloch] added to this service a second, the value of which I was not to appreciate until much later: it was he who took me for the first time into a house of assignation." Everyone knows that it is with prostitutes that one is most surely protected against the emergence of feminine desire; that is what they are paid for.

That the encounter of desires should always be missed seems to have had, for Marcel Proust, the value of an axiom, even of a profession of faith, and to have imposed upon him an apostolic requirement to spread the word. Emmanuel Berl, a survivor of the trenches of World War I who often called on Proust during the spring of 1917, paid the cost. "Despite his refined courtesy, he never for a second left me the illusion that he would have consented to waste his time with me were it not for this duty to preach that it seemed to me he judged himself compelled to fulfill."[2] Having received an unlikely response from a young woman long lost from sight to a sign that he had addressed to her as one tosses a bottle into the ocean, Emmanuel Berl rushed to tell Proust the good news that a desire can echo another desire. Dismayed, then angered by Berl's having flung back at him that he was confusing love with "a hallucinatory

* This text is translated from a chapter of Catherine Millot's *La vocation de l'écrivain* (Paris: Gallimard, coll. L'infini, 1991).

1. Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past,* trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (New York: Random House, 1981), vol. 1, p. 619. [I have modified translations when necessary without noting the fact. Translations not ascribed are my own.—Trans.]
2. Emmanuel Berl, *Sylvie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 111.

onanism," Proust kicked him out, followed by insults tossed "like slippers." This necessarily put an end to their relationship.

What is, then, the nature of this force that "exalted cities and women to such a height so long as I did not know them, and, slipping away from beneath them as soon as I had approached them, made them at once collapse and fall flat on to the dead level of the most commonplace reality"?[3] Like travels, loves are always disappointing. Desire is as little in accord with its object as the name is with the thing. Guermantes, Stermaria, Venice, la Berma: place names, the names of unknown women, give body—that of their shimmering sonority—to ideal figures that, one day, a certain blue eye or bird-like nose, inflamed by an entirely real pimple, will show to be lies. Desire often vanishes in face of this rude approach. "To human beings, fulfillment of desire comes as a day's outing does to a maid-servant."[4]

Coveted beings are first of all linguistic beings. It was reading *Mornings in Florence* or *The Stones of Venice* that awakened the narrator's desire to travel, just as medieval legends, together with Doctor Percepied's descriptions, adorn the Duchesse de Guermantes, whom he has never seen, with the charms of an insurmountable distance.

That idealizing dreams should be contradicted by reality is common experience. Under certain conditions, desire can survive it. Once descended from the stained-glass windows of the chapel of Gilbert the Bad, the Duchesse de Guermantes becomes no less the object of the narrator's obsessions. There exist, however, more essential impasses to desire and to love.

No preestablished harmony destines desire to encounter its objects. Nothing guarantees that another desire will ever come to echo it. When the narrator, racked by the fevers of adolescence, haunts the woods of Roussainville, no naiad, not even the least peasant girl, appears to assuage them. His call echoes in "the inhuman vacancy of this deconsecrated forest."[5] "I ceased to think of those desires which came to me on my walks, but which were never realized, as being shared by others, or as having any existence outside myself. They seemed to me now no more than the purely subjective, impotent, illusory, creations of my temperament. They no longer had any connection with nature, with the world of real things, which from then onwards lost all its charm and significance, and meant no more to my life than a purely conventional framework, what the railway carriage on the bench of which a traveler is reading to pass the time is to the fictional events of his novel."[6] The world thus conceals no "hidden treasure," the object pursued by desire being entirely lacking in reality.

3. *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol. 3, p. 170.
4. Marcel Proust, *On Art and Literature, 1896–1919*, trans. Sylvia Townsend Warner (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1984), p. 81.
5. *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol. 1, p. 462.
6. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 173.

The narrator is thus sent back to the solipsism of solitary *jouissances*[7] whose first shelter was the "water closet that smelt of orris-root."[8] The contingency of the encounter was immediately transformed, for him, into the certainty of its impossibility.

Thenceforth, even were a woman to crystallize his desires, he could do no more than verify the postulate of their unshareable character. Everything happens as if, by some strange spell, loving a being was enough to make one importunate to him. And if, miraculously, it happens that this being answers our expectations, like the day Gilberte writes the narrator the much-awaited letter inviting him to tea, the suspicion immediately arises of some factitious arrangement that would give the lie to the spontaneity of the proposal and destroy by that very fact its value as a sign of desire. "Life is strewn with these miracles for which people who love can always hope. It is possible that this one had been artificially brought about by my mother who, seeing that for some time past I had lost all interest in life, may have suggested to Gilberte to write to me, just as, when I first went sea-bathing, in order to make me enjoy diving which I hated because it took away my breath, she used secretly to hand to my bathing instructor marvelous boxes made of shells, and branches or coral, which I believed that I myself discovered lying at the bottom of the sea."[9]

Even miracles are fallacious. Where the omnipotence of the mother extends to pleasure as to desire, none of which can escape her inquisitive clairvoyance, there is no more room for the chance of an encounter: "Happiness can never be achieved."[10]

The mother's omnipotence, moreover, was echoed by that imputed to the father. If the mother's infallibility saw itself as that of the Law, whose empire, in its own eyes, should be limitless, it still happened that the father could block it out of his taste for the arbitrary, like the famous evening at Combray when he enjoined his wife to spend the night with the "child." If we are to believe the portrait given of him by the *Remembrance,* he was not a man to bother himself with principles, any more than with the "rule of law," and gladly considered himself as above the law, be it that of nature. His passion for barometers was an image of the one he had for making rain and fine weather. The narrator will recognize in the persecutions to which he submits Albertine "the abrupt, arbitrary desire" inherited from the father, "to threaten the people I loved best in the hopes with which they were lulling themselves with a sense of security which I wanted to expose to them as false."[11]

7. [I have left *jouissance* untranslated here, as has become traditional. Partial approximations in English include satisfaction, enjoyment, and orgasm. It can equally well be used in a sexual and a nonsexual sense.—Trans.]
8. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 172.
9. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 539.
10. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 672.
11. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 86.

Elsewhere, Marcel confesses his complacency with respect to paternal pretensions to omnipotence. If he lacks "inspiration," he counts on his father to "settle it all," he who disposes of so many "letters of introduction to the Almighty" and who is able to "postpone for a year the compulsory repointing of the walls of our house, alone among all the houses in that part of Paris."[12] Is not the life of sickly idleness that it so upsets him to lead entirely his father's artificial creation, revocable at any moment?

If the bubble of paternal omnipotence in which the narrator shelters his procrastinations pops soon enough to leave him to his solitude, the one in which the mother enclosed him by the care that she lavished on him would survive her. To her eighteen-year-old son, vacationing in Ostend with the Finalys (their daughter, "the charming Marie," was one of Marcel's first loves), a worried Madame Proust wrote letter upon letter, full of recommendations. "Somewhere, I don't remember where, I read the touching story of a blind and paralytic mother who could nevertheless perceive that her daughter was in love, follow the passion's progress, warn her, etc.—and I, paralyzed by distance and getting so little clarity from your letters, which neglect all too much the essential points, I can feel your pulse and your prose beating too fast, and I absolutely demand calm, diet, time alone, refusal to take part in excursions, etc.,"[13] all sources of excitation needing to be banished.

She immediately makes the most innocent of joys into duties for him: "I am delighted with the sensations you described to me about your morning walks and I desire that you do not fail to take them more often if that would continue to be pleasant."[14] No pleasure is licit if taken far from her: some are forbidden and others, which consist in pleasing his mother, are obligatory.

Addressing a distress call to Darlu, his philosophy professor, Proust complains of an obsessive doubling, a ceaseless self-observation that destroys all his pleasures in the bud and leads him to a dilemma to which perversion will attempt to respond, but that will find a resolution only in writing: "But in that case, to cure myself, I shall have to destroy my inner life, or rather the gaze ceaselessly open upon my inner life, and this strikes me as frightful."[15] An unbearable outcome, in fact, if this gaze which must be destroyed is that of the mother. An eloquent slip in a letter to Daniel Halévy clearly indicates where this mother and her gaze were lodged: "Great eyes [*yeux*]," he writes, instead of "Great Gods [*dieux*]."[16]

12. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 189.
13. Marcel Proust, *Correspondance générale*, ed. Philip Kolb (Paris: Plon, 1970–), vol. 1, pp. 130–31.
14. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 113.
15. Marcel Proust, *Selected Letters (1880–1903)*, ed. Philip Kolb, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Doubleday, 1983), vol. 1, p. 23.
16. *Correspondance générale*, vol. 1, p. 124.

This inquiring gaze, which demands to know "the details of your time and meals,"[17] the times of waking and going to sleep as well as the quality of his bowel movements (cf. the prolixity of her son's commentaries on the effects of laxatives),[18] tries above all to track the slightest emergence of a desire in order to eradicate it in time. A gap in the schedule can be its index, thus signaling a danger to be conjured away. Such a concern can only be constant. The narrator's jealous obsessions about Albertine's schedule can easily be recognized in it. The mother's anxiety about her son's desire took the more admittable form of a permanent concern with his health.

Even after his mother's death, Marcel Proust will say that he lived as if immersed in this anxiety. It is the air he breathes; how can we be astonished if it suffocated him? A letter written during his mourning evokes the maternal anxiety which welcomed him back each time he went out, "to see if I had returned without too much of a crisis," and says that he is gnawed by the "remorse" of having been, for his mother, the object of this concern "that I cannot even call incessant in that it is in it that I breathe and that I think, it alone surrounds me."[19]

If, in the mother's eyes, desire makes one sick, on the other hand sickness, prohibiting "going out," presents the advantage of protecting one from the occasions that could arouse desire. The ambivalence of this solicitude ("there are times when hatred meanders through a vast stretch of love . . . ")[20] came to exasperate Proust, who denounced it brutally: "The truth is that as soon as I feel better, the life that makes me feel better exasperates you and you demolish everything until I feel ill again. This isn't the first time. I caught cold last night; if it turns to asthma, which it's sure to in the present state of affairs, I have no doubt that you'll be good to me again, when I'm in the same state as this time last year. But it's sad, not being able to have affection and health at the same time."[21]

Another gaze, whose power of attraction is the inverse of this all-seeing, totalitarian gaze that tolerates neither shadow nor refuge, traverses the *Remembrance,* leaving a hole in the tissue of the story. Both a break and a fault, an abyss and a vanishing point, it opens upon that which escapes par excellence, so intolerable that it is glimpsed only by misunderstanding its meaning and immediately forgetting it.

It is precisely this primary disavowal, this *proton pseudos,* that seals in advance the destiny of the encounter. If the impossibility of the encounter of

17. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 128.
18. See, for example, ibid., vol. 5, pp. 192 and 237.
19. Ibid., vol. 5, p. 359.
20. Marcel Proust, *Jean Santeuil,* trans. Gerard Hopkins (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), p. 552.
21. *Selected Letters,* vol. 1, pp. 281–82.

desires has the value of an axiom, it is because it originates in a primordial rejection of the desire of the other, whose gaze bears the trace of this desire, a trace that one struggles to efface.

The narrator's unhappy love for Gilberte or for the Duchesse de Guermantes takes its birth from the forgetting of its cause: the gaze of desire that both of them placed on him at their first encounter.

Gilberte, still almost a child, suddenly glimpsed through the hawthorn hedge of the park at Tansonville, sketches an obscene gesture with her hand, holding a garden spade, all the while "staring out of the corner of her eye in my direction, without any particular expression, without appearing to see me, but with a fixity and a half-hidden smile"[22] which the narrator immediately interprets as "a mark of infinite contempt." The dark gaze of a desire that cannot be recognized as such, soon covered over by the false memory of the blue eyes of ideal love for an inaccessible Gilberte. "Whenever I thought of her, the memory of those bright eyes would at once present itself to me as a vivid azure, since her complexion was fair; so much so that, perhaps if her eyes had not been quite so black—which was what struck one most forcibly on first seeing her—I should not have been, as I was, so especially enamored of their imagined blue."[23]

Much later, at the end of the long detour of the *Remembrance,* at the moment the circle is closed, the day Gilberte teaches him that the two "ways" of Guermantes and Méséglise can come together, she reveals to him at the same time the signification of that old gaze, and that it had indeed been the sexual proposition that he had refused to see in it. "I remember quite well that, as I had only a moment in which to make you understand what I wanted, at the risk of being seen by your people and mine, I signaled to you so vulgarly that I'm ashamed of it to this day. But you stared at me so crossly that I saw that you didn't want to."[24]

The narrator had also believed that he had been mistaken in attributing to Albertine the sly vice with which her first glance had seemed to be marked. Thus "the true Gilberte, the true Albertine," to whom love was blind, "had at the first moment yielded themselves with their eyes." "I had 'botched it' more completely . . . and for the same reasons as Saint-Loup had with Rachel."[25]

It is from a similar and equally misunderstood gaze that his love for the Duchesse de Guermantes originates, seen for the first time in the chapel of Gilbert the Bad, in the church at Combray. "Marvelous independence of the human gaze, tied to the human face by a cord so loose, so long, so elastic that

22. *Remembrance of Things Past,* vol. 1, p. 154.
23. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 153. This split can also be found in the narrator's vision of a double Albertine, whom he compares to Doodica and Rosita, the Siamese twins; cf. vol. 3, pp. 66–67.
24. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 712.
25. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 712.

it can stray alone as far as it may choose."[26] In this gaze which she allows to wander upon the young unknown that he then was for her, like "a ray of sunlight which, at the moment I received its caress, appeared conscious of where it fell," he still did not dare to read a desire. And long after having ceased to love her, the narrator receives from the Baron de Charlus the confidence that the virtuous reputation of the Duchess "was in fact made up of an incalculable number of skillfully concealed love affairs."[27] "Was I now to suppose that my first idea had been correct and that, if in the sequel the Duchess had never spoken to me of love, this was because she had been more afraid to compromise herself with a friend of her nephew and her aunt than with an unknown boy encountered by chance in the church of Saint-Hilaire at Combray?"[28]

In the absence of the recognition that makes it human, desire is condemned to staying underground and confines itself to an *incognito,* even in the anonymity of brothels, under the unnameable features of "vice."

This particular concatenation of an abrupt, obscene desire, refused one minute and forgotten the next, and reappearing in whoever was its object in the inverted form of an obsessional and hopeless love, is already figured twice in *Pleasures and Regrets.* The heroine of "The Melancholy Summer of Mme de Breyves" receives an unequivocal invitation from an unknown at whom she had momentarily looked. She begins to doubt the words she had heard and persuades herself, instantly, that she had been the victim of a hallucination. This man who until that time was nothing to her, who is not distinguished by any particular quality, then becomes the center of her thoughts and the cause of an incessant torment, while chance unrelentingly refuses to grant her a new encounter. Lovesick, she resigns herself to thinking "that the two worlds, the world of reality and the world of her desires, are parallel, that it is as impossible for them ever to meet as a shadow the body that projected it."[29]

Violante, another heroine of *Pleasure and Regrets,* also becomes enamored of a young man who taught her "most unseemly things she had never before suspected,"[30] and whom she repulsed. After passing a year dreaming of him, she learns of his return and makes up her mind to write to him, full of hope "that after all, she could give the wheels of their two destinies which seemed to have kept them mechanically apart, a little push with her finger . . . that between her unspoken tendernesses—her perpetual interior romance—and real things, there were avenues of communication along which she would hasten toward the impossible which, in creating, she would make viable."[31] But the letter will

26. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 192.
27. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 1077.
28. Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 1077–78.
29. Marcel Proust, *Pleasures and Regrets,* trans. Louise Varese (New York: Crown Books, 1948), p. 190.
30. Ibid., p. 88.
31. Ibid., p. 91.

remain vain, and the writing of the *Remembrance* will be necessary for the two "ways" to at last communicate.

In the missed occasion itself can be read that desire is the cause of desire and that the subject and the other appear to inhabit two parallel worlds only following the rejection of this first, constitutive link of the desire of the subject with the desire of the Other.

That the fate which is opposed to the encounter of desires might cease for a moment is what an immediately disappointed hope allows Jean Santeuil to glimpse, he who had thought that he felt only a platonic love for Charlotte, reserving for others a sexuality reduced to need.

"Beneath the surface of the woman who had become indifferent as a result of being loved without desire . . . he suddenly felt the movement of possibilities quite different from those which till then she had kept shut away within herself." From the depths of what for him had been until then this woman in whose breast "there was no desire at all" is suddenly born "something which he did not know" and that reveals to him "in relation to this woman a himself that he did not know," and "at the same time in her a herself in whose presence he had never been." And "it was as though his whole life had undergone an instantaneous transformation, as if the world had become richer than he had ever thought possible, as if the purely physical delights and desires with which he had grown bored were not everything," as if life "had now split open in a flash" and he suddenly entered "the mythical room which might all his life have remained closed, past which he might have walked without even knowing of its existence," "a new room of life."[32] But Charlotte, whom he was going to clasp in his arms in this new outburst of desire, repulses him, and Jean, driven out, "would never return."[33] The door of the room, which had already closed, would never open again.

It is from the repression of a sensual desire, properly that of the other, misrecognized, but carrying that of the subject with it in the same movement, that love is born in its simultaneously obsessive and idealized form, an intellectual passion getting no further "than letters, reproaches, adorations, services rendered, pretended coldnesses,"[34] while repressed desire returns from the outside, in the disfigured features of jealousy, of which the *Remembrance* gives so many magisterial clinical descriptions.

Underneath the sweetness of life together with Albertine hides the permanence of the danger that living together with her was supposed to conjure away. If love is born of the obliteration of desire, jealousy responds to the desperate enterprise that seeks to prevent its resurgence, constantly to seal

32. *Jean Santeuil,* pp. 686–87.
33. *Ibid.,* p. 689.
34. *Ibid.,* p. 687.

up any cracks through which it might slip: those which open in the bat of an eye, a blank in the schedule.

Submitted to the laws of intermittence, of the alternation of doubt and confidence, jealousy is essentially tied to the interval. Its place in time and space is the in-between. The unknown surges forth between four and four-thirty, between the Avenue du Bois and the Rue La Pérouse, and above all between the lines, between the words, in the fissures of discourse. Stumblings, slips, brusque silences are so many indices of a lie, which itself would be the infallible sign of a desire. It only takes a few words escaping from Odette or Albertine for this gaping hole to open up and reveal the horror of an unknown desire.

The doubt which is coextensive with jealous surveillance, a doubt similar to the one which "prevents us from remembering whether we have bolted the door,"[35] is only a rampart against a horrible certainty. The desire to know is animated by the horror that is its repulsive source and from which it ceaselessly distances itself. This is why, unless the worst is confronted—in which case jealousy becomes an ascesis—the truth of this quest is the passion of ignorance.

To know everything about a being, to extend one's field of vision to "all the points in space and time that this being has occupied and will occupy," is "the impossibility which love comes up against."[36] Were Albertine to be condemned to the most rigorous solitary confinement, the narrator would still be able to feel "that there yawned like a chasm the inexhaustible expanse"[37] of the evenings when he did not know her. Only sleep, which prefigures death and like it closes the eyelids, assures that her face has "that continuity which is unbroken by the eyes."[38]

A gaze suffices to reveal the irreparable gap in the absolute knowledge dreamed of by love, immediately to constitute its blind spot, the vanishing point which will always give the lie to the illusion of possession. For Albertine's black eyes are not "merely two glittering sequins of mica," and "we sense that what shines in those reflecting disks is not due solely to their material composition; that it is, unknown to us, the dark shadows of the ideas that that person cherishes . . . and above all that it is she, with her desires, her sympathies, her revulsions, her obscure and incessant will."[39] The narrator knows in advance that he will not possess the young cyclist in the polo hat without also possessing what is in her eyes, and that possession cannot be realized.

The gaze is not the window of the soul. Its gaping chasm remains impenetrable. If the batting of the eyes opens upon another scene, the latter remains invisible. The narrator, only grasping of Albertine's desire the shimmer of her

35. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 55.
36. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 95.
37. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 393.
38. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 65.
39. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 851–52.

pupils, will see "no more than does the spectator who has been refused admission to the theater, and who, his face glued to the glass panes of the door, can take in nothing of what is happening on the stage."[40] Even were he to surprise Albertine in her pleasures or to wring a confession out of her, what he is looking for would still escape him, for what thought wishes to know is "what is, what has been . . . 'in itself,' as it would appear to God," but "that is the unknown to which the mind cannot attain."[41]

Jealousy is the dream of a Vision in God: to see the lovers reunited, as God would see them, in the midst of their most intimate *jouissance,* to attain at last the knowledge of the other's *jouissance,* of that radically other *jouissance* that Gomorrah, the paradigmatic *hétéros,* incarnates for the narrator. The truly Other woman is she who loves women, for the mystery of her pleasure is only all the more absolute in that it is inconceiveable for a man. The narrator approaches it only by way of that underside of *jouissance* that is suffering. "Formerly, when I learned that a woman loved other women, she did not seem to me to be on that account a quintessentially different woman. But in the case of a woman one loves, in order to rid oneself of the pain one feels at the thought that such a thing is possible, one wants to know not only what she has done, but what she felt while she was doing it, what she thought of what she was doing; then, probing ever more deeply, through the intensity of one's pain one arrives at the mystery, at the quintessence."[42]

To know at last, absolutely, would be to be able to slip behind the gaze Albertine directs upon the objects of her desires and, doubling that gaze with one's own, "twinning"[43] it, finally, to see with her eyes. But only the work of art could claim to accomplish this impossibility, "to see the universe through the eyes of another."[44]

The other's gaze, by which his desire escapes, makes knowledge impotent. It is its failure, its intimate and unsurpassable limit, its insupportable blindness. It would be necessary to rip it out in order to wipe out the spot. For would not the supreme horror be that this very blindness would be the source of the other's *jouissance?* To rob her of this *jouissance* at any price, and into the very tomb where she has borne her secret, to make Albertine know that one knows: "I know about the laundry-girl. You said to her: 'Oh, it's too heavenly,' and I've seen the bite."[45]

The mystery upon which her eyes have closed remains to be tracked in what were the objects of her desire—the women she coveted or who would

40. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 391.
41. *Jean Santeuil,* p. 590.
42. *Remembrance of Things Past,* vol. 3, p. 536.
43. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 572.
44. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 260.
45. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 539.

have attracted her, to be possessed. Thus Andrée becomes the incarnation of Albertine's desire "as Venus was the desire of Jove."[46] Thenceforth, the young girls perceived in the street awaken an agitation whose roots plunge into the darkness of Albertine's unknown desires and evenings, while the gaze the narrator places on them is immediately matched by "the curious, furtive, speculating glance, reflecting unimaginable thoughts, that Albertine would surreptitiously have cast at them,"[47] which clouds them in its mystery.

"All my desires in life merged into this one sole curiosity, to know in what manner Albertine experienced pleasure."[48] Jealousy is the very substitution by which the desire of an other takes the place of that of the subject.

The hidden desire that he tracks in the loved one is none other than the unknown—because not recognized and unconscious—portion of his own desire, coming back to him affected with the negative sign of pain, the mark of repression. "What it tortured me to imagine in Albertine was my own perpetual desire to find favor with new women, to start up new romances, was to suppose her guilty of the glance which I had been unable to resist casting, even while I was by her side, at the young bicyclists seated at tables in the Bois de Boulogne."[49]

"That inexpressible sense of horror,"[50] inseparable from the representation of Albertine's pleasures, finds itself nourished by the memory of his own desires, of his own lies which are transformed into so many torments, "as though in this algebra of sensibility they reappeared with a minus instead of a plus sign."[51]

This "algebraic" law had already been disengaged by Proust in the last story of *Pleasures and Regrets,* "The End of Jealousy": the mortal jealousy of Honoré for Françoise is born from the thought of his own infidelity.

Love bears the indelible mark of its origin, of the disavowal which gave birth to it, and, even "unhappy," bears witness to the communication of desires. "For was it not, despite all the denials of my reason, tantamount to knowing Albertine in all her hideousness, actually to choose her, to love her?"[52] The other's "vice" is revealed to be the ultimate cause of the love one bears for him. "In the midst of the most complete blindness, perspicacity subsists in the form of predilection and tenderness; so that it is a mistake to speak of bad choice in love, since as soon as there is a choice it can only be a bad one."[53] Thus, the

46. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 557.
47. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 572.
48. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 566.
49. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 392.
50. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 527.
51. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 527.
52. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 624.
53. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 624. See also vol. 3, p. 147: "For what makes this sort of love painful is the fact that there preexists it a sort of original sin of Woman, a sin which makes us love them."

assertion that in love there are only missed encounters turns out to be a denegation that protects us from the horrible certainty of a bad encounter, the one in which the malignant *jouissance* of the other echoes our own.

In any case, the axiom of the incompatibility of desires is shown to be a lie by jealous apprehension itself, which so dreads at each moment its imminence that it must ward it off at any price. In the narrator's eyes, Albertine and her lovers never stop coming together in a connivance that excludes him: "a glance from one, understood at once by the other, brings the two famished souls in contact."[54]

Nevertheless, this immediate communication of desires is only evoked in the *Remembrance* in a homosexual context. That a woman might respond to a man's desire remains excluded. At most she submits to it out of subservience or interest. Thus Jean Santeuil is astonished that Charlotte should be "capable of *giving him pleasure*[55] in this [sensual] manner, to condescend to it and to consent to it,"[56] but does not imagine that she could possibly get off on it.

One day at the Ritz, Proust, leaving his listeners totally perplexed, declared that he was a homosexual out of "delicacy."[57] Upon a woman as upon "the French language," he wrote in his youth to Daniel Halévy, "one must never impose obscene poses."[58] That a woman cannot accept masculine desire is indisputable. The semi-universality of sapphism among Proust's heroines serves as a confirmation of the impossibility of the two sexes coming together.

It is only in homosexuality that the "miracle" of the harmony of desires occurs, the unforgettable paradigm for which remains the encounter of Charlus and Jupien in the courtyard of the hôtel de Guermantes. While the narrator lies in wait for the arrival, "almost beyond the possibility of hope," of "the unlikely insect"[59] which would come to fecundate the Duchesse de Guermantes' orchid, it is the equally improbable conjunction of the Baron and the tailor for which he is present. How then could one doubt the miraculous possibility of the union of the rare insect with the captive flower, if Monsieur de Charlus "who for years past had never come to the house except at hours when Jupien was not there, had, by the mere accident of Mme de Villeparisis's indisposition, encountered the tailor and with him the good fortune reserved for men of the Baron's kind by one of those fellow-creatures who may even be, as we shall see, infinitely younger than Jupien and better-looking, the man predestined to exist that they may have their share of sensual pleasure on this earth: the man who cares only for elderly gentlemen"?[60] The particularity of perverse desire, which

54. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 14.
55. My emphasis.
56. *Jean Santeuil*, p. 686.
57. George Painter, *Marcel Proust* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), vol. 2, p. 281.
58. *Selected Letters*, vol. 1, p. 24.
59. *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol. 2, pp. 623–24.
60. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 629.

at first glance renders the conditions so difficult to satisfy, turns out on the contrary to constitute the only basis of a possible understanding between beings.

This scene, upon which the narrator looks as a voyeur, echoes another scene at which he was also a hidden spectator, at Montjouvain where Mademoiselle Vinteuil and her lover submitted their pleasure to this equally particular condition: the profanation of filial love.

If desire only encounters its object in Sodom or Gomorrah, then it is guaranteed that

The two sexes shall die, each in a place apart

and that they could never come together.

That this was the danger which had to be conjured away at any price is what is suggested by a passage in a draft of the *Remembrance,* "Return to Guermantes," which furthermore clarifies the source of the inaugural drama of the nocturnal kiss at Combray, precursor of the future tortures of jealousy. The narrator, who has just learned of the imminent departure of his mother and his brother (a character who will be stricken from the definitive version), a departure which had been hidden from him, cannot contain his rage: "We set off for the station. Once or twice as we were going along I was possessed by a sort of madness; I saw myself as persecuted by her and my father who would not let me accompany her, I would have liked to avenge myself by making her miss the train, by preventing her from going, by setting fire to the house."[61]

Fraternal jealousy is in the foreground, but right away parental connivance and the major motive for what so upsets the narrator come into profile: the secret, this knowledge hidden from his gaze, explicitly compared to the original mystery of generation. "I have never been able to understand how it is that when people try to keep something from us, the secret, however well it may be kept, automatically affects us and works us up into a sort of exasperation, a feeling of being persecuted, a frenzy to investigate. It is so with children when, while still too young to have the slightest notion of procreation, they feel that they are being deceived, and have an inkling of the truth."[62] Maternal absence leaves the narrator on the threshold of the unknown pleasures in which she partakes without him, the impotent ignorance of which forms the torment of separation.

Maternal anxiety in the face of the manifestations of the son's sexual excitement brought with it, thus, its doubling in the anxiety of her son, kept apart from the virtual *jouissances* withheld from his eyes.

Doubtless, the violence of infantile jealousy imprints its "sadistic" mark on the primitive scene which then doubly incarnates the supreme danger to be

61. "Contre Sainte-Beuve," *On Art and Literature,* p. 260.
62. Ibid., p. 255.

conjured away. The *Remembrance* bears multiple traces of this originary knot of sadism and sex in the form of the sudden revelation of a theretofore unsuspected cruelty in a person dear to us. The sadism of Saint-Loup, giving a footman Machiavellian advice about how to get a comrade fired, and thus betraying his homosexuality; Saint-Loup, ordinarily "so kind and tender-hearted," who seems to be playing "the role of Satan in a play."[63] The cruelty of Françoise, cutting the heads off of chickens while yelling "filthy creatures!" at them, an episode of which a first version was given in *Jean Santeuil,* where the allusion to a fantasy of the primitive scene is particularly transparent: "Jean was still too young to realize that before a wonderful roast duck could be set upon the table, superbly limbed and shining with gravy so that his mouth watered with innocent desire, it had been necessary to catch a terrified creature, to struggle with it, to wring its neck, and to drain away oceans of blood down the kitchen sink. When he heard cluckings and the flapping of frightened wings in the yard he believed that it was only the cock being punished, but not hurt, for misbehaving with the hens."[64]

This screen memory is echoed by a strange anecdote, reported by Maurice Martin du Gard, according to which Proust would have had the habit of having a chicken killed in a shady hotel room while he stayed in the next room accompanied by a young man dressed in a policeman's uniform.[65]

Proust's taste for young butchers, which he also gave to Charlus, is well known, as is the story of the rats, given in different versions by André Germain and Maurice Sachs: beaten to a bloody pulp by "delivered" boys, or put in a cage and blinded with hatpins. A taxi driver was happy to recount, "with a large, benevolent smile," "I'm the one who used to bring the rats to Monsieur Marcel."[66]

These little animals would be nothing other than the representation, in itself blasphemous, of the parental figures, if we are to believe the narrator's nightmare at Doncières, in which "our relatives who are dead are shown meeting with serious accidents which at the same time do not preclude their speedy recovery. Until then we keep them in a little rat-cage, in which they are smaller than white mice and, covered with big red spots out of each of which a feather sprouts, regale us with Ciceronian speeches."[67]

Sachs also reports the profanations to which Proust submitted photographs of his mother, displayed in brothels alongside portraits of his beautiful young friends of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, at the sight of which a duly admonished

63. *Remembrance of Things Past,* vol. 3, p. 479.
64. *Jean Santeuil,* p. 87.
65. Maurice Martin du Gard, *Les mémorables* (Paris: Flammarion, 1957), vol. 1, p. 244.
66. André Germain, *Les clés de Proust* (Paris: Sun, 1953), pp. 71–72.
67. *Remembrance of Things Past,* vol. 2, p. 85.

young man would cry out, "and who the hell's this little tart?"[68] The scene at Montjouvain is its manifest transposition.

But is not the most accomplished profanation the one that the son realizes in effigy, he whom everyone agreed was "the very portrait of his mother"?[69] In giving himself over to the pleasures of Sodom, it is still she whom he delivers to impure and vengeful assaults, while he thus realizes an incest fantasy *quoad matrem*.

Maternal inflexibility, which tolerated only conduct that responded to duty, overly occulting the part of the wife in herself, was doubtless no stranger to the sentiment of deception whose persecutory effects the son felt. What virtue betrays of desire is seen to be denounced by the perverse staging that is the reply to its disavowal.

Proust himself, through the mouth of the narrator, gives an interpretation of sadism which is worth pausing over: it is not so much that evil is a source of sexual excitation as that sensuality appears to be malignant. "Sadists of Mlle Vinteuil's sort are creatures so purely sentimental, so naturally virtuous, that even sensual pleasure appears to them as something bad, the prerogative of the wicked. And when they allow themselves for a moment to enjoy it, they endeavor to impersonate, to identify with, the wicked, and to make their partners do likewise, in order to gain the momentary illusion of having escaped beyond the control of their own gentle and scrupulous natures into the inhuman world of pleasure."[70]

Nevertheless, the moral delicacy of the sadist is doubtless itself not without motivation, for if sensuality appears in the light of a necessary malignity, it is because it is cruel to the other of love. The pleasures of the one are the sufferings of the other, escaping his grasp. Thus in "A Young Girl's Confession," the heroine's sensual *jouissances* cause her mother's sickness, even though the latter knows nothing about them until the day when their unequivocal revelation finishes killing her off. "Then, while more and more pleasure took possession of me, I felt at the same time, stirring in the depth of my heart, an infinite sadness and desolation; it seemed to me that I was causing my mother's soul, the soul of my guardian angel, the soul of God to weep. I have never been able to read without shuddering those stories of beasts who torture animals, their own wives, their own children; I now confusedly felt that in every sensual and sinful act there is just as much ferocity on the part of the body in the throes of pleasure and that in us so many good intentions, so many pure angels are martyred, and weep."[71] In the eyes of maternal love the paradigmatic sin is

68. [*Poule,* properly meaning "hen," is also a French slang term for prostitute.—Trans.]
69. See ibid., vol. 2, pp. 938–39.
70. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 179.
71. *Pleasures and Regrets,* pp. 45–46.

sensual pleasure. "I had rather my mother had seen me commit still other crimes, and even that one too, than that she should have seen that look of joy on my face in the mirror,"[72] displaying before her eyes the reflection of a "sensual, stupid, brutal joy."

Jouissance is always somewhat matricidal. "The Filial Sentiments of a Parricide," an article written for the *Figaro* after the drama of Henry Van Blerenburghe's murder of his mother, at the time that Proust was in mourning for his own mother, expresses his conviction of sharing the sin of the murderer. "Fundamentally we age and we kill all that loves us by the concerns we cause it, by the very nervous tenderness that we inspire and continually alarm."[73]

Nevertheless, certain passages in the *Remembrance* clearly indicate that suffering inflicted upon a beloved person can, in return, be a source of erotic excitation.

Gérard Genette has noted the repetition of the concatenation that makes the horrified compassion aroused in him by the spectacle of his grandmother's pain when her husband gives in to the temptation to drink cognac, which his state of health forbids, be followed by the equivocal consolation that the narrator will soon go seek in the solitary pleasures of the "water closet smelling of orris-root."[74]

This is echoed by the episode in which a drunken Marcel perceives in the mirror the "hideous" reflection of a "ghastly self"[75] (following the example of the heroine of "A Young Girl's Confession") and the one in which his mother's expression, at the news of his intention to marry Albertine, evokes for the narrator the air she had on that famous night at Combray, when, giving in to her son's "nerves," she agreed to spend the night in his room: "that air which was extraordinarily like my grandmother's when she had allowed me to drink brandy."[76]

Is it not the mother's "air" (doubled in the fiction by that of the grandmother), which accompanies, in its consternated disapproval, her gaze of incessant solicitude, that steals the air of her asthmatic son?[77] Asthma or guilty pleasures, such is the dilemma, appearing in the guise of blackmail, whose prisoner the narrator makes himself by enclosing the other within it. This is at least what seems to be confirmed by the passage in which the grandmother, not without appearing to be crucified by such an act of debauchery, permits Marcel a drink of the famous cognac or beer which will alleviate his suffocation.

72. Ibid., pp. 46–47.
73. *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971), pp. 158–59.
74. *Remembrance of Things Past,* vol. 1, pp. 13, 535–36, and 700–701. Cf. Gérard Genette, "Métonymie chez Proust," *Figures III* (Paris: Editions du seuil, 1972), p. 59.
75. Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 174–75.
76. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 1169.
77. This R could very well be the cipher of his destiny, insisting beginning with the birth of his younger brother Robert, moving through Gilberte, Albertine, Bergotte, la Berma, Guermantes, Stermaria.

This anguished gaze that asphyxiates him is the very one whose perverse staging will become the condition of *jouissance*. The singular property of a gaze is that, blind or dead, it is only all the more omnipresent. It only remains to make it serve the very ends that its first function was to forbid. But the gaze does not form the real of perverse *jouissance* without making unreal the sexual act, thenceforth reduced to the spectacle offered to this anxiety, in the form of a sacrificial rite.

The sadistic scene, Proust notes explicitly, is a theater. It is inscribed in the parenthesis of its uprights or in the frame of a window. Its protagonists are officiating priests who recite the responses of a black liturgy, or the bit parts of a vaudeville play: the primal scene is a burlesque, even a *Grand Guignol*. In its "crude" and "rudimentary" symbolism,[78] perversion participates in the "aesthetics of the melodrama." The sadist is an "artist in evil"[79] who installs sex in the space of a simulacrum. Sham is an intrinsic part of the perverse ritual which should signal this falseness by some detail, as if desire itself had to be marked by this trait. The game of desire is played "for laughs" and not "for real," whence the comic element that marks the story of Charlus's encounter with Jupien and explodes in the staging in which, as in a joke, the policeman balances the chicken in the next room.[80]

The quotation marks within which the perverse act is inscribed are, doubtless, to be referred to the disavowal in which Freud situated the structure of perversion. Castration must be affirmed and denied in a single movement, and how better to accomplish this than in staging it so that it strikes false? A false man dissimulating a woman's soul, like Charlus, whose virile protest never stops betraying his secret feminine identification; the false couple of two women, one dressed as a man, like Gilberte and Léa on the Champs Elysées; a young woman harboring within herself a virgin and a ruffian, like Mademoiselle Vinteuil—mixing up the cards of sexual difference, the pervert wants to demonstrate that there is only a sexual relation in the reduction of sex to a simulacrum. The perverse scenario superimposes upon the fundamental axiom of the nonencounter of desires the fiction of a harmony, whose purpose, in return, is to demonstrate by absurdity the impossible link of desire with the desire of the other.

This logic led Proust to the brothel where he confined his last sensual pleasures. There is, in fact, no more appropriate frame for placing the encounter of desires under the sign of the lure. The gesture of payment guarantees that a scenario, agreed upon in advance, will not, any more than for chance, leave room for the question of the desire of he who is paid to give the reply. It

78. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 179.
79. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 179.
80. [Chicken, "*poulet*," is French slang for policeman.—Trans.]

is as sham that the desire of the Other is called upon. Following the mother's example, hiding shells and coral which her son would later believe he had found, Jupien, the master of ceremonies, procures for Monsieur de Charlus, who pretends to be fooled, the Giton whom he will introduce as a dangerous thug who stabs old women. The only response to desire is rigged: this is the theorem that perverse staging wants to demonstrate.

Finding only the faithlessness of a fake treasure at the bottom of the sea, Narcissus is sent back to the solitary reflection of his vain desire.

In "The Death of the Cathedrals," Proust proposed the fiction of a future age in which all that subsisted of a long-disappeared Christianity was "deconsecrated and mute cathedrals," the vestiges of a bygone belief, sunk in oblivion. Historians having exhumed the ancient rituals from the archives, the government decided to have a mass reconstituted as a spectacle in the course of which actors would play the role of the officiating priests of the rite while others would play that of the faithful.

The perverse scene is in the image of this curious fable. In a world deserted by the real Presence[81] of the desire of the Other, the pervert devotes himself to the theatrical representation of a dead belief. Lacking the double metaphor of love which makes the echoing of desire possible, the pervert, like the aesthete, becomes attached to the metonymy that transfers to the image the value of that which it figures. They adore the veil and not the beyond of which it is the sign, and which they challenge.

Idolatry: this is the accusation Proust proffers with respect to Ruskin, the aesthete par excellence, devoting to representation the cult which is only due to the hidden presence whose simulacrum it is. Proust demonstrates the subtle sleight of hand by which Ruskin imagines that he loves art for being the expression of the sacred while in reality the only interest he has in the sacred is that of the aesthete.[82] If the aesthete, like the pervert, occasionally poses as a defender of the faith, it is on the basis of a disbelief in the real Presence. The aesthete and the pervert sustain their desire by the desire of an other in whom they do not believe.

But Proust the artist never stops denouncing idolatry. That of the amateur who makes a pilgrimage to contemplate a landscape painted by Elstir. That of the lover of Balzac who will admire a woman dressed in "the very dress and coiffure worn by the princess de Cadignan the day she saw d'Arthez for the first time."[83] Or that of Swann, believing himself to have been taken with Odette because he had recognized in her "Jethro's daughter."

81. Proust thought of calling the last part of the *Remembrance* (which became *Time Regained*) *The Perpetual Adoration of the Real Presence*. Cf. George Painter, *Marcel Proust,* vol. 2, p. 235.
82. Marcel Proust, *On Reading Ruskin,* ed. and trans. Jean Autret, William Burford, and Phillip J. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 49ff.
83. Ibid., p. 55.

The prey of metonymy, the idolator mistakes his desire by deceiving himself about the nature of what causes it. "The beauty of a painting does not depend on the things represented in it,"[84] no more than the source of love is in the intrinsic value of the beloved. Proust makes his own Buffon's position, for whom "all the intellectual beauties found [in a beautiful style], all the relationships of which it is composed, are so many truths, as useful and perhaps more precious for the public mind than those which may be the essence of the subject."[85] The value of a work of art is determined by neither the immediate signification nor the referent, but by the effect of meaning or truth which surges forth from metaphor, both hiding and revealing a reality that is more essential and that alone counts.

The adolescent narrator, after having vainly implored the castle-keep of Roussainville, the only confidant of his solitary pleasures, to bring to him some child of the village, ceases "to think of those desires . . . as having any existence outside [him]self,"[86] reality losing "all its charm and significance" in the absence of an echo from a nature as mute as the cathedrals deserted by faith. But Marcel will only finally begin to write one day because he had not abandoned the belief in "something real existing outside of us."[87] The narrator, awaiting a sign from Gilberte which would be "a happiness external to my mind, independent of my will, a true gift of love,"[88] will be disappointed, while this happiness will be accorded to the artist, who has remained faithful to the signs of the "real Presence." While the pervert demonstrates by absurdity the absence of the Other, for the Proustian artist there is Other, and this Other leaves traces.

Traces such as the "confused impressions," the obscure and long-undecipherable signs that dot the itinerary of the narrator like so many enigmatic signposts. The shadow of a cloud in a pool of water, the steeples of a village near Combray, a row of trees near Hudimesnil, or more simply a taste, a scent, a color, can give birth to them. They are accompanied by a happiness that can deepen into ecstasy, whose mystery interrogates the narrator about what its cause could be, and which seems to hide within itself the thing that aroused it. "Suddenly a roof, a gleam of sunlight on a stone, the smell of a path would make me stop still, to enjoy the special pleasure that each of them gave me, and also because they appeared to be concealing, beyond what my eyes could see, something which they invited me to come and take but which despite all my efforts I never managed to discover."[89]

The plenitude experienced, the enthusiasm aroused by such instants, seem

84. Ibid., p. 57.
85. Ibid., pp. 48–49.
86. *Remembrance of Things Past,* vol. 1, p. 173.
87. *On Reading Ruskin,* p. 33.
88. *Remembrance of Things Past,* vol. 1, p. 444.
89. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 195.

to the narrator to be the index of a superior truth. They alone bring an unadulterated satisfaction. And, however far apart such moments may be, they make whatever has happened in the interval lose all value, and they alone appear to be real, they alone to be proper to open the path of the "true life." Their simultaneously fortuitous and inevitable character is the token of an independent reality. Effects of an encounter which responds to no intention and which the will is powerless to provoke, they impose themselves upon the narrator who cannot escape them.

Only a few works of art show that they are capable of engendering comparable sensations. They too seem to be made of "a hidden reality revealed by a material trace,"[90] and to both contain and withdraw "the same object, known to me and yet vague,"[91] ungraspable. The ineffable joy of which the last phrase of Vinteuil's septet is the victorious annunciation is of the same nature as that promised by "those impressions which at remote intervals I experienced in my life as starting points, foundation-stones for the construction of a true life: the impression I had felt at the sight of the steeples of Martinville, or of a line of trees near Balbec."[92]

When the narrator manages to interrogate more profoundly the impression that sweeps over him, it occasionally gives him the answer of a reminiscence that clarifies its mystery. The taste of the madeleine dipped in tea, the musty odor of the pavilion of the Champs Elysées, reawaken a past instant, and this resurrection seems to give the key to the happiness experienced.

It is worth noting the context in which these impressions are inscribed, throughout the *Remembrance*. They are, in fact, regularly reported before or after the description of a paroxysm of desire. The reflection of the tile roof in the pond near Montjouvain and the exaltation that this sight arouses in the narrator succeed upon the vain waiting for the peasant girl who would respond to his ardors and precede the scene between Mademoiselle Vinteuil and her lover. The encounter of the steeples of Martinville takes place immediately following that with Madame de Guermantes in the church at Combray, while the ecstasy before the hawthorns frames the vision of Gilberte behind the hedge. And it is just after leaving the "handsome fishergirl" of Carqueville, whom he would have liked to seduce, that the narrator experiences a mysterious happiness at the sight of the trees of Hudimesnil.

The contiguous relation between sensual desire and aesthetic excitation brings out an analogy and a contrast. In both cases, it is a question of signs, of envelopes hiding an unknown reality. The women he glimpses hide within them a mystery which is that of their desire; they sometimes manifest it by ambiguous

90. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 382.
91. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 772.
92. Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 262–63.

signs, destined to remain undecipherable. But whereas the amorous encounter is destined to failure, the aesthetic impression, which likewise springs forth from an encounter, will keep its promise of happiness.

The first moments when "involuntary memory" emerges are also situated in a significant context. The episode of the madeleine is told following the one in which the mother gives in to the narrator's "nerves" and spends the night with him. The pleasure stolen from Gilberte in the course of a struggle in the gardens of the Champs Elysées is intercalated between the perception of the musty odor of the little pavilion held by the "Marquise," and the resuscitated memory of Uncle Adolphe's little room at Combray. The pleasure extorted from both of them consummates the loss of hope that desire might respond to desire. To have forced his mother's consent deepens the narrator's despair, for her giving in to his distraught demand was not the hoped-for response, which would be one "independent of [his] will, a true gift of love." The impossibility of love is found to be sealed by this inaugural scene, which fixes a disappointment all the more radical in that a response has been given to the demand. Opposed to this impasse are the pleasures tied to these "confused impressions," "pleasures of a different kind from other pleasures, which leave one more unstable, incapable of grasping them, of possessing them, pleasures that were consistent . . . delicious, soothing, rich with a truth that was lasting, unexplained and sure."[93]

Everything indicates that the order of satisfaction they conceal is related to that vainly awaited from love. The "division of bodies" condemns us never to touch anything of the other but the "sealed envelope" of his being, nature not having dreamed "of making possible the interpenetration of souls."[94] In love only pain opens "that way out of oneself"[95] which gives us a fugitive access to the lives of others.

Music possesses the privilege to evoke, without language, the nostalgic plenitude of this impossible communion of souls.[96] The unity of two timbres (the sublime being born "from the encounter of the brass")[97] suggests that harmony of desires that the angels knew before the fall. While listening to Vinteuil's septet, the narrator wonders "whether music might not be the unique example of what might have been—if the invention of language, the formation of words, the analysis of ideas had not intervened—the means of communica-

93. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 530.
94. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 393.
95. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 394.
96. Approached, nevertheless, by the eucharistic gratifications that the narrator draws from the two "goodnight kisses" of the *Remembrance:* the mother's, "when she had bent her loving face down over my bed, and held it out to me like a host for an act of peace-giving communion in which my lips might imbibe her real presence and with it the power to sleep" (ibid., vol. 1, p. 14), and Albertine's, slipping "her tongue between my lips like a portion of daily bread" (ibid., vol. 3, p. 2).
97. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 256.

tion between souls."[98] Music would be like "a possibility that has come to nothing,"[99] humanity having committed itself to the path of articulated language. Already in *Jean Santeuil* one could read that poetry and music were "as memories of a shared love which may have really existed."[100] Language of the angels, language before words, music is the image of the lost paradise of a communication delivered from lies and equivocation, from the failure consubstantial with speech. Vinteuil's septet resonates like the strange call of a "supra-terrestrial joy," "as the promise and proof that there existed something other, realizable no doubt through art, than the nullity that I had found in all my pleasures and in love itself, and that if my life seemed to me so futile, at least it had not yet accomplished everything."[101]

And still, right up to the end of the *Remembrance,* he will doubt the reality of this promise. Just like the *jouissance* of involuntary memory, music guards the mystery of a truth too confusedly glimpsed to not be suspected of an illusory subjectivity: "it might be the case that, if Vinteuil's phrases seemed to be the expression of certain states of soul analogous to that which I had experienced when I tasted the madeleine soaked in tea, there was nothing to assure me that the vagueness of such states was a sign of their profundity rather than of our not having yet learned to analyze them, so that there might be nothing more real in them than in other states."[102]

Only articulated language can realize the promise of announced *jouissance* and demonstrate its reality. The revelation accorded by these mysterious "impressions" remains incomplete so long as their truth is not disengaged from them by the labor of words. This is why "real life, life at last laid bare and illuminated . . . is literature."[103]

What then is realized during the development, thanks to language, of those which, for as long they remain untranslated into words, remain in the state of photographic "negatives," of "clichés." And why are they not sufficient in and of themselves?

"Impressions such as those to which I wished to give permanence could not but vanish at the touch of a direct enjoyment which had been powerless to engender them. The only way to savor them more fully was to try to get to know them more completely in the medium in which they existed, that is to say within myself, to try to make them translucid even to their very depths."[104] The *jouissance* one takes from them is fugitive, and when they seem to deliver their message by the sudden eruption of a reminiscence, it is still only a matter of an

98. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 260.
99. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 260.
100. *Jean Santeuil,* p. 595.
101. *Remembrance of Things Past,* vol. 3, p. 265.
102. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 388.
103. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 931.
104. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 911.

"optical illusion" which does not last.[105] Furthermore, nothing explains why such a resurrection of the past, which in its present state was as unsatisfying as always, should be in itself the source of a *jouissance*. Why, indeed, does this coincidence between two impressions deliver reality to us? Just like impressions that have remained obscure, reminiscences are still signs to be deciphered so that their laws can be disengaged.

From the beginning of the *Remembrance,* the narrator had glimpsed the path that alone would allow its elucidation. If, before the reflection in the water of a sunlit tile roof, the destitute narrator can only call out, "Darn! Darn! Darn," leaving its enigma unresolved, he will discover, a bit later, the correct response to that presented by the steeples of Martinville. "In noticing and registering the shape of their spires, their shifting lines, the sunny warmth of their surfaces, I felt that I was not penetrating to the core of my impression, that something more lay behind that mobility, that luminosity, something which they seemed at once to contain and to conceal. . . . And presently their outlines and their sunlit surfaces, as though they had been a sort of rind, peeled away; something of what they had concealed from me became apparent; a thought came into my mind which had not existed for me a moment earlier, framing itself in words in my head."[106]

Without telling himself "that what lay hidden behind the steeples of Martinville must be something analogous to a pretty phrase," the narrator, in order to "appease [his] conscience" and to "satisfy [his] enthusiasm," writes a page which so totally relieves his mind "of its obsession with the steeples and the mystery which lay behind them" that he begins to sing at the top of his voice as if he were, he adds, a hen who had just laid an egg.

What then does this page, the narrator's first text and the only one to be inscribed *en abyme* turn in the text of the *Remembrance,* tell us? A rewritten version of the "Sunday Drive"[107] in the company of Agostinelli that Proust wrote in 1907, it offers itself to deciphering, and its analysis allows the nature of the response that writing gives to the question of desire, the stylistic solution to his impasses, to be singled out.

At first glance, one can remark numerous examples of the sort of analogy that Proust designated by the term metaphor: the steeples are compared to "three birds perched upon the plain," "three golden pivots," "three flowers painted upon the sky," and "three maidens in a legend." Analogy is the relation between two terms established on the basis of an element that is common to both of them, essentially a sensation. As in the phenomenon of involuntary memory, it realizes the "miracle"[108] of an encounter between a present moment

105. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 906.
106. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 196–97.
107. "Journées en automobile," *Contre Sainte-Beuve,* pp. 63ff.
108. *Remembrance of Things Past,* vol. 3, p. 904.

and a past one: the miracle of "a unique connection which the writer has to rediscover in order to link forever in his phrase the two sets of phenomena."[109]

This relation is the object proper to art, its specific truth. "A writer can describe a scene by describing one after the other the innumerable objects which at a given moment were present in a given place, but truth will be attained by him only when he takes two different objects, states the connection between them—a connection analogous in the world of art to the unique connection which in the world of science is provided by the law of causality—and encloses them in the necessary links of a well-wrought style."[110] The writer will accomplish with his words what involuntary memory does spontaneously: his task consists in extracting the common essence of two sensations by "reuniting them to each other, liberated from the contingencies of time, within a metaphor."

The miracle of a coincidence reveals the secret identity of two heterogeneous terms: the two "ways" come together at last. Thus writing remedies the exile of the division of bodies, supplementing the impossible relation of the sexes with the analogical relation, revealing a common essence between two beings which everything seemed to separate, in the same way that, in involuntary memory, "the distant scene engendered around the common sensation [grapples] for a moment, like a wrestler, with the present scene."[111]

But analogy is not the only stylistic figure used in the page on the steeples of Martinville. There is another one which, although less evident, may nevertheless be the major figure of the *Remembrance*. This is the particular form of metaphor that consists in the exchange of the attributes of two terms, the reciprocal transfer between two things of their respective properties. A double metaphor, in a sense, which is not without evoking chiasmus. Thus the text on Martinville is entirely constructed around the reversal of the properties of mobility and immobility, respectively associated with the car and the steeples. This reversal is repeated in a balancing motion like the two sides of a seesaw turning on their axis.

The text thus begins with the rising toward the sky of the two steeples of Martinville, followed by the "bold leap" of the "dilatory steeple" of Vieux-Vicq, while, in a second moment, the "we were traveling fast" is coupled with the immobility of the steeples, compared to birds who have just perched. The swirling movement concludes with a final leap which resumes it: "of a sudden, the carriage turned a corner and set us down at their feet; and they had flung themselves so abruptly in our path that we barely had time to stop before being dashed against the porch."[112]

109. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 924.
110. Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 924–25.
111. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 908.
112. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 198.

This exchange of attributes is also what, in the narrator's eyes, constitutes the art of Elstir, whose seascapes confer upon the sea the properties of the land, while the land takes on a maritime aspect, a church seeming to rise from the water, boats from the center of the city.[113]

A figure which Proust gave the name of "perpetual alliteration"[114] by which a container and a content exchange their properties, like the glass jars in depths of the Vivonne, "filled by the stream in which they in their turn were enclosed," like a solidified water immersed in a liquid crystal,[115] like the room in the Grand Hôtel at Balbec, which bathes in the atmosphere of a pool, the glass sides of the furniture reflecting the maritime landscape that it thus seems to contain.

This putting into continuity of the inside and the outside is the image of the reversibility of the signifier and the signified that a double metaphor produces, by which the bar that normally separates them is abolished. By the powers of language, we come back to the ideal of a primordial communication in which signifier and signified would coincide, overcoming the law of their ordinary disjunction, which cheats desire. The chiasmatic twist of the double metaphor allows their relation to be inscribed on a surface without recto or verso, on which the reversible passage from the signifying side to that of signification is made without crossing any edge, for there is only one side. If, on a simple surface, the desire of the subject appears to be irredeemably separated from what is inscribed on the other side as signified to the Other, the two sides being separated by an edge whose crossing is forbidden by the normal laws of speech—as if forming two parallel worlds that could never meet up—the twist of the Möbius strip realized by the double metaphor creates a continuity between the desire of the subject and the desire of the Other, as the reversibility in which their identity is revealed.

Thanks to metaphor the encounter of desires ceases to not write itself. Just as involuntary memory abolishes "the harsh law . . . which ordains that we can only imagine [that is, desire] what is absent,"[116] metaphor, on account of the structure of language, with the very path of the signifier making up for the failure of the communication of desire, restitutes lost *jouissance*.

The exchange of attributes in the double metaphor, culminating in the "perpetual alliteration" of the reversibility of container and content, of exterior and interior, is itself the metaphor of a realized communication of the desire of the subject and the desire of the Other.

This allows us to clarify Proust's strange assertion that metaphor, that is, the transfer of the attribute of one object to another (or the transfer of sensa-

113. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 894–96.
114. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 184. Cf. also Gérard Genette, *Figures of Literary Discourse*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 209ff., and *Figures III*, p. 54.
115. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 183–84.
116. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 905.

tions in involuntary memory), would be capable of revealing its essence, which would amount to saying that the essence of an object resides in another object, like "noon at Combray in the sound of its bells."[117] Such propositions can be read if by "essence" we understand "desire." What constitutes the essence of a thing is the desire it conceals, the real presence in it of desire as the desire of the Other.

Genette has underlined the paradox of Proust's procedure, which, "having set out to locate essences, ends up constituting or reconstituting mirages," and, "intended to reach . . . the profound substance of things," would culminate in "an effect of phantasmagoric superimposition"[118] like that of a magic lantern on a doorknob.

Would illusion be the truth of the superior existence of art, exalted by Proust as "the most real of all things,"[119] and would the artist in the end be a sophist who would see ultimate reality in the play of appearances? Are art and involuntary memory reducible to an "optical illusion?"[120]

Doubtless there is in Proust as in Madame de Sévigné a "Dostoyevsky side": "Mme de Sévigné, like Elstir, like Dostoyevsky, instead of presenting things in their logical sequence, this is to say beginning with the cause, shows us first of all the effect, the illusion that strikes us. That is how Dostoyevsky presents his characters. Their actions seems to us as deceptive as those effects in Elstir's pictures where the sea appears to be in the sky."[121]

In the page on the steeples of Martinville, it is indeed this sort of effect that is produced: the transfer of movement from the car to the steeples restitutes the optical illusion of the passenger who sees the countryside pass by when it is he who is moving. Would relativism be the final word of Proustian aesthetics?

Proust nevertheless insists on the non-"subjective" character of what he calls "impression," which should rather be taken in the typographical sense. He explicitly qualifies it as real. It is a mark impressed in or on us by something external, like a letter inscribed in the flesh. The set of "impressions" whose imprint we have undergone constitutes in itself a "book," "more laborious to decipher than any other," but "the only one which has been dictated to us by reality, the only one of which the 'impression' has been printed in us by reality itself."[122] These "material models," "not traced by us," do not come from ourselves. The alterity of their origin is the guarantee of their necessity, as opposed to "ideas formed by the pure intelligence" which "have no more than a logical, possible truth."[123] As Gilles Deleuze notes, "it is precisely the contingency of the

117. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 925.
118. Genette, *Figures of Literary Discourse,* p. 214.
119. *Remembrance of Things Past,* vol. 3, p. 914.
120. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 906.
121. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 385.
122. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 914.
123. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 914.

impression that guarantees the necessity of what it leads us to think."[124] "Only the impression, however trivial its material may seem to be, however faint its traces, is a criterion of truth."[125] Trace of a *jouissance* that comes from the other, it bears witness to the existence of "something other" than a vain subjectivity. The real of the trace, "the little furrow which the sight of a hawthorn bush or of a church has traced in us,"[126] calls for deciphering. This call, the call of the Other, literally constitutes the writer's vocation, whose task consists in passing from one writing to another, from the hieroglyphic writing constituted by "a cloud, a triangle, a church spire, a flower, a stone," to a writing whose cipher he has to invent, that of the work of art,[127] for "interpreting," "deciphering," "translating" are here "the process of production itself."[128]

The "impression" is "double, and the one half which is sheathed in the object is prolonged in ourselves by another half."[129] Touching both the subject and the Other, it is what unites them, their common essence, and possesses the character of extimacy by which the foreign joins the intimate. This is why the enigma that it constitutes can be deciphered. Indeed, what is hidden in the strange thing that remains closed to us is identical with what is hidden in us and to which we can have access. As opposed to the amateur, the "bachelor of art" who comes back over and over to hear the symphony or to see the church that left in him the trace that he finds "too difficult a task to try to perceive,"[130] the artist is he who, renouncing his love for the fascination exerted by the mystery of the object, performs the conversion which consists in searching for its key within himself, that is, in inventing its equivalent.

It is in us, because it is there that it left the trace of its lightning, which opens the access to the real presence that the world conceals from us, and that art's mission is simultaneously to reveal and to produce.

"All one's powers of submission to the real are not enough to manage to transfer the apparently simplest of impressions from the world of the invisible into the very different one of the concrete, where the ineffable is resolved in a clear formula."[131] Such is the artist's task: to render the invisible visible, to make it appear.

We find again here the Proustian paradox: what the artist creates is none other than a vision, or rather, what it causes to arise from a hollow, by an "optical illusion": a gaze. The work realizes this otherwise impossible thing, to

124. Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Georges Braziller, 1972), p. 162.
125. *Remembrance of Things Past,* vol. 3, p. 914.
126. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 927.
127. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 912.
128. Deleuze, *Proust and Signs,* p. 130.
129. *Remembrance of Things Past,* vol. 3, p. 927.
130. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 927.
131. *Contre Sainte-Beuve,* p. 645.

make a gaze visible. "This appearance with which [artists] charm and deceive us, and beyond which we would like to go, is the very essence of that thing without thickness, so to speak—mirage fixed on canvas—that a vision is. And that mist which our eager eyes would like to pierce is the last word of the painter's art."[132] The gaze that the artist places on the world lifts for us "the veil of ugliness and insignificance which leaves us indifferent before the universe. Then he tells us: 'Look, Look.'"[133] And they are his eyes that he offers us, the better to see and to resuscitate our desire.

Such is the final revelation of the *Remembrance:* what hid from the narrator's eyes the strange thing that captivated him with its mystery was his own gaze.

A gaze is not an illusion, if the desire whose trace it bears is what there is that is most real. By giving consistency with the work of art to the gaze that is in him, the artist reveals to himself and to others the irreducible singularity of the desire whose mark he has undergone. "We would like to have him give us answers, when all he can do is give us desires."[134] The desire he awakens thus does not exempt us from the task of deciphering it in our turn, but helps us to read our own desire, which echoes it.

Art gives us the unique possibility "to see the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to see the hundred universes that each of them sees, that each of them is."[135] "Optical instrument," "magnifying glass,"[136] the work of art comes to complete the vision, to supplement it with another gaze, with this gaze of the other, ungraspable by love and which tormented it.

Style is the "equivalent" of this gaze hidden at the heart of our own vision and marking it with a particular trait. "Style for the writer, no less than color for the painter, is a question not of technique but of vision: it is the revelation, which by direct and conscious means would be impossible, of the qualitative difference, the uniqueness of the fashion in which the world appears to each one of us, a difference which, if there were no art, would remain forever the secret of every individual,"[137] thus giving us access to the "unknown quality of a unique world."[138]

It is this quality, this trait that style restitutes by "these key-phrases," that Proust remarks upon in Vinteuil, Barbey d'Aurevilly, or Thomas Hardy, like the birdsong that traverses the work of Chateaubriand, "what is his own personal

132. *On Reading Ruskin,* p. 115.
133. Ibid., p. 116.
134. Ibid., p. 114.
135. *Remembrance of Things Past,* vol. 3, p. 260.
136. Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 949 and 1089.
137. Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 931–32. I am close here to Leo Spitzer, who sees in the Proustian period "the linguistic equivalent of the look [*regard*]," in *Études de style* (Paris: Gallimard, coll. Tel, 1970), p. 402. He also notes that it goes far beyond "the normal length of a human breath" (p. 407).
138. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 382.

cry, just as monotonous, just as inimitable . . . that thing which overcomes all else, in him is always one and the same and true to itself";[139] "what is individual, what is most original in a person, in an intention, does not die, it persists in the memory of God and will be resurrected."[140]

Following the example of involuntary memory, whose accomplishment remained precarious, the work of art performs the resurrection of a "world of desires."[141] Desire, as the real presence of the Other, at last recaptured, is the veritable object of the resurrection, which is materialized in a gaze.

The inquisitive gaze of the mother, with that "air" of sadness or anxiety that robs his breath, the gaze of the beloved by which his ungraspable desire ceaselessly flees, the deceived gaze that constitutes the *jouissance* of the perverse scene. Asthma, jealousy, sadism: the gaze of the Other, unblindable, indestructible, whose wound he never stopped wanting to eradicate, the writer finally discovers it in himself, as his intimate essence, his irreducible being, and then can lay it down, as one lays down arms, subdued, pacified, delivered.

And "through those eyes, now filled with dust, generations yet unborn will learn to behold the light of nature."[142]

139. *On Art and Literature,* pp. 367–68.
140. *On Reading Ruskin,* p. 47.
141. *Remembrance of Things Past,* vol. 3, p. 910.
142. *On Reading Ruskin,* p. 49.

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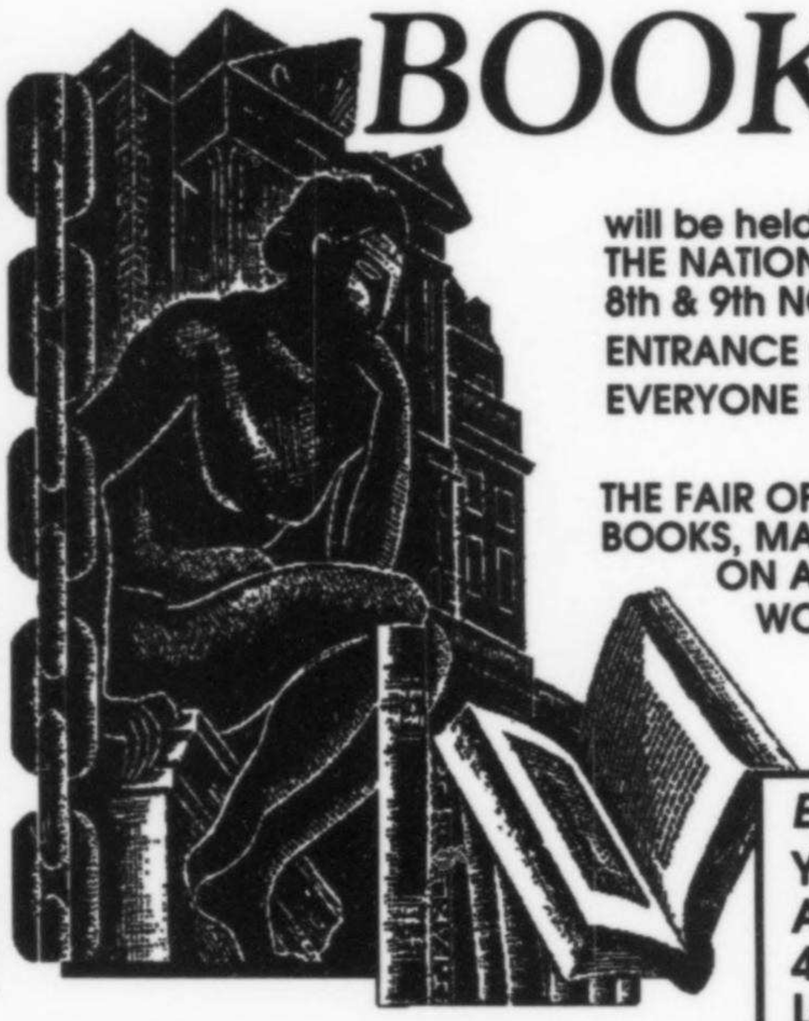

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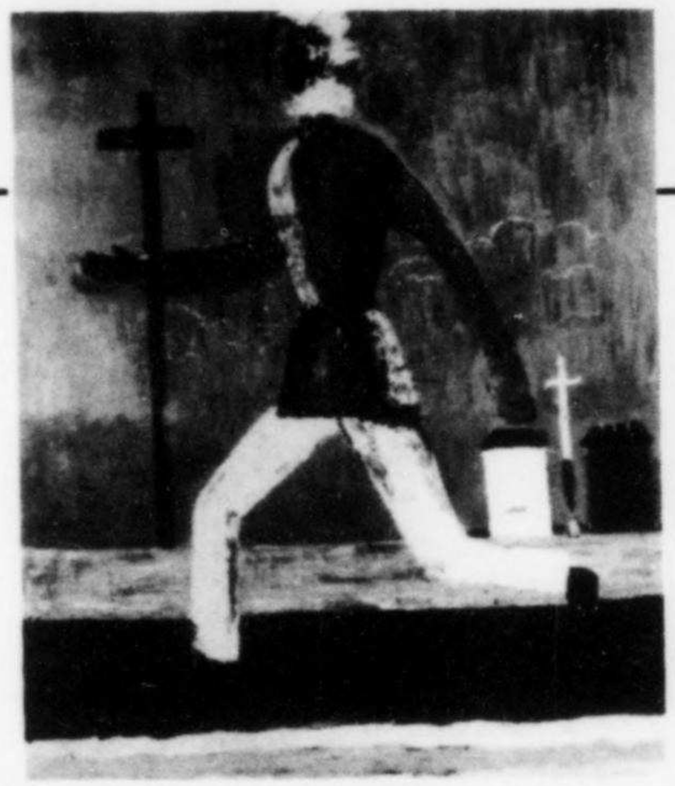

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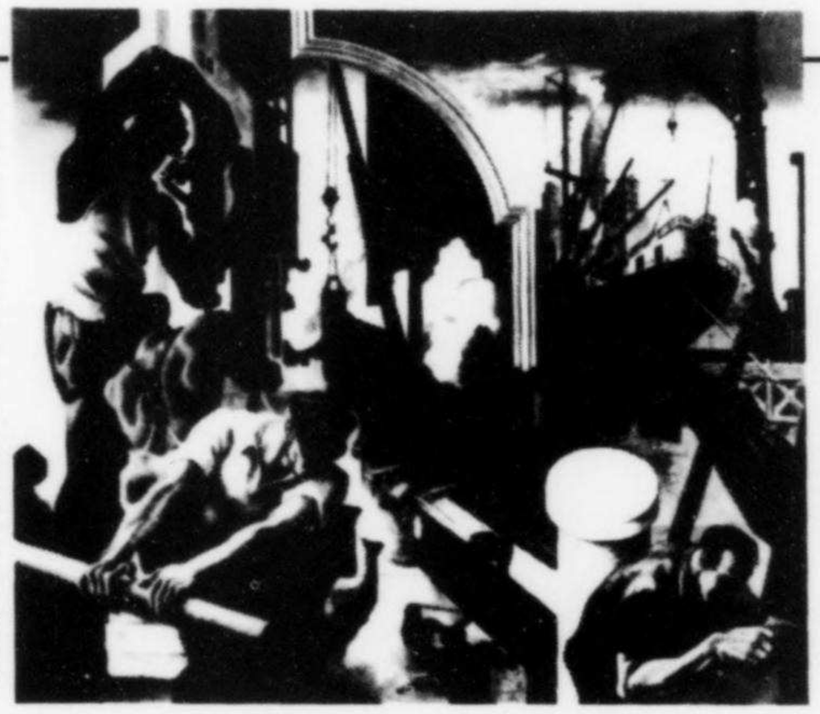

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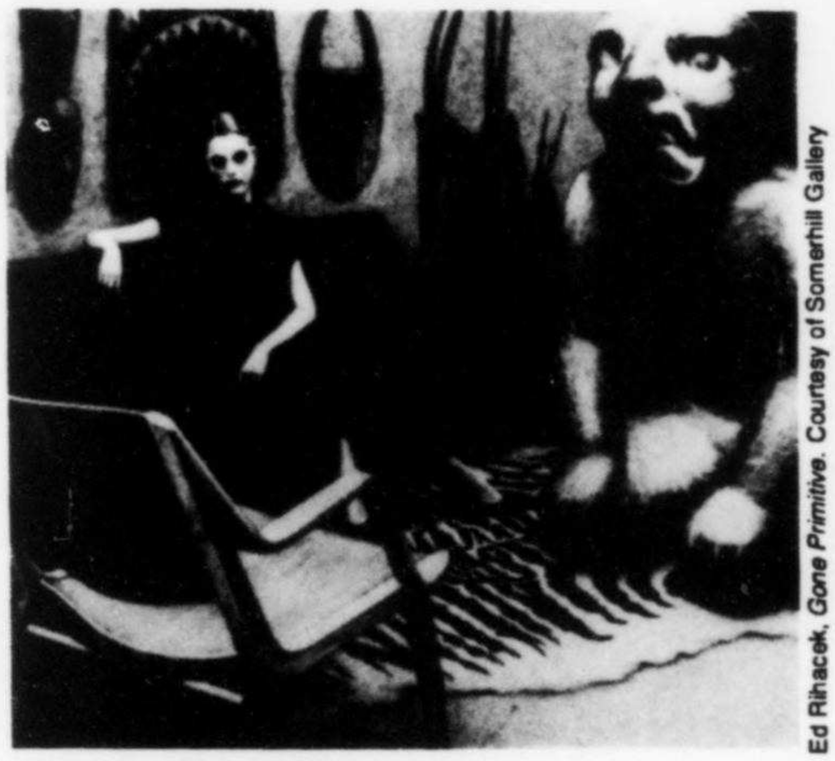

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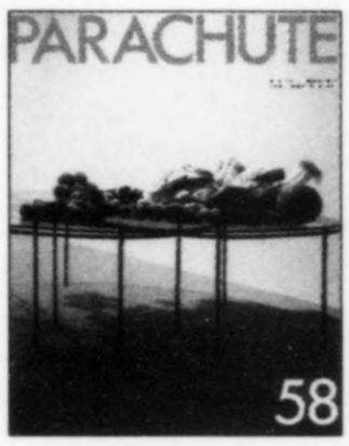

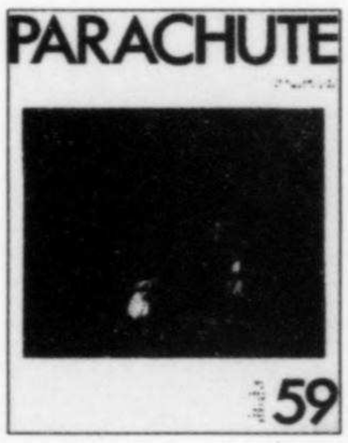

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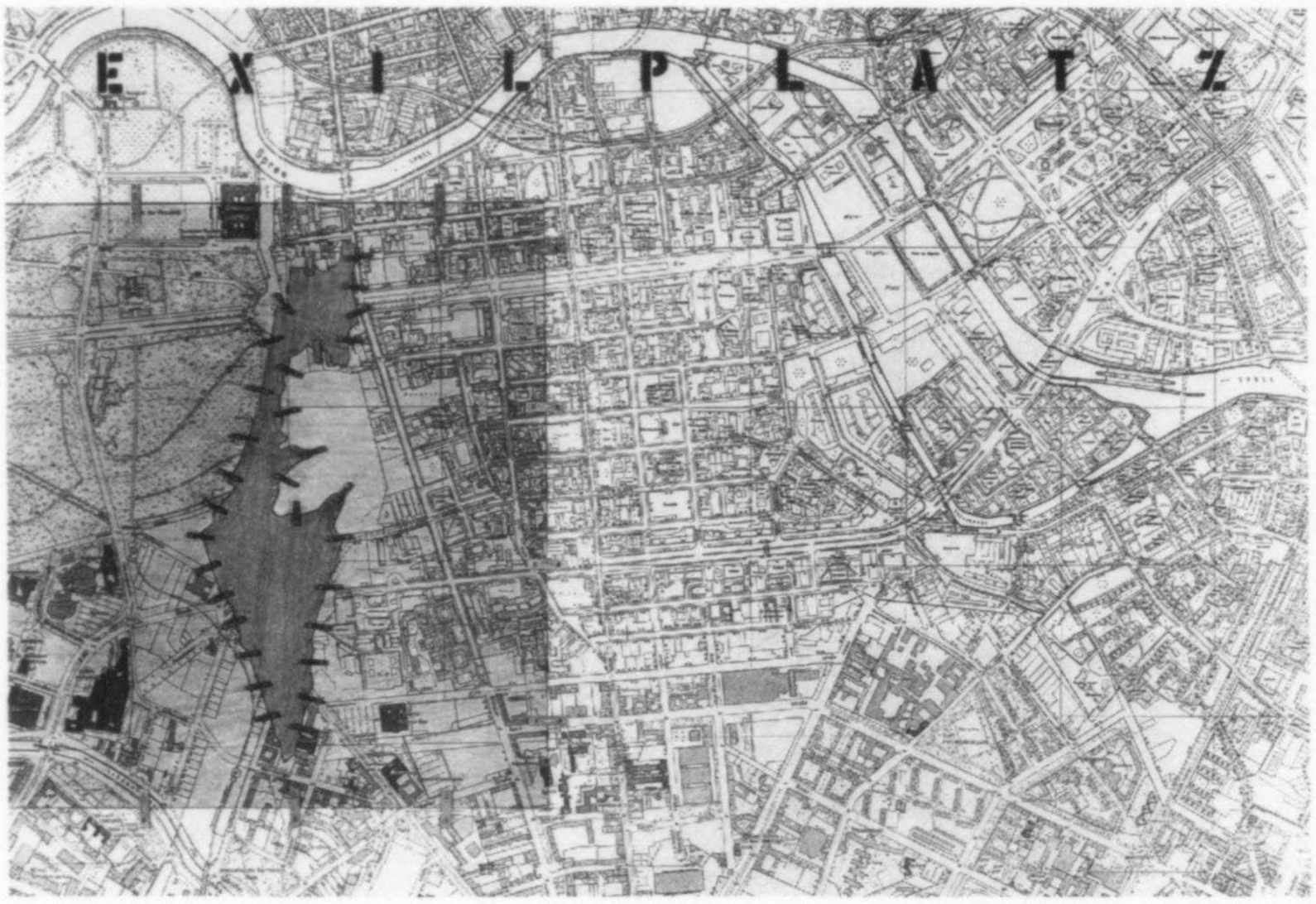

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