THE PLAGUE OF FANTASIES

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1   The Seven Veils of Fantasy

'The truth is out there'

When, a couple of years ago, the disclosure of Michael Jackson's alleged 'immoral' private behaviour (his sexual games with underage boys) dealt a blow to his innocent Peter Pan image, elevated beyond sexual and racial differences (or concerns), some penetrating commentators asked the obvious question: what's all the fuss about? Wasn't this so-called 'dark side of Michael Jackson' always here for all of us to see, in the video spots that accompanied his musical releases, which were saturated with ritualized violence and obscene sexualized gestures (blatantly so in the case of *Thriller* and *Bad*)? The Unconscious is outside, not hidden in any unfathomable depths - or, to quote the *X Files* motto: 'The truth is out there'.

Such a focusing on material externality proves very fruitful in the analysis of how fantasy relates to the inherent antagonisms of an ideological edifice. Do not the two opposed architectural designs of *Casa del Fascio* (the local headquarters of the Fascist party), Adolfo Coppede's neo-Imperial pastiche (1928) and Giuseppe Teragni's highly modernist transparent glasshouse (1934-36) reveal, in their simple juxtaposition, the inherent contradiction of the Fascist ideological project which simultaneously advocates a return to pre-modern organicist corporatism and the unheard-of mobilization of all social forces in the service of rapid modernization? An even better example is provided by the great projects of public buildings in the Soviet Union of the 1930s, which put on top of

a flat multistorey office building a gigantic statue of the idealized New Man, or a couple: in the span of a couple of years, the tendency to flatten the office building (the actual workplace for living people) more and more became clearly discernible, so that it changed increasingly into a mere pedestal for the larger-than-life statue – does not this external, material feature of architectural design reveal the 'truth' of the Stalinist ideology in which actual, living people are reduced to instruments, sacrificed as the pedestal for the spectre of the future New Man, an ideological monster which crushes actual living men under his feet? The paradox is that had anyone in the Soviet Union of the 1930s said openly that the vision of the Socialist New Man was an ideological monster squashing actual people, they would have been arrested immediately. It was, however, allowed – encouraged, even – to make this point via architectural design . . . again, 'the truth is out there'. What we are thus arguing is not simply that ideology also permeates the alleged extra-ideological strata of everyday life, but that this materialization of ideology in external materiality reveals inherent antagonisms which the explicit formulation of ideology cannot afford to acknowledge: it is as if an ideological edifice, if it is to function 'normally', must obey a kind of 'imp of perversity', and articulate its inherent antagonism in the externality of its material existence.

This externality, which directly embodies ideology, is also occluded as 'utility'. That is to say: in everyday life, ideology is at work especially in the apparently innocent reference to pure utility – one should never forget that in the symbolic universe, 'utility' functions as a reflective notion; that is, it always involves the assertion of utility as meaning (for example, a man who lives in a large city and owns a Land Rover does not simply lead a no-nonsense, 'down-to-earth' life; rather, he owns such a car in order to *signal* that he leads his life under the sign of a no-nonsense, 'down-to-earth' attitude). The unsurpassed master of such analysis, of course, was Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose semiotic triangle of preparing food (raw, baked, boiled) demonstrated how food also serves as 'food for thought'. We probably all remember the scene from Buñuel's *Phantom of Liberty* in which relations between eating and excreting are inverted: people sit on their

lavatories around the table, pleasantly talking, and when they want to eat, they silently ask the housekeeper, 'Where is that place . . . you know?' and sneak away to a small room in the back. So, as a supplement to Lévi-Strauss, one is tempted to propose that shit can also serve as a *matière-à-penser*: do not the three basic types of lavatory form a kind of excremental correlative-counterpoint to the Lévi-Straussian triangle of cooking?

In a traditional German lavatory, the hole in which shit disappears after we flush water is way in front, so that the shit is first laid out for us to sniff at and inspect for traces of some illness; in the typical French lavatory, on the contrary, the hole is in the back – that is, the shit is supposed to disappear as soon as possible; finally, the Anglo-Saxon (English or American) lavatory presents a kind of synthesis, a mediation between these two opposed poles – the basin is full of water, so that the shit floats in it – visible, but not to be inspected. No wonder that Erica Jong, in the famous discussion of different European lavatories at the beginning of her half-forgotten *Fear of Flying*, mockingly claims: 'German toilets are really the key to the horrors of the Third Reich. People who can build toilets like this are capable of anything.' It is clear that none of these versions can be accounted for in purely utilitarian terms: a certain ideological perception of how the subject should relate to the unpleasant excrement which comes from within our body is clearly discernible – again, for the third time, 'the truth is out there'.

Hegel was among the first to interpret the geographical triad Germany-France-England as expressing three different existential attitudes: German reflective thoroughness, French revolutionary hastiness, English moderate utilitarian pragmatism; in terms of political stance, this triad can be read as German conservatism, French revolutionary radicalism and English moderate liberalism; in terms of the predominance of one of the spheres of social life, it is German metaphysics and poetry versus French politics and English economy. The reference to lavatories enables us not only to discern the same triad in the most intimate domain of performing the excremental function, but also to generate the underlying mechanism of this triad in the three different attitudes towards excremental excess:

ambiguous contemplative fascination; the hasty attempt to get rid of the unpleasant excess as fast as possible; the pragmatic approach to treat the excess as an ordinary object to be disposed of in an appropriate way. So it is easy for an academic to claim at a round table that we live in a post-ideological universe – the moment he visits the restroom after the heated discussion, he is again knee-deep in ideology. The ideological investment of such references to utility is attested by their *dialogical* character: the Anglo-Saxon lavatory acquires its meaning only through its differential relation to French and German lavatories. We have such a multitude of lavatory types because there is a traumatic excess which each of them tries to accommodate – according to Lacan, one of the features which distinguishes man from the animals is precisely that with humans the disposal of shit becomes a problem.

The same goes for the different ways in which one washes dishes: in Denmark, for example, a detailed set of features opposes the way dishes are washed to the way they do it in Sweden, and a close analysis soon reveals how this opposition is used to index the fundamental perception of Danish national identity, which is defined in opposition to that of Sweden.[1] And – to reach an even more intimate domain – do we not encounter the same semiotic triangle in the three main hairstyles of the female sex organ's pubic hair? Wildly grown, unkempt pubic hair indexes the hippie attitude of natural spontaneity; yuppies prefer the disciplinary procedure of a French garden (one shaves the hair on both sides close to the legs, so that all that remains is a narrow band in the middle with a clear-cut shave line); in the punk attitude, the vagina is wholly shaven and furnished with rings (usually attached to a perforated clitoris). Is this not yet another version of the Lévi-Straussian semiotic triangle of 'raw' wild hair, well-kept 'baked' hair and shaved 'boiled' hair? One can see how even the most intimate attitude towards one's body is used to make an ideological statement.[2] So how does this material existence of ideology

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1   See Anders Linde-Laursen, 'Small Differences – Large Issues', *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 94: 4 (Fall 1995), pp. 1123–44.

2   The most obvious case – which, for that very reason, I left out – is, of course, that

relate to our conscious convictions? Apropos of Molière's *Tartuffe*, Henri Bergson has emphasized how Tartuffe is funny not on account of his hypocrisy, but because he gets caught in his own mask of hypocrisy:

> He immersed himself so well into the role of a hypocrite that he played it, as it were, sincerely. This way and only this way he becomes funny. Without this purely material sincerity, without the attitude and speech which, through the long practice of hypocrisy, became for him a natural way to act, Tartuffe would be simply repulsive.[3]

Bergson's expression of 'purely material sincerity' dovetails perfectly with the Althusserian notion of Ideological State Apparatuses – of the external ritual which materializes ideology: the subject who maintains his distance towards the ritual is unaware of the fact that the ritual already dominates him from within. As Pascal put it, if you do not believe, kneel down, act *as if* you believe, and belief will come by itself. This is also what Marxian 'commodity fetishism' is about: in his explicit self-awareness, a capitalist is a common-sense nominalist, but the 'purely material sincerity' of his deeds displays the 'theological whimsies' of the commodity universe.[4] This 'purely material sincerity' of the external ideological ritual, not the depth of the subject's inner convictions and desires, is the true *locus* of the fantasy which sustains an ideological edifice.

The standard notion of the way fantasy works within ideology is that of a fantasy-scenario which obfuscates the true horror of a situation: instead of a full rendering of the antagonisms which traverse our society, we indulge in the notion of society as an organic Whole, kept together by forces of solidarity and co-operation . . . Here also, however, it is much more productive to look for this notion of fantasy where one would not expect to find it: in marginal and, again, apparently purely utilitarian situations. Let us simply recall the safety instructions prior to the takeoff

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of the ideological connotation of different positions in the sexual act; that is, of the implicit ideological statements we are making by doing 'it' in a certain position.

3   Henri Bergson, *An Essay on Laughter*, London: Smith, 1937, p. 83.
4   For a more detailed elaboration of the paradoxes of fetishism, see Chapter 3 below.

of an aeroplane – are they not sustained by a phantasmic scenario of how a possible plane crash will look? After a gentle landing on water (miraculously, it is always supposed to happen on water!), each of the passengers puts on the life-jacket and, as on a beach toboggan, slides into the water and takes a swim, like a nice collective lagoon holiday experience under the guidance of an experienced swimming instructor. Is not this 'gentrifying' of a catastrophe (a nice soft landing, stewardesses in dance-like style graciously pointing towards the 'Exit' signs . . .) also ideology at its purest? However, the psychoanalytic notion of fantasy cannot be reduced to that of a fantasy-scenario which obfuscates the true horror of a situation; the first, rather obvious thing to add is that the relationship between fantasy and the horror of the Real it conceals is much more ambiguous than it may seem: fantasy conceals this horror, yet at the same time it creates what it purports to conceal, its 'repressed' point of reference (are not the images of the ultimate horrible Thing, from the gigantic deep-sea squid to the ravaging twister, phantasmic creations *par excellence*?).[5] Furthermore, one should specify the notion of fantasy with a whole series of features.[6]

5   The example of conservatism's reference to the horrifying origins of power (their prohibition against talking about these origins, which precisely creates the Horror of the 'primordial crime' by means of which power was instituted) perfectly expresses the radically ambiguous functioning of the Horrible with respect to the fantasy-screen: Horror is not simply and unambiguously the unbearable Real masked by the fantasy-screen – the way it focuses our attention, imposing itself as the disavowed and, for that reason, all the more operative central point of reference. The Horrible can also function as the screen itself, as the thing whose fascinating effect conceals something 'more horrible than horror itself', the primordial void or antagonism. For example, is not the anti-Semitic demonic image of the Jew, the Jewish plot, such an evocation of the ultimate Horror which, precisely, is the phantasmic screen enabling us to avoid confrontation with the social antagonism?

The logic of the horror which functions as a screen masking the void can also be illustrated by the uncanny power of the motif of a ship drifting along alone, without a captain or any living crew to steer it This is the ultimate horror not the proverbial ghost in the machine, but the machine in the ghost: there is *no* plotting agent behind it, the machine just runs by itself, as a blind contingent device. At the social level, this is also what the notion of a Jewish or Masonic conspiracy conceals: the horror of society as a contingent mechanism blindly following its path, caught in the vicious cycle of its antagonisms.

6 We can leave aside the feature which acquired commonplace status: the answer to the question 'Who, where, how is the (fantasizing) subject inscribed into the phantasmic narrative?' is far from obvious; even when the subject himself appears within his narrative, this is not automatically his point of identification – that is, he by no means necessarily

Fantasy's transcendental schematism

The first thing to note is that fantasy does not simply realize a desire in a hallucinatory way: rather, its function is similar to that of Kantian 'transcendental schematism': a fantasy constitutes our desire, provides its coordinates; that is, it literally 'teaches us how to desire'. The role of fantasy is thus in a way analogous to that of the ill-fated pineal gland in Descartes's philosophy, this mediator between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*: fantasy mediates between the formal symbolic structure and the positivity of the objects we encounter in reality – that is to say, it provides a 'schema' according to which certain positive objects in reality can function as objects of desire, filling in the empty places opened up by the formal symbolic structure. To put it in somewhat simplified terms: fantasy does not mean that when I desire a strawberry cake and cannot get it in reality, I fantasize about eating it; the problem is, rather: *how do I know that I desire a strawberry cake in the first place? This* is what fantasy tells me. This role of fantasy hinges on the fact that 'there is no sexual relationship', no universal formula or matrix guaranteeing a harmonious sexual relationship with one's partner: because of the lack of this universal formula, every subject has to invent a fantasy of his or her own, a 'private' formula for the sexual relationship – for a man, the relationship with a woman is possible only inasmuch as she fits his formula.

Recently, Slovene feminists reacted with a great outcry against a large cosmetics factory's publicity poster for sun lotion, depicting a series of

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'identifies with himself'. (At a different level, the same goes for the subject's symbolic identity; the best way to render its paradox palpable is to paraphrase the standard disclaimer from the movie credits: 'Any resemblance to actual events or persons is purely accidental': the gap between $ and S, between the void of the subject and the signifying feature which represents him, means that 'any resemblance of the subject *to himself* is purely accidental'. There is no connection whatsoever between the (phantasmic) real of the subject and his symbolic identity: the two are thoroughly *incommensurable*.) Fantasy thus creates a multitude of 'subject positions' among which the (observing, fantasizing) subject is free to float, to shift his identification from one to another. Here, talk about 'multiple, dispersed subject positions' is justified, with the proviso that these subject positions are to be strictly distinguished from the void that is the subject.

well-tanned women's behinds in tight bathing suits, accompanied by the slogan 'Each has her own factor'. Of course, this publicity is based on a rather vulgar double entendre: the slogan ostensibly refers to the sun lotion, which is offered to customers with different sun factors in order to suit customers' different skin types; however, its entire effect is based on its obvious male-chauvinist reading: 'Any woman can be had, if only the man knows her factor, her specific catalyst, what arouses her!' The Freudian point regarding fundamental fantasy would be that each subject, female or male, possesses such a 'factor' which regulates her or his desire: 'a woman, viewed from behind, on her hands and knees' was the Wolf Man's factor; a statue-like woman without pubic hair was Ruskin's factor; and so on. There is nothing uplifting about our awareness of this 'factor': such awareness can never be subjectivized; it is uncanny – even horrifying – since it somehow 'depossesses' the subject, reducing her or him to a puppet-like level 'beyond dignity and freedom'.

Intersubjectivity

The second feature concerns the radically intersubjective character of fantasy. The critical depreciation and abandonment of the term 'inter-subjectivity' in late Lacan (in clear contrast to his earlier insistence that the proper domain of psychoanalytic experience is neither subjective nor objective, but that of intersubjectivity) does not in any way involve an abandonment of the notion that the subject's relation to his/her Other and the latter's desire is crucial to the subject's very identity – paradoxically, one should claim that Lacan's abandonment of 'inter-subjectivity' is strictly correlative to the focusing of attention on the enigma of the impenetrable Other's desire (*'Che vuoi?'*). What the late Lacan does with intersubjectivity should be opposed to early Lacan's Hegelo-Kojèvian motifs of the struggle for recognition, of the dialectical connection between recognition of desire and desire for recognition, as well as to middle Lacan's 'structuralist' motif of the big Other as the anonymous symbolic structure.

Perhaps the easiest way to discern these shifts is by focusing on the changed status of the *object*. In early Lacan, the object is depreciated as to its inherent qualities; it counts only as a stake in the intersubjective struggles for recognition and love (the milk demanded by a child from the mother is reduced to a 'sign of love', that is, the demand for milk effectively aims at prompting the mother to display her love for the child; a jealous subject demands from his parents a certain toy; this toy becomes the object of his demand, because he is aware that it is also coveted by his brother, etc.). In late Lacan, on the contrary, the focus shifts to the object that the subject itself 'is', to the *agalma*, secret treasure, which guarantees a minimum of phantasmic consistency to the subject's being. That is to say: *objet petit a*, as the object of fantasy, is that 'something in me more than myself on account of which I perceive myself' as 'worthy of the Other's desire'.

One should always bear in mind that the desire 'realized' (staged) in fantasy is not the subject's own, but the *other's* desire: fantasy, phantasmic formation, is an answer to the enigma of '*Che vuoi?*' – 'You're saying this, but *what do you really mean by saying it?*' – which established the subject's primordial, constitutive position. The original question of desire is not directly 'What do I want?', but 'What do *others* want from me? What do they see in me? What am I to others?' A small child is embedded in a complex network of relations; he serves as a kind of catalyst and battlefield for the desires of those around him: his father, mother, brothers and sisters, and so on, fight their battles around him, the mother sending a message to the father through her care for the son. While he is well aware of this role, the child cannot fathom what object, precisely, he is to others, what the exact nature of the games they are playing with him is, and fantasy provides an answer to this enigma: at its most fundamental, fantasy tells me what I am to my others. It is again anti-Semitism, the anti-Semitic paranoia, which reveals this radically *intersubjective* character of fantasy in an exemplary way: fantasy (the social fantasy of the Jewish plot) is an attempt to provide an answer to 'What does society want from me?', to unearth the meaning of the murky events in which I am forced to participate. For that reason, the standard theory of 'projection', according to

which the anti-Semite 'projects' on to the figure of the Jew the disavowed part of himself, is not sufficient: the figure of the 'conceptual Jew' cannot be reduced to the externalization of my (anti-Semite's) 'inner conflict'; on the contrary, it bears witness to (and tries to cope with) the fact that I am originally decentred, part of an opaque network whose meaning and logic elude my control.

This radical intersubjectivity of fantasy is discernible even in the most elementary cases, like that (reported by Freud) of his little daughter fantasizing about eating a strawberry cake – what we have here is by no means a simple case of the direct hallucinatory satisfaction of a desire (she wanted a cake, she didn't get it, so she fantasized about it . . .). That is to say: what one should introduce here is precisely the dimension of intersubjectivity: the crucial feature is that while she was voraciously eating a strawberry cake, the little girl noticed how her parents were deeply satisfied by this spectacle, by seeing her fully enjoying it – so what the fantasy of eating a strawberry cake is really about is her attempt to form an identity (of the one who fully enjoys eating a cake given by the parents) that would satisfy her parents, would make her the object of their desire . . .

One can clearly perceive the difference here from early Lacan, for whom the object is reduced to a token which is totally insignificant in itself, since it matters only as the point in which my own and the Other's desires intersect: for late Lacan, the object is precisely that which is 'in the subject more than the subject itself', that which I fantasize that the Other (fascinated by me) sees in me. So it is no longer the object which serves as the mediator between my desire and the Other's desire; rather, it is the Other's desire itself which serves as the mediator between the 'barred' subject $ and the lost object that the subject 'is' – that provides the minimum of phantasmic identity to the subject. And one can also see in what *la traversée du fantasme* consists: in an acceptance of the fact that *there is no secret treasure in me*, that the support of me (the subject) is purely phantasmic.

We can now see clearly, also, the opposition between Lacan and Habermas. Habermas insists on the difference between the subject-object relationship and intersubjectivity proper: in the latter, the other subject

is precisely *not* one of the objects in my field of experience, but the partner in a dialogue, the interaction with whom, within a concrete life-world, forms the irreducible background of my experience of reality. What he represses thereby, however, is simply and precisely the *intersection* of these two relations - the level at which another subject is not yet the partner in intersubjective symbolic communication and/or interaction, but *remains an object*, a Thing, that which makes a 'neighbour' into a sleazy repulsive presence - *this* other *qua* the *object* which gives body to an unbearable excess of *jouissance* is the proper 'object of psychoanalysis'. Lacan's point is thus that symbolic intersubjectivity is *not* the ultimate horizon behind which one cannot reach: what precedes it is not a 'monadic' subjectivity, but a pre-symbolic 'impossible' relation to an Other which is the *real* Other, the Other as *Thing*, and not yet the Other located within the field of intersubjectivity.

The narrative occlusion of antagonism

The third point: fantasy is the primordial form of *narrative*, which serves to occult some original deadlock. The sociopolitical fantasy *par excellence*, of course, is the myth of 'primordial accumulation': the narrative of the two workers, one lazy and free-spending, the other diligent and enterprising, accumulating and investing, which provides the myth of the 'origins of capitalism', obfuscating the violence of its actual genealogy. Notwithstanding his emphasis on symbolization and/or historicization in the 1950s, Lacan is thus radically *anti-narrativist*: the ultimate aim of psychoanalytic treatment is *not* for the analysand to organize his confused life-experience into (another) coherent narrative, with all the traumas properly integrated, and so on. It is not only that some narratives are 'false', based upon the exclusion of traumatic events and patching up the gaps left by these exclusions - Lacan's thesis is much stronger: the answer to the question 'Why do we tell stories?' is that *narrative as such* emerges in order to resolve some fundamental antagonism by rearranging its terms into a temporal succession. It is thus the very form of narrative which bears

witness to some repressed antagonism. The price one pays for the narrative resolution is the *petitio principii* of the temporal loop – the narrative silently presupposes as already given what it purports to reproduce (the narrative of 'primordial accumulation' effectively explains nothing, since it already presupposes a worker behaving like a full-blown capitalist).[7]

Let us elaborate on this gesture of the narrative resolution of antagonism apropos of the splitting of the domain of law into the neutral public Law and its obscene superego supplement. The problem with the definition of 'totalitarianism' as the eclipse of the neutral symbolic Law, so that the entire domain of law is 'stained' by the obscene superego,[8] is how we are to conceive the *prior* epoch – that is, where was the superego obscenity *before* the advent of 'totalitarianism'? Two opposed narratives suggest themselves here:

- The narrative according to which, with the advent of modernity, the law rooted in concrete traditional communities, and as such still permeated by *jouissance* of a specific 'way of life', gets split into the neutral symbolic Law and its superego supplement of obscene unwritten rules: it is only with the advent of modernity that the neutral judicial order of Law delivered of substantial *jouissance* emerges.

- The (Foucauldian) counter-narrative according to which, in the epoch of modernity, the rule of the traditional judicial Law is replaced by the web of disciplinary practices. Modernity involves the 'crisis of investiture', the inability of subjects to assume symbolic mandates: what prevents them from fulfilling the act of symbolic identification is the perception of a 'stain of enjoyment' in the big Other of the

7   The reference to narrative also enables us to differentiate between neurosis (hysteria) and perversion, since each involves a unique form of narrative: hysteria displays the linear narrative of origins (the neurotic's 'family myth'), while in perversion the narrative remains stuck in the same place and repeats itself indefinitely – that is to say, the perverse narrative is unable to 'progress' properly.

8   For such a notion of 'totalitarianism', see Chapter 6 of Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, London: Verso, 1991.

Law, the perception of the domain of law as permeated with obscene enjoyment. Consequently, the disciplinary exercise of power which supplants the pure symbolic Law is by definition stained with super-ego enjoyment (the fact that Schreber was possessed by the vision of the obscene God who wanted to use him as the feminine partner in the act of copulation is thus strictly correlative to the fact that he was the victim of a proto-Foucauldian disciplinary father).[9]

The problem is that these two narratives are, in their crucial aspects, mutually exclusive: according to the first one, the neutral Law, delivered of the stain of enjoyment, emerged with modernity; while according to the second, modernity signals the 'crisis of investiture', the fact that Law is perceived as stained with superego enjoyment . . . The only solution to this deadlock, of course, is to conceive of these two narratives as the two complementary ideological gestures of resolving/obfuscating the under-lying deadlock which resides in the fact that the Law was smeared, stigmatized, by enjoyment *at the very moment of its emergence as the neutral-universal formal Law.* The very emergence of a pure neutral Law, free of its concrete 'organic' life-world support, gives birth to the obscene superego underside, since this very life-world support, once opposed to the pure Law, is all of a sudden perceived as obscene.[10]

It is easy to discern this same paradox in the standard New Age critique of Descartes: Descartes is accused of 'anthropocentrism' – however, does not Cartesian subjectivity (as correlative to the universe of modern science) involve the 'Copernican turn', does it not decentre man and reduce him to an insignificant creature on a small planet? In other words, what one should always bear in mind is how the Cartesian de-substantialization of the subject, its reduction to $, to the pure void of self-relating negativity,

9 As for the political stakes which overdetermine D.P. Schreber's psychosis, see Eric Santner, *My Own Private Germany,* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.

10 An excellent example of this shift is provided by the novels of Walter Scott, especially *Waverley,* a true epic of the inversion of tribal heroism into banditry; once Scottish society is subordinated to the bourgeois legal order, the very acts which hitherto epitomized the ethical generosity of clan society suddenly look like simple crimes.

is strictly correlative to the opposite reduction of man to a grain of dust in the infinity of the universe, to one among the endless objects in it: these are the two sides of the same process. In this precise sense, Descartes is radically anti-humanist; that is, he dissolves the Renaissance Humanist unity of man as the highest Creature, the summit of creation, into pure *cogito* and its bodily remainder: the elevation of the subject to the transcendental agent of the synthesis constitutive of reality is correlative to the abasement of its material bearer to one among the worldly objects. Although Descartes is also accused of patriarchal bias (the unmistakable male features of *cogito*), does not his formulation of *cogito* as pure thought which, as such, 'has no sex' mark the first break from pre-modern sexualized ontology? Descartes is also accused of conceiving the subject as the owner of natural objects, so that animals and the environment in general are reduced to mere objects available to be exploited, with no protection. However, is it not true that only when we confer upon them the status of property do natural objects become, for the first time, legally *protected* (as only a property can be)?

In all these (and other) cases, Descartes *set up the very standard by means of which one measures and rejects his positive doctrine on behalf of a post-Cartesian 'holistic' approach.* Narrativization is thus misrepresentational in both its versions: in the guise of the story of the progress from the primitive to the higher, more cultivated form (from primitive fetishistic superstition to the spiritual monotheistic religion or, in the case of Descartes, from primitive sexualized ontology to neutral modern thought), as well as in the guise of the story of historical evolution as regression or Fall (say, in the case of Descartes, from organic unity with nature to the exploitative attitude towards it; from the pre-modern spiritual complementarity of woman and man to the Cartesian identification of woman with the 'natural', etc.) - both versions obfuscate the absolute synchronicity of the antagonism in question.

Consequently, the paradox to be fully accepted is that when a certain historical moment is (mis)perceived as the moment of loss of some quality, upon closer inspection it becomes clear that the lost quality emerged only

at this very moment of its alleged loss ... This coincidence of emergence and loss, of course, designates the fundamental paradox of the Lacanian *objet petit a* which emerges as being-lost – narrativization occludes this paradox by describing the process in which the object is first given and then gets lost. (Although it may appear that the Hegelian dialectic, with its matrix of the mediatization of immediacy, is the most elaborate philosophical version of such a narrativization, Hegel was, rather, the first to provide the explicit formulation of this absolute synchronicity – as he put it, the immediate object lost in reflection 'only *comes to be* through being *left behind*'.[11]) The conclusion to be drawn from this absolute synchronicity, of course, is not that 'there is no history, since everything was already here from the very outset', but that the historical process does not follow the logic of narration: actual historical breaks are, if anything, *more* radical than mere narrative deployments, since what changes in them is the entire constellation of emergence and loss. In other words, a true historical break does not simply designate the 'regressive' loss (or 'progressive' gain) of something, but *the shift in the very grid which enables us to measure losses and gains.*[12]

The supreme example of this paradoxical coincidence of emergence and loss is provided by the notion of *history* itself – where, exactly, is its place; that is, which societies can be characterized as properly *historical*? On the one hand, pre-capitalist societies allegedly do not yet know history proper; they are 'circular', 'closed', caught in a repetitive movement predetermined

11   *Hegel's Science of Logic*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1969, p. 402.
12   Another way of formulating the same impasse is via the relationship between Althusser and Foucault: in contrast to Foucault, who conceives the relationship between judicial and disciplinary power as, *grosso modo,* that of historical succession (and thus underestimates the extent to which modern disciplinary power itself requires a 'judicial' supplement, and vice versa), Althusser endeavours (and ultimately foils) to think of the two aspects in a synchronous way, as the two constituents of the ideological process (the interpellation by the big Other stands for the 'judicial' aspect of power, while the Ideological State Apparatuses stand for the disciplinary 'micro-practices'), and thereby leaves out of consideration the historical shifts in the relationship between the two aspects. How are we to conceive of the two approaches, Foucauldian and Althusserian, together, so that we consider the historical passage as the shift in the very status of the split between the two aspects?

by tradition – so history must emerge *afterwards*, with the decay of 'closed' organic societies. On the other hand, the opposite cliché tells us that capitalism itself is no longer historical; it is rootless, with no tradition of its own, and therefore parasitical upon previous traditions, a universal order which (like modern science) can thrive anywhere, from Japan to Argentina, uprooting and slowly corroding all particular life-worlds based on specific traditions. So history is that which gets *lost* with the growth of capitalism, with its ultimate worldwide triumph, signalling the moment of the 'end of history' (Fukuyama's half-forgotten concept). The solution, again, is that *emergence and loss coincide*: the properly 'historical' is only a moment, even if this moment is properly unending and goes on for centuries – the moment of *passage* from pre-capitalist societies to a capitalist universal order.[13]

13   Following the Russian Formalists, David Bordwell has elaborated the distinction between story and plot: the story is the succession of events 'in itself', while the plot designates the way events are 'for itself', presented in the narrative. The clearest example of the gap between story and plot is, of course, the detective whodunit, where the plot progresses from traces of the crime to its final retelling as a consistent linear narrative. (Is not this distinction analogous to that between collection and set – to the fact that it is possible to construct a multitude of sets from the same collection?) The point of this distinction, of course, is that there is *stricto sensu* no story which simply precedes the plot: every story is already a 'plot', it involves a minimum of narrative organization, so that the distinction between story and plot is *internal to the plot*: 'story' (the 'true sequence of events') as opposed to plot always involves a minimum of naturalizing misrecognition of the devices of plot. For that reason, the example of the whodunit is misleading in so far as it suggests that the plot is a way of manipulating-repressing 'what really went on' (the story), as in the flashback procedures by means of which we gradually penetrate the true outline of the story. The point to make, rather, is that the story itself relies on a minimum of 'repression', and the plot (i.e. the way the story is manipulated in its presentation), in its very 'distortion' of the 'natural' succession of events, reveals the 'repressed' of the story (as in the Freudian distinction between the latent thought and manifest content of a dream, where the true secret, the unconscious desire, inscribes itself via the very distortion of the latent thought in the manifest content). When one retells a detective mystery in linear form, it loses its appeal, since what gets lost is precisely the element of mystery; this excess, produced by the shift from the linear narrative of a crime to the reconstruction of this crime via the deduction based on interpreting the traces, is not merely 'rhetorical', it reveals a 'truth' which disappears in the linear retelling.

Incidentally, this holds not only in the case of mystery, where our interest is kept alive by the fact that we do not know what happened in the past, but perhaps even more in the opposite case of a tragic course of events which is rendered even more tragic when its ultimate catastrophic impact is presented to us in advance. In J.B. Priestley's *Time and the*

After the Fall

This brings us to the next feature, the problematic of the Fall. Contrary to the common-sense notion of fantasizing as an indulgence in the hallucinatory realization of desires prohibited by the Law, the phantasmic narrative does not stage the suspension-transgression of the Law, but *the very act of its installation,* of the intervention of the cut of symbolic castration - what the fantasy endeavours to stage is ultimately the 'impossible' scene of castration. For this reason, fantasy as such is, in its very notion, close to perversion: the perverse ritual stages the act of castration, of the primordial loss which allows the subject to enter the symbolic order. Or - to put it more precisely - in contrast to the 'normal' subject, for whom the Law functions as the agency of prohibition which regulates (access to the object of) his desire, for the pervert, *the object of his desire is Law itself* - the Law is the Ideal he is longing for, he wants to be fully acknowleged by the Law, integrated into its functioning ... The irony of this should not escape us: the pervert, this 'transgressor' *par excellence* who purports to violate all the rules of 'normal' and decent behaviour, effectively longs for the very rule of Law.[14]

At the political level, let us recall the interminable search for the phantasmic point at which German history 'took the wrong turn' which

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Conways, we see in Act I an evening gathering of young family members, brothers and sisters, dreaming about their future plans; in Act III, we see them twenty years later, all of them failures, leading miserable lives; Act III in then returns to the same evening as Act I, and presents its continuation, with the Conways dreaming about their bright future hopes ... this minimal, elementary shift from story to plot (the reversal of temporal order) - the fact that after we have already witnessed their miserable failure, we see the Conways in Act III dreaming about their future - not only makes the situation much more depressing, but also conveys its truth: the fact that their hopes were in vain, that they were doomed to fail.

14   A further point about the pervert is that since, for him, the Law is not fully established (the Law is his *lost* object of desire), he supplements this lack with an intricate set of *regulations* (the masochistic ritual). The crucial point is, therefore, to bear in mind the opposition between Law and regulations (or 'rules'): the latter bear witness to the absence or suspension of Law.

ended up in Nazism: delayed national unification, due to the dismemberment of the German Empire after the Thirty Years War; the aestheticization of politics in the Romantic reaction to Kant (the theory of Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe); the 'crisis of investiture' and the Bismarckian state socialism in the second half of the nineteenth century; up to the report of the German tribes' resistance to the Romans which, allegedly, already displayed the features of *Volksgemeinschaft*...[15] Similar examples abound: when exactly, for example, did patriarchal repression coincide with the repression and exploitation of nature? The tenets of eco-feminism provide a multitude of 'regressive' determinations of this unique phantasmic moment of the Fall: the predominance of nineteenth-century Western capitalism; modern Cartesian science, with its objectivizing attitude towards nature; the noxious influence of the Greek rationalist Socratic Enlightenment; the emergence of great barbarian Empires; up to the passage from nomadic to agricultural civilization ... And – Jacques-Alain Miller pointed out – is not Foucault himself also caught in the same phantasmic loop in his search for the moment when the Western order of sexuality emerged? He regresses further and further back from modernity, until he finally sets the limit where the Antique ethic of the 'care of the Self' disintegrates into the Christian ethic of confession: the fact that the tone of Foucault's last two books on pre-Christian ethics differs completely from his earlier probing into the complex of power, knowledge and sexuality – instead of his usual analyses of the material micro-practices of ideology, we get a rather standard version of the 'history of ideas' – bears witness to the fact that Foucault's Greece and Rome 'before the Fall' (into sexuality-guilt-confession) are purely phantasmic entities.

Against this background, it is possible to elaborate a precise theory of the Fall via a reference to Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Its first feature is that, for structural reasons, the Fall has never occurred in the present – Adam 'does not, strictly speaking, decide; he finds that he has decided. Adam discovers

his choice rather than makes it.'[16] Why is it like this? If the decision (the choice of the Fall) were to happen in the present, it would already presuppose what it gives birth to – the very freedom to choose: the paradox of the Fall is that it is an act which opens up the very space of decision. How is this possible? The second feature of the Fall is that it results from the choice to disobey in order to retain the erotic rapture of Eve, yet the paradox lies in the fact that 'because [Adam] disobeys he loses what he disobeyed in order to keep'.[17] Here we have, once again, the structure of castration: when Adam chooses to fall in order to retain *jouissance*, what he loses thereby is precisely *jouissance* – do we not encounter here the reversal of the structure of the 'states which are essentially by-products'? Adam loses X by directly choosing it, aiming to retain it . . . That is to say: what, precisely, is symbolic castration? It is the prohibition of incest in the precise sense of the loss of something which the subject never possessed in the first place. Let us imagine a situation in which the subject aims at X (say, a series of pleasurable experiences); the operation of castration does not consist in depriving him of any of these experiences, but adds to the series a purely potential, nonexistent X, with respect to which the actually accessible experiences appear all of a sudden as lacking, not wholly satisfying. One can see here how the phallus functions as the very signifier of castration: the very signifier of the lack, the signifier which forbids the subject access to X, gives rise to its phantom . . .

This paradox also enables us to define Paradise as the libidinal economy in which the paradox of the 'states which are essentially by-products' is not yet at work: in Paradise, the impossible coincidence of knowledge and *jouissance* persists. The assertion of some theologists (Aquinas among them) that there *was* sex in Paradise, that Adam and Eve *did* copulate, that their pleasure was even greater than ours (i.e. the pleasure of having sex after the Fall), the only and crucial difference being that, while copulating, they maintained proper measure and distance, and never lost self-control – this

16   I draw here on Henry Staten, *Eros in Mourning,* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, p. 125.

17   Ibid., p. 124.

assertion unknowingly reveals the secret of Paradise: it was the kingdom of *perversity*. That is to say: does not the fundamental paradox of perversion reside in the fact that the pervert successfully avoids the deadlock of the 'states which are essentially by-products'? When the sadomasochistic pervert stages the scene in which he participates, he 'remains in control' at all times, maintains a distance, gives directions like a stage director, but his enjoyment is none the less much more intense than that of immediate passionate immersion.

So – what precise form did sexual activity assume in Eden? In the practice of homosexual fist-fucking, the man (usually associated with active penetration) must open himself up passively; he is penetrated in the region in which 'closure', resistance to penetration, is the natural reaction (one knows that the difficulty of fist-fucking is more psychological than physical: the difficulty lies in relaxing the anal muscles enough to allow the partner's fist to penetrate – the position of the fisted one in fist-fucking is perhaps the most intense experience of passive opening available to human experience); on top of this opening oneself up to the other, whose organ literally enters my body and explores it from within, the other crucial feature is that this organ, precisely, is not the phallus (as in 'normal' anal intercourse) but the fist (hand), the organ *par excellence* not of spontaneous pleasure but of instrumental activity, of work and exploration. (No wonder fist-fucking, in its physical features, almost overlaps with the way a doctor examines the rectum for prostate cancer.) In this precise sense, fist-fucking is *Edenic*; it is the closest we can get to what sex was like before the Fall: what enters me is not the phallus, but a pre-phallic *partial object*, a hand (akin to hands running around as objects in the surrealistic nightmares in some of Buñuel's films) – we are back in a pre-lapsarian Edenic state in which, according to the speculations of some theologians, sex was performed as just another instrumental activity.

The impossible gaze

The fifth feature: on account of its temporal loop, the phantasmic narrative always involves an *impossible gaze*, the gaze by means of which the subject is already present at the act of his/her own conception. An exemplary case of this vicious cycle in the service of ideology is an anti-abortion fairy-tale written in the 1980s by a right-wing Slovene nationalist poet. The tale is set on an idyllic South Sea island where aborted children live together without their parents: although their life is nice and calm, they miss parental love and spend their time in sad reflection on how it is that their parents preferred a career or a luxurious holiday to themselves . . . The trick, of course, lies in the fact that the *aborted* children are presented as *having been born*, only born into an alternative universe (the lone Pacific island), retaining the memory of parents who 'betrayed' them – in this way they can direct at their parents a reproachful gaze which makes them guilty.[18]

Apropos of a phantasmic scene, the question to be asked is thus always: for which gaze is it staged? Which narrative is it destined to support? According to some recently published documents, the British General Michael Rose, head of the UNPROFOR forces in Bosnia, and his special team of SAS operatives, definitely had a 'hidden agenda' in Bosnia: under the pretence of maintaining a truce between the so-called 'warring factions', their secret task was also to place the blame on the Croats, and especially the Muslims (soon after the fall of Srebrenica, for example, Rose's operatives suddenly 'discovered', in northern Bosnia, some Serb bodies

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18   What this reactionary fairy-tale relies on is the overlapping of the two lacks in the encounter of the enigma of the Other's desire. As Lacan puts it, the subject answers the enigma of the Other's desire (what does the Other want from me? What am I to the Other?) with his own lack, with proposing his own disappearance: when a small child is confronted by the enigma of his parents' desire, the fundamental fantasy to test this desire is the fantasy of his own disappearance (What if I die or disappear? How will my mother and father react?). In the Slovene fairy-tale, this phantasmic structure is realized: the children imagine themselves as nonexistent and, from this position, question their parents' desire ('Why did my mother prefer her career or a new car to me?').

allegedly slaughtered by the Muslims; their attempts to 'mediate' between Muslims and Croats actually inflamed the conflict between them, etc.); these diversions were intended to create the perception of the Bosnian conflict as a kind of 'tribal warfare', a civil war of everybody against everybody else in which 'all sides are equally to blame'. Instead of a clear condemnation of the Serb aggression, this perception was destined to prepare the terrain for an international effort of 'pacification' which would 'reconcile the warring factions'. From a sovereign state, the victim of aggression, Bosnia was suddenly transformed into a chaotic place in which 'power-mad warlords' acted out their historical traumas at the expense of innocent women and children . . . Lurking in the background, of course, is the pro-Serbian 'insight' according to which peace in Bosnia is possible only if we do not 'demonize' one side in the conflict: responsibility is to be equally distributed, with the West assuming the role of the neutral judge elevated above local tribal conflicts.

The key point for our analysis is that General Rose's pro-Serb 'secret war' on the terrain itself was not trying to change the relations between military forces but, rather, to prepare the ground for a different narrative perception of the situation: 'real' military activity itself was here in the service of ideological narrativization.[19] And, incidentally, the key event which functioned as a kind of *point de capiton* in turning the held perspective on the Bosnian war hitherto upside down, and brought about its depoliticized (re)narrativization as a 'humanitarian catastrophe', was François Mitterrand's visit to Sarajevo in the summer of 1992. One is even tempted

19   Rose's bias was also clearly discernible in his curious, almost Lacanian, definition of the 'safety zones' which UNPROFOR was supposed to guarantee: in a TV interview, he stressed that one should define them in a 'flexible' way – if the Serbs occupy part of a safety zone, one simply redefines its boundaries, so that UNFROFOR now guarantees the restricted zone; in this way, no matter what the Serbs do, the security of these zones is always maintained . . . The arguments which made the fall of Srebrenica palpable also followed the same sophistic reasoning: first, the UN forces demanded that the besieged Bosnians in Srebrenica should disarm, since the UN can defend only civilian populations, not one army against another; then, after the Serbs attacked the almost defenceless civilian population of Srebrenica, UNPROFOR, of course, made it known that its limited forces could not protect a defenceless city from the well-armed Serb Army.

to postulate that General Rose was sent to Bosnia in order to realize Mitterrand's vision of the conflict on the ground. That is to say: until Mitterrand's visit, the predominant perception of the Bosnian conflict was still a *political* one: in dealing with Serb aggression, the key problem was the aggression of ex-Yugoslavia against an independent state; after Mitterrand left, the accent shifted towards a humanitarian aspect – down there, a savage tribal war is going on, and the only thing the civilized West can do is to exert its influence to assuage the inflamed passions and help the innocent victims with food and medicine.

Precisely through his display of compassion towards the suffering people of Sarajevo, Mitterrand's visit dealt the crucial blow to Bosnian interests – it functioned as the key factor of *political neutralization* in the international perception of the conflict. Or as vice-president of Bosnia and Herzegovina Ejup Ganic put it in an interview: 'First we were glad to receive Mitterrand, hoping that his visit signals a true concern of the West. All of a sudden, however, we grasped that we are lost.' However, the key point is that this gaze of the external innocent observer for whom the spectacle of 'tribal warfare in the Balkans' was staged, has the same 'impossible' status as the gaze of the aborted children born into a different reality in the Slovene anti-abortion fairy-tale: the gaze of the innocent observer is also in a way nonexistent, since this gaze is the impossible neutral gaze of someone who falsely *exempts* himself from his concrete historical existence – that is, from his actual involvement in the Bosnian conflict.

The same operation is easily discernible in the abundant media reports on the 'saintly' activities of Mother Teresa in Calcutta, which clearly rely on the phantasmic screen of the Third World. Calcutta is regularly presented as a Hell on Earth, the exemplary case of the decaying Third World megalopolis, full of social decay, poverty, violence and corruption, with its residents caught in terminal apathy (the facts are, of course, rather different: Calcutta is a city bursting with activity, culturally much more thriving than Bombay, with a successful local Communist government maintaining a whole network of social services). Into this picture of utter gloom, Mother Teresa brings a ray of hope to the dejected with the message

that poverty is to be accepted as a way to redemption, since the poor, in enduring their sad fate with silent dignity and faith, repeat Christ's Way of the Cross ... The ideological benefit of this operation is double: in so far as she suggests to the poor and terminally ill that they should seek salvation in their very suffering, Mother Teresa deters them from probing into the causes of their predicament – from *politicizing* their situation; at the same time, she offers the rich from the West the chance of a kind of substitute-redemption by making financial contributions to her charitable activity. Again, all this works against the background of the phantasmic image of the Third World as Hell on Earth, as a place so utterly desolate that no political activity, only charity and compassion, can alleviate the suffering.[20]

The inherent transgression

In order to be operative, fantasy has to remain 'implicit', it has to maintain a distance towards the explicit symbolic texture sustained by it, and to function as its inherent transgression. This constitutive gap between the explicit symbolic texture and its phantasmic background is obvious in any work of art. Owing to the priority of place over the element which fills it up, even the most harmonious work of art is a priori fragmentary, lacking in regard to its place: the 'trick' of an artistic success resides in the artist's capacity to turn this lack into an advantage – skillfully to manipulate the central void and its resonance in the elements that encircle it. One can account in this way for the 'paradox of the Venus de Milo': today the statue's mutilation is no longer experienced as a deficiency, but, on the contrary, as a positive constituent of its aesthetic impact. A simple mental experiment confirms this conjecture: if we imagine the undamaged, complete statue (during the nineteenth century, art historians were actually busy 'complementing' it; in different 'reconstructions', the missing hand holds a spear, a torch, even a mirror ...), the effect is unmistakably

20   See Christopher Hitchens, *The Missionary Position*, London: Verso, 1995.

that of kitsch, the proper aesthetic impact is lost. What is significant in these 'reconstructions' is their very multiplicity: the object destined to fill the void is a priori secondary and, as such, exchangeable. A typically 'post-modern' counterpart to this nineteenth-century kitsch is provided by recent attempts to fill the void around which some canonical work is structured; again, the effect is inevitably that of obscene vulgarity. Take *Heathcliff*, a recent novel that deals with the central void of *Wuthering Heights*: what was Heathcliff doing between his disappearance from Wuthering Heights and his return as a rich man several years later? One of the earlier, more successful examples is the classic *film noir Killers*, based on Hemingway's short story of the same name: in its first ten minutes, the film faithfully follows the original story; what then ensues, however, is a prequel to it – an attempt to reconstruct the mysterious past traumatic experience that caused the 'Swede' to vegetate like the living dead, and calmly await his death.

Art is thus fragmentary, even when it is an organic Whole, since it always relies on the *distance towards fantasy*. In the 'unpublishable fragment' of her unfinished story 'Beatrice Palmato',[21] Edith Wharton provides a detailed X-rated description of a father–daughter incest, with mutual masturbation, cunnilingus and fellatio, as well as, of course, the act itself. It is easy to indulge in a quick psychoanalytic explanation, according to which this fragment offers the 'key' to Wharton's entire literary *œuvre* best condensed in the syntagm 'the "No" of the Mother' (the title of a sub-chapter in Erlich's book on Wharton). In Wharton's nuclear family it was her mother who acted as the agent of prohibition, while her father embod-ied a kind of prohibited knowledge, permeated with enjoyment. Further-more, it is easy here to play the game of child sexual abuse, and to point out that sufficient 'circumstantial evidence' suggests Wharton's childhood sexual abuse by her father as the traumatic event which marked the course of her life and literary career. It is also easy to emphasize the

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21   The plot summary and the surviving fragment of 'Beatrice Palmato' are published in Gloria Erlich, *The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992.

ambiguity between fantasy and 'reality': it is practically impossible clearly to discern their respective parts (was paternal incest just her fantasy, or was this fantasizing triggered by 'real' sexual abuse?). In any case, this vicious cycle bears witness to the fact that Edith is not 'innocent': she participated in incest at the level of fantasy. Such an approach, however, fails to perceive that there is more truth in the artist's removal from fantasy than in its direct rendering: popular melodrama and kitsch are much closer to fantasy than 'true art'. In other words, in order to account for the distortion of 'original fantasy', it is not sufficient to refer to social prohibitions: what intervenes in the guise of these prohibitions is the fact that fantasy itself is a 'primordial lie', a screen masking the fundamental *impossibility* (in the case of Edith Wharton, of course, we are dealing with the phantasmic notion that doing it with one's father would really be 'it', the fully realized sexual relationship the woman is looking for in vain in her relationship with her husband or other partners). The artifice of 'true art' is thus to manipulate the censorship of the underlying fantasy in such a way as to reveal the radical falsity of this fantasy.

Let us further illustrate this gap between an explicit texture and its phantasmic support with an example from cinema. Contrary to its misleading appearance, Robert Altman's *MASH* is a perfectly conformist film – for all their mockery of authority, practical jokes and sexual escapades, the members of the MASH crew *perform their job exemplarily*, and thus present absolutely no threat to the smooth running of the military machine. In other words, the cliché which regards *MASH* as an anti-militarist film, depicting the horrors of the meaningless military slaughter which can be endured only through a healthy measure of cynicism, practical jokes, laughing at pompous official rituals, and so on, misses the point – this very distance is ideology. This dimension of *MASH* becomes even more tangible the moment one compares it to two other well-known films about military life, *An Officer and a Gentleman* and *Full Metal Jacket*. *MASH* and *An Officer* exhibit the two versions of the perfectly functioning military subject: identification with the military machine is supported either by ironic distrust, indulgence in practical jokes and sexual escapades (*MASH*),

or by the awareness that behind the cruel drill sergeant there is a 'warm human person', a helping father-substitute who only feigns cruelty (in *An Officer and a Gentleman*), in strict analogy with the - profoundly anti-feminist - myth of a hooker who, deep in her heart, longs to be a good mother. *Full Metal Jacket*, on the other hand, successfully resists this ideological temptation to 'humanize' the drill sergeant or other members of the crew, and thus lays on the table the cards of the military ideological machine: the distance from it, far from signalling the limitation of the ideological machine, functions as its positive *condition of possibility*. What we get in the first part of the film is the military drill, the direct bodily discipline, saturated with the unique blend of a humiliating display of power, sexualization and obscene blasphemy (at Christmas, the soldiers are ordered to sing 'Happy birthday dear Jesus. . .') - in short, the superego machine of Power at its purest. This part of the film ends with a soldier who, on account of his overidentification with the military ideological machine, 'runs amok' and shoots first the drill sergeant, then himself; the radical, unmediated identification with the phantasmic superego machine necessarily leads to a murderous *passage à l'acte*. The second, main part of the film ends with a scene in which a soldier (Matthew Modine) who, throughout the film, has displayed a kind of ironic 'human distance' towards the military machine (on his helmet, the inscription 'Born to kill' is accompanied by the peace sign, etc. - in short, it looks as if he has stepped right out of *MASH*!), shoots a wounded Vietcong sniper girl. He is the one in whom the interpellation by the military big Other has fully succeeded; he is the fully constituted military subject.

The lesson is therefore clear: an ideological identification exerts a true hold on us precisely when we maintain an awareness that we are not fully identical to it, that there is a rich human person beneath it: 'not all is ideology, beneath the ideological mask, I am also a human person' is *the very form of ideology*, of its 'practical efficiency'. Close analysis of even the most 'totalitarian' ideological edifice inevitably reveals that not everything in it is 'ideology' (in the popular sense of the 'politically instrumentalized legitimization of power relations'): in every ideological edifice, there is a

kind of 'trans-ideological' kernel, since, if an ideology is to become operative and effectively 'seize' individuals, it *has* to batten on and manipulate some kind of 'trans-ideological' vision which cannot be reduced to a simple instrument of legitimizing pretensions to power (notions and sentiments of solidarity, justice, belonging to a community, etc.). Is not a kind of 'authentic' vision discernible even in Nazism (the notion of the deep solidarity which keeps the 'community of people' together), not to mention Stalinism? The point is thus not that there is no ideology without a trans-ideological 'authentic' kernel but rather, that *it is only the reference to such a trans-ideological kernel which makes an ideology 'workable'.*

In one of his speeches to the Nazi crowd in Nuremberg, Hitler made a self-referential remark about how this very reunion is to be perceived: an external observer, unable to experience the 'inner greatness' of the Nazi movement, will see only the display of external military and political strength; while for us, members of the movement who live and breathe it, it is infinitely more: the assertion of the inner link connecting us . . . here again we encounter the reference to the extra-ideological kernel. Hitler's favourite Wagner opera was neither the overtly German *Meistersinger* nor *Lohengrin*, with its call to arms to defend Germany against the Eastern hordes, but *Tristan*, with its tendency to leave behind the Day (the daily life of symbolic obligations, honours and debts) and to immerse oneself in the Night, ecstatically to embrace one's own death. This 'aesthetic suspension of the political' (to paraphrase Kierkegaard) was at the very core of the phantasmic background of the Nazi attitude: at stake in it was 'something more than politics', an ecstatic aestheticized experience of Community.[22] So, paradoxically, the dangerous ingredient of Nazism is

22   For that reason, it is also erroneous to dismiss Nazi rituals as an 'inauthentic', faked imitation of pagan sacred rituals: Nazism actually *does* carry out the 'return of the repressed' of Christianity - of the pagan logic of the 'offering to obscure gods': 'This, re-enacting the most monstrous and supposedly superseded forms of the holocaust, is the drama of Nazism' (Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, New York: Norton, 1978, p. 275), In other words, those who lament the loss of the authentic, 'primitive' relationship to the Sacred in our 'rationalist' and 'utilitarian' Western civilization have no right to become indignant about Nazi rituals . . .

not its 'utter politicization' of the whole of social life but, on the contrary, the suspension of the political through the reference to an extra-ideological kernel, much stronger than in a 'normal' democratic political order. Therein, perhaps, resides the problem with Judith Butler's question

> Does politicization always need to overcome *dis*identification? What are the possibilities of politicizing *dis*identification, this experience of *misrecognition*, this uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong?[23]

Is not the attitude of the heroes of *MASH*, however, precisely that of an active *disidentification*? Of course, one can argue that *this* disidentification is something entirely different from the lesbian parodic imitation-subversion of feminine codes - none the less, the point remains that the difference is one between the two modes of disidentification, not between identification and its subversion. For that reason, an ideological edifice can be undermined by a too-literal identification, which is why its successful functioning requires a minimal distance from its explicit rules. Is not an exemplary case of such a subversion-through-identification provided by Jaroslav Hašek's *The Good Soldier Schweik*, the novel whose hero wreaks total havoc by simply executing the orders of his superiors in an overzealous and all-too-literal way? The inevitable conclusion to be drawn from this paradox is that the feature which effectively sustains identification, the famous Freudian-Lacanian *einziger Zug*, the unary feature, is not the obvious one, the big 'official' insignia, but a small feature, even the one of *marking a distance* from the official insignia. When a lesbian imitates-parodies-repeats-subverts the standard feminine code, does she not thereby, at a 'deeper' level, assert her 'true' queer identity, which requires such an ironic-subverting-parodizing attitude? A different example of the same logic is provided by the 'leader caught with his pants down': the solidarity of the group is strengthened by the subjects' common disavowal

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23   Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 219.

of the misfortune that laid bare the Leader's failure or impotence – a shared lie is an incomparably more effective bond for a group than the truth. When, in an academic department, members of the inner circle surrounding a famous professor become aware of some flaw in him (he is addicted to drugs, a kleptomaniac, a sexual masochist pervert, he has stolen a key line of argumentation from a student, etc., etc.), this very knowledge of the flaw – coupled with the willingness to disavow this knowledge – is the true feature of identification which keeps the group together . . . (The catch, of course, is that the subject fascinated by the charismatic figure of a Leader is necessarily the victim of a kind of perspective-illusion: he [mis]perceives the 'because of' as 'in spite of': in his subjective experience, he adores the Leader *in spite of* the mark of his weakness, not because of it.)

The Duelists, Ridley Scott's extraordinary directorial début (based on a short story, 'The Duel', by Joseph Conrad), depicts the lifelong combat between two high-ranking soldiers, a true upper-class nobleman and an aspiring officer of middle-class origins – what keeps them forever apart is the difference in the way each of them relates to the upper-class code of honour: the aspiring middle-class officer doggedly follows this code and, for that very reason, generates a lasting impression of awkward ridicule; his counterpart, the nobleman, constantly violates the explicit rules of the official code, and thereby asserts his true upper-classness. The problem of the aspiring lower middle classes is that they misperceive the true cause of their failure: they think they are missing something, some hidden rule, and therefore feel compelled to follow all the rules even more closely. What they misperceive, however, is that the mysterious X which accounts for true upper-classness cannot be pinned down to a specific positive symbolic feature. Here we again encounter the *objet petit a*: when we are faced with two series of behaviour which cannot be distinguished by any clearly defined positive symbolic feature, yet the difference between the two is the unmistakable difference between true upper-classness and its clumsy imitation, that unfathomable X, the *je ne sais quoi* which accounts for this gap – in short, the object which makes the difference where one cannot

establish any positive difference - this is precisely the *objet petit a* as the unfathomable object-cause of desire.

When the Clinton administration resolved the deadlock of gays in the US Army with the compromise 'Don't ask, don't tell!' (i.e. soldiers are not directly asked if they are gay, so they are also not compelled to lie and deny it, although they are not formally allowed in the Army - they are tolerated in so far as they keep their sexual orientation private, and do not actively endeavour to engage others in it), this opportunist measure was deservedly criticized for basically endorsing the homophobic attitude towards homosexuality: although the direct prohibition of homosexuality is not to be enforced, its very existence as a virtual threat compelling gays to remain in the closet affects their actual social status. In other words, what this solution amounted to was an explicit elevation of hypocrisy into a social principle, like the attitude towards prostitution in traditional Catholic countries - if we pretend that gays in the Army do not exist, it is as if they actually do not exist (for the big Other). Gays are to be tolerated, on condition that they accept the basic censorship concerning their identity.

While it is fully justified on its own level, the notion of censorship at work in this criticism, with its Foucauldian background of Power which, in the very act of censorship and other forms of exclusion, generates the excess it endeavours to contain and dominate, none the less seems to fall short at a crucial point. What it misses is the way in which censorship not only affects the status of the marginal or subversive force that the power discourse endeavours to dominate but, at an even more radical level, splits the power discourse itself from within. One should ask a naive, but nevertheless crucial question here: why does the Army community so strongly resist publicly accepting gays into its ranks? There is only one possible consistent answer: not because homosexuality poses a threat to the alleged 'phallic and patriarchal' libidinal economy of the Army community, but, on the contrary, because the libidinal economy of the Army community itself relies on a thwarted/disavowed homosexuality as the key component of the soldiers' male bonding.

From my own experience, I remember how the old infamous Yugoslav People's Army was homophobic to the extreme (when someone was discovered to have homosexual inclinations, he was instantly turned into a pariah, treated as a non-person, before being formally dismissed from the Army), yet at the same time, everyday army life was excessively permeated with the atmosphere of homosexual innuendo. Say, while soldiers were standing in line for their meal, a common vulgar joke was to stick a finger into the ass of the person ahead of you and then to withdraw it quickly, so that when the surprised person turned round, he did not know who among the soldiers sharing a stupid obscene smile behind his back did it. A predominant form of greeting a fellow soldier in my unit, instead of simply saying 'Hello!', was to say 'Smoke my prick!' ('*Pu i kurac!*' in Serbo-Croat); this formula was so standardized that it completely lost any obscene connotation and was pronounced in a totally neutral way, as a pure act of politeness.

References to homosexuality permeated even the (sometimes surprisingly complex) soldiers' practical jokes. Once, upon entering the large sleeping barracks, I witnessed a strange scene: three soldiers were holding another soldier's head firmly on a pillow, while a fourth soldier, using his half-erect penis as a stick, was beating the forehead of the soldier whose head was fixed on the pillow. The explanation of this strange ritualistic procedure involves a series of linguistic references and displacements worthy of Freud's famous case of the forgetting of the name Signorelli. In Serbo-Croat, the common term for testicles is not 'balls' but 'eggs' ('I'll squeeze your eggs!', not 'your balls'). Furthermore, the term for eggs 'over-easy' (unscrambled fried eggs) is 'eggs on the eye'. These two features provide the background for a standard Serbo-Croat vulgar riddle-joke: 'How do you make eggs on the eye? By putting the prick on the forehead!' All these elements combined account for the scene I witnessed in the barracks: after a particularly tasteless dinner, which was left uneaten by most of the soldiers, the unfortunate soldier, the victim of the practical joke, lying on his bed, loudly complained that he was still very hungry and wouldn't mind a simple meal, perhaps a pair of eggs on the eye; his

fellow soldiers immediately seized the opportunity and provided him with 'eggs on the eye' by putting a prick on his forehead.

The key point not to be missed here is how this fragile coexistence of extreme and violent homophobia with a thwarted - that is, publicly unacknowledged, 'underground' - homosexual libidinal economy bears witness to the fact that the discourse of the military community can operate only by censoring its own libidinal foundation. At a slightly different level, the same goes for the practice of hazing (the ceremonial beating up and humiliating of the US Marines by their elder peers: sticking their medals directly on to their breast skin, etc.): when the public disclosure of these practices (somebody secretly shot them on video and made the tape public) caused such an outrage, what disturbed the public was not the practice of hazing itself (everybody was aware that things like this were going on) but the fact of rendering it public.

Outside the confines of military life, do we not encounter a strictly analogous self-censoring mechanism in contemporary conservative populism, with its sexist and racist bias? Recall the election campaigns of Jesse Helms, in which the racist and sexist message is not publicly acknowledged (on the public level, it is sometimes even violently disavowed), but is instead inarticulated 'between the lines', in a series of double-entendres and coded allusions. The point is that this kind of self-censorship (not openly admitting one's own fundamental message) is necessary if, in the present ideological conditions, Helms's discourse is to remain operative: if it were to articulate its racist bias directly, in a public way, this would make it unacceptable in the eyes of the predominant political discursive regime; if it were effectively to abandon the self-censored coded racist message, it would endanger the support of its targeted electoral body. Conservative populist political discourse is therefore an excellent example of a power discourse whose efficiency depends on the mechanism of self-censorship: it relies on a mechanism which is operative only in so far as it remains censored. Against the image, ever-present in cultural criticism, of a radical subversive discourse or practice 'censored' by Power, one is even tempted to claim that today, more than ever, the mechanism of

censorship intervenes predominantly to enhance the efficiency of the power discourse itself.

The temptation to be avoided here is the old Leftist notion of 'better for us to deal with the enemy who openly admits his (racist, homophobic ...) bias than with the hypocritical attitude of publicly denouncing what one secretly and actually endorses'. This notion fatally underestimates the ideologico-political significance of keeping up *appearances*: an appearance is never 'merely an appearance', it profoundly affects the *actual* sociosymbolic position of those concerned. If racist attitudes were to be rendered acceptable for the mainstream ideologico-political discourse, this would radically shift the balance of the entire ideological hegemony. This is probably what Alain Badiou had in mind when[24] he mockingly designated his work a search for the 'good terror'. Today, in the face of the emergence of new racism and sexism, the strategy should be to *make such enunciations unutterable*, so that anyone relying on them automatically disqualifies himself (like, in our universe, those who refer approvingly to Fascism). One should emphatically *not* discuss 'how many people really died in Auschwitz', what are 'the good aspects of slavery', 'the necessity of cutting down on workers' collective rights', and so on; the position here should be quite unashamedly 'dogmatic' and 'terrorist': this is *not* a matter for 'open, rational, democratic discussion'.[25]

We are now in a position to specify the distinction between the Foucauldian interconnection between Power and resistance, and our notion of 'inherent transgression'. Let us begin via the matrix of the possible relations between Law and its transgression. The most elementary is

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24   In a recent private conversation.

25   Towards the end of 1996, the Croat President Tudjman and his close advisers, in their overview of the situation in Croatia, referred to a 'Masonic-Jewish plot against Croatia', denouncing Western organizations and foundations (Amnesty International, Soros) as hand-in-glove with the enemies of Croatia, adding to this list even the BBC and Voice of America, warning against the penetration of paid subversives into every pore of Croat public and cultural life (incidentally, exactly the same list of enemies as twenty years ago, when the former Communist regime warned against the subversive ideological warfare of the West). The measure of ideologico-political 'regression' is the extent to which such propositions become acceptable in public discourse.

the simple relation of externality, of external opposition, in which transgression is directly opposed to legal Power, and poses a threat to it. The next step is to claim that transgression hinges on the obstacle it violates: without Law there is no transgression; transgression needs an obstacle in order to assert itself. Foucault, of course, in Volume I of *The History of Sexuality*, rejects both these versions, and asserts the absolute immanence of resistance to Power. However, the point of 'inherent transgression' is not only that resistance is immanent to Power, that power and counter-power generate each other; it is not only that Power itself generates the excess of resistance which it can no longer dominate; it is also not only that - in the case of sexuality - the disciplinary 'repression' of a libidinal investment eroticizes this gesture of repression itself, as in the case of the obsessional neurotic who derives libidinal satisfaction from the very compulsive rituals destined to keep the traumatic *jouissance* at bay.

This last point must be further radicalized: the power edifice itself is split from within: in order to reproduce itself and contain its Other, it has to rely on an inherent excess which grounds it - to put it in the Hegelian terms of speculative identity, Power is always-already its own transgression, if it is to function, it has to rely on a kind of obscene supplement. It is therefore not enough to assert, in a Foucauldian way, that power is inextricably linked to counter-power, generating it and being itself conditioned by it: in a self-reflective way, the split is always-already mirrored back into the power edifice itself, splitting it from within, so that the gesture of self-censorship is consubstantial with the exercise of power. Furthermore, it is not enough to say that the 'repression' of some libidinal content retroactively eroticizes the very gesture of 'repression' - this 'eroticization' of power is not a secondary effect of its exertion on its object but its very disavowed foundation, its 'constitutive crime', its founding gesture which has to remain invisible if power is to function normally. What we get in the kind of military drill depicted in the first part of *Full Metal Jacket*, for example, is not a secondary eroticization of the disciplinary procedure which creates military subjects, but the constitutive obscene supplement of this procedure which renders it operative. Judith Butler provides a

perfect example of, again, Jesse Helms who, in his very formulation of the text of the anti-pornography law, displays the contours of a particular fantasy - an older man who engages in sadomasochistic sexual activity with another, younger man, preferably a child - which bears witness to his own perverted sexual desire.[26] Helms thus unwittingly brings to light the obscene libidinal foundation of his own crusade against pornography.

The empty gesture

How do these two levels, the public text and its phantasmic support, interact? Where do they intersect? Bertolt Brecht gave poignant expression to this point of intersection in his 'learning plays', notably in *Jasager*, where the young boy is asked to accord freely with what will in any case be his fate (to be thrown into the valley). As his teacher explains to him, it is customary to ask the victim if he agrees to his fate, but it is also customary for the victim to say yes ... Every belonging to a society involves a paradoxical point at which the subject is ordered to embrace freely, as the result of his choice, what is anyway imposed on him (we *must* all love our country, our parents . . .). This paradox of willing (choosing freely) what is in any case necessary, of pretending (maintaining the appearance) that there is a free choice although in fact there isn't, is strictly co-dependent with the notion of an empty symbolic gesture, a gesture - an offer - which is meant to be rejected: what the empty gesture offers is the opportunity to choose the impossible, that which inevitably will *not* happen (in Brecht's case, the expedition turning round with the sick boy instead of getting rid of him by throwing him into the valley). And is not something similar part of our everyday mores? In John Irving's *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, after the little boy Owen accidentally kills John's (his best friend's, the narrator's) mother, he is, of course, terribly upset; so, to show how sorry he is, he discreetly delivers to John a gift of the complete collection of colour photos of baseball stars, his most precious

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26   See Judith Butler, 'The Force of Fantasy', *Differences* 2: 2 (1990).

possession; however, Dan, John's fastidious stepfather, tells him that the proper thing to do is to return the gift.

Let us imagine a more down-to-earth situation: when, after being engaged in a fierce competition for a promotion with my closest friend, I win, the proper thing to do is to offer to withdraw, so that he will get the promotion, and the proper thing for him to do is to reject my offer – this way, perhaps, our friendship can be saved ... What we have here is symbolic exchange at its purest: a gesture made to be rejected; the point, the 'magic' of symbolic exchange, is that although in the end we are back where we were at the beginning, the overall result of the operation is not zero but a distinct gain for both parties, the pact of solidarity. Of course, the problem is: what if the other to whom the offer to be rejected is made actually accepts it? What if, upon being beaten in the competition, I accept my friend's offer to get the promotion instead of him? A situation like this is properly catastrophic: it causes the disintegration of the semblance (of freedom) that pertains to social order – however, since, at this level, things in a way are what they seem to be, this disintegration of the semblance equals the disintegration of the social substance itself, the dissolution of the social link.

The need for the phantasmic support of the public symbolic order (materialized in the so-called unwritten rules) thus bears witness to the system's vulnerability: the system is compelled to allow for possibilities of choices which must never actually take place, since their occurrence would cause the system to disintegrate, and the function of the unwritten rules is precisely to prevent the actualization of these choices formally allowed by the system. In the Soviet Union of the 1930s and 1940s – to take the most extreme example – it was not only forbidden to criticize Stalin, *it was perhaps even more forbidden to announce this very prohibition*: to state publicly that it was forbidden to criticize Stalin. The system *needed* to maintain the *appearance* that one was allowed to criticize Stalin, the *appearance* that the absence of criticism (the fact that there was no opposition party or movement, that the Party got 99.99 per cent of the votes at elections ...), simply demonstrated that Stalin was effectively the best, and (almost)

always right. In Hegel's terms, this appearance *qua* appearance was essential.

Or – to put it another way – the paradoxical role of unwritten rules is that, with regard to the explicit, public Law, they are simultaneously *transgressive* (they violate explicit social rules) *and more coercive* (they are additional rules which restrain the field of choice by prohibiting the possibilities allowed for – guaranteed, even – by the public Law). When universal human rights were proclaimed in the late eighteenth century, their universality, of course, concealed the fact that they privileged white men of property; however, this limitation was not openly admitted, it was coded in apparently tautological supplementary qualifications like 'all humans have rights, *in so far as they truly are rational and free*', which then implicitly excluded the mentally ill, 'savages', criminals, children, women… Fantasy designates precisely this unwritten framework which tells us how we are to understand the letter of the Law. And it is easy to observe how today, in our enlightened era of universal rights, racism and sexism reproduce themselves mainly at the level of the phantasmic unwritten rules which sustain and qualify universal ideological proclamations. The lesson of this is that – sometimes, at least – the truly subversive thing is not to disregard the explicit letter of Law on behalf of the underlying fantasies, but to *stick to this letter against the fantasy which sustains it*.[27] In other words, the act of taking the empty gesture (the offer to be rejected) literally – to treat the forced choice as a true choice – is, perhaps, one of the ways to put into

27   In (still Communist) Slovenia in the mid 1970s, there occurred a famous political incident known as 'the affair of the twenty-five delegates'. The unfortunate twenty-five 'delegates' (self-management newspeak for the members of the National Assembly) proposed as candidate for one of the two Slovene members of the collective Yugoslav Presidency an additional person, on top of the two 'official' candidates, so that the voters would have to choose two out of the three; they broke absolutely no rule, their procedure followed all formal rules, even the person they proposed was an absolutely faithful Party apparatchik – the unbearable trauma for the Power was the simple fact that another name emerged *outside the established unwritten rules of choosing the candidates*. So, immediately after this 'affair', there was a violent campaign in all public media against the unfortunate twenty-five 'delegates', accused of 'pseudo-democratic formalism', anti-Socialist activity, and so on – they were all forced to step down.

practice what Lacan calls 'traversing the fantasy': in accomplishing this act, the subject suspends the phantasmic frame of unwritten rules which tell him how to choose freely - no wonder the consequences of this act are so catastrophic.

It is therefore crucial to bear in mind the radical ambiguity of fantasy within an ideological space: fantasy works both ways, it simultaneously *closes the actual span of choices* (fantasy renders and sustains the structure of the forced choice, it tells us how we are to choose if we are to maintain the freedom of choice - that is, it bridges the gap between the formal symbolic frame of choices and social reality by preventing the choice which, although formally allowed, would, if in fact made, ruin the system) and *maintains the false opening*, the idea that the excluded choice might have happened, and does not actually take place only on account of contingent circumstances - as in Buñuel's *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, in which three upper-class couples try to dine together, but there is always an unforeseen incident (they misunderstand the date of the dinner; the police burst in, searching the place for drugs, etc., etc.). In this film, the role of the phantasmic frame is precisely to maintain the (mis)perception that the three couples *might* have succeeded in having the planned dinner together, and that what prevents this from happening is merely a series of unfortunate circumstances - what is thereby obfuscated is the fact that these unfortunate circumstances intervene necessarily, so that the dinner is, as it were, precluded by the very fundamental structure of the universe.

This void of the possible Otherness is what sustains hysterical desire (that is to say, desire *tout court*) - this non-acceptance of the ultimate closure, this vain hope that the Other Thing is waiting for us just around the corner. In my personal version of it, I am always afraid to miss the phone ringing, to be too late picking up the receiver; when a phone rings, I always expect it to be *the* call, and I am always disappointed when I hear the voice of the actual caller, whoever he or she is. There is no positive feature or content to identify this Call (a beloved person promising me sexual favours, a contract offering me a lot of money, or whatever) - it stands for pure, empty Otherness. And 'traversing the fantasy' involves

precisely the acceptance of the traumatic fact of radical closure: there is no opening, contingency as such is necessary . . . Bearing in mind that our capacity to desire involves the paradoxical structure of the forced choice (of the empty symbolic gesture of an offer to be rejected; of the gap between the explicit symbolic texture which guarantees the choice and the phantasmic obscene supplement which precludes it – that is, of the gap which separates the public symbolic space in which the subject dwells from the phantasmic kernel of his/her being), one can appreciate the radical character of 'traversing the fantasy': by means of this traversing, the gap is closed, the structure of the forced choice is suspended, the closure of being is fully accepted, the hysterical game of 'I offer you X (the opportunity to leave our community), on condition that you reject it', which structures our belonging to a community, is over. Once we move beyond desire – that is to say, beyond the fantasy which sustains desire – we enter the strange domain of *drive*: the domain of the closed circular palpitation which finds satisfaction in endlessly repeating the same failed gesture.

Drive's 'eternal return of the same'

The Freudian *drive* is thus another name for the *radical ontological closure*. Does not Nietzsche's famous 'Drunken Song' from the Fourth Part of *Zarathustra* ('*The world is deep, / And deeper than the day could read. / Deep is its woe –, / Joy – deeper still than grief can be: / Woe says: Hence! Go! / But joys all want eternity –, / – Want deep, profound eternity*'[28]) express perfectly the excessive pleasure-in-pain at which late Lacan aims in his rehabilitation of drive? This Nietzschean 'eternity' is to be opposed to being-towards-death: it is the eternity of drive against the finitude of desire. The 'Yes!' of the 'eternal return of the same' thus aims at the same thing as Lacan's '*Encore!*' ('More!' – Nietzsche himself says in the preceding paragraph that 'the name of / this song / is "Once more" '), which is to be read (also) as

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28   Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1993, p. 338.

an evocation of the proverbial woman's 'More!' during the sexual act – it stands for *more of the same*, for the full acceptance of the pain itself as inherent to the excess of pleasure which is *jouissance*. The 'eternal return of the same' thus no longer involves the Will to Power (at least, not in the standard sense of the term): rather, it indexes the attitude of actively endorsing the passive confrontation with *objet petit a*, bypassing the intermediate role of the screen of fantasy. In this precise sense, the 'eternal return of the same' stands for the moment when the subject 'traverses the fantasy'.

According to the *doxa*, fantasy stands for the moment of closure: fantasy is the screen by means of which the subject avoids the radical opening of the enigma of the Other's desire – is 'traversing the fantasy' not therefore synonymous with confronting the opening, the abyss of the Other's impenetrable desire? What, however, if things are exactly inverted? What if it is fantasy itself which, in so far as it fills in the void of the Other's desire, sustains the (false) opening – the notion that there is some radical Otherness which makes our universe incomplete? And, consequently, what if 'traversing the fantasy' involves the acceptance of a radical ontological closure? The unbearable aspect of the 'eternal return of the same' – the Nietzschean name for the crucial dimension of *drive* – is the radical *closure* this notion implies: to endorse and fully assume the 'eternal return of the same' means that we renounce every opening, every belief in the messianic Otherness – here late Lacan parts with the 'deconstructionist' notion of spectrality, with the Derridean-Lévinasian problematic of the ontological crack or dislocation ('out-of-joint'), with the notion of the universe as not-yet-fully ontologically constituted. The point is thus to oppose the radical closure of the 'eternal' drive to the opening involved in the finitude/temporality of the desiring subject.

This closure of drive, of course, is not to be confused with the domain of pre-symbolic animal bodily instincts; crucial here is the basic and constitutive discord between drive and body: drive as eternal-'undead' disrupts the instinctual rhythm of the body. For that reason, drive as such is death drive: it stands for an unconditional impetus which disregards the proper needs of the living body and simply battens on it. It is as if some part of

the body, an organ, is sublimated, torn out of its bodily context, elevated to the dignity of the Thing and thus caught in an infinitely repetitive cycle, endlessly circulating around the void of its structuring impossibility. It is as if we are not fit to fit our bodies: drive demands another, 'undead' body. 'The Unputrefied Heart', a poem by the Slovene Romantic poet France Prešeren, perfectly expresses the partial object of drive which is *libido*: years after a poet's death, his body is excavated for some legal reason; all parts of his corpse are long decayed, except the heart, which remains full of red blood and continues to palpitate in a mad rhythm – this undead organ which follows its path irrespective of the physical death stands for the blind insistence; it is drive itself, located beyond the cycle of generation and corruption. One is tempted to subtitle this poem 'Prešeren with Stephen King': is not such an undead partial organ one of the archetypal motifs of horror stories? Does it not index the point at which sublime poetry overlaps with repulsive horror?

The problem with Nietzsche, perhaps, is that in his praise of the body, he downplays – disregards, even – this absolute gap between the organic body and the mad eternal rhythm of drive to which its organs, 'partial objects', can be submitted. In this precise sense, drive can be said to be 'meta-physical': not in the sense of being beyond the domain of the phys-ical, but in the sense of involving another materiality beyond (or, rather, beneath) the materiality located in (what we experience as) spatio-temporal reality. In other words, the primordial Other of our spatio-temporal bodily reality is not Spirit, but another 'sublime' materiality. Perhaps modern art provides the most pertinent case of this other materiality. When typical modernist artists speak about the Spiritual in painting (Kandinsky) or in music (Schoenberg), the 'spiritual' dimension they evoke points towards the 'spiritualization' (or, rather, 'spectralization') of Matter (colour and shape, sound) as such, *outside* its reference to Meaning. Let us recall the 'massiveness' of the protracted stains which 'are' yellow sky in late Van Gogh, or the water or grass in Munch: this uncanny 'massiveness' pertains neither to the direct materiality of the colour stains nor to the materiality of the depicted objects – it dwells in a kind of intermediate spectral domain

of what Schelling called *geistige Körperlichkeit*. From the Lacanian perspective, it is easy to identify this 'spiritual corporeality' as materialized *jouissance*, '*jouissance* turned into flesh'.[29]

Fantasy, desire, drive

Desire emerges when drive gets caught in the cobweb of Law/prohibition, in the vicious cycle in which '*jouissance* must be refused, so that it can be reached on the inverted ladder of the Law of desire' (Lacan's definition of castration[30]) – and fantasy is the narrative of this primordial loss, since it stages the process of this renunciation, the emergence of the Law. In this precise sense, *fantasy is the very screen that separates desire from drive*: it tells the story which allows the subject to (mis)perceive the void around which drive circulates as the primordial loss constitutive of desire. In other words, fantasy provides a *rationale* for the inherent deadlock of desire: it constructs the scene in which the *jouissance* we are deprived of is concentrated in the Other who stole it from us. In the anti-Semitic ideological fantasy, social antagonism is explained away via the reference to the Jew as the secret agent who is stealing social *jouissance* from us (amassing profits, seducing our women . . .).[31] In 'traversing the fantasy', we find *jouissance* in the vicious cycle of circulating around the void of the (missing) object, renouncing the myth that *jouissance* has to be amassed somewhere else.

Hysteria provides the exemplary case of desire as a defence against *jouissance*: in contrast to the pervert who works incessantly to provide

29   Apropos of this material weight of Van Gogh's paintings, one can articulate the difference between traditional and modern painting: in traditional painting the stain is limited, located in the anamorphic element (the protracted-distorted skull in Holbein's *The Ambassadors*, etc.), whereas in Van Gogh the stain, in a way, spreads over and pervades the entire painting, so that every element within the frame is a depiction of some 'real object' and, simultaneously, a stain with its own material weight.

30   Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, New York: Norton, 1977, p. 324.

31   The paradigmatic case of the narrative which 'explains' how the *jouissance* we are deprived of is amassed in the Other is, of course, the neurotic myth of the primordial father [*Père-Jouissance*].

enjoyment to the Other, the neurotic-hysteric wants to be the object of the Other's *desire*, not the object of his *enjoyment* - she is well aware that the only way to remain desired is to *postpone* the satisfaction, the gratification of desire which would bring enjoyment. The hysteric's fear is that, in so far as she is the object of the Other's enjoyment, she is reduced to an instrument of the Other, exploited, manipulated by him; on the other hand, there is nothing a true pervert enjoys more than being an instrument of the Other, of his *jouissance*.[32] In a typical case of hysterical triangulation, while a wife can fully enjoy illicit sex only, her message to her lover is: if her husband learns of her affair and leaves her, she will also have to drop him ... What we encounter here is the basic neurotic strategy of snatching back from the other part of the *jouissance* he has taken from us: by cheating her husband, she steals back from him part of the *jouissance* he 'illegitimately' stole from her. That is to say: a neurotic has made the sacrifice of *jouissance* (which is why she is not a psychotic), which enables her to enter the symbolic order, but she is obsessed with the notion that the sacrificed *jouissance*, the *jouissance* 'taken' from her, is stored somewhere in the Other who is profiting from it 'illegitimately', enjoying in her place - so her strategy consists in getting at least part of it back by transgressing the Other's norms (from masturbating and cheating, up to speeding without getting a ticket).

In other words, the neurotic's basic notion is that the Other's authority

32   Is not the tendency to desire and enjoy the same object responsible for what Freud perceived as the 'universal tendency to debasement in the sphere of love'? Does not the paradigmatically modern endeavour to love, desire and enjoy the same object give rise to the superego pressure which makes the subject feel guilty if he does not love the object he enjoys? Perhaps, it would be productive to articulate the matrix of all possible combinations between the four fundamental modes of relating to a (libidinal) object: love, desire, *jouissance*, friendship. A *jouissance* entirely deprived of love and/or desire can none the less bear witness to an authentic act of friendship and solidarity (the melodramatic figure of a woman who goes to bed with her male colleague in distress, to comfort him). In *For the Moment*, a Canadian war melodrama, a promiscuous elderly woman with a heart of gold goes to bed with the hero, who is devastated by an impossible love affair; when the hero's love surprises the couple in bed, she is not jealous, since she immediately understands that her lover acted out of despair - sometimes, having sex with a third party can function as the proof of love.

is not 'legitimate': behind the facade of Authority, there is an obscene *jouis-sance* stolen from the neurotic (in the case of Dora, Freud's patient, her father is perceived by her as a dirty old man who, instead of loving her, 'castrated' her – turned her into an object of exchange and offered her to Mr K – in order to pursue his dirty affair with Mrs K). What the neurotic cannot stand is the idea that the Other is profiting from his sacrifice; he (typically the obsessional) is prepared to sacrifice everything *on condition that the Other does not profit from it*, that he does not amass the sacrificed *jouissance*, does not enjoy in his place. Through psychoanalytic treatment, the neurotic must be helped to stop blaming the Other (society, parents, church, spouse . . .) for his 'castration', and, consequently, to stop seeking retribution from the Other. (There, in the strategy of culpabilizing the Other, also resides the limitation of 'postmodern' identity politics, in which the deprived minority indulges in *ressentiment* by blaming, and seeking retribution from, the Other.) In the dialectic of Master and servant, the servant (mis)perceives the Master as amassing *jouissance*, and gets back (steals from the Master) little crumbs of *jouissance*; these small pleasures (the awareness that he can also manipulate the Master), silently tolerated by the Master, not only fail to present any threat to the Master but, in fact, constitute the 'libidinal bribery' which maintains the servant's servitude. In short, the satisfaction that he is able to dupe the Master is precisely what guarantees the servant's servitude to him.

Although both the neurotic and the pervert sacrifice enjoyment: although neither of the two is a psychotic directly immersed in *jouissance* – the economy of sacrifice is fundamentally different a neurotic is traumatized by the other's *jouissance* (an obsessional neurotic, for example, works like mad all the time *to prevent the Other from enjoying* – or, as they say in French, *pour que rien ne bouge pas dans l'autre*) – while a pervert posits himself as the object-instrument of the Other's *jouissance*; he sacrifices his *jouissance* to generate *jouissance* in the Other. In psychoanalytic treatment, the obsessional is active all the time, tells stories, presents symptoms, and so on, *so that things will remain the same*, so that nothing will really change, so that the analyst will remain immobile and will not effectively intervene

– what he is most afraid of is the moment of silence which will reveal the utter vacuousness of his incessant activity. In an intersubjective situation permeated with an undercurrent of tension, an obsessional who detects this undercurrent will talk continuously, to the distraction of those around him, in order to prevent the awkward silence in which the underlying conflict might emerge.[33]

The key point is thus clearly to delineate the specific intermediate status of perversion, between psychosis and neurosis, between the psychotic's foreclosure of the Law and the neurotic's integration into the Law. According to the standard view, the perverse attitude as the staging of the 'disavowal of castration' can be seen as a defence against the motif of 'death and sexuality', against the threat of mortality as well as the contingent imposition of sexual difference: what the pervert enacts is a universe in which, as in cartoons, a human being can survive any catastrophe; in which adult sexuality is reduced to a childish game; in which one is not forced to die or to choose one of the two sexes.[34] As such, the pervert's universe is the pure universe of the symbolic order, of the signifier's game running its course, unencumbered by the Real of human finitude. What this standard view (which persists within the confines of desire, Law and finitude as the ultimate horizons of human existence: the Law elevates to – or sublates into – a symbolic prohibition, the 'natural' barrier of mortality

33   One can also say that while the hysteric wants to keep the Other's desire (for her) alive, in order to avoid the fate of becoming the object of the Other's *jouissance*, the obsessional neurotic wants to obliterate his existence as an object of desire: whenever he discerns in his Other some signs of the latter's desire, he reacts with panic.

The difference between hysteria and obsessional neurosis also concerns their different historicity: hysteria was already known in Antiquity; it is, as it were, consubstannal with the very logic of symbolic identification, of recognizing oneself in the symbolic mandate that the social 'big Other' bestows on us; while obsessional neurosis is paradigmatically modern, and can arise only against the background of the phenomenon (mis)perceived as the 'decline of paternal authority', and whose consequence is the retreat from public life of direct manifestations of aggressivity (no more sacrifices, public punishments and tortures . . .). The repressed aggressive drives then return in the guise of obsessional compulsive symptoms - of the rituals destined to keep at bay the aggressivity which continues to lurk within the subjects.

34   See Louise Kaplan, *Feminine Perversions*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993.

and sexual reproduction) leaves out of consideration is the unique short circuit between Law and *jouissance*: in contrast to the neurotic, who acknowledges the Law in order occasionally to take enjoyment in its transgressions (masturbation, theft…), and thus obtains satisfaction by snatching back from the Other part of the stolen *jouissance*, the pervert directly elevates the enjoying big Other into the agency of Law. As we have already seen, the pervert's aim is to *establish*, not to undermine, the Law: the proverbial male masochist elevates his partner, the Dominatrix, into the Lawgiver whose orders are to be obeyed. A pervert fully acknowledges the obscene-*jouissant* underside of the Law, since he gains satisfaction from the very obscenity of the gesture of installing the rule of Law – that is, of 'castration'. In the 'normal' state of things, the symbolic Law prevents access to the (incestuous) object, and thus creates the desire for it; in perversion, *it is the object itself* (say, the Dominatrix in masochism) *which makes the law*. Here the theoretical concept of masochism as perversion touches the common notion of a masochist who 'enjoys being tortured by the Law': a masochist *locates enjoyment in the very agency of the Law which prohibits the access to enjoyment.*

The truth of desire, the knowledge of fantasy

The opposition desire/drive coincides with the opposition truth/knowledge. As Jacques-Alain Miller emphasized, the psychoanalytic concept of 'construction' does not involve the (dubious) claim that the analyst is always right (if the patient accepts the analyst's proposed construction, that's OK; if the patient rejects it, this rejection is a sign of resistance which, consequently, again confirms that the construction has touched some traumatic kernel within the patient . . .). Rather, psychoanalytic treatment relies on the other side of the same coin, which is crucial in psychoanalysis – it is *the analysand who is always, by definition, in the wrong* (like the priest from Jutland who, at the end of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, repeatedly claims: 'You do not say "God is always in the right"; you say "Against God I am always in the wrong"'). In order to grasp this point,

one should focus on the crucial distinction between construction and its counterpart, interpretation – this couple, construction/interpretation, is correlative to the couple knowledge/truth. That is to say: an interpretation is a gesture which is always embedded in the intersubjective dialectic of recognition between the analysand and the interpreter-analyst; it aims to bring about the effect of truth apropos of a particular formation of the unconscious (a dream, a symptom, a slip of the tongue . . .): the subject is expected to 'recognize' himself in the signification proposed by the interpreter, precisely in order to subjectivize this signification, to assume it as 'his own' ('Yes, my God, that's me, I really wanted this . . .'). The very success of interpretation is measured by this 'effect of truth', by the extent to which it *affects the subjective position of the analysand* (stirs up memories of hitherto deeply repressed traumatic encounters, provokes violent resistance . . .). In clear contrast to interpretation, a construction (typically: that of a fundamental fantasy) has the status of a knowledge which can never be subjectivized – that is, it can never be assumed by the subject as the truth about himself, the truth in which he recognizes the innermost kernel of his being. A construction is a purely explanatory logical presupposition, like the second stage ('I am being beaten by my father') of the child's fantasy 'A child is being beaten' which, as Freud emphasizes, is so radically unconscious that it can never be remembered:

> This second phase is the most important and the most momentous of all. But we may say that in a certain sense it has never had a real existence. It is never remembered, it has never succeeded in becoming conscious. It is a construction of analysis, but it is no less a necessity on that account.[35]

The fact that this phase 'never had a real existence', of course, indicates its status as the Lacanian *real*; the knowledge about it, a 'knowledge in the real', is a kind of 'acephalous', non-subjectivized knowledge: although it

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35   Sigmund Freud, 'A Child is Being Beaten', *Standard Edition*, vol. 10, p. 185.

is a kind of 'Thou art that!' which articulates the very kernel of the subject's being (or, rather, for that very reason), its assumption *desubjectivizes* me – that is, I can assume my fundamental fantasy only in so far as I undergo what Lacan calls 'subjective destitution'. Or – to put it in yet another way – interpretation and construction stand to each other as do symptom and fantasy: symptoms are to be interpreted, fundamental fantasy is to be (re)constructed... However, this notion of 'acephalous' knowledge emerges rather late in Lacan's teaching – somewhere around the early 1970s, after the relationship between knowledge and truth has undergone a profound shift:

- 'Early' Lacan, from the 1940s to 1960s, moves within the co-ordinates of the standard philosophical opposition between the 'inauthentic' objectifying knowledge which disregards the subject's position of enunciation, and the 'authentic' truth in which one is existentially engaged, affected by it. In the psychoanalytic clinic, this opposition is perhaps best exemplified by the clear contrast between the obsessional neurotic and the hysteric: the obsessional neurotic *lies in the guise of truth* (while at the level of factual accuracy his statements are always true, he uses this factual accuracy to dissimulate the truth about his desire: say, when my enemy has a car accident because of a brake malfunction, I go to great lengths to explain to anyone who is willing to listen to me that I was never near his car and, consequently, am not responsible for the malfunction – true, but this 'truth' is propagated by me to conceal the fact that the accident realized my desire . . .), while the hysteric *tells the truth in the guise of a lie* (the truth of my desire articulates itself in the very distortions of the 'factual accuracy' of my speech: when, say, instead of 'I thereby open this session', I say 'I thereby close this session', my desire clearly comes out . . .). The aim of psychoanalytic treatment is thus to (re)focus attention from factual accuracy to hysterical lies, which unknowingly articulate the truth, and then to progress to a new knowledge which dwells in the place of truth; which, instead of

dissimulating truth, gives rise to truth-effects – to what the Lacan of the 1950s called 'full speech', the speech in which subjective truth reverberates. As we have already emphasized, Lacan thus reinserts his theory into a long tradition, from Kierkegaard to Heidegger, of despising the mere 'factual truth'.

- From the late 1960s, however, Lacan increasingly focuses his theoretical attention on drive as a kind of 'acephalous' knowledge which brings about satisfaction. This knowledge involves neither an inherent relation to truth nor a subjective position of enunciation – not because it dissimulates the subjective position of enunciation, but because it is in itself non-subjectivized, ontologically prior to the very dimension of truth (although, of course, the very predicate 'ontological' thereby becomes problematic, since ontology is by definition a discourse on truth . . .). Truth and knowledge are thus related as desire and drive: interpretation aims at the truth of the subject's desire (the truth of desire is the desire for truth, as one is tempted to put it in a pseudo-Heideggerian way), while construction expresses the knowledge about drive. Is not the paradigmatic case of such an 'acephalous' knowledge that pertains to drive provided by *modern science*,[36] which exemplifies the 'blind insistence' of the (death) drive? Modern science follows its path (in microbiology, in manipulating genes, in particle physics . . .), cost what it may, satisfaction is provided by knowledge itself, not by any moral or communal goals that scientific knowledge supposedly serves. And are not all the 'ethical committees' which abound today and endeavour to establish rules for the proper conduct of gene manipulations, medical experiments, and so on, ultimately so many desperate attempts to reinscribe this inexorable drive-progress of science, which knows of no inherent limitation (in short: this *inherent* ethic of the scientific attitude), within the confines of human goals, to

36   See Jacques-Alain Miller, 'Retour de Granade: Savoir et satisfaction', *Revue de la cause Freudienne* 33, 1996.

provide them with a 'human face', a limitation or 'proper measure' that they are expected to obey? The commonplace wisdom today is that 'our extraordinary power to manipulate nature through scientific devices has run ahead of our faculty to lead a meaningful existence, to make a human use of this immense power' - at this point, the properly modern ethics of 'following the drive' clashes with the traditional ethics of leading a life regulated by proper measure and subordination of all its aspects to some notion of the Good. The problem is, of course, that the balance between the two can *never* be achieved: the notion of reinscribing scientific drive into the constraints of life-world is fantasy at its purest - perhaps the fundamental *Fascist* fantasy. Any limitation of this kind is utterly foreign to the inherent logic of science: science belongs to the Real and, as a mode of the Real of *jouissance*, it is indifferent to the modalities of its symbolization, to the way it will affect social life.

Of course, although the concrete organization of the scientific apparatus, up to its most abstract conceptual schemes, is socially 'mediated', this game of discerning a patriarchal (Eurocentric, male-chauvinist, mechanistic and nature-exploiting . . .) bias of modern science, in a way, *does not really concern science*, the *drive* which effectuates itself in the run of the scientific machine. Heidegger's position here seems utterly ambiguous; perhaps it is all too easy to dismiss him as the most sophisticated proponent of the thesis that science a priori misses the dimension of truth (didn't he claim that 'science doesn't think', that it is by definition unable to reflect its own philosophical foundation, the hermeneutic horizon of its functioning, and, furthermore, that this incapacity, far from playing the role of an impediment, is a positive condition of the possibility of its smooth functioning?). His more crucial point is, rather, that, as such, modern science at its most fundamental cannot be reduced to some limited ontic, 'socially conditioned' option (expressing the interests of a certain social group, etc.), but is, rather, the *real* of our historical moment, that which 'remains the same' in all possible ('progressive' and 'reactionary', 'technocratic' and

'ecological', 'patriarchal' and 'feminist') symbolic universes. Heidegger is thus well aware that all fashionable 'critiques of science', according to which science is a tool of Western capitalist domination, patriarchal oppression, and so forth, fall short of, and thus leave unquestioned, the 'hard kernel' of the scientific drive.[37] What Lacan forces us to add is that, perhaps, science is also 'real' in an even more radical sense: it is the first (and probably unique) case of a discourse which is *stricto sensu non-historical*, even in the most fundamental Heideggerian sense of the historicality of the epochs of Being - that is, whose functioning is inherently indifferent towards the historically determined horizons of the disclosure of Being. Precisely in so far as science 'doesn't think', *it knows*, ignoring the dimension of truth, and is, as such, drive at its purest . . . Lacan's supplement to Heidegger would thus be: why should this utter 'forgetting of Being', at

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37   In order to get an idea of what Heidegger has in mind with *Gestell* as the essence of technique, it is instructive to cast a glance at the graveyards of outdated or used technical objects: piled-up mountains of used cars and computers, the famous aeroplane 'resting place' in the California desert . . . in these ever-growing piles of inert, dysfunctional 'stuff', which cannot but strike us with their useless, inert presence, one can, as it were, perceive the technological drive at rest. Let us recall how we experience the death of someone close to us: even if we directly witness his or her death, the trauma is redoubled, since often the most unbearable moment comes afterwards, when we visit the deceased's home and observe his private quarters: cupboards full of his clothes, shelves lined with his books, the bathroom with his toilet utensils . . . It is usually only at this moment - when we are compelled to acknowledge that the person to whom all this relates is no longer here, that all these personal belongings are now entirely *useless* - that we become fully aware of, fully take in, his final departure. Behind this, of course, is the fact that a person is in a way more 'here' in the material traces of his presence in his living environs than in the immediate presence of his bodily existence. And - at a totally different level, of course - is it not the same with the graveyards of used technology? It is only here, when its functioning is suspended, that we fully become aware of the ruthless technological drive which determines our lives.

Are we then condemned to the suffocating alternative of being dominated by technological drive, or of becoming aware of its meaninglessness through the confrontation with its useless debris? The third choice (which, perhaps, provides a superb example of what *spirit* is in the non-obscurantist meaning of the term) was invented by today's Japanese, in the guise of *chindogu*, the art of uselessly overfunctional objects, that is, of the objects-inventions which become meaningless and provoke laughter by their very excessive functionality, like glasses (binoculars) with electrically operated windscreen wipers to enable us to see clearly when it rains. Does not this Japanese trend confirm Kojève's insight into how the Japanese have added the touch of snobbery to capitalist functionalism?

work in modern science, be perceived only as the greatest 'danger'? Is there not within it an already perceptible 'liberating' dimension? Is not the suspension of ontological Truth in the unfettered functioning of science already a kind of 'passing through' the metaphysical closure?

Within psychoanalysis, this knowledge of drive, which can never be subjectivized, assumes the form of knowledge about the subject's 'fundamental fantasy', the specific formula which regulates his or her access to *jouissance*. That is to say: desire and *jouissance* are inherently antagonistic, even exclusive: desire's *raison d'être* (or 'utility function', to use Richard Dawkins's term) is not to realize its goal, to find full satisfaction, but to reproduce itself as desire. So how is it possible to couple desire and *jouissance*, to guarantee a minimum of *jouissance* within the space of desire? It is the famous Lacanian *objet petit a* that mediates between the incompatible domains of desire and *jouissance*. In what precise sense is *objet petit a* the object-cause of desire? The *objet petit a* is not what we desire, what we are after, but, rather, that which sets our desire in motion, in the sense of the formal frame which confers consistency on our desire: desire is, of course, metonymical; it shifts from one object to another, through all these displacements, however, desire none the less retains a minimum of formal consistency, a set of phantasmic features which, when they are encountered in a positive object, make us desire this object - *objet petit a* as the cause of desire is nothing other than this formal frame of consistency. In a slightly different way, the same mechanism regulates the subject's falling in love: the automatism of love is set in motion when some contingent, ultimately indifferent, (libidinal) object finds itself occupying a pre-given fantasy-place.

This notion of an impossible/real knowledge also allows us to tackle the question: is psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic knowledge, on the side of Law (the 'repressive' scientific gaze, objectifying, cataloguing, classifying, explaining sexuality away, and thus eliminating its excess) or on the side of its transgression - that is, does it provide a kind of initiatory knowledge about the secrets of *jouissance* hidden from the official public gaze? One should, rather, suggest the hypothesis that psychoanalytic knowledge is

located at the intersection of Law and its transgression - an intersection which, of course, is an empty set. In the good old times of 'actually existing Socialism', every schoolchild was told again and again of how Lenin read voraciously, and of his advice to young people: 'Learn, learn, and learn!' - a classic joke from Socialism produces a nice subversive effect by using this motto in an unexpected context. Marx, Engels and Lenin were each asked which they preferred, a wife or a mistress. Marx, whose attitude in intimate matters is well known to have been rather conservative, answered, 'A wife'; Engels, who knew how to enjoy life, answered, of course, 'A mistress'; the surprise comes with Lenin, who answered 'Both, wife *and* mistress!' Is he dedicated to a hidden pursuit of excessive sexual pleasures? No, since he quickly explains: 'This way, you can tell your mistress that you're with your wife, and your wife that you are about to visit your mistress ...' 'And what do you actually do?' 'Learn, learn and learn!' Psycho-analytic knowledge is definitely Leninist in this sense. Or - to put it in a slightly different way - the dialectic of Law and its transgression constitutes the domain of desire, while asexual (non-phallic) Leninist knowledge is constitutive of the domain of drive, which breaks out of the vicious cycle of desire supported by Law and involved in its transgression.